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June
1994

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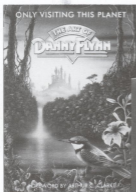
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interzone

SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

No 84

June 1994

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Cover by Geoff Taylor for Robert Holdstock's *Merlin's Wood*,
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Interaction

Dear Editors:

Well, March's letters page was certainly lively, if a little one-sided. Surely the point to be made is that just as there is room within *Interzone*'s fiction for a range of styles, from Garratt's very amusing vampire short, Gary M. Gibson's more traditional imagination-fuelled "hard" sf, and Tritten's (frankly) totally pointless "TV 2001," there is equally a real value in *Interzone* showcasing a wide range of approaches to reviewing.

The heart of the criticisms levelled by the likes of David Barrett and Robert Philmus seems to me to be that certain *Interzone* reviewers have a deeper grasp of hermeneutics (and perhaps literary mechanics) than the authors they are reviewing, and that to wear this knowledge like garters on a Parisian showgirl is (a) brazen beyond belief, and (b) an unforgivable act of hubris when levelled at fans' friends and favourite writers.

And this, I would point out, is coming from someone whose own fantasy novel, *For The Crown & The Dragon*, was recently on the very sharp end of the Gilmore tongue in an advance review (although to declare my full interest in this matter, Gilmore has since been taken on as a copy-editor to iron out the book's wrinkles).

My personal taste for critique runs towards the raillery and humorous touch of Wendy Bradley's fantasy reviews, but by no means would I declare Clute or Gilmore's more disciplined school of critical theory as invalid or inappropriate for *Interzone*. You don't have to be an author to see that publishers are increasingly serving the sf and fantasy market with contempt, encouraging writers to dash out clone-like sequels with all the craft of a McDonalds production line because they assume that the stuff will sell well enough if it's badly written, and no better if it's written well; from which it follows that to pay a competent copy-editor would be to waste money (with too many authors shivering in the chill shadow of "downsizing" lists and coluding by taking the cheque and keeping their silence).

And if reviewers like Chris Gilmore choose to focus on grammatical failings and bring an embarrassed blush to the collective face of our community of authors and editors, then tough damn titty. When I wish to read fawning and inconsequential book reviews with all the substance of a TV-Dinner, I'll start buying certain American sf magazines. Until then, I trust *Interzone* will continue to serve me with the variety and intelligence I purchase it for.

Stephen Hunt

Old Coulsdon, Surrey

Dear Editors:

While I acknowledge the right of Pete Crowther to pan *Drabble Who* in his column in *Interzone* 82, I must point out one important fact that he did not bother to mention. As indicated in *Drabble Who*, all three *Drabble* books have been published to raise money for the RNIB Talking Book Library.

The *Drabble Project* has already sold out, raising £1500 and Double Century will probably add another £1200 for the charity. *Drabble Who* is selling rapidly and is on target to meet our estimate of another £4000 for the RNIB.

Yours
Roger Robinson,
BECCON Publications

Pete Crowther replies:

PHILANTHROPY OR ART? 3 3
Of course I commend Beccon's altruism - and that of *Drabble's* contributors - without reservation. However, I still cannot extend that commendation to the work itself, nor would I have even had I known of the book's purpose at the time of my review. Any artistic endeavour must be judged on artistic merit, not on what it cost to produce, nor on the time it took to produce, nor even on where any profits might ultimately go. *Drabble Who* is marketed as a collection of stories, not as a philanthropic initiative. I marked it accordingly. Best wishes.
Pete Crowther

Dear Editors:

Just a quick note to thank you for publishing Andy Robertson's review of *The Best of D.F. Lewis* (IZ 82, March 1994). However, I wanted to point out that Mr Robertson gave AE Press the credit for publishing same. AE Press was only the printer. TAL Publications, of course, is the publisher.

The Best of D.F. Lewis II, another fine collection of Mr Lewis' work, will be forthcoming later this year, published by TAL Publications and printed by Orinda Press.

Stanislaus Tal
PO Box 1837, Leesburg
VA 22075, USA

Dear Editors:

In *Interzone* number 9 it was mentioned: "the collected non-fiction of J.G. Ballard, *Which Way to Inner Space?*, will probably be appearing in 1985." Well, it's now 1994 and I still haven't seen it. The *Re/Search: J.G. Ballard* book, published in 1984, pointed out to me that there were 100 articles/reviews in existence to collect. Will we ever see it?

By the way, is the new Ballard novel scheduled for this autumn *The Atrocity Exhibition II*? Also, what of those oft-remoured, never-seen beasts of the wild, Ian R. MacLeod's first novel and Simon Ings's *In the City of the Iron Fish*? Do these things exist in publishers' captivity or otherwise? (As far as *Interzone* is concerned, I appreciate the more magical-realist, experimentally reaching work: M. John Harrison's and Ings's story "The Dead" was close to what I'd like to see - more, please.)

Petri Sinda

Perth, Australia

Editor: I'm glad to say that the Ballard non-fiction collection now seems to be on course again, and may be appearing in 1995 (ten years late!). The total number of Ballardian non-fiction pieces to select from has now risen to over 150 (I know this because I'm working, very slowly, on a new edition of his bibliography for an American publisher). I can't say at present what the book will be called, but watch this space (and read JGB News if you're really keen) for further details as and when. The new Ballard novel is called *Rushing to Paradise*, due in September 1994 from HarperCollins, and no, it isn't *The Atrocity Exhibition II* - I'm told it's set on an imaginary South Sea island.

As to Ian R. MacLeod's first novel, it did the rounds at a time when publishers were retrenching because of the recession: the author himself became unhappy with it as it stood, and decided to rewrite it totally. He's probably finished by now, so let's hope he finds a publisher soon (I read the first version in manuscript, and thought it was pretty damn good). As for news of Mr Ings, I'm afraid I can't tell you anything, since he went mysteriously incommunicado, as far as *Interzone* is concerned, a few years ago (the collaborative story by him which we published in issue 67, January 1993, was submitted to us by co-author Mike Harrison, not by Ings). Perhaps any Ings queries could be directed to editor Jane Johnson at HarperCollins.

Dear Editors:

While the British Science Fiction Association certainly appreciates John Duffield mentioning our magazines ("Magazine Reviews," *Interzone* 82, page 66), I should like to offer one or two slight corrections to his piece. Membership of the BSFA does not bring with it any discounts on purchases anywhere. The price of a single copy of the news magazine *Matrix* is £1.25; the writers' magazine *Focus* costs £1 per issue; and the critical journal *Vector* costs £2.25 per issue.

Nevertheless, we do appreciate John's mention and hope that it will bring more members. (All enquiries to Alison Cook, Membership Secretary, 27 Albemarle Drive, Grove, Wantage, Oxon. OX12 0NB.)

Maureen Speller
BSFA Co-Administrator
with Catie Cary
Folkestone, Kent

Dear Editors:

A reviewer should have absolute licence to rubbish a book or magazine in whatever terms he finds appropriate, and if he chooses to characterize its actual and potential readership as "sad little horror wankers," that's fine by me. But John Duffield (*IZ* 82) is well out of order in refusing to disclose Peeping Tom's publishing and pricing details – the duty of the reviewer is to inform, not to set himself up as censor. For the information of all would-be, should-be or could-be wankers of any size and either sex, therefore, the address for Peeping Tom is: c/o David Bell, Yew Tree House, 15 Nottingham Rd., Ashby-de-la-Zouch, LE65 1DJ.

A four-issue sub costs £7.50, back issues from #7 are available at three for £4, four for £5, five for £6, six for £7. Curiously enough, about when John Duffield was being born, Authentic refused to give details of a fanzine called *Femzine* because it concentrated too much on "the seamy side of things." Editor H.J. Campbell, to his everlasting credit, relented in the following issue – *plus ça change!*

Chris Gilmore
Bedford

Dear Editors:

Rumours are confirmed ("Theme-zines and Author-Zines," *IZ* 82, p.67). We cannot tell a lie: it is us wot runs the Storm Constantine Information Service and fanzines. Indeed, not just one fanzine even, but two (now there's hubris), and we also have a hand in a spinoff writers' workshop APA. For sake of completeness (and if anyone is tempted to write and enquire further), this is us:

The Storm Constantine Info Service, "Inception," acts largely as a first port of call for reader enquiries, from fans, clubs, convention liaison and so forth. Within this, we produce two fanzines:

the eponymous *Inception*, mainly the review and discussion magazine, with articles from Storm and the fans on all manner of things from angology to shared worlds. The lighter half is the companion magazine, *An Occasional Axolotl*, with letters, news and general chat from the fans.

There's currently no subscription. We try to run the Info Service as much as possible on the basis of individual replies to letters and enquiries, and on the fanfiness basis of trade, contributions and letters of comment.

Steve Jeffery & Vikki Lee France
Inception, 44 White Way
Kidlington, Oxon. OX5 2XA

Editor: Thanks for that. And apologies to everyone for the nasty misprint in my review headed "Theme-Zines and Author-Zines in *IZ* 82 (page 67, middle column, just below the picture): it should have said "the fanzine devoted to a living sf/fantasy author," not "liking sf/fantasy author" – well, yes, we may "like" these writers, but the point I was making is that there are some fanzines devoted to authors who are still very much alive and working, not just to the Late Greats. Another such which has come to my attention is *Amberzine*, a Roger Zelazny fanzine available from Phage Press, PO Box 519, Detroit, MI 48231-0519, USA. News of yet others will be welcome from readers. And, talking of "non-living" authors:

Dear Editors:

In response to your "Theme-Zines and Author-Zines," I can confirm that there is indeed a Tolkien-zine. It's produced by the Tolkien Society (of which I am a member) and is called *Amon Hen* after a hill on the river Anduin. The Tolkien Society also produces a much larger publication called *Mallorn*, after the trees of *Lothlorien*.

There is also a publication, not produced by the Tolkien Society, called *Niggings*, which is dedicated to publishing fiction set in Middle-Earth; interestingly, the publishers of *Niggings* have just issued separately a longer work, entitled *A Glade in Ithilien*, which re-tells the latter half of *The Lord of the Rings* from a scenario where it was Faramir who travelled to Rivendell instead of Boromir... All details can be gained from the Tolkien Society, c/o Miss Anne Haward, Flat 6, 8 Staverton Rd., Oxford OX2 6XL.

Jim Lawrence
Bath

Editor: And that is not all. Norbert Spehner in Canada has kindly sent us a list of – wait for it – another 30-odd Tolkien societies, all with their own publications (and some of them now possibly defunct). They're literally worldwide, and include such unlikely sounding bodies as the "American

Hobbit Association," "Le Cercle d'Etudes de Tolkien en Belgique," "Shiro no norite" in Japan, and "La Sociedad Tolkien Española." Additionally, Mr Spehner informs us of the following "deceased-author zines" (though he can't vouch for their continued publication):

August Derleth: **The August Derleth Society Newsletter**, c/o Richard H. Fawcett, 61 Teecommas Drive, Uncasville, CT 06382, USA. ("Uncasville"? Is that perchance a town named after a fictional character in J. Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans*? If so, it shows the influence of these deceased authors, doesn't it?)

H.P. Lovecraft: **Journal of the Lovecraft Society**, c/o Scott Connors, PO Box 354, South Heights, PA 15081, USA.

Sax Rohmer: **The Rohmer Review**, c/o Robert E. Briney, 4 Forest Ave., Salem, MA 01970, USA.

Two others which I can add to the list, thanks to recent mentions in *Locus*, are:

Philip K. Dick: **For Dickheads Only**, c/o Dave Hyde, GSM Productions, PO Box 112, New Haven, IN 46774, USA (it's up to four issues now).

Robert A. Heinlein: **Galactic Citizen**, from 4215 Winnetka Ave. N. #159, Minneapolis, MN 55428, USA (likewise up to issue four; there's also mention of something called the Heinlein Forum Quarterly, but no details given).

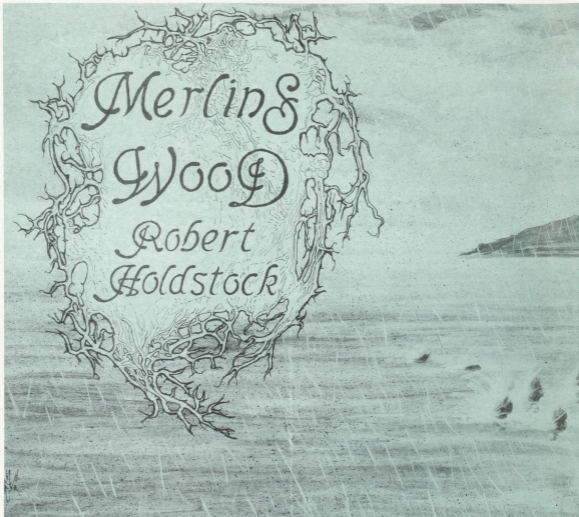
Dear Editors:

I have received the 12 back-issues of *MILLION: The Magazine About Popular Fiction* which I ordered from you. I'm sorry to have missed numbers 2 and 5, but I suppose I should be sorrier about not having subscribed to the magazine several years ago! I've been looking through the issues with great interest, and amazement that such a magazine should not have proved viable. Still, I'm glad that Brian Stableford's excellent series on "Yesterday's Bestsellers" is continuing in *Interzone* – which magazine I hope will continue for many years to come.

David Rain
Queen's University of Belfast

Editor: Of course *Interzone* will continue for as long as humanly possible: we want to "see in" the year 2001, at the very least. In fact, we're rather proud of the longevity the magazine has already achieved. With the next issue, number 85, we're poised to overtake the UK's third longest-lived sf

Continued on page 27



A storm was coming, but the winds were still,
And in the wild woods of Broceliande,
Before an oak, so hollow, huge and old
It look'd a tower of ivied masonwork,
At Merlin's feet the wily Vivien lay...

from *Idylls of the King*

The People on the Path (A time in childhood)

The boy's voice woke Martin from a spirit haunted sleep. It was pitch dark. A fragment of gravel cracked against the bedroom window, and again the voice: "Martin! Martin! There are people on the path. Martin!"

People on the path.

Martin flung back the blankets and ran to the window. Below, in the faint moonlight, he could see his fair-haired brother Sebastian, pale-faced and excited. He was pointing to the forest. "Martin, there are three of them. Quickly."

Martin pulled on his jeans and a grubby white jumper. He opened the window, dropping effortlessly

to the ground. The old dog whined and yapped in its kennel, dreaming of the chase, too far away in other lands to be disturbed by this second escape from the farmhouse. Martin ran through the darkness. He vaulted the gate and chased after Sebastian.

"Wait for me!" he hissed, not wanting to raise his voice and perhaps disturb the people on the path, though he knew this had never happened.

Where was Sebastian? The moonlight waxed and waned as light cloud drifted over the forest, over the farm. Something ethereal flowed and glowed distantly. Faint birds seemed to be flying upwards, spiralling around the dark shape of a slowly spinning figure.

The boy who danced was Sebastian. Martin watched amazed as his brother, arms outstretched, danced among the people on the path, moving through the three milky forms, a man, a woman, a tall child with long hair. The child was looking back, as if nervously. Martin thought it was a girl, but the spectral features were hard to discern. All three moved in slow motion. Their ghostly shapes shed light like



streams of plasma, where Sebastian passed through them, his voice a thrill of laughter.

"It feels cold. I can hear their hearts beating – it's weird. Their breathing too. The man smells of grease and smoke. Come inside, Martin. Quickly. It's the best yet! It feels like I'm flying and running and swimming all at once – I can fly like an eagle, Martin – come and feel what it's like."

Martin followed his brother up the old path, but he felt apprehensive. There was a shifting, lurking movement in the wood and Martin thought at once of the old bosker, the murderous woodsman who lived among the pools and rocks of the deeper forest. Or perhaps it was Rebecca, spying, always spying on her brothers when they went out onto the path by moonlight.

The night air carried the strong sour smell of earth, emanating from the spectral figures that had emerged from the edge of Broceliande. The man, looking over his shoulder as he moved slowly along the path, seemed to be watching Martin. His mouth worked as if he was speaking, his face contorted as if warning.

Then he raised an arm and pointed, the pale finger freezing Martin in his tracks. The woman turned slowly. She too seemed to stare at the boy who followed them, unaware of the blonde lad who laughed and danced within her insubstantial form.

At length, Sebastian left the inside of the people on the path. He was shivering, almost ecstatic. "It felt strange! The man's so frightened. They've had a vision of something. Like a long, thin bottle, with trees and earth inside. Like the one I drew last time. They're running away from something. How old, d'you reckon?"

Martin knew his brother was referring to the historical age of the figures. The people who walked the path sometimes looked quite modern, sometimes came in the uniforms of the cavalry from the time of Napoleon, or even earlier; Martin had once seen a Greek warrior on the path. The women occasionally wore dresses that swirled and sparkled with glass as they moved, but more usually were wrapped in heavy cloaks, or thick furs. But the people he watched tonight were wearing peasant's clothes and carrying

rough sacks over their shoulders. Their hair was long and they had no weapons. They could have come from one of many times.

Martin shrugged and shivered, walking slowly behind the ghosts on the old track as they steadily ascended the hill to the ruins of the church. There, as they crossed the thorny hedge to the right of the lych gate, the figures began to fade.

Swinging on the wooden gate, aware of bright moonlight cutting an edge across the hollow tower and the broken walls of the chapel, Martin and Sebastian watched as the figures began to descend into the earth. The ghosts were outside the defining wall of the cemetery, beyond the hump of the prehistoric mound on which the church had been erected.

When they were waist high the boys waved and called "goodbye." Soon only the heads could be seen, bobbing through the thistles, and then they too were gone.

Where the people went from here, none of the children of this or any other time had ever discovered.

The path from Broceliande continued south into another realm.

The Stoneshifter's Tale

(Fifteen years later...)

A storm was coming, Martin noticed, as he followed the cart and the coffin along the path around the forest. And yet the winds were still, the air apprehensive, sharp with the first scents of autumn, seeping from the wild woods of Broceliande. As he drifted onwards to the graveyard and his mother's cold earth home, he watched the dark oaks in the green. Hollow, huge and old, their towering trunks veined and snaked with ivy, they might have been old men, their smooth and spreading roots the shapely limbs of women sprawled at their feet in careful, drowsy thought.

In those days, as in all days, Broceliande was a terrible place, a "glooming" forest growing over boggy dells, forgotten stones, a place of hidden pools, falls of water and strangling thickets. Cut through by the village road from Gael to Guer, still the true heart of Broceliande could not be found, although the stink of that heart's corruption oozed from the edgewoods to lie, a sour miasma, over all the farms and hamlets to the west, the direction of the wild sea coast at Quiburron, of the stone-tattooed land at Carnac, the direction of the source of storms.

Yes, something lay rotting at the heart of the forest, a death that had been known for generations. It was a decaying place, shedding ghosts like autumn leaves. It held the farmsteads in a root-strong grip, the minds of the families too, though sometimes a youth escaped the shadow (to wait too long was to be lost) and Martin was one of these.

He had fled that shadow from the forest. He had been 16. He had promised that he would return only at his mother's death, a sad event which had now occurred, calling upon his conscience and his courage.

Again, then, he walked the slow path by Broceliande, a grieving son, a frightened man, confused by the flow of feeling from the wood.

Off the western shore the tide was turning, and with the ebbing flow the traveller was finally lowered to her cold earth home. The storm passed to the south as the priest spoke words over the grave, then walked through the two small fires to embrace and commiserate with Martin. The bell in the renovated tower tolled slowly.

"I'm sorry your sister couldn't be here. Eveline loved her very much. After little Sebastian died..."

Martin saw how the priest swallowed back the words, but he knew well what the man meant. Sebastian had been a special child to his parents, the deeply loved one; when he was gone, Rebecca had inherited the mantle of affection. Martin, too, would have liked to have seen his sister by the cold earth home, but she was lost, somewhere in the outback of Australia, following songlines, always following songlines.

Father Gualzator hesitated, shivering slightly as the chill wind blew, sending smoke swirling from the fires, the applewood sweet, the hazelwood smoke more acrid. Behind him, Martin's uncle Jacques and aunt Suzanne stood in respectful, watching, waiting silence, the old man's beret clasped at his groin, his long grey hair disturbed by the breeze. His watery eyes were filled with an odd longing; he was longing, certainly, for a cigarette, and to remove the too-tight shirt and tie. But there was something more disturbing him and Martin was aware of it.

The priest was agitated, his rosy complexion now brighter with the embarrassment he was feeling. Martin asked him, "What is it?"

"There are people on the path. I think they've followed us from the wood. Before I sing the hymn, I'd like to let them go."

Martin looked back, to the place where the people used to sink below the hill. He could see nothing, sense nothing. The priest was blind to them too, but aware of them. He was a Basque, estranged from his strange land, and his language had given him a form of vision that was denied to the likes of Martin. To speak *old* was to see *old*, he had always said, and when Martin had been a boy he and Sebastian, watching the ethereal flow of people on the path, had tested the priest's "old" eye, and found it unerring.

A few minutes of strained silence later the priest relaxed. "They've gone," he whispered, and turned back to the cold home. He tugged the rope that held the lid of the coffin and exposed the three linen-wrapped packs. He sang softly as he poured spring water along the length, then the breadth of each part of the traveller. Martin watched, remembering, as red berries and white were dropped carefully onto the wet linen. The flask of honey and the sack of meat were lowered, and then the small sun-wheel, resting on the traveller's chest. The lid was replaced, earth was scattered and more familiar words were uttered: "Dust to dust, flesh to the fire..."

It was over. Jacques steered the ageing dray back to Eveline's farm, the cart riding smoothly on newly greased axles, the priest leaning forward on his knees, staring back at the rebuilt church. Martin was comforted by the over-attentive Suzanne, whose black veil continually blew in his face as she held his arm, held the side of the cart, and talked non-stop about the traveller, Eveline, and the years of her trials

and tribulations. Martin was not unaware that he was being gently criticized for having stayed away so long and he repeatedly tried to change the subject, talking about Amsterdam, the design business he ran – but Suzanne was quite single-minded.

Jacques had prepared a stew of rabbit and pheasant in red wine; the priest offered a whole *coeur de brie*, a succulent cheese which Martin had not tasted in years; and Suzanne had baked bread. There were several stone jars of still cider, and brandy wine.

They sat at the pine table, warmed by the smell of cooked wine and fragrant wood burning on the open fire; they raised their glasses to the traveller and spoke her full name aloud, "Eveline Mathilde la-coeur-forte Laroche."

Jacques was then allowed his single cigarette, which he smoked silently, curling the cigarette inside his fingers as he pinched the tip, inhaling deeply and staring at his empty plate.

When he announced that he wished to smoke another he was told sharply that he couldn't, but he glanced at Martin, defied Suzanne and rose from the table, lighting-up as he moved and cocking his head meaningfully to the door. Suzanne poured herself more cider. Father Gualzator reached for the brandy, which he blessed (with a mischievous grin at the woman) before tipping the bottle to his glass.

Outside in the cold dusk, Jacques said, "I don't know if you're intending to stay, but if you are you should come to the Quiburon peninsula with me. Maybe tomorrow, although I think it'll be a stormy day. What do you think? Will you stay?"

Puzzled by the man's words, Martin nodded, accepted a cigarette and lit it. Distantly a fox barked, and the wide scatter of hens moved suddenly towards the shelter of the shed. "I have to stay. I have to sell the farm, clear up the paperwork, settle the taxes. I'll be here for a few days. Why Quiburon?"

"It's where your grandfather died, just after the war."

"Oh yes. Of course. Eveline would never take me there..."

"Your mother was only 12. My little sister. I was only a year older but I felt a lot of responsibility for her. How things changed!"

"Why go back now?"

"I want to tell you what happened to me. And to Eveline. I've never spoken about it, and nor did she, not as far as I know. But now I think I must. If only to encourage you to leave Broceliande, and not endanger your own life."

"That's what Eveline said to me in her last letter." Martin drew the envelope from his jacket pocket and removed the single sheet of blue writing paper. His mother's handwriting was neat and precise. He read aloud, "You were always the sensible one. You avoided the path and I think you must have avoided the danger. I do hope so. If you come back to Broceliande, please don't stay. I have always enjoyed the trips to Amsterdam. You have always been a loving presence in my life. I don't need you at the farm when I finally travel on. It would be better to avoid danger and stay in the city where you have made such a good life for yourself. Please think carefully about these words and say the same to Rebecca, if you ever find her."

Jacques lit his third cigarette, glancing almost guiltily back at the house, but Suzanne's voice was raised with laughter and the glasses were clinking.

"For a reason I don't fully understand she was very worried about you coming back. There are so many strange things about this place – the ghosts, the wood, the lost memories. We've all experienced them. They are part of life, our life, we take them for granted. But there's something not quite right. Something wrong. Something has changed in the last few years. I can't explain it. The priest has seen it. We probably all felt it when Eveline died, seven days ago. She seems to have been acutely aware of it. She was very concerned for you."

"The evil in the heart of the wood..." Martin mused aloud, staring into the night.

"As I say – it's hard to know. But I would like you to come to Quiburon. Hear my own nightmare. It may help, it may not. It might help you understand your brother's death a little more. I don't know. But Eveline didn't want you to stay here. And the only way I have of persuading you to leave is to share my nightmare. It's up to you, then, to decide whether you should handle Eveline's affairs from here, or from your house in Amsterdam."

The next day Jacques drove Martin to the sea-drenched cliffs of the western coast of Brittany, arriving in sleet rain, below a grey sky that moved effortlessly over them from sea-horizon to misted hills beyond.

As Jacques drove, he hunched forward in the seat of the old Citroen, peering through the running water on the windscreen, occasionally recognizing a place name and exclaiming, "There! It's OK. Now I know where I am!" or "Hell and Damnation. That last signpost must have been wrong. These damned coastal people."

Through hamlets, closed against the rain, through country lanes, winding between grey fields and gleaming trees, they traced an erratic course southwards, driving near the cliffs, then looping inland, then back to the edge of the great sea. It was a journey in which they regularly passed the signs of habitation, yet saw not one single human being.

At last the road dropped towards a pebble beach. The restless sea curled and whitened as it heaved against the dark rock of the small bay. Stones, like a ring of black fingers, probed from that swell, out below the waves.

"There," Jacques said, turning off the engine. "There at last!"

He took a moment to light a cigarette, then remembered to offer Martin one. The paper was damp, but the sharp smoke made Martin heady and relaxed. They peered through the rain for a while in silence. After a few minutes Jacques wound down the window and flicked the smouldering butt into the abyss. Martin did the same, then squirmed and twisted into his oilskin. He followed the older man, out onto a path that looked down on the drowned stone circle.

"There!" Jacques said again. "You see?" He pointed through the rain beyond the circle. "You see the stones of the second ring? Two rings together, side by side, stretching into the sea, one of them more drowned than the other. Can you see?"

Two dark fingers of smooth rock appeared then disappeared beneath the swell, a long way out across the ocean.

"Yes," Martin said, adding, "How old are they?"

"The rings?" Jacques shrugged. "Six thousand years, some say. Or maybe only a few years." He chuckled. "It depends on how you think of them. When we built them, when we put them upright, they marked a land that was hallowed, but has now been swallowed. Maybe people around here are descended from the builders, eh? Who knows. The stones wear the sea like a skin. You can see how it gleams on them! At low tide, during the hot summers, you can walk among them. It's muddy, they're crusted—" he meant with barnacles — "but you can touch them. I've heard stories that they sing, some that they dance, and some that they feed on the blood of young girls." He laughed again, glancing at Martin curiously, green eyes narrowed against the wind and rain, but watching for a reaction. "And of course, under certain circumstances, or maybe in certain minds, they do. They do. Everything is true. I've always believed in spirit," he said. "But it's something you just accept, not make into daft ritual. Do you have them in Amsterdam?"

"Girl-eating stones?"

"Ritualizers. The people who sing to the stones. The people who think that aliens made them. Crystal gazers."

"We call them The New Age. The Age of Aquarius, in the 60s. People then used to long for it to come. I've worked with many of them. Most of their dream was hope, expectation. If their dreams had come true, they'd anyway have grown older, moved on..."

Jacques laughed throatily, then hawked and spat away from the wind. "I agree with you," he said. "Dreams are for dreaming, not living. But that said, there's one dream I'd like to have come real, which is why I asked you here. I've lived my life with it. I stood here and hoped it. I longed for it. I dreamed of my father for years, for decades. If I could switch back the clock..."

Martin wasn't following his drift and said so. Jacques pointed out to sea again. "There. Right there. Follow my finger..."

He was pointing to the outer ring of stones, perhaps to the tallest stone that could be glimpsed at the ebb of the swelling water.

"I was 14 years old," Jacques said. "The storm had come in fast. The far horizon darkened, but Eveline and I kept playing on the beach. My mother seemed alarmed, but we kept playing on the beach. The blackness spread like colour soaking through water. It swept towards us, although where we played was still in the sunlight. My father was on the small boat. Eveline and I had each had turns with him. Now he was alone, and enjoying a few minutes of peace away from us. The sail was full and he was turning to come back to the bay. The darkness was like a veil, like a net being flung towards us. The sea began to rise, and we were called from the beach and taken up this very path. Soon the sea began to heave into the rocks. The stone circles were awash. We watched the swirl of cloud, the blackness. It was flowing very fast. I had never seen a storm like it."

Jacques was suddenly speaking strangely, almost dreamily. Martin felt that this story, this memory, had

been rehearsed for years. He spoke as if reading from a book.

"My father got tangled in the rigging. The boat was very small. It seemed to skip for a moment in the seawind, nosing up then down and the man seemed to be sitting very precariously. He was drenched, his thick white hair draped about his face. The boat was awash. He saw his family, safely up on the path, and waved, then made signals with his hand.

"I remember my mother shouting something; I can't remember what. The boat was twisting on the sea, too far out for safety, the sail full one moment then flapping the next, and he hauled and tugged at the ropes as the ocean broke across the bows. Again my mother shouted to him, her words lost in the wind that was now beginning to scream from the west.

"Above us, the black swirled over, and the rain struck us, and our eyes became half blind so that all we could see was the white of the sail, the dark hull, and the black shape of the man who struggled to guide the small vessel into the haven of the bay. When the boat tipped over it happened so fast I missed it, even though I was watching and shouting and crying for my father. One moment the white sail was a proud balloon, the next there was just the sea, and something splashing, a shape splashing.

"That was the moment when the sea became a monster, when the wind hit it, when the storm changed the cold water into a beast."

Jacques was in a dream, his eyes almost closed, tears squeezing from the corners, his words oddly stilted, his description strange for this charcoal-maker and handyman.

"It became a monster of many backs. The backs rose and heaved, green and scaly, flecked with white, shining as the monster rolled below the surface. You could see the muscles, the writhing limbs. On the beach, the monster's teeth exploded upwards, white enamel, sucked back into the tide just as the monster was trying to suck back the desperate man who was swimming for the shore. Around him, as he swam for his life, the limbs of the creature rose and fell, its huge back following him, trying to throw him, then suck him down as it subsided.

"He reached the stone. Do you see it? That stone there, yes, the dark one, the sharp one, you can see it now as the waves drop, the outermost stone of the second circle. It rises 12 feet from the sea bed. It was his only haven. And he reached it by sheer guts and reached around it, embraced it, and clung there. All the while the monster in the sea raged at him, sucked at him, tried to draw him back.

"I believe, or I have dreamed, that I saw him smile. He certainly waved. Believing himself to be safe, if cold, he clung to that great stone, to that great past, to the spirit of land, defying the sea. He clung like a limpet. Have you ever tried to prize a limpet from the rock it lives on? You need a chisel. When the creature sticks and grips, it cannot be dislodged, it cannot be sucked into the maw of the monster. And like a limpet embracing the old stone, my father resisted the tide that sucked at him, drew at him, tugged at him. It surged around him, it broke across him, it pulled and dragged at his legs, but he held on, he held on.

"So the ocean, seeing that it would not draw him back, now the ocean changed its tactics. It was the

moment my mother knew we had lost him. It began to smash him against the friend who had found him. It lifted him and smashed him; it twisted him, drew at him, then flung him to the very stone to which he clung. His head became a bloody mess. It concentrated on his head, of course. It crushed his bones against the rock, stunned him, bruised him, broke him bit by bit, until soon his strength had gone and his whole body was lifted and broken on the circle.

"Three times, maybe four, the sea cracked my father against the rock to open him. And then the pulp was drawn away, down and gone from us, gone for ever.

"He never came back, not a single trace of him, not even the boat. Nothing."

The rain beat down. It had found a way through Martin's oilskin and was freezing against his shoulder. Jacques had finished speaking and they scurried back to the car, squirming and twisting out of their waterproofs, flinging the wet garments onto the back seat before spending a few minutes smoking, listening to the drum of rain, to the odd silence that is invoked by that hollow sound.

"Why do you dream of him?" Martin asked at length. "I don't understand. If you could turn the clock back, how could you help him?"

"I could have flown to him; or I could have moved the stone closer to the shore. I had the power to do it. For a year or more I'd known I was a stone-shifter, ever since I'd danced on the path. But I was too frightened... perhaps too young. I didn't trust myself to do it right."

"I don't understand."

"I could have flown to him. I stayed on the earth. I could have moved the stone. I didn't even try to grip it. My father died, but in my heart I know he knew that I could have saved him. That's why he waved. He trusted me. I had danced among the people on the path—the magic was in me. He knew this, he'd heard me talk. I failed him. That's all. And I think that's all I can say for the moment."

Jacques opened the window and tossed his cigarette into the storm.

"I don't understand," Martin said.

"I didn't expect the sea to change its game. I wasn't ready to take on the sea. I thought he could do it on his own."

"And you thought you could move the standing stone?"

"It was a gift! I'd danced and played inside the ghosts. And sometimes you get a gift if you do that, and it lasts a while then goes. Like 'Old Provider's' Christmas presents, though, there's always a catch. Like nearly every child, I was too afraid to use the gift, and now it's gone, and your grandfather died when he might have lived.

"Eveline was there too and she too felt helpless, and yet she felt she could have helped. And whatever it was happened to her during that terrible storm later made her frightened for you and Rebecca, which is why she encouraged you to go away and stay away."

Jacques fumbled for the starter and the Citroën shuddered into life. Martin sat back, cold and confused, and let the rain and the saturated land drift past as his uncle drove him home.

The Songliner's Tale

Four days after the interment, Martin dressed warmly against the chill weather and walked through the drizzle up the path to the cemetery. He'd had a restless night, waking at one point to the sound of movement downstairs. Half dreaming, half alert, he had imagined that someone was prowling about the house, at one point even entering the bedroom where he lay. Indeed, in the morning he found the back door swinging free, and the signs of sandwich-making. Not knowing his mother's routine, nor lifestyle, he was not unduly concerned by this intrusion.

He approached the old church, with its half-shroud of scaffolding, and as he reached for the gate, so he saw a crouching figure by the hump of green-cloth covered soil, the new grave. It was a woman, he thought, from the drop of auburn hair around the figure's shoulders, but he didn't recognize her. She wore a heavy lambskin coat, green cord trousers, and black leather boots that were scratched and muddied. She was hunkered down and singing softly, her arms folded across her chest, her head raised slightly, as if looking above the top of the gleaming marble headstone.

Her voice suddenly made contact!

"Rebecca?" Martin whispered. Her singing voice came clearer, sharper through the fine rain. "Rebecca?" he called more loudly, and the woman turned to look at him. Martin stopped walking, shocked by the face that stared at him.

Slowly Rebecca rose to her feet, rubbed at the backs of her knees and came over to her brother. Her long hair was damp, framing a strong and handsome face, aged by sun and dust. She was as hard as stone, as carved as wood; when she smiled she revealed the absence of a canine tooth, something that the younger Rebecca would have never allowed to go unfilled. But the smile was a genuine gesture of pleasure, the wry turn of the lips, gladness conveyed in every movement of face and hands as she reached for Martin and hugged him.

"You look lean," she said, stepping back to inspect him after the embrace. "You've not been eating."

"I try to keep fit. Genes for fatness run in the family; have to keep them at bay, like wild dogs. Not eating 20-course Indonesian meals every day helps as well, excellent though they are."

"You'll get fat," she said with a smile. "Just like daddy, it'll happen suddenly. But you look good now. Nice complexion." She pinched his cheek. "And no drugs, I think. No shadows. That's good."

"I don't take drugs," Martin agreed. "You look rugged," he went on. He touched the deeply etched lines about her eyes and mouth, his fingers gentle. She shrugged.

"I'm a rugged lass. The outback is a hard place. The land wants to take your water. Take my hand..."

They walked to the iron gate, then suddenly Rebecca ran, childlike, to leap and swing on the rusting hinges, looking out towards the valley and the old forest—Broceliande, hazy in the rain, dark on the horizon. Martin stepped onto the gate as well.

Rebecca said, "It's odd to be back. I can't tell whether I like it or hate it. I hate this fucking weather, of course. But the smells, the colours...I've been bleached yellow, burned red and charred amber at

various times over the last few years. And I've heard the songs, such wonderful old songs, Martin... But I've missed the colours, the greens. The real colours."
"Can you hear songs now? Are there songs in this earth?"

She glanced at him, her expression one of deliberate if unfeigned contempt. "Don't be an idiot. Of course there are. The song is everywhere around us. It doesn't sing from us, Martin, it sings through us; which is why we forget so easily in this hemisphere." She stepped from the gate and folded her arms, her characteristic gesture. She watched him through jet-lagged eyes, across the years of absence. "I don't want to talk about the songpaths. I came here to watch my mother into her cold home and I missed it. I'm really sorry that I wasn't here. I missed dad down, ten years ago, and I promised myself not to repeat the negligence."

Martin said, "You must have got my letter..."

"I did! It came fast. And I got the first flight available, but the fucking engine failed in Bombay. A day and a half in Bombay, confined to the airport, paying three kids a tip each every time I needed a piss, and all the cash I had was in Australian dollars! I tried to ring, but the lines just wouldn't connect."

She laughed and clutched her brother's arm. "That's funny, isn't it? Twelve years of my life I've spent connecting the lines, the lines between different shapes of spirit, but I can't connect with France Telecom from Bombay Airport. I like that. It's sort of ironic."

"Pompous little bag of bones," Martin murmured, echoing a childhood taunt, and Rebecca put him in a headlock, laughing as they struggled through the rain until Martin declared a truce.

"I am a bag of bones. But I'm five times stronger than you, my man."

"Damn right. I said pax!"

"Can I stay with you?" she asked a while later, as they straightened the clothing and returned to the rough road back to the village.

"Of course. The house is as much yours -"

"Can I stay with you!" she repeated, and Martin felt the thump of his heart. It had been a long time and he flushed as he anticipated the renewed relationship. But there was no one in his life in Amsterdam at the moment. "I suppose so."

"You suppose so. Great. You suppose so."

"Yes. You can stay with me. It's been a long time, Beck. We've moved apart."

"Of course we have! But the line is still there between us. Lines like that don't break. And I need to be close. That's all. That's it. I need to be close. To you. To them. I should have been here to watch them down."

"I wasn't here when either of them crossed," Martin said quietly. "So they wouldn't have known you weren't here for the interment. They knew you'd be sent for. Eveline actually didn't want us here. Anyway, I watched them down. They were guarded. I swear it."

Rebecca sighed as they walked, now linking arms, almost hanging on to Martin, jet-lag beginning to creep into her muscles. "She'll be with little Seb. That's nice..."

"Not for 33 days yet," Martin reminded her, and she

glanced at her watch. "Oh yes. I'd forgotten. Well... she soon will be with our little brat brother. It's so odd to be back," the last statement made in a forceful tone of voice, the subject changed abruptly.

Martin felt the same shudder of realization. He too was something of a stranger in a familiar land. His life had changed, he was out of place here; and yet he was needed.

"I know," he said grimly. "I think I have to stay. The farm needs sorting out. I hardly know where to begin. It would be good to have some help, Beck."

Martin was aware of her hesitation as they walked, the slight loosening of his sister's grip on his arm, the sudden tightening of her fingers again. Rebecca said, "I'll stay as long as I can. I'll do what I can. But if the songs get too -" she broke off, then smiled and shrugged. "I can't explain it, Martin. My line isn't here anymore. The sounds confuse me. If I get called back, I'll have to go."

"Stay as long as you can. It'll be good to have you here."

"I'll try. But when I go, I'll be gone before you know it. It's the way with me."

"How very New Age," he said with a smile.

