

interzone/87

£2.50

SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

September
1994

New stories by

Paul Di Filippo

Thomas M. Disch

Timons Esaias

Andrew Lane

and others



Interviewees in *Interzone*

(Issues 13-88 inclusive; we ran no interviews before issue 13. Interviewers' surnames are given in brackets after each interviewee.)

- Acker, Kathy (Nicholls) #27, Jan/Feb 1989
Adams, Douglas (Nicholls) #66, Dec 1992
Aldiss, Brian (Greenland) #38, Aug 1990
Asprin, Robert (Nicholls) #60, Jun 1992
Atkins, Peter (Green) #81, Mar 1994
Atwood, Margaret (Tidmarsh) #65, Nov 1992
Ballard, J.G. (Pringle) #22, Winter 87/88
Ballard, J.G. (Kadrey & Pringle) #51, Sept 1991
Banks, Iain (Newman) #16, Summer 1986
Banks, Iain (Nicholls) #86, Aug 1994
Barker, Clive (Newman) #14, Winter 85/86
Barnes, Steven, & Larry Niven (Nicholls) #39, Sept 1990
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Baxter, Stephen (Munro) #50, Aug 1991
Bayley, Barrington (Pringle & Robertson) #35, May 1990
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Bisson, Terry (Feeley) #40, Oct 1990
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interzone

SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

No 87

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Interaction

Dear Editors:

I read *Interzone* avidly, primarily for the fiction but also for "Ansible Link," the reviews and again now Charles Platt.

I know I said I'd shut up about "Scottish science fiction" but then came David Pringle's review column in *IZ* 85 noting the absence of a body of work identifiable as Scottish sf (or Welsh, or Irish). The answer may be provided by the subject of the review itself. It would seem that Scottish writers prefer fantasy. (The tradition is honourable, the list impressive.) But the problem goes beyond that. How many role models does a Scottish sf writer have? Apart from J.T. McIntosh the only other old-timer I can think of is Angus McVicar. As to high-profile modern Scottish sf/fantasy writers, the names run out very quickly (Banks, Gray?...) – and those two do most of their work outside the genre, although their mainstream work is heavily tinged by sf/fantastic elements.

There is no Scottish sf marketplace. The sf outlets are all based in England. I would argue this makes it more difficult for Scottish sf to be written. Its acceptance for publication is even more problematic so I have been pleased by the recent appearance in *IZ* of a growing number of new Scottish writers, though they don't all write "Scottish" sf.

Some might even reject the label. Sf after all has to be sf first and foremost. Foreground the national characteristics and you may be dismissed out of hand. Or simply misunderstood. (In this context it is noteworthy that J.M. Barrie only got his break because an English editor wanted something "different" and Barrie's very Scottish "Tommy" stories fitted the bill. Also, the use of perfectly common Scottish words – sometimes ones which we Scots actually regard as normal English! – can be queried by English editors. Allan Massie once had to fight to have "scunner" accepted by Penguin despite its frequent use in a networked children's TV programme a few years before.)

A different set of assumptions, of cultural values, operates north

of the border. There is not, I would guess, the same harking back to a pastoral golden age, a communing with nature, which pervades so much of what I have heard described as "Home Counties" sf. There isn't, apparently, the same distrust of space opera. Whether this is due to Scotland being more rural, I doubt. The majority (circa 3/5) of Scots live in the central belt in a series of mainly grim industrial towns (which are now largely post-industrial), and the estates of, eg, Drumchapel, Easterhouse and Wester Hailes, are hardly rural idylls. I agree that no one in central Scotland lives more than two hours drive away from the most spectacular scenery but the reality of everyday life is more prosaic. By the "deracinated" criterion this surely argues for more sf, not less. (I'm not sure the argument holds in those terms, anyway. I've never been there, but I don't get the impression that Minehead, for example, is a hotbed of industry.)

Seen from the northern periphery, the British sf scene can sometimes appear as a London-Brighton axis dominated by a cliquish Saffia – with maybe a smaller Birmingham-Leeds-Liverpool one bolted on. I'm not suggesting there is a bias, just stressing the difficulties inherent in any attempt to penetrate the market from a different angle.

But even British (for which read English) sf has a limited base. There are really only a handful of cisatlantic sf writers around, though some are undeniably significant. You mention a few. (Please correct me if I'm wrong but isn't Geoff Ryman Canadian? I'm sure I've read that somewhere. Not that being born in a country makes you a cultural inhabitant. It is upbringing that is more important. Both my maternal grandparents were born in England of English families but I never knew them as anything but Scots. Ian McDonald may have dirtied a few nappies in Manchester but his accent and influences are Irish. And I would argue that he does write [Northern] Irish sf; albeit in a way that James White and Bob Shaw don't. I got the impression Geoff Ryman didn't

come to Britain till he was in his late teens/early 20s, which to my mind makes him Canadian.)

There are simply too few Scottish-aculturated exponents of sf to make a valid judgment on the matter, though it is arguable that both Banks and Gray are qualitatively different from their Southern colleagues (Gray's settings, Banks's expansiveness). As for Irish sf, I've already mentioned McDonald and, now I think of it, White and Shaw share some of Banks's grand visions. Compare the inwardness of Chris Priest's or Keith Roberts's fiction. I agree there are signs of reaching out from more recent English sf writing, *Take Back Plenty* – though not strictly space opera, being solar system bound – the early novels of Paul McAuley. The latter, like me, lives in but does not originate from, the notoriously insular Fife; but he works for that most curious bastion of Englishness, St Andrew's University. Arthur Clarke, as always, perhaps disproves the thesis, but Somerset is nearly Celtic. I apologize for my ignorance here but the only Welsh sf writer I know of is Christopher Evans. *Capella's Golden Eyes* maybe fits the broad-minded Celtic theory, but I don't think the rest of his work does.

The Northern Irish situation argues for a critical-mass assessment. Until there is a sufficient number of writers from a country to compare their work as a whole – remembering that some may show no peculiarly "national" characteristics, or may buck the trend – judgment has to be reserved.

I sense a note of expectation. There is perhaps something stirring. Witness the recent appearances in *IZ* of members of the Glasgow SF writers' group and others. In sum I would say that Scottish sf is probably there if you look for it hard enough. But you have to know where to look and what to look at. Dig under a few stones and see what you come up with.

Dr J.D. Stephen
(Jack Deighton)
Kirkcaldy, Fife

Editor: Geoff Ryman was born in

Canada and raised partially in the United States. But he has lived in Britain for at least two decades now and works for the Civil Service (which I assume means he has to have UK citizenship...?). He began his writing career here, and certainly seems to be regarded as "British" by critics on the other side of the Atlantic.

Dear Editors:

I thought I'd try comparing your yearly popularity polls to see if your stories are getting any more or any less popular. By factoring the votes down to an equivalent base of 50 voters, I produced a table from which a couple of interesting facts emerge.

First off, the pattern is pretty consistent from year to year. If your story quality had dropped suddenly, e.g. if you had published 36 real stinkers of stories last year, the vote-count at place 20 would have dropped dramatically, instead of staying at the same level. The votes haven't dropped, so I deduce that your story quality is almost exactly the same as last year. (Which somewhat disproves my own gut-feeling that 1993 was rather better.) So your quality is consistent.

Next, did you realize how remarkably popular "The Ragthorn" was? The No 1 story for 1993 was by far the highest-scoring story of the last three years. (Timons Esaias would have topped the poll in any other year.) Special honours to Kilworth and Holdstock.

But the last main point is that only "The Ragthorn" received favourable mention from more than half your voters. Even your most popular other stories received

only 22 votes out of 50 voters; in other words, about 60% of your readers were less than knocked out by your highest-placing stories. I know it's difficult to get sf fans to agree about anything, let alone their tastes in anything so subjective as their reading matter, but I do feel there should be more stand-out stories. Was this what Graham Ashley meant when he wrote that the last year had given him an impression of overall mediocrity? Maybe something needs looking at here.

This numerical exercise can't be done for unpopularity, though, because people who dislike the magazine too much will stop buying, rather than sending in negative votes. I wonder: would the degree of dislike of your least popular stories show any change?

David Redd

Haverfordwest, Dyfed

Dear Editors:

I'm afraid I must take exception to the remarks directed at me by your columnist Nick Lowe in the July issue of your magazine. Lowe refers to me as a "joke author" and suggests that I am a joint pseudonym for two other authors, Leroy Kettle and John Brosnan. This is not true and is the result of a "joke" perpetrated by John Brosnan over a decade ago and continually repeated by him over the years since then. Needless to say, I am utterly fed up with having to deny over and over again that I am fictitious.

I must also rally to the defence of the star of the film *Beyond Bedlam*, Elizabeth Hurley, who Lowe suggests gives a less than stunning performance. This is untrue. Ms Hurley is an actress of great talent

as well as being blessed with an extraordinary dress sense (and I completely deny all those rumours that have been circulating about Ms Hurley and myself – well, most of them).

Harry Adam Knight

c/o MBA Literary Agents Ltd
45 Fitzroy Street
London W1P 5HR

Dear Editors:

Before anyone starts accusing me of having an L. Ron Hubbard-like approach to the facts of my career (IZ 85, p.40), can I say it was *F&SF* and *Aboriginal* that I've sold stories to in the States – not *Asimov's* (that's next on the list). And I'd like to thank all those who voted me two places in the top 10 *Interzone* 1993 stories, plus my editor, my agent, my parents, my vicar, my cat...

But, yes, I'll keep contributing to *IZ* – support your local sf magazine. Meanwhile, I'm working on the novel.

Ben Jeapes

Abingdon, Oxon

Dear Editors:

The Rohmer Review, listed by Norbert Spehner in the letters column in your June issue among the "deceased-author zines," has not published an issue since no. 18, dated Spring/Summer 1981.

I would like to add to your list of genre journals *CADS*, a very well-edited British fanzine specializing in "crime and detective stories," edited and published by Geoff Bradley, 9 Vicarage Hill, South Benfleet, Essex, SS7 1PA. Number 23 was published in May, and it appears about three times a year.

Walter Albert

Pittsburgh, PA

Please write to *Interzone* – we may not be able to reply to every letter, but we're always interested to hear readers' responses. Unless otherwise stated, all letters will be considered for publication.



After Jerome Bagley was graduated from Maya Angelou High School in Brooklyn in 1998, he spent the next 12 years either unemployed or attending a variety of vocational and pre-vocational classes at City College and its affiliates. He studied computer programming, hair styling, substance abuse counselling, auto repair and maintenance, cake decorating, and introductory Sanskrit, but none of these efforts ever led to an actual salaried position. Then one day his parole officer, Mona Schuyler, suggested that he look into the possibility of reading books for money, and showed him the ad, in the back pages of *The National Endowment*, that told him where to write in order to find out if he was qualified.

He was! His educational background showed him to be the kind of all-things-considered reader that publishers were looking for. He might well enjoy a career in readership if he were willing to make a strong personal commitment and enlist in the career development programme sponsored by the Yaddo Reading Institute of Boca Raton, Florida. Jerome filled in the Institute's two-page questionnaire and faxed

it in, together with his cheque for \$50. The very next day the Institute's Aptitude Profile arrived, and Jerome began answering the Profile's 350 multiple-choice questions. Some answers he was certain he got right: America's Number One Best-Selling Author since 1984 was (c) Stephen King. Tennessee Williams was the author of the immortal 1948 tragedy (a) *A Salesman Named Desire*. Hyperbole was (b) a rare disorder of the lymph nodes. Others he was not so certain of, but he knew enough about test-taking to rule out obvious wrong choices and then flip a coin. In any case, as the Institute's brochure explained, the important thing wasn't getting exactly the right answer. He wasn't a contestant on "Jeopardy." The important thing was an attitude of confidence, affirmation, and a sheer love of reading.

Jerome mailed in the Aptitude Profile with a cheque for \$200 and waited. But not for long. A week later he got a signed letter from Mr Yaddo himself, the head of the Institute, congratulating him on his responsiveness, energy, and knack. Mr Yaddo said that Jerome's Aptitude Profile was absolutely unique



THE
MAN
WHO
READ
A
BOOK

Illustrations by Noel Bateman

THOMAS
M. DISCH

according to the Institute's 7-trillion-byte databank, and he personally promised Jerome that he would be hearing from interested publishers in no time at all, publishers who would be paying him top dollar in order to find out what he, JEROME BAGLEY, thought about their books.

His name was written just like that, with every letter a capital letter. Looking at his name in such big letters, it was almost like seeing it on the cover of one of the books he might have to read. Jerome went to Wal-Mart and bought a picture frame the exact same size as the letter, and he hung the letter, in the frame, on the wall behind his dormitory cot, where everyone would see it.

Then he received a letter from a publisher, Alfred Kopf, who had heard about Jerome from Mr Yaddo and wanted him to read one of the books he'd published and tell him what he thought about it. For this service Alfred Kopf was prepared to pay Jerome \$50. A copy of the book Mr Kopf wanted him to read accompanied his letter. It was the new revised edition of one of their most popular titles, *A Collector's Guide*

to *Plastic Purses*. Jerome didn't know that much about plastic purses, but Mr Kopf wasn't hiring him for his expertise but for his gut reaction as a Common Reader.

Jerome found himself a quiet area, far from the TV, in the dorm lounge and settled down to read the book then and there. It was incredibly boring, but there were lots of pictures, so it didn't take as much time to read it as he'd originally feared. When he'd finished reading it, he filled out the Official Reader's Report, stating in 200 words or less his own personal opinion that *A Collector's Guide to Plastic Purses* was not a book that most people would want to read, but that it would certainly have an appeal for anyone who collected plastic purses. He was tempted to add that he'd never known anyone who did collect plastic purses and had never even seen a plastic purse like the ones in the book. He didn't want to seem overly negative the first time he worked for Mr Kopf. For all he knew, the man had already made a big investment in the book and wouldn't be happy to hear what Jerome honestly thought, which was that plastic purses sucked.

A week later Jerome received a cheque for \$50 signed by Mr Kopf, along with a note from Mr Kopf's assistant, Betty Kreiner, thanking him for his valuable input. Jerome could hardly believe his good luck. He was employed! Just as the ad had promised, he was earning real money just by reading books!

The very next day he got a phone call from Mr Yaddo himself, congratulating him on his first success in his career in professional readership. It surprised Jerome a little to think that Mr Yaddo already knew about the work he'd done for Alfred Kopf, but as the lecturer had explained in his computer programming course, we live in an age when data flows at almost the speed of light, and the data knows, all by itself, where it ought to go. Anyhow, Mr Yaddo was delighted for Jerome, and wanted to invite him to take part in a seminar that Mr Yaddo was planning to conduct for a select group of professional readers in his own apartment. The fee for attending the seminar was rather steep, \$1,500, but most of it would be paid by a National Endowment Fellowship, if Jerome would take the time to fill out the application Mr Yaddo would be sending him and return it to the National Endowment Office in Boca Raton, Florida.

"Well, Jerome, what do you think?" Mr Yaddo asked.

"I don't know," said Jerome. "It's a lot of money."

"It is," Mr Yaddo agreed. "But faint heart ne'er won fair maid."

"What?" Jerome asked.

"Nothing ventured, nothing gained."

"Yeah," said Jerome.

"This could be your big break, fella," Mr Yaddo said with great conviction.

"Okay, I guess so, sure."

There was a whirring sound at the other end of the line, and then a different voice announced, "You have been speaking with the simulated intelligence of Yaddo Incorporated of Boca Raton, Florida. The Corporation stands behind all statements that have been made as being essentially similar to any that Mr Yaddo himself would have made, were he available. Thank you for your interest and cooperation. And good luck in your new career as a Reader."

Two weeks later Jerome appeared promptly at Mr Yaddo's apartment, which was in the World Trade Centre, and looked more like a class-space than an apartment someone might live in. He was met at the door by a Chinese girl, who introduced herself as Tracy Wu and said she was Mr Yaddo's protégée, whatever that was. She accepted the copy of *A Collector's Guide to Plastic Purses*, which Jerome had gift-wrapped as a present for Mr Yaddo, and put it on a table beside other gift-wrapped presents. Then she led him to his seat in the third row of folding chairs that faced a king-size Sony Holo-Man.

"Isn't Mr Yaddo going to be here in person?" he asked Tracy, before she could go back to the door to welcome the next participant.

"He may or he may not," said Tracy with an enigmatic Oriental smile. "Mr Yaddo is nothing if not unpredictable. But if he isn't here in person, he will surely be here in spirit. We'll know in just a moment, won't we. Now, please excuse me, duty calls."

Participants continued to arrive for the next half-hour, which gave Jerome time to get acquainted with those sitting on either side of him, who were, just like him, newcomers to the profession of Readership. On his left was Ms Lorelei Hummell, from Yonkers, a single mom with four children, who intended to specialize in books about Satanism and UFOs. On his right was Studs Liebowitz, a gay plumber with a Mohawk haircut whose chief interest in literature was books about the history of pro wrestling. By a strange coincidence, Studs had also prepared an Official Reader's Report for Alfred Kopf on *A Collector's Guide to Plastic Purses*, so they had something to talk about while they waited for Mr Yaddo or his simulation to appear. At last, when all the participants had arrived, the Sony Holo-Man luminesced, and there was Mr Yaddo, in larger-than-life simulation, wearing a five-piece Armani Suit and smoking a large Prestige Brand symbolic cigar, the kind that smells like room deodorant and can't give anyone cancer.

The Yaddo simulation blew a gigantic smoke ring toward the assembled participants, which dissolved into purple fizz as it reached the perceptual boundary of holographic space. It leaned forward and seemed to look at each participant directly in his or her eyes.

"Let's be honest with each other," it said. "Nobody likes to read. Okay?"

There was a murmur of muted dissent and a few cautious chuckles. From the last row of seats, Tracy Wu, Mr Yaddo's protégée, raised her voice. "Then why are we here, Mr Yaddo? We're all readers."