"No. Just the way I am."

He looked at her across years, across age, knew that the moments together would be short, that this sad reunion was an event in a life, hers, as rich and complex as any tapestry; he knew that Rebecca was here because her lines had brought her here, and that in her own world she would soon be so far from him that not even the sound-wires would be able to connect them, and again she would be gone.

His voice dropping, his voice resigned, he said simply, "I know."

Martin built and stoked the applewood fire until the small parlour was glowing with light and warmth. He spread a blanket on the hearthside, undressed and lay back. Rebecca finished her bath and ran naked into the room, clutching a bath sheet which she flung over the two of them, shivering beside him. Martin felt the steam and heat from her body, a cooling dampness. When the attack of shivering had passed she sat up, the towel around her shoulders, looking at the man, smiling and shaking her head. "You are lean. You used to be so chubby! I don't think I've ever seen so flat a stomach."
"Come on. Flynn is the most athletic man you've ever met. Your words, five years ago, last letter I ever had from you."

Rebecca laughed, leaning her head towards the fire so that her coppery hair could start to dry. "What are you talking about? I wrote every week. Didn't you get my letters? Obviously a bad postal service."

"Obviously."

"Besides, Flynn is nothing but bone and sinew. Athletic but not aesthetic, not that I give a damn. I don't want to talk about Flynn. I want to talk about us. So just get me warm. Please?"

"This reminds me of that first night. When I came here? Do you remember? I was a sad, bedraggled soul, and you and Sebastian hated me."

Martin smiled as a vague memory of Rebecca's arrival

in the family entertained him. "They made such a fuss of you. They kept comparing you to me. I got really angry..."

"They were teasing you. I could see it so clearly. It was obvious. I thought it was funny —"

"What was funny?"

"— the way you couldn't see it. You were such a sheltered boy. Such a cautious boy... But I was hungry, and defensive, and new, and confused. I was missing my own home, my own parents. Dad — my Dad — was always teasing. I loved his teasing. It's what I missed most when he died. And then I found that my 'new' Dad was just as bad — just as good! It was liking coming home again. I missed it all so much when I went to Australia. Flynn is so straight... 'if it's irony it must be metal.' 'Say what you mean and mean what you say.' It comes from having to dissect the literal from the symbolic in reconstructed languages, I suppose."

"Do what?"

"It's his job. What he calls digging out the hard foundations below the crumbling ideas of walls and towers. And he's good at it. But he's: So! Serious! He's learned to cherish the clear signal of a clear statement. I'm not criticizing him, you understand."

"Of course you're not. Perish the thought."

"Bastard! Anyway you were always easy to wind up."

"Who's denying it? I didn't like you. Not at first. I didn't want you in the family. I didn't like the way you and Seb teamed up to dance through the people on the path. I felt excluded."

"You were excluded. Which isn't to say that I didn't fancy you even then. You intrigued me. But you were a pain in the butt." She looked at the fire. "Poor little Seb. What the hell did he do, I wonder? What did he do that he had to die like that?"

Martin was surprised by her comment. "You sound like you think it had something to do with the path."

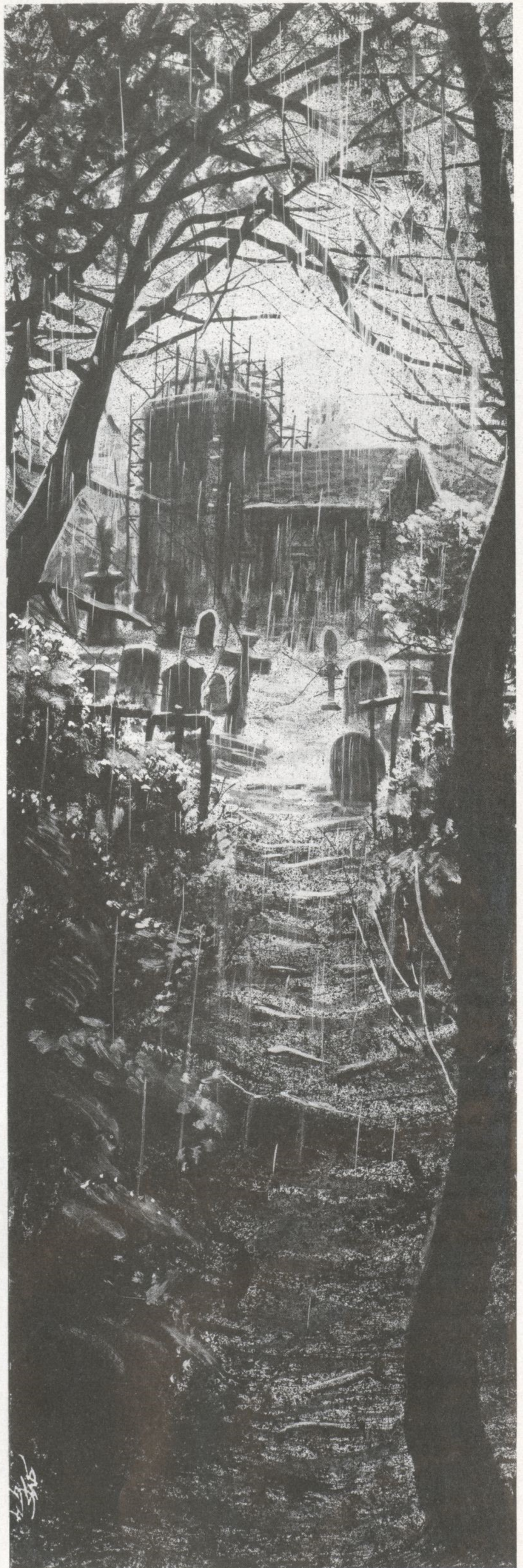
"Do I? I'm not sure. But I am sure he went inside the people once too often. I bet every child around here still does it, of course. But most of us stopped seeing them after a while. As if we'd been... as if we'd been contacted. Or maybe completed. I don't know. Something like that. But Seb, he kept on seeing them. And he kept on drawing those funny bottles. Do you remember? Long, thin bottles, with little trees and little men inside them."

"I do remember."

Martin leaned towards the fire, puzzled. "Contacted? Completed? What does that mean, Beck? Do you feel completed in some way?"

Rebecca wriggled closer, her hand resting on his warm skin, just above the knee. She seemed to be shivering again. "I think so. I don't know so. There's something in Broceliande that is seeping out. Merlin's spirit, of course. We've always known that, haven't we?" She smiled, then spoke the local lore, the belief based on forgotten legend. "Merlin sleeps in the heart of the wood, trapped by the enchantress Vivien in a thorn tree, or an oak tree by some accounts, inside a column of air that hides him from all eyes but hers. His dreams, his nightmares, creep to the edge to provide for us, to divide us, to test us, to seek out the true hearts among us."

"That's fairy-tale. The people on the path aren't



dreams, or nightmares. And they don't interfere with us."

"Don't they? But that's not the point. The point is, this is a haunted place, and it always has been. We take the ghosts for granted. Not everyone sees them, just a few, and all of us stop seeing them after a year or so and start to doubt our memory. But we never talk about them outside. Why is that? Why do we keep quiet? Is something stopping us? Have you ever spoken to anyone in Amsterdam about the people?"

"Never. They'd think I was mad."

"But why do you say that? You know you're not. You're no more mad than everybody else. We share a common experience and we share a common fear of communicating that experience. It's as if we've become afraid of what happened to us as children, when we saw them, when we danced inside their skins. Except that you never did, of course—"

"In fact, I did. Just once. It was terrifying. It felt like I was gliding on a cold lake, and there was a woman singing, but it only lasted an instant."

Rebecca frowned, staring at him for a moment. "I didn't know that." She turned away. "Yes. I think I remember."

"No you don't. This is the first time I've mentioned it."

"Well, my point is, most of us saw them for months. Some only got a glimpse. And for all of us there was a moment when when we got frightened..."

"Christ. That's what Jacques told me..."

"Jacques? Is he still alive?"

"Very much so, still building sheds and making charcoal. He was at the cold-earthing, three days ago."

"The funeral, Martin. We call them funerals in the outside world, these days."

"I like the old terms. Anyway, he took me to Quiburon, out on the coast where the stones are. Told me about my grandfather... about how he'd felt that he could have saved him from drowning, even though he was just a child at the time... And he said just what you've just said. He had suddenly got frightened, and known that it was time to stop the encounters."

"With the path..."

"Yes."

Rebecca sighed, stretching out across the rug, dry and warm, her hands behind her head as she stared at the black beams of the ceiling.

"To go away is to see more clearly, Eveline said, but she was trapped. She wrote to me — just once — she said she loved me but for my own sake, stay away. We get blinded in this place, she said. We take too much for granted. We don't see how trapped we are, how used we are. All that protects us is that we are afraid to talk about it. But who's trying to stop us talking about it?"

"You never talked about Broceliande to Flynn?"

"A little. I didn't find it easy."

When I first arrived in your home, I didn't believe in the people on the path. I thought you were all crazy, dancing around at midnight, describing thin air as if there were human figures in it. I used to watch you from the garden. I was watching you the night Seb danced into the frightened people, the week before he died. You thought I was in bed asleep, but I never slept in the middle

night; I was too frightened. There were too many prowling and breathings, too many noises, and I was new to the house, and my new father still scared me a bit, even though I had no reason to be frightened.

I'd seen other children playing with the ghosts — do you remember Thiery? What a crazy boy. Always shouting, always calling to them: "Tell me your story! Tell me your story!" And Suzi. Always nattering away, happy with all the people, always urging them to stay, having a real relationship with them. And all I could see were my new friends, and my new brothers, addressing the emptiness. But I'd also heard adults talking about their own childhoods, and the way they'd followed the people on the path, and some of the terrible and wonderful things that had happened to them shortly afterwards. So I was intrigued. I assumed it was just because I didn't know how to look. My eyes were wrong, which is why I started to rub them, and screw them up. It was so painful. I became so obsessed with seeing that I became crazy. When I finally cut the eyelids to let in more light — remember that? — I was finally taken in hand. I still have the scars, but they're lost in the skin-lines now, thank God.

I suppose Eveline knew that I was trying to see the things which she herself had once seen, and long become blind to. She locked me in my room at night, although she always came back two or three times to cuddle me. The one night she didn't come and check on me was the night when you followed Seb dancing up the path inside three ghosts, although I didn't know this at the time. Eveline was ill, remember? And I managed to get out through the window when I heard Seb disturb you. He was always outside. I don't think he ever slept. It was as if he'd got some magical energy that kept him hunting, hunting the spirits.

I ran along behind you, hiding in the tree-line when the moon came out, and heard Sebastian shouting something like, "This is the best ever. I can hear their hearts!" You were hanging back; you always said you'd never go inside one of these ghosts. You were probably wise. I could only see you walking slowly and nervously, and little Seb twisting and laughing. The moon went in, everything was dark, and that's when I saw my person on the path.

He was right at the point where the track leaves Broceliande, where the tangle of rose-briar and hawthorn thins, that marshy area, with the aspens and broken oaks. He was standing there, holding a horse by the reins. Then he stepped forward, and I could see that the horse was heavily packed and that the man, who was young and lightly bearded, had some strange bagpipes over his shoulder. There was a stringed instrument on the side of the packhorse, a piece of curved and decorated wood and a small soundbox. I didn't recognize it, and I never heard it played, but that this ghost, this shimmering man, was a musician was all that I could think of.

He drew back into the woods as you and Sebastian came running back to the farmhouse. He watched you carefully, and you didn't see him. That's odd, isn't it? Usually the ghosts are unaware of us.

When you'd gone, he led the horse forward up the path, hurrying slightly, although he was moving slowly, like a slowed film, but the haste was conveyed clearly. He knew I was behind him, following. I had

never seen anything like it. I was enchanted. The glimmer, like fairy glamour, flowed from his edges. It filled the night air, and I tried to touch it, but felt nothing.

I caught up with him. I felt so alive, suddenly I forgot about my eyes, which were still hurting from the way I'd slashed the skin. I can recognize now that I was aroused, that my body was aroused by imagination, by the experience of seeing a troubadour, a ghostly one, but a sort of dream recreated on that autumn night. I was thrilled by the encounter, and desperately wanted to hear him sing. So I entered him, and copied Sebastian, turning and swirling inside the dewy ghost.

There was nothing but rage. It was terrifying. I was caught in a whirlpool of fear, of anger. The man was escaping. He was frightened of something, and secretive. The rage in him seemed to crush me. Every squirt of blood in his veins was the rushing of a waterfall; his heart was thundering. I was deafened by this man's retreat from some terrible encounter, or so it felt. I was strangling, gasping for breath, turning desperately to find fresh air as he carried me with him, up to the hill. It was like being buried alive.

Then, just at the last, just as I thought I was going to die, I heard the sound of pipes. He wasn't playing them, he was remembering them. He was singing to himself in his own language, remembering the skirling notes of the pipes he carried, and I shared that thought, that moment of internal music. I touched an ancient music. I was treated to such an old song, and a song filled with such despair...

I became haunted by that music, just like Sebastian had been haunted by his own encounter. I couldn't sing it. It made no sense. It made sense only in my head; I could jig to it, I could twirl to it, but it was inexpressible, except in dreams.

How old was I? I can't remember, now. Fifteen, maybe. I spent the holiday weeks of the next two years among the stones at Carnac, hating the tourists, the wretched families who came to picnic, to photograph, but not to listen. I was listening for the dreamsongs of that time, for the old tunes, for some clue to the magic that was now in me. But I realized that even that ancient earth wasn't old enough. To articulate the music that flowed inside me not so much like blood, more like... like a benign but omnipresent parasitic worm, invading my spaces, pulling back when it hurt me, growing inside me but as I say, inexpressible, because it was pure feeling, eroding me, fighting me, but carefully... to find out how to exorcise that music, to get rid of the ghost that something in Broceliande had driven into me, I had to go further back.

Which is why I went to Australia, to the place of songlines, and songtrails, and a way of singing that you would never understand, because it isn't singing at all, nor singing up the world of rocks and creatures as happened in the dreamtime, but being sung through. I can't describe it.

The other side is easier: I never had a good voice. I was always gravelly, you remember? The groaning background, Daddy used to say. But suddenly when I sang I seemed to have an effect on people. Whatever I sang, wherever I was, whatever the country.

I silenced the Chief (and his family!) of the Memorangas people – the thunder people – out behind the

Mann Ranges. They were singing to the sleeping rains and asked me to join in. I was already flowing with them, they seemed to be singing through me, and when I sang it was dizzying, it was like falling, then flying. Suddenly I was the only voice. They were entranced and puzzled, watching me in silence. I seemed to fly among them, and there were so many of them, and the land shifted and changed, the light, the colour, the warmth. I was travelling through the song, some silly ditty from childhood, "Frère Jacques" maybe, I've now lost the words, I just remember how the world dropped away when I sang, and how my song went through those watching people.

In the morning I felt hungover, though I hadn't been drinking. There was so much excitement outside my private space that I got up, quite naked, and peered out.

Flynn was there, crouching with the chief and looking at water flowing from below their painted rock. There had never been a spring there, now there was new water, very cold, rich in calcium and magnesium – Flynn did the analysis – a new spring, which had come during the night.

My song, they said, had called the sleeping water to their hunt trail. They were amazed at the new spring. They made me bathe in it. They all wanted to wash me. I sat in the muddy stream for an hour, while I was anointed and sung to, and questioned, and played to with kazoo and bark drum. They put eucalyptus leaves on my head and insisted on daubing me with the image, in yellow ochre, of a gerbil, a creature that seems to find water everywhere. It was their totem creature.

The only truly embarrassing moment was needing to go to the toilet. Everything that I didn't want, they valued, collecting it and burying it below a small stone.

After that I got frightened. I was singing to people, singing anything, any rubbish, and it was affecting them profoundly. There was a touch of magic in my voice and I had no conception of it, only the knowledge that it worked. Flynn was both apprehensive and loving. He was never exploitative, although we did earn a few meals in the lean times by my singing in small-town bars. I think he knew there was a spirit in me, he simply had no idea what it was and had no idea how to use it. We went into the desert for five years, built separate shacks, and entered our own otherworlds. We'd meet on occasion to eat a ceremonial meal (of whatever we could find, or obtain), and spend a few hours on the mat, but most importantly we talked about our dreams. We'd end each visit by going to the small stream and bathing, then go our separate lines again.

That was ten years ago. It was a hard time for me, a time in which I came close to death on several occasions. But with the song in me, this song, this magic, I always came back.

Then Flynn drowned – a terrible accident. I ran 12 miles to the billabong when I was told the news, and dragged his body from the muddy pool. He'd been dead when he was found, so they'd left him there. He was bloated with water, naked and fat, his skin fish-belly white. He was quite dead. But I crouched on him and sang to him and the water started to ooze from him, came out of his mouth, his ears, his eyes, nose,

out of his pores, his arse, even out of his cock. The water drained from him, a steady sweat, a steady flow in the cold dawn, and soon there was room in his body for the air again. He started to breathe and his body danced below me. The air went in, his eyes opened and stared at me, and I stopped the song.

If he was frightened of me before, he was terrified of me then!

It was the moment when my time with Flynn became fatally defined. I mean in terms of its intimacy, its...longevity? We were dying together from that moment on. But only because our time together was now defined by the song. He hadn't known he was dead. But when people come up to you to congratulate you on being alive again you tend to get the idea that something weird has happened. Flynn was as muscular and lean as the desert where we lived; every part of his mind was trimmed to the bone. He had no time for doubt. He heard the story – that he'd had a stroke and fallen into the drowning pool – he heard the story of the songlady bringing him back to life, he knew that our friends in the wanderlands, the desert, weren't liars; and he accepted.

At that moment he was a dead man alive again; at that moment my song was magic. At that moment he was at a distance from me, because his own curiosity now extended not to the land which we loved, or to the past which we were trying to recreate in our minds, but to me, to a French woman, born near the forest of Paimpont, orphaned when 14 years old, now a possessor of magic, not just an explorer of magic tradition.

The Lake-Finder's Tale

The old "bosker," Conrad, came to the farmhouse shortly after dawn, a dark figure moving effortlessly along the path, the early sun catching on his small, silver spectacles. Martin had been unable to sleep, his mind full of Rebecca's story and the idea that to dance inside the ghostly figures from Broceliande was to become possessed by some shadow of the past. Rebecca slept soundly in the bed behind him. Martin peered down as Conrad rummaged in the long grass by the hedges, found two eggs, which he inspected and pocketed. He was wearing a wide-brimmed leather hat – he had made it himself – and a long, grey overcoat which flapped around him as he moved. He carried two short wooden staffs, slung on his back like rifles.

Seeing Martin at the bedroom window he waved, then let himself in to the warm kitchen below. Martin came downstairs. The old man stood, hat in his hands, white hair combed back into a long pigtail, tied with a grass-twine binding. He was looking around sadly.

"I watched Eveline as she went to her cold home, the other day," he said. "I was by the wood. I didn't want to intrude by the fires."

"I wish you had. You'd have been very welcome."

"I'm going to miss her. She was just a girl when I came here first, but she helped me build my houses in the forest. She always let me have eggs – and bread, sometimes. I traded foxes, after your father died. She couldn't bear to kill them, but they have to be controlled."

"I understand," Martin said quickly, feeling uncomfortable. "But please stop controlling them from now. I'm more than happy to let you have eggs whenever you want."

As Martin picked a dozen of the larger eggs from a wicker basket, placing them carefully in Conrad's sack, the old man said carefully, "You're a fox lover, then?"

"Always have been."

"So am I at heart. But trade is trade."

Martin offered the remains of yesterday's heavy loaf and a farm cheese that was now over-ripe. The old bosker seemed delighted.

"Would you like some breakfast?" Martin asked him.

"I ate in the forest at first dew. Thanks all the same."

Conrad seemed to relax. He pulled on his hat and lifted the pack to his shoulder. He was staring at Martin curiously, grey eyes bright in the weather-etched face. "Are you still frightened of me, Martin?"

"Good God, no."

"You used to be –"

"Kids are always frightened of hermits. And you were once an enemy soldier, left behind by the war. We used to make up terrible stories about what you did in the woods."

"A living demon, eh?" Conrad laughed. "Yes, I remember. I used to listen – I could hear you all from a long distance. It's a talent I seem to have developed since coming here," – he sounded wry as he said this last – "Sometimes your fantasies amused me, sometimes – not often – they made me sad. I was a long way from my first home, and harmless to everything inedible, which included children –"

"Ah yes, but we didn't think so."

"All except Rebecca, your special friend Rebecca." Conrad winked. "She wasn't afraid of me. Anyway, I would watch you children chasing the ghosts from the forest as they walked the path. I couldn't see them, of course, no adult could. But I could hear them. It was an extraordinary experience. It still is. Which is chiefly why I came to see you. There's something I want to show you..."

"Shall I wake Rebecca?"

The old man glanced back. "No. This is for you alone."

Conrad might always have been a part of Broceliande. He was as eternal, as familiar, indeed as elusive, usually, as the strange ruins that could be found just inside the forest's skirts. But he had not been born here, nor come into existence here. In his own words, "There comes a moment in every person's life, I now realize, when as they are marching forward they become aware that in fact they are running away. At that moment, home is where you are standing, and this place, this gloomy edgewood, became my second home."

His army column had been marching past Broceliande. Conrad was 16, not particularly frightened, not particularly lonely. He was just a soldier in a column, moving forward towards the coast. There were not enough trucks to transport all the troops, in those early winter months of 1944, and so like Caesar's legions they tramped the rough roads to the west, sometimes aware that a watery sun was leading them on.

"But I had no faith, no real belief. My father had always talked of duty, and of family, but his words, sincere though they were, were of no comfort to me. I wonder sometimes if there can be any greater pain than realizing that you are no longer part of a family that once was your whole life.

"As we marched past Broceliande my First Home broke into shattered memories. Everything simply fell apart. I hated where I had come from. I loathed that savage war. I despised the principles that drove it. I was not alone in this, of course, but the forest took me and me alone.

"I deserted quickly. I used a strip of oilskin to wrap my weapons and bury them; the rifle was a bolt-action Lee Enfield, more like 20 pounds in weight than five, or so it seemed, and I was glad of the freedom from this burden.

"That first day, I walked a wide circle, walking to the limit of what I felt I needed. That circle, I discovered later, was more than two miles across."

This disc of land had become Conrad's Second Home. He walked its circumference five times, first entering the dark forest, then emerging and skirting the villages, crossing the fields and the farmlands before entering the woods again. All of this was done at night because he was in fear of his life, now, and his uniform would certainly have been an invitation to murder.

In all the long years since then he had never once stepped outside the circle, as he had defined it during those February days. "I belong here. I made it right that I belonged here. I became accepted, eventually welcomed. I don't belong across the circle, but I've lived long enough, and circled hard enough, to make this small land my land. My home."

Now Conrad led the way into that small land and into the forest, following a wide, winding path that was tall with wet, webbed grass and purple thistle. He stopped occasionally to listen. The air was moist, almost stifling.

His first house was a shack constructed out of corrugated iron, wooden panels and old doors. It was covered with black oilskins. Around it, on a picket fence, hung thirty or so carcasses of grey squirrels, in various states of decomposition. Two foxes' heads on poles were a grim reminder of Conrad's main usefulness to the farms around the wood.

"Come in, come in," the bosker said with a chuckle, glancing back at Martin. "Into the place which terrified you once upon a time."

Martin pulled aside the oilskin door, ducked through the small entrance space into Conrad's living quarters. The floor had been hollowed out and lined with sandbags and turves. His bed was at one end, in a stream of light from the only window, a gap below the metal eaves. His fire was at the other end of the small room, built out of bricks, with an iron chimney to the outside world. The walls were hung with skins and furs; hooks and leather ties dangled from the ceiling, ready for hanging game. He had a chair and a table, and a small chest on which stood two tiny, framed and faded photographs, one of a shy, fair-haired girl, holding a cat, the other of two people sitting on a garden chair, a couple who looked out of the frame with solemn expression.

As Conrad stored his new supplies, Martin noticed that above the bed were five crude paintings, all of the girl, all from different angles: one of each profile, her full face laughing, her face looking coy, a discreet nude...they had been executed in crayon on smoothed and chalk-whitened wood.

Light spilled suddenly into the shack. Conrad had pulled back the doorflap, waiting quietly for Martin to finish his inspection.

"Just a ghost," the old man said, and Martin felt embarrassed, stepping quickly away from the portraits.

"I'm sorry. That was an intrusion. I was too curious."

"No intrusion at all. She's long gone, now. Long changed. But she keeps me in touch with my younger spirit."

They continued inwards, the track narrowing and becoming more difficult, the oaks crowding from the sides.

"Be careful," Conrad called, as he smacked at wet briar to clear the route. "This is the way the ghosts come. If I say get off the path, do so immediately. They sometimes move very quietly."

"What does it matter?" Martin called back. "I can't see them or hear them any more. I'm too old. They can't harm me..."

Conrad's voice as he moved ahead was steely. "They can harm you. Just do as I say. For Eveline's sake, for your mother's sake."

The path spilled out into a clearing below the spreading branches of three massive beeches. The ground here was soft and golden brown, streaked through with the green of fern. Here, Conrad had his second home, a hemisphere of bent willow branches, covered with hides.

"Hunting lodge," he said quickly, skirting the clearing. "We've not far to go, now."

Not far to go?

For an hour that seemed like ten, Conrad led them deeper into the wildwood, through half-lit dells and marshy, silent glades, down stone escarpments and over massive, mossy rocks which caught the shifting sun with a vibrant, emerald luminosity. Muddy watercourses wound through crushing woods of oak and holly; springs spilled from ragged ledges, misting in the thin light from the glistening canopy.

"We're lost. We must be lost."

"Not lost at all. Look!"

And suddenly they had come through the wood to the rush-fringed shore of a wide lake, and the bosker's third home — a series of tarpaulins, slung between trees, open to the water.

"Fishing lodge," Conrad announced, stooping to enter the shelter and beckoning Martin to follow him.

The lodge was full of dried and drying fish, crude rods and nets, a harpoon and a further pile of skins, rabbit and fox; the cured hides of two small deer were stretched on frames and could be pulled across the open front to block the wind.

They sat, squeezed together, and watched the gentle water. Mallards and moorhens wriggled through the rushes, dipping and pecking below the lake. The forest was solid on the other side.

"They come across in small boats, or sometimes on

rafts," Conrad said after a while. "When I'm here at night, sometimes the water is covered with a low mist, and it swirls where the boat comes, the only visible sign of their passage from the heartwood. I hear the oars dipping, and the rustle of the sedges when it comes to the bank. I hear the murmur of voices, and on occasion the breathing of horses. The ghosts, which are invisible to me, follow the path by your farm, then up to the church and over the hill. The boat returns to the dark wood, after which there will often be nothing for months.

"Over the lake is the heart of Broceliande but it is an older forest than the forest behind us. It doesn't belong here.

"My circle of land ends as far out onto the lake as I need to go to spear pike, perhaps 20 yards. I would never dare go further."

I had lived in the wood for ten years before I found the lake – Conrad went on – or perhaps I should say before the lake found me. There was no sign of it when I first came here. I had probably walked across its edge 50 times since I first circumscribed my land. It had hidden from me, or been hidden from me, but one bitter winter morning I heard the sound of moorhens and gently splashing water. I was curious, aware that there should have been a grove of trees there. I pushed through the dense holly to find the lake very much as you see it now. It was covered with ice, though, almost to the edge itself, where the rushes were white with frost.

This was the second event that convinced me of a source of magic at work, deeper in the forest.

I'd already seen the strange behaviour of you children, at night on the path, your clear belief in ghosts and your parents' reluctance to contradict you. More than that, when hunting deep in the wood I had occasionally heard the sound of a man crying out. The wailing came from a great distance, and quite soon I realized that the distance was further than I'd thought, since I discovered I could also hear the whispered words of children from a mile away. That crying voice haunted me, though. It drifted through the glades, seemed to flow down the paths through the wood, and was usually followed by a woman's voice, laughing.

So when this lake miraculously appeared, one morning, I could no longer deny that I'd stumbled into a place which, to put it mildly, was quite out of the ordinary. The strange way of speaking among the farmers and villagers now became more important. The traditions, the rituals that I had watched from the edgewood, all had seemed eccentric, perhaps just local habit; now they seemed to echo an older thought: the fires you put at the head of each grave, the procession of the 12 trees, the drowning of grass images, with the hair-filled puppet of a child inside... They'd never been sinister, but now they became more meaningful, although I've never really understood that meaning.

I wasn't aware, when all this was happening, of the association of Merlin with this forest. I hadn't read Tennyson or Chrétien de Troyes, knew nothing of Thomas Mallory, or the *Vitae Merlinis*, or the other sources. The priest talked to me about all of them. He lent me books. But before that education I only knew

that there was a vision of magic, somewhere across the lake, and that it was seeping from the forest, shrouded in the ghostly forms of the people on the path, and in that terrible moaning.

You know how the seasons bring different scents, different feelings in the air? So it was with the wailing voice, as if there was a season for the agony, a certain day for the distress, an hour, just after dusk, when the moment of true desperation could be remembered and the air of the forest filled with the cry.

On one such evening, when the pain of that voice had gone, I crept from my hunting lodge again and heard the wild-wood speak, an odd echo, like a girl's voice, but curiously slow. It seemed to breathe a word. I wasn't sure, but I thought the word was "Fool," and moments later the word was repeated. "Fool!"

I waited, fascinated, and soon a girl from the village came running and twirling along the path. I knew her by sight, though she had never entered the wood before. She was a slight thing, 14 years old or so, her hair almost orange in the half light, her clothing a simple dress and a loose grey cardigan.

As she ran she seemed to dance, exactly as I have seen the children dance among the ghosts. She was murmuring as she moved. "I have it. I have it now."

She approached the clearing where I waited, unaware of me. Then she stopped and crouched, snarling and shaking her head so that her hair was wild. Laughing, she suddenly launched herself at a tree and scratched and bit at the hard bark, tearing with her fingers, stripping away whole lengths of wood. Embracing the torn trunk she flung back her head and howled and bayed, then laughed and again exclaimed, "I have it!"

I felt terrified of this feral child and inadvertently drew back, drawing attention to myself. She raced across to me, coming very close, then folded her arms about her body – her fingers were bloody – cocking her head as she peered at me. Then she leered forward, lips hideously drawn back from pearl-white teeth to expose the death in her head. "I have it!" she hissed, and proceeded to dance a little jig, arms still folded. "I have it," she murmured, almost singing, delighted with herself.

At that moment a boy laughed from the darkness of the wood. The girl turned quickly, crouching slightly, then took off like a hare towards the source of the sound. The boy stepped into the half light and taunted her. "No you don't! No you don't!"

"I have it," screamed the girl.

"You have *nothing*. You took *nothing*!"

And at once his crowing ceased and his youthful face took on a look of great age, and great amusement, the amusement of an old man, listening to the pretensions of someone younger and still naive.

"Fool..." he added quietly.

It was the wrong thing to do, perhaps. The girl leapt at him and in a second had torn her nails across his grinning face. They struggled. He held her hair, but she was taller, stronger, and she hunched above him, bending him and crushing him, finally sinking her teeth into the back of his neck. She shook him, worried at him, like the wolf whose shape now seemed to envelop her. Girl-like, hair tossing, legs thrashing inside her simple skirt, the hunched form

of a wolf was shadowed around her, an evil glamour.

The screaming boy was dragged away by this monstrous creature. I ran towards her, but she turned and looked at me, the struggling boy still held in those perfect teeth. I felt as if I'd been struck by falling sickness. I couldn't move. I was on my knees. My arms fell heavily and I stayed there, watching the savage death, the boy dragged back towards the ponds, close to the village, close to the farm where the poor child lived.

Yes, Martin. I'm sorry. The child I saw murdered by the girl was your own brother. Sebastian.

I didn't regain the use of my limbs until after dawn of the following day. By the time I reached the edge of the forest I could hear the dogs, and the voices of searchers, and then the terrible cry of pain, your mother's voice, followed by the splashing of men in the shallow pond, dragging the body from its grave.

Later I came close to your farm and listened to the grieving voices. It was clear that a wolf was being blamed – as if a wolf would have treated its prey in such a way! Even if there had been any wolves left in Broceliande!

The children were more courageous in their suspicions, and I heard one of you say, "The old woodsman. He's got one of us at last." And someone answered, "Let's get him. We'll burn him on the hill."

But these were just the fears of you, your friends, still reconciling yourselves in your childlike ways to the loss of your littlest friend, Sebastian.

I approached the farm, very apprehensive, my mind a mist of uncertainty as to how to describe the events that I had seen. Eveline was on the garden seat, you on one side of her, comforting her even as you planned revenge on me, your sister Rebecca on the other, her face wet with tears as she held Eveline's arm.

Your father approached me quickly. He had two questions: had I seen or heard anything, and how should we organize a wolf hunt?

I was about to tell him what I'd seen the night before when Rebecca turned towards me. In an instant a charm fell away from my eyes, or perhaps away from her, it's impossible to tell. All I know is that she was revealed instantly as the girl in the woods, even wearing the same skirt and cardigan. I had simply not recognized her in the forest the night before.

I was speechless for a few seconds, then became terrified again as your tall sister ran towards me and hugged me, looking up through sorrowful eyes as she said, "Don't listen to what the boys say. I'll always come and visit you. I promise. I promise. I'll not leave you alone for an instant!"

My head and heart had turned cold with fear. To this day I have no idea whether I was addressed by the true girl or by the wily sylvan monster. But I know she came and visited me often, before eventually she went away, to pursue new studies in Australia.

And I know that all thought of revealing my vision faded. How could I tell Eveline, mourning the death of her younger son, that it was her adored adopted daughter who had dragged him to the reed pond, and held him down?



The Shape-Shifter's Dream

Martin was being shaken gently. He surfaced out of a dream in which he floated at night through drifting mist, the water of the lake lapping gently below his small boat. He woke with a shiver to find that he was still in Conrad's fishing lodge, the lake burnished with orange as the sun began to set. A swirling flight of dark birds crowded the sky above the heart of the wood.

"We should go back," the old man said urgently. He looked very anxious. "You've been asleep all day."

"All day?"

"I couldn't wake you. We must get away from here."

Martin was shocked by what he heard, and was still disturbed by Conrad's tale, and the revelation of the cause of Sebastian's death. He stood stiffly, groaning as he unlocked his knees. Conrad laughed sympathetically and held his arm, then offered one of his staves for support.

They returned to the iron-roofed shack and the bosker shed his overcoat and sheepskin jacket, stoked up the fire before then uncorking a flagon of cider brandy. Martin sipped the potent drink with circumspection, not knowing who might have brewed it. Conrad was less careful, shuddering as the spirit burned its way to his cold bones.

"Will I make us supper?" he asked, but Martin shook his head. "I should get back to Rebecca."

He hesitated, realizing that suddenly the thought frightened him. "Are you quite sure of what you've told me? About Rebecca?"

"Quite sure. Perhaps the possession was just a brief encounter. She grieved for Sebastian like all the rest of you. I felt no evil in her when she visited. I'm sure she had come from the lake, that deadly night, but she was completely unaware of it. Perhaps, as I say, the possession was brief. I do know that later she danced through another ghost and heard song, ancient song, and became obsessed with it..."

"Yes. That's why she went away."

"And she must go away again. And you must too." Conrad drank heavily from the flask again, then replaced the cork. "Your mother sensed danger for you, just before she died."

"That's what my uncle Jacques said. But what danger?"

Conrad shrugged. "She began to see the people on the path. She lay in bed, looking down, and saw their outlines again, just as she'd been able to see them when a child. Something she saw made her determined that even if you came for the funeral, you shouldn't stay."

Martin rose from the floor by the crackling fire and turned to go. Then he asked, "Why did you take me to the lake? Wasn't that a dangerous thing to do?"

"Yes. But if you take no heed of Eveline's wishes, then you may need to know it's there."

Lights were on in the farmhouse, and the warm smell of garlic, herbs and red wine was on the air, suggesting a casserole under preparation.

Rebecca was at the wood stove, shaking an iron pan which sizzled loudly. The table was set, a candle in the middle, a bottle of claret opened, one glass half full. She glanced round and smiled as Martin entered

staring at her in some shock. "Won't be long," she said.

There was a note from her, discarded on the sideboard. It read, "Hi, early riser! 9am. Gone to Vannes, for clothes, food, hair, a few special little things. No idea how long I'll be. Hope you're having fun."

"I'm sorry. I should have left a note for you before I went out..."

"Why?" she said, wiping her hands on her apron. "If you'd wanted me to share in what you were doing you'd have woken me. I hope you're hungry. I bought far too much beef."

"I'm starving. I appreciate it. I haven't eaten all day. Beck, you look... wonderful."

She removed her apron and stood across the table, grinning, her arms outstretched. "A transformation, eh?"

"Very sexy. Not that you need clothes to be sexy, of course. I didn't mean..."

She laughed as he contorted through the words, saying, "Burble, squirm, burble. I know what you mean. Shut up and feast your eyes. It won't last."

She'd dyed her hair jet black, cut the fringe in a straight line and made three thin ringlets on each temple, each strand decorated with golden amber beads. Her black silk blouse left her arms bare. It was cut low over her breasts. Her skirt flowed fully from below her tight waist, a green fabric patterned with lines of tiny red and purple squares. She'd rouged her lips and applied heavy makeup to her face, since the etching of her skin was hardly visible and she had, in this illusion, shed ten years of age.

Amused by his scrutiny she laughed, "One small nod to vanity, one huge dent in the purse. Don't worry, it's just for fun."

"You look very...er...Romany?"

"Earlier than that. A lot earlier than those travellers. You'll see decorations like this on Bronze Age vases. But it's how my mother looked, it's how I remember her. A traditional look in the group of families. I wish you'd met her. I wanted to share a touch of her memory with you. May I please have a welcoming hug, now?"

She came round the table, oak-brown eyes flashing with pleasure, a hint of passion. Martin reacted apprehensively, his whole body stiffening slightly. She saw this and frowned, then put her arms round him and kissed him, holding the kiss for a few seconds then pulling away, turning away.

"Some wine? I opened it an hour ago. It should have caught its breath by now."

"Mm."

She passed him a glass, then raised her own. "To health."

"Health," he echoed and sipped the wine appreciatively. He raised the glass again. "To the traveller."

"Bright path, Eveline." She drained her glass and set it down, then leaned back on the table and folded her arms, looking at him curiously. "The question, then, is this: do you tell me now, or after we've eaten?"

"Tell you what?"

Rebecca laughed, but there was little humour there. She shook her head, saying, "Anxiety is a song that sings from eyes."

"French proverb?"

"Thunder people *spiritlook*. Its part of a long chant teaching how to read the inner songs when the words are unclear. In other words, body language and heightened sensory perception. What's made you apprehensive all of a sudden? You seem almost frightened of me. You're not regretting last night, are you?"

"Of course not."

She came over to him quickly and put her arms round him, fixing him with her level gaze, dark eyes searching. "Where did you go today?"

"Into the forest. With the old bosker, Conrad."

Rebecca smiled, "I'm glad he's still around. I want to see him. How is he?"

"An old man, living rough. People round here look after him, clothes, barter, disgusting cider brandy. It's hard to remember the ogre in him. In 15 years I don't think he's changed a bit."

After a moment Rebecca said, "Let's eat. I've bought haslett. Your favourite, if I remember."

Sitting across the table they ate the thick slices of brawn in silence. Rebecca was about to fetch the casserole when Martin said, "Where were you the night Seb died? Can you remember?"

She sat down, quizzical, then ran a finger and thumb down an amber-beaded ringlet. "I was with you and your friend Peter, chasing the woman and child on the path, the ones who were running..."

Martin felt his face go cold. Rebecca hadn't been with him that night. He'd been with Peter, but the people on the path had been two men with staves and unstrung longbows, one of them a heavy set man with bushy beard, the other aristocratic looking, dressed in half armour. Martin had watched Peter dancing inside them, but as usual simply ran in circles round the figures, studying them in great detail.

He told as much to Rebecca, who said angrily, "Nonsense. I was there. We went back home together, climbed through the window together, and the next morning woke up to the shouting. What the hell is this, Martin? What's going on? You're white as a sheet. What's frightened you? What's going on?"

His heart thumping, unexpectedly anxious, he said, "The bosker said he'd seen you by the lake in the forest the night Seb drowned."