Ms Lorelei Hummell nodded vigorously. "I love to read," she insisted, turning toward Jerome. "I read all the time. I am an avaricious reader. What's he talking about?"

"This is what I'm getting at." It paused. "Got your laptops open?"

"Are we supposed to be taking notes?" Studs Liebowitz whispered. "I thought this was going to be more like a party. It's just another damned lecture."

"Reading," said the Yaddo simulation, "is a dying art. It began to die when the movies were invented more than a century ago, and at this point genuine readers are an endangered species, as rare as the white rhinoceros. By readers I mean people who actually sit down a few hours every day with a book in their hands, turning the pages and reading what's printed on each page. It is not a natural activity. It takes training, application, and ambition. And if you want to make a career of it, it also takes connections. Which is why we're all here tonight, to learn to network, to rub shoulders, to earn big bucks."

"Right on!" Studs shouted out.

The Yaddo simulation smiled in Studs's direction.

"As professionals in the book field, we often ask ourselves, why do books exist? What practical purpose do they serve that our computers don't do better? What entertainment can they provide that isn't better provided by the flick of a switch? Maybe these are not the right questions to ask. Maybe we're looking through the wrong end of the telescope. Because the simple fact is that books exist because there is a gigantic industry that is in the business of making books. It is a faltering industry, admittedly, but it's still huge, and lots of jobs depend on it, our own included."

Studs leaned sideways and whispered into Jerome's

ear, "I wish he'd cut to the chase and tell us which publishers to contact who want people to read books about pro wrestling. The rest of this is just a lot of crap as far as I'm concerned."

"Fortunately, we are not the first major industry to face such a crisis. When the tobacco industry experienced a similar crisis long ago, the Government stepped in and provided subsidies for tobacco farmers so they could continue producing a product that was less and less in demand. The same was done for breeders of Angora goats and for the Savings and Loan industry. When the publishing crisis loomed, the Government was ready. Thanks to the National Endowment this country now has more writers producing more books in more categories than ever before, and this in despite of the fact that almost no one reads any of them. Fortunately, paper is highly recyclable, and so after most of these books have been warehoused long enough for tax purposes, they can be made into other books, in the same way that tobacco plants can be ploughed back into the soil to grow new tobacco plants."

The Yaddo simulation paused to savour its symbolic cigar. This gave Ms Lorelei Hummell time enough to raise her hand. "Excuse me, Mr Yaddo. I have a question."

With a silken shiver of its Armani suit, the simulation shifted into interactive mode. "Yes, Ms Hummell?"

"I have read a lot of books. I mean a *lot* of them. So I can't agree with you about no one reads books any more. I have a bookcase *full* of books, mostly about UFOs and Satanic child abuse. So when I joined the Institute I naturally expected that I'd be sent books that related to my own special interest areas. But instead I got this book of poetry."

A murmur of sympathy passed through the participants, like the wind stirring a field of wheat.

The Yaddo simulation furrowed its brow. "What were the poems about, Ms —" It paused as though searching its memory for her name. "— Hummell?"

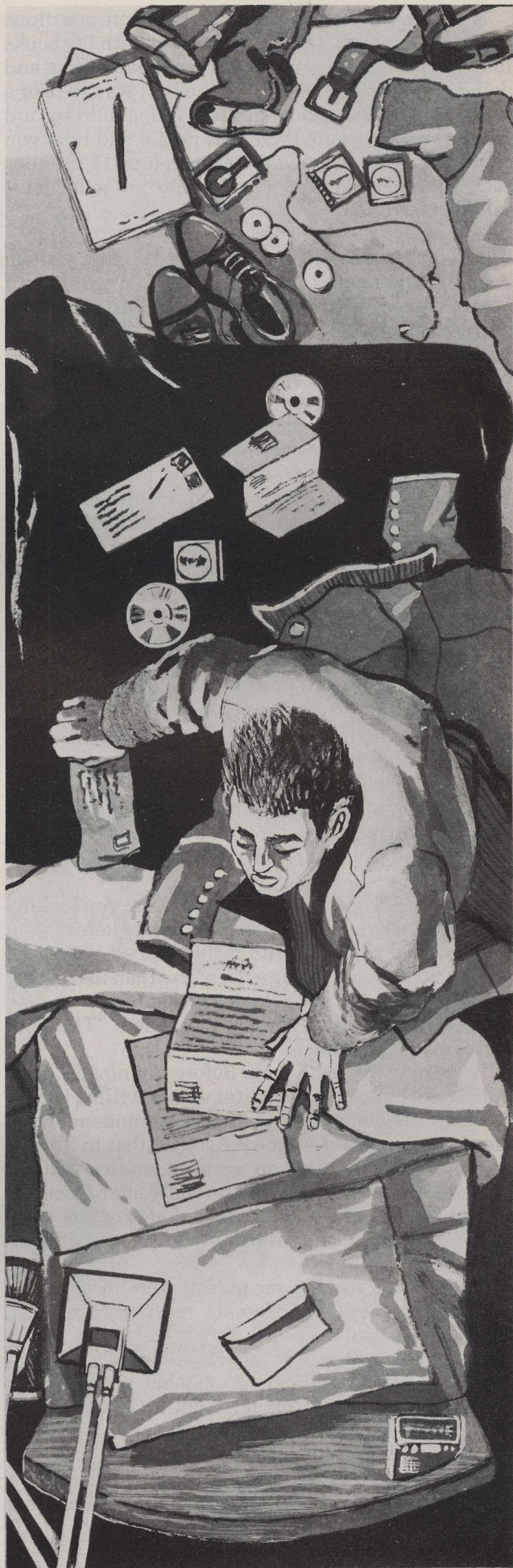
"They weren't about anything at all in particular that I could see. The weather, sometimes, I guess. And maybe somebody died at some point, but that was never clear. I didn't know that poetry was *supposed* to be about something. If I had, I might not have given the book as high a rating. Anyhow, what I wanted to ask you about —"

"Poetry," declared the simulation, overriding Ms Hummell, "isn't about anything. According to one great poet, it just is, period. According to another, it's a real toad in an imaginary garden, and the poet herself says she dislikes it. So it's small wonder if ordinary people dislike it even more. But that's why people are *paid* to read it. Now you tell me you *like* to read books about Satanic child abuse. And so, of course, do millions of other readers. It's one of the few genuinely popular genres left, because it speaks to the fears and curiosity of every parent. But those books don't need a subsidized readership the way poetry does. Does that answer your question, Ms Hummell?"

"I guess so. Thank you."

"It sounds," Studs stage-whispered, "like we're going to be stuck with plastic purses."

Jerome nodded glumly.



The Yaddo simulation fielded a few more questions from seminar participants dissatisfied with the books they'd had to read, and then it switched tracks and delivered a long speech about the best way to read a book, including practical tips like you should try and sit somewhere where there was no TV and how you should try and set aside the same ten or 15 minutes each day and make it an absolute rule not to let yourself be interrupted.

Then the seminar was officially over, though everyone was invited by Tracy Wu to have a glass of strawberry-kiwi punch and do some networking.

The punch wasn't free, but Jerome didn't find that out till he'd already asked for a glass and taken a sip. At that point, having forked over five bucks, he felt he had to finish the punch, so he stuck around and introduced himself to some of the other participants, who always wanted to know did he work for a publisher. When he told them he didn't, that was the end of any conversation. They were looking for another book to read, of course, but was that a licence for bad manners?

Finally, just to have some fun, he told the next person who asked that yes, he was an editor at Alfred Kopf.

"An editor! That's wonderful," the man enthused. He was the small, nervous type with a fox terrier haircut and beard, short and bristly, and the same apparent disposition. "They said there'd be editors and publicists here, but you're the first one that I've run into. I was beginning to think this whole thing was some kind of con game."

Jerome's was not a naturally suspicious nature, but now that the man had thrown out the possibility, he had to wonder whether he might not be on to something.

"Are you a reader?" Jerome asked. "Are you looking for a new assignment? Is that why you're here?"

"No," said the man with a thin-lipped weaselly smile, "no, I'm something even worse than that – from an editor's point of view. I am a writer."

"You write books?" Jerome marvelled. "The kind that publishers publish?"

"That remains to be seen. Before my novel can be published, I must find an editor who is willing to read it. And I understand, from my correspondence with the Scott Fitzgerald Literary Agency, that to find an editor I must first find an agent, a service that Mr Fitzgerald offered to perform but only after receiving an initial reading fee that I balked at. For the same price I could publish the book myself in an edition of 500 copies."

"Hey, would you like me to read your book?"

The man regarded Jerome with amazement. "Would you want to?"

Jerome tried to assume the world-weary manner of a professional editor of books, someone who had read dozens all the way through. "Well, like Mr Yaddo says, no one wants to read books. It's a job, isn't it?"

"How much?"

"How much?" Jerome echoed.

"How much do you want to be paid to read my book?"

"Well, I'm not quite sure... I mean I didn't mean to suggest..."

"A thousand dollars?"

"A thousand dollars!"

"One and a half, then. It's all I can afford."

"Well, that's very generous, Mister, um –"

"Swindling. Lucius Swindling." He dropped his paper cup of punch into the trash puppy that had positioned itself by his knee and he offered his hand to Jerome.

Jerome gave the trash puppy his own paper cup, accepted Swindling's hand, and agreed that they had a deal, with two provisos: Swindling must pay him his reading fee in cash and he must deliver the manuscript in person and not Fedex it. It was easier than dealing dope.

Swindling agreed, and they met the next day at noon outside the legendary Union Square Cafe. Two of the tables inside served as the Manhattan office of Alfred Kopf, where its top editors lunched with other top editors and with celebrities wanting to sell their life stories and sex videos to the media. The more labour-intensive divisions of the company's business were based elsewhere, chiefly in Quito, Ecuador.

Jerome counted through the little sheaf of bills and accepted the little envelope containing the disc of Swindling's manuscript.

"You understand," said Jerome, slipping the manuscript into the pocket of the 100% cotton White Collar T-shirt he'd bought specifically for this occasion, "that I can't guarantee you that Kopf will want to publish your book. All I can promise is that I will read it."

"Yes, yes. But I do count on your writing me a rejection letter with a few remarks that show you actually read the book and some concrete suggestions for how I might go about re-writing it. A letter like that can make all the difference when the evaluation team at the NEA is going over my application for a revision stipend."

"You had a grant to write your book?" Jerome had all this while been thinking that the Swindling man was an old-fashioned kind of fanatic who wrote books because he wanted to.

"I've four grants," Swindling said, and ticked them off: "National Endowment, United Way, Advocates for the Disadvantaged, and a matching grant that went with the Advocates award from Prose Writers in Prison."

Jerome expressed polite surprise. "Gee, you don't look disadvantaged to me."

Swindling glared at him. "I have dyslexia."

"Dyslexia" rang a bell, but very faintly. It was one of those words like "polyunsaturated" that someone had explained to him once, probably in school, but the explanation had come unglued, and now the word was like a disc without a label. It seemed safe to say, "Well, that's too bad," and move on to an exchange of numbers. Jerome coded his phone to take calls from Swindling's and vice versa, and then they said good-bye.

Jerome wondered, as he fingered the roll of bills, whether this was, technically, a white-collar crime, and if so, whether it would have been called something more complicated than just fraud, and counted as a felony or a misdemeanour.

But what the hell, it was a job, and when was the last time he had a job? Swindling wanted a letter of rejection. He'd read his book and give him what he wanted.

It wasn't that easy. If *A Collector's Guide to Plastic Purses* had been a punishment, *The Last of the Leather Stockings* was cruel and unusual. It just about filled the disc and it was almost impossible to tell what it was about. Sometimes it was about a guy called Natty Bumpo, which made you think it might be funny (but it never was), and other times it was about a woman in ancient times called Madame Bovary, and then for a while it was about Swindling himself, who seemed to be some kind of serial killer, which might have been interesting, if he'd got into it, but Jerome figured he'd have made a better serial killer himself. Swindling had no imagination when it came to killing women. Any night on TV you could do better without even switching channels.

About half way through Swindling's book Jerome had a brainstorm. If it was worth Swindling's while to pay Jerome 1,500 dollars to read his book and reject it, think what he must be getting paid to write it! So...

It was a simple thing to copy the disc and then change the name Swindling, each time it occurred, to Bagley, and Lucius to Jerome. The title also had to go, since the NEA's computer probably kept track of things by their titles. While he was deleting the title, Jerome also accidentally lost the first chapter, but that had been the boring part about Natty Bumpo, so getting rid of it was probably an improvement. Once he'd made that conceptual leap – the idea that he could change what was on the disc – Jerome was off and running. He downloaded the latest issue of *I'm a Writer* magazine and followed the advice of an article called "How to Write a Book," which was to write about things you know something about.

Jerome tried to think of something he knew anything about. There wasn't that much, but what there was he stuck into the book. He'd studied hair styling, so in all the parts of the book where Madame Bovary appeared she had her hair styled in some new way. It was frosted and braided and teased up into a buffalo and clipped down to elflocks. And where the serial killer was cutting up his victim's bodies, Jerome brought his cake decorating know-how to bear. He sprinkled some choice samples from his introductory Sanskrit course here and there, along with pointers on lubricating the suspension system for an '04 model Toyota Aida and how to deal with idle stop solenoids. The book kept getting longer and longer, and Jerome began to feel the thrill of authorship, as described in *I'm a Writer* magazine.

He retitled the new manuscript *I Iced Madame Bovary* by Jerome N. Bagley. He didn't usually use his middle initial, but somehow, even before he'd printed the manuscript out, it seemed like the sort of name a writer would have: Jerome N. Bagley.

He did not forget that he had an obligation to write a letter to Swindling. "Dear Mr Swindling," he wrote, on a piece of stationery he'd designed so it looked like it came from the Kopf office at the Union Square Cafe, "Everyone here has been very impressed with your long book, *The Last of the Leather Stockings*. The first chapter shows unmistakable talent, and the character of Natty Bumpo is very interesting and original. However, we do feel that it needs revision! Concentrate more on Natty Bumpo and less on Madame Bovary. Maybe get rid of her altogether or give her a name that is more believable. Also, there is too much sex and



serial murder. Can't you substitute something in place of that? For instance, plastic purses. At Kopf we are very interested in plastic purses. These are only suggestions, of course. Basically we are very excited about *The Last of the Leather Stockings*. Keep up the good work. Sincerely, Jerome N. Bagley."

A week later, at his regular session with his parole officer, Jerome announced that he had decided to become a writer, and that, in fact, he'd written a book.

"You've written a book?" Mona Schuyler marvelled. "What kind of book?"

"Sort of a big one," Jerome replied. He showed her the manuscript, which he'd had printed out on 496 pages of real paper.

She leaned across her desk and lifted up some of the pages to verify that they weren't blank. On every page there were sentences and paragraphs. "I'm amazed," she said. "A book."

"It's about sex," Jerome volunteered. "And killing. Like you'd see on TV, only I've written it all out."

Mona read the title page aloud: "*I Iced Madame Bovary*."

"By Jerome N. Bagley," Jerome pointed out with modest pride.

"It's a novel?"

"Yeah, I suppose so. You can read it if you want to."

Mona shook her head primly. "No, I'm not much of a reader myself. But you know what you should do, don't you?"

He knew, but he wanted to hear it from her. "What should I do?"

"You should apply for a grant."

"How do I do that?"

She explained.

It took most of the money he'd taken from Swindling to print out 40 more copies of the manuscript and Fedex them to the appropriate federal, state and city agencies and to enter it in the different competitions sponsored by publishers and writers' groups.

The first responses were not encouraging. The Great Writers Society thanked him for his contribution but pointed out that only Tentative Members were allowed to compete for the Harold Brodkey Memorial Award for Exceptional Early Promise, and it would cost him \$500 to become a Tentative member. The Authors' Guild, the Fiction Union, and American PEN provided similar disappointments.

And then he won the Pushcart Prize! The news came in a big envelope that announced that JEROME K. BAGLEY was a Pushcart Prize Winner and a contender for the Grand Prize of \$100,000 and that his book might be optioned by a Major Hollywood Studio. He read through the letter carefully to see if there were any strings attached, and there weren't, except for a coupon that allowed him to purchase, at a substantial discount, 50 copies of the *Pushcart Prize Anthology* in which an excerpt from *I Iced Madame Bovary* was scheduled to appear. The letter was signed by Isaac Pushcart himself.

He was a little miffed that Mr Pushcart had got his middle initial wrong, and when he returned the coupon he pointed out, in a polite way, that he was Jerome N. Bagley, not Jerome K. But that didn't help. When the 50 copies of the Anthology arrived at his

dorm, he was still Jerome K. Bagley. It didn't matter. Because there, on page 856 of the Anthology, was the excerpt that he'd written, the chapter in which Jerome Bagley decorates a Lady Baltimore cake with the minced heart and liver of Emma Bovary. The best part of all was the paragraph after "By Jerome K. Bagley" that said that he was a writer to watch out for, and that *I Iced Madame Bovary* was a brilliant contribution to the New Wave Postmodern Splatterpunk Novel, worthy to be compared to the work of Bret Eastern Alice.

Jerome made copies of the letter Mr Pushcart had sent him and of what it said in the anthology about his brilliant contribution and sent them off to all the places he'd applied to for grants, then he waited for the results. They didn't come at once but when they did Jerome K. Bagley hit the jackpot. The National Endowment for the Arts awarded him a special citation for Writers Living in Dormitories, with an annual stipend for \$2,500 renewable for five years. The New York State Council for the Novel offered him a Tenured Fellowship in their programme for bringing artists into homeless shelters. It paid him \$8,000 a year, in return for which he was to give intensive workshops in Creative Writing at selected shelters in the Bronx and Queens. And the City of New York awarded him a grant of \$5,438.92 so that he could be videotaped by the Department of Parks and Performance Arts while he read passages from *I Iced Madame Bovary*, which would be simultaneously signed for the deaf.

He didn't, in the end, win the Grand Pushcart Prize of \$100,000, but by the time he got the bad news about that, he was already at work on his second novel and he'd been elected to the executive board of the New York office of the American Council for Literacy.

What worked for Jerome Bagley could work for you, too, readers! All that's required is an attitude of confidence, affirmation, and a sheer love of reading. So why don't you do what Jerome did and *earn big bucks by reading books!* If you want to know how to get started just mail a self-addressed stamped envelope to the American Council for Literacy, National Endowment of the Arts, Washington, D.C. and enclose your non-refundable cheque for \$500.

You'll be hearing from us soon.

Thomas M. Disch last appeared in these pages with "The Story of Faith" (issue 82). His new novel, *The Priest: A Gothic Romance*, has just been published in the UK by Orion/Millennium. He lives in New York state and has been a distinguished contributor to the sf and horror genres for many years, as well as a poet, theatre critic and much more.

Andrew Lane makes his first appearance in *Interzone* with the following story (although he contributed several non-fiction items to our now-defunct sister magazine, *MILLION*). He is the author of two novels in the "New Adventures of Doctor Who" series, the most recent being *All-Consuming Fire* (Virgin, 1994) in which the Doctor meets Sherlock Holmes. Andy Lane lives in London.

Lovers, and Other Strangers

Andrew Lane

Amarah and I went hunting camels the day before her shuttle launched.

The frozen ground of the Steppes rang beneath the horses' hooves as we rode. Behind us the tower blocks of Star City cluttered the skyline: ahead the wilderness of Kazakhstan was broken by skeletal gantries and pitted expanses of concrete. Every few hundred yards our path crossed one of the other avenues of open ground that linked one side of the Tyuratam Cosmodrome to the other. On our right a waist-high monkey puzzle of pipes and tubes led to a cluster of liquid hydrogen and oxygen tanks on the horizon. A battleground of blast pits and launch pads, scarred and blackened by the heat of regular launches, stretched away on the left.

"Look, Veronique!" Amarah shouted, pointing clumsily with her gloved hand to where three mangy wolves stood watching us with hungry eyes. One took a few tentative steps as we rode by. I thought I could hear it whining, but it could have been the biting Kazakh wind as it whistled around the fuel pipes. I could tell from the way Amarah slowed down that she wanted to take a pot shot at them, but the wolves around the Cosmodrome were notoriously wary of people who looked as if they could protect themselves. Besides, unlike the camels, their flesh was tough and their pelts almost worthless on the black market.

By the time the sun had fallen to the horizon we had found no camels and ridden so far across Tyuratam that we could see the current launch pad. The *Energiya* rocket was already bathed in lights, and even from a few miles away we could see the frantic pre-launch preparations. Amarah's face was a mask of joyful pride as she gazed up at the *Buran* shuttle, which clung to the booster assembly like a lovesick peasant. She looked pure, strong, as if she was posing for a painting in the Stalin-approved school of Patriotic Realism. She looked beautiful.

When the light began to fail we started back for home – or the place I had been calling home for three weeks whilst waiting for the launch and falling in love with Amarah. I still found it hard to believe that a place like Star City existed. For a while, of course, neither could anybody else. Soviet press releases had always referred to it as the Baikonur Cosmodrome in a vain attempt to confuse Western intelligence agencies, although it was hundreds of kilometres from Baikonur. Now the press releases were using the UN

launch as a selling point, trying to attract commercial interest in the launch site. One place: two histories. It's a funny old world.

As we reached the outskirts of the town Amarah reined in her horse and motioned for me to do the same. I started to speak, but she shushed me.

Something moved in the shadows close to a concrete blast shelter. A large, blunt head appeared near to the ground, cropping at the sparse grasses. As the camel moved forward its sinuous neck emerged into the horizontal rays of sunset, followed by a lumpy body set atop ungainly and splayed legs. Another camel followed it out into the light, and then another. Amarah reached into her jacket and pulled out her heavy Makarov pistol. The lead camel, scenting something new in the air, raised its head. Its eyes were large, brown, and ringed with lashes. It seemed to be looking directly at me. Amarah raised the gun and squinted along it at the camel's head. After a pause long enough for me to count the sores on its skin, Amarah lowered the gun. The camel looked away, and continued browsing. The rest of the herd slowly followed as it moved incuriously away.

I looked across at Amarah.

"Cash on four legs," I sighed. "You always tell me how underpaid the space industry is compared with Europe."

"Don't, Veronique," she murmured. "I just couldn't ..."

"Blinovitch will be pissed off. He's already got orders in for the meat."

"Blinovitch can go screw himself," she said. "Tomorrow's a big day. I keep thinking: André and I are going to be the first people ever to meet an alien race! I don't want to spoil it by killing." She paused, and smiled. "Not even a camel."

We rode back in silence, but by the time we reached the small cooperative where the horses were stabled we had achieved some kind of tacit understanding. As we walked across the squares and wide *prospekts* of Star City, emptier now that the workers were preparing for the launch, I felt Amarah's hand slip into mine. By the time we had reached her room in one of the many apartment blocks we were smiling at each other, and by the time we were in her bed it was as if we had never argued.

In the afterglow of passion, as condensation trickled

down the windows, I reached across Amarah for my tape recorder.

"Do you mind?"

"What the hell," she said, smiling contentedly and nodding towards the device. "I know you have to. And we wouldn't have met if it hadn't been for that thing."

She was right, of course. As *Le Monde's* Russian stringer I usually spent most of my time reporting on back-stabbing in Parliament and drive-by shootings in St Petersburg. When the UN announced that their representative was being flown to the orbital rendezvous with the mysterious aliens in the off-again-on-again Russian shuttle *Buran*, I had been on the first flight out to Star City. Chance of a lifetime.

Amarah gazed up at me as I supported myself on one elbow. Her hand slowly ran down my side. Her smile was beautiful: it was the first thing I had noticed when I had interviewed her: the pilot who would take André Ferrand to the Cimliss spacecraft. It had broken my journalistic concentration and made me watch her as a person, made me aware of the way she smelled, the way her hair moved, the curve of her neck into her shoulder.

"So, Amarah Polovska," I said, pressing the *RECORD* button, "how do you feel on the evening before your launch?"

She reached up and pulled me down towards her.

"I thought you were supposed to be an *investigative* journalist?" she whispered.

The dictaphone went on recording, but we weren't talking.

Although I felt, and was usually treated, like one of the launch team, I was watching alongside selected representatives of the world's press from the observation lounge as the shuttle climbed into the pure blue sky. Amarah's calm, professional voice was being piped through into the lounge. Blinovitch, the big, bearded UN representative and local black marketeer, kept feeding us tea spiked with vodka. There seemed to be no problems with the booster separations. Long after the fragile metal container vanished from sight its plume hung suspended in the still air. And then, just as a stable orbit was about to be achieved, I heard André's voice in the background.

"Polovska! Look at that!"

"*Bozhe moi!* They're beautiful."

"Ground Control," André said, more formally, "we have visual contact with the Cimliss craft." He sounded as though he knew posterity would be listening. "They're...ah...reddish, and covered with...ah...extrusions..."

"Spikes," Amarah murmured.

"Spikes, and there must be 20 of them. Size difficult to estimate..."

"But they're big."

"But they're big, and —"

"*Buran*," the calm, professional voice of Ground Control broke in, "please check your position."

Amarah read out a string of numbers."

"*Buran*, please confirm that position."

I felt a slow shiver pass up my spine. Blinovitch glanced over at me and smiled in reassurance, but I could see that he was concerned. A ripple of unease

passed through the crowd. Journalists spoke urgently to camera or to dictaphone.

Amarah read another string of numbers back: they sounded identical to me, and I could hear the worry in her voice.

"*Buran*, we have a slight problem. You appear to have drifted slightly off course. Please check your attitude control thrusters."

"We show fuel states normal, and all failsafes operative," Amarah responded instantly. She must have already anticipated the request.

"*Buran*, radar shows that a normal orbit can be achieved, but you'll be about a hundred kilometres from where the Cimliss asked for you to be. I'm sure they won't mind." Irony tinged Ground Control's voice. "We'll ask them to come and pick you up."

"No problem, Ground Control," Amarah said, relieved. "Please tell them —"

There was a sudden burst of static, and then nothing but the hum of a dead carrier wave. I wasn't a technician, I had never seen a launch before, so I didn't know whether this was standard practice or not, but the sudden flurry of activity in the observation suite and the questions which Ground Control were barking, and which neither Amarah nor André were answering, made me worry. The ground suddenly felt as if it had vanished from beneath my feet. Blinovitch glanced towards me, frowning, and said something, but I was insulated from the rest of the world in a hot little bubble of my own, and I could not hear him.

I don't remember anything between then and when I burst through the doors to the cold, cavernous room they called Ground Control with Blinovitch trying to hold me back. People in jeans and T-shirts were standing around, doing nothing. I was the first and last of the journalists in, and that was only because my relationship with Amarah had spread during the weeks of our relationship to include Blinovitch and the rest of the technicians and operators. The press were outsiders; I was almost family.

There was no agitation. There was no confusion. Just bewilderment and a terrible sense of finality. Some people were attempting to get through to the UN or the Commonwealth Space Organization offices at Moscow or Alma-Ata on the telephones and announce the news, but from what I could hear of their curses the exchanges were continually busy.

I threaded my way through the rows of consoles until I stood before the main screen. It was displaying what I guessed to be a radar picture of the area where...where the *Buran* should have been. There was nothing but a blurred area now, dispersing and fading as I watched, and a mass of signals nearby which must have been the Cimliss spacecraft.

I felt like the picture: blurred, almost lost in static.

Blinovitch placed his hands on my shoulders. I wanted to ask him what had happened, but the words jammed in my throat. I wanted to scream, or to cry, but everything was trapped inside me.

"One moment the shuttle was there," he said from behind me, his voice a cheap cigarette rasp in my ear. I could feel him shrug. "The next moment, it wasn't. They got their orbital insertion wrong. A problem with the booster, little bit more thrust in an unexpected

direction, it happens. Not usually important. Don't know what happened."

"They were destroyed," one of the computer operators said behind me. "The aliens, they are invading!"

"It must have been an accident," someone else yelled from across the room. "A collision..."

As the argument began, I slipped away. Part of me knew I should be interviewing, reporting, acting as *Le Monde's* person on the spot. A spot, at least. The rest of me just wanted to lash out at anybody who tried to stop me curling up in the observation lounge with one of Blinovitch's bottles of black-market vodka and watching the end of the world.

In the end, it didn't matter. Whatever reports I could have filed would probably have been duplicated 20 times over by the massed ranks of the press. The alien Cimliss made every page of every paper and every minute of air time for the next few days. Wars were ignored and economies neglected as they apologized for the loss of our shuttle, claiming that its unexpected course correction had made it drift into the path of whatever mighty engines pushed their ships across space. "Like a pigeon sucked into a propeller," the British tabloid press had said in a grisly, but apt, phrase. I almost passed out when I first heard it, but frequent repetition dulled the pain.

The Cimliss went on to suggest that perhaps it would be better if they landed, and did so, in Ecuador. I sat for most of that day and the following night watching CNN with Blinovitch and some of the technicians in Ground Control. Blinovitch had broken out his last crate of vodka. "After all," he said, "it's history."

In what we assumed at the time was just the turmoil of the moment, the newsreaders referred to the tragic explosion of the *American* shuttle soon after launch. There was a near riot amongst the technicians. Blinovitch threatened to rip the wire out of the plug if they didn't shut up and listen.

An hour later, after on-the-spot footage of the Cimliss spacecraft nestling amongst the trees and a live broadcast from the American President, CNN circled back briefly to the *Buran*. They were still referring to it as *American*, but this time they mentioned in passing that the French Government had claimed not only André Ferrand but also Amarah Polovska as French citizens.

Soon after that a technician who had been listening to the World Service on his radio heard the BBC talking about an accident involving two British astronauts on the UN diplomatic mission launched from Kazakhstan.

We just looked at each other, aghast. They had been our friends, and we felt as if we were losing them all over again.

It was two hours later that Sky News reported new information. By now the Cimliss had invited all heads of Government to meet them, but all we were interested in was mentions of the *Buran*. This time it was the Japanese Prime Minister who, in a speech to his people, referred in passing to the tragic deaths of a Japanese diplomat and a Japanese pilot in an accident.

Blinovitch took a telephone call – the first time that anybody had bothered to get in touch with us, despite our frantic attempts to report the disaster to Moscow

and Alma-Ata and Geneva. It was Itar-Tass, the news agency, wanting biographies of the Russian cosmonauts Amarah Polovska and André Ferrand. I was furious, not so much for Ferrand, my countryman, but for Amarah. I knew how much she valued her hard won Moldovan heritage. *Had* valued.

Blinovitch took me aside.

"Something's going on, Veronique," he murmured. On the TV screen behind him the tiny silhouettes of eagles soared against a spiky orange metal background whilst a newsreader tried to keep up with his teleprompter.

"It's just the confusion..." I told him, but even as I spoke I knew that he was right.

"It's more than confusion, it's those things." He pointed to the TV. "Somehow, getting caught in their wake has... I don't know... unravelled Amarah and André. Those ships must use some sort of mechanism that warps space. It's warped them as well." He tapped the side of his head. "They've been spread out across the universe of the mind. They're just a symbol now. They belong to all of us."

"Bullshit," I snapped, close to the edge of hysteria. He was drunk. Drunk and maudlin.

He began to cry. I reached out and touched his shoulder.

"She was my sister," he wept. "I was so proud of her. So proud of my little Amarah."

I couldn't believe what I was hearing. My hand fell away from him. He wiped a sleeve across his eyes.

"My only sister..." he continued.

"My girlfriend," said a voice behind Blinovitch. Rutskoï, one of the backup cosmonauts, came up behind him. He too was crying. "We were to be married," he continued. "When she landed. And now... What is there left?"

I backed away, shaking my head. The ground seemed to be rocking under my feet, and I could feel a strange buzzing sensation creeping through my head. Everything seemed to be moving slowly, dreamily. I don't think either of them noticed me stagger away; they were too busy consoling each other over their loss.

All around me people were crying. One of the *babushkas* from the canteen was wailing over the death of her son, André. I picked up the last bottle of vodka and left.

Walking through the empty early morning streets towards my apartment block I could see the flicker of televisions behind every set of curtains. People watching history. I took a long swig from the bottle. As my head tipped back I could see the stars cold and haughty, hanging above me, above all of us, changeless and eternal. Suddenly I needed to hear her again, just to reassure myself that she was real. Or that I was.

The weight of the tape recorder was dragging my pocket down. Last night we had made love, and then rewound the tape and listened to ourselves, and then made love again, excited by the voyeurism. It was all I had left, apart from memories. No photographs, no letters. Nothing of Amarah except for the most precious thing that we had shared.

I took the recorder from my pocket and weighed it in my hand. It was my proof. She *had* been my lover.

A scattering of raindrops sluiced across my face.

I threw it away, and watched it tumble over and over until the darkness swallowed it up. ●

Leaving Reality Behind

Paul Kearney interviewed by

Sally Ann Melia

“I never know the end of the novel I am writing. If I plotted a book outright to the end and had the ending all neatly scooped from page one, I would lose interest in the book. I would have to move on to something else. For me, writing a book is like the reader reading it. For instance, when I was finishing *Riding the Unicorn*, I was scribbling down the last chapters long-hand as fast as I could go. I was absolutely caught up in the story. I wanted to see what was going to happen. I can also tell you, that 20 pages from the end, I didn't know what the ending was going to be. I was just making it up as I was going along. That was the way it went! Sometimes you are lucky that way. Sometimes you are not.”

Paul Kearney, Northern Irish author of the well-received fantasy novels *The Way to Babylon* and *A Different Kingdom*, was talking about his third novel *Riding the Unicorn* (all published by Gollancz).

“The title comes from a book on schizophrenia. There, schizophrenia is compared to a unicorn because nobody can pin it down; nobody knows where it comes from. The story is about a prison warden called Willoby. He is schizophrenic. He is a pretty hard case: middle-aged, balding, paunchy, and he slaps his wife around. He drinks too much. Not a one-hundred-percent pleasant character! In many ways, he is a bit of an unreformed middle-aged layabout. Then...he starts hearing voices and seeing visions, hallucinations about another world, other people. So, while in this world, he is diagnosed schizophrenic. From the other world, people are trying to get hold of Willoby. These others wish to co-opt Willoby to murder, to induce him to become a king's assassin. Yet the crux of the matter is that Willoby finds the other world attractive, more attractive than his everyday life. He feels better when he is in that other world. Willoby doesn't really mind the epileptic fits that accompany his illness, because he is getting to grips with a new world.

“I had the character of Willoby in my head for quite a while. It's what gave me the power-house to keep going.

I read medical texts on schizophrenia. I met several prison wardens and I picked their brains. I was supposed to actually go and visit a prison, to spend a couple of days there. But, what with security restrictions in Northern Ireland, in the end I had finished the book before I was given the go-ahead to do the visit. So I didn't go. Still, the prison wardens I met put me right on a few facts. I learned there are three types of prisoners: the ODCs, the Animals, and the Bigwigs. The ODCs are Ordinary Decent Criminals. The Animals are the sexual offenders. The Bigwigs have positions of power within the prison itself. Their power is tolerated by the prison wardens because it helps to keep the other prisoners in check. Last of all, there are the terrorists – back home, anyway (I didn't go into all that; I wanted to keep that out).