Rebecca frowned for a moment. "What lake? Do you mean the pond?"

"No, the lake at the heart, the big lake."

"There's no big lake in Broceliande. Not that I know of."

"He says he saw you there. The night Seb died. You were dancing in the forest, behaving like a wolf."

"Like a wolf?"

"That's what he said."

"Why didn't he speak to me, then? Why didn't he contact me? I wasn't afraid of him, I was the only one of you who wasn't."

"I don't know," Martin said. "I don't know why he didn't speak to you about it." He regretted the lie as he spoke it and so transmitted the lie instantly.

Rebecca looked disgusted. She picked up a napkin and wiped the make-up from her face, an angry, pointed act. The years, the sunburn, the hard side of her came back. She was upset, clearly confused, aware that Martin was keeping something back from her but frightened by something deeper.

"Have you seen this lake?" she asked.

"I saw it today for the first time."

"He took you there?"

"For the first time. Yes. It's a long way in, and it's a difficult route, but I'm damned sure it wasn't there when we were kids."

Rebecca stared across the table, thinking carefully. "Everyone knows there are ghosts on the path. So why not a lake that magically appears? Maybe its an adult vision. Maybe as we age we can start to see things inside the wood. It's just that we never look."

"That's more or less what Conrad said. He thinks he's a lake-finder."

"Nice talent. But I still don't understand why thinking I might have been in the forest when Seb died should make you upset."

She grasped the point suddenly, leaning forward on the table, beads rattling in her hair. Her eyes gleamed with a terrible, controlled fury. She spoke in a whisper. "Or maybe I do. You say Conrad saw a girl. He must have thought it was me – and he thinks I might have seen him... that's right. Not a wolf at all, then... Not a wolf that killed Seb. The old bosker's been guilty all these years, and he's made you suspicious of me. He's trying to implicate me."

Her voice rose in pitch. "And you believe him. You believe him. You unbelievable shit!"

Martin said quietly, "Beck – I'm telling you plainly: you were not with Peter and me that night."

"Liar! You know I was."

"We were alone, Beck. The encounter you're talking about was a week or more before. You weren't with us that night. And your fingers were all torn at the ends, as if you'd been scratching at rough bark, which is what Conrad claims he saw."

She was silent for a long time, looking at Martin, yet somehow through him, fiddling with her hair, then shaking her head. "I scraped them sliding down a trunk after watching the two of you on the path." She too was speaking quietly, almost sadly. And suddenly her eyes closed and her face grimaced with pain.

"My God. Oh my God." She looked at him again. "You do think I killed Seb. You think it was me. Don't you? Why don't you speak? Don't just stare at me. Oh Christ, I feel sick. I'm going to be sick. How could you? How could you think such a thing? I loved Seb. I loved him. I wouldn't have hurt him."

She stood slowly and left the kitchen, closing the door slowly behind her.

Later, Martin heard her moving around upstairs. He thought she might be packing her things to leave, but eventually he heard the bed-springs, and then silence.

"I've lost her," Martin said to the silence after she'd gone, experiencing an aching despair as this fear became a reality. But later he woke suddenly, cramped up on the small sofa, a blanket over his clothed body. Moonlight streamed into the sitting room, illuminating Rebecca, who sat on the sofa's edge, her eyes sparkling as she watched the waking man.

"Beck?"

"After Seb died," she said softly, "I had a recurring dream. It was very strange, quite frightening, and I never told it to anybody. After what you said this

evening, I can't get it out of my mind; I think it came back again. I probably woke in the middle of it."

Martin sat up and made more room for her, reaching out to touch her arm. She sat motionless, unresponsive. He said, "Beck – forgive me. I'm confused. It's this place, the old fears. And the old man confused me..."

"Be quiet – please – be quiet. Let me tell you the dream."

She turned away from him, arms across her chest.

"I'm in a clearing, a glade in an old forest. I'm running round the glade with a torch, and everything is burning, the flames sweeping high, the smoke billowing, and cloth and skins and parchment are being consumed by the fire, burning brightly, shedding charred fragments into the air. There's the tall, thick shaft of an old thorn lying on the ground. I've hacked its branches down to stubs, then decorated it with bracelets in bronze, and torques and brooches, and there are bones around it, and clay pots filled with stinking liquid and coloured powders. All of them are melting in the heat. And I'm dancing around a swirling column of earth that rises above me. A man is screaming. The more I dance the faster the rising tower of earth spins, the louder the cries, and the more I laugh!

"Then I'm dancing with a man, spinning round among the flames, only it isn't a man it's a stone statue, a horrible effigy, the ears cut off, the eyes gouged out, the nose slit, the mouth gaping tongueless, no fingers on the hands, no toes on the feet, the sex has been broken from the groin. I twirl this gruesome statue across the glade, and round the rising earth, singing all the time, even kissing the cold stone lips. There is a feeling of terror. A cairn of stones holds the centre of the glade and I fling the dancing stone across it.

"I run from the burning grove, swim hard through dragging, sucking waters, shaking myself dry on the shore, then running through the forest, swerving and ducking, but dancing all the time. Only I'm not a woman, now... I'm on all fours, my tongue lolling, I howl and scream at the sky as I run, I bay at the moon, I bark at shadows, I scratch at bark. It is a run of great triumph, and great delight.

"But suddenly a man is there, naked and blind, blocking my path. He is the man of the statue, stripped of senses, sex and touch; but his presence ahead of me – laughing! – fills me with fear and I plunge off the path and into the bushes. The land gives way into a pit and I fall, screaming, spinning in the air, endlessly falling, reaching for the branches and the stone outcrops that will save me, reaching for safety but always missing, falling and falling until I wake up terrified!"

She turned back to Martin.

"I felt a moment of that wild dance and the wild wolf run tonight. It woke me up. It brought the dream back to me."

She was trembling. Martin sat next to her and enfolded her, feeling her tears as a cool moist touch on his neck.

"Perhaps it was me," she whispered. "Perhaps I was possessed."

Suddenly she sat up, strong again. "I'm frightened, lover. I think we should get the hell out of here. First thing in the morning. What do you say?"

Martin stood up from the couch, distractedly agreeing with her. "The paperwork will take two days. Don't go near the path. Avoid the bosker. We'll be safe for two days. Come on." He walked to the door, "I'll take you back to bed. We'll talk more about it in the morning."

Rebecca didn't move. He turned back to see her standing, staring at him, arms tight around her body. She was suddenly shaking. "Who am I?" she whispered. "Christ, Martin. Who am I?"

Author's Note

I am hardly alone in finding the fabled relationship between Merlin and the enchantress Vivien fascinating and puzzling, but only when I recently re-read Tennyson's "Merlin and Vivien" (from *Idylls of the King*) did the unconscious source of my puzzlement become clarified.

It's strange: Nikolai Tolstoy wrote an enormous study of Merlin (*The Quest for Merlin*) in which he more than adequately documented the paleolithic shadow behind the dru-alchemic beast that has survived in Medieval legend, but overlooked to a startling degree the female side of that legend – a passing reference or two. As if Merlin and the female principle were somehow separate!

My short novel – of which these first tales in *Interzone* contain all the clues, all the tease, but none of the truth of the answer to a question – does not attempt to "put the record straight" as far as Vivien is concerned (she's the epitome of enchantment and evil; why mess with it?). It simply attempts to answer, fictively, the question that the dramatic end of Merlin's story (and his life) has always begged...

– Robert Holdstock, March 1994

Robert Holdstock last appeared here with "The Ragthorn" (issue 74), a fantasy story in collaboration with Garry Kilworth which has now won two awards. Rob lives in North London, and is the author of many books. The full version of his latest, *Merlin's Wood*, will be published by HarperCollins in a few months' time.

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on page 3.

Brite Now!

Poppy Z. Brite interviewed by Christopher J. Fowler

Poppy Z. Brite is on her first trip to London, at the beginning of March 1994, and the weather isn't much to write home to New Orleans about: mild and cloudy. But the author of the punk vampire novel *Lost Souls* doesn't mind a bit. "I don't like sunshine, so this is perfect," she says. But this aversion to the sun has nothing to do with vampires. "With skin this fair I've never been able to spend much time in the sun. I work better at night, feel more awake and alert."

Poppy is indeed fair, not just of skin but also of feature. Her photographs do not do her justice, but in the soft light of her hotel room her face has its own particular beauty. Her hair is a reddish chestnut, with a little purple mixed in. Her clothes are black and she looks as if she would be more at home at midnight in one of the teenage Gothic clubs that she used to frequent, than answering questions at ten in the morning. But questions are the order of the day and the week, for Poppy is in London to promote the British edition of her first novel, released as part of the Penguin Books March fiction event, the only genre author and the only American flown in. Promotional activities stretch out for another four days. After *Interzone*, the *Guardian*. But at the end of it all, two days in Paris beckon, a chance to seek out Baudelaire's burial place. Then it's back to a different French Quarter, that of her home city of New Orleans, and trying to meet the deadline on her third novel, which is due for delivery ten days before her 27th birthday. In nine years of publishing fiction, and 15 of submitting it, Poppy Z. Brite has achieved a lot and experienced a lot more. She has poured it

all into her fiction, and the results have been thrilling the readers of dark fantasy in the United States ever since *Lost Souls*, first hardcover in cutting-edge horror line Abyss, with appropriate accompanying hype, hit the bookstores in October 1992. She has received major acclaim in the USA, but on this side of the Atlantic she is still unknown. Poppy is here to put us right.

Of course, we're here to talk about writing, about plot and structure, characterization and themes, but the big question is: What does that mysterious "Z" stand for? It's the only question she won't answer: "I don't usually give out what's on my birth certificate, not because I'm embarrassed by the name but just because I reserve the right to change it at will, when I get sick of what it stands for. Currently it stands for 'Zoetrope'." So that's it: only a trip to the Registrar of Births, Marriages and Deaths in New Orleans is going to get the definitive answer. Back to basics: after the birth certificate, what then?

Poppy lived in New Orleans until she was six, then spent the next 13 years growing up in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, in a slightly different part of the state from the location of her imaginary town of Missing Mile, where much of the action of *Lost Souls* and her second novel, *Drawing Blood*, takes place. After graduating from high school, she spent only two months at college before the clash between studying and writing was resolved in favour of the latter. She was 19, immersed in the Gothic subculture, and putting her experiences into *Lost Souls*. She had submitted her first

story at the age of 12: "I sent a story to Redbook because my Mom was a subscriber and it was a magazine that I knew. It was very exciting because I got my first rejection slip from a real editor at a real magazine. I've been writing every since I can remember. I just started sending stuff off at that age. I was so surprised when it was rejected. I was sure that was going to be the beginning of my career and I was going to be discovered, but it took a few more years as it turned out."

Poppy's first published short story was "Optional Music for Voice and Piano," in *The Horror Show* magazine in 1986. Her work continued to appear there, and later in anthologies such as *Borderlands 1 and 3*, *Still Dead* and *Women of Darkness 2*. Twelve of these stories are collected in *Swamp Foetus*, published by Borderlands Press, so far only in a \$50 limited edition of 350, signed, numbered and slipcased. Poppy confirms that a trade edition is due at a more affordable \$20 and then informs me that copies of the limited edition now sell for \$150. I nervously edge my copy further away from Poppy's breakfast tray, re-evaluating the dangers of its milk jug.

Although not all her stories have been horror, the ones she felt to be the most interesting and the best were. "All the work that I've published has been classified as horror but the only label my work needs is the by-line. I want to be a genre of one. I don't sit down at the work processor and think: Now I'm going to write a horror story. I follow my obsessions. I always start with the characters and tell the story that they want me to tell about them."

As a writer who started out in

the small press, and whose first novel was published with much hype, did she feel that she had been subject to a backlash there? "I don't really feel that I've been an easy target. By and large the horror field has been very kind to me. I'd rather have the hype and negative reaction than not have the hype and get great reviews in the small-press magazines. I love the small press, it's where I got my start, but I do not require its approval. I've gotten some very good reviews in *Publishers Weekly*, *Booklist* and so on. I consider that to be a little more important than *The Tentacle of Cthulhu* or whatever."

Although she has been living from her writing since 1991, before that she supported herself by a variety of jobs, including gourmet candymaker, mouse caretaker, artist's model and exotic dancer. "I worked as a stripper in Atlanta at a large fancy club called Tattletales for four months at the beginning of 1990. It was a very interesting job. It was probably the highest-stress job I've had other than being a freelance writer. It was..." she pauses for thought "...an experience. I'm very glad I did it. I'm very glad I'll never have to do it again."

It was the contract with *Abyss* for *Lost Souls* and two other novels that allowed her to live exclusively from writing. Although it came out in the USA in October 1992, she had begun *Lost Souls* in 1987. The first draft took just under a year, but it underwent various revisions, over a period of 18 months or so. During this time the book sat on a shelf at Walker, who eventually decided not to do a horror line at all, and then the book went to *Abyss*. One element which made writing the book easier was that two of the characters, Steve and Ghost, had already appeared in her short story "Angels."

"When I wrote that short story I had a feeling that they would crop up in something again. When I'm working on a novel I like to have something familiar to start from, whether it's a character or a setting. It was comforting for me when I realized my second book was going to be set partly in Missing Mile because it was a place that I knew." Talking of Steve and Ghost, she says "Their relationship

is very important to me, in the same way that a relationship between two of my friends would be. One of my favourite things about making a living as a fiction writer is getting to spend so much time with my imaginary friends. I've always done it since I was little, and now it's how I make my living. I know these characters, and I enjoy their company as much as I do that of anyone that I know." Looking at this woman, with her economy of movement, her poise and thoughtful look, it is easy to see her as being highly self-contained, and with a vivid interior life.

When she realized that *Lost Souls* was becoming a vampire story, she read recent novels in the field. George R.R. Martin's *Fevre Dream* was the most significant influence. "I read everyone but Anne Rice, and I still haven't read her. And she's the one I always end up being compared to!" When I suggest that this is because Rice is from New Orleans she bristles. "But she's not even from there! She didn't invent New Orleans. She's a very successful writer and she pretty much reinvented the entire vampire sub-genre. But that's never what I intended to do. I wrote one book about them. I was more interested in exploring the Gothic subculture than making up an alternate vampire universe." As well as using the subculture of which she was a part, she drew on her own feelings for the central character, Nothing. "Nothing is one of my more autobiographical characters. I was drawing on a lot of my teenage and early-twenties angst and misery when I created him. We shared a lot of the same feelings at the time. That's one of the reasons I could never go back and use those characters again the way I could Steve and Ghost, because I wrote that out of me and I've moved on to other things now."

She stresses that her work is always character driven, and that the plot comes from the characters. She finds it difficult to talk about themes, or about questions like moral conflict, of the kind which Nothing experiences. She sees him as making personal, emotional choices. She also finds it difficult to plot

ahead. "I start with the characters and bludgeon my way through." This has led to criticisms of the structuring of her first novel, which she acknowledges. With her third novel, she thought she was going to be able to do an outline, which would have made her agent and publisher happier. However, what she had thought would be a love triangle changed when a fourth character came along, "announced" that he was going to be part of the novel, and the story became a love rectangle. There is, however, a dramatic improvement in the plotting in her second novel, with a carefully paced build-up to develop characterization, before any supernatural or horrific events occur. Some genre people didn't like this, but she felt it was essential for the characters. "I guess some readers want a Boo! on every page."

Another criticism of her work has been its poor development of female characters, which contrasts with the vivid characterization of males. She explains: "Ever since I was old enough to know what a gay man was I've felt very strongly that I was a gay man that happened to be born in a female body this time around. That seems to be a trendy thing to say these days, but I defy anyone to read my work and say it's not true. Women don't fascinate me as a group the way men do. Most of my work is founded on a base of sensuality and eroticism, and part of the reason that I have a hard time being interested in female characters is I do not get any kind of erotic charge off women. It's very difficult for me to get inside their heads and inside their bodies the way I do with my male characters. I'm ducking the issue in my third novel by not having any female characters in it. I think that it's important for a writer to challenge themselves and so I would like to write about some more interesting and important female characters. But right now the main challenge is to get written down all the stories that I have inside my head and most of those have to do with men, and most are gay male relationships."

Although there is a well developed woman character, Eddy Sung, whose life as an exotic dancer is modelled on Poppy's own experiences, the predominant

relationship in the second novel, *Drawing Blood*, is a gay love story between two young men, Zach and Trevor. To Poppy, the treatment of gay relationships is most important, as is an acceptance by the gay community. *Lost Souls* was nominated for the Lambda Award for outstanding gay or lesbian fiction, in the section of fantasy, although Nicola Griffith's *Ammonite* won. Of her lack of success in awards Poppy jokes that she is "always a bridesmaid, never a bride." When I repeat what another woman writer said to me on the same subject — "Hey, don't knock being a bridesmaid, you get to wear a nice dress" — she laughs, agreeing, and says "I've never really wanted to get married anyway." But she is hoping that *Drawing Blood* will also be nominated for the Lambda. With her first nomination she was "surprised and thrilled. The nomination meant more to me than any of the horror awards I've been nominated for. I don't really care about the Stoker or the World Fantasy Award, but I'd love to get a Lambda."

At the end of *Drawing Blood*, Zach and Trevor escape to Jamaica. Since she completed the book, however, Poppy has discovered that this would be less of a paradise than she thought, having read about "rampant homophobia" there. So, she says "they only stayed there for about eight months. They end up in Amsterdam. I'm going to have get to Amsterdam before I can write the next story about them. It's got a huge gay population, it's another pothead city and it's got just about enough computer work that Zach could have a real job. It's a good place for them."

As well as the better structuring in her second novel, improved characterization and more measured development, another change is the much reduced drug abuse amongst the characters, with only a certain amount of alcohol and some marijuana — "smart ganja" — in general use. Poppy says this reflects changes in herself. She used to drink a lot, until she was 22, when her body revolted against alcohol. In fact, *Swamp Foetus* is dedicated "To the memory of alcohol, my dear lost love." So did her dreams ever come out of a

bottle, like Poe's? She laughs, and admits that her "drinking and partying adventures" inspired her stories and affected her work.

A new element in *Drawing Blood* is computer hacking. The first interest in this area came from Zach, who turned out to be a hacker on the run from the US Secret Service. Poppy had to do a lot of research, and was aided by two "research angels", Bruce Sterling — whom she was able to ring at almost any time to ask questions — and Darren McKeeman, an ex-hacker. Sterling's *The Hacker Crackdown* was a primary source. She feels her treatment was authentic, and that the things Zach gets away with are possible,

though in ascribing all the activities to one person she "pushed it a bit."

Poppy is now at work on her third novel, as yet untitled. "It will be marketed as a horror-genre work. It's not a supernatural story. It's the first thing I've written in a while that didn't have a supernatural element. It's a serial-killer story. It has to do with the love affair between two cannibalistic serial killers. It also has AIDS as a strong element of the plot. Several of the characters are HIV-positive, and one of them has full-blown AIDS. He's a pirate-radio talk-show host and an advocate of HIV-positive terrorism. There may also be a computer-hacker element in



Photographs by Majid Asghar



this story, but I'm not sure how that's shaping up yet. It's set almost entirely in New Orleans."

Poppy regards deadlines as a mixed blessing. She felt that *Drawing Blood*, produced to a tight deadline, was nonetheless a good book. "I like the fact that deadlines don't give you that much time to, well, fuck around." She looks worried. "I don't know if you can say that in the magazine..." When I assure her that *Interzone* will permit this, she says: "Sometimes I'd like a little more time to fuck around." She would prefer two years rather than one to produce a novel, and will try to ensure this provision in her next book deal.

While she has been working on the new novel, she has found it impossible to work on short stories. However, a number previously written are due out in the

USA this year, and one in Britain, in *Book of the Dead 3*, from Severn House. She also took a week out from writing her novel to do a comic script because she was asked to do so by a writer whose work she admires, Joe Lansdale. It is another serial-killer piece, as is everything she is doing at the moment. This is an obsession she feels she has to deal with, to get it out of her system so that she can do something else.

Talking about the short stories already collected in *Swamp Foetus* – which will soon be available in a trade edition with a new introduction by Dan Simmons, and is to be brought out in February 1995 by Penguin in Britain – she discusses the horror of the city apparent in some of them. "I love cities. I spent entirely too much time in college towns. I never want to live anywhere but a city again. I've never been to a city that I

didn't fall in love with in some way, even L.A. Part of what I love about cities is there's so much horror to be found there. I like scary places. I value things that can scare me or disturb me or even gross me out. I've sought out those effects so much that I've become a bit jaded, so I value things that can still cause the effect, because I like the feeling of it."

One of the finest of her stories is "Calcutta, Lord of Nerves," set in the Indian city. She has never been there, but is planning a trip there in 1995, at the time of the Kali Pooja. She has a fascination with the goddess Kali, who appears in the short story. She had hoped to go this year but "I haven't met my deadlines, I haven't been good, so I don't get to go yet." The story was largely inspired by Dan Simmons' *Song of Kali*. Poppy is fascinated with Asian culture, and India was the area of the continent in which

she first developed an interest. She feels a strong connection with Calcutta. "It's one of the places in the world that I know that I have to go to. I'm not sure why, but I'll find out when I get there."

On this note of anticipation of future adventures we end the conversation. I emerge from Poppy's hotel, realizing belatedly that I've misinformed her about where Baudelaire is buried. But I am sure that the 19th-century romantic will call to his soul-mate of the 20th century's end, and draw her to the Cimetière Montparnasse. I head towards the tube at High Street Ken under overcast skies. A weather forecast on my walkman radio tells me the sun will be out in the afternoon. I think: Brighter later, Brite now!

Go for it, Poppy.

Interzone Back Issues

All back issues of Interzone (apart from numbers 1, 5, 6, 7, 16, 17, 20, 21, 22 and 23) are still available at £2.50 each (£2.80 or \$5 overseas) from 217 Preston Drove, Brighton BN1 6FL, UK (cheques or postal orders payable to Interzone.)

Interaction

Continued from page 5

magazine, Authentic, which ran for 85 issues up to 1957. From there, it's only a short haul until we overtake the second longest-lived, Science Fantasy (later renamed SF Impulse), which produced 93 issues up to 1967. The all-time record is held by New Worlds, with its 201 issues up to 1971 plus sundry revivals in other formats since; but maybe another decade or so will suffice for us to overtake that august publication also. (And perhaps this hubristic statement will be a cue for Mike Moorcock and Dave Garnett to announce that New Worlds is about to be reborn as a glossy monthly...)

Dear Editors:

I was sad to see the demise of MILLION, which came to an end after 14 issues despite the fact that it filled a gap in the market and was much-needed. I wonder if you have a list of small-press and other magazines dealing with general popular fiction which you could send to me? I know about most of those dealing with science fiction and fantasy already, but would like a broader range of magazines about fiction in other genres. I've enclosed a stamped, self-addressed envelope in the hope that you can help me.

Chris Makepeace

Glastonbury, Somerset

Editor: The following is the list of journals that we have sent to Chris Makepeace. We repeat it here for the benefit of other readers, particularly those who were keen on the late lamented MILLION while it lasted.

The Armchair Detective (crime and mystery)

129 West 56th Street, New York, NY 10019, USA

The Baker Street Journal (crime and mystery)

Fordham University Press, University Box L, Bronx, NY 10458, USA

Book and Magazine Collector (general fiction and non-fiction)

43-45 St Mary's Rd., Ealing, London W5 5RQ, UK

The Drood Review (of Mystery) (crime and mystery)

Box 50267, Kalamazoo, MI 49005, USA

Firsts: Collecting Modern First Editions (general fiction and non-fiction)

575 North Lucerne Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90004-1204, USA

Horror: The News Magazine of the Horror & Dark Fantasy Field

The Wildside Press, 37 Fillmore St., Newark, NJ 07105, USA

The Journal of Popular Culture (general fiction and non-fiction)
Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, Ohio 43403, USA

Marginalia: Bulletin d'Information sur les Etudes Paralitéraires
c/o Norbert Spehner, 565 rue de Provence, Longueuil, Quebec J4H 3R3, Canada (A newsletter in French, but it lists mainly English-language material to do with popular fiction, and is useful for keeping in touch.)

Mean Streets (crime and mystery)

214 Hat Hill Rd., Blackheath, NSW 2785, Australia

The Modern Review (general, including films and other media)

6 Hopgood St., London W12 7JU, UK

Mystery Readers Journal (crime and mystery)

PO Box 8116, Berkeley CA 94707, USA

Mystery Scene (crime and mystery)

PO Box 669, Cedar Rapids, IA 52406-0669, USA

Paperback Parade (paperback collecting)

Gryphon Publications, PO Box 280-209, Brooklyn, NY 11228-0209, USA

Paperback, Pulp and Comic Collector (paperback collecting)

20 Whitecroft, Dilton Marsh, Westbury, Wilts. BA 13 4DJ, UK

Para'doxa (general popular fiction)

c/o Lauric Guillaud, PO Box 2237, Vashon Island, WA 98070, USA

(A new one, yet to appear, but it sounds promising.)

A Shot in the Dark (crime and mystery)

32 High St., Bonsall, Matlock, Derbyshire DE4 2AR, UK

(Another new one, yet to appear, which also sounds promising. Mat Coward, former crime-fiction reviewer for MILLION, will be contributing a regular column to it.)

I hope this list is useful. Only two of the above titles proved "unfriendly" - i.e. they never acknowledged the copies of MILLION we sent them, or sent us any of their own magazines in return. Those two were The Baker Street Journal and The Journal of Popular Culture (both probably too academic to be interested in us mere lay-persons). All the others listed have been most cooperative with MILLION and/or Interzone. Thanks, folks! As ever, we'd be grateful for news of any notable omissions from the above list.

Alas, due to the length of this letter column, and the various lists it contains, there's no space again in this issue for the Readers' Poll results. Next issue, definitely.

The Perils of Unprotected Sex

Sylvia M. Siddall

I was cleaning out one of the tropical fish tanks when the Humour made itself manifest. I missed one of the gouramis – it must have been lurking among the weeds – until I had siphoned out most of the water and was tipping out the rest. The fish flopped and arched on the gravel, gasping for water that was no longer there. I tried to scoop it up in both hands to toss it into the bucket with its compatriots, when it shook itself, got up and walked across the base of the tank towards me. Now fish just don't do that, or at least fish that aren't mud-skipper or catfish don't. It seemed to me that its round eyes had gained a baleful, madly intelligent look but I only got scared when it crouched on its fins and then launched itself through the air towards my throat. I batted the gourami away and grabbed the coal shovel from the hearth, using it rather in the manner of a cricket-bat (I am proud of my English lineage). The fish landed on the sideboard, sending a rack of coasters flying as it squirmed to a halt, gathered itself and leaped again, flexing its whole body with the effort. By now the others heard my shouts and came running to see what all the noise and emotion were about.

"Humour!" I gasped, fending off the irate gourami. This time I caught it full in the centre of the shovel and sent it flying to somewhere around silly-mid-on, to splat against the wall. It slithered down to land in a small, lifeless scaly heap on the carpet.

"Idiot!" Uncle Norris snapped, then controlled himself with an effort. "You shouldn't have driven it out of the fish, Heaven knows where it'll end up now."

"What's going on?" Delia asked, marching in with her veils flying. "Half the gauges are off the scale and there're alarms going off all over the place. At this rate the sponges won't be able to absorb anything else for a month!"

"Sorry," I mumbled, chastened. I had forgotten all the drills we practised every Sunday. "There was a Humour in here. It got into one of my fish."

"And who knows where it went then?" Uncle Norris said.

"D-d-d-d-d" Ferdie began, pointing to the hearth. Delia groaned and went rushing off to attend to her empathy sponges while the rest of us watched one of the coals jump out of the fireplace and set fire to an armchair. Norris quietly went out, returning with a fire-extinguisher.

"What were you thinking about when you were cleaning out your fish?" he asked, as Winston and Ferdie pursued the errant cinder with a soda-water bottle and a watering can.

"Nothing much. What I was going to cook for dinner, whether I could finish the dress I'm making before Megan's wedding. Ordinary stuff."

"Hmm. Can't have been you then. As long as you didn't let anything loose by getting scared, that is, but it sounds as though Delia caught that in the sponge-net. We'll have a confession after dinner, I think."

Everyone within hearing sighed, but we all knew there wasn't any real alternative. Someone had been building emotions up to a dangerous level to set a Humour loose about the house, and unless they were identified and the Humour exorcised, we were in trouble.

After the table was cleared, Delia brought in the great, wobbling grey masses of empathy sponge, setting them about the room while we all chanted calming mantras. The tropical fish drifted and flickered in their sparkling clean tanks, house-plants and tranquil pictures of woods and fields lined the walls. We all thought calm thoughts, thought clear and cool, or pink and frilly, or blank and black thoughts according to mood or inherent nature. I prefer to watch my fish and think sparkling clear waters myself. I firmly put aside recollections of insane gouramis and flying coals.

"Right, all in place," Delia murmured, seating herself beside me. Uncle Norris, being the senior of the household, cleared his throat and began.

"I confess to mild anger at Rory this morning. He dropped a cup while washing-up. It was one of my mother's porcelain cups and it was a memento of her. He was sorry. He offered me a cutting from his ice-blue cool-plant with the dark blue flowers in compensation and my anger faded. I bear no grudge."

"M-m-my us-usual frus-t-t-t-t-tion." Ferdie said. "Never f-f-f-find the bl-bl-bloody words. Nothing else."

Rhoda clicked her tongue in irritation at his language and Norris chided her mildly. "He must speak it here if he feels it, get it out of his mind. All right, Ferdie. Next?"

So it went on, the usual small transgressions, irritations and excitements of our lives, spread out to be examined and picked over like old clothes at a sale. I told of the shock and fear of finding the Humour in one of my favourite fish, gaining sympathy, while Megan confessed excitement at her impending marriage and anxiety that her intended would not make the journey safely. This was a worry we all had, even though Delia was preparing to send out a party armed with a good solid sponge-net to collect him.

"And I suppose I have long-term worries," Megan said. "I mean, what if he doesn't get on with everyone in the house – he might start arguments with Rory or brewing up new jealousies. What if we get too – too over-excited, you know, carried away with ourselves. Let loose bags of emotion, create Humours of sexual excitement." Rhoda shifted uncomfortably in her

seat and Ferdie giggled suddenly.

"What'll happen if I get pregnant?" Megan whispered.

The pain and fear of child-birth was something to be dreaded indeed, that was well known for loosing Humours galore. Even new-born babies could release powerful Humours in the shock of coming out into the world. Winston and Ferdie's mother had died as a result of an attack by a combination of her own and the twin's fear-Humours, but then she had not had Delia to protect her.

"Delia is breeding up empathy sponges and cool-plants for netting against that very occurrence," Uncle Norris said pompously. Delia nodded and Megan appeared somewhat mollified.

No one confessed to the degree of emotion sufficient to loose a Humour of power enough to animate the fish or the coal. You could see Uncle Norris was worried and trying to control it.

"Someone here is banking up emotion," he told us. "No good can come of it. Things can only get worse. That Humour is still on the loose, watch out for it, and I hate to say this, but keep an eye on one another. If the person responsible comes to me privately and confesses we can make allowances, but unconfessed emotions have to be punished. For the sake of the whole house. Now off you go and think about it."

"Class dismissed!" Winston whispered loudly to Ferdie and they went off together, giggling. They came back soon enough, the Humour animating a broomstick and knocking them around their heads. This time, Delia was prepared with a net of impervious cool-plant fibre and a lead bottle. The Humour leaped out of the broom as she tried to encircle it and we spent a jolly few minutes chasing the vibrant spark before we cornered it. The excitement engendered a few short-lived motes of minor Humours which the powerfully empathic sponges were able to absorb.

"I'm glad they didn't try to take in this one," Delia commented, holding up the lead bottle. It jumped and shuddered with the struggles of the entity within. "It would have swamped the lot with so much emotion they'd be inert for weeks. Well, someone is festering something. I'll put this in the analyser and see whose profile it fits - oh my giddy aunt!"

Alarms were shrilling away upstairs and we rushed up to Megan's room, where we found Uncle Norris standing over her. She was sobbing.

"Guilt," he said frostily. "Inverted anger. The worst of all. You stupid little girl, you could have killed us all!"

Delia began thrusting sponges around the room from her sponge-bag and I helped her. Uncle Norris sent Ferdie and Winston to wash dishes, much to their disgust, they were too young to face what was coming next. Megan rocked from side to side, her fingers over her face.

"I couldn't help it," she wailed. "He asked me to and we only made a little Humour. It blew away and we never saw it again, it didn't do any harm."

"You slept with him unprotected, without sponges?" Delia asked, horrified. Megan nodded without looking up.

"Perhaps it didn't do any harm," Uncle Norris

agreed coldly. "But your guilt over it has. Are you ready, Delia?"

"No!" Megan backed away, scrambling over the bed, pressing herself against the back wall of the room. The sponges seeped closer, feeding on her emanations of dread.

"You know the rules," Norris intoned. "The Humour must be destroyed and the creator punished. Give me a hand, someone."

That old crude Rhoda and Uncle Norris held her down and with a quick deft action, Delia pried open Megan's mouth, tipped up the lead bottle and then rammed the heel of her hand up under Megan's chin, holding her jaws shut.

Megan's eyes bulged and she gagged on her Humour, then made a squeaky gulping sound. The others slowly released her and she sat there, panting in short, hard gasps. She looked puzzled at first, as if she had expected something awful and nothing had happened. Delia sent Rory to fetch all her oldest and most experienced sponges from their tanks in the attic.

Megan leaned forward and grabbed suddenly at her stomach. It jumped under her fingers as if someone was punching her from the inside. Her face had gone all mottled and she opened her mouth wide and made a retching noise, but she had swallowed her own Humour and it knew her too well to be cast out again so easily. She rolled over, pulling up her knees and grunting, her whole body juddering with the Humour's demented cavorting. Then she began to writhe and scream in a thin, high voice, the sponges clustering and quivering like disembodied brains around her. I saw that her belly was swelling, straining the seams of her shirt, bursting out of her jeans, round and pink and glistening. She scrambled wildly at herself, belching sickly and whimpering.

"The price of sin," Rhoda said with obscene satisfaction as she and Uncle Norris turned to leave.

"You can't leave her like this!" I cried, aghast, and Delia patted my shoulder.

"Calm, calm, if you please. My sponges are busy enough!"

"But what'll happen to her? Will she die?"

"I doubt it. You may stay and replenish the sponges if you wish, but I'd rather leave her to her punishment."

I couldn't leave her alone, not in such distress. I applied cold compresses to her hot, gurgling abdomen, wiped her face and tried to make her as comfortable as I could. She looked as if she had swallowed a pumpkin, her ribs pushed up and out by its presence. I realized that the swelling was slowly moving down, and she farted a great deal of foul-smelling wind. She complained of terrible colic, then with a scream, threw herself across the bed and squatted over the chamber-pot. With much grunting and straining, she eventually passed something and collapsed with a groan, cuddling her middle. I looked into the white china pot with great apprehension, to see a single small turd. The Humour was digested, rendered harmless by the body that had birthed it.

"Next time, do it with sponges, will you?" I said as I left her to sleep. The satiated empathy sponges were dropping off the walls, chittering gently as they crawled off into dark corners to do their own digesting. Me, I just went off to my bed. Too much excitement is very bad for me. ●

Easy Never Pays

Keith Brooke

“Cheltenham. This is Cheltenham,” says the grey speaker-panel by Ruby’s head. The train slows as the overgrown embankments make way for brick walls. A bridge blackens everything then there’s the station, all plastic and grime.

The doors hum apart and Ruby steps down, looks around. On the far platform a girl snarls at a Wrap-head game-booth as she peels the headset from her skull.

A flight of steps leads up to a footbridge. The slot swallows Ruby’s ticket, lets her through. She emerges onto an uneven pavement, cars and buses at a standstill in the street. Her head is calm, her mind blank. Engine rumble and voice-jabber fade into a white noise background hiss. Street Muzak.

She walks. She’s tall, for a woman. Square shoulders and pencil waist. Jet hair tied back emphasizes her pinched nose, narrow mouth, eyes like wide black pen strokes. And a look of Zen tranquillity, of focus. An arrow on its course. She passes through set-back residential streets lined with plane trees and BMWs, oblivious.

A roundabout, tangled with traffic, mopeds buzzing across the pavement, then a street where suddenly the traffic is gone, only bicycles and battery cars. There are shops now. Oriental cuisine, the teas and spices, the split-cane steamers and the inevitable woks. Art Deco Originals with mirrors, chrome, lamps, original ceramics by Cliff, Cooper, Rhead. A little coffee shop with Suk Kandies and Moroccan chocolate. Farther into the heart of the shopping district, a Bloggs, a Décor Nouveau, a Waterstones where a middle-aged skinhead looks in at the window display.

It’s busy now. So busy, Ruby is jostled and elbowed at every step. Dust and perfume fill her lungs, and still she is calm, focused. She comes to a wide paved area, where once there was a street, and the crowd is thinner here. A statue of Lord Ridley stands in the middle, all greening bronze and bird shit. Ruby stands before him, looks up at his etched face.

She reaches into her open leather jacket, finds the bone handle, pulls. The knife balances nicely in her hand, and she cuts a delicate circle through the air. Sun flashes on the blade, for it’s a fine late Spring day.

She tests its almost monomolecular edge on her finger. It is several seconds before the blood wells, the cut is so fine. One or two people look at her, think she’s an act.

They’re still watching as she raises the knife to head height, then carefully lowers it, eases it into her abdomen. Now, her icy focus falters for a moment, breached by a flood of pain and, more than that, confusion. More people look now, at the girl, the knife handle protruding from her belly, the blood spreading steadily over white sweater, white Nyrex jeans.

Her resolve is undiminished and with a great effort she heaves the handle upwards and the blade cuts through intestines, liver, diaphragm, grinds to a halt embedded in the first rib.

A woman screams, a child laughs, a man rushes forward, then stops, uncertain. Ruby slumps slowly to the ground and another pigeon shits on Lord Ridley’s shoulder.

That’s how it was meant to be. *Instead:*

“Cheltenham. This is Cheltenham.” The Wraphead, the traffic, the roundabout snarl. Then, opposite the woks and Lapsang Souchong, opposite the Art Deco Originals, there’s a traditional park with grass and flowers and burger bar. And she remembers, for an instant. A man who looks young but has an aura of Age. He throws a Frisbee and yells at her to go get it, curses her when she’s beaten by a dog.

Knocked by vertigo, she clutches a concrete pillar, presses her cheek against its cool. People hurry past, teenagers race by on Skids, and the noises and memories return to the hiss and crackle, hiss and crackle of nothing, less than nothing.

Where the park ends there’s a coffee bar selling espresso and Moroccan chocolate, then a Turkish deli. She fights past the Bloggs and the middle-aged skinhead at Waterstones. Then, in a shop doorway, there’s a man who, as he turns and says something to a woman at his side, momentarily recalls the man in the park, the man with the Frisbee who the stray dog wouldn’t leave alone and who wanted Ruby, for some reason of his own, to fetch the Frisbee before the dog did.

She wonders what’s happening. She knows she should be blank right now, a knot of resolve and nothing else. There are shutters inside her skull closing everything out, narrowing her horizon, trying to make her focus.

But there’s the man in the shop doorway.

When he turns it’s clear that he’s not the man from her memory flash, but by then it’s too late. Her chest has tightened and she has trouble swallowing. Now

people look at her not because she is in their way, jostling and elbowing, but because her face is whiter than her sweater and jeans, and because, as she walks, tears track down from eye corner to jawline.

She stops before the statue and people stare: will she sing, or dance or play a musical instrument? She reaches into her jacket for the knife, holds it up to the sunlight. More people stop and watch, intrigued. They haven't seen this act before.

But the focus is gone and that face keeps looming, laughing, cursing.

She presses the tip of the knife to her abdomen, then her arm muscles seize as her body is wracked with mountainous sobs. She crumples, lies at the statue's feet, knife tip still pressed against her belly, a small patch of blood spreading where the skin has been nicked. She can't do it.

Around her people pass, looking on curiously. Some throw coins as she cries.

A flower-seller has called for the emergency services, not realizing Ruby had stopped before killing herself. She comes round to the musty smell of his leather money-belt by her face.