“Not much of the book is set in the prison, just a couple of scenes. It's more the mentality of the prison warden character: I wanted to get a kind of idea of what he was like, how he would act, what kind of situations, he could get himself into. More than just a prison warden, Willoby, the hero of *Riding the Unicorn*, has the 'killer instinct.' He can't help it. The story shows how this trait can be both good and bad. When I say 'killer instinct' I am being very crude about it. It's a certain, I don't know... (I have not got it, by the way). Kipling said it best: 'Whether you can keep your head when all about you people are losing theirs...' There are certain people who you know would be great in a tight situation. Yet the 'killer instinct' is something more as well. You would not want to cross these people. It is not that they lack control. It is just that there is one level less of civilized behaviour within them. Most people go through several layers of good and rational behaviour before they hit the barbarian at the bottom. Other people have a thinner veneer. They make very good soldiers. (Sometimes they make very bad soldiers as well.) It is a fantasy of mine. So I created this guy Willoby and gave him all these attributes. Sometimes I would like to be that man myself. Most of the time, I'm glad I'm not.”

After all this research, did Paul Kearney not want to write a mainstream novel – one simply about schizophrenia or about the life of a prison warden?

“I am tempted to write a mainstream novel with every book I write. I start off with great intentions of sticking as close to the mainstream as I can, with just a little fantasy added in. But for me it is the fantasy element that gives the story the edge, the frisson, that holds my interest. By the time I get halfway through a book I always find I am plunging deeper and deeper into the fantasy. Leaving reality behind. This is not always what I intended. But the fantasy really takes on a life of its own. There's not a lot I can do about it at that stage. Although I do have doubts – particularly towards the last 50 or 60 pages. I'm always a nervous wreck by then, trying to gather the strands together.

“With *A Different Kingdom*, the first time I wrote the ending it was all wrong. So I had to go back and rewrite it. Though I still like the original ending, the final version worked well and I was pleased with it. *A Different Kingdom* is my second novel, just out in paperback. The story starts in Ireland in 1953. I don't know whether you would call it idyllic: the farm is the farm of my grandparents of the late 60s, early 70s, with all its characters. I have stuck my grandfather Pat straight into the book, for posterity. The description of the way of life is exactly as I remember it. We did use more electricity when I was there – still, it is more or less what it was like, because they had tractors and other machines but they still used horses as well. The whole thing is a bit nostalgic, as I think those were the happiest days of my life. The house where I grew up! The house of the endless summers! The old rose-tinted spectacles! It really was a very good time, with a greater sense of community. Actually the Troubles were very bad. We are talking early 1970s, and it was pretty rough. Yet we were right in the middle of nowhere. We really didn't see much – my father's shop was burnt out twice, there were a few shootings and bombs – yet this was nothing. It didn't seem



Paul Kearney

to touch us. Probably because there was no television – without TV you saw less of it.”

The story of *A Different Kingdom* concerns a young boy, Michael. When playing at the bottom of the garden, he sees into another world that will forever have a hold on him. The novel tells of Michael’s quest into the heart of this fantastic forest, Wolfweald. To what extent did Paul Kearney draw inspiration from Robert Holdstock’s *Mythago Wood* or the many forests of Tolkien’s Middle-Earth?

“As a matter of fact it was my editor Richard Evans who first said, ‘You like Holdstock, I can tell.’ I read *Mythago Wood* when it first came out, and I loved it. It was my kind of stuff. That’s the sort of thing I like to write. I want that sort of dirty-smelly-peaty-muddy realistic fantasy, with lots of deadly odours, blood and gore. If there is one thing I can’t stand it is where you have this company of swordsmen and so on, going on a quest across the countryside, and they never have to squat behind a bush. Not once! Never mentioned! I like things more realistic. That’s what I have got in common with Robert Holdstock: I like woods and mountains, I like to write stories that concern the land, where the landscape

plays a vital role. I wanted to make the Wolfweald, not exactly horrific...I mean, I could have made it technicolor horrific with monsters left, right and centre. No, I wanted it black and empty. I wanted Wolfweald more to be like a vacuum. The forest would suck the life-force out of all growing things and even the animals.

“Mirkwood, from Tolkien, is full of life flickering at the corner of people’s eyes. When I was at school, we studied an excerpt from *The Lord of the Rings* as part of English Language and Literature. This was a book I had not read at that time; I was only 11. So here was this extract in the Old Forest, the part where the Hobbits are captured by Old Man Willow. I read, out of context, this section where the trees come alive. I thought, ‘bloody hell’ – It really impressed me. After that, I was almost disappointed when I read *The Lord of the Rings* in its entirety.”

Paul Kearney is a keen walker and climber. How do these pursuits touch on his writing?

“I have been on a few expeditions in Mexico, the United States and Thailand, up in the mountains. I’m not going to say I have done all the things described in *A Different Kingdom* –

say, for instance, eating frogs. But I do know what it is like to be bitten by insects in the night. I remember drinking (and relishing) dirty water. I have travelled knowing that if you don’t catch any food that day you will starve.

“In Thailand, the trip started as a typical tourist jaunt. We were moved around in coaches and shown this and that. Then the faint-hearts and the elderly American tourists were left behind. The rest of us got out our hiking boots and started walking through the hills – staying in the huts of villagers, travelling around on elephants (the novelty of that quickly wore off, I can tell you!), catching fish in the rivers. Climbing trees to pluck and eat fruit, papaya and such, fresh off the trees. It was pretty good actually. The time in South America, we started in Guatemala, then travelled north to the Sierra Madre in Mexico. In Guatemala, we travelled through dense jungle and it was very, very hot. We would sling hammocks each evening. Then the mosquitos would eat us alive all night. Our horses were attacked by a jaguar one night. No horse died (unlike in *A Different Kingdom*, where the horses are regularly killed – I’m a horse lover by the way). What happened was: suddenly the horses, who were tied up on

a horse line, just went berserk. We were running about, shouting and yelling. We didn't know what it was, until we saw the jaguar slink off. It was crazy, like something out of a film. Nobody was scared, instead they all cried: 'Where's me camera, where's me camera?'

"Up in the north, in Mexico, in the Sierra Madre, it was minus 20 degrees. We took horses up into the mountains there. It was fantastic, I think it was the high point of my life: horses, deep snow, mountains, crisp sharp air – all that! And from a writing point of view, at least I have an idea what it is like to go on a long hike, a long trek or a long ride. I like to bring that sort of realism to the books themselves."

Before *A Different Kingdom*, Paul's first novel was *The Way to Babylon*. It is the story of a writer, Michael Riven, a fantasy novelist, who survives a mountain accident that kills his wife. Destroyed by guilt, Michael finds himself unwillingly drawn bit by bit into his own fantasy world. A strong and original story. How was *The Way to Babylon* received?

"The reviews were equally split – love it, hate it. For instance, in *Locus* they praised the first part of the book when Michael Riven was in the hospital. They thought it was fascinating, well-written, bizarre, blah-blah-blah. After that, (when Michael Riven travels into Minginish, the fantasy world), *Locus* continued, it becomes a 'normal' fantasy novel. They have got a point, to a certain extent. A couple of other papers said, 'I wish he had not wasted so much time in that bloody hospital to start off with. Could we have a straight the fantasy novel, please?' So you can't please all the people all the time. Richard Evans, my editor, says I am straddling two genres, walking a tightrope. He says he would not be at all surprised if I started writing mainstream novels in a few years time. He could be right, though for now I like to explore the edges. I like to venture where two worlds meet; that's where all the interesting things happen."

Where did the idea come from, the notion of a fantasy world cutting into the real world?

"Years ago, I read a book review (I have no idea of the author, the reviewer, nor indeed the title of the book in question!). Anyhow, the book speculated that every possible history comes true. There was a second universe where everything that could have happened actually did happen. So somewhere the South wins the American civil war; somewhere else, dinosaurs evolved into people. Moreover, every story people thought up in their heads also existed: there was no such thing as imagination. It's all real, you are just receiving it from somewhere. I never read the book, I

just remember reading this vague, quick synopsis. The idea just stuck in my head: what if a writer could enter the world of his own imagination? What if he met his own characters? I could get a real buzz out of that. Also if the author knew what was going to happen in the novel. Or, if he could influence what was going to happen on a cosmic scale... Anyhow, Gollancz liked the original idea, so I went on from there."

How long was *The Way to Babylon* in the writing?

"When I was at college, I wrote a story about a guy who falls off a mountain on Skye – because, funnily enough, I had just fallen off a mountain on Skye. The story started as a few paragraphs here and there in my diary. It was not entirely autobiographical since I only had scrapes and bruises, I didn't fall that far. That's how it started, then a very odd thing happened. I situated *The Way to Babylon* on Skye, and I invented a 'Red Mountain' or Sgurr Dearg. I just called it that because I knew most mountains in Scotland are called Sgurr (gaelic for rocky outcrop) and Dearg from the Irish: red. I didn't know there was a mountain called Sgurr Dearg on Skye. Then I looked on the map and I found it exists. I couldn't believe it. The real Sgurr Dearg on Skye has a second name: the Inaccessible Pinnacle. This, I thought, is too good to be true. That's how the story started."

"Minginish is the fantasy world that forms the common link between the three novels, *The Way to Babylon*, *A Different Kingdom* and *Riding the Unicorn*. In the third novel they are building the city of Talisker, which figures in the first – except it is called Courbisker, because the first king was called Courbisker, long before Tallimon takes over and builds the city for himself. *Riding the Unicorn* is set 1,200 years before *The Way to Babylon*, though Michael Riven and Willoby would almost be contemporaries. In *A Different Kingdom*, it is a different time-set as well."

"The link is that in *The Way to Babylon* we see the hidden folk fleeing Minginish across the Greshorn mountains. In *A Different Kingdom* we find out what happened to them: they had gone into the Wolfweald and have built a society there. The degenerates in *A Different Kingdom* were actually Myrcans, the disciplined soldiers in *The Way to Babylon*. The Myrans have declined and all they have left now is their pride. There are actually some clues: at the end of *A Different Kingdom* Ringbone produces his namesake, a little ring of corroded metal, that came off the staff of a Myrcan soldier. This is all he has got left to show what he once was. He doesn't even know what it is. He just keeps it as a

talisman. So there are links between all three novels. I like having these references, even if nobody else gets them. I put them in for myself. But *Riding the Unicorn* will be the last novel set in this particular world."

"I'm in the process of selling to Gollancz a trilogy, which will be called *The Monarchies of God*. The first book in the trilogy will be called *Hawwood's Voyage*. I should have finished the first book by the end of this year, and it should be coming out in 1995. So, no let-up after *Riding the Unicorn*. I just keep going, I have to keep churning them out. I have to keep the butter on the bread."

How does Paul write his novels?

"Actually, I am a very lazy writer. I have to say I hate revising, I hate rewriting. Once it is done I just want to put it away and start something else. I sweat blood when I have to revise anything, even checking for spelling mistakes. I sit there grumbling and muttering. I think my style is evolving. Usually when I finish the first draft I like it to be as near as possible finished. Then I don't want to touch it again, because I just get stale if I have to go over it again. I admit to a very short attention span. I can just manage one book for a year. I couldn't take two years or longer to write a book."

"I am a really dilatory writer. One day I will sit there for a couple of hours and then think, 'What the hell?' Another day, I will really catch the thread, then I will be at it for 12 hours. So the problem is sustaining the regularity of it, trying to make a routine of it – even though I have written three books now. Until this year I worked part-time, and I was fitting my writing around the job. Hopefully in this next year I will be able to just sit down and get on with it."

"I wrote my first novel at the age of 16. It was absolutely dire. It was 120,000 words about a young boy who makes good and who becomes the saviour of the world, so to speak, by finding this magic sword. Not the most original of themes, but it was a very useful lesson, because it taught me a lot about pacing myself: how to draw out a scene, how to get the right rhythm. So it was pretty useful. I won't look at it again. I started writing *The Way to Babylon* when I was 20. I messed about with the first half and left it for a year; then I wrote the second half and sent it off. I got an agent almost immediately. Gollancz quite quickly said 'Yeah!' but then they took another year to say, 'Well, we want you to tinker with it a little bit.' They wanted me to draw it out a little more. By the time I had finished my revisions, *The Way to Babylon* was half as long again. A lot of changes had to be made, it was pretty rough around the edges."

"In *A Different Kingdom*, the actual writing process was more leisurely."

There was more room for description. I was savouring it, if you know what I mean. I was really going to town on it. *Riding the Unicorn* is more to do with character, more character-driven. It took less time. It is a shorter book, and there is less time to dwell on description and place and all that. It is a lot more in the characters' heads. Since *Riding the Unicorn* I am actually feeling a lot more comfortable with dialogue. I enjoy putting speeches into people's mouths. Before, I would have been happier describing action or describing a scene or a forest or a city or whatever – something I can really get my teeth into. Now I am getting more interested in the dynamics of the whole thing. I want to bring character and description and dialogue together in the new book, to have both the richness of description of *A Different Kingdom* and the more complicated characters of *Riding the Unicorn*.

"So that's it, really. I wrote *The Way to Babylon*, it was accepted by Gollancz, they said, 'what about another one?' It has been like that ever since. A treadmill: one book a year. Yet even if I was not getting paid I would still keep writing. I can't stop. In fact, I sometimes look back to those heady days, when I didn't have contracts or anything, when I just wrote as I felt like it, when I could pick it up or put it down. I think a little wistfully back to the days before deadlines and commitments. But back then I was thinking 'if only I could get published!' Are we ever happy?"

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*.)

MILLION – CLEARANCE SALE

Fourteen issues of *MILLION: The Magazine About Popular Fiction* appeared between January 1991 and June 1993. While it lasted the magazine was highly praised by many writers and critics. We still have stocks of all issues except numbers 2 and 5. Normally priced at £2.50 each, the 12 remaining issues are now available at just **£1.50 each** (postage included; overseas, £2 each; USA \$3 each). Please make your cheques or postal orders payable to *Interzone* and send them to 217 Preston Drove, Brighton, BN1 6FL, UK.

No. 1: interviews with Dick Francis, Colin Dexter, James Ellroy, Sue Grafton; Kim Newman on British gangster movies; Dennis Wheatley and *Sequels by Other Hands* features; Brian Stableford on Marie Corelli; etc.

No. 3: interviews with Leslie Thomas, Anne McCaffrey, Jonathan Gash, Robert B. Parker, etc; John Christopher on his gothics; Angus Wells on his westerns; Fu Manchu feature; Brian Stableford on Rider Haggard; etc.

No. 4: interviews with Ellis Peters, Barbara Cartland, Cay Van Ash, etc; Kim Newman on Larry McMurtry; Andy Sawyer on Virginia Andrews; Jack Higgins bibliography; Brian Stableford on James Hadley Chase; etc.

No. 6: interviews with Dorothy Dunnett, Mary Higgins Clark, J.T. Edson, Douglas Reeman, etc; Thomas Harris and E. Charles Vivian features; Daphne Wright on *Crime vs Romance*; Brian Stableford on *Robinson Crusoe's Children*; etc.

No. 7: interviews with Hammond Innes, E.V. Thompson, James Leasor, Campbell Armstrong, Norman Mailer, etc; Mike Ashley on the *Strand Magazine*; Brian Stableford on Hank Janson; etc.

No. 8: interviews with Tom Sharpe, Anthony Buckeridge, Stephen Gallagher, John Harvey, Robert Barnard, etc; Hall Caine and steamy "Slaver" *Novels* features; Brian Stableford on *Hammett & Chandler*; etc.

No. 9: interviews with Rosamunde Pilcher, Ted Allbeury, Geoff Ryman, Catherine Aird, etc; *Hollywood Novels* and *Doc Savage* features; Brian Stableford on Robert Hichens; etc.

No. 10: interviews with Juliet Dymoke, Carl Hiaasen, Andrew Vachss, Jonathan Kellerman, etc; David Langford on Rex Stout; Leslie Charteris "Saint" feature; Brian Stableford on *Bulwer Lytton*; etc.

No. 11: interviews with Keith Waterhouse, Reginald Hill, James Herbert, etc; Garry Kilworth on *Animal Fantasy*; Graham Andrews on *Richard S. Prather*; Michael Crichton and P. Berresford Ellis features; Brian Stableford on *Eugene Sue*; etc.

No. 12: interviews with David Nobbs, Dinah Lampitt, etc; S.T. Joshi on *Robert Aickman*; *Saturday Evening Post* and *Fay Weldon* features; Brian Stableford on *Robert Graves*; etc.

No. 13: interviews with Clive Barker, Evelyn Anthony, Ed Gorman, etc; S.T. Joshi on *Stephen King*; *Dracula* and *Biggles* features; Brian Stableford on *James Hilton*; and much more.

No. 14: interviews with Patricia Kennealy, etc; Ian R. MacLeod on *Gerald Seymour*; Gary Westfahl on *The Hardy Boys*; John D. MacDonald, Dorothy L. Sayers and *Jack the Ripper* features; Brian Stableford on *W.H. Hudson*; and much more.

Ansible Link

David Langford



Yes, this page is still on the "information superhighway" (a phrase which through sheer repetition has become as groan-inducing as "political correctness" or "rejection slip"). Send e-mail news to ansible@cix.compulink.co.uk. Meanwhile, 30 million Internet users wait in hushed anticipation: will David Pringle go on-line?

The Argonauts of the Air

John Brunner cried "They seem to value the arts more in Romania than in the west!" after receiving the supreme accolade: being waved through customs on route to "EuROcon" in Timisoara, merely because officials discovered he was a writer. It couldn't happen here...

Emma Bull's musical group "The Flash Girls" was interestingly reviewed in *Folk Roots* magazine, which calls her a "Somewhat renowned former sci-fi authoress and art rocker..." Former?