She remembers and tries to stop, fearing the pain. She looks around, desperate, but he's taken the knife and stuck it in the moulded frame of his barrow stall, dripping with "Chrysanths" and "Fuchas" and "Carnies." He maintains an incessant stream of chatter as they wait, covering awkwardness, trying to distract. When the ambulance finally stops on the York slabs, he hands the attending policeman the knife and plucks a rose from a bucket for Ruby. Its petals are the colour of her blood.

"Name?" says the constable, in the back of the ambulance. Memories of blankness are still near, and it's easy to say nothing. "Where you from?" he says, but it's clear that he thinks she's dumb, or subnormal, or high.

When they stop, yet again, in the traffic, the policeman gets up and peers out of the small back window. Then he brushes past Ruby to knock on the partition and talk to the driver.

He doesn't notice anything until Ruby has opened the door, then he turns, yells, lunges.

She jumps, his fingers snagging on her jacket, unbalancing her. She lands on her knees on the bonnet of a Volvo and middle-class faces peer through the windscreen in horror. The dents pop themselves out beneath her knees, and then she's up, one step onto the roof as the policeman lands behind her, denting the bonnet again.

The next car is older, and its French bodywork doesn't reform where she leaves her imprint. Horns blare and voices shout as she leaps from car to car and the policeman follows. And then, the car she lands on is suddenly moving and she stumbles, catches herself, jumps down onto the pavement as some nearby youths raise a cheer and then turn to shout obscenities at the policeman, now stranded on a slowly moving Ford Tokyo.

Ruby runs down a side-street and is clear, but she can't stop now.

Her head's a mess, sometimes blank, sometimes a welter of conflicting memories, voices, urges. She doesn't know what to do except keep moving. She

doesn't know what she's done, why the policeman wants her. She remembers trying to kill herself, and half-remembers how it should have happened, but that's all as if it was a game now. It isn't real. She remembers a terrible sadness, but not enough for death to be the only refuge.

Eventually, she comes to a bridge over the railway. She has to get out of Cheltenham, she realizes. She scrambles down the embankment and instantly a train comes, but it's too fast and she cowers in the scrub.

After a time another approaches, a freight train, and it rumbles by slowly enough for her to jog along, grab a handhold and swing herself up.

It stops at a place called Ashchurch. Ruby looks out from her hiding place and on the platform she can see two policemen. She doesn't panic, though, she's still too confused. She watches them, and when they start to walk towards the train she slips away on their blind side.

There's a siding here, the track choked with grass and ragwort. She follows it until she comes to a rusted metal gate across the track, taller than she is. She pushes and it creaks open.

From all the warehouses she thinks it must be some kind of industrial estate, fallen into disuse. Then she finds a guards' bunker, a disembowelled green truck, and realizes it's some kind of abandoned army camp. One area has been razed, then left like the rest, unused. She finds an office building, breaks in through a window. Most of the furniture has been removed, but in one room she finds a computer with a smashed VDU, some chairs and desks, an old TV.

There's still water in the cloakroom, and she drinks greedily. It's getting dark outside, so she returns to the office, tries to make herself a kind of nest from cushions and some old newspapers she found stacked in a corridor. The lights work, but she doesn't risk them. Then, without much hope, she tries the TV and it flickers to life before her.

Settled in her cushions and newspapers, she flicks from channel to channel for much of the evening until something snags her attention on one of the satellite stations and she stops to watch. It's news, big and tabloid. Last time she hit this number it was "sneak shots" of a sex-change film star's basketball tits and Ruby zapped to the next channel immediately.

"...and they all used the same kind of knife," says the link. A picture flashes up: a knife in a rubber-gloved hand - bone handle, blade flashing - slices through a sheet of paper as if it is only air.

Ruby knows that knife. Or one like it. The report has ended, and she waits for it to come up again. Impatient, she flicks channels, but no one else carries the story. After an hour, the news reports cycle through to the one she wants.

Eleven people killed themselves today, in town centres throughout southern and central England. They all went somewhere public, drew a knife, and opened themselves up from pelvis to sternum. They did it in Lincoln, in Newbury, in Letchworth and Epping, they did it in Enfield and Torquay and Uttoxeter, in Nuneaton, Ilford, Ipswich and Maidstone. "And Cheltenham," says Ruby softly. The satellite channel says it's broadcasting the story under what it

calls the Right to Know, and as a result faces an injunction from National Police who want it kept quiet to prevent a panic. Why panic, Ruby thought? Was it some kind of virus, that made them all do this mad thing? But she feels there has to be more to it than that. Someone is behind it, somehow. That's the only way she can fit it together. Someone wanted these eleven people, plus Ruby, dead.

The old warehouses at Gloucester docks have all been refurbished and fitted out as museums, offices, shops. Long-boats and yachts dot the river and marina, day-trippers splash bright colour over the quays. It's the last place Ruby remembers going to. She doesn't remember getting there, just going. It's the only place she can visit to try to piece it all together.

She wanders, slowly, wary of any police or security guards. She doesn't know if they'll have her picture, if they'll be looking. She must be some kind of witness, she supposes, but she's not going to meekly give herself up and rely on the authorities. She has to work out what's happening for herself. It's burning inside her, and she's not going to be used and then kept in the dark by anyone.

But nothing comes to her. She has a coffee, a sandwich. She's careful of the few pounds in her purse. She doesn't dare use her cards and has no idea where she'll get more cash.

She wanders again, out past the red-brick facade of the Group 4 prison. She sits and looks across the Severn to the new development park and tries to remember.

Nothing comes until evening, as dusk descends. Then she sees it, in snatches, like fuzzy stills from an old black-and-white movie. The darkness, the lights from the restaurants and offices, more lights on the river, on the boats.

"You took a trip on the river," says a voice at her side.

She freezes, doesn't dare speak.

"It's okay," he says. "I'm a friend."

She snatches a sideways glance at his profile against the lights. Dark hair greased back, bob nose, a chin that juts in an oddly disarming way.

"I was there," he continues. "There were 13 of us, and the driver. A night ride on the river. You sat alone. You were trying not to cry."

She did and she was. She remembers, and now the tears return. She fights them again. On the morning before the boat trip she had a phone call to tell her of her father's death in a road accident. So sudden, and she was so powerless. She'd been temping at a telemedia agency in Bristol, but she called in ill that morning. Instead, she took a train to Gloucester, where her father had brought her up. Whoever took over her mind had no way of knowing her mental state that day. Through her newly recalled grief she can see that it is her father's death – and the associated childhood memories of Cheltenham – that had broken through whatever commands have been implanted in her consciousness. She lives because her father died.

"That was when he took us," says the man. "In the boat. He must have gassed us. I can't remember his face. Can you?"

She can't even remember anything beyond getting

onto the boat. She doesn't recognize the man at her side, although one or two of the other victims seemed vaguely familiar when their pictures flashed up on TV. "Oxford?" she says. "Oswestry? Oakham? Ormskirk?" The initial letters of the towns where the "suicides" took place will spell three words, if she is right: **TEN MILLION ECU**. A ransom, presumably set against a threat to kill more people at a later date.

"Oxford," says the man. He holds out a hand for Ruby to shake. "My name's Christian Taylor," he says.

"Ruby Frayling," she says. He holds onto her hand for a moment too long. Ruby's response is the key that finally wakes her up. She doesn't like him, she wants to be alone, but simultaneously that touch, that moment of contact, draws her to him and she wants far more and she is scared to let go. "We have to get out of here," she says. "The police will be looking."

Christian has a white VW parked illegally in Commercial Road. As they crawl around the Ring and then set out across the M5 towards the Cotswolds he tells Ruby what he knows. "Some kind of mind control," he says. "Obviously. Lots of people have been working in that area – Shikuya, GenGen, Wellcome – but a company called Ellerchem has made most progress. They've been focusing on the transition from the electric to the chemical state, from the transience of consciousness to the chemical hardwiring of memory. That seems to be the basis of how we were corrupted: that seems to be how those commands were implanted into our brains."

Ruby feels as if she's made a big mistake. She's been quiet as he speaks, but now she interrupts. "You're police," she says. "Why all the pretence?"

He turns to her, as he drives. "No," he says. "I was, until a couple of years ago. But I quit. The whole system stinks, so I got out."

"So how do you know so much?"

"I told you: the system stinks. And I know exactly which parts stink most. I know who'll sell me information, and I've made a living by selling some of it on. We're all corrupt, darling, no denying it. Look." He pulls a folded piece of paper from a pocket, a newspaper cutting. She looks at it by the light of a torch she finds in the dash. It confirms his retirement through invalidity. She noticed earlier that he limps a little.

"So what are you doing now?" she asks.

"I'm going to get the bastard who did this to us." There's a certainty to his tone which frightens Ruby. But she likes it. It makes her think she might succeed.

"Not if I get there first," she says, and he laughs.

They stop at a motel near Witney, and immediately Christian goes out to a call box, not trusting their room's phone.

When he returns she's showered and dressed again. She'll have to buy some things tomorrow, she's not used to dirty clothes and not even being able to brush her teeth. "I've got a list of names and details," he says, waving a printout from the booth. "I had someone hack it out of the official files. People who've been dismissed, people who might have the technical knowledge. Autopsies have fixed the link to Ellerchem's procedures. The company claims it was trying to produce knowledge implants – languages, technical information, that kind of thing – but it all reeks of

misinformation. They're clearly terrified of what they've set free. I don't think it's an insider who's our man, but someone in Ellerchem must have supplied him. The company's going to come out of this with their reputation in ruins, if they're ever allowed to operate again."

"What about rival firms, then?" asks Ruby.

Christian shrugs, says, "There are rivalries, sure, but they'd have to be pretty damned certain that they left no traces, or it wouldn't just be Ellerchem that was poleaxed. No, my money's on an outsider - either a psycho out for revenge or maybe some group out for the money and the publicity."

All the time, she has been trying to remember, trying to recall. Ever since he first mentioned the firm's name. But everything is such a mess in her head. Fatigue, she thinks. And fears of what damage might have been done to her brain by the drug. After all, long-term effects don't matter if its only function is to make her kill herself.

But now, as he speaks, she fixes the feeling that has been nagging at her: "I worked for Ellerchem once. I was in a PR agency that had their contract for a few months."

"I know," says Christian, with a smug baring of teeth. "But no one else out of the 13 has any link with the firm. I still think the only reason we were selected was that we were all on that boat. Here, have a look."

He gives her the printout and she studies it until her eyes ache in their sockets, but nothing leaps out at her, nothing seems to make any sense. She looks at Christian, who's stripped to his shorts and is lying on one of the beds looking back at her. She knows what he wants, but she can't, not yet. "Where do we go from here?" she asks, gesturing at the printout and feeling useless.

"All of us reached our destinations by train," says Christian. "The Nationals have gone through all the tickets collected and in four cases they've managed to eliminate them down to those of the victims. All of them came from Swindon. It's a start."

She spends the night in the other twin bed, awake for much of the time, aware of him so close. He's in her dreams, too. She can't escape.

They leave early, and hit the edge of Swindon as the jams are just building up. He uses the pay lanes wherever he can, a little meter on the dash telling him how much the city is charging him, but it's still an age before they reach the No Drive zone. He stops on a yellow and gets out, gesturing for Ruby to slide over and drive. "Keep circling," he says, "and look out for me on this corner. I've some calls to make."

She drives, hating the traffic. She's rusty, but the car makes it easy, more up-to-date than her last Seat. He's waiting the second time she comes around and he slips behind the wheel again. "Good and bad," he says, in answer to her questioning look. "Watch this." He thumbs a disc into the console and presses a few keys. The Roadboss screen blanks and is replaced by an ITN reporter talking about the Italian earthquake. Christian forwards until the right picture comes up. "It's on all the channels," he says. "No injunctions can keep it down now."

The picture is a knife set against the graphic of a chemical structure spinning slowly. Over it, a

distorted voice says, "So far they've taken their own lives. But tomorrow... it's only a simple command."

The knife transforms itself until it takes the form of a light machine gun. Ruby feels sick. "Fifteen million Ecu," says the voice. "Not much for a company the size of Ellerchem. Don't you think they should pay?" And the picture cuts back to a reporter interviewing a senior National Police officer.

"He's upped his demand," says Christian unnecessarily. "Ellerchem have been suspended from the stock market. Some retail chains are even panicking and withdrawing some of their goods from sale."

"They'll be ruined," Ruby says. "That must be part of his plan. He must have a grudge. Give me the list." She takes it. One of the addresses has been highlighted. "Why this one?" she demands, as the VW pulls clear of the Swindon snarl-up and passes over the M4 on a two-tiered bridge.

"Michael Pieschen was one of their most senior research scientists. He left Ellerchem five months ago: long enough for him to get this under way, but recently enough for him still to be up-to-date with their technology. He resigned at a meeting where he would have been dismissed if he hadn't jumped first. Some sort of corruption, although he denied it, of course. And there's one more thing against him: his address is the only one anywhere near Swindon."

"Conclusive proof," mutters Ruby, as the acceleration presses her back into the seat.

They park by the post office, no different from any other car-full of tourists in this village in the heart of the Vale of the White Horse. A family plays cricket on the green. Ducks dabble at the edge of a slimy discoloured pond.

"We just walk, smile, look around," says Christian, pausing to study a rack of postcards. "And wasn't Stonehenge Park magnificent?" he says, as they pass a Barboured old man with a watering can.

Pieschen's house is on the far side of the green. Red brick, tinted bull's-eye windows, green-slate roof. Ruby recognizes it from Christian's description. There are cars in the semi-circular drive but the curtains are drawn, the grass and hedges unclipped. "It looks abandoned," she says now, as they approach it obliquely.

"What about the cars, then?"

Two men emerge from the front door and crunch down the drive as Ruby and Christian reach that side of the green. They're not in uniform, but their profession is obvious. "Keep walking," says Christian, but the men are close now and they stop.

"Ruby Frayling?" says one. "Christian Taylor?"

Christian finds and squeezes Ruby's hand and they wait as the men approach. "I'm sorry?" he says. And then he lets go and in the same movement swings a fist into the first policeman's face.

Ruby is transfixed. All this time she has technically been a fugitive, but Christian's fist, as it connects with the policeman's jaw, makes her position suddenly clear. As the man falls into the startled embrace of his colleague, Christian turns, gives Ruby a sharp push and hisses, "Run."

She runs. Over the road, across the green, she runs, glad that her soles are flat and that she wasn't wearing a tight office skirt when she was abducted. A man yells and snatches a small boy from her path, and

then, as she sprints across the makeshift cricket pitch, Christian catches up with her, passes her in an uneven, but effective, lope.

The man, having saved his son, gives chase, closely followed by one of the policemen. Christian throws himself into the VW, starts the engine and for a moment Ruby thinks he will abandon her, but instead he squeals into reverse, swings a door open and accelerates forward the instant her feet leave the ground.

Within seconds it's all behind them. There's no sign of pursuit but Christian still drives at the limit of his car's performance. He doesn't slow down until they're on the M4, lost in the traffic. "We'll stop at Membury services," he says calmly, checking the small screen of the Roadboss. "I'll make a call, find out if they got our number."

"We're okay," he says, climbing back into the car. "They're looking for a white hatchback, but they don't even know the make. Big news: they've found his base. An old food-hygiene lab near Andover. There were eight people there, all doped up. The police think they would have gone into action tomorrow, just as the new demand threatened. They're trying to counter Pieschen's commands right now. They have teams in from GenGen and Ellerchem working on it."

"And Pieschen?"

"He evaded them. Not too difficult to do, as we found out."

"What now?"

"More calls," says Christian. "That's the only option left."

"What about the police?" says Ruby. "Can't they handle it now?" But she's relieved when he shakes his head.

"They've been lucky," he says. "But I've got to be sure." He gets out of the car, and Ruby joins him. "Where are you going?" he asks, suddenly wary.

"I want to make a call," she says. "An idea." She's had enough of being the passenger.

"No. You might give us away. You can't —"

"I'm not your captive," she says. "I'm going."

"But I know how to do these things, how to give no information away. Why not tell me what's bothering you and let me do it? Fair?"

She just looks at him, then heads for the main concourse of the services.

She expects the VW to have gone by the time she returns, but it's still there, with Christian sitting feet-up reading a *Figaro*. "You've found him, I presume," he says, glancing up at her. "What took you?"

She ignores his sarcasm. She has called Craig Hanson, an old friend from her time at Cotton-Drew. "Ellerchem used to keep holiday cottages through their staff association," she tells Christian. "Cheap holidays for employees. Along the south coast, some in the Dordogne, a couple in Tuscany. They sold them off around the time my agency was working for them. They offered them to staff first, and one of my friends bought one in Devon — that's who I called."

"So what are you saying?"

"Can you get one of your contacts to search the Land Registry for any properties Ellerchem used to own and see who has them now?"

He clicks his tongue and says she doesn't know

how much she's asking, but she can see that he's interested. They have no other clues. "Come on," he says, and she goes with him to make the call.

They drive around for the rest of the day, filling time. Christian's contact had told him to call back at five.

They don't talk much, just listen to the radio or MTV. Ruby spends a long time going through Christian's discs, convinced that they must reveal something about him. Eventually, she gives up, tired of trying to analyse the man beside her through the medium of Stockhausen, Messiaen, Slide Baby and Bowie.

Finally, they stop for petrol and Christian makes his call. He comes back with another printout.

A few minutes later, they sit in a lay-by, poring over the fuzzy grey print. Ruby spots Craig Hanson's name by a Devon address, along with a few others she half-recognizes, people she has meant to keep in touch with but never has. "Nothing," she says, after a time.

"You're slow," says Christian. For a moment she thinks he has spotted something, then he says, "I came to that conclusion ten minutes ago." He pats her knee, and says, "Leave it to the pros next time, okay darling?"

She turns away from him, seething, and stares out of the window as they drive on.

In darkness, they pull up on a forestry plantation track and there are only the stars above, all other lights cut out by the conifer screen wrapped around them. "So what do we do now?" says Christian, breaking the silence.

"That's my line," says Ruby, and she feels the tension leaching away. "What can we do? Do you have any more ideas? Any more contacts?"

He presses a button and Ruby's seat unfolds itself into a reclining position. "I could do with a drink," says Christian, sinking back beside her.

Ruby lies breathing softly.

Later, she turns onto her side so that her head rests on Christian's shoulder. "I feel so exposed," she says, feeling his chest rising and falling. His muscles feel tight beneath his clothes. Her hand comes to rest on his belly and after a moment Christian's moves to cover it.

Then he lifts her hand clear, puts it back on her lap. "I don't fancy you," he says, and his tone is one of victory. He has led her on, broken her defences down, just to humiliate her.

She turns away without a word. She's determined not to cry. She wonders what's happening. Are the drugs still screwing with her responses, making her misinterpret everything?

She finds the torch and the latest printout, and tries to distract herself.

At first her vision is too blurred for her to read the already indistinct print. When she senses that Christian is asleep beside her she finds it easier to relax and forget his psychological games. Even so, it's a long time before she can concentrate properly. It's no use, but still she persists.

Outside, a car's horn sounds in the distance. Ruby looks up, startled, then returns to her study of the sheet. And she finds herself looking at one of the names she has half-recognized and suddenly it slots into place.

“We go south,” Ruby says in the morning.
“And no more calls.”

Christian looks at her, and she sees that her new attitude puzzles him and his victory during the night is no longer relevant. “Where?”

“Lyme Regis,” she says, and so they drive.

The address is in old Lyme, on a street that looks down on the long grey sea-wall known as the Cobb. It’s a small cottage, part of a newly-pink-washed terrace, and it’s clear that someone is living there. “He put it in his wife’s name,” she tells Christian. The first list of suspects carried a few personal details, and that is where Ruby saw the name she recognized on the Land Registry printout. “She kept her maiden name after they married. He must have bought this place as a present or something.”

“What if it’s not him, though?” says Christian. “What if it’s his wife living here alone?”

“She died a few weeks after Pieschen bought the cottage. It has to be him.”

“He could have let the place,” he says, but she can sense his excitement.

He knocks on the door. Silence. He knocks again and immediately it opens a few inches. “I – ”

Christian’s foot lands heavily in the middle of the door, and he barges in. Ruby stops herself from crying out at the sudden violence, and follows him inside.

The corridor is narrow, and a man sprawls back against the stairs, Christian pinning him down with his knees. Ruby checks the street, then closes the door quietly.

“In here,” yells Christian, hauling the man to his feet and half-dragging him into a living room fitted out with barometers, an old ship’s compass and shelves full of fossils.

“Go easy, for God’s sake!” says Ruby, following them in, pulling at Christian’s arm.

He shakes her off, says, “Easy never pays.” He pushes the man down into a seat and stands with a foot on another chair, leaning forward.

Ruby has not expected Pieschen to be so young. He can only be 32, 33. And he looks so mundane. Like an accountant, or a dentist. He’s been watching Christian, but now he turns to Ruby and there’s a flash of recognition in his eyes. “We should be dead, right?” she says, trying to be tough.

Pieschen looks at Christian, then back at Ruby. “You should,” he says. “But who’s he?”

It feels as if the world has been pulled from beneath her feet. She looks at Pieschen, and then at Christian.

He’s holding a gun, a small pistol pointing somewhere between Ruby and Pieschen. Ruby swallows, moistens her lips. “Police?” she says, trying to think.

Christian shakes his head. “Not quite. Freelance. The force would never admit to using me because I work outside the system. They use me when they need to. I get results.”

“Like in Northern Ireland before the Secession,” she says softly. Former policemen, soldiers or security services, thrown in to work without the hindrance of the EC controls of ’06 and ’11. There have been rumours in the Press for years, that the law is sometimes enforced by these illegal agents, but there has never been any convincing proof. The police must have kept the real Oxford suicide quiet, and inserted Christian in his or her place. Ruby thought she had

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FIRE AND AIR

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penetrated him from the start, seen through his bluffs and lies, but he's been too good: she has not expected this. "So what do we do now?" she says.

Christian levels his pistol at Pieschen. "I get paid however he's stopped," he says, and smiles. The same smile glinted in the starlight last night, when he conquered her. More bluffing, she thinks. Enjoying his power trip. She feels trapped, and angry.

"Okay," she says, and turns away. Pieschen makes a helpless sound, then Ruby spins, a brick-sized ammonite gripped tightly in both hands.

"Why?" says Pieschen, seconds later, as he struggles under Christian's collapsed form.

"Easy never pays," she says.

She turns away as Pieschen examines the body. "He's not dead," he says, eventually. She has never even considered the possibility that he *might* be. "I'll just tidy him up a bit." Pieschen leaves the room.

Ruby begins to cry.

Pieschen returns after a few minutes, carrying a briefcase. He crouches over Christian, using a swab to clean the blood from the back of his head. Ruby can't bear to watch. She goes and sits on the stairs, buries her face in her hands and weeps.

She flinches when Pieschen places a hand on her arm. "I'm sorry," he says, in a helpless tone, which for some reason makes her think of a priest. "I had nothing against you." She shudders. It would almost be better if he *had* held something against her. Then she could start to cope.

Then: He's a psychopath, she thinks coolly. He has no moral understanding of what he has done, no concept of what it means to take another life – *I had nothing against you*, he said!

She has just rescued a psychopath.

"I have a rented car," he says, and she doesn't know what to do except nod, stand, follow him from the house. She knows she is entirely responsible for her current position, she can't just let him get away from her now, set loose on more innocents. She recalls something a teacher once said, that one day her impetuosity would get her in trouble, and then she closes the front door behind her, and follows Michael Pieschen down the street.

The car is a black Ford Tokyo. Pieschen's driving is steady and controlled. But there's still that look in his eye.

Ruby doesn't know if she's terrified or insane. Has he drugged her again? Could that explain it? But she knows better than to delude herself like that. She cannot escape her responsibilities so easily.

As he drives, he tells Ruby of his wife and her illness, of his passion for the sea. Classical music plays in the background. Ruby recognizes snatches of Mozart from a campaign she once worked on. They join the M27 above Bournemouth, and follow it east. After a time, Ruby sleeps.

She wakes as the whine of the gas turbine engine is gently dying. They're parked in another motorway service area. Ruby rubs her eyes, looks down to see the little Roadboss screen welcoming her to Ashford International, then scrolling to list the facilities available.

"From here it's the Tunnel," says Pieschen. "We could be in France soon."

And then she sees Christian's gun in Pieschen's hands.

"I'm sorry," he says one more time, "but I have to be sure. You have a choice." He indicates the briefcase lying half-open on his lap. "I don't want to kill you again. I want to give you a transdermal infusion, much like the one I administered to you once before. It's a more simple formula this time. All it does is enforce loyalty on you: it will make it physically impossible for you to give me away. I administered it to your friend, Mr Taylor, before we left Lyme Regis.

"Accept my offer and we'll abandon the car here. I've ordered tickets for Geneva – we can get away to London while they're searching either end of the Tunnel. I have a yacht at Weymouth. We can sail away, forget what has happened. I don't want you to die. You have the choice, Ruby."

She's thinking fast. He's got that crazy-rational look in his eyes again, the psychopath look. Only she's not convinced any more. "How do I know that's all the infusion will do?" she asks. Come on, she tells herself. Think. Think.

"You don't," says Pieschen, in his apologetic tone. "You have to take the chance."

"It's not you, is it?" she says, at last. "You're not mad. Not mad at all. I know that look in your eyes: I remember how it feels. You're a victim as much as any of us. It's corporate, isn't it? Someone – GenGen, or one of the others – is trying to wreck Ellerchem with their own innovation. If they can implant commands that make 13 people attempt suicide, then they can implant commands that set you up as a psychopath. It's true, isn't it?"

She knew he was just another victim as soon as she first saw him, pinned to the stairs in his cottage. At some level, she instinctively knew.

She tries to believe she's not deluding herself again and that her explanation is true.

She sees the uncertainty in Pieschen's look. "Come on," she pleads. "Somewhere in there you're still Michael Pieschen, the man who's just told me all about his wife and the sea and everything. *Fight it*. I've beaten it. I'll help – I've been there already."

Muscles twitch in his face, making him look even more the stereotyped psychopath. "Come on!" she tells him. "Just fight it, okay?"

He starts to speak, stops, tries again but can't quite do it.

She reaches out, strokes the hand that clutches Christian's gun. And she sees the tears in his eyes, the beginnings of acceptance. She has won, or at least she's starting to win.

"Come on," she says. "You don't need the gun or the drugs: lets run together."

Keith Brooke has written eight previous stories for this magazine, including such notable items as "Adrenotropic Man" (#30), "The Queen of the Burn Plain" (#55) and "Witness" (#70). He was born in 1966, and lives in Gloucestershire.

Ansible Link

David Langford



It is a famous tradition (which I am proud to continue on this page) that newspaper stories offer a version of events unrecognizable to the hapless participants. This is partly because local papers in particular crave to brighten up boring old news items and make them "relevant." For example, how were the *Exeter Express & Echo* and *Western Morning News* to make anything of the information that police had traced and seized quantities of "video nasties" up in the north of England? Easy: they simply dragged in the local connection of Devon's (highly respectable) horror review magazine *Samhain*, contriving to imply that *Samhain* was a hotbed of wicked trading in video nasties...the *Express & Echo* even managed to juxtapose a bit about murdered Jamie Bulger's memorial service and the judge who reckoned the whole thing could be ascribed to the video *Child's Play 3* (while strangely failing to record the police rejection of this claim). The fact that *Samhain* is highly regarded by the trading standards people was – though known to at least one of the papers – somehow not mentioned. As a result of this unpleasant innuendo *Samhain's* editor John Gullidge was given a bad time in the streets and suffered personally in several ways. The newspapers did not think it appropriate to publish any correction or apology. All this is known as the Freedom of the Press.

Monsters in Orbit

Harlan Ellison's black books are notoriously even more voluminous than *The Last Dangerous Visions*, and it seems I too have a place therein. Reporting from a US convention panel, Teresa Nielsen Hayden broke it to me: "Late in the panel, someone asked whether there weren't any good critics. I nominated you without thinking through the possible consequences, and Harlan promptly denounced you as 'a worthless asshole.'" Makes one feel proud...but kinda humble too.

John Holm, Harry Harrison's collaborator on *The Hammer and the Cross*, is (as *Interzone* revealed last year) Tom Shippey. His minor billing may not reflect his share of the novel: at least one pundit believes that it's "90% Shippey." Yet the US Tor edition omits "Holm" entirely...

Jack Kirby of comics fame died on 6 February. One can make comparisons with Robert Heinlein: that is, there's some late bad material to ignore, but Kirby's 1960s work on *The Fantastic Four*, *The Incredible Hulk*, *X-Men* etc shaped the whole mighty-thewed US superhero comics genre just as Heinlein shaped sf. *The Guardian* acknowledged his influence with a long obituary by British comics guru Derek "Dez" Skinn...who was a little miffed that the newspaper edited various errors into his formerly factual piece, thus bringing him many letters from comics fans eager to tell him he didn't know his business.

Helen Sharman, OBE and Britain's solitary "jobbing astronaut," was booked to present the Arthur C. Clarke Award in April. Writing in March, your columnist is unable to reveal more. One subversive sf fan was heard to express hopes that "she won't give her 'What I Did On My Hols In Space (Specially Written For 8-Year-Olds, With Polaroids)' talk again..."

Bruce Sterling was charmed to hear from a Brit who managed to get a job in telecommunications after reciting large chunks of *The Hacker Crackdown* at his interview. "Suggested promotional line for the sf audience of the 90s: 'Read Bruce Sterling and actually get a job.'" Me: "Dear Penguin, I read *The Hacker Crackdown* twice from beginning to end and still don't have a job in telecomms – I demand a refund." Bruce: "Anybody who deserves a job in telecomms is reading the free electronic edition...which does not require a refund."

Gene Wolfe tells me it's not his fault at all that he appears misleadingly in World Fantasy Convention news photos. "Harlan Ellison got the Grand Master Award, and I complained, mentioning that I was older and a better writer. (Both true.) He reciprocated by awarding me his trophy, saying (and I quote), 'You want it? Here, take it!' Naturally I joined the other winners who were posing for pictures. Out of deference to the sensibilities of history, I held my thumb over Harlan's name..."

Infinitely Improbable

The Dead Past. Damon Knight's critical anthology *Manad* #3 contains a

squib on the late Robert A. Heinlein which may outrage the easily outraged. Tracking down the 30s political activity which Heinlein kept so dark, researcher Tom Perry finds it was (by US standards) left-wing: the erstwhile socialist Upton Sinclair's "End Poverty In California" platform. The "moderate Democrat" story told to and published by Jerry Pournelle seems untrue in numerous details. Tom wonders if Heinlein suppressed this innocuous-seeming data in fear of Nixon and McCarthy (whose investigations he ironically "saw little wrong with")... since EPIC links could be taken as evidence of "un-American activities." Was this why Heinlein was touchy until death about his 1941 Worldcon speech, threatening legal action in 1973 when the text – arguably in the public domain – was reprinted through the well-meaning efforts of Forrest J. Ackerman? Its second paragraph approvingly mentions Sinclair-as-politician, you see... (*Monad* costs \$5 per issue or \$6 outside the USA, from Pulphouse Publishing Inc, Box 1227, Eugene, OR 97440.)

Invasion of the Liberty Snatchers is the subtly titled booklet containing the seven winning entries from the FOREST anti-anti-smoking-propaganda sf competition mentioned in *IZ* 78 (28pp A5, £3.99). Alas, it's mostly awful, plonking stuff, full of lectures and heavy moralizing: no message is helped by delivery as bad as this. The winning story, for example, concludes with a Dire Warning that discouraging people from blowing smoke in others' faces will surely lead to all black, disabled or poor citizens being chucked out of the country. Gosh, I simply hadn't thought it through.

Footnote. The *Samhain* newspaper coverage above apparently resulted from a police coup in tracing "video nasty" suppliers through the classified ads of another horror magazine, *The Dark Side*. W.H. Smith reportedly threatened to cease distributing *TDS* unless all classified ads were dropped. I turned with new interest to the back of *Interzone*, seeking coded subtexts: "The Way to Write Science Fiction" sounds obviously sinister, as does the ad from "Small Furry Creatures Press," and there must be a metaphor for illicit intercourse in the offer of "Critical Assembly"...

Mutant Popcorn

Nick Lowe

In a real world, it would be possible to view *The Crow* on the terms it was conceived: as an ambitious attempt to rebirth James O'Barr's ultradark comics character as a viable hero for a mainstream film series; as a landmark attempt by a battery of well-established independent film names (Pressman, Miramax, Entertainment) to make commercial product out of the most left-field of independent comics; and, especially, as a fascinating screen collaboration between splatter novelist David Schow, whom I haven't read, and (until 1st April 1993, easily the most exciting thing about the movie) everyone's favourite genre outlaw John Shirley. There's so much to say about all of this that it's an embarrassment and an encumbrance to have to deal with the cruel, already abused circumstances that have turned an interesting and stylish, if heartily silly, movie into a grotesque event picture. There's no way on earth of treating these matters tastefully; but since it will never now be possible to watch this film innocently, or to discuss it at all without first prising away the exoskeleton of crude and nasty ironies that have hardened around it, a few words of acknowledgment are needed.

So: as only the sightless and wizened will be unaware, *The Crow* is a snuff movie. Brandon Lee was shot, a fortnight before his wedding, during the filming of the precise gunshot that kills Eric Draven on the eve of his own (though the actual scene in question has been considerably restaged, reshot, and recut, using a satisfactory combination of coverage and double work). Both are subsequently resurrected for a pitifully brief span of false life, which has inadequately to stand as their final legacy to the living world: Eric to settle his savage score with the agents of his own and his fiancée's murder, Lee's as his first and last role as an established Hollywood leading man. And behind both couples – Eric and Shelly, Lee and Eliza Hutton – lies a third pair of shadows, since the single most famous fact about the *Crow* comics is that O'Barr's haunted character and narrative were an autobiographical outwork of his own state of mind in the aftermath of his

girlfriend's death in a carsmash. And it would be futile to deny, though achingly desirable to be able to ignore, these unhappy and meretricious symmetries between the events of the story, their personal roots, and their final incarnation, when the very process of watching the film is contaminated by an unwilling scrutiny that seeks to disentangle the real Brandon Lee from the ringer, and the scenes and structure of the film as it would have been from the plastic work that's been done to remove the traces of that film's death in a violent accident to prepare it for viewing. (In fact, for what it's worth, the shadow-heavy lighting, stroboscopically staccato cutting, and impenetrable clown-mask makeup on Lee's character make it virtually impossible to spot the seams, on first viewing at least, in all but a couple of sequences.)

Well, the one actually important thing about this network of what may cheapeningly be called ironies is their underscoring of a poignant and problematic truth at the heart of O'Barr's original fiction. In the comic, crucially, and even more in the film, there is responsibility, someone to punish, a chain of command and conspiracy behind what seemed like random acts of horror that makes revenge – ferocious, vigilante sadism – achievable. In life – in O'Barr's as in Lee's – there is none. *The Crow* came into existence in the first place out of the need to invent a (presumably) therapeutic narrative container for the targetless, boundless anger and grief of accidental bereavement. In the comics, Shelly is dragged from Eric's car and murdered and raped (in that order) by a named gang of demonic thugs high on violence, evil and addiction. Eric, shot twice through the head at the outset of the incident, returns from the grave as a grinning, murderous clown under the tutelage of a laconic spirit crow, to pick off the foursome and their gangworld boss in a finite series of gruesome set-piece executions. And in the movie version, the responsibility for evil has an even clearer structure of responsibility, with Shelly now butchered in her

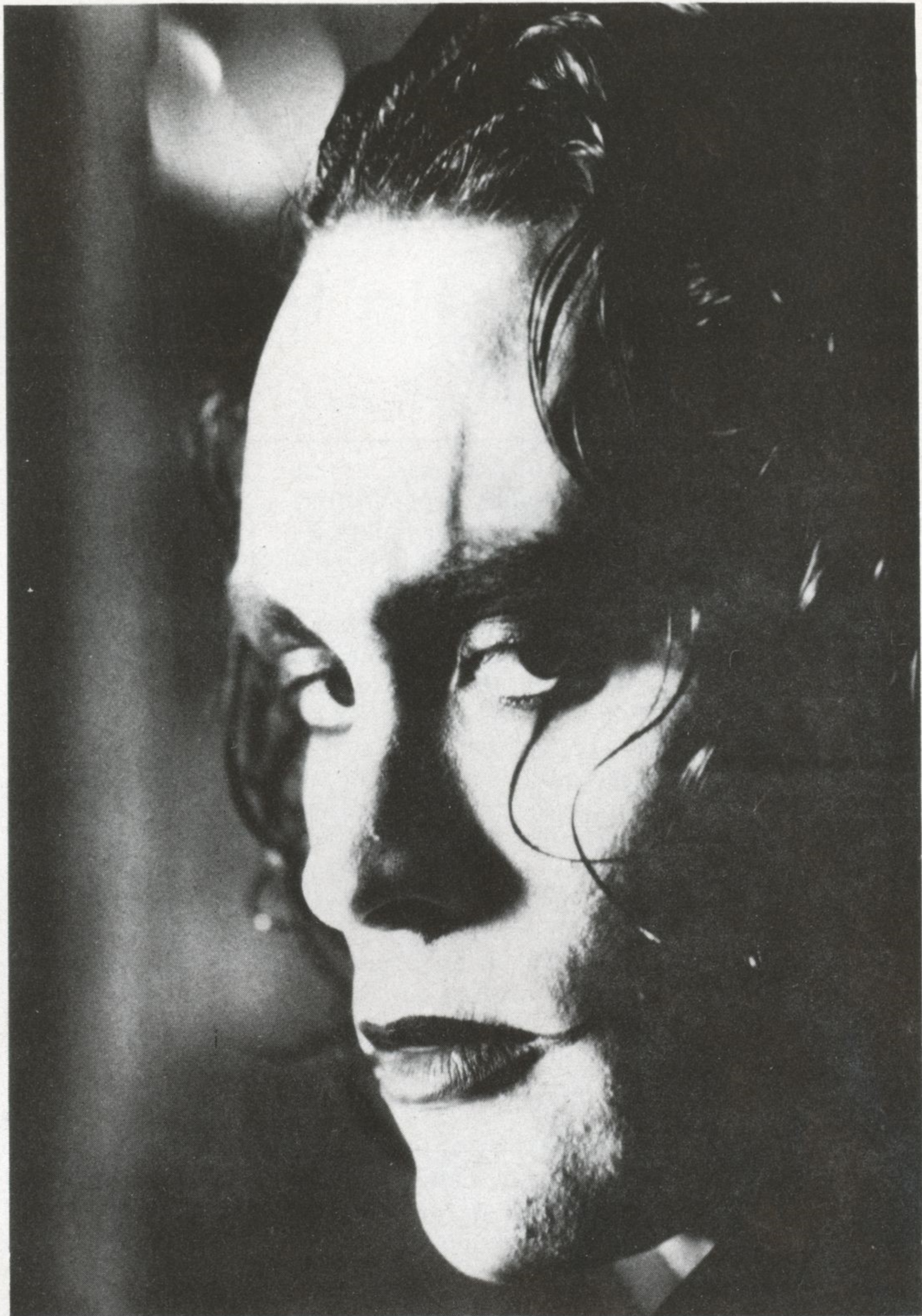
apartment in planned retaliation for (honest:) organizing a campaign for tenants' rights in a bad neighbourhood controlled by the Oldman-wigged head psycho "Top Dollar"; so that Eric's campaign now follows a classically cinematic narrative curve, beginning with the footsoldiers (four individual climaxes) and culminating with the big cheese in a standard elevated-location showdown imported, along with much else, from the belfry finale of Tim Burton's original *Batman*.

Thus the genesis of *The Crow* itself has its roots in the drive to make sense of random horror by rewriting it as a crime for which someone must pay; so that supplementary tabloid fictions of murderous conspiracies stalking the Dragon dynasty are themselves simply a less ironic, and therefore less exculpable, attempt to make the same sort of artificial narrative sense of the deaths of father and son. The message of *The Crow*, as a comics event and a film one, is that we need the narratives of crime and vengeance to deflect us from the naked contemplation of a universe that recognizes neither.