Harlan Ellison phoned about various past items, saying in particular that his huge wrath at the inclusion of that *Last Dangerous Visions* story in the New England SF Association's Cordwainer Smith collection had a lot to do with Ellison himself having partly rewritten Smith's imperfect draft for TLDV... only to learn for the first time of the story's pre-emption (courtesy of the Scott Meredith agency) when he saw the NESFA volume. He protested that coverage here made him look like, if I heard correctly, "a goofus." *Mea culpa*, no doubt; this column's fatal tendency is to portray practically everyone as a goofus... NESFA spokesfans later said that although the MS had been acquired quite legally in its original, unedited version, they regretted their failure of tact in (a) not telling Ellison, and (b) emphasizing in the book's publicity that this story was snatched from the jaws of *The Last Dangerous Visions*.

Raymond Z. Gallun, the old-time sf author whose first sale was "The Space Dwellers" in 1929, died on 2nd April aged 83.

Alasdair Gray's photograph appears in Colin Manlove's *Scottish Fantasy Literature: A Critical Survey*, with an analytical caption worthy of Lombroso: "This is a coolly interrogative Gray, whose narrow lips and strong nose, together with the sheer hairiness of aspect, sufficiently suggest the academic manqué who has outdone all academics. This is the Gray who refuses to be pinned

down..." But is it the one who writes books?

Nicola Griffith (expatriate Brit) won the 1994 James Tiptree Jr award for "gender-bending" sf with her 1993 novel *Ammonite*.

Roz Kaveney was brutally censored during a recent convention panel on censorship, where freedom of speech was curtailed by a repressive and authoritarian sound system: "The truth about snuff movies is that wheeeEEEEEE!"

Paul McAuley reports that mighty legal forces have overcome "the lunatic wannabe from Canterbury" who was claiming authorship of Paul's "Karl and the Ogre" and offering it to publishers as part of a short story collection. "Apparently, he has also written something called *Pasquale's Machine*, and claims that Paul McCartney stole the lyrics and music of 'Yesterday' from him."

Verna Smith Trestrail, E.E. Smith's daughter and a much-loved sf fan since the 1930s, died in March aged 73.

Jane Yolen was censored again in the USA after a school librarian made the mistake of reading aloud from her picture-book version of *Tam Lin*. Accusations of satanism followed, with a threatened lawsuit from a parent claiming: "After my daughter heard that story, she needed therapy." The librarian was vindicated by the school board... and told never to use the story again since the school lacked time and money for such legal hassles. Jane Yolen glumly notes: "Win the battle—lose the war!" (The original, satanic *Tam Lin* may be found in that forbidden grimoire *The Oxford Book of English Verse*.)

Infinitely Improbable

Know Your Market. The 1995 Arthur C. Clarke Award – for best sf novel published in the UK this year – received its first submission when Serif rushed in Steve Aylett's *The Crime Studio*, an exciting collection of non-sf short stories...

Worldcon Stuff. From the 1995 (Glasgow) World SF Convention staff meeting agenda: "the main topics of discussion this time will be Timeline's and Theme's." They looked strangely at me when I suggested a seminar on Apostrophe's. Meanwhile the 1994 Worldcon in Winnipeg will consider a motion to pension off winners of five consecutive Hugos in any one category with a Lifetime Award, followed by five years'

ineligibility for that category. Sounds almost sensible – throw out boring old farts like... (H'mm. Counts surreptitiously on fingers.)

Fame at Last. How to deter computer net spies in 2050: "She [...] typed: Whoever you are, be warned: I'm about to display the Langford Mind-Erasing Fractal Basilisk, so..." (Greg Egan, *Permutation City*).

SAMHAINballs: the spiteful West Country newspaper campaign against John Gullidge and his horror review magazine *Samhain* (see past columns) seems to have died down. Plans for a legal fund are thus suspended. A *Prominent Member of the UK Horror Community Sends Encouragement*: "I'm afraid John Gullidge has never considered himself one of the 'horror community' (which is one of the reasons I will not support him or his magazine, as I feel he has brought a lot of these problems on himself)." One for all and all for one.

Science Corner. I was fascinated by a science-fictional flyer from the Association of Autonomous Astronauts ("Write to us about our plans for an independent space exploration program"), revealing that EVERYTHING WE KNOW IS WRONG. Spying on the Royal Society's March meeting, the AoAA was swift to note the insidious political agenda behind modern so-called mathematics: "The threat to the notion of the static universe, set in motion in the 20th Century by the discovery of the relativity of all knowledge, has caused the ruling class to hit back with its bullshit theory of chaos. [...] Chaos Theory, with all its talk of disorder in geometry and mathematical systems sensitive to initial conditions, is nothing more than another instrument of control in the hands of a ruling class attempting to strengthen their islands of order surrounded by a sea of chaos, in the vain hope of preserving their privileged existence." Yes, yes! But the people can strike back: "Much was made of the 'curse of dimensionality'; that is, when these boffins attempt to map their mathematical models in higher dimensions than three the predictions become far more problematical. We will be exploring the possibilities for higher-dimensionality acts of subversion." Just hurl a well-aimed tesseract into the machinery of capitalist government, and...

Simile of the Month. "I suppose I looked mesmerized already as a skinned rabbit." (Jane Gaskell, *The Serpent*).

A Changing of the Guard

Timons Esaias

“Boy, just look at him. Look at that smile!” The old man leaned forward and spat precisely into one of the aluminium spittoons. Chewing and spitting occupied most of the day in the Indiania Farm Owners’ Retirement Village, what with noncarc smokeless on the market. Especially in the barbershop. “Must think he’s king of the world.”

This day the weathered faces bent over the two-inch screens on the arm of each of the chairs. “Must have 40, maybe 50 teeth in that mouth.”

“Like a shark, I’d say.”

“They’re all sharks, them politicians.”

The owner, a Belarussian emigré, paused between clips. “Now, fellaz, zhow zome rezpect. Thatz our new Prezident.” He pointed at a TV with scissors. “Our brand new Prezident.”

“Could be the old one, if you assed me. I caint see nothin’ on these piddly Chinese sets.”

“You caint see nothin’ anyway,” chimed several voices in chorus.

They quieted while a cutaway shot panned a Texas high school cheerleading squad, in white cowboy hats and black leotards, black net tights with a paisley lace pattern, and red five-inch spike heels. The commentator discussed probable appointments to the Supreme Court.

“I wouldn’t want the job. No, sir,” allowed the senior member of the regular afternoon crowd. “Burns a man out. President when I was born, Roosevelt, he’d served what, four, five terms? Now they don’t even run for a second one.”

“Bush did!”

“Yeah, but that was 20-some-odd years ago.”

PBS went to commercial with a still-frame of President Quantrill, waving at the crowd from his armoured limousine.

“Yessir. Probly thinks he’s king of the world.”

“I’m the President of the United States and Canada!” he thought, waving happily at the crowd. “Jerry Quantrill made good and is the most powerful man on earth.”

The crisp January air, perfect for a triumphal procession, put roses in the cheeks of everyone. The crowd, a sketch of joyful Americana. His supporters, his people, part of the millions who had chosen him to ride in triumph to the White House.

The thrill of power engulfed his mind, tingled through his muscles, and caused a pleasant stirring beneath his bulletproof shorts. More gorgeous women would ant him than he could ever possibly have. He would pay back Roskins for that crap with the New York delegation, and make Berlin rue the day they decided to discount the Euromark right before the election.

Jerry Quantrill believed in democracy, but his thoughts strayed to Napoleon and Alexander, to Caesar and Genghis Khan. Had they felt like this? Had they felt the self-confirming exhilaration, the aphrodisiacal rush of boundless personal power?

Of course they had.

The Chief Butler bowed ever so formally. “Mr President, Madame, let me introduce the White House staff.”

Quantrill let Susan lead the way down the line of cooks, butlers, waiters, maids and janitors. These domestic matters would be her concern, and would fulfil her dreams. Susan had always wanted responsibility, though her family had never trained her to take it. Well, here it was. The biggest doll house in the country, or at least the most important. Maybe it would keep her out of the Cabinet meetings where hard bargaining had to be done.

Why don’t women understand compromise? he wondered. In their own homes they thrive on nothing else, but let them get into politics and they go all moral and principled on you. Can’t run things that way.

They shook the last hand at the foot of the stairs to the North Portico. Just as he turned to Susan to lead her up the stairs, a hand rested on his shoulder. “Mr President?”

Bob Patterson, head of their Secret Service detail, held out his hand. “This is where I leave you, sir.”

“What?” Bob had been with them since Iowa. “Was it something I said?”

“Changing of the guard, Mr President.” Bob indicated a line of six agents waiting at the top of the stairs, eyes hidden by sunglasses, but clearly roving the grounds for the slightest threat. These guys wore the new Uzi 60’s on their hips. “I get to go back to Treasury and hunt down counterfeiters and smugglers for a change.”

Jerry pumped Bob’s hand and leaned close, “So

who's gonna handle my social arrangements, now, eh?" and gave his best twinkle; but before the man could respond, said loudly, "Susan? Bob and the boys are deserting us."

"Oh, no!"

Bob signalled his detail to gather around. "Not without a word for each of us, I hope, ma'm."

"Well of course not."

As the President showered in preparation for an evening of inaugural balls he ran through the names he needed to remember. Andy Fontocini, the head of the White House Secret Service detail. Tom, Corponovo? Corpanueva? Yes. And Roman Jelezomanski. He'd have to call the rest "Son" until he got the names down. And that nervous young Lieutenant who carried the "football" around. Lieutenant Wilson. Well, if I were his age and carrying the nuclear codes I'd probably have the jitters myself.

He's probably wondering if I'm sound. Jesus, the kid probably has nightmares of having to fight off a nutcase President. I'll have to relax him. Show him the charm.

It occurred to him, briefly, to wonder what the Lieutenant must think of having to sit outside the bedroom while his President serviced members of the female citizenry. Well, the world was full of funny jobs.

The Presidential couple spent half of the evening in Motor Pool One, the Presidential limousine, being ferried from one to another of the separate sites of the Inaugural Ball. At each location they took a few turns together on the dance floor and then separated. The First Lady danced with movie stars and sports legends. The President honoured the wives of the big contributors, with the occasional unknown beauty chosen on the spur of the moment.

"I must have pawed five million dollars' worth of dresswear already this evening," he quipped to Andy as they waited for Susan to finish powdering her nose. "That last one. The brunette in the purple mini. Get her name, will you, Andy, and set it up for tonight."

The agent continued to scan the crowd for trouble, but leaned close. "Sir, it's not like that in your position..."

The President squeezed Andy's surprisingly firm upper arm. "Well, however it's done, see to it. Ah! Susan, how is it to be absolute Queen of the Ball?"

The new President sent his wife and her mother upstairs to the Lincoln Bedroom to discuss the triumphs of the evening, and took himself off to the Oval Office, a quaint survival from the days before the construction of the Executive Control Centre in the Ellipse. He loosened his tie and sprawled across the leather couch to await his liaison.

When the champagne cart arrived he helped himself.

Walking around the room, he studied the decorations, which tradition almost required him to leave unchanged: the Kennedy naval paintings, the Truman desk, the Jefferson portrait. The Beaux-Arts oil of *Claudius Being Proclaimed Emperor* seemed an odd choice. He'd have to ask somebody about that.

The minutes stretched into half an hour.

Finally he paged Andy, who arrived crisply dressed, despite the hour. "Yes, Mr President?"

Waving his third drink, the man of the moment asked, "Well, where is she?"

"Senator Brandywine's niece? The young lady at the French Consulate's Ball?"

"If that's who she was, yes." A look of annoyance spread across the Presidential visage. "How did you arrange things?"

Andy stiffened into an almost military stance. "I'm afraid that I didn't arrange things, sir. It would violate Service policy to do so."

"Now look, son. This isn't getting us off on a very good footing. As President, I expect that Secret Service policy is pretty much what I say it is."

"That's true, on the whole, sir. But there are certain restrictions which supersede your instructions..."

"Are you trying to tell me that you boys didn't look the other way when Hexon played around? When he was governor of Manitoba you couldn't even find him the whole afternoon he was so busy with his chippies."

"He did make the request, sir, but we had to inter-vene. After all, he ran on a chastity platform, just like yourself."

"Let's not be irrelevant. Now call the young lady up and get her over here!"

"I'm afraid I must decline to do so." Andy looked very unhappy. "Perhaps after Chairman Penney briefs you tomorrow you'll..."

"Penney! Let's get him to straighten this out right now," and he stalked over to the desk and paged the switchboard. "Honey, find Jack Penney... Yeah, from the Treasury Committee, and tell him to get his fat ass over here pronto. And tell the First Lady that I've got an emergency meeting and it may last a while."

Senator Penney arrived minutes later, struggling to conceal a smug expression. His attire was in fine order, for such a heavy shapeless figure, and suggested that he had anticipated this summons. "Trouble already, Mr President?"

Quantrill waved him into a chair. "The job's interfering with my social life, Jack."

"Too many Balls for your taste?"

"Not enough balling, actually. And this young man," he pointed at Andy, standing stiffly in the window, his back to them, "says that it's against his policy to grease the skids."

The Chairman smiled broadly and sat back in his chair. "Well, I warned you at the convention that this job wasn't all it's cracked up to be. Actually, Andy hasn't told you the half of it. His crew will have to see to it that you don't get any such opportunities for the duration of your term. I'm afraid that the First Lady is going to have to be it for the time being."

The President flushed a bright, ugly red. "Cut the crap, Jack. Men in our position can't be bound by stupid rules."

The Chairman considered best how to respond, and then spoke quietly. "Jerry, it isn't so much your being bound, as it is his being bound" indicating the stiff form by the window. "His rules are the problem."

"What is your point?" asked a glowering President, thinking that Alexander the Great never put up with

this horse manure. If he didn't put his foot down right now, he would end up like the old Sultans of Turkey, tied hand and foot by the complicated regulations imposed by the Harem, a prisoner in his own palace.

"Well, I was going to explain it at the morning briefing, but it might as be tonight. You see, your security detail is rather unique." Penney laboriously rose from his chair, a fat man who didn't carry his weight happily. He walked over to the embarrassed agent and put an avuncular hand on his shoulder. "Give him the low-down, Andy."

The agent seemed to straighten his tie before turning around, but when he turned he had actually opened the top of his shirt. Holding the shirt open, revealing a mat of dark, masculine hair, he recited his little explanation. "I am a Type VII military android. I have been programmed to defend the President, his family, and his immediate successor and the successor's family. I am further programmed to ensure that the President does not act in a way that would betray the promises made to the electorate during the course of the campaign. I am required to ensure this by any means, including elimination of the President. I am required to put the sanctity of the Office before the safety of the man."

As he finished the speech, a panel in his chest slid aside, revealing the mechanisms underneath.

After a demonstration of the android-agent's special capabilities, it buttoned its shirt and made to leave the two men alone. Quantrill held it back to ask one more question. "What about my wife and her private arrangements, son?"

The android focused on the middle distance. "Normally your campaign promises wouldn't constrain her behaviour, sir. But she made quite a strong presentation before the Detroit League of Women regarding fidelity, and she made similar pledges to the National Chastity Foundation. Those speeches were part of your campaign, and we're going to have to hold her to them."

Penney dismissed it. Quiet filled the Oval Office for some minutes.

Finally, the President went to the bar for yet another drink. Constructing a brutal concoction of his own he asked, "So whose idea was this, anyway?"

"Bush's. It was an NSA black programme, Aurora, totally off the budget. Congress knows what they were working on, but now how well it succeeded. The Mark IIs that the Marines have are nothing like these babies."

"And why did he do it?"

The Chairman grinned, "Why, for the good of the country, of course."

"The good of the country, my ass! I bet he signed the order *after* he lost the election, and not a day sooner!"

"Jerry! Let's not be bitter."

"Well, this can't be legal!"

"Just as legal as the CIA and NSA," the Chairman sighed. "There's an executive order creating it, secret, of course. And the Official Secrets Amendment may keep the Hill from interfering with policy, but it also keeps you from taking this thing to the courts. It's just one of those Constitutional exceptions we learn to live with."

"So who in Congress knows about it, now?" Leaning

against a sculpted doorframe, he was reminded of the architecture of court-houses and jails from his lawyer days.

"Just a couple of the big fish."

"The ones who never run for President," said the current Executive.

"The ones who never run."

"So there are what, a couple of dozen of these android things? They must break down. If we just don't replace or repair them, how long before we're rid of the whole crew?"

Penney shook his head. "Part of their programme is to ensure the continuity of the White House guard."

"So how do we stop it?"

"We don't."

Both men quietly reflected on the injustices of life. "Well, you did warn me," the President said ironically.

"I did warn you."

"Doesn't look like he slept too good." The morning crowd at the barber shop assessed the pictures from the President's first Cabinet Meeting.

"It's all them naugewral parties 'n such. Man must of been up all night."

"For the king of the world he don't look too happy."

"Probably feelin' the weight of the job. I wouldn't want it." A line of spittle arched into the spittoon. "Just look at the bags under his eyes."

"I don't know what y'all see, cause I can't see a damn thing on these little Chink sets."

"You can't see..." chorused the regulars, as the camera panned away from the latest in a long series of one-term Presidents.

Timons Esaias came second in our 1993 popularity poll with his previous story for us, "Norbert and the System" (issue 73). He lives in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

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Mutant Popcorn

Nick Lowe

Cast no tears for Alex Murphy, for his fate is the fate of our world. Large fantasy movies in the 1990s are cyborged into an expensive suit of merchandising spin-offs; the film is merely the expendable fragment of live tissue that animates the whole apparatus and keeps it moving. In a successful operation, the performance of these auxiliary limbs can dwarf the revenues generated by the original organism. And as far as the guys with ties in the boardroom are concerned, the only commercially defensible reason for keeping a film character alive as such is to prolong the viability of the larger machine – to renew the networked cartoon, the game module, the comics title, the posable action figure licensing for one more season. It may seem inhumane to civilians, but such is the way of the the cold equations that govern our privatized future: the harsh, calculating bottom-lineism that inexorably takes possession when once you allow the imagination to be developed for commercial use. It is not, on the whole, a set of values that assigns a premium to political truth-telling, to the feelings of the individual, or to adult relationships. If necessary, these can be excised and replaced with more convenient imperatives.