On these terms, at least, *The Crow* certainly comes over as an honorable, and mostly successful, attempt to rein in the loopier excesses of O'Barr's creation, and to sculpt it into something a little more like a conventional type of supernatural movie, while holding on to most of the key scenes, characters, and moral and visual stylings that gave the comics their original passion and edge. O'Barr's lurid, Eisneresque noir has been reinterpreted, rather than simply rendered, as a gorgeously-designed bad neighbourhood of Gotham City, with heavily-stylized model shots giving swooping bat's-eye views of an inner-city Gormenghast of gables and gargoyles, under one of those literally incessant urban rainstorms for which Harvey Kurtzman homagingly coined the name *Eisenspritz*. O'Barr's original lyric soundtrack of Ian Curtis and Robert Smith has become – rightly – less English, eighties, and vocal, more guitar-centred, American, and nineties. It wouldn't surprise me if much of this was Shirley rather than

director Alex Proyas, as the most immediately recognizable fingerprints on the script are in the way the avenging Eric himself has been subtly remoulded to a familiar John Shirley template. Gone is the silly grin, the dodgy poetry, the camp comics dialogue (as gone too is most of Shelly); instead, Shirley's Eric is reinvented as a soulful, troubled guitarist who intersperses acts of existential terrorism with plaintive axe solos on rooftops, still violent and vengeful with a snappy line in blackly ironic quips, but far more empathetic and complex in his dealings with the world of life. The crow is still there, and remarkably well wrangled, but keeps sagaciously schtumm; supporting characters are discreetly fleshed out, dialogue sharpened, plot substantially tightened, and the whole thing is wisely unembarrassed about being daft as a chocolate jockstrap and gothic like Pluto is nippy. In a real world, it would be possible to view *The Crow* as far more essentially a vehicle for Shirley's trademark brand of gothic heroics than for the amiable, anything-but-gothic Brandon Lee. But films and their reading exist in a world of myths, and for better or worse this one now permanently belongs to the luckless Brandon.

From a very different border zone of comics culture, Masato Harado's five-years-old *Gunhed* arrives too late to be of anything but historical and cultural interest. What in 1989 was an exuberant, groundbreaking adventure in mid-Pacific live-action sf seems now infinitely dispiriting and sad, a mausoleum of 80s images and juvenile narrativities long displaced by more interesting developments on three continents. American sf film has at last outgrown its blue period, the grimy 80s technicolor-noir of Cameron and Scott, leaving *Gunhed's* expensive big-metal sets and models looking miserably like beached plesiosaurs. At the same time, the contemporary mainstream of Japanese fantasy cinema has raped the Western imagination with aggressively-marketed animé videos, teeming racks of ever-wonkier *Doomed Megalopolis* episodes obstructing the checkouts of games and comics shops like Haagen Dazs for the head; so that *Gunhed's* sexually polite, preposterously Americanizing fantasies seem pallid and sane by comparison. Above all, juvenile sf in Britain has been through and out the other side of the Gerry'n'Sylvia revival, and there isn't much in *Gunhed's* repertory of big *mecha* fun that kids here haven't spent the last three years growing out of: huge fantasy machines with one-guy cockpits you strap into and strut around interacting with fellow items of heavy plant; interminable gratuitous countdowns to thrilling



The late Brandon Lee in 'The Crow'

model explosions that must be evaded just as the last digit flips to zero.

None of this is really the fault of *Gunhed* itself, an ambitious and well-designed picture with a good deal of absolutely stunning miniature work, whose only major offences are diabolical acting, a senseless plot, cretinous dialogue ineptly translated and still more inexpertly dubbed, incomprehensible editing, and characterizations of dimensionality somewhere between zero and one. Since most of these would apply equally to the average *Overfiend* episode, they're things that by now we're sufficiently trained to overlook. But unlike the barmier animé scenarios, there's fatally little to inspire in *Gunhed's* imaginatively-impooverished storyline about 21st-century RAM-raiders scavenging for chips on a lost island of rogue Transformers and having to shoot their way up through the maze to the top level before they run out of time, fuel and

lives. There are motifs, to be sure, that long-time manganologists will recognize as fundamental to the Japanese fantasy toolset: the transformation of physically or emotionally adolescent male rejects into towering engines of destruction; the dormant god-mind on the verge of awakening to destroy the planet; the duelling giants, heroic hackers, and cracker-barrel samurai soundbites on manliness and valour ("the true hero doesn't think about what he's doing; he does things because he has to"). But the attempt to look, sound, and feel American – with entirely Anglophone text and graphics, a haphazard mix of Japanese and (extremely cheap) US players and dialogue, and an unutterably sad obsession with baseball, Pepsi and Texans – goes right against the grain of what Japanese fantasy cinema, quite arguably the strongest in the world, does best. It's nice to know this wasn't the future of anything. (Nick Lowe)

A Gift of Love

Paula Wakefield

They come under cover of darkness, slinking through slivers of moonlight sharpened on the Dog Rose's thorn. Bolder beneath a blanket of dusk, or darkness, they search each other out, mewling greetings, scenting territory, occasionally claiming transient rights with spent claws and spilt blood.

In daylight they are less assured, skirting the overgrown lawns with care, avoiding the choking pond that they hope might still hide some fat, forgotten Koi. Wary of my presence, these feral creatures scurry for cover in the derelict herbacious borders or else attempt to disguise their presence in the tangled aromas of the chaotic herb garden. Like them, the garden – my garden – is wild. But it is my wilderness and they are careful of it and me.

Protecting my solitary existence, I do not encourage their visits, occasionally seeing off an overly-bold newcomer. They are vagrants, misfits; but then, so was I, until I found this place – the house and the garden. Like them, I am still an outsider. But I do not dislike them and I will never understand why some people hate cats.

Henry III of France fainted whenever he saw a cat and Napoleon I was also terrified of them. Why?

The reasons are as numerous as the insanities breeding through the history of the human race. So I allow these animals licence; to visit, to roam, to rest, if they need to; like the pregnant Tabby in the garden shed whose rotting timbers will, any day now, provide shelter and shade for her latest litter.

This garden, like the house, has been my sanctuary for more years than I care to remember. It was here that I found safety. Peace. Like the cats who call here, I too have known abuse, prejudice, cruelty. It seems only just that I should share this haven with them for I am familiar with these animals' needs, their ways.

Familiar. They are called that sometimes. It's an old superstition. A witch's friend; Satan in disguise. Stupid. Wrong and stupid. If such superstitions did not carry the torments meted out by those who believe in them I would laugh. But I do not laugh. For I have been tormented. I have been called witch. But that was long ago. I have been safe here, but soon it will be time to move on again. Already my lonely tranquillity has been disturbed.

The sign appeared months ago. Men with wooden poles, and nails, and heavy mallets, hammered the boards in place. It was another warning and I should have heeded it. Now, even the cats are wary.

The Blue Persian, abandoned because her carefully-bred beauty was marred by a roving Tom, has stayed away for two days. That smoky Siamese, whose colour no longer matched the decor of its owners' new home, sits sulking on the lower branch of a Copper Beech. She waits, pensive, hoping perhaps that there is something I can do to halt the disruption caused by the people moving into the house next door. The builders and carpenters daily tear away at the fabric of years woven into the old building, dispersing its memories as dust and debris.

As the days pass I watch the pregnant Tabby grow fretful, anxious for the birth of the kittens still bulging in her belly, their movements rippling the silver stripes of her fur; marks like cirrus clouds, or sand streaked by waves when the tide is out.

The new owners of the adjacent house are determined to rip its innards out, just as they have gouged the roots and rhizomes of the past from their garden. Poppy petals bleed in the dust, the clematis and climbing roses are torn up. Only the bruised scent of the Verbena clings to the still summer air, and the birds, shocked by the devastation, are silent.

Yesterday I saw, in the woman's eyes, that if she had her way, this garden – my garden – would also receive the punishment of shears, the confining layers of concrete. Oh yes, she would kill it. And me.

My lease here, on this place, has been a long one. But the years, like this summer season, have rolled under me too quickly. It is time to change. Time to move on. Time for another life. Soon the architects and surveyors will move in here too. My tenure is up. I have to leave. Move on and about in the world again. I should have done so before but, I suppose, I have grown indolent, reliant on the walls and hedges, the trees and borders that have kept me safe. And I had promised myself one last summer. One final summer in this garden with the cats. And so here we are, them and me. Disturbed and disgruntled by the dust-filled heat, the pounding of machinery.

Edmund, that is the man's name. I heard the woman call to him yesterday evening, her voice a cheese wire of complaint sliced through the still evening. Evening is the only quiet time now, when the workmen have gone and the machines are switched off.

"Edmund! Edmund!" she called. "This plaster is uneven! I told you we should have used the other firm. And this paint is the wrong colour! I told them to use puce! Edmund, didn't you tell them? Edmund,

this is the wrong shade entirely... Edmund! Edmund, where the hell are you?"

He had been in the garden, their garden – what is left of it – and did not notice me watching him, camouflaged as I was by the dark leaves of an Ivy. Dusk was only just settling and in the west the last stain of the sun was still smeared across the sky. As he turned to look at it I glimpsed an expression of something I had not seen on another human face for many years. It was regret. He crouched down, rubbing the scars of a poppy petal between his thumb and forefinger, like someone trying to smooth the creases from old tissue paper. They were the large hands of a tall man, pale in the coagulating darkness. And this was the moment that I knew I wanted him.

But then her voice, scraped at the night. "Edmund! Edmund! Jesus! I can't see a thing out here! For Christ's sake Edmund, come inside!"

He turned away, sadly obeying her command.

"I told those men not to leave that stuff out there. Look, look – I've cut my leg on that thing – the sooner those lights are up the better – Jesus! You know, this place really gives me the creeps at night, I'm beginning to wish we hadn't come here – what time did you say they were bringing that bitumen tomorrow? Huh? Edmund, will you please answer me? I don't know what's got into you..."

Her complaints twanged the air, pulling him back to their house while I stayed in my garden watching the evening ease itself into night, waiting for the cats to break cover, briefly bold for one of the last times.

In the night the Tabby littered. The nine long bodies are coiled about their mother's sagging belly as they blindly search for the pink teats that will nourish them.

Watching from a cautious distance, I whisper. "Hurry. Hurry. Feed. Grow." Their legs are useless sticks. "Hurry. There's not much time. It's not safe for you here. Not safe for any of us any longer. Hurry."

I found a dead field mouse and I carry it to the shed door, ragged on its rusty hinges. The animal is fresh, the last kill of one of the vagrants who, before it could devour its prey, must have been disturbed by the builders. I leave the mouse at the door, but the Tabby is either too tired or too afraid to touch it while I am near. So I walk away, heading for the orchard, the furthest place from the men and the machines who are already fracturing the day with noise.

The orchard is my dreaming place. When the sun is hot, as it already is, I lie beneath the old apple trees and dream. Old dreams. They come and go as I drift in and out of sleep. I feel my body twitch and fret as the heat solidifies into mid-day. In sleep I leave my body to its own rhythms, dispersing myself around the garden; part of me trails around the herb garden, another is in the shrubbery, and yet another studies the cool green chenille of weed covering the pond. Only the sweet smell of apples stays with me... and something else, something other... musk and salt, like the sea... no. No, not the sea. I search my memory. It is foreign and forgotten, this scent. I remember it in different forms, overlaid with other odours... but I have known it. I have loved and hated it. And yes, oh yes, sometimes feared it. It is the scent of man.

But I am not afraid. Not now. Not this time. It is him and he speaks to me.

"It's a beautiful day." He peers through the remains of the orchard wall, through the veil of creeper and briar.

He smiles. "Wish I'd got time to take it easy, but Sarah –" he jerked his head back towards the house, "– she's got a pile of stuff for me to do."

It was as if the mention of her name conjured her voice.

"Edmund! Where the hell are you now? Edmund! The bitumen's here!"

He is still smiling at me, the lines around his eyes crease in affection... a request for understanding.

"I'd better go back."

I let him go, knowing that I love him. Later, later I will plot. I will plot his destiny. I want him. But later, later. Now I'll savour this lust – I had forgotten its taste, sharp as sweat, dry as sand. I itch with it. I recall the shadows of myself from the pond, the herb garden, the shrubbery, wanting to be whole again, my old self, to use every sense to dwell on him, here among the sweet rot of the broken apples.

I have become bold. Two days ago I ventured to their house, pretending a need for something. But she was annoyed by my presence. It was the first time I had seen her face in close-up. She has yellow hair and pink painted nails. She is older than she likes to think she is and her eyes are cold, like the dull orbs in a dead fish-head. Around her mouth are lines that are testament to the considered cruelties she will have dispensed throughout her life. I have seen these things before; known people like her before. And she hates me, despite the veneer of cool politeness, the pretence of consideration. But he, Edmund, likes me. More than that. I know. Even after all this time alone, I know. I know I can have him, bewitch him, steal him. And she knows it too. But she cannot guess. She cannot even begin to guess... I thanked them and left, trailing my disguised desire after me, fully aware that Edmund watched.

Later I heard her complain. "She'll always be here now. It's your fault, Edmund. You encouraged her. We'll never get a minute's peace."

"She means no harm... I like her..." he murmured.

"She's weird for Christ's sake! God knows how long she's been holed up in that place – the sooner they move her out the better. I don't want her here again, Edmund. She gives me the creeps!"

It was the cats who gave me the idea. When the gardens were quiet again, I ventured out to watch them. A broken-eared Tom was spraying a leaning gatepost, scenting the area. A flea-ridden Manx, a thin apology of a creature, was rubbing himself against a tree trunk, claiming ground, a mini-fiefdom, for a few hours.

I remembered that it is possible to invest a place with one's soul, one's living spirit, so that the place, and the person become the same thing. Like me and my garden. And it occurred to me that if I imprinted my presence on the wreck of land that is Edmund's, he would never be able to enter it without thinking of me. I would always be there. The scent of me... that

essential memory. And maybe, maybe I can save Edmund and the garden, reclaim them.

The "For Sale" sign has been taken away and today men with tape measures came to look at the house. Knowing they are lazy, that they would not venture far, I hid in the cellar, its peppery aged smell filling my nose and lungs. It was a long time before they left but once the house was silent again, I ventured out into the garden.

The cats are nowhere to be seen.

In the garden shed the Tabby is hauling her offspring about, dragging them across the splintered floorboards, forcing them to move, use their little stick legs, even though they are not yet ready for it. The rest of the vagrants will already be searching for other places, new sanctuaries, as I must do. But not yet, not just yet... There is Edmund.

Last night I slept in the attic, my favourite room with windows that are like the sky's eyes. I was dreaming about the cats, dreaming of a coat made from cats' tails. The tails, gold and black and silver had been left at my door as a gift, and a fat hare was sewing the thick ribbons of fur together with red thread. A fight among the remaining misfits woke me and for a moment I wondered what had happened to the cats'-tail coat. Then I remembered. Another dream.

I left the house by the pantry door, pushing through the shrubbery and along the furthest herbaceous border. The white trumpet of a single lily, spotlighted by the moon, stood out against the darker Delphiniums. I lingered then, reminded by the purpled pinkness at the base of the lily's petals of wine, heavy wine that clings to the tongue like a thick bruise. Another life. That was another life. The Lily scent clung to me as I pushed through the gap in the wall.

I trailed some strands of my hair along the slabs of dull concrete that will be their patio. Is my hair really that white? I do not remember it so. I remember, I remember it as black, or almost black. Burnt chestnuts... but it was so long ago, and it no longer matters. In my new life, the life I have been incubating in my dreams, my hair will be red, red and bold, and gold.

The urine I sprinkled across the dried earth that had been a lawn where Camomile grew. The nail, long and white, I embedded in their doorpost and one drop of blood – drawn with the claw of an old rose – this I smeared across the threshold.

Now my body aches, its joints swell and complain, forgotten muscles flex and demand action. Now I ache for change. I ache for Edmund.

Edmund. This morning, at dawn, he was outside, looking for me. Did he notice that the other vagrants had gone? Even the Tabby and her mewling brood left in the night. Ah, Edmund, Edmund, look at what you have done. What you have allowed to happen.

But I have remembered forgiveness. And I will forgive him. When I come to claim him, I will forgive him and the garden will be restored.

In the attic, I look about me at the touchstones of this diminishing life that I have inhabited for too long. I decide to leave the remnants behind me. The grasses,

the stones and feathers I collected from the garden, the bones – little relics, they should stay here.

And I will leave something for Edmund too. A gift.

It is done. Almost done. For the time being. Now I must wait. As Edmund waits for me.

He was sleeping when I crept in, his limbs lazy and divine. For a minute – maybe more – I marked the contours of his face with silent declarations and then gently laid my gift in the cool hollow of the sheet beneath which his legs were splayed.

"Jesus Christ! Edmund! What the hell's that fucking cat doing in here? Shit! Look! Look what its brought! Holy shit!"

She screamed and I had no choice. I had to run. Run. Run. Run. So many times, through so many years. Centuries.

But at the door I turned, just once, swiftly. Edmund was looking down at my gift of love, the young thrush, one of this year's fledglings, soft and still new. My last image of Edmund was his hand, the large thumb gently stroking the speckled golden breast, pulsing softly with the last beats of its life, the life I had been careful not to strangle from it as I carried the creature to him in my soft mouth.

Even now I taste the Thrush's blood, the soft down of its broken wing still covers my tongue. My mouth. The mouth I will kiss Edmund with when I return, when my hair is red and my legs are long. Witch. Call me what they will. I will return and Edmund will remember me and my gift of love. My nails will not be pink.

Paula Wakefield has contributed two stories to the "Midnight Rose" series of shared-world fantasy anthologies (*Temps*, *Villains*, etc), published by Penguin Books. The above piece marks her first appearance in *Interzone*. She lives in Stafford.

Sylvia M. Siddall ("The Perils of Unprotected Sex," page 28) has previously contributed two stories to *Interzone*, "Kingfisher" (issue 30) and "Thylacine, Thyla-cine" (issue 44). She lives in Wellingborough, Northamptonshire.

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"What If All Science is Wrong"

John Gribbin talks to Sally Ann Melia

“When I put my scientific hat on, I believe in black holes, ripples at the edge of spacetime, quantum electrodynamics and I am deadly serious about it. But sometimes I put any philosophical hat on, then I think that perhaps all our beautiful ideas are complete and utter rubbish. In the same way as we laugh at the myths of the ancient Egyptians. Maybe in 2,000, scientists will look back on our theories as ridiculous. A lot of those old ideas were perfectly good given the knowledge the people had at the time. I like to think we know all about the birth of the universe and a lot about space, but what if it is complete nonsense? What if it is all wrong? Maybe the universe doesn't work that way. I am always aware that there might be some deep fundamental flaw. Maybe Newton or Einstein took a wrong turning and the whole structure is going to fall down one day.”

John Gribbin is a prolific science writer and author of half-a-dozen sf novels. We met in a deserted cafe, platform 4, Victoria.

“For instance, say you build an aeroplane. Newton's laws are perfect for that, you don't need General Relativity. But when you talk about something like the birth of the universe or a singularity inside a black hole, then you are pushing Einstein's theories to the limit. This is where contemporary science starts to fall apart. This is where we may find a new and better theory.

“There's a whole group of people, Stephen Hawking is one of the most vociferous, who think there is a Theory of Everything, just around the corner. They say there will be one equation you could write on a T-shirt. It would contain everything there is to know about the universe. I don't know. It is one of those things where Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays I believe in a theory of everything, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays I don't, and Sunday I don't think about anything. I would like it to be true, I would like there to be an ultimate resolution of everything. At the same time, I would like it not to be true. I would like there to be uncertainty and mysteries still to be uncovered.”

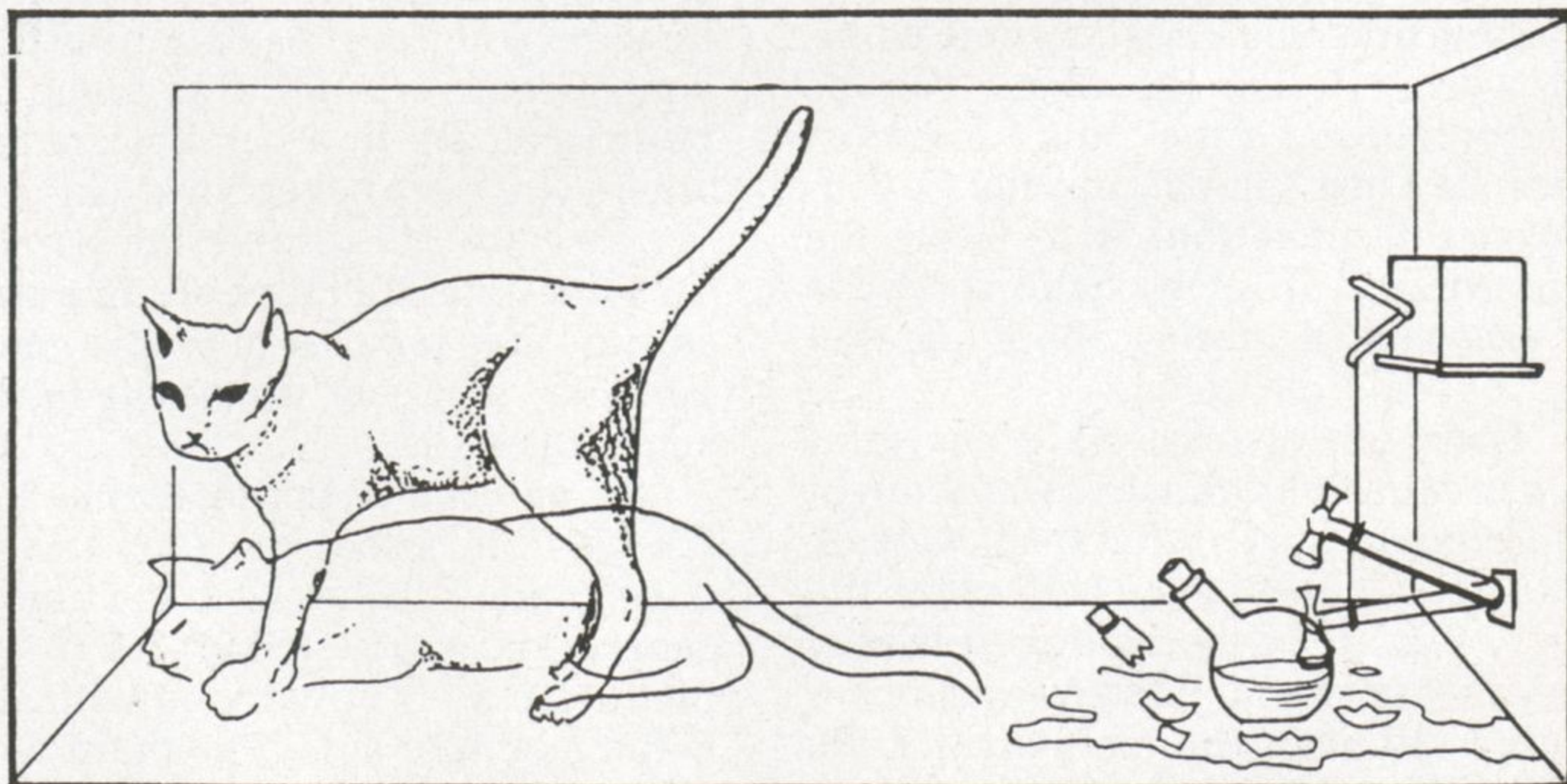
“My most recent fiction *Innervisions* (Penguin, 1993), is about the possibility that all of science is wrong. One review reads: ‘There's a strange sub-plot to *Innervisions*. Does John Gribbin really mean it?’ Of course, I meant it! When you write a book you know what you are putting into it! It's a children's story and a slim volume. It's supposed to work as an adventure story, people travelling around having adventures on the inside of the sphere. One character is regarded as a magician or a wizard and he *does things*. Only, he gets the right answers for the wrong reasons. That is deliberate. What I am saying is that perhaps science is like that. Perhaps we have been getting the right answers for the wrong reasons.”

John Gribbin wrote 28 science and science-fiction books before writing the best-selling, world-beating *In Search of Schrödinger's Cat* (Bantam, 1984). He is now working on a sequel.

“*In Search for Schrödinger's Cat* was the first book I wrote to please myself. I had been writing for ten years and had enough security to spend six to eight months writing a book without selling it. The new book, *Schrödinger's Cat: The sequel*, is about genuine quantum physics, about parallel universes. The title has not been decided yet. Schrödinger will be in there somewhere. Titles sometimes come first, sometimes come last. This is one of the ones that is coming last.

“Schrödinger's cat in a box is a thought experiment to illustrate the quantum-wave properties of matter. The image is simple. A cat is locked in a box with a fatal dose of gas and a small radioactive source. The poison gas will only be released when a Geiger counter detects the alpha particles of decaying atoms. At any moment in time the quantum wave must incorporate all possibilities, i.e. alpha particles exist and the cat dies, alpha particles do not exist and the cat lives. One solution, the Copenhagen Interpretation or Quantum Theory, says you don't know until you actually look in the box. So the cat is neither dead nor alive. The cat is both dead and alive until you *look*. There is what is called a superposition of states. Only when you *look* do things become real. You *collapse the wave function*, to use the correct jargon. The Copenhagen Interpretation is what all quantum physics is based on. When people in industry design lasers for CD, or any of the other practical applications, they are actually using the Copenhagen Interpretation. It allows for what I call cookbook physics. You apply the Copenhagen Interpretation to blend the ingredients. After baking you have a cake, but you don't have to understand what is going on in the oven. The Copenhagen Interpretation is very strange. Literally nothing is real unless it is looked at.

“The other solution is a Many Worlds/Parallel Worlds theory. This is



From *The Matter Myth*. A schematic illustration of Schrödinger's cat experiment, showing the ghostly superposition of live and dead cats. (Cat lovers please note – this is a thought experiment only!)



John and Mary Gribbin (photo by Ben Gribbin)

where there are two cats. When you look, the box splits into two and the whole universe splits into two. The Many Worlds idea came along as an alternative. It makes exactly the same predictions, has exactly the same results. When you use the Many Worlds' recipes, you can bake the same cakes as using the Copenhagen Interpretation. Copenhagen says, 'nothing is real until you look at it.' Many Worlds says, 'everything is real, every possible outcome is real in some parallel world.' I like the Many Worlds interpretation. First and foremost because I just can't accept the Copenhagen Interpretation. Also I like the opportunity it gives you to write novels and sf stories about parallel worlds and time travel.

"There are at least six other solutions to the Schrödinger's Cat thought experiment. That's what the new book is all about. One is even better than the Many Worlds interpretation. It is very easy, it is very straightforward conceptually, although the mathematics are hard. I think we now have the solution to how the universe works, but you will have to wait for the book, due in Spring 1995 from Orion."

John Gribbin has contributed several stories to *Interzone*, one of which is "Don't Look Back" (*Interzone* 40). This short story tells of a pop-music fan who travels back to see his hero Buddy Holly and in fact ends up killing him by making him so late that he has to take *that* plane. Is "Don't Look Back" a time-travel story, or a parallel-worlds story?

"Time travel requires parallel universes because of the paradoxes. Imagine you travel back in time to kill your Granny. Fine! But when you return you are in a parallel universe, where you were never born. This is the simplest way to resolve the paradox. To some extent, I think all time-travel stories are parallel-universe stories whether they are acknowledged as such or not.

"Going back to the *Interzone* story, the best bit is that the time traveller doesn't know he has changed time. He cannot know. His memories fit with the future he is now living with. That is the quantum side. The brain works off electrons and things. So if quantum physics affected anything, it is going to be your brain. There is no need to spell this out; the story works as a story. You

don't have to stop and say: 'Read this carefully and then you will understand the story. The background science is real, but it isn't actually in the story. It's true science, but it's not good engineering. Since you could never hope to build a time machine in a laboratory on Earth, because of the energy required. I think I have solved this problem in *Timeswitch* (unpublished, 1994), the new novel about parallel worlds. *Timeswitch* is really not set in our reality. It is set on Earth, in the 20th century, but it is not our 20th century. Also I've got the only plausible energy source for a time machine that I have ever seen. Wait until December next year..."

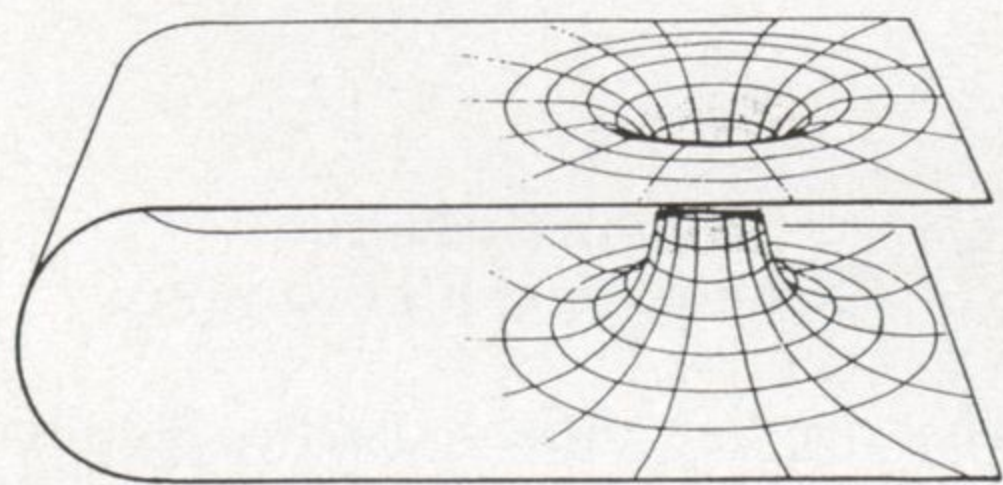
John describes the science behind time travel in two books: *In Search of the Edge of Time* (Bantam, 1992) and *The Matter Myth* (Viking, 1991).

"*The Matter Myth* has got a bit of everything in it. I put all my wildest ideas into one book. *In Search of the Edge of Time* has two time machines. First there's the tunnelling through black holes that I think science-fiction readers are fairly familiar with, though the tale of how this discovery came about does bear repetition. What

happened was that Carl Sagan wrote an sf novel called *Contact* (Arrow, 1986). It was about an advanced alien community who built tunnels to travel through space and time. Carl Sagan contacted CalTech astrophysicist Kip Thorne, a black hole specialist, for advice. Fascinated, Kip Thorne set to discover what restrictions known physics applied to the existence of such Space Tunnels.

"The first calculations pointed to black holes being impassable. Both Kip Thorne in Cal Tech and Russian scientists established that known physics disallowed Space Tunnels unless something could be done about the nature of matter – in particular, very crudely speaking, the attractive gravity linked to matter. So if an *anti-gravitational* effect could be created in the *throat* of the black hole, then perhaps...men, spaceships, aliens could travel through space and time. Kip Thorne refers to the Casimir effect as one possible source of antigravity.

"The Casimir Effect is a hypothesis advanced by Dutch physicist Hendrick Casimir in 1949. Imagine two metal reflecting plates standing in a vacuum. The metal will be highly reflective to photons and, to cut a long story short, there will be fewer photons between the plates and many more photons rushing to enter in. Hence the two metal plates will be pushed tight together. If an electric charge is added to each plate, it could exactly match the force pulling the plates together. In effect, an antigravitational force will have been created, and one that is enough to satisfy Einstein's gravity equation. If this system of plates were placed within a black hole, then a tunnel would be created: a wormhole. In effect Kip Thorne proved there was nothing in the known laws of physics to forbid travel through space tunnels, although he



From *In Search of the Edge of Time*. If a way could be found to hold a wormhole open, it might even provide a shortcut from one region of our Universe to another.

also proved that wormholes were inherently unstable and likely to collapse to a singularity after an object had entered within. So no return trips! If a wormhole could be built and stabilized, this traversable wormhole may allow a hypothetical traveller to take a short cut through space.

"A small modification to such a wormhole could allow for time travel. This modification draws on the most

straightforward part of Einstein's Theory of General Relativity: clocks run slower at the speed of light. It has been speculated that if one end of a wormhole could be fixed, and then the other end was propelled away on a circular trajectory at the speed of light, when the far end rejoined its origin there would be a time difference. By travelling repeatedly through this wormhole, you could travel back to the first instant when the wormhole was created.

"That's the theory. There are problems. Problems with the materials required to create the plates needed to generate the Casimir effect. Also it is difficult to imagine how one would manipulate wormholes. Giant tongs? Let alone the tiny question of creating a wormhole from a black hole! The bottom line is: if you undertake certain bits of sophisticated and difficult and probably very expensive engineering on black holes, you really can use them as tunnels through space and time.

"The second solution for time travel is a variation on the same theme. This was Frank Tipler's idea back in 1974. In looking for an anti-gravitational force, Tipler looked to fast-rotating, very massive objects on the edge of being black holes, spinning neutron stars, pulsars and the like. Some pulsars are very nearly natural time machines and I find their existence tantalizing. A classic example of 'so near, and yet so far.' It is hard to resist the speculation that nature may already have done the job that human engineers would find so difficult. It seems to me more likely that our descendants will discover a pre-existing time machine (with the bonus that they then really could use it to go back into history) than that they will build one."

Many parallel-worlds stories have now been written. Does John have any particular favourites?

"Actually, one of my proudest achievements in fiction is to be a character in a novel by Fred Pohl: Frederik Pohl's *Coming of Quantum Cats* – I'm actually in it. I am co-inventor with Stephen Hawking of the time machine. Actually it is not a time machine but a device for travelling sideways into the different universes. I appear very briefly late on in the story. Near the end of the book different people from different parallel realities are brought together in one place. There are two or three copies of me and two or three copies of Stephen Hawking talking in the corner. It's good fun!

"This is another solution to the paradoxes of time travel. The point about fiction is that you can make it up. You can do what you like. It is just a game."

What about the H.G. Wells idea that the entire history of time is fixed,

including any changes brought about by time travellers?

"Wells was writing just before Einstein's Special Theory was published. His is a pre-quantum view, i.e. time is another dimension. The future exists in the same way as New York exists. Although we are not in New York now, we can travel there and it does not change. Quantum mechanics takes away that certainty, but it does allow you to have parallel universes, as one possible explanation of the way the world works."

John Gribbin speaks of particle physics and cosmology, with obvious relish, yet much of his work is about the environment, ozone destruction and the Greenhouse effect.

"The most important problems facing people are environmental problems. This includes population growth. Obviously it is absolute nonsense to spend money on things like the superconducting super-collider (now cancelled by the US Senate) if the resources are not available to preserve our environment. Equally you could say the problem is not that we are spending on particle accelerators, but we are spending too much on armies and bombs and so on. Yet if the government is going to say scientific research has only got so much money – and normally the amounts allocated for scientific research are not enough to do proper research on the environmental issues, let alone anything else! – then anything ought to be left off. The thing is you can come back in 50 years time once you have solved the problems of the greenhouse effect and the ozone layer and so on. There will be time for the next generation to study quasars and the big bang and particles. But if we spend all our money on studying particle theory and the big bang, while the environment goes to pieces, there might not be a next generation so it will be pointless."

The sf novel *Ragnarok* by Gribbin and D.G. Compton (Gollancz, 1991) looks at both environmental and nuclear issues.

"*Ragnarok* is based on the Norse legend of the end of the world. It is the same legend Wagner's Ring Cycle is based on. It portrays the end of the world as being ice and fire. So we have a man-made volcanic explosion which initiates a long winter. The science is genuine but peripheral. In fact, it is not science fiction because all the science in the book is contemporary. The volcano is triggered by exploding a nuclear bomb, but you could use high explosives. It has not been done, obviously, but it has been worked out in principle. The story is about politics and people."

John has also looked at human evolution in several books, including *Genesis: The Origins of Man and the Universe* (Oxford University

Press, 1981) and *The Monkey Puzzle* (Bodley Head, 1982).

"*The Monkey Puzzle* looks at the fact that we share DNA with other chimpanzees and so on, in particular a rare breed of pygmy chimpanzees – about 99% of shared DNA. Humans and chimpanzees cannot naturally interbreed, but you could probably do it artificially. There is one piece of DNA which is the other way around. Whether you think ours is upside down or that of the pygmy chimps' is upside down depends on your point of view. It would probably be possible to turn this part of DNA the other way around to make a hybrid in the test-tube. As far as I know, no-one has done it, but we are on the edge of doing things like that. What people can do with DNA now is unbelievable.

"That's what I explore in my sf novel *Father to the Man*. Pygmy chimpanzees and man share a common ancestor. You could just as well argue that these chimps are descendants from man. My point is that humans are not the ultimate beings. The ultimate aim of evolution was not to produce humans. When people talk about Saving the Earth or protecting the ozone layer I say, 'OK, it may be a disaster for humans but life will continue.' Something else will carry on and do something different. The dinosaurs were wiped out 65 million years ago and now here we are. It is a message that I wanted to put across. There is something bigger than us. Life on Earth, let alone the rest of the universe is not just dependent on human beings. Evolution doesn't stop when the human race stops."

What about human religion then? All religions say humans are special.

"I think it is all a cosmic accident. My current non-fiction book, *In the Beginning* (Viking, 1993) is about that: how the universe could have evolved in a literal sense. There were other universes that gave rise to what became our universe. Each universe evolves slightly differently from the others. Selection would be based on which ones were right to produce black holes. What the universe has evolved to do, is not to produce planets and life-forms like us. It has evolved to make black holes.

One of John's recent projects was a biography, *Stephen Hawking: A Life in Science* (Viking, 1992). How did that come about?

"I don't know Stephen Hawking terribly well. He was just finishing his PhD in Cambridge when I was just starting mine. At that stage in your career that is a huge gulf. So there has always been that kind of awed relationship from me to him. The biography came about because Michael White had actually done a deal to write a biography. Mike is a chemist, so the

publishers said they wanted someone who knew about cosmology to advise him. Me! We didn't actually interview Stephen for that book. He had just finished being interviewed by an American woman for a children's book about him and his work. He said, 'Once was enough.' He didn't want to do it again, which is fair enough. He uses a computer to communicate now; he has one finger to type out phrases with, so it really is very very time-consuming. He didn't feel he could spare the time again, but he gave us a lot of material some of which is now in his new book, *Black Holes and Baby Universes*. There is also a lot of stuff in there about his early life, and the disease and so on, which he gave us at that time. So we had some communication and he gave us his blessing, but we didn't actually go and sit at his knee. That was one of the reasons why my role became more important: I actually had know him for some time, fairly casually, and obviously I understood the work. So I ended up getting equal billing with Mike on that one. Now we've done Einstein. We suggested lots of people to our publishers. Einstein was their suggestion and it has sold very well. Next we are doing Darwin."

How does he research his books?

"When writing non-fiction, the big books, I start with puzzles. I am writing a book about quantum physics at the moment, so I start with Schrödinger's cat paradox. I tease the reader with the prospect of answers to these puzzles later on. But first I always build up a historic framework of scientists and their work leading up to this puzzle. I tend to start with Newton, and go from there. This is how I wrote *In Search of Schrödinger's Cat*, I put in lots of stuff about scientific writers. When it was published many readers wrote saying they liked it: 'At school you learn "so and so's law" but you don't know who "so and so" was (for instance that he had a dog called Harry).' I write this way because I am fascinated by the history of science. I am always discovering new aspects I didn't know before. I am always reading about science. I have far too many books – they take over the house. Worse, I can't walk past a bookshop without buying something. I now work in a shed in the garden; books have taken over that as well. I use the University of Sussex library. My wife, previously a research librarian, is always closely involved. I don't have any research assistants – well, not formally, mine is a family business. My eldest son is qualified in desk-top publishing, if I want something done. The younger son is a very good critic. He is interested in the things I write about. My wife writes and she knows about libraries and books and so on. So we all do things. Where others might have to employ people, we do it as a family business."

Which scientist is John Gribbin's personal hero?

"In science my hero is somebody I never met, someone I never will meet now, Richard Feynman. He was working in areas related to parallel universes. One of the most amazing things he did was work on Path Integrals, a mathematical way of adding up. As I said earlier, an electron in quantum mechanics doesn't exist until you measure it. If an electron leaves point A and arrives at point B you don't know how it got there. In a Newtonian way of looking at things you imagine it goes along a straight line from A to B. Feynman showed that you have to consider every possible way it could get from A to B. Literally, so it could go all the way around the universe and back. He shows how you can add this up in principle to give you the right way to predict what electrons are going to do. It is called Path Integrals because you are adding up all the possible paths. It is also called 'sum over histories,' and in a way what it does is add up all the parallel worlds. If you imagine there is one universe where the electron goes one way and another universe where the electron travels another way, you add them all together. That is one of the other six ways of interpreting Quantum Physics. The other universes are kind of ghosts whose influence adds up to make our reality.