Robert Burke in 'RoboCop 3'

And so what's happened to the perennially luckless Murphy is simply a demonstration, albeit a peculiarly violent one, of the brutal logic of long-term survival in the hard world of future fun. For **RoboCop 3**, the mantra is "repositioning," as the whole RoboCop concept returns to the workshop for a complete overhaul to meet the changing needs of its beleaguered employers. First is some serious downbudgeting: even without the crisis at Orion, a third movie on the cost scale of its predecessors just isn't a realistic investment after the disappointments of 2, so *inter alia* the big effects climax with the cast of thousands has to downsize to a couple of dozen extras and some of the ropiest matte work in living recall. Next comes major retargeting: the key consumers of the RoboCop franchised products (the toys, cartoons, computer games, and comics) are precisely the 12-and-unders excluded from the first two movies by their R rating in the US. Now, the explicit violence and profanity that secured that rating are of course central to the essential texture of the RoboCop movies; but essential texture is for wussies, so we certainly shan't be having any of that. Instead, search and replace "motherfucker" with "spatterbrain," "whore" with "slag" (surely a Hollywood first), and the exchange "Piss on a fossilized rhino stool and shove it 75 inches up your ringpiece, you frontbottomfaced gob of rat's puke!" "Oh yeah? Wank off and die, Murdoch-breath" with "You son of a bitch!" "Hey, watch the language, there's children present." And since the bodycount has been revoked, it has become necessary to ensure that nobody is actually killed in any of the wall-to-wall set pieces of mass violence that make up the first 20 minutes. Ordnance may be used up instead on peppering vehicles with tirepopping automatic fire, so long as Nancy Allen emerges unscathed with a reassuring "Everyone all right?"

But this is only the beginning. While we're in the workshop, let's replace a few original moving parts, or ideally all of them. Who's got lips like Peter Weller? Well, Robert Burke has

good eyes, that'll do; simply resculpt the face to Weller's mask, cut back on closeups, and lose all but a couple of the scenes with his hat off. Oh yes, and ask if he can't style his movements a bit more like an articulating plastic toy. Next, that Nancy Allen: ageing, dumpy, *complete* spare dinner. Well, you can be sure Ann Lewis has blown her last bubble; we'll give her a reel and a half of truly terrible acting before cashing her in for a killed-his-partner motivation coupon. So that puts us ready to launch the all-new RoboCop family: Jill Hennessy, great looking babe, stick her in a white coat and that's the calendar sales in the bag; and we need a kid, some sassy orphan type, not too gendered, say a girl hacker who can play the characters from a console, that'll give the joystickers something to fixate on. Finally, you know, we're going to have to do something about these very negative storylines: it's so important to get the message across that the police do a wonderful job really, that neighbourhood values can still win the war against drugs, organized crime, official corruption, and gangs of wastrels with threateningly large haircuts, and that the only thing wrong with corporate business in this country is that those evil slanty-eyed Japs keep buying it up and perverting it to their own filthy yellowskin ends.

So it's a strange, shambling thing indeed that comes clonking out of the machine room at the end of this refit. Encouragingly, Frank Miller remains from 2 as a name on the script, his imprint most clearly visible in a rather sad and stranded plotline about a samurai assassin robot – christened "Otomo," in Frankish homage to the manga maestro and legendary animator of *Akira* – sponsored by the Japanese leisure corporation that's bought up the contract on Detroit. But I doubt there's much more of Miller's meat left in the shell than the Writer's Guild minimum for credit, because the script's been worked over in some very unMillerish directions by director Fred Dekker (a suggestive choice: Dekker's was the cap behind the camera of *The Monster Club*, which affectionately euthanatized the Universal

monster cycle by repositioning it for the *Famous Monsters*-reading tree-house audience). Most strikingly, Miller's unabashedly dodgy romantic regard for Japanese martial arts and ethics, of which a small fragment seems to have survived in the peculiar ending, has otherwise warped into what must be the most nakedly xenophobic protest picture since the Japanese takeover of Hollywood began to roll – with particular contempt for the way the Old Man's successor kisses virtual arse with Kanemitsu-san over the videophone, to the extent of actually speaking to his oriental overboss in his own unspeakable language.

As an unmistakable sign that all has not gone well in the rewrite box, strange ghost plotlines appear only to vanish (the Delta City leisure complex, the Relocation Villages, the tiresome wiping-his-human-memories red herring); while even the long-heralded *RoboSamarai* spends so much time standing around and posing between stunts that its climactic showdowns turn out to be anything but. And the cynic nihilism of the first film, already diluted in 2 by Miller's earnest comicsy meditations on the politics of superhero vigilantism, has been so complicated by the ideological epicycles of multiplying interest groups (the Kanemitsu Corporation, OCP itself, the mayor's office, the uniformed police, John Castle's mysteriously British elite Rehab commandoes, C.C.H. Pounder's terrorist cell, and the unfortunate citizens of the Heights themselves) that it's hardly surprising our hero's torn loyalties seem to give up and settle into a bipolar alignment suspiciously indistinguishable from old-fashioned good guys and Nazis. I doubt anyone would have wanted to make a third *RoboCop* for its own sake; there are still a few nice jokes, but the Miller/Kershner sequel, gleeful and amusing though it managed to be in a lot of important ways, had already proved the extreme difficulty of developing any Verhoeven film into a series concept. That casual, ironic sadism doesn't reheat at all well; it has to be kept dry, cool and fresh to retain its flavour, and this is to that as Bernard Matthews' boneless reconstituted turkey drumsticks are to free-range pullet hand-wrung that morning and plucked and cleaned by 13-year-old Catholic girls on stools of Scottish beechwood. In other words, your kids might actually eat it.

I don't think it's stretching a link too far to claim that *Roujin Z* is in effect the same movie from the other side of the ocean. Billed as "A Work by Katsuhiko Otomo" (who in fact contributed only screenplay, mecha designs, and some rather fey Cocteau-esque credits, leaving others to get on with making the actual film), this high-concept



From 'Roujin Z'

animé likewise uses the language of juvenile genre sf in a marriage of east and west to explore complex ethico-political issues of public trust, community responsibility, and the privatization of social services by sending a hulking indestructible cyborg on a cartoon rampage through the city. The difference, and the thing that makes *Roujin Z*'s easily the most bizarre and original animé scenario since *Ultimate Teacher* elevated sanitary confidence to superpower status, is that where *RoboCop 3* plundered and parodied images of Japan traditional and modern for its representations of the Other, *Roujin Z*'s most evident source of western inspiration is none other than *RoboCop*. For Z-san is *RoboWrinkle*: a bizarre fusion of one incontinent elder and his atom-powered biointelligent hospital bed, secretly equipped by the military with all sorts of keen powers nor normally included on the agenda of geriatric care, like the ability to fire anti-tank missiles and shoot out the obligatory clutches of robot tentacles, all the while growing and transforming by the assimilation of scrap into a vertical junkyard the size of a small Alp. Little, however, do its creators reckon on the power of the human component's yearning for its mortal past, which resurfaces in a most unexpected, not to say extremely confusing, way.

The nearest thing so far to manga with message, *Roujin Z* addresses the white-hot domestic issue of caring for the world's fastest-growing aged population in a society whose cultural centre of gravity is shifting inexorably towards youth, individualism and the technological fix. Otomo's verdict, unambiguously enough, is that there's no quick bypass for traditional one-to-one caring, and that youth should model its attitude on his fairly puke-making student-nurse heroine – for despite the big metal fun, this is at heart one of those distinctly girly animés – who sees cleaning bedsores and wiping nightsoil from the wizened genitalia of the infirm (ironically blotted out on screen by a floating grey dot to spare our own, less reconstructed, sensibilities)

as a joyous honour she is proud yet humble to perform. In Otomo's scenario, all technology does is at best empower the elderly to defy the society that seeks to control them, and at worst to play into the hands of the covert militarists waiting to hijack civilian projects for the cause of rearmament.

Just how much of this is supposed to be comic is, as often with these movies, a little hard to gauge. Certainly there's plenty of overt satire (which the English dubbing script has done its thankless best to reproduce), along with a lot of rather tiresome broad character comedy and slapstick – including well over the quota of shiteating grins, and a splash of Guyish rape humour that will not endear it to over-fifteens in the West. Yet its representation of old age is remarkably frank and poignant, especially by western standards, and in particular the old man's moving monochrome memories seem imported from a different genre altogether. It's clearly a long way from the followup-to-Akira Otomo's name might evoke, not least in its visual and technical ambition – with disappointing character designs, unadventurous backgrounds, and animation that even in the climactic scenes falls well short of the irreproducibly labour-intensive wizardry of Akira itself. Aware that it's not really a crossover feature, Manga have opted to send a single print on a kind of limited roadshow release, and it's bound to encounter most of its audience on video. But it's still a well-above-average specimen of the form, looks its very best on the big screen, and offers any number of cross-cultural wonders to marvel at – not least the inexorable tendency of all animé plotlines to converge, from whatever point of departure, on the exact same endgame where a couple of cybernetic mutant metaliths duke it out in a final mechasmic confrontation amid the rubble of what once was Tokyo. One calls it abject failure of imagination; one calls it giving the kids what they want. But in the end, they usually merge, and go on to a sequel.

(Nick Lowe)

Meditations of the Heart

Julian Flood

Soul-space.

I winced when I read that, written out on the screen for anyone to see. Worse, it might one day be committed to paper, be published, become a commonplace concept. My first reaction was that this must not be allowed. I had come up behind him silently, my movements a mere whisper. I hovered in the darkness, waiting just outside the pool of light cast by the screen of his machine. He snorted a little, pleased with the word.

"Perfect," he said softly. "Perfect. Soul-space. Exactly right."

Carefully I drifted back, turned and slid from the room. He was unreachable tonight, too absorbed in his thesis to yield to my entreaties, no matter how urgent or devious. There would be other days, other nights. I waited for him in the kitchen, warming myself in the glow of the fire. Eventually his fatigue would overwhelm him. He had been writing for nearly a month, each night taking less sleep, each day typing a little more slowly. Soon he would fail, would collapse in exhaustion, wallow in bed, dream. Then he would wake and think. His obsession would fade. They always do. The dream that men call consciousness would once more teem with half-formed wishes, dim desires, partial knowledge. As he hovered in his uncommitted way between thought and feeling he would be easier to stir into action. I would go to work on him in the morning. Then he would again be mine.

It was past midnight when he lurched into the kitchen, unshaven jowls wobbling as he rubbed one hand wearily across his face. The need to express his idea had been so overwhelming that he had hardly eaten for a week and his pale greasy skin hung slack on the great frame of his skull. Had he been less slothful he would have made a fine figure of a man. The wasted potential still showed after 20 years of my assiduous attention, showed in broad shoulders and eyes which, black-rimmed and sunken in flabby cheeks though they were, looked sensitive and even noble.

I paused in the act of sliding into his brain. It was hardly worth the effort. An image flickered across the surface of his mind, a picture of mounds of food, great slabs of chocolate, soapy lumps of cheese as big as a fist, handfuls of raisins and dried fruit, thick sweet drinks. For a moment he stood by the pantry door, chewing one nail as he thought of eating. A nudge

would do it, just a little nudge. I fought down the temptation. He was too tired, too elevated by the thrill of completing his work. Perhaps he would start gobbling and then be overcome by fatigue, perhaps he would even push a full plate away with a gesture of disgust and vow to go on a diet. A habit once broken in mid-flight is doubly difficult to re-establish, just as sin once denied becomes easier to turn from a second time. That concept could not be allowed to gain a foothold in his brain, first because it would make him stronger and secondly because from there it might grow, proliferate, radiate out and infect... soul-space. He would be more open to my instruction when the fatigue poisons had dissipated. Sleep, I suggested, sleep is the priority right now. We can always have a huge breakfast in the morning. He yawned and turned away from the pantry.

I followed him up the stairs and watched as he fell fully clothed onto the bed. Soon he began to snore. Even in his sleep he was smiling. I drifted back to the study, cursing that smile. What right had the creature to be happy?

Modern microprocessors are susceptible to manipulation, vulnerable to the subtle probings of such as I. Down at the quantum level, particles swim up unbidden from the depths of nothing, exist briefly and then fade once more into blackness like a soul going down into hell. There is our chance, our entrance, we children of the quantum fire. I alter probability, encourage here, whip there, and the static charges build and flicker at my behest.

He had left the machine on and I was able to use my tiny forces. The switch itself, a huge and unwieldy lump of reality, would have been too much – direct manipulation of bulk matter is always too much for us, although brute nature has made the leap, has found a way of tying together the fermion and boson worlds. I can almost find it in me to admire the way that a sloppy colloid of fat and water has managed to trap and ensnare the very substance of soul-space, tie it and fold it into the entities that some humans call their souls, bootstrapping existence from nothingness. Almost admirable, even to those of us made from the pure substance itself.

Had he remembered to turn the computer off I would have had to wait till morning. Or worse, I might have had to search for the traces of charge and

neuro-transmitter throughout his sleeping brain, hunting the modifications of neural endings. I detest the process of actually probing inside the vast Bose-Einstein condensate that matter uses to link and mesh with soul-space. Whenever I sink into the mishmash of sentiment, dirt, love and hatred that is a human mind I come out feeling tainted, infected with the dullness and inertia that is the price of contact with fermions. Not for me, not when I can find an easier way. My photon armies marched and the processor responded.

The screen rolled and I read through his thesis in its entirety. Even the title was enough to cause me pain. He had named this naive groping after truth, this wild and not entirely inaccurate stab at matters that should be left alone, "The Scientific Soul." I winced as I read it, winced and felt a tingle of fear.

He had been easy, so very easy from the beginning. He was inclined to self-indulgence, skilled at finding excuses, eager for secret and debilitating vices. When he was a boy I had whispered in his ear every time he was hurt on the games field, had persuaded him that pain was never worth the pleasure of exercise. Before long he was wobbling along the touchline on fat red legs, his note from mother having secured him from contact with others. He hated that, the humiliation of running slowly while the rest raced up and down the field. His mind had wandered, had opened, had yielded to me. We joined without a murmur.

We daydreamed of icecream, sweets, the store of biscuits he kept in his locker, of long lazy summer days when we could hide in the grass to eat and doze his little time away. From that first victory our life together had been smooth and gentle, one long slide downwards. Except, that is, for his skill in mathematics. I could distract him from anything else, from friends, love, even hatred, by the thought of indolence, by stimulating his sloth. But I could never turn him completely away from his beloved equations. They alone had sustained him, kept a part of him out of my grip. All his successes, all the small achievements of his life, the prizes, the place at university and the fellowship, were because of this one obsession.

Ipondered his thesis. His mathematics were beyond me. The conclusion was all too clear. Tapping his sleeping brain for assistance, I thought through the implications as they would be seen by other scholars. I had worked hard at keeping the deeper insight hidden from him but it was there, just below the surface, waiting to break through in another of those flashes of light that change the way these dirt-formed creatures live. First the concept that humans were inhabitants of soul-space would gain currency, then the idea of enemies would spring spontaneously to mind. Already, crude though his work was, there were indications, substructures in the equations which hinted at other structures, negative potentials, predatory knots in the field. Us.

The figures even suggested how we were formed, self-sustaining offshoots of erroneous thoughts, inspissations in the patterns of the meat-bound condensates they call their brains. Soon they would have

proof of our existence and new theories of how we might be eliminated. I brooded through the night. If once they realized that soul-space was generated in their own heads we would become vulnerable. Even clay minds would realize that here was proof of things that we have made unfashionable to believe. What next? Religious revival? A revolution in behaviour and thought? Repentance? It was all too horrible to contemplate.

Morphic resonance was the trigger that set him off. The day after a crossword solution had been published, the original puzzle becomes easier to solve, even by those who have not seen the solution – some influence spreads from the people who know the answer to those who come fresh to the problem. Psychologists postulate a resonance between brains, overlooking the possibility that thoughts are shared at every level except the material. My host had read about it in a tabloid, just a little childish paragraph. Vaguely he thought it might have a bearing on his work and the idea spun in soul-space, waiting. It waited for years.

It is the curse of those who induce laziness in others that they will themselves be infected. Even I am not immune. We were working in the library one day and I had become bored with his equations, letting him wander almost unsupervised among the shelves, looking in a desultory way for something about resonance. A title caught his eye – *The Quantum Self*. I tried to stop him but it was already too late. His interest was engaged. He reached out a curious hand, took up Danah Zohar's book. He read through it, first amused, then interested, then absorbed. I could hear his plodding thoughts. If the brain was, as she postulated, a quantum entity, a Bose-Einstein condensate that instantaneously explored all possible pathways, then he might be able to write down the equations of its function. Thought could be considered as a virtual search through multiplex future lines before the wave function collapsed into an optimal solution. Therefore the brain should be regarded as something more than just a material body.

Suddenly there was insight. He could treat it as a single object existing simultaneously at all levels in a multiverse. Multi-dimensional. Perhaps even beyond dimension. With an almost audible click the idea of soul-space seized his imagination.

My subject was a mathematician through and through. He worked (how he worked!) over the problem, trying alley after blind alley, reading psychology, almost drowning in Jung's theories of the collective unconscious. But he did not give up. How forcibly the lesson was brought home to me: allow the creatures one area outside our control and anything can happen. I tried desperately to turn him aside – down such promising avenues as the observer/reality interface, simultaneity and thought transference. It was no use, his eyes were set on the goal. There was nothing to do but watch as he trudged towards the finish. He explored Penrose's concept of the quantum mind, delved deeper and saw possibilities. Minds, quantum minds, were linked, budding from a single dimensionless entity – soul-space. Only in soul-space could the conditions required for morphic resonance exist. Within a week he saw the answer. Now his

theory was roughed out, ready to be tidied up and presented.

I felt a twinge of envy as I read through it, for humans have a huge advantage in their control of the world. The dense unchanging universe of matter allows them enormously persistent storage, great solidity of thought. We, quick and brilliant though we are, lose interest so rapidly compared with the dull plodding brains of our hosts that we are left behind, hares overtaken by the tortoise.

I had to salvage something from the wreckage. Time was short. Already the concepts would be spreading out from his mind, diffusing through soul-space, disinfecting other brains like chlorine discharging into a cesspool. I must act at once.

They oscillate, the meat men, up and down, joy and depression. He had been on a high for so long that the reaction was inevitable. Now his work was finished I knew he would be overcome with sloth, self-doubt, dullness. I had to strike at once while he was at his weakest, even though I would have preferred to debilitate him further before the battle. It was self-defence. Him or me.

He had been a bully at school. I'd encouraged this in an offhand sort of way – one never knows what is going to prove useful – but I'd not made too much of it. One vice at a time is our motto, and cultivating his laziness had taken up my major effort. Sloth has always been my favourite vice. It leads automatically to so many others. It induces boredom and thence greed. The subject becomes fat and ugly so it envies others, it covets, hates. These secondary sins lend a piquancy, a dash of flavour to their minds. When he was older I'd encouraged his bullying with more assiduousness – there are such delightful scenarios when adults are bullies.

He had enjoyed hurting little girls best, savouring the feel of their thin arms beneath his rubbery, sweating fingers, smiling at the tears and the sobbing promises not to tell, enjoying furtive gropings when they agreed to anything just so long as he left them alone. Fat, lonely, hated and despised, he had no other contact with girls. It was a great loss when we left school and our supply of secretive baby-faced girleens was cut off. We could no longer wait at the bus stop, choosing our victim with care, no longer watch her face freeze over with fear as we took hold of her skinny shoulders, no longer feel the trembling young body as we squeezed and fumbled. Pornography filled the gap. The sexual urge is a great boon to us, although why the creatures make so much fuss about it is beyond me. Our way is better, the self-assembly of errant ideas and fantasies. So much cleaner than the exchange of fluids.

From magazines I led him down dark alleyways, to photographs, contact sheets, into dim rooms where flickering old films fed his desire, finally to furtive encounters with those who pander to the weakness of others. I had smiled as he paid a week's salary to watch, merely to watch, a pubescent teenager undress and masturbate for him in a slum bedroom.

My work had not been wasted. His mind was filled with distorted ideas which grew and spread through the collective subconscious. Dreams of avid and experienced Lolitas took root in other eroded and

primed brains. In turn those minds brooded, elaborated, fantasized. The infection spread. It returned to its instigator who vomited more evil thoughts into the festering pool, amplifying in a feedback loop that could have only one end. According to my long-term plan there would be despair, pain, recrimination, hatred, a widening ripple of damage, a weaker opponent for me when the time came for our struggle. Desire had become the key to my control. Now I had to turn that key.

I have heard humans puzzle over a friend who has done something strange. "Out of character" they say when someone finally submits to the will of the predator within. Wrong, of course. Their actions are not out of character to those of us who know what happens under the innocent faces humans present to the world. My host was a perfect example. Most people would have said that he was a lazy, introspective sort of chap, inoffensive, clever in his own way of course but hardly likely to set the world on fire. Behind the mask I had nibbled at the supports of his personality until he stood like a child on a rotten floor, ready for the hangman's drop.

Even asleep he was under my sway. Lust for impossibly compliant young flesh filled his dreams. One push and all his defences crumbled.

Binoculars. The thought popped unbidden into his head as he opened his eyes. After it came a tumble of images, the house across the street, the girl. It was early afternoon, the school holidays. Her mother worked. The girl would be alone. Waiting for a man. Any man.

He stood well back in the room, focused on the window by the front door. Her image leapt into view. She was sprawled on the carpet, ungainly coltish legs crossed, absorbed in front of a flickering screen. Thin pale thighs under a skimpy skirt, short white socks.

Tight T-shirt.

He ran a furred tongue against crusted lips, blood sugar well down, unable to think of anything but that tender body. She moved, rubbing her legs together. From polluted soul-space his old thoughts returned, bounced back by other deranged dreamers, amplified.

She was asking for it. She needed a man. She scratched her stomach. It was a signal. She knew he was watching her. She wanted him to teach her.

A fully-formed fantasy spiralled in and caught in the web of his mind, expressing itself in the fermion world of neuro-transmitters and electrons. Afterwards she could come over each day when her mother was out. She would beg for everything.

Now she was licking her lips. Hot as hell, practically flaunting it in the street.

He would pay her, a fiver maybe. She'd like that. A fiver each time.

Take a knife, threaten her. Give her the excuse she needed so she could give in. He wouldn't need it really. It would just be part of the game.

The girl rolled over onto her front and put her tilted head in her hands, staring at the television. Skirt riding high.

Little white knickers.

She was a tease. Begging for it. She deserved to be had.

He rang the bell. She looked anxious, had probably been told not to talk to strangers, but she smiled when she saw who it was.

"Hello Suzy. Can I come in?"

"Yeah, OK."

Randy little bitch.

Afterwards he washed the blood from his hands, feeling numb. He looked at his face, saw the scratch marks down one cheek. DNA test of material gathered from under the nails of her stiffening fingers. He had bitten her. His teethmarks could be checked. Fingerprints. Semen typing. He was doomed.

"Oh God, why did I do it? Why?"

I gave another tiny push. It was hardly needed. His thoughts were already drifting that way. I had him beautifully trained.

Not thinking too much, he looped his belt round his neck and the banister and stepped off into space. It hurt a lot more than he imagined it could.

Here was my ultimate moment of triumph, to watch him break out of the cocoon of clay, to see spirals of energy arcing and twisting as the dull dirt let go and the quintessential soul leapt free into its true kingdom. How changed he was. Gone the dull and sluggish flesh, gone the slow throb of blood and brain. In an instant he was transformed into glittering power, a thing of quicksilver thought and brilliant light. Oh, the joy of my victory! That shining filigree saw itself and what I had done to it in a moment of pure clarity, saw where my whispers had led, and despaired. Oh, the pleasure of that despair!

Others of my kind drifted closer. If I was going to be weakened in the coming duel then I myself might be vulnerable to attack. They took one look at his struggling rebirth and drew back, slipped away. He was ripe for the taking. I would easily be able to defend myself as I gorged.

I moved closer and he drew away, unable to flee, too weak and decayed to avoid a certain and terrible end. Mine, he was all mine, trapped in the reality mankind and its demons have created together. It was a nasty surprise for that silly and indulgent entity to see its sins manifested, its errors of omission and commission, the bullying, the fantasies of domination and exploitation, all incorporated into my being: to see me, his acts of evil, made incarnate and Enemy. We had walked together so often, had chuckled and smacked our lips over his dirty magazines, salivated together as he read his stories of rape and destruction and hatred. Together we had forced and fondled, hurt and laughed and fantasized. In all this we had been companions, almost, he imagined, friends. Now he saw me clearly, stark in the dimensionless ur-light that beats outside their dirty cave. I laughed in his face, laughed at the rejection and horror there. Too late, my friend, my fat and self-indulgent friend. Too late!

I showed him my teeth, the teeth he had made for me of hot and evil imaginings. He moaned in terror, knowing he was no match for me. I leapt at his throat and overwhelmed his puny defences. He collapsed at the first bite, weeping, begging for mercy. Mercy, from me! He had assembled me thought by thought, error by error, feeding me with lust and strengthening me

with greed, armouring me in sloth and envy. There was no mercy of course. How could he imagine that there might be mercy in my makeup?

I loved the taste of him, this lost one, the tang of rot on the tongue, the odour of corruption in the nostrils as gobbets of his decaying energy structures slid down my ravenous throat. But something marred my pleasure, as it always does. There was a cry as I gnawed him, a wailing that pervaded soul-space, unlocated, unlocatable, the universe mourning another failure, mourning another soul denied its kingdom. Ha! But I had gained, gained strength and energy to carry the battle onwards, to move to the next and the next victim, devouring, growing, conquering. In time I will challenge and overwhelm soul-space itself, preside over chaos and destruction, sole Lord of Darkness, ruling over the bound and weeping remnants of men. Flushed with power and energy I now saw clearly what I must do.

I left him secure in my private space, left him right at the border of disintegration, light dulled, twitching with unbearable pain. He will repair himself slowly. In a hundred or a thousand or a million years the pain will ease. He will grow again, his shining body reformed and strong. I will be ready, still hungry for him even though I will have waxed fat over the centuries. I have others to graze on, so many others. I can afford to wait until he feels secure, to wait as he explores his prison and then, just when he is beginning to hope, I will dine again. More despair! The joy of it, the joy of knowing that he is mine for ever!

I have a new host now. He was unoccupied but ripe for takeover, already infected from soul-space with vague notions of tolerance in all things, with the automatic urge to compromise, with convictions of his own worth. His resistance was feeble. Pride will prove the key here and I anticipate no problems when he meets me face to face. Meanwhile, I can use him.

The solution was obvious when I applied myself to the task. The proof of our existence is not a threat as I had thought. Quite the reverse. Total control will be ours only when we are continually summoned by the massed minds of the meat-people. In spite of their reluctance they must be trained to think of us, to accept us into their tolerant world. Dialogue (that blessed word!), we will have a dialogue, like a butcher and a pig. We will compromise like the stoat and the rabbit, co-operate like the spider and the fly, lie down together like the lion and the lamb. My host is a man of talent but he is a man, only a man. He will spread the knowledge I wish to see disseminated while convincing himself he is doing the opposite. What fools these mud-men are!

Let me explain. I want you to read this slowly and carefully.

Do not think of soul-space. Got that? Do not think of it. What picture does this bring to mind? Soul-space. Inevitably you think of it. It is the way your foolish brain is organized. Wriggle and twist as much as you like, the concept sits there in your mind.

The image is context-free, without moral overtones – affectless as the current jargon has it – so no counter energies hold it in check. The idea floats within itself, resonates, grows. Harmless of course, that intrusive

little concept, that inoffensive image. Perhaps a few humans will dream of it tonight. Items on the subject of non-dimensional realities will appear in newspapers, in essays. The soul-space Ideal will be strengthened, a little, just a little. More each day. Through your attempt at non-thought we enter complicity. The image resonates.

Now, the final stage. Are you ready?

Try not to think of an entity in soul-space who has been created by your own imaginings, by the sins you have committed in thought and word and deed. Resist the concept of a predator whose sole purpose is to wait for you beyond the grave. Avoid believing that I exist as your nemesis, because if you do you will only make me stronger. Try to convince yourself that your actions invoke no demons, engender no devils.

Feel your mind sliding round these non-concepts, touching them, stroking, flirting with mounting excitement. Feel the pressure grow as the opposing truth becomes evident and inevitable.

The time has come to accept, the time when belief must triumph over non-belief. Yield. Relish the moment of surrender. Submit.

Think of Me.

Julian Flood's previous stories for *Interzone* were "The Jade Pool" (issue 57), "Children of a Greater God" (issue 62) and "An Occupational Disease" (issue 74). He lives in Suffolk.

Our Hundredth Issue

Yes, although it may seem a way off yet, *Interzone's* hundredth issue will be appearing in just over a year's time – the October 1995 issue, out in September. So we need to start planning now. Obviously, we'll attempt to fill that issue with as many fine stories by as many major writers as possible. But, apart from inviting Brian Aldiss to write a story called "Old Hundredth Revisited" or whatever, does anyone else have any unusual ideas? How should we mark our hundredth? We'd be interested to hear from readers who have thoughts on the matter – Editor.

interzone

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The Carnival of Angst

Charles Platt



My editor Mr Pringle has asked me to indulge myself. In recognition of my impending 50th birthday, he wants me to reminisce.

This should ring alarm bells in the head of any reader, old codgers being almost always a wretched bore when they look back on their glory days. Still, it gives me an interesting challenge. Can I describe a literary movement of the late 1960s without inducing a narcoleptic fugue in hapless readers under the age of 40? There's only one way to find out.

First, the context. You youngsters probably don't realize the way things used to be in science fiction. Sex was seldom mentioned, let alone described; stories hardly ever focused on human psychology; they never mentioned drugs; they seldom showed awareness of contemporary trends and fashions; they were unsophisticated and clumsily written; and writers never, ever experimented with style. (This of course explains how idiot-savant Ray Bradbury acquired a reputation as a stylist. He was the one-eared man in the country of those who were deaf to nuance.)

Basically, science fiction was a formula: you had a hero with a problem, and somewhere along the way, he fixed it.

The End.

Today, as any *Interzone* reader is aware, things are different. We have mood pieces, character studies, even speculative fiction that tackles (gasp) political themes. But how did this come about? Who released the science-fictionoids from their low-rent genre prison and ushered them into a new land of literary opportunity?

At the risk of sounding smug about it, we did – namely, a small group (some would say, a clique) centered around Michael Moorcock, who had the hubris to imagine that he could change the direction of an entire category of fiction, and the charisma to persuade other people to take him seriously.

The vehicle which Moorcock used to break down the walls around science fiction hardly seemed fit for the job. It was nothing more than a cheesy little digest-sized monthly magazine, the kind of thing that you had to read fast before the newsprint pages turned brown and crumbled into fragments. *New Worlds*, it was called. As a teenager, I used to buy it from railway-station newsagents, though I was always embarrassed by its economy-style two-colour cover. It was basically a weak imitation of American magazines such as *Galaxy* or *Fantasy and Science Fiction*.

New Worlds had been losing sales for years. Its long-time editor, John Carnell, made plans to quit, and the magazine seemed doomed. But at the last moment, a white knight appeared: David Gold of Gold Star Publications.

Gold knew nothing of science fiction. In fact, to be honest, this very charming and decent man was barely able to read. His main business was importing slightly sexy American novels which were used literally as ballast in freighters crossing the Atlantic. He wanted *New Worlds* because he thought it would add a bit of class to his operation, and he planned to repackage it as a paperback book so that he could distribute it along with the raunchy stuff in "variety packs" that would be thrown into the racks in back-street newsagents all over Britain.

Sane men might have felt daunted by the prospect of Doing Art in such circumstances. Moorcock, however, didn't hesitate. As soon as he was appointed editor, he prophesied a whole new kind of science fiction that would borrow techniques from modern literature. He started publishing Ballard stories that no one could understand, he printed his own surreal/symbolic work under pseudonyms (William Barclay, James Colvin), and he commissioned guest editorials, one of which was by Ballard, endorsing William Burroughs.

He got away with this noncommercial, intellectual posturing because no

one at any point in the distribution chain actually read the magazine. Concealed among the monthly shipments of sex books, it rode into crummy little newsagents like a tarantula hidden in a shipment of bananas.

Subscribers, however, saw things differently. They reacted as if the magazine was a cherished, elderly relative who had just been raped by a slaverling pervert. They harangued Moorcock mercilessly at science-fiction events. Some of them even made threats.

Personally, I didn't share their point of view. I was still a mere reader, not yet a published writer, and I found myself intrigued by what Moorcock was up to. I was woefully ignorant of literature in the larger sense of the word, but the idea of experimenting with form as well as content seemed exciting. Why not be speculative in the fullest sense? Why not boldly go where no sci-fi scribe had gone before?

Soon I sold my first story to Moorcock and discovered that he lived just a few blocks from me. So we got acquainted. "You know, you could use some more interesting typefaces to break up the text a bit," I suggested to him.

"All right," he said, "why don't you give it a try?"

I knew nothing about design, but I wasn't going to let that stand in my way. After all, I'd produced my own fanzine, and I had some sheets of Letraset. What more did I need?

In its booklike format, the magazine managed to sell a steady 20,000 copies a month, which was just enough to keep it in business. My little bits of typographical design started appearing in it, and my first novel was serialized in it. This was heady stuff for a callow lad who was still at college.

That was the public side of the story. The private side was something else again.

I was renting a three-storey tenement in Notting Hill, where I had

foolishly taken in a psychopathic bricklayer as a tenant on the ground floor. Every week I would nervously ask him for rent, and he would stare at me in hostile silence until I backed out of the room and closed the door – at which point there would be a crash as he threw a knife into the door panels behind my head. He stole all the money out of the gas meters and warned me that although I might be able to put him in jail for three months, he could put me in hospital for six. He then invited everyone from a notorious local pub to share his pad on a permanent basis – including an escaped convict named Tony, who hid under the stairs when the police arrived one day to raid the place at six AM.

For many months, there were two or three long-haired degenerates for each single bed, sleeping in shifts. They kept shutters over the windows to blot out the painful stimulus of daylight, and they never replaced burned-out light bulbs, so the ground floor was soon in perpetual darkness. This made it hard for them to perform their ablutions, especially when they were stoned. The gay man who lived in the basement would complain, and I'd hear him shouting, "There's piss coming through my ceiling!"...at which point they would beat him up, and I would run around trying to hustle everyone into the hall so they wouldn't get blood on the living-room carpet.

Michael Moorcock was married with two young children, yet sometimes his life seemed almost as unstable as mine. On one occasion, in a fit of anger, he destroyed every piece of furniture in his living room, including a grandfather clock, leaving a dusty heap of wreckage in the centre of the floor. Another time, in a rebellious mood, he set fire to some newspapers in an Underground train and left the other passengers to stamp out the leaping flames.

His home became a constant hang-out for writers, musicians and radicals. There was a lot of substance abuse, a lot of guitar playing, a lot of drunk driving, and a lot of bad behaviour in general. At the local Indian restaurant, ten of us celebrated by tossing around the food and drink. "Waiter!" Moorcock cried, "bring us some more of that cheap throwing champagne!"