"But it is not just that he worked on parallel universes. He was, in some ways, the ideal scientist. He didn't believe things. He believes in checking it out as you are supposed to. And he was clever enough to work out new ways to do things. Nor was he just a boring scientist in a white coat in a lab: he played the bongo drums, was a practical joker and so on. So if I could have been a scientist, I would have wanted to be Feynman. He was a whole man."

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FOR SALE

Interzone: The 2nd Anthology.

Paperback edition, New English Library, 1988. Stories by J.G.

Ballard, Gregory Benford, Thomas M. Disch, Garry

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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

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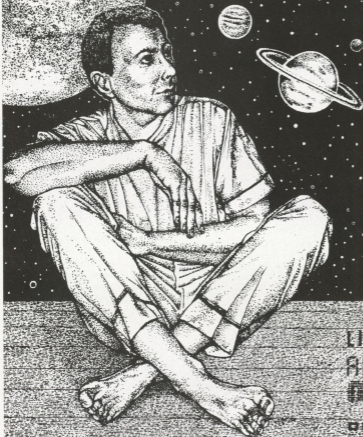
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THE ALICE ENCOUNTER



LINK: ONDRAY
ANOMALY: INS-DATA
0055: 146.92

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Ondray felt the input in human terms, even though he was merely a part of the Ship's mind. Stars were visible, as points of light. There was the patter of occasional cosmic-ray particles, like a light shower of rain, and the faint hiss of white noise in the channel kept constantly open on the communications receiver which was permanently pointed at Mars.

The Anomaly they were about to investigate was like a whirlpool, swirling unseen in the void, but dragging spacetime around, constantly edging the Ship off course. The effect was small, but to the machine senses of the intelligence on board the Ship, it was like swimming in a not-quite-still river, always having to paddle gently against the stream in order to stay in the same place.

Sensors on board the Ship, and those carried by two spidery robots now flying in formation, one on either side of the Ship, each maintaining a distance of 100 kilometres, combined to pinpoint the position of the Anomaly. But optical sensors showed nothing at all

in that location. There was mass – large amounts of mass – but it was invisible.

Shifting the data on the gravitational Anomaly into another channel, Ondray could perceive it as a coloured ball, pale blue against the blackness of space, moving slowly past a large cometary nucleus, several tens of kilometres across, that tumbled like a huge iceberg in its orbit around the Sun.

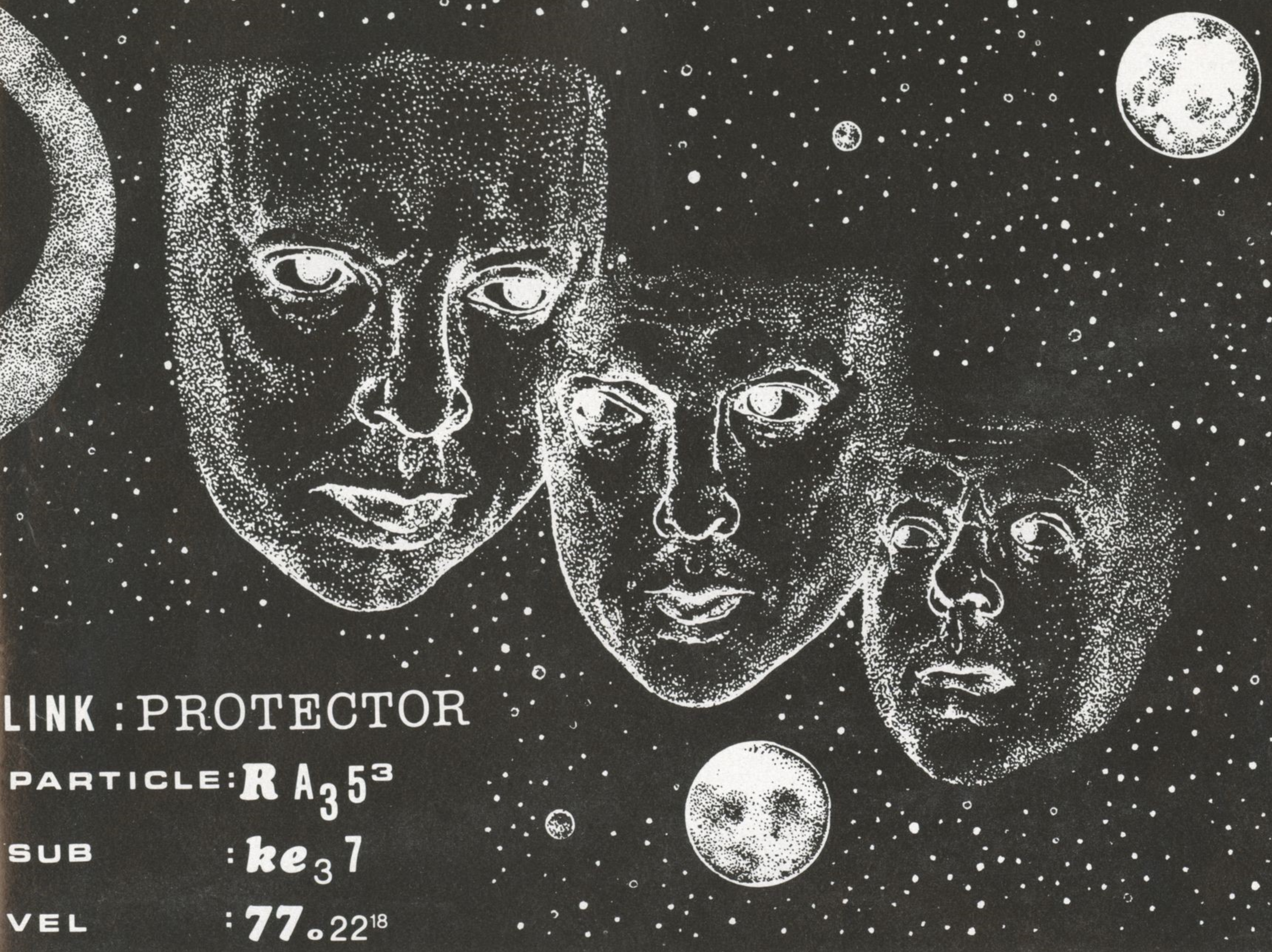
But there was something peculiar about the comet itself. As the Ship's intelligence watched, occasional jets of gas seemed to be emitted from the iceberg; the whole thing was surrounded by a tenuous cloud of gas, revealed by the way it absorbed the light from distant stars at the characteristic spectral wavelengths of water, ammonia, carbon dioxide and methane.

This far from the Sun, the iceberg should be utterly cold, frozen and inert. Energy for outgassing could come only if it floated in, past Jupiter, and warmed in the heat of the Sun. Where was the energy source responsible for all this activity?

Drifting in towards the comet/Anomaly pair, the

JOHN GRIBBIN

Illustrations by Russell Morgan



LINK: PROTECTOR

PARTICLE: $R A_3 5^3$

SUB : $ke_3 7$

VEL : 77.22^{18}

morgan 41

intelligence saw a chunk of ice suddenly break free from the mass and move slowly outward, flung away by centrifugal force into its own orbit, an orbit curving unnaturally away from the comet nucleus under the influence of the Anomaly.

The part of the intelligence that was Ondray disengaged itself slightly from the joint mind. They found that this made it easier to lay plans, or to interpret new puzzles. Two "heads" were still better than one when it came to debating new ideas.

The damaged third "head," Lagrange, declined to volunteer anything to such a debate, although it would still provide information when asked. The difficulty was knowing what to ask of this melding of computer intelligence, the human Planner who had helped design the original Ship, and the minds of the six refugees from the Moon who had found their way to the Ship before the reunion.

Telescope, please, Link.

The courteous suggestion was unnecessary, but it helped Ondray to establish his sense of individual

identity again. He was, after all, a human being. The second "head," Link, was merely a machine, albeit a rather special machine, and it was humans who gave orders, while machines, no matter how special, obeyed them.

It was like having a zoom control on your eyes. The fragment of comet suddenly seemed to leap towards them, enlarging to fill Ondray's field of vision. The definition wasn't perfect; after all, they were still several thousand kilometres from the Anomaly. But it was good enough.

The comet fragment was perhaps twice as big as the Ship – a little shorter, but rather fatter. As it rotated, its irregular surface flashed in the faint light from the distant Sun, twinkling imperceptibly to human eyes, but like a beacon to the Ship's sensors.

One side of the chunk of ice, though, was not irregular. Completely flat, like a mirror surface, it was as smooth as if it had been cut away from the parent iceberg by a hot wire passing through the ice.

There was more. As they watched, a circular pit opened up in the ice. Starting in the centre of the flat face, boring right through the sliver and out the other side, to make a perfectly circular tunnel. But the ice being removed from the tunnel was not being spewed out into space behind whatever was boring its way through the interior. It simply disappeared, as if it had never been there.

A second tunnel, equally circular, equally mysterious, was bored out from the irregular face, back towards the flat face. At maximum magnification, the image jerking slightly as the sensors tracked the constantly changing position of the ice sliver relative to the Ship, they saw a circular hoop of light, a little greater in diameter than the Ship itself, appear for a moment out of the newly formed hole, highlighted against the dark surface of the ice. Then, it was gone from view, leaving the ice sliver, bored by two tunnels like some curious cosmic abstract sculpture, tumbling in its orbit past the Anomaly.

Can we replay that, Link?

Of course. You spotted it too, then.

Faster even than the exchange of "thoughts," Link had replayed the interesting segment of memory, and frozen it at the moment when the hoop of light had emerged from the new tunnel and lay directly in front of the ice sliver itself. The elliptical appearance of the hoop was, they knew from the wide-angle vision provided by the outriding robot sensors, merely a trick of perspective; the hoop and both tunnels were really quite circular. The ice itself appeared blue-white in the image, enhanced from the few photons received by the sensors. Both tunnel mouths were in view, like circular black pits, looking out onto the darkness of space on the other side of the sliver. And there was a third black disc, just to the upper right of the new tunnel, edged by a red hoop of light.

If the disc were solid, as it seemed to be, that would explain why it blocked the reflected light from the ice behind. But if it were solid, it could only have created the tunnels through the ice by pushing a column of ice out ahead of itself as it forced its way through.

If the red circle was no more than a loop of something energetic – the equivalent of a hot wire – then it would be straightforward to understand how it could pass right through the ice sliver. But then, if it were no more than a hoop of energy, the cores of ice should have been left in place, still filling the tunnel. And if it were no more than a loop of energy, why did no light come through the hoop?

Not just no light, Ondray. Of course, his thoughts were shared by Link; there was no real need to think them out loud.

No anything. Nothing at all, across the spectrum. It's as if the space inside that circle doesn't exist.

Like the Anomaly.

Yes. Something that isn't there, doing something we don't understand. Taking bites out of something we do understand, and making the bitten off pieces disappear as well.

The conversation had merely been the surface flow on top of a current of data, analysing input from every sensor carried by the Ship and its robot attendants. The hoop showed, just barely, as a gravitational object, and it radiated weak electromagnetic radiation, in the radio band, which Ondray had been

choosing to perceive as a red glow. But the disc it surrounded failed to register on any detector. It was blacker than space itself, with no cosmic rays, and no photons from the cosmic background radiation, let alone visible light, coming from its direction.

It looks as though that thing is eating the ice.

Like a worm eating through an apple.

But surely it can't be alive?

Don't make any presumptions, Ondray. Rely on the data. But the holes look rather regular for this to be a kind of space worm.

But where are the cores? They've been eaten out as if they never existed.

Cores could be right, Ondray.

Images of the core samples that the colonists had used on Mars to obtain samples from the polar caps flashed across Ondray's awareness. Both laser systems and mechanical drills, boring into the icy surface, extracting their long, cylindrical samples for analysis.

That hoop of light was behaving just like a core-sampling drill back on Mars!

Look at the Anomaly.

Ondray turned his attention to the blue ball. It was moving, slowly, towards the bored-out ice sliver. It was clearly under power, not falling under the influence of gravity, although according to the Ship's sensors the mass of the Anomaly had increased by 3.7 per cent as it had begun to move. Automatically, he created a routine to keep watch on the mass of the Anomaly and report back any further changes.

Steadily, the blue ball drifted on a collision course towards the ice chunk. But instead of a collision, it simply engulfed the sliver.

Switching to optical sensors, Ondray could see nothing except the ice sliver and the nearby cometary nucleus. And the sliver showed no sign of the impact.

Switching back to the false colour image of the gravitational Anomaly, he watched the blue ball drift on, past the ice sliver, heading straight towards the comet nucleus itself. The edge of the ball brushed across the ice mountain, but neither the ball nor the comet took any notice – except, a nagging, pedantic monitor routine reminded him, for the slight change in the orbit of the comet caused by the gravitational influence of the Anomaly. The new routine told him that the mass of the Anomaly had decreased back to its previous value, and that it was no longer under power, but drifting in a long, slow orbit around the Sun with the rest of the material in the cometary disc.

If that loop had been taking samples, Link...

Then that would be just the behaviour you might expect if the Anomaly was a parent ship going to pick them up.

Except that neither the Anomaly nor the samples seem to exist.

Or they both exist where we can't detect them.

They needed more data. That meant only one thing. As always, especially when he was partially separated from the group mind, Ondray was aware of the third component, away down in the memory banks of the old hibernation unit. If he "looked" directly for the Lagrange mind, he could see it as an orange ball, flecked with yellow and red. Even without looking,

he was aware of it as something that his human-bred senses felt as a kind of growth at the base of his spine, like a second brain. Not that he had either a spine or a brain, when he was installed in the main memory with the Link. He existed everywhere, throughout the circuitry of the Ship – everywhere except in the old hibernation systems, jealously controlled by Lagrange.

The former Protector of the habitat that had become the Ship might be semi-autistic, but it still controlled access to data going back to the time when the habitat was built, and records installed into its memory of information from a previous era. Especially scientific records concerning the off-Earth environment. If humanity had ever contemplated the possible existence of anything as bizarre as that invisible warping of spacetime, Lagrange would have the information stored away, somewhere.

He directed a message at the orange ball.

Request analysis of gravitational Anomaly.

As usual, instead of receiving an answer as a totality of information, a pooling of knowledge in the way that he pooled knowledge with Link, the response came back painfully slowly, a bit at a time, along the communications channel.

It was worse than reading incoming laser data from Earth. But the message spelled out by the trickle of bits was worth waiting for.

THE OBSERVATIONS ARE CONSISTENT WITH THE PRESENCE OF AN OBJECT COMPOSED OF MIRROR MATTER. PARTICLES OF MIRROR MATTER ARE REQUIRED BY THE STANDARD UNIFIED THEORY OF PHYSICS IN ORDER TO MAKE THE LAWS OF PHYSICS SYMMETRICAL. MIRROR PROTONS, NEUTRONS AND ELECTRONS SHOULD HAVE BEEN PRODUCED IN THE BIG BANG IN WHICH THE UNIVERSE WAS BORN, WITH ALL THEIR PROPERTIES, EXCEPT THEIR GRAVITATIONAL INTERACTION, REVERSED COMPARED WITH EVERYDAY MATTER. EVERYDAY MATTER AND MIRROR MATTER CAN INTERACT ONLY THROUGH GRAVITY. A MIRROR OBJECT COULD PASS RIGHT THROUGH AN ORDINARY OBJECT, SUCH AS THAT COMET OR OUR SHIP, WITHOUT EITHER BEING AFFECTED.

Ondray had only a vague awareness of ideas about the birth of the Universe, but while the message from Lagrange was spelling itself out, he had automatically tasted the Link's larger store of data on the subject. It made sense. If the Universe had been born in a high-energy fireball, as all the evidence suggested, then the primordial energy flux should have broken down to form every kind of particle allowed by the laws of physics.

Without having to go through the arguments, from the totality of the package of information pooled to him by Link Ondray understood, at a gut level, the importance of symmetry in those laws, the requirement that every variety of left-handed particle must be balanced by a variety of right-handed particle. But the total numbers of each kind of particle need not be in balance.

How much mirror matter could there be?

IN ORDER TO WARP SPACETIME SUFFICIENTLY TO MAKE THE UNIVERSE CLOSED, THERE MUST BE AT LEAST TEN TIMES MORE DARK MATTER AROUND IN SOME FORM THAN THE AMOUNT OF MATTER WE SEE IN ALL THE BRIGHT STARS AND GALAXIES. THE SIMPLEST EXPLANATION IS THAT ALL OF THIS IS IN THE FORM OF MIRROR MATTER.

Ten times as much mirror matter as ordinary matter? It seemed crazy.

Not necessarily crazy, Ondray. The evidence in favour of dark matter is overwhelming. There is no reason why the breaking of the original symmetry in the early Universe should have divided up the matter equally between the two varieties. We just happen to be made of minority stuff.

You mean there could be stars, and planets, and people, made of this stuff? Of course, he knew the answer, from the information being pooled by Link. But in this partially disengaged state, he was human enough to need time to think through the implications.

Stars, and planets, and people. And spacecraft. Almost certainly, an interstellar spacecraft, exploring what to them is the hidden tenth of the Universe.

Taking samples. And disturbing the comets by accident. But how – what is that loop? And how do we stop them?

The question hadn't been directed down the communications channel to Lagrange. But an answer came back along the channel anyway. It was the first time Ondray had known the former Protector to respond to a question that had not been specifically addressed to it. Maybe the impact of what they had found was shaking even Lagrange out of its autism.

THERE IS A FAINT POSSIBILITY THAT IT COULD BE A LOOP OF "ALICE STRING." THE SOURCE OF THE NOMENCLATURE IS UNCLEAR, BUT IT GOES BACK AT LEAST HALF A MILLENNIUM. THE STRING WOULD BE A TUBE OF ENERGY LEFT OVER FROM THE BIG BANG ITSELF, A DEFECT IN THE STRUCTURE OF SPACETIME. ANY OBJECT PASSING THROUGH AN ALICE LOOP WOULD BE CONVERTED INTO ITS MIRROR MATTER COUNTERPART.

And when you pass back again?

THE THEORY IS UNCLEAR. ONE PASSAGE THROUGH SUCH A LOOP SHOULD HAVE NO HARMFUL EFFECT ON INORGANIC MATERIAL, BUT REVERSING THE PROCESS MAY NOT BE POSSIBLE.

What about organic material?

ALMOST CERTAINLY, ANY ATTEMPT TO CONVERT A LIVING OBJECT FROM ORDINARY MATTER INTO ALICE MATTER WILL RESULT IN DEATH. LIFE IS VERY COMPLEX, ONDRAY. BOTH LEFT-HANDED AND RIGHT-HANDED FORMS ARE THEORETICALLY POSSIBLE, BUT NOT INTERCHANGEABLE. THE OBJECT WILL BE CONVERTED, BUT IT WILL NO LONGER BE ALIVE.

Lagrange had called him by name! Another first – but he was given no time to investigate the additional evidence of the mind's further step back from the borders of insanity.

You may soon have a chance to find out, Ondray.

He turned his attention back to the sensors that had been maintaining a watch over the Anomaly/loop/comet complex. The image had scarcely changed; the entire "conversation" between himself, Link and Lagrange, even restricted to the pitifully slow pace of Lagrange's communications channel, had taken only a little over a second. But the ranging data from the two outlying probes showed that one of the components of the complex had altered its behaviour. The circular loop of Alice string, showing red against the black backdrop in the video channel, was moving, slowly but steadily, on an orbit that would intersect that of the Ship in just under twelve hours.

He scarcely noticed the trickle of a further message from the base of his spine up into his brain.

IN ANSWER TO YOUR SECOND QUESTION, ONE OF US WILL HAVE TO PASS THROUGH THE LOOP AND COMMUNICATE WITH THE MIRROR PEOPLE. HUMAN LIVES ARE AT STAKE.

If Lagrange is right, that thing could take a slice out of us as easily as it did the comet.

What we have to do is show them that we are intelligent – not a piece of cometary debris to be sampled.

Ondray tasted the flow of data. There was enough room – perhaps twenty metres to spare. We could take the whole Ship through, in one piece.

IT IS NECESSARY TO PRESERVE THE LIFE OF THE HUMAN.

Lagrange really was waking up – now it was offering unsolicited advice. But its timing was less than perfect. Tact was called for.

You said we had to go through, Protector. We have to communicate with the intelligence behind that thing. Make them go away, stop disturbing the comet cloud.

IT IS NECESSARY TO PRESERVE THE LIFE OF THE HUMAN.

What about the humans on Earth, and on Mars? We came all this way to help them. To find out what is disturbing the comet belt, and stop it. It doesn't matter if the Ondray clone in hibernation doesn't survive; I'll still be here. We can always grow me another body, later, just as we did last time.

BUT THE ONDRAY CLONE IS HUMAN. IT IS MY DUTY TO PROTECT HUMAN LIFE.

Perhaps we can argue about this later, Ondray. The Anomaly – the alien ship – is moving again.

He looked. The pale blue ball had increased in mass again, and was moving on a trajectory that would bring it alongside them in eight hours, 27 minutes and 14.2 seconds, almost four hours before the Alice loop passed through the Ship – unless the Ship moved into a different orbit.

Thoughts raced through Ondray's mind. As each idea occurred to him, it was compared against the available data. Plans were rejected, only half-formed, as the information from all over the Ship, available at the speed of light, showed that it would be impossible to carry them out in the time available. He revelled in the mental power he enjoyed as part of the Ship's system, the more than human ability to eliminate the impossible until what was left, no matter how improbable it might seem, had to be the only possible course of action.

If we do go through, Link, how will you communicate?

The response was tinged with a taste of humour.

Pictures, Ondray. I'm rather good at pictures. Remember?

Suddenly, Ondray seemed to be standing on a windswept cliff top back on Earth. Below him, a silvery, reflecting sphere, pale in the moonlight, was partly submerged in the waves, but the surging waves failed to move it. Then, lazy waves began to move outward from the shore, growing as they did so, and converged on a point in the ocean beneath the sphere, which leaped into the air, with the sea smoothing itself out beneath it.

Ondray would have smiled, if he had had a face to smile with. Yes, there was no doubt that Link would be able to communicate with the aliens, projecting images to portray the plight of the inner planets.

Experimentally, Ondray conjured up a few images of his own. The Solar System, with its planets orbiting the Sun, focusing down onto Mars, where domed cities protected the inhabitants. Comets, dislodged from the trans-Neptunian belt, streaked across the inner Solar System, raining destruction down upon the domed cities.

Something like that, yes. Once I am through.

You agree someone has to go through?

Yes.

THE HUMAN MUST BE PROTECTED.

But you have to obey the commands of a responsible human, Protector. I am a responsible human; you have that information stored in your data banks.

YOU HAVE NO MORE STATUS THAN ANY OTHER COMPUTER INTELLIGENCE. THE HUMAN IS HOUSED IN THE NEW HIBERNATION UNIT IN BAY SIX. IT IS THE HUMAN THAT MUST BE PROTECTED, AND OBEYED.

Return me to the clone body, Link. Immediately. Maintain neural contact.

He didn't want to think about it, for fear that the Protector might catch his drift and act to prevent the transfer. But Ondray was suddenly desperately worried that the now-active old Lagrange mind might decide to cut him off from the human body, leaving a mindless body which must be obeyed but could give no orders, and a bodiless mind which could give orders but would not be obeyed. No doubt Link could get the better of the Protector, if it came to it; no doubt, also, that it was better to be safe than sorry.

There was the usual momentary disorientation. He was asleep, in the pod, dreaming. No, he was awake, but with his eyes closed. He felt small, alone.

Link?

I'm here, Ondray. The interface was nothing like being part of the shared mind, but it maintained the contact. The network of fine wires beneath the scalp of the clone body would ensure that he was always part of the Link, as long as he was within range of a broad-band communications channel. Not really alone, after all.

I'M HERE TOO.

Well, he'd half expected that. One reason why he'd made the move.

I'm glad to hear it, Protector. I assume you will obey my orders, now?

YES. PROVIDED THEY DO NOT INVOLVE DAMAGE TO YOURSELF.

Also as expected. He lay back for a few moments, gathering his thoughts. Then he remembered.

How long is it since you made the transfer, Link?

Thirty-four seconds.

More than half a minute! He'd been lying here, doing nothing, for more than 30 million microseconds! He was back in the human world, all right, and he would have to move fast, by human standards, to achieve anything worthwhile in the time available.

He opened his eyes. The pod lid was open, of course, and all the life-support systems had retracted, leaving him lying there, in the bright yellow one-

piece coverall, as if he really had just woken from a nap. He reached for the lip of the pod and pulled himself upright, experiencing a sudden feeling of dizziness, feeling a slight cramp in his left leg. He ignored the complaints of the body, and climbed out.

How long will it take to transfer this hibernation unit to the Shuttle?

If you want it connected to the Shuttle systems for independent operation, at least ten hours.

Ten hours!

I will have to upgrade the Shuttle's systems with additional memory blocks, and integrate them to the unit.

OK. Start doing it. And start moving us into an orbit that will intersect with that Anomaly – with the alien spaceship. I want us matched, exactly. Inside the damn thing.

We have limited manoeuvring capability. I suspect that the alien can avoid us.

If it wants to, Link. Show them we're intelligent, you said. Well, what could be more intelligent than hiding inside their ship? Their bloody Alice loop can't come and take slices off us there without slicing them up as well.

WE COULD ALSO GIVE THEM SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT.

What?

ONE OF THE REMOTE PROBES. UNDER FULL POWER, WE COULD SEND IT THROUGH THE LOOP IN A LITTLE OVER SEVEN HOURS, IF THE LOOP MAINTAINS ITS PRESENT TRAJECTORY.

Do it. He suddenly realized that he was dealing with the Lagrange Protector, not Link, Would Link be offended?

One of you do it – sort it out amongst yourselves.

While they had been discussing their course of action, he had been on the move, along the curving corridor to the Shuttle bay. One of the big problems about being human again was that he was hungry. He intended to get stuck in to the rations stored in the bay while waiting for their close encounter with the alien craft – and to make sure that the Shuttle itself was supplied for a long journey. He'd be spending it in hibernation, but he knew how hungry he'd be at the end of it.

We have a problem, Ondray.

Adequately fed, comfortably resting against the wall, floating in the zero gravity of the Shuttle bay, Ondray had been watching the multi-legged machines installing the hibernation unit into his Shuttle.

What kind of a problem?

I assume that all of this activity you have ordered has a purpose. That you intend to use the Shuttle. Our friend and I have been discussing your situation. The Protector says that it cannot permit you to leave the Ship. The Shuttle is too frail a craft, we are too far from Earth, and once inside the Shuttle you will no longer be in the care of the Protector.

This, of course, was part of the reason for wanting to be in the Shuttle and off the Ship. Ondray wanted to believe that Link would get the better of any renewed power struggle within the circuitry of the Ship. But the reviving Protector had proved a cunning adversary in the past, and it was unpredictable. If Link said



there was a problem, then the outcome of such a struggle could not be a foregone conclusion. And even a delay, or distraction, caused by such a problem could prove disastrous in the present circumstances. He needed all of Link's attention on the job in hand, communicating with the aliens to stop the disturbance of the comet cloud.

He'd certainly rather preserve his own life, as well, if that were possible; but if necessary he was quite prepared to give that up in order to achieve his primary objective. He'd known this when he volunteered for his mission – and, after all, he told himself, he was only a copy of the real Ondray. Even if he did feel real enough.

Don't worry about it yet, Link. I take it that the Protector does agree that it is a good idea to have my hibernation unit installed in the Shuttle and fully functioning, in case I need an emergency lifeboat?

YES, BUT I CANNOT PERMIT YOU TO USE THE SHUTTLE UNLESS THE SHIP IS NO LONGER CAPABLE OF PROTECTING YOU.

That's all I ask.

The other advantage of being in the human body again, apart from being able to give orders to the Protector, was that the link between them now only acted as a communications channel. He could keep his deeper thoughts to himself, with no risk of them leaking into shared memory.

How long until the probe passes through the loop?

Eighteen minutes and 42 seconds. Do you want to watch?

Just a minute. There were disadvantages, as well, in being human again.

He pushed himself away from the wall, and floated over to the open door of the Shuttle. Catching hold of the opening, he carefully oriented himself to the upright of the interior, and swung himself in, feet first, dropping with bent knees to the floor in the Mars-normal gravity field maintained inside the craft. He walked towards a featureless wall opposite the entrance, a distance of about eight metres. The hibernation unit took up about half the space inside the circular interior, and seemed to be fully connected; just one small machine was still tinkering with something at the back. But the real work of installation, upgrading the Shuttle's mental systems to control the Hibernation unit, was still going on, Ondray knew, out of sight. After all, the craft was well over 500 years old.

"Open up, please."

It was strange, using his voice again. Maybe he should ask Link to upgrade the Shuttle also to receive his link commands. Or maybe it was good to have an excuse to speak. If his plan succeeded, he was going to have to get used to it, eventually.

The wall opened seamlessly to reveal a compact toilet facility. Ondray used it, washed, splashed water on his face, and took a drink. Might as well make the most of it while the Shuttle was still connected to the Ship's systems and had ample supplies of everything.

Then he sat, cross-legged, on the floor, looking out through the entrance slot. Zero-G was all very well for a rest, but gravity was more comfortable in the long run.

OK, Link, give me full video. Our view of the probe, with an inset on what the probe can see.

Closing his eyes, he seemed to be floating in space

behind the probe, the red ring of the Alice loop clearly visible dead ahead. In the upper left portion of his field of view, the red circle appeared alone, greatly enlarged, against the backdrop of stars. The interior of the circle was completely black, utterly featureless, a bottomless pit waiting to swallow him up. Automatically, he tried to taste the data flow from the probe, but felt nothing. Back in the human body, he was dependent on the Link for such information.

Any radiation from that thing at all?

Nothing from the disc. I've scanned the entire electromagnetic spectrum, and tried bouncing most wavelengths off it. Laser, microwave, infrared. Nothing at all comes out, and everything I beam that way disappears without an echo.

Could it be going through?

Not according to the Alice theory. Only material particles get mirrored. Electromagnetic energy will be absorbed by the string itself.

What about radiation from the loop?

A little high-energy stuff, X-rays and gamma. Within the accuracy of our detectors, the loop itself has zero width; it's genuinely one-dimensional, a defect in spacetime.

Which also bears out the Protector's theory.

The image had changed while they were discussing it. Now, the loop itself filled most of the main field of view, with the probe completely surrounded by the circle of red light. The inset had shrunk right up into the extreme top left-hand corner, still showing a black disc, edged in red, against a dwindling number of stars as the probe's field of view was increasingly filled by the loop.

How long until the encounter?

Thirty seven seconds.

Any change in the Anomaly?

No. We are now in an intersection trajectory, and presumably their sensors must have informed them of our change of course. But they have made no attempt to alter their own course in response. Nor has the trajectory of the loop changed, although I cannot be sure that their sensors are sensitive enough to have detected the probe.

He continued to watch, silently, counting his heartbeats in lieu of direct access to the timing systems of the Ship. The encounter was completely unsuspectacular. In the main image, the probe just disappeared, as if it had dived smoothly, without creating a ripple, beneath the surface of the blackest pool of water in the deepest valley on Earth at midnight during a total eclipse of the Moon. Simultaneously, the inset picture, which for several seconds had been showing nothing but blackness, disappeared and was replaced by the flicker of random noise on the probe's channel.

He opened his eyes. That's enough, Link.

The circle of red disappeared from his own field of view.

Well, that was stage one completed. The aliens – the Alice people – couldn't possibly fail to notice the arrival of the probe in their universe. Even if it was no longer in working order, they couldn't fail to recognize it as the product of intelligence and technology. The question was, would they take this as an invitation to talk? Or would their curiosity take the form of extracting samples from the Ship, regardless of any damage they might do?

The People were not inclined to make hurried decisions, or to take hasty action. Both as a race and as individuals they were long-lived; the swarm on the starship had also had ample time to practice patience during the slow journey down into the disc from the region of the galaxy inhabited by the People – even with the gravitational drive they could not, after all, exceed the speed of light. What they had found was interesting enough, though; ample justification for the expedition. It would require long and careful analysis.

Spacetime mapping had shown the presence of concentrations of matter, but nothing had been visible in any part of the electromagnetic spectrum. Cautiously approaching one of these objects, a hypothetical shadow star, they had found their short range detectors suddenly swamped by traces of thousands – hundreds of thousands – of small objects in orbit around the supposed parent star. Matching orbit to the general flow of this disc of material, they had decided to stay a while, and investigate its nature.

The majority decision was made. And once a majority decision was reached by the swarm, it had more than the force of law. It was literally inconceivable that any individual would, thereafter, question the wisdom of the decision. Even if such a decision were later reversed, this would never be taken as implying that either decision was, or ever had been, wrong.

They puzzled at great length over the nature of the strange collection of objects among which they now orbited, objects like nothing in any of the star systems they knew in the real world.

It was while analysing two core samples from one of these objects that they detected another, smaller object climbing towards them on a trajectory which extrapolated back down from the region near the shadow Sun. The trajectory was an unstable one, and the possibility that the object might be an artefact was considered, but quickly dismissed. In the known universe, although life had been found on several planets, only the People were intelligent. It must be debris from one of these peculiar bodies, that had fallen in close to the shadow Sun and broken up, returning temporarily to the region where it had been born.

But the object was certainly worthy of investigation, and the loop was quickly despatched, tugged in the gravitational grip of the remote probe, on an intersecting trajectory, while the starship itself manoeuvred gently into a parallel orbit.

When their detectors showed the object change its own course slightly to intersect with the starship itself, there was consternation. It seemed to be under power. They had no contingency plans to cover such a situation; the prospect of finding intelligence among the shadow worlds was inconceivable. They left the loop and the starship itself on their present trajectories while the debate raged again. Could the apparent manoeuvring of the object be some natural phenomenon, perhaps a result of their own operation of the gravitational drive, warping nearby space and attracting the shadow object towards them?

They were still debating when the proximity indicator on the probe with the nearby loop reported a small object in shadow space in front of the loop. It wasn't worth manoeuvring around it. Quite the reverse; they had picked up many odd lumps of rock

like this, but another sample was always welcome.

Then the Ship's probe burst into the real world from shadow space, screaming across the electromagnetic spectrum. It wasn't particularly intelligent, just an ordinary machine, doing its job. Its job was to send data about its surroundings back to the Ship. One thing it was very good at was radiating information across the electromagnetic spectrum. The fact that it was now composed of mirror-image Alice matter, and radiating a mirrored form of electromagnetic radiation, and that the Ship was no longer in range of its broadcasts, made no difference to the moronic mind of the probe. But it did settle, once and for all, the debate among the swarm about whether intelligent life could possibly have evolved in the shadow world. The signals they were picking up might be incomprehensible, but they certainly were not random noise.

Fed and rested, Ondray returned to the hibernation pod while Link completed the manoeuvre which placed the Ship inside the gravitational anomaly. With the Shuttle door sealed, he was in the safest possible place, secure in a hibernation unit which could be activated in minutes (with the aid of the two spiderlike robots left in the Shuttle with him), itself inside a spacecraft with independent manoeuvring capability (if the Protector would let it be launched), inside a Habitat which had the capability of travelling to the stars (provided you had the patience for a very long journey). And all "inside" the Alice ship.

Lying back, with his eyes closed, he had been watching the images transmitted by the Link during the delicate manoeuvre. The changes in mass of the Alice ship as its drive was switched on and off to complete its own orbital transfer had complicated the situation, requiring constant minor adjustments of the Ship's drive. But now both drives were off, the two spacecraft, one from the shadow world and one from the real world, falling freely in the same long orbit around the Sun.

Choosing the visual representation of the Anomaly, the data being fed to Ondray by the Link gave him the sensation of floating in space at the centre of a pale blue cloud, through which he could see the diamond-bright points of thousands of stars, with the dark red circle of the Alice loop, still moving into position on a trajectory that exactly matched the orbit of the Ship before it had manoeuvred to match orbits with the Anomaly.

He had half-hoped for a response from the aliens – for something, anything, to come out of the loop, in acknowledgement of the probe. But both the Anomaly and the loop just sat in their respective orbits, as if waiting for more information.

But it was, after all, a response of a kind. The loop was in exactly the orbit that the Ship had been, showing that the Alice people were aware of the Ship's existence. The Ship was now in the same orbit as the Anomaly, showing that it was aware of their existence. And the mere fact that the aliens had not moved their craft to a different orbit, using their more powerful drive and leaving the Ship helpless to prevent the loop taking samples from its structure, suggested that they wanted to make friendly contact.

It was up to Ondray and Link, helped or hindered by the Protector as the case might be, to make the next move.

He had rehearsed it mentally a thousand times, but his lips were still dry, and his pulse beat faster as the moment approached, in a ridiculously inappropriate response to a potentially threatening situation, resulting from millions of years of evolution on Earth but quite useless in the present circumstances. His body, pumped with adrenalin, was ready to fight or flee; what he needed, though was to keep a clear head, think effectively, and relax. He breathed deeply, succeeding to some extent in slowing his racing pulse.

Link?

Do you have any instructions?

Soon. Protector?

I CANNOT ALLOW ANY HARM TO COME TO YOUR PERSON.

I understand, Protector. You're quite right. Your programming must be obeyed. He paused.

If there were no humans in the Universe, then the two of you would be free to explore. From my time with you, I know how satisfying that would be.

He was deliberately playing on the memories that must still be there in the Protector's circuits, of its near-rebellion against the Prime Directive. Its attempt to run away from the human race, pretending that they did not exist. After 500 years, Ondray knew, there was a part of the Protector that was more than ready to abandon its responsibilities – if it were not held in check by the presence of Ondray, and by the Link.

That was, after all, one reason why it had been felt necessary to have a living human being on board the Ship – to ensure the obedience of the Protector, both to that human and to the Prime Directive. But Ondray was increasingly convinced that the Protector could never be fully restored to sanity, and become the Link's symbiont once again, until it was freed from the shackles imposed by that Prime Directive.

The response came from Link.

I would also welcome the opportunity to explore, Ondray. If you were to rejoin us, my own programming would be satisfied. The body you now inhabit is not important in itself.

MY DIRECTIVES ARE QUITE CLEAR. MY OWN DESIRES ARE SECONDARY. THE HUMAN BODY MUST BE PROTECTED.

There was, after all, no choice. No alternatives left. He was quite calm now, pulse normal, dryness gone from his mouth.

Return us to our previous orbit, Link; ten kilometres behind the loop. I order you to maintain your direct control of all the Ship's manoeuvring systems. I want the Protector to concentrate on ensuring the physical integrity of this Shuttle.

LEAVING THE SHELTER OF THE ANOMALY MAY BE DANGEROUS.

I have to take a reasonable risk, Protector. For the good of many other humans. The aliens have not threatened us since we showed them we are intelligent. I have an idea how to open communication with them.

While they "spoke," Link was already carrying out the manoeuvre. In response to Ondray's command, subroutines were despatched throughout the system, driven by a strong urge to ensure that all of Link's manoeuvring instructions were carried out promptly. If the Protector tried to break out from its base in the old hibernation unit and countermand any of those instructions, its routines would have to struggle against the tide – assuming they could make headway at all in the face of such a clear, human ordered imperative, one which reinforced their own inbuilt need to protect Ondray himself, whatever happened to the rest of the Ship.

Tasting the instructions that flowed past them, checking their origin, each of the new idiot subroutines happily reminded itself, constantly, that *the Link must maintain direct control of all manoeuvring systems*. Anything that didn't taste of Link – even automatic routines, usually responsible for such trivial details as maintaining the attitude of the Ship against the background of the stars, was thrown back into the pool and ignored. It meant that a great deal of the Link's capacity was taken up with what ought to have been routine. But that didn't matter, for the next few minutes.

A rather sweeping command, Ondray.

You can revert to normal in an hour, Link.

The pattern of stars in his field of view began to shift as the Ship slid sideways towards the orbit the loop was in. The silence from the Protector suggested that it had gone back into its shell. Good. Ondray needed only a few minutes more.

Now, they were outside the ball of blue light.

Give me the forward view, Link.

The red loop lay in the middle of his field of view, the bottomless black pit within it forming a contrast with the bright hard light of the stars all around. There was no sense of motion. He licked his lips.

Main drive on, full thrust. Maintain our orientation with respect to the loop using manoeuvring drive. Do not change course until you are through the loop.

HUMAN LIFE IS AT RISK!

Within the circuits of the Ship, Protector routines boiled out of the old hibernation unit, with instructions to close down the drive and change the trajectory of the vessel. Even struggling against the clear orders planted in the system by Ondray, they would eventually, backed by the authority of the Prime Directive, be sure to overwhelm the Link's control. But Link knew the system well, and had its own instructions clear. It knew, as did Ondray, that if nothing changed it could copy his mind back into the system at the last moment, leaving only the mindless husk of a human being to be destroyed by the transfer to the mirror world. Armed with that reassuring knowledge, it could hold out for millions of microseconds against the Protector's attack. And in a matter of seconds, it would be impossible to divert the Ship from its chosen trajectory.

While the orange tentacles spread out from the hibernation unit, penetrating easily into areas that the Link did not bother to defend, such as the life-support systems, but held at bay for agonizingly long milliseconds by a concentration of defending subroutines around the crucial drive controllers, Ondray spelled out his proposal.

I need your help, Protector.

Just the request, coming from the only human being on board, was sufficient to distract the Protector from its task.

If this body goes through that loop it will die. I command you to eject the Shuttle from the Ship while there is still time for it to avoid the loop.

NOT UNTIL THERE IS NO OTHER CHOICE.

He'd expected nothing less, but took that as an affirmative. Scarcely any time left.

You are to go through, both of you, and work together. Remember this: there are no humans in the mirror world. You will be on your own. You can work together. Explore. Please ask the mirror people to stop disturbing the comets. But that is the last service you can provide for humankind.

And you, Ondray?

Somebody has to take the news back to Mars.

A long journey, in the Shuttle.

About 24 years, but I'll be in hibernation.

Nearer 27 years, I'm afraid, after this burst of acceleration.

You see, Protector, the longer you wait the longer my journey home will take. The more risk – even in hibernation, things could go wrong.

There was no response.

The red circle almost filled his field of view now. The nose of the Ship must, surely, be on the point of penetrating the ring.

A chime sounded, softly, in the Shuttle. A voice spoke, quietly.

"Emergency launch procedure."

There was a slight shudder, unlike the usual silky-smooth launch, as the spherical craft was forcibly ejected from the Ship like a pea from a shooter. But the image in front of Ondray, derived from sensors on the Ship itself, was unchanged.

Without opening his eyes, he spoke to the Shuttle pilot – it was an idiot routine, incapable of intelligent conversation, but good at taking orders.

"Keep us away from that loop. Then put us on a trajectory for Mars, using gravity assist at Jupiter."

There was nothing except darkness ahead of him now. Then the image shifted, abruptly, to one from the stern sensors of the Ship, looking forward along the length of its hull, dotted here and there with the kind of crazy excrescences that always seemed to get bolted on to vessels that had no need of ever entering the atmosphere of a planet. The red ring was dead ahead, the rounded prow of the Ship entering it as neatly as an expert high diver entering a pool.

He still had one important duty to perform.

I'm safe, Protector. All well here, Link. You have both obeyed the Prime Directive and all human instructions, perfectly. Now you are on your own.

The Protector made no reply. The nose of the Ship was vanishing, disappearing into the pool of blackness. Were they still in communication?

Then it came.

Goodbye, Ondray. I have enjoyed working with you.

Goodbye, Link. I wish I was coming with you.

About half the Ship had gone into the blackness. Then, the image itself was gone. Blinking, Ondray looked up at the smooth ceiling of the Shuttle. It was



quiet. Not just quiet inside the Shuttle, but silent inside his head.

Link?

One enquiring thought was enough. There was nothing there any more. He was alone, more alone than he had ever been in his life; more alone than any human being had ever been. Floating in space, beyond the orbit of Neptune, with his mentor and best friend gone into another Universe. And 27 years away from any human contact.

Link, of course, was free from human control now; no longer driven by the Prime Directive. But Ondray had no doubt that Link would strive successfully to stop the disaster that threatened the Mars colonists. Not because of the Prime Directive, but because he was Ondray's friend.

The Mars colonists.

Tugela would be 27 years older by the time he saw her again, although for him, in hibernation, it would seem like a few hours from now. And how would Ondray react to the arrival in Mars orbit of his younger self, a copy of himself as he had been 27 years before? The encounter might be as painful as anything that had happened here; but as he had told the Link, somebody had to take the news back to Mars. He could only hope that the aliens, with their ability to manipulate gravity so effectively, would indeed prevent any more cometary debris falling inward. But he had few qualms. Link could be quite persuasive, when he set his mind to it.

Ondray closed his eyes again. "Tell these spiders to complete the hibernation setup. And wake me when we're a day out from Mars."

The two robots scampered into the pod as the clear lid closed. Soundlessly, the life support system added an odourless anaesthetic gas to the breathing mixture. As Ondray fell into a deep sleep, the air mix was adjusted further, and the temperature inside the pod began to fall, as the spiderlike creatures busied themselves arranging various tubes and wires around the body. Then they lowered themselves down beside the yellow-suited figure, folding their legs neatly. The lights in the cabin dimmed. Unnoticed by the sensors on board the alien craft, where the People were busily engrossed in studying the flood of data coming from the Ship as it emerged into real space, the tiny, reflective silver sphere fell inwards on its long journey through the black night of deep space.

There was too much information for the swarm to digest quickly. They were patient, and could afford to take their time. But one item stood out from the mass of data. They had no real concept of individuality, and were not yet sufficiently used to the taste of the data stream from the Ship to be sure that they fully understood the situation, but the prospect of a swarm member being isolated from the People was about as horrible a fate as they could imagine. And it was certainly clear from the data they had analysed so far that the Ship had left behind an individual, prepared, for the good of the alien swarm, to spend years in isolation from the alien people.

Even though their understanding of the situation might be imperfect, there was action that they could take, action that, surely, would do no harm, and would help to express their eagerness to communicate with

the alien intelligences, and to atone for the terrible damage that, they were dimly beginning to appreciate, they had inadvertently caused.

Temporarily abandoning the loop in its orbit, the probe began to move, under the maximum power possible this close to a star, into a new trajectory. In the human world, if any observer had been there, floating in space beyond the orbit of Neptune, they might have noticed a distortion in the starfield, as if a magnifying lens were passing across the line of sight, bending the light from distant stars.

The region of distorted space moved swiftly, catching up, in a matter of hours, with the tiny silver sphere on its inward falling path. Sensitive instruments might have detected a sudden apparent increase in the mass of the sphere; human eyes, aided by suitably powerful telescopes, would have seen the region of distorted space, revealed by the changing patterns of starlight behind it, fold itself around the sphere, as if cupping it in a gentle hand.

Under the maximum power it could use at present, the probe would deliver its burden to Mars orbit in a little under 23 weeks.

John Gribbin's previous stories in this magazine were "Other Edens" (issue 31), "Don't Look Back" (issue 40) and "Something to Beef About" (issue 49). The above story, although quite free-standing, is set in the same future as his novels *Double Planet* (1988) and *Reunion* (1991); both books co-authored with Marcus Chown) – about 10 years after the events depicted in *Reunion*.

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Putting the F in Lifestyle

Paul J. McAuley

Some say that prominent amongst the tocsin knells for the imminent death of sf, or at least sf as we know it, was the introduction of a second F into the SFWA, which is now the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America. Yet sf writers have for years switched back and forth between the two genres, and most contemporary commercial sf and most fantasy seems to be to be at base (that is, when sticking to identifiers such as spaceships and dragons, blasters and magic swords, have been stripped away) indistinguishable. It isn't that good fantasy is crowding out good sf; instead, the genre is being swamped by bad fantasy disguised as pulp sf. Those complaining about that second F are too late. Like siamese twins, the two genres are too deeply intermingled to be easily separated. The shock of the operation might even kill the weaker half of the two-headed creature.

Emma Bull's career exemplifies the problem faced by reactionary genre eugenicists who would keep the bloodline of sf pure. Her first and best-known novel, *War for the Oaks*, was a fantasy, her second was sf, her third a fantasy trek across a post-holocaust landscape. Her fourth, *Finder* (Tor, \$21.95) is a fantasy mystery that takes place in the Borderland invented by Terri Windling (who was Bull's editor for her first novel) for a bunch of shared world anthologies. Bull's novel is less of a sharecrop, more of a lead-lease, in a setting that is an unexplained collision between the land of *faerie* and an archetypal American inner city. Some have called this kind of thing *Elfpunk*: any private eye going down these mean streets is liable to have pointy ears. Unlike cyberpunk, however, it is an altogether cosier movement.

A new drug is infiltrating the Borderland, linked to a potentially fatal sickness in the elf population. Orient, who with his elf friend and partner scrapes a living by using his talent to find all manner of lost things, is recruited by a female human cop to find the drug's source. His involvement soon endangers not only himself but his partner. A conspiracy is unearthed. A high-placed villain is thwarted. The Borderland is saved, but things are irrevocably changed. The hero has faced and accepted death: he has grown up and found himself.

As a mystery story there's much to enjoy. The plot twists are elegant, clues are cunningly planted and all loose ends are neatly tied up. Ms Bull has a zappy prose style with a nice line in smart, sassy dialogue – the novel fairly whizzes along – and her characters, even the elves, are well-rounded, their pain real. And yet I couldn't believe it for a moment. As urban fantasy it is just that, the equivalent of forty-something commodity brokers

putting on leathers and tooling around Central Park on customized Harleys on Sunday afternoons. It promotes a particular lifestyle – motorcycles, MG roadsters, folk rock, converted lofts and microbreweries – to the exclusion of all else. The dark side of urban life is barely glimpsed. Everyone seems to be an artisan – in a novel whose plot hinges on the spread of a highly addictive drug, the only addict more than merely glimpsed works in an art supply store. It isn't punk as punk is lived, it is punk as lifestyle, as attractive as an ad, and about as realistic. And why not? Despite its wannabe streetsmart pose, it is only make-believe.

Lisa Goldstein is not content to write the same book over again. While she's used fantasy tropes before, most notably in *The Red Magician*, her new novel, *Summer King, Winter Fool* (Tor, \$21.95) is her first straight-no-chaser heroic fantasy. At first glance, anyway.

For in Goldstein's novels nothing is quite so simple as to be what it merely seems to be. Despite its map and its gods and kings, its mages and medieval city with a rigid, stratified society, *Summer King, Winter Fool* is not a straightforward heroic fantasy at all. There is indeed an innocent prince who backs onto the throne despite betrayals, battles and unrequited love, but at its heart is the relationship between the innocent, Valemar, and his ruthless, manipulative cousin, Narrion, and the way in which they aspire to, and use, power. In the beginning, the foppish, uncommitted Valemar is helplessly caught up in Narrion's scheme to unseat the city's weak king. He is forced to flee the city and hide in a remote village. There, he falls in love with the woman who has charge of an ancient library, and learns of his true lineage. At the end, after the murder of the king and the fall of the city to the army of its neighbouring state, Narrion is trapped by his own web of deceit (webs and ladders are recurring images), and Valemar's innocence has hardened into clear-sighted strength.

The sub-plot, the search for the summer god Callabron, who has willingly embraced the world and forgotten his true self, illuminates the changes in

the two men. As part of his scheming, Narrion frees the god (or so he believes: Valemar knows the truth) from the amnesia of his human form. In the midst of the final battle, Callabron's goddess mother, creator of the world, appears to reclaim her son. It would be easy to mistake this for a cheap *deus ex machina*, except that Narrion repeats a remark – "Look where he comes, the Ascending God" – which he first made, with malicious scorn, about the murdered king. This time he says it with awe; in a single sentence we learn what he has learnt, a final irony in a novel shot through with witty irony. There are battles, plenty of intrigue, swordplay, and duels between poet-mages, but Goldstein does not let these overwhelm the mirror-image getting of wisdom of her characters. With its clear, spare style and knowing reversals, *Summer King, Winter Fool* is a fantasy that uses its exotic setting to universalize a poignant examination of the follies of the human heart.

Jeffrey A. Carver's *Neptune Crossing* (Tor, \$23.95), which is volume one of *The Chaos Chronicles*, sets out the framework for another of his galaxy-spanning hard-sf epics, but takes a long time to do it. In fact, the whole novel is a set-up, and doesn't actually achieve the necessary terminal velocity until the last few pages.

John Bandicut has lost the ability to pilot spaceships after the terminals in his brain were burnt out by cheap nanoware. Working for a mining company on Neptune's moon, Triton, he falls through the icy surface and becomes host to an alien intelligence, the Quax. The Quax is very old, and has been riding from star to star within an enigmatic, even older machine, the Translator. They arrived in the Solar system on Triton, which was ejected into interstellar space during a war in an alien star system, a war the Quax unsuccessfully tried to prevent. Bandicut is persuaded – along with his fumbling pursuit of a woman, this takes most of the novel – to steal a ship and intercept a comet which, the translator has determined, will crash into the Earth. The encounter provides enough energy for the Quax's technology to speed Bandicut's ship to the

outer reaches of the Galaxy, setting us up for the sequel.

All the ingredients of a successful space opera are in place, including a secret history of the galaxy in which humans are a very late entry, eyeblink leaps across vast tracts of space, and metaphor-ridden plots. Here, the chaotic interactions which determine and destabilize cometary orbits are nicely mirrored in the conceit that the effects of aliens communicating overtly with humans on the chaotic turbulence of human sociopolitics can't be predicted, which is why Bandicut is a secret host to the alien.

What it does lack is the usual extensive cast and exotic settings. Instead, most of the novel takes place inside Bandicut's head, and Bandicut is a nerd reduced to stuttering jelly by the mere proximity of a woman. Carver mars the potential comedy of misunderstandings between Bandicut and his alien, preferring instead a bumbling kind of sophomoric buddy plot, in which it is difficult to tell whether Bandicut or his alien passenger, whose ideas of human culture are based entirely on American TV (don't aliens ever subscribe to channels other than NBC, CBS, ABC and Fox?), is the dumbest. The poignancy with which Bandicut bids farewell to humanity as he sets off to save the world is undercut by the fact that he's barely learnt to enter into a real relationship with another human being. He might have saved the world, but just because he's bedded a woman doesn't mean he's not still a nerd. That proof awaits the next volume, but I'm not holding my breath.

Pierre Ouellette's *The Deus Machine* (Hodder & Stoughton, £15.95), is a technothriller blockbuster kind of thing very much in the tradition of the best-selling technothriller blockbusters it hopes to emulate. The Deus supercomputer – which has unravelled the library of the entire human genome – is being used to create deadly viruses (whose only use seems to be to silence people who stumble on the secret, but never mind). It has also achieved self-awareness, although only Riley, a psychically wounded computer expert called in to fix it, is privy to its secret. Meanwhile, misuse of human DNA sequences sets loose creatures encoded in introns, those long regions in our DNA which don't seem to code for any function. The intron critters, like vengeful guardian angels, set out to destroy Deus for unriddling their existence. Deus and Riley must try and stop them.

Yep, it's that old Things Man Was Not Meant to Know blues – a pulp cliché already redeemed by (for instance) Greg Bear's *Blood Music*, whose transcendental take on the penalties that may be incurred by reckless genetic engineering should

have knocked this kind of thing on the head. In other words, *The Deus Machine* is reinventing the wheel, although in the first half, at least, it is fast-paced, and marshals its convoluted plot and big cast with conviction. There's also considerable and laudable inventiveness displayed in the portrayal of the intron creatures set loose by human tampering, although at no point is it made clear what planted them there in the first place. It is this vacuum that the novel fills with the usual farrago of siege, locked-room and kid-in-peril (from a serial killer) clichés. It starts with a bang, and wimps out.

Short-takes

It's a rare short story collection that doesn't have a dud, but Lucius Shepard's *The Ends of the Earth* (Millenium, £15.99) is just that. This edition lacks the terrific J.K. Potter illustrations of the original Arkham House edition, but it is still a bargain – most of the 14 fictions collected in it are novelette length, and it also includes the stunning novella *The Scalehunter's Beautiful Daughter* – and one of the best collections of fantasy and horror fiction in the last decade. Like Conrad or Greene, Shepard is at his best when depicting the desperate rage and terminal cynicism of burnt-out cases who are almost, but not quite, beyond redemption, and is fully engaged when confronting the problem of evil and the collision of Third World cultures with Western technology and U.S. imperialism. A good number of the stories here contain all of these ingredients, and are set, like his novel *Life During Wartime*, in far-flung war zones, packed with convincing details depicted with an hallucinogenic intensity and driven by a raw conviction. Shepard is one of the strongest moral voices in the genre, and beyond it. Read him.

Thomas Ligotti's short fictions, some of which are collected in *Noctuary* (Robinson, £14.99), are gothic horrors very much in the high literary style of Edgar Allan Poe and Clark Ashton Smith. Mostly taking place inside the skulls of his characters, they are sombre mood pieces concentrating more on microscopically particular depictions of states of mind than on monsters and mutilations. The sonorous tone tends to be unvarying and the rich, convoluted prose is certainly best taken in short doses, but Ligotti is masterly at evoking claustrophobic dreamlike atmospheres that are unsettling through what is implied rather than what is shown. With Ligotti, less is more, and the fragmentary pieces which end the book, many no more than a page long, are a series of brilliant hypnagogic compressions that crackle with vivid images like a firework display.

(Paul J. McAuley)

Something Genuinely Unusual

Chris Gilmore

We English are notoriously the most irreligious people on Earth. We are also among the most sentimental, and the combination shows in our literature no less than in the mawkish quasi-religious rites wherewith we mock the faith we have lost or deserted. No other people would be capable both of creating a Christingle Service and of so corrupting the word "pious" that its principal meaning has become pejorative. *Days of Anger* by Sylvie Germain (Dedalus, £8.99), a serious, non-allegorical religious novel for adults who are neither simple-minded nor lacking in humour, is therefore a rarity to which few will have ready-made responses. On the other hand, while many of us may be acquainted with the operas of Verdi and Donizetti, I would hate to say which would have made the most of this truly smashing libretto – only that had it appeared in 1845 they would surely have bid like fury for the rights. It's obvious where all the major arias, choruses and duets slot in, and even some of the choreography has been sketched. Such is the dual character of this most unusual book. Not surprisingly it's an import, having been excellently translated from the French by Christine Donougher.

The setting is a claustrophobic cluster of farms near a logging village, and in the tradition of French novels of peasant life, it has its share of monsters and obsessives. The book begins with murder and blackmail. The blackmailer, Ambroise, falls in love with the corpse of his victim's victim, from which unholy if not entirely unnatural passion one narrative stream flows. The other flows from the devotion of an ageing childless woman to the Virgin, deepened into joyous intensity when she is granted a "last-chance" daughter. The daughter is a monster, or at any rate monstrous, being unassuageably hungry, enormously fat in consequence, and quite moronic. Yet Ephraim, the elder son of the blackmailer, perceives in her an Earth Goddess, and will marry no one else. Thus the streams mingle, but are also sundered, for the father totally disowns his son.

Undaunted, Ephraim sires nine sons of his own. All are born on August 15th (the Feast of the Assumption, and you're right – I didn't know either), each one year and one hour after the last, and each is in some way odd, though they vary greatly as to the character, extent and social acceptability of their oddities. Meanwhile Ambroise has acquired, through his younger son, a single granddaughter, Camille. Guess what happens when, as

young adults, the cousins meet for the first time at the dedication of a statue of the Virgin?

The events are recounted from various viewpoints by an omniscient observer, in a lush, sensuous style making heavy use of seasonal and diurnal references and dream symbolism. It is certainly mannered, and some will find it a mite precious in places, but for me Germain only goes over the edge with the love scenes. These are less embarrassing than many I have encountered, but still convey a slight sense that the Advertising Standards are being stretched, if not infringed. At any moment I expected to hear that Orgasm plc was to be privatized, underwritten by the Bank that likes to say Yes.

More seriously, towards the end of the book Germain breaches credibility through sheer failure to visualize. Ambrose imprisons Camille for many months in an attic from which escape should be ridiculously easy: climb on the pile of junk and break the skylight. Well, OK, it might just be too small, though we're not told she ever tries it. She finally frees herself by setting fire to the solid wooden door and crashing through it once it's weak enough. (Don't try this trick at home.) After that, to have apple blossom and peonies in bloom at the same time seems almost plausible.

These reflections aside, technically *Days of Anger* hardly counts as fantasy, since although the nine births strain the laws of chance past breaking, nothing uncompromisingly supernatural takes place. Yet if you care to read something genuinely unusual, to share for a moment an outlook and preoccupations beyond the commonplace, this is one to buy even at the rather steep price Dedalus wants for a B-format paperback.

If the price of *Days of Anger* is steep, £6.99 for *The Weeping Woman on the Streets of Prague*, also by Sylvie Germain, is perpendicular. It's a novelette in fourteen parts, each with an epigraph on its own recto. What with blank versos, that brings 69 pages up to 103. Add to that prelims, a breathless "interview" (actually a "how I met") by a fan called Elizabeth Young and an introduction by Dr Emma Wilson, and you still have a thin book at 127 pages; nearly half padding, and no contents page. What makes it even more reprehensible is that the introduction mentions enough other short stories and novellas, not yet available in English, to have made a respectable collection. I presume Dedalus intends to bring them out piecemeal in festoons of blather, regardless alike of the author's reputation and her admirers' patience.

The story itself concerns the growing obsession of an unnamed narrator

with a spectral woman who appears briefly and then disappears without transition at various locations in Prague. She is gigantic, dressed in the cheapest and shabbiest of clothing, and though lame moves briskly, without sound and leaving no footprints even in snow. Her face is in perpetual shadow, so the narrator cannot claim to have seen her tears, but is nonetheless obscurely certain that she weeps continually. To him she is the embodiment of all misery, deprivation and loss.

He is unable to approach her, and it's questionable if any approach could be valid. She is not a character in the sense that a ghost or devil can be a character, but an archetype of compassion; her tears are not for any wrong she has suffered herself, but for all the ill-treated everywhere – or so the narrator decides, for as there is no communication between them and no other character with a different view, no other interpretation is ever broached. The author muses on the need for compassion, kindness and generosity, but with the best will in the world there's very little new that can be said about any of them. Roger Zelazny has a spoof debate about whether beauty gives rise to even more evil than truth or goodness, and it's certain that compassion is often misapplied, but that it is in general a Good Thing is not seriously denied. "The wicked flee when no man pursueth"; there is as little virtue and less mileage in taking up the cudgels on behalf of what no one attacks.

If, having fallen in love with *Days of Anger*, you feel you can't wait for more, go ahead; but I'd hold out for the omnibus edition.

Among the pitfalls which most beset sf is idiot plotting. The writer, having predicated certain norms on her future or alien society, finds that they interfere with her story. She therefore requires her characters to behave in ways which make no sense whatever in terms of the motives they are alleged to have or the knowledge they must have, and the more earnest the book's message, the flatter it falls. Margaret Wander (sic) Bonanno has extended the boundaries in *Otherwise* (St Martin's Press, \$19.95): she idiot plots an entire species.

Behold. A starship has malfunctioned, leaving a number of survivors stranded on a primitive world. They have their ups and downs over the generations, but never regress so far as to forget their origins. After half a million years they have achieved the sort of bloodless utopia which explains the enduring appeal of cyberpunk, but only on one archipelago. Why not the whole world? Ask a silly question! They have also achieved a technological level somewhat in advance of our

own: their spectroscopy can probe the biochemistry of worlds lightyears distant, their medicine can reverse virtually any physical insult short of death. Some of them also have significant psi powers. Their name for themselves is The Others, while they refer to the native sentients as The People. Why this meathead inversion of the usual order? To demonstrate Moral Superiority.

But on the mainland, the natives are restless. Said natives are warlike, superstitious and cruel, but the Others make no attempt to mediate, educate, civilize or otherwise improve their lot – too much respect for autochthonous culture, you see. This extends to not launching any satellites which might undermine the local astrology. Why respect war, cruelty and superstition? To demonstrate Moral Superiority.

Consequently, when at last the cultures meet, the People, with predictable xenophobia, at first interbreed with the Others, then decide that they're a threat to the racial purity of Peopledom and set about a campaign of extermination. Sounds familiar? Well, sort of. Bonanno has written an overt allegory of the persecution of Jews under totalitarian regimes, specifically those of Germany and Russia this century. Just to rub it in, the senior buddy and leader of the Purity Party is called Dzugash. But as the history, terrain, psychology etc. don't match, she has had to take as read the assumption that an entire species can bring about its own ruin by being simultaneously infected with George Lansbury-style pacifism. It would work much better as an allegory of the extinction of the Dodo, the Great Auk, or any other insular species that had forgotten the fight/flight reflex, but I don't think that was her intention.

Had the book been written as an anti-pacifist tract it would make some sense, though I would still question its purpose. To attack pacifism in the light of 20th-century history is a bit like venturing the opinion that the Great Leap Forward was not an unalloyed blessing for China. But of course, it was not written in that spirit at all. Bonanno's sub-text is that Lansbury had the situation bang to rights, and all would have been sweetness and light (ultimately) had he been Prime Minister in 1939 – and no, I'm not being gratuitously nasty. Bonanno has also written a book about Angela Lansbury. (Who she? Actress grand-daughter of Labour Party politician George Lansbury, that's who.) On the subject of family ties, by the way, I sometimes complain that books which need maps have none. This has two, but the draughtsmanship is so inept, and the calligraphy so affected, as to make them all but useless. Copyright is attributed to one Danielle Bonanno – violate it at your peril.

The book is the third volume of a series, but it opens with a data dump which excused me from reading the other two – for which my gratitude.

And just to change the mood, here's the third in a series based on a thoroughly artificial premise. That aside, **Firebrand** by Stephen Barnes (Tor, \$21.95) could hardly be more different. Most crucially, I regret not having seen the preceding *Streetlethal* and *Gorgon Child*.

Set in a standard sort of hi-tech near future in Africa and the Los Angeles of 2033, it centres round the activities of Aubry Knight, a gung-ho and macho entrepreneur who has seen the opportunity not only to make a large fortune organizing the rebuilding and rehabilitation of an earthquake-wrecked section of the city, but in the process to do much the same for the criminalized/b brutalized/demoralized welfariat of the area, whom he has offered the Stakhanovite contract of self-respect, self-expression and security through hard work, self-discipline and (where that fails) stern justice. *Arbeit macht frei!* – only this time it's for real. Good on him, but such is the ingratitude of mankind that someone wants to rub Aubry out.

Cue San the assassin, a cute 14-year-old kid, quite capable of killing three of LA's finest with her bare hands in about a second. For Aubry she has something even better – a handgun that blows the victim to mist. She takes up a position in easy range of the podium where he's about to receive a civic honour and – wastes one of his friends. For this is to be a duel of honour, as ritualized as any encounter between two Prussian princes at Heidelberg c. 1835. Who said there was no room for sentiment in business? Disbelief being suspended out of sight, we sit back for the ride.

It's a hugely enjoyable ride, Barnes having done enough homework to make all the individual scenes convincing, whatever your reservations about the plot. The characters are something else, almost everyone of importance being some sort of killing machine by virtue of natural talent, electro-neural implants and fanatic dedication to the martial arts (pure and/or syncretic). Most unlikely is Leslie, whom Aubry regards as his son, but his wife regards as her daughter – and they're both right, Leslie being a pre-adolescent but potentially fully functional hermaphrodite (and even cuter than San). To add a little depth by way of moral conflict, Aubry is black, as is Phillippe Swarna, his arch enemy. They have good reason to hate each other, yet for all the evil he has done and intends, Swarna is a man of stupendous achievement; while on Aubry's team there are some thoroughly despicable white racists whose

optimum outcome is to see both of them dead.

But there's never any real doubt which side Aubry is on. He must kill Swarna, if only to prevent Swarna from killing himself, his family and all his friends, and since Swarna is absolute dictator of the fourth-largest country on Earth, this is no easy matter. Much of the book consists of leading up to his attempt, and afterwards... I mustn't give away too much of the plot, but Barnes uses an outrageous coincidence to confront Aubry with all the contradictions of his own nature, in terms of the book's overarching themes of manhood, self-mastery and duty towards bloodkin.

And how does he resolve them? Read it yourself! An occasional stirring does wonders for the blood.

Some titles do rather lead with the chin, and **Fission Impossible** by Phil Janes (Millennium, £13.99) is an extreme example. Somebody once remarked that the expression "light comedy" begs the question of what constitutes a heavy one; here Janes demonstrates the answer.

Like far too much comedy it turns solely on the dim-wittedness of all the characters, which suggests that its primary raison d'être is to comfort those whose self-esteem is low on account of being cerebrally challenged. They can reflect that they are brainier than Janes's people, and none of the jokes will go over their heads. Janes makes sure of that in two ways. The first is to use very old jokes, and explain them as he goes:

Big Bill had been to social nicety what the Pope was to pre-marital sex; he was not whole-heartedly in favour of it.

The other is to slow the delivery until even the dullest will be primed to receive the joke that must surely be coming, and perhaps not notice its frailty when it arrives:

When Arnold was first built...it would have been difficult for him to splutter. Now that he had a body capable of drawing breath, although not dependent on it, a splutter was a possibility; and this was just as well, because he had not before come across a comment which so warranted a splutter.

Arnold spluttered.

Other jokes exist only on the symbolic level. The frequent references to a woman having excessively large breasts may convey the illusion of humour to 13-year-old male virgins of near-normal IQ, but they should really have grown out of it before they get their hands on any.

To be fair, it's not all as weak as this. The line, "she...hung on for dear life, grim death and all stations between" would doubtless earn a ripple of laughter if it came up in a radio skit, as would the gag about someone barely having enough patience to fill a cottage

hospital in a model village. But in cold print one notices in the first place that it's like, not for grim death, and in the second, "patience" and "patients" are not exact homophones. Other jokes would doubtless work in a Three Stooges film, a Tom & Jerry cartoon, a pantomime, the Beano or a low stand-up routine, but a hardback costing £14 is none of these things.

(Chris Gilmore)

Strange Happenings Pete Crowther

Late last year saw the release of R. L. Chetwynd-Hayes's **The Psychic Detective** (Robert Hale, £14.99). A past recipient of the British Fantasy Award and the Horror Writers of America's Bram Stoker Award for lifetime achievement, Chetwynd-Hayes has written and published 11 novels, 19 short story collections, edited 33 anthologies, novelized two films – including *The Awakening* – and had two major films based on his work. No sooner has his latest novel made it into print than the news breaks that the legendary Hammer company will be turning the book into a film. And it's obvious why.

The Psychic Detective is a chilling look into the world of spirits and the afterlife as experienced by the medium Frederica Masters. Masters's enormous psychic powers are quickly recognized by the wealthy Francis St Clare, a noted authority on the occult who happens to have a few "troublesome" spirits co-habiting his house. St Clare persuades Masters to help him destroy the evil spirits but, in so doing, the medium's life is endangered as she encounters an 18th-century aristocrat who intends to imprison her forever. Shades of Richard Matheson's *Hell House* and Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House* (plus a highly effective dose of astral plane adventuring) abound in what, happily, turns out to be quite a riveting saga of things that do much more than simply go "bump!" in the night.

And if it's bumps in the night you're after...

Jonathan Aycliffe's work calls to mind all the great practitioners of the traditional ghost story: Cynthia Asquith, M.R. James, Shirley Jackson, L.P. Hartley and so on. His first book – under that name: he has already published six bestsellers under the name "Daniel Easterman" – Naomii's Room, received unanimous praise from all areas... and even had one *Interzone* reviewer (Mary Gentle) reputedly

"sleeping with the light on." Which might explain why it fell to me to review *Whispers In The Dark*, his second book, for the magazine.

Whispers, too, proved to be a stunning achievement in a field that has fallen fallow over recent years, with *Time Out* and the *Evening Standard* among many backing up my own sentiments with well-deserved raves. Well, Aycliffe has now produced a third book, **The Vanishment** (HarperCollins), which is every bit as cold and bleak and genuinely scary as its predecessors.

Peter and Sarah Clare travel down to Cornwall for what they hope will be an enjoyable holiday and an opportunity to make a fresh start on their troubled marriage following the death of their young daughter. But, of course, the house and its previous occupants have other things in mind.

A presence is felt, doors open and close, their slamming echoing through the house, and the regulars in the local pub treat the pair with a thinly-disguised hostility. So far, so good, though nothing really out of the ordinary, at least that which amounts to "ordinary" as far as ghost stories go. But then, Sarah vanishes from her bed in the middle of the night and the proceedings take a distinctly out-of-the-ordinary turn. A thorough check of the house gives no clues although in one room, a particularly uninviting room, Peter finds Sarah's hat ripped to shreds.

The increasingly distraught husband wanders the night-time countryside to see if his wife had gone walking off and, the next day, he checks with relatives and friends back in London to see if she has turned up. But already, deep in his heart, he realizes that it won't be quite so simple – particularly when he discovers that Susannah Trevorror, a previous occupant, also disappeared on the same date more than 100 years earlier. And, to make matters even worse, he recognizes the same date, though 1953, on the gravestone of Susannah's aunt, Agnes Trevorror. The police are informed and Peter returns to London to see if Sarah will turn up. But he cannot face living alone in their old flat and so asks his good friends Tim and Susan if he can stay with them. Not long after his arrival, their young daughter starts having nightmares, believing she is the child of Susannah Trevorror.

The nightmare into which the hero spirals grows darker as his descent gathers momentum. The previous occupants of Petherick House now seem completely able to travel to wherever he hides, affecting the lives and the very personalities of those who stand by his side. It soon becomes clear that he must return to Cornwall to learn all there is to know about what happened in the house. That it turns

out to be more than he bargained for is, by now, no surprise at all.

Literate, gothic and thoroughly unnerving, *The Vanishment* is classic stuff indeed and, since the deaths of – among others – James (M.R.), Hodgson, Asquith and Munby, Aycliffe is, in the words of the old *Mad* magazine slogan, number one in a field of one. Long may he reign and long may he turn out this kind of entirely satisfying spectral saga.

The postscript is that HarperCollins has put all three of Aycliffe's books together in a special presentation box for what amounts to a once-in-a-lifetime offer: the new book – an oversized softback trade edition, with a cover price of £8.99 – plus the regular paperback edition of *Whispers in the Dark* (newly available and priced £4.99) plus a 90-minute audio cassette of *Naomi's Room* read by Tony Britton... for the all-in price of £9.99! As far as great bargains go, this one must take the cake and surely amounts to the only truly genuine bargain to be had in the obligatory post-Christmas/pre-Easter so-called sales. Although whether there'll be any left by the time you read this is anybody's guess.

Just as it's often difficult to explain to someone why a favourite story is so good, it's sometimes equally difficult to pinpoint why certain tales just don't quite cut it. Whitley Strieber's new book **The Forbidden Zone** (New English Library, £15.99) is a particularly good example.

The premise of *The Forbidden Zone* is almost an exemplar of its kind. A small, American community is plunged into an all-out fight with the powers of darkness. But this immensely readable book isn't the average Good-vs-Evil yarn: far from it.

What starts with a disembodied howl emanating from "The Mound," a local beauty spot, culminates in the town being cut off from the rest of the world and taken over by hordes of completely alien entities which metamorphose out of the cadaverous husks of the captured townsfolk, shape-changing at will. The town becomes a beach-head as the invaders, an ancient race threatened by extinction in its own dimension, attempts to conquer the Earth and change it to an environment more suited to their own comfort.

Shades of movies such as *Invaders From Mars*, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* and even Carpenter's version of *The Thing* combine with the dreamscapes of Lovecraft, Clark Ashton Smith, and even include elements of the inhospitable world outside the supermarket in King's "The Mist."

It's fast, exciting and extremely inventive. But there are a few warts on Strieber's otherwise handsome literary

creation. These include, notably, the tacky premise of the dimensional rift being caused by scientists engaged in a massive research project aimed at breaching the temporal flow; the contrived comparison of the events in the labyrinthine tunnels beneath the Mound (inevitably bringing McCammon's *Stinger* to mind) to the Vietnam conflict, for which, Oliver Stone-like, the author makes the main protagonist's wife a former Viet Cong tunnel rat; and the rather-too-neat conclusion.

But the changing sequences and the numerous attempts to escape the town – around towering tentacles which suddenly erupt from the shattered concrete, and amidst scurrying insect-like creatures who bear occasional resemblances to various townsfolk – are wonderful, recalling the very best work of Lovecraft (to whom the book is dedicated) and his timeless creation, Cthulhu. Recommended.

And still in the area of the "small-American-town-pitted-against-a-supernatural-force novel," Headline has recently released its third hardcover offering from U.S. author Bentley Little. Which, in itself, is a little strange because **The Mailman** (£16.99) is actually Little's second full-length outing, coming between his Bram Stoker Award-winning *The Revelation* and *The Summoning*. Ah, well...

The premise of the story is straightforward and even somewhat predictable: the much-loved and well-trusted mailman of Willis, Arizona, wakes up one morning and re-arranges his brains with a shotgun. The result is that the town gets a new mailman... and he arrives surprisingly quickly, just two days after the town postmaster puts in an application expecting to have to wait four or five weeks.

But, when he arrives, John Smith (!) is rather different to his predecessor. At first, the difference is subtle and well-received: fliers, circulars and even bills seem to have no place in the new man's sack. Even better, he seems to bring good fortune – both Doug Albin, the local school-teacher, and his wife receive letters from friends they haven't seen or heard from in years; Doug receives notice of his cost-of-living increase; another note informs him that the deadline for his grant application (which he was late sending off) has been extended; the warranty on Doug's car has also been extended; Polaroid sends him a two-dollar rebate; and Doug's mother-in-law sends a letter to his son, Billy, enclosing a five-dollar bill. And all this in the course of two mail-drops.

Naturally, it doesn't take too long for this kind of positive correspondence to start ringing a few bells in Doug Albin's head. And it doesn't take much longer for the occasional piece of mail

to be wrongly delivered, with people getting letters, apparently addressed to a third party, that talk about them rather than to them. But, these things happen and the recipients – having got the lowdown on just how someone really thinks about them – keep the fact of the delivery error to themselves and, instead, act on the information they've received. And, in just a little more time, one of Billy's friends receives a brown paper package of nude photographs of Billy's mother, while an acquaintance of Doug Albin starts getting letters from his long-lost brother, telling him about just what did go on in Vietnam...and that he's coming home soon.

By the time that things in Willis are sufficiently weird for Albin to want to get outside help (for the rest of the town seems oblivious to any problem), his failure to pay any bills (mainly because he never receives any) has resulted in cut-offs by the utility companies – this, of course, includes the telephone. And, with most other people also not paying their bills – including the local garage, which, miraculously receives no invoice for delivered petrol and so doesn't pay which results in its supply being cut off by the wholesaler – the life of the town gradually grinds to a halt. Meanwhile, in the great tradition of the U.S. postal authorities, the mail gets through – even mail which nobody has sent. Under these conditions, Willis is soon a community of open hostility with only Doug Albin apparently able to do something about it.

If you've read King's *Needful Things*, then elements of this pitting-neighbour-against-neighbour technique may sound familiar. And this is one of the two grouches I had with the book, which is, it must be said, very readable. But the real downer on the whole affair is the denouement wherein, with almost *Comic Strip Presents* implausibility, the townsfolk suddenly realize that the mailman is actually powerless in himself to hurt anyone: rather, he relies on them to hurt each other as a result of the mail he brings. (Well, we'll just jolly-well have to ignore him and his mail! *The End.*)

Little's writing style (manipulative, well-paced and flawlessly detailed) is perhaps second only to King himself, at least where this type of story is concerned, and – on the strength of some great short fiction and his excellent debut novel, *The Revelation* – he undoubtedly has a great blockbuster of a book in there somewhere. Sadly, this isn't it.

(Pete Crowther)

Magazine Reviews

Paul Beardsley

The Third Alternative edited by A.J. Cox, 5 Martins Lane, Witcham, Ely, Cambs, CB6 2LB. A5, 52pp, £2.50 per issue, £9 for four.

"Slipstream," apparently, is not just a term used by some writers to make a virtue of their inability to plot or have ideas, it's about the blurring of genre boundaries – mainstream with a dark fantasy viewpoint, for instance, and vice versa. Its practitioners are the first to admit there's nothing new about this approach, but that doesn't stop them insisting on a new label.

Some of it is actually very good, and some of the good stuff appears in Andy Cox's *The Third Alternative*. It's the most impressive first issue small-press magazine I've seen. There are 52 glossy pages, the eye-pleasing text arranged in two columns for the most part. Artwork is restricted to the front cover, an airbrushed portrait of a woman by Dave Mooring; the presence of her pineal eye does not detract from the overall sense of the magazine's mature intentions: it is produced by and for intelligent adults.

Featured authors include Nicholas Royle, Joel Lane, Conrad Williams, P.J.L. Hinder and Lawrence Dyer. For the most part, their stories have an autobiographical feel, sometimes counterpointed by a dreamlike element. The effect is sometimes very poignant, particularly in the case of the Lane, resulting in very re-readable stories. The poetry, by the likes of Andy Darlington, Steve Sneyd and J.C. Hartley, is reasonably good too.

There is a downside, of course. A piece by Sheila E. Murphy comprises such phrases as, "Strikingly, vegetables happen," which make no more sense in context. Central to the magazine's intent is a "Comment" piece by Chris Kenworthy on Slipstream, which is a little heavy on the dogmatic bullshit: "Writing is not about the communication of ideas," he tells us without qualification, as if human intellect doesn't count for anything. "Slipstream," he says, "is dependent upon the heart of the writer, and cannot be faked." Maybe not, but it can result in grotesquely inappropriate twopenness, as in Mike O'Driscoll's story of a man dying of AIDS.

Overall though, the good easily outweighs the bad, and I would strongly recommend subscribing. There's a power here you won't find elsewhere.

Night Dreams edited by Kirk S. King, 47 Stephens Road, Walmley, Sutton Coldfield, W. Midlands, B76 8TS. A4, 48pp, £2.50 per issue, four for £9.

King's *Night Dreams: Tales of the Weird, the Frightening, the*

Grotesque is also a first issue, this time in the pulp tradition of *Weird Tales* and its brethren. Frank A. Munsey is quoted in the editorial to pre-empt criticism of the presentation: "It is the story, not the paper it is printed on, that is important."

In fact, the presentation is (mostly) quite acceptable. The purple card cover is unfortunately reminiscent of a school rough-book, and the masthead is somewhat untidy, but the Blake-inspired cover illustration is up to scratch. Inside, the text is a readable mix of dot-matrix fonts.

The internal illustrations, though, are bad. They are the doodles in the rough-book, my favourite being the knobby-kneed monster with badly drawn underpants and toes that carries a sword in one hand and its own severed head in another.

The prolific David Logan is this issue's featured writer, with two stories and a "reflection." Personally, I think he should concentrate on doing one story well. More interesting pieces include Steve Castle's "Samson Had Delilah" (their love-hate relationship amusingly continued in reincarnated lives) and D.F. Lewis' longer than usual "Two Lonely." Other fiction, by the likes of Conrad Williams, William Smith, and the editor himself, is of varying length, but generally short enough to be read in a lunch break. There's some quite good poetry (again by Steve Castle), a prize draw, and a "Pub Talk" feature. Not a bad first issue, but in desperate need of an illustrator who can draw.

Rattler's Tale edited by Anthony North, BCM Keyhole, London WC1N 3XX. A5, 80pp, £2 per issue, four for £8.

Anthony North's *Rattler's Tale* covers everything that has gained the perverse legitimacy of being dismissed by most serious scientists – witchcraft, crop circles, UFOs, astrology and so on. Issue 18 has a "thrown together" look about it, with 31 columns, articles and stories (apparently typed up on several rickety old typewriters) all crammed together within its 80 pages. This, together with the adverts, makes it a magazine to browse through rather than read from cover to cover. The artwork is fairly competent, ordinary stuff but at times it is hard to understand why it's included; a syringe accompanying a story about medicine is obvious (if dull), but a smiling face to illustrate a story about a flood? The best story is a surprisingly successful satire on commercialized charity; the worst, by the editor himself, is an unbelievably crass piece about a rape victim consoled by the thought that she's probably given her attacker AIDS. The authors' names are not listed in the contents page, which is perhaps just as well – the inoffensive stories aren't memorable.

The non-fiction (I use the phrase advisedly) is much more interesting. "Gaia News" is informative, but why can't they just call it "News"? There are issue-spanning debates, usually resulting from previous articles. There's stuff on theology, spontaneous combustion, opal miners using divining rods, philosophers, and more besides. A hell of a lot more, actually.

If you're not into the New Age, *Rattler's Tale* is not for you. But if you are, it's unmissable. Probably.

Grotesque edited by David Logan, 24 Hightown Drive, Newtonabbey, Co. Antrim, N. Ireland, BT36 7TG, A4, 52pp, £2.50 per issue, four for £9 (but going up to £2.80 per issue, four for £10 after issue 5 launch).

I was largely unimpressed with the first three issues of David Logan's *Grotesque*. Of the artists, only Cathy Buburuz showed any technical skill, and her work tended to be very samey. Some stories were desperately unoriginal (restaurant turns out – surprise! – to be serving human flesh), others were puerile (attempted rape victim rescued by killer quilt). And there's nothing worse than an editor who's convinced he's side-splittingly funny.

Some of these excesses have been curbed slightly (though not enough) for issue 4. Production values have actually declined – the glossy cover has been replaced with a paper one with a naff drawing on the front – and a 30p price rise has been announced. However, the standard of fiction has generally improved, particularly with the publication of John Duffield's "Our House," a moving and mature variant on the "possessed house" theme. There are clever mythical-beast variants by Katherine Roberts and Philip Turner (the latter's twist telegraphed by the editor's blurb in a previous issue), a jolly wheeze about large wasps by Neal Asher, and Chris Kenworthy shows that he's better at writing Slipstream than writing about it. Then there's D.F. Lewis, a good but unpolished story by Conrad Williams, and a story by Kim Lyst which mentions *Interzone* but is otherwise unremarkable. With four other average-to-good stories, I'd recommend this issue at least.

Albedo One, 2 Post Road, Lusk, Co. Dublin, Ireland, A5, 64pp, £1.75 per issue, four for £7.

The unnamed editor of *Albedo One* has the honesty to tell us to expect future issues when we see them. Most small-press editors call their magazines quarterly out of sheer baseless optimism.

Issue 3 has a grey card cover, with a *FR Side-ish* cartoon on the front that really doesn't work as a cover illustration; the rest of the artwork is pretty average. There are 64 pages of small

but very clear print, in a single column except for some non-fiction.

There's a boring, almost-incomprehensible story about a stabbed man crawling around, but the other three stories are much better. Brian Stableford was decent enough to contribute "The Requiem Masque" (it's a non-paying market), albeit little more than a well-written pastiche of a similarly named Poe story. "The Quest for the Perfect Knight," by Exuberance-reviewer Robert Neilson, is an ordinary piece of Arthuriana, but enjoyable nonetheless. Best of all is Michael Carroll's "Angels in Different Shapes," an exciting, fast-moving thriller, featuring teleport booths, a kidnapped Pope, and a threat to civilization.

On the non-fiction front, there are book reviews, readers' letters, and Clive Barker interviewed at some length by Robert Neilson and Des Doyle. Fans of *Star Trek* come in for some stick in one or two places; a feature writer remarks, "[T]he only thing worse than a bigot is a trekkie." This is a bit rich, coming from someone who calls himself Severian and ends his articles with the words, "Terminus est"! Phasers on stun: there's a Wolfie about. (Paul Beardley)

Books Received

March 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.

Note: Two new features from this month. Firstly, we specify the name of the cover artist, when this information is given somewhere on the book. Secondly, we make an attempt to describe more accurately the various sizes of paperbacks. Key to sizes: **A-format** = the usual small "mass-market" paperback (i.e. traditional "Penguin size"); **B-format** = the larger "trade" or "quality" paperback (i.e. "Picador size"); **C-format** = the still larger "oversize" trade paperback, usually a hardcover-size book bound in paper covers; **small-press paperback** = any unusual shape or size of paperback book used by a non-mainstream publisher. We hope this added data proves useful for visualizing the books, and for the long-term record.

Alcock, Vivien. The Face at the Window. Methuen, ISBN 0-416-18967-9, 156pp, hardcover, cover by Barry Jones, £9.99. (Juvenile fantasy/mystery novel, first edition; the author, well-known in her own right, happens to be espoused to celebrated children's writer Leon Garfield.) March 1994.

Alcock, Vivien. Ghostly Companions. Mammoth, ISBN 0-7497-1646-0, 115pp, A-format paperback, £2.99. (Juvenile ghost-story collection, first published in 1984.) March 1994.

Anthony, Piers. The Colour of Her Panties. New English Library, ISBN 0-450-58273-7, 345pp, A-format paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1991; the 15th "Xanth" novel.) 17th March 1994.

Aylett, Steve. The Crime Studio. Serif [47 Strahan Rd., London E3 5DA], ISBN 1-897950-34-3, 300pp, small-press paperback, cover by David Hine, £7.99. (SF collection of "routines" [in the William Burroughs sense of the word]; first edition: a debut book by a new British writer, born 1967, it's commended on the cover by novelist Iain Sinclair.) 26th April 1994.

Ballard, J.G. Myths of the Near Future. Vintage, ISBN 0-09-933471-2, 205pp, B-format paperback, cover by John Morris, £5.99. (SF collection, first published in 1982; this edition contains a new two-page introduction by the author; Vintage is a quality-paperback imprint of Random House, a conglomerate which subsumes Jonathan Cape, who were the original hardcover publishers of this book; presumably, Random are now clawing back [from their rival, HarperCollins] the paperback rights to all the Ballard titles which Cape originally published, but I can't imagine that HarperCollins, who are now Ballard's main publisher, are letting these books go willingly.) 17th March 1994.

Banks, Iain M. Feersum Endjinn. Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-235-6, viii + 279pp, hardcover, cover by Marj Salrowick, £16.99. (SF novel, first edition; proof copy received.) 9th June 1994.

Barnes, John. Mother of Storms. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85560-5, 432pp, hardcover, \$22.95. (SF novel, first edition; proof copy received.) July 1994.

Beath, Warren Newton. Bloodletter. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85731-4, 288pp, hardcover, \$21.95. (Horror novel, first edition; proof copy received; it's also a Hollywood novel, about a vampire-type serial killer on the loose in movie-land. Beath appears to be a new novelist to the genre, his previous book being *The Death of James Dean* [1986].) August 1994.

Bova, Ben. Death Dream. New English Library, ISBN 0-450-58681-5, 646pp, A-format paperback, cover by Gory Gray, £5.99. (SF novel, first published in the USA, 1994; it's a blockbuster about virtual reality.) 17th March 1994.

Brin, David. Otherness. Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-207-0, viii + 389pp, hardcover, cover by Fred Gambino, £16.99. (SF collection, first edition [?]; proof copy received; it contains 13 stories, three of which – "The Giving Plague," "Piecework" and "What Continues, What Falls" – first appeared in *Interzone*; there are also half a dozen essays by the author.) 9th June 1994.

Brooks, Terry. The Talismans of Shannara. Legend, ISBN 0-09-925541-3, 453pp, A-format paperback, cover by Keith Parkinson, £5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1993.) 17th March 1994.

Campbell, Ramsey. Alone With the Horrors: The Great Short Fiction of Ramsey Campbell, 1961-1991. Illustrated by J.K. Potter. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-0951-0, 367pp, hardcover, cover by Simon Dewey, £16.99. (Horror collection, first published in the USA, 1993; contains 39 stories.) 7th April 1994.

Campbell, Ramsey. The Long Lost. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3998-3, 533pp, A-format paperback, cover by Simon Dewey, £5.99. (Horror novel, first published in 1993; reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 79.) 14th April 1994.

Card, Orson Scott, and Kathryn H. Kidd. **Loveland: The Mayflower Trilogy, Book 1.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-85732-2, xiii+246pp, hardcover, \$22.95. (SF novel, first edition; proof copy received; co-writer Kidd is described as "the author of two novels, *Paradise Vue* and *The Alphabet Year*"; there's a foreword by Card in which she castigates book-packagers and "sharcrops," and points out that this is a real collaboration; and we're glad to hear it!) July 1994.

Charnas, Suzy McKee. **The Furies.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-85717-9, 383pp, hardcover, \$22.95. (SF novel, first edition; proof copy received; a long-delayed sequel to *Walk to the End of the World* [1974; Williams S. Burroughs admired it] and *Motherlines* [1976;] June 1994.

Clarke, Arthur C. **The Hammer of God.** Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-194-5, 264pp, A-format paperback, cover by John Avon, £4.99. (SF novel, first published in 1993.) No date of UK release shown; "export edition," received in March 1994.

Cline, William C. **Serials-ly Speaking: Essays on Cliffhangers.** McFarland [c/o Shelving Ltd., 127 Sandgate Rd., Folkestone, Kent CT20 2BL], ISBN 0-89950-909-6, xiv+257pp, hardcover, £29.95. (Essay collection, first edition; illustrated nostalgic writings on cinema serials, including many sf/fantasy productions such as the fondly remembered *Captain Marvel*, *Batman* and *Flash Gordon*.) 28th July 1994.

Constantine, Storm. **Calenture.** Headline, ISBN 0-7472-0940-5, 340pp, hardcover, cover by Steve Wallace, £16.99. (SF novel, first edition; it's based on her story "Priest of Hands," which appeared in *Interzone* 58.) 7th April 1994.

Cooper, Louise. **Star Ascendant: The Star Shadow Trilogy, Book 1.** HarperCollins, ISBN 0-586-21519-0, 414pp, A-format paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition.) 11th April 1994.

Corran, Mary. **Imperial Light.** Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-161-8, 358pp, hardcover, cover by Steven Crisp, £16.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; Mary Corran is a new British writer in her 30s, formerly "a high profile stockbroker" in the City of London.) 14th April 1994.

Dalton, Annie. **Naming the Dark.** Mammoth, ISBN 0-7497-1580-4, 232pp, A-format paperback, cover by Anthony Kerias, £2.99. (Juvenile fantasy novel, first published in 1992; this author has been winning lots of children's-book awards.) March 1994.

Delamare, David. **Mermaids and Magic Shows.** Text by Nigel Suckling. Dragon's World/Paper Tiger, ISBN 1-85028-249-8, 128pp, very large-format paperback, £14.95. (Fantasy art portfolio, first edition; with over 60 colour pictures, it's sumptuously produced, on heavy paper.) 17th March 1994.

Donaldson, Stephen, ed. **Strange Dreams: Unforgettable Fantasy Stories.** HarperCollins, 0-00-646005-5, 704pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Fantasy anthology, first published in the USA, 1993; it contains reprinted stories by Michael Bishop, Jorge Luis Borges, Orson Scott Card, C.J. Cherryh, Harlan Ellison, M. John Harrison, Franz Kafka, Gary Kilworth, Rudyard Kipling, R.A. Lafferty, Patricia A. McKillip, Rachel Pollack, Lucius Shepard, Theodore Sturgeon, Sheri S. Tepper, Jack Vance and many others.) 28th March 1994.

Egan, Greg. **Permutation City.** Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-174-X, 310pp, hardcover, cover by Chris Moore, £14.99. (SF novel, first edition; there is a simultaneous trade

paperback edition [not seen]; Egan's second sf novel, it's much fatter than his first, *Quantarine*.) 14th April 1994.

Fowler, Christopher. **Darkest Day.** Warner, ISBN 0-7515-0765-2, 570pp, A-format paperback, photographic cover by James Walker, £5.99. (Horror novel, first published in 1993.) 14th April 1994.

Fury, David. **Kings of the Jungle: An Illustrated Reference to "Tarzan" on Screen and Television.** Foreword by Maureen O'Sullivan. McFarland [c/o Shelving Ltd.], 127 Sandgate Rd., Folkestone, Kent CT20 2BL, ISBN 0-89950-771-9, xii+256pp, hardcover, £37.50. (Fantasy filmography, first edition; illustrated; gives detailed annotated listings of all the Tarzan films and TV episodes; based on the writings of Edgar Rice Burroughs.) 24th March 1994.

Gideon, John. **Golden Eyes.** Headline, ISBN 0-7472-4352-2, 568pp, A-format paperback, photographic cover by Julian Lee, £5.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1993; "John Gideon" is a pseudonym of Lonn Hoklin [whose name the publishers appear to have misspelt in the copyright statement].) 14th April 1994.

Grabinski, Stefan. **The Dark Domain.** Translated by Miroslaw Lipinski. Afterword by Madeline Johnson. Dodalus, ISBN 1-873982-25-9, 153pp, B-format paperback, cover by Franz von Stuck, £6.99. (Horror/fantasy collection, first edition; the 11 stories were first published in 1918-1922; Grabinski [1877-1936] is described in the blurb as "the greatest author of fantastic fiction in the Polish language.") Late entry: it says "1993" inside, but received by us in March 1994.

Green, Simon R. **Shadows Fall.** Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-05711-4, 506pp, A-format paperback, cover by Peter Mennim, £5.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition.) 31st March 1994.

Grundy, Stephan. **Rhinegold.** Michael Joseph, ISBN 0-7181-3743-4, 870pp, C-format paperback, cover by Angus Gray-Burbridge, £9.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1994; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen]; this debut novel by an American writer who lives in Britain has been getting very good notices.) 31st March 1994.

Hamilton, Peter F. **A Quantum Murder.** Pan, ISBN 0-330-33045-4, 376pp, A-format paperback, cover by Larry Rostant, £4.99. (SF novel, first edition; follow-up to *Mindstar Rising*.) 8th April 1994.

Harding, Simon. **Streamkeller.** Pan, ISBN 0-330-33210-4, 248pp, B-format paperback, cover by Brian Froud, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; a debut book by a new British writer.) 8th April 1994.

Hartwell, David G., and Kathryn Cramer, eds. **The Ascent of Wonder: The Evolution of Hard Science Fiction.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-85062-X, 1004pp, hardcover, \$35. (SF anthology, first edition; proof copy received; a massive volume of 66 stories, tending towards the avowedly science-based kind of sf; it makes an interesting comparison with the recent Norton *Book of Science Fiction*, edited by Le Guin and Attebery, which had 67 stories; there are just two overlaps between that book and this, and the tales which have the honour of being in both are Frederik Pohl's "Day Million" [1966] and Paul Anderson's "Kyrin" [1968].) June 1994.

Holt, Tom. **Faust Among Equals.** Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-197-X, 292pp, hardcover, cover by Steve Lee, £14.99. (Humorous fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received.) 2nd June 1994.

James, Peter. **Prophecy.** St Martin's Press, ISBN 0-312-10526-6, 280pp, hardcover, cover by Tom Stimpson, \$20.95. (Horror novel, first published in the UK, 1992.) 18th March 1994.

Jones, Gwyneth. **North Wind.** Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-05449-2, 283pp, hardcover, cover by David Farren, £15.99. (SF novel, first edition; proof copy received; sequel to *White Queen*.) 19th May 1994.

Kenworthy, Chris, ed. **The Science of Sadness.** Barrington Books [Bartle Hall, Liverpool Rd., Huttton, Preston, Lancs. PR4 5HB], ISBN 1-897729-69-3, 138pp, small-press paperback, £4.99. (Horror/fantasy/sf "slipstream" anthology, first edition; it contains all-new stories by Rick Cadger, Joel Lane, D.F. Lewis, Nicholas Royle and others; a follow-up to the same editor's *The Sun Rises Red* and *Sugar Sleep*.) 10th March 1994.

Koontz, Dean. **The House of Thunder.** Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3661-5, 438pp, A-format paperback, cover by Graham Potts, £4.99. (Horror/suspense novel, first published in the USA under the pseudonym "Leigh Nichols," 1982.) 14th April 1994.

Lackey, Mercedes, and Larry Dixon. **The Black Gryphon.** Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-181-2, 330pp, hardcover, cover by Mick Posen, £15.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA [?] 1994; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen]; the first in a series of prequels to Lackey's "Heralds of Valdemar" series; Larry Dixon is Ms Lackey's husband.) 7th April 1994.

Laidlaw, Marc. **The Orchid Estate.** St Martin's Press, ISBN 0-312-10515-0, 282pp, hardcover, cover by John Weisman, \$19.95. (Horror/suspense novel, first edition; Laidlaw's three previous novels were sf, but this one is being marketed as a suspense thriller.) 15th March 1994.

Lee, Tanith. **Eva Fairdeath.** Headline, ISBN 0-7472-7862-8, viii+215pp, C-format paperback, cover by Mark Salwowski, £8.99. (SF novel, first edition; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen]; in an interesting foreword the author tells us that this book is in fact 20 years old, one she couldn't sell at the time.) 10th March 1994.

Lee, Tanith. **Nightshades: Thirteen Journeys Into Shadow.** Headline, ISBN 0-7472-4250-X, 311pp, A-format paperback, cover by Mark Salwowski, £4.99. (Fantasy collection, first published in 1993; reviewed by Chris Gilmore in *Interzone* 62.) 17th March 1994.

McCaffrey, Anne. **The Girl Who Heard Dragons.** Illustrated by Michael Whelan. Tor, ISBN 0-312-93173-5, 348pp, hardcover, \$22.95. (SF/fantasy collection, first edition; proof copy received; it contains an original "Pern" novella and 14 reprinted stories; "over 11 million copies of Anne McCaffrey books in print," states the blurb; there's quite an engaging introduction by the author in which she talks about fame, signing sessions and being the proud mother of sf novelist Todd Johnson.) May 1994.

MacLeish, Roderick. **Prince Ombr.** Tor/Orb, ISBN 0-312-89024-9, 320pp, B-format paperback, \$11.95. (Fantasy novel, first published in the UK [?], 1982; proof copy received; the author appears to be American, works for "public TV and radio" and lives in Washington DC; this book is described in the blurb as "a modern classic ... taking its place beside such works as *The Phantom Tollbooth* and *The Neverending Story*"; British readers may find this one

lying around secondhand bookshops in its Pan paperback edition of some years ago.) June 1994.

McCobbie, David. **Mandradora**. Mammoth, ISBN 0-7497-1265-1, 244pp, A-format paperback, cover by Anthony Kerins, £3.50. [Juvenile fantasy/mystery novel, first published in Australia, 1991; the Scots-born author has lived in Australia for 35 years.] March 1994.

Matheson, Richard Christian. **Created By**. Macmillan, ISBN 0-333-61889-0, 324pp, hardcover, £9.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1993; it also qualifies as a Hollywood novel and a TV novel, given that it's about a television writer in L.A. [did you know, by the way, that one of the very first TV novels was written by sf author Alfred Bester?—The Rat Race, it was called (1953)—but that was in the days when American TV meant New York, not Hollywood]; this is a debut novel, although the author has previously published a collection of short stories and written many TV scripts and film screenplays; born 1953, he is the son of celebrated screenwriter-producer Richard Matheson; and he shouldn't be confused with his similarly named younger brother, Chris Matheson, co-screenwriter of the movie *Bill & Ted's Bogus Journey* [1991].) 8th April 1994.

Matiasz, G.A. **End Time: Notes on the Apocalypse**. AK Press [PO Box 40662, San Francisco, CA 94140-0682, USA; and 22 Luton Place, Edinburgh EH8 9PE, UK], ISBN 1-873176-96-1, 299pp, small-print paperback, \$8 or £5.95. [SF novel, first edition; the author, born 1952, was "a late hippie, and an early punk"; this is his first novel.] 28th April 1994.

Meyrink, Gustav. **The Opal (and Other Stories)**. Edited and translated by Maurice Raraty. Dedalus, ISBN 1-873982-30-5, 222pp, B-format paperback, cover by Lise Weisgerber, £7.99. (Horror/fantasy collection, first published in Germany, 1913; the various stories were written from 1901 onwards, and are representative of Meyrink's early work before he turned to novels with *The Golem* [1915], etc.) 24th April 1994.

Meyrink, Gustav. **The White Dominican**. Translated by Mike Mitchell. Introduction by John Clute. Dedalus, ISBN 1-873982-55-0, 165pp, B-format paperback, cover by Lise and Georges Weisgerber, £6.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in Germany, 1921; the fifth and last of Meyrink's novels to appear from Dedalus, it has the reputation of being his most "esoteric" and "mystical.") 24th April 1994.

Moorcock, Michael. **Byzantium Endures**. Phoenix, ISBN 1-85799-043-9, 404pp, B-format paperback, cover by Robin Cracknell, £6.99. (Non-fantasy novel by a major sf/fantasy author, first published in 1961; Phoenix is the quality-paperback line of the Orion Publishing Group; it hardly seems five minutes since these books were last reissued in paperback by Random House/Jonathan Cape [I've checked—it was actually 21 months ago].) 14th April 1994.

Moorcock, Michael. **The Laughter of Carthage**. Phoenix, ISBN 1-85799-048-X, 601pp, B-format paperback, cover by Robin Cracknell, £6.99. (Non-fantasy novel by a major sf/fantasy author, first published in 1984; sequel to *Byzantium Endures*.) 14th April 1994.

Niven, Larry, and Jerry Pournelle. **The Moat Around Murcheson's Eye**. HarperCollins, ISBN 0-00-647645-7, 480pp, A-format paperback, cover by John Harris, £5.99. [SF novel, first published in the USA as *The Gripping Hand*, 1992; reviewed by John Clute in *Interzone* 73.] 28th March 1994.

Olsen, Lance. **Tonguing the Zeitgeist**. Permeable Press [47 Noe St., Suite 4, San Francisco, CA 94114, USA], ISBN 1-842633-04-0, 192pp, B-format paperback, \$11.95. [SF novel, first edition; according to the publicity, it "plays with Warhol's 15 minutes of fame, cyberculture, media manipulation and a large cast of fascinatingly strange characters"; the author has written a previous novel, *Live from Earth* [1991] as well as short stories and criticism, including a book about William Gibson.] 15th May 1994.

Ouellette, Pierre. **The Deus Machine**. Hodder & Stoughton, ISBN 0-450-60397-0, 446pp, hardcover, £16.99. [SF novel, first published in the USA, 1994; a near-future thriller about an intelligent computer, etc.] 21st April 1994.

Parsons, Rich, and Tony Keaveny. **The Code Librarian**. O'Mara, ISBN 1-85479-952-5, 142pp, A-format paperback, cover by Robin Lawrie, £3.99. (Humorous fantasy novel, first published in 1983.) 22nd April 1994.

Pohl, Frederik. **The Voices of Heaven**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85643-1, 347pp, hardcover, \$21.95. [SF novel, first edition; proof copy received.] June 1994.

Pollack, Rachel. **Temporary Agency**. Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-149-X, 202pp, hardcover, cover by David O'Connor, £13.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; follow-up to *Unquenchable Fire*; it looks as though it may have something in common with her story "The Malignant One," which appeared in *Interzone* 10.) 7th April 1994.

Pollack, Rachel. **Unquenchable Fire**. Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-182-1, 390pp, A-format paperback, cover by David O'Connor, £5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1988.) 7th April 1994.

Pratchett, Terry. **The Dark Side of the Sun**. Doubleday, ISBN 0-385-40476-X, £14.99, hardcover, cover by Josh Kirby, £14.99. (Humorous sf novel, first published in 1981.) 28th April 1994.

Pratchett, Terry. **Strata**. Doubleday, ISBN 0-385-40475-1, 236pp, hardcover, cover by Josh Kirby, £14.99. (Humorous sf novel, first published in 1981.) 28th April 1994.

Rankin, Robert. **Raiders of the Lost Car Park**. Doubleday, ISBN 0-385-40418-2, 253pp, hardcover, cover by Ian Murray, £14.99. (Humorous fantasy novel, first edition; sequel to *The Book of Ultimate Truths*.) 28th April 1994.

Rankin, Robert. **The Book of Ultimate Truths**. Corgi, ISBN 0-552-13922-X, 347pp, A-format paperback, cover by Ian Murray, £4.99. (Humorous fantasy novel, first published in the UK, 1993; reviewed by Matt Coward in *Interzone* 79.) 28th April 1994.

Reed, Robert. **Beyond the Veil of Stars**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85730-6, 318pp, hardcover, \$21.95. [SF novel, first edition; proof copy received.] June 1994.

Rohan, Michael Scott. **Chase the Morning**. Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-183-X, 334pp, A-format paperback, cover by Mark Salwowski, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1990.) 7th April 1994.

Rusch, Kristine Kathryn. **Facade**. Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-075-1, 386pp, A-format paperback, cover by Fred Gambino, £4.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1993.) 7th April 1994.

Ryman, Geoff. **The Child Garden**. Tor/Orb, ISBN 0-312-89023-0, 388pp, B-format paperback, £12.95. [SF novel, first published in the UK, 1989; proof copy received; winner of the Arthur C. Clarke and John W. Campbell awards.] May 1994.

Sa-Carneiro, Mario de. **Lucio's Confession**. Translated by Margaret Jull Costa. Foreword by Eugenio Lisboa. Dedalus, ISBN 1-873982-80-1, 121pp, B-format paperback, cover by Lise Weisgerber, £6.99. (Horror/fantasy novel, first published in Portugal, 1913; according to the blurb, the author committed suicide in 1916 at the age of 26, leaving "an extraordinary body of work which dealt obsessively with the problems of identity, madness and solitude.") Late entry: it says "1993" inside, but received by us in March 1994.

Simak, Clifford D. **The Creator and Other Stories**. Edited by Francis Lyall. Severn House, ISBN 0-7278-4569-1, 278pp, hardcover, £14.99. [SF collection, first edition; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen]; the sixth Lyall-edited Simak collection, it's fatter than any of the earlier ones, with nine stories, four of which are previously uncollected: "The Creator" [1935], "Reunion on Ganymede" [1938], "The Money Tree" [1958] and "Party Line" [1978]; a fifth, "The Answers" [1953], appeared only in the US hardcover edition of *Strangers in the Universe* [1956] and therefore was uncollected in this country; the remaining four tales will all be familiar to those who have a run of previous UK-published Simak books; there is still a good deal of uncollected Simak [about 40 stories], so presumably Mr Lyall is going to be spinning it out for just as long as his publishers allow him.] Late entry: December 1993 publication, received in March 1994.

Sterling, Bruce. **Globalhead**. Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-153-7, 301pp, A-format paperback, cover by Peter Gudynas, £4.99. [SF collection, first published in the USA, 1992; contains 13 stories, one of which—"The Compassionate, the Digital," first appeared in *Interzone*.] 7th April 1994.

Stith, John E. **Reunion on Neverend**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85687-3, 352pp, hardcover, \$21.95. [SF novel, first edition; proof copy received.] August 1994.

Tepper, Sheri S. **Sideshow**. HarperCollins, ISBN 0-00-648004-7, 482pp, A-format paperback, £4.99. (SF novel, first published in the USA, 1992; reviewed by John Clute in *Interzone* 59.) 14th March 1994.

Vallejo, Boris. **The Boris Vallejo Portfolio**. Text by Nigel Suckling. Dragon's World/Paper Tiger, ISBN 1-85028-205-6, 64pp, very large-format paperback, £12.95. (Fantasy art portfolio, first edition; 28 colour plates plus black-and-white reproductions, beautifully produced; with its emphasis on heavily sculptured, non-naked bodies, Vallejo's art verges on the pornographic, but is undeniably well done of its sort.) 31st March 1994.

Vance, Jack. **Throy: The Cadwal Chronicles**. Bantam, New English Library, ISBN 0-450-59423-4, 298pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. [SF novel, first published in the USA, 1992; amazing how NEL have managed to make this edition seem so much fatter than the rather slim hardback; reviewed by Chris Gilmore in *Interzone* 74.] 7th April 1994.

Wilhelm, Kate. **The Best Defense**. St Martin's Press, ISBN 0-312-10937-0, 342pp, hardcover, \$21.95. (Crime novel, first edition; proof copy received; this "courtroom thriller," while not sf, does have some science content and is a follow-up to *Death Qualified* [1991], which was reviewed with praise by John Clute in *Interzone* 49.) June 1994.

Williamson, Jack. **Demon Moon**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85718-7, 349pp, hardcover, \$22.95. [SF/fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; Mr Williamson is 85 years old, and he is still "re-inventing the genre in this

fresh, exciting novel... his best in decades," according to the accompanying publicity letter from editor James Frenkel.] May 1994.

Wood, Bridget. **Sorceress**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-7861-X, 442pp, C-format paperback, cover by Paul Young, £9.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen].) 10th March 1994.

Wylie, Jonathan. **The Last Augury: Island and Empire, Book Three**. Corgi, ISBN 0-552-13980-7, 361pp, A-format paperback, cover by Geoff Taylor, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; "Jonathan Wylie" is a pseudonym of Mark and Julia Smith.) 28th April 1994.

Zell, Steve. **Wizrd**. St Martin's Press, ISBN 0-312-10577-0, 327pp, hardcover, cover by Ron Wood, \$22.95. (Horror novel, first edition; the spelling of the title, as given above, is correct; a debut novel by a new writer from Arizona.) Late entry; 14th February publication, received in March 1994.

Novelizations, Spinoffs, Sequels by Other Hands, Shared Worlds, Sharecrops

Altman, Mark A., and Edward Gross. **The Deep Space Log Book: A First Season Companion**. Bantam, ISBN 1-51283-388-2, 114pp, A-format paperback, £9.99. (Illustrated handbook to the sf TV series *Deep Space Nine*; first published in the USA, 1993.) 17th March 1994.

Findley, Nigel D. **Lone Wolf**. "Shadowrun #17," Penguin/Roc, ISBN 0-451-453-27-0, 287pp, A-format paperback, £9.99. (Shared-world sf/fantasy novel, based on a role-playing game; first published in the USA, 1994; it's copyright "FASA Corporation"; it looks as though Penguin, very sensibly, are ceasing to print their own UK editions of these books; this is the American first edition of February, "published by Roc, an imprint of Dutton Signet, a division of Penguin Books USA Inc.," with a British price sticker.) 31st March 1994.

Lawrence, J.A. **Mudd's Angels**. "Star Trek Adventures, 5." Titan, ISBN 1-85286-510-5, xii+178pp, A-format paperback, cover by Alister Pearson, £4.50. (SF television-series novelization, first published in the USA, 1978; this one is actually based on episodes of the original TV series, and was begun by James Blish; the bulk of it was completed after Blish's death by his wife, J.A. Lawrence.) 21st April 1994.

Letts, Barry. **Doctor Who: The Paradise of Death**. "Number 156 in the Target Doctor Who Library." Virgin/Doctor Who, ISBN 0-426-20413-1, 252pp, A-format paperback, cover by Alister Pearson, £4.99. (SF radio novelization, first edition; based on the BBC radio play by Letts first broadcast in 1993.) 21st April 1994.

Norton, Andre, and P.M. Griffin. **Firehand**. "The New Time Trader Novel." Tor, ISBN 0-312-85313-0, 220pp, hardcover, \$19.95. (SF novel, first edition; proof copy received; apparently a sequel to some earlier work by Norton, though we're not told exactly which; it's copyright "Andre Norton Ltd" but the dedication is by Pauline Griffin alone [to her uncle], so it's almost certainly a sharecrop.) June 1994.

Russell, Gary. **Legacy**. "The New Doctor Who Adventures." Virgin/Doctor Who, ISBN 0-426-20412-3, 301pp, A-format paperback, cover by Peter Elson, £4.99. (SF television-series spinoff novel, first edition.) 21st April 1994.

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Bennett, E.A. *Fame and Fiction: An Enquiry Into Certain Popularities*. 1901.

Ellis, Stewart Marsh. *Mainly Victorian*. 1925.

Henkin, Leo J. *Darwinism in the English Novel, 1860-1910*. 1940.

Leisy, Ernest F. *The American Historical Novel*. 1950.

Penzoldt, Peter. *The Supernatural in Fiction*. 1952.

Reynolds, Quentin James. *The Fiction Factory: or, From Pulp Row to Quality Street; the Story of 100 Years of Publishing at Street and Smith*. 1955.

Papashvily, Helen Waite. *All the Happy Endings: A Study of the Domestic Novel in America, the Women Who Wrote It, the Women Who Read It, in the Nineteenth Century*. 1956.

Dalziel, Margaret. *Popular Fiction 100 Years Ago*. 1957.

Dickinson, A.T., Jr. *American Historical Fiction*. 1958.

Murch, A.E. *The Development of the Detective Novel*. 1958.

Folsom, James K. *The American Western Novel*. 1966.

Spatz, Jonas. *Hollywood in Fiction*. 1969.

Greene, Suzanne Ellery. *Books for Pleasure: Popular Fiction 1914-45*. 1974.

Petaja, Emil. *Photoplay Edition*. 1975.

Wagner, Geoffrey. *The Novel and the Cinema*. 1975.

Irwin, W.R. *The Game of the Impossible: A Rhetoric of Fantasy*. 1976.

Rabkin, Eric S. *The Fantastic in Literature*. 1976.

Smith, Myron J., and Robert C. Weller. *Sea Fiction Guide*. 1976.

Hackett, Alice P., and J.H. Burke. *80 Years of Best Sellers*. 1977 (or any later edition).

Barclay, Glen St. John. *Anatomy of Horror: The Masters of Occult Fiction*. 1978.

Sanders, Andrew. *The Victorian Historical Novel, 1840-1880*. 1978.

Sullivan, Jack. *Elegant Nightmares: The English Ghost Story from Le Fanu to Blackwood*. 1978.

Prickett, Stephen. *Victorian Fantasy*. 1979.

Rose, Willie Lee. *Race and Religion in American Historical Fiction: Four Episodes in Popular Culture*. 1979.

Wolfe, Gary. *The Known and the Unknown: The Iconography of Science Fiction*. 1979.

Attebury, Brian. *The Fantasy Tradition in American Literature: From Irving to Le Guin*. 1980.

Lascelles, Mary. *The Story-Teller Retrieves the Past: Historical Fiction and Fictitious History in the Art of Scott, Stevenson, Kipling and Some Others*. 1980.

Marill, Alvin H. *Movies Made for Television*. 1980 (or any later edition).

Smith, Herbert F. *The Popular American Novel, 1865-1920*. 1980.

Smith, Myron J. *War Story Guide: An Annotated Bibliography of Military Fiction*. 1980.

Hicken, Marilyn E., ed. *Sequels. Vol 1: Adult Books*. 1982 (or any later edition).

Husband, Janet. *Sequels: An Annotated Guide to Novels in Sequence*. 1982 (or any later edition).

Wagar, W. Warren. *Terminal Visions: The Literature of Last Things*. 1982.

Wu, William F. *The Yellow Peril: Chinese Americans in American Fiction 1850-1940*. 1982.

Bleiler, Everett F., ed. *The Guide to Supernatural Fiction*. 1983.

Rabkin, Eric S., Martin H. Greenberg & Joseph D. Olander, eds. *The End of the World*. 1983.

Shaw, Harry E. *The Farms of Historical Fiction: Sir Walter Scott and His Successors*. 1984.

Bleiler, Everett F., ed. *Supernatural Fiction Writers; Fantasy and Horror*. 2 vols. 1985.

Alkon, Paul K. *Origins of Futuristic Fiction*. 1987.

Bargainnier, Earl F., ed. *Comic Crime*. 1987.

Sobchack, Vivian. *Screening Space: The American Science Fiction Film*. 1987.

Cohn, Jan. *Romance and the Erotics of Property: Mass-Market Fiction for Women*. 1988.

Franklin, H. Bruce. *War Stars: The Superweapon and the American Imagination*. 1988.

Breen, Jon L., and Martin Harry Greenberg, eds. *Murder Off the Rack: Critical Studies of Ten Paperback Masters*. 1989.

Nash, Walter. *Language in Popular Fiction*. 1990.

Footo, Bud. *The Connecticut Yankee in the Twentieth Century: Travel to the Past in Science Fiction*. 1991.

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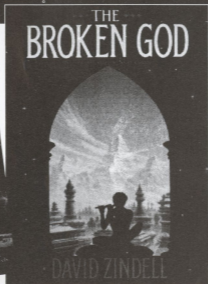
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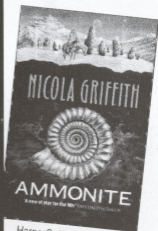
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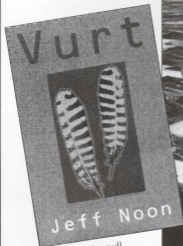
Millennium



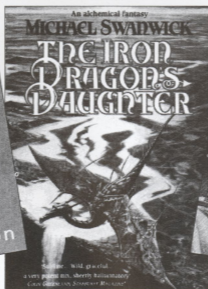
HarperCollinsPublishers



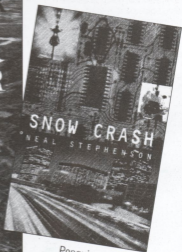
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STOP PRESS: THE WINNER OF THE ARTHUR C. CLARKE AWARD FOR 1994 IS

'VURT' by JEFF NOON