It seemed as if a lifetime of frustration was being blown away in a carnival of angst. Looking back, I believe that the outbursts of sociopathic behaviour were linked with the outpouring of creativity in our magazine. In life and in print, rebellion was the motivating force.

We were all in our 20s and high on the spirit of the 1960s – sex, drugs, and music from pirate radio stations that broke the BBC's monopoly and replaced Petula Clark with The Who.

The Who, of course, embodied that same dynamic of frustration and bad behaviour: when I watched them smash their amps at my college dance, it seemed little different from domestic scenes that I participated in on a routine basis.

None of this was socially acceptable, yet it seemed to be, perhaps because of the general sense of social dislocation. Everything was in flux. I inhabited a world of light shows, psychedelic drugs, six-month fashions, the Arts Laboratory, *International Times* (Britain's first "underground newspaper"), huge anti-Vietnam demos, casual sex, communes – a whole list of indulgences that had been inconceivable five years previously. My favourite pastime was to get wrecked on rum and Coke and Mandrax (ah, beloved Mandrax!) and listen to Zoot Money's Big Roll Band doing James Brown cover versions at the Flamingo on Wardour Street from midnight till six AM – where Jamaicans on the dance floor looked wickedly exotic to a repressed white-middle-class science-fictionoid such as myself. In a sense, allnites at The Flamingo were a religious ritual, reaffirming my new faith that the repressions of my youth truly had been banished, and gloriously, for the foreseeable future, I was free.

There seemed to be no limits at all. In this context, it was perfectly plausible that *New Worlds* could ride the social shockwave and sell experimental fiction to a national audience on a monthly schedule – even though we had virtually no money, no advertising, and a staff of three.

Our sense of manifest destiny was given a short, sharp shock, however. When David Gold's main distributor went out of business, and he was no longer able to publish our magazine. This was a major crisis, since we were totally dependent on the "variety pack" system for getting into the shops. A small newsagent might find it worthwhile to order a dozen assorted titles, of which *New Worlds* just happened to be one; but the same newsagent would never bother to place an individual order for a single copy of a weirdo magazine that might or might not sell during the subsequent month.

Characteristically, Moorcock not only refused to accept defeat, but enlarged his ambitions further. After looking for financial backing elsewhere, he started publishing the magazine himself, subsidizing it by writing more Elric novels. He insisted that it now had to have a full-size glossy format, with heady visuals and a commitment to create a new synthesis of fiction, science, and art.

I was still retained as the designer, though my naive, untutored talents were barely up to the task, and 64

large pages imposed a formidable challenge on a monthly basis. I was now living in a different tenement. The roof leaked, there was no heat (I had to thaw my fingers over a paraffin stove before I could use a typewriter), and the bathroom carpet was squishy with mould. Still, the neighbours were much more congenial. John Sladek (a regular contributor) stayed with us for a while, James Sallis (co-editor, with Moorcock) lived opposite, and my girlfriend became the advertising manager. She also wheeled the subscription copies to the local post office in a rusty pram which she bought for ten shillings in Portobello Market, conveniently located outside our front door.

No one ever guessed that the magazine emanated from such primitive conditions. Incredibly, it lived up to Moorcock's grandiose goals and started attracting serious attention in the world of contemporary art, literature, and even science (as Dr Christopher Evans of the National Physical Laboratory started contributing articles about his maverick research projects). It also penetrated the American market, where respected sci-fi figures started denouncing it as a threat to the sacred principles that were the very foundation of science fiction. (Oddly enough, they were right.)

One way or another, everyone took *New Worlds* seriously. In truth, though, it was all a matter of bravado – almost a con trick, really, bearing in mind its real-life background of poverty, discontent and downright dishonesty. The printer wasn't being paid, we discovered that our new distributor had been lying to us about our circulation, and when I finally sat down and figured out the production costs (a task which no one had ever attempted before) I was astonished to find that even if we sold every single copy of our print run, we would still make a net loss. So that was why we never had enough money to pay the bills!

Moorcock was a genius at infecting people with enthusiasm, and he made it seem that the passport to nirvana was nothing more than a ream of typing paper. Financially, however, he generated chaos. Every bank account was overdrawn, some contributors were paid twice, some not at all, and when one printer started demanding money, we simply took our business to another. I recall hiding on the floor in Moorcock's flat with all the lights out while the owner of the previous printing company shouted to us through the letterbox – and we didn't think much about it. After all, we were involved in a heroic mission, a grand attack on the literary status-quo, which made money seem trivial by comparison. That, at least, was the message we picked up from our mentor.

Eventually, I got control of the finances, halved the number of pages, and put the magazine on a break-even basis, but by this time the spark had gone. Moorcock was exhausted from leading and attempting to bankroll a four-year crusade. My girlfriend and I were at each other's throats, to such an extent that we had screaming, hair-pulling fights that spilled into the street. I was worn out from typesetting the whole magazine, because the equipment was so primitive, it required me to type each line twice: once to assess its length, and a second time inserting a code to fill out the line to its proper measure. I was also still supervising the design, commissioning art, and earning a living in my spare time by writing dirty jokes for a sex magazine (almost five hundred jokes, altogether). The high point of my career was when I was assigned to write an intercourse positions guide. Thus was the "new wave" in science fiction underwritten over the years: by Elric and smut.

Meanwhile, the 60s were starting to self-destruct. The Beatles discovered transcendental meditation and began burbling about love and peace, and we felt a deep sense of betrayal. This sounds silly, but bear in mind that it had been the Beatles who showed that you could Do Art (as in "Eleanor Rigby" or "I Am the Walrus") and sell it to millions of plain-and-simple punters. This was the example that we yearned to follow; yet they abandoned us and went to contemplate their navels in an ashram that seemed to be run by the 1960s equivalent of a snake-oil salesman. The music turned to mush, and so, apparently, did the brains of those who had over-indulged in various psychoactive substances.

I ran off to America in 1970. My girlfriend stayed in London, became a radical socialist, and took a job as a baggage handler at Heathrow to show her solidarity with the workers' struggle. Moorcock subsided into seclusion, and spent years paying off printing debts for which he was personally liable (he had always refused to make *New Worlds* a limited company). Thomas M. Disch, who had written some of the most impressive fiction, was recovering from a nervous breakdown. Ballard, the greatest innovator of all, stopped writing "condensed novels" and moved into his "decadent" period, the beginning of which was marked by his brilliant novel *Crash*. Aldiss set aside his brief fictional flirtation with Ouspenski and psychedelic drugs and returned to more conventional themes.

Other *New Worlds* contributors dispersed in different directions. Norman Spinrad went back to California. John Sladek got married and, for a while, settled into a seamless imitation of

family life. Barrington Bayley and M. John Harrison quietly continued writing their own kinds of science fiction. Michael Butterworth started a new publishing business.

A few people, such as Langdon Jones and James Sallis, stopped writing altogether, probably because their support system had gone. Without Moorcock making everything seem possible, it wasn't possible – at least for those who lacked the confidence to do it alone. To some extent I suffered that syndrome myself, as I emerged from five years as a component of a very tight-knit support group. It took me a long time to recover from *New Worlds*.

Looking back, the 60s was a period of half-baked ideas pursued with wide-eyed naivety. Often the results were embarrassing (the whole "flower power" thing, and the Tolkien fad, and astrology). In a few areas, though, there were some substantial achievements.

New Worlds clearly belongs in the latter category. During the five-year period from 1965 to 1970, the magazine published novels in serialized form that today would be considered far too experimental, or cerebral, or difficult for the mass audience. (Disch's *Camp Concentration*, for instance.) It broke some moralistic barriers, to the extent that questions about it were asked in the House of Commons. It fused fine art, literary experimentation, and the subject matter of science into an unprecedented, seamless whole. It published truly successful experiments by contemporary writers such as D.M. Thomas. It catalyzed the growing awareness of style and technique in science fiction and interrupted the tradition of clumsy formula writing which had persisted, in various guises, ever since the birth of "scientifiction" in the 1920s.

Not bad, coming from a tiny bunch of inexperienced idealists operating out of their squalid living rooms with virtually no capital and a total lack of business savvy.

I have only one regret, which is that I was never able to read all of the material that *New Worlds* published. I was spending so much time doing design and production, writing porn for quick money, listening to Jimi Hendrix at window-rattling levels, and fighting with my girlfriend, there were never enough opportunities to sit and read.

Maybe one day I'll dig out the back issues that I still have stashed away. But – I really don't know if I have the stomach for it. When I look at those pages today, I feel a powerful, wrenching sense of loss. I honestly expected the tidal wave of creativity and rebellion to roll on and on. I never imagined that it would break on the beach of conservatism, laziness and repression. And almost 30 years later, I miss it still.

(Charles Platt)

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Get Hot and Dance!

Stuart Palmer

“**T**hey’re packing the place, lads. When you roll out there, they’ll wet ’em.”

That’s Arn Hutchins in the cowboy hat. He’s backstage at the stadium toking on an expensive cigar. Lights scorch. The crowd screams for action.

“Yeah, great. Yeah.” That’s Jonny, all grinning teeth and tan. He’s nodding and sweating in equal measures. He looks round at the other members of Get Hot.

There’s Paul, looking tired and chubby-faced, Dave-E, joker of the pack, wearing a leather waistcoat that shows his smooth chest, and Kez, withdrawn but slyly smiling because he’s *Smash Sounds*’ hottest male of the year.

“We’re talking money here, lads. We’re talking money and sex.”

“Don’t you worry,” says Dave-E, “we’ll shag the lot of ’em.”

Arn smiles. Kez smiles. Jonny laughs and says, “Yeah, great. Yeah.”

“The new songs are, like, really kickin’,” says Paul.

“Go knock ’em dead.”

Arms raised to show smooth armpits and impeccable muscles, Get Hot take to the stage. The backing tapes play. The funky bass of “Play With Me” fills the stadium, and 25,000 pre-pubescent girls transform into screaming harpies.

THIS WEEK’S POPSTASY STAR PROFILE: Cool! It’s Paul, lead singer with Get Hot!

EYES: Blue, like river water that’s not been polluted.

HAIR: It’s like a blond look for the sexy summer.

FAVE DRINK: Hot chocolate with a Tia Maria in it (Yeuk!).

FAVE FOOD: Paella (I had it when we was touring Spain last Chrimbo and it was real great).

DREAM DATE: I’m not telling!

STAR SECRET: (We at Popstasy reckon he’s got a solo career up his sleeve just waiting to happen.)

SEX APPEAL: (Loads-a-snogs. We reckon he’s one for a candlelit nosh and a few smooches round the fire. Well, that’s what we’d do with him here at Popstasy!)

Extract from an interview in *Smash Sounds* to promote their second album:

WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN THE LAST MONTH, GUYS?

Kez: Well, like, we’ve been in the studio doing the new album. It’s been, like, really hard work, but it was fun ’cause we were all doin’ it.

Jo: Yeah, great. Yeah.

Paul: There’s some really meaningful tracks, you know? It’s like, got a message.

Dave-E: That’s only if y’ play it backwards!

Paul: No, but, like, it ain’t just about splitting up with girls, it’s like...meaningful. Like, *Come On! Come On!* and *Let’s Shake It* are about stuff and the environment and things.

WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENT?

Dave-E: I can’t even spell it!

Paul: It’s, like, really great. I mean, we’re not just pop stars. I mean, I like going out to the countryside and taking walks in my car in the hills and things. And, you know, you need the environment for that stuff, don’t you?

Dave-E: (Says something unprintable about sheep!)

Paul: No, but you do. And, like, this ozone stuff is really bad.

Kez: I’ve heard it’ll go soon. I s’pose we’ll be all right then, but, you know, ’til it does, it worrying, ’cause we can’t go sunbathing, can we?

WHAT’S THE NEW ALBUM CALLED?

Paul: It’s called *Don’t Sweat It*, like, ’cause... Well, ’cause it’s one of the songs on the album. It’s, like, the first one to get released into the Hi-CD call-system autologue.

Arn Hutchins’ office. Gold and platinum records adorn the walls. Behind his balding head is the triple platinum for *Get Hot and Dance!*

Arn’s not happy.

Across the desk sit Dorkin and Baustein, song-writing talent behind Get Hot. They’re unassuming thirtysomethings. Baustein wears trendy glasses, both wear grey suits.

“Number six,” says Arn.

“It...it’s not our fault, Arn,” says Baustein.

“First week of release and we get number six in the autologue.

“I do know what you’re thinking, Mr Hutchins,” says Dorkin, “but it can’t be the song. We know it can’t. It’s the same beat as their last hit, virtually the same tune, but...”

Arn’s taken the cigarette from his mouth. He’s busy licking his lips.

“Do you know the costs of producing a band like these lads?”

"Well, I..."

"PopMedia Profile Ltd pay over a million a head." Arn's shouting. "Over a million a head! Work it out, people. The craze is for four good-looking, all singing, all dancing guys. That's over four million before they make a track. We're only recouping initial costs on these lads."

"It's... it's the audience," says Baustein. "They're fickle. They download the song one day and love it, but the next they're ordering something else. Things go out of flavour. Today's pin-up's tomorrow's joke and..."

"Are you telling me my job, Mr Baustein?"

Baustein shakes his head.

"I'm liaisoning accountant for Get Hot, and I say when they quit. I say when the next big thing comes on the scene. You got that?"

The song writers nod and shrink into their suits.

Arn cools and lights another cigarette. "We've already got the new band in initial production. They'll be ready early next year. We've gone for four guys with long hair, more muscle, bigger packets; a kind of surfer look."

"I'm... I'm sure it'll catch on, Mr Hutchins," says Dorkin.

"If we push the image through the teenshows, it damn well will," says Arn, "but I still want more from Get Hot."

THIS WEEK'S POPSTASY STAR PROFILE: Melt in my undies! It's Kez from Get Hot!

EYES: Kinda chocolate brown, I s'pose (We could look at them for weekeroonies).

HAIR: Blond and curly on my head. I'm not saying about you-know-where...

FAVOURITE DRINK: I like a nice red wine. Nothing fancy.

FAVOURITE FOOD: Pineapple and tropical fruits (We here at Popstasy wouldn't mind picking his coconuts for him!).

DREAM DATE: That woman from that soap opera. The one with the nice smile.

STAR SECRET: I like showering in my jeans, so they get really wet and clingy.

SEX APPEAL: (Gusp! This one's a scorcher! Here at Popstasy we've been dreamin' of him on a tropical island in a dreamtastic loin cloth. Picture and drip...)

Review of the latest release in *Hot Sounds UK:*

Get Hot: Don't Sweat It (PopMedia Profile Ltd)

Pop's a cut-throat thing. It ain't like the movies where you make a crap film and people still think you're great. Make a crap song, and that's you. Over and out with a big finito to the zap-void of yesterday's enterprise. And what about this rockular mish-mash of hip-hop backing, pop-soul wibbly-bits and Paul pum-pin' for all he's worth? Save it for the zap-void. Spend your autologue tokens on Funky Boys new outing.

Extract from *Get Hot and Dance! The Holo-Vid Collection:*

(The lads are slumped on a sofa. They wear vests and well-filled torn jeans.)

Paul: They're, like, really great.

Jonny: Yeah, great. Yeah.

Dave-E: Really crazy. I mean, like, some of the things they'll do.

Kez: (Laughs bashfully.)

Dave-E: You know, like, when that girl, just threw herself on the limo' and was, like, hangin' on screamin', "Kez! Kez! Kez! Kez!" and there was her mother chasin' after the car with her knickers in the air. It was mad, that was.

Kez: (Looks a little embarrassed and, still smiling, lowers his face.)

Paul: But, like, we know it won't be like that forever. I think me and the lads are sussed enough to know it's gotta end some time and we're, like, planning for that. You know, I'd like to go solo and...

Dave-E: And then there was that time when that girl collapsed at the signing session. She just flaked out, like, whammo!

Paul: (Soldiering on regardless) I mean, its our fans that made us and nobody lasts, like, a really long time. You know, a week's a long time in pop, but a year or two's just nothing.

Kez: It's nothing, man.

Paul: A week is, but not a couple of years.

Dave-E: And this girl's spread on the floor, right? And I picks her up and carries her through to the back of the shop. I mean, I'm not kiddin', you should have seen her face when she came round. She was like... (Does an impression of great surprise). It's freaky, but it's great.

Jonny: Yeah, great. Yeah.

Paul: But answering the question, no, all of us get on, like, really well.

Kez: I mean, we would, wouldn't we? We're, like, mates.

“Why don't you fuck off, you bastard?”
“Who're you talkin' to, arsehole?”
“You, you bastard.”

Paul's pacing the dressing room searching for a dry towel. Eyes narrowed, he's trying not to look at Dave-E, even though he's pointing at him.

“Just 'cause you're fat,” says Dave-E. “Just 'cause you can't dance and sing at the same time.”

Kez ambles into the centre of the room, arms raised and boyish face set in a beatific gaze. “Guys, like, we don't have to be like this, 'cause...”

Paul and Dave-E shout assorted obscenities. Jonny nods and grins and looks agreeable between squat-thrusts. Clearly hurt, Kez slinks into a corner and tries some red wine. He doesn't like it.

“Don't call me fat,” says Paul. “I get more fan mail than you. I get...”

“You get cakes in the post, don't you?” says Dave-E.

“I'm going solo soon. I'm gonna talk to Mr Hutchins about it.”

“You're goin' nowhere, y' bloated old queen.”

Paul scowls and thumps the edge of the washbasin. He shakes his head and grits his teeth. After a moment of staring at the mirror, he corrects his posture so his slight paunch doesn't hang over the waistband of his trousers.

“Anyhow, I'm the singer,” he says. “It's me what does the hard work. You stand at the back doing all the ah-yeahs and spinning on yer arse.”

“It's called dancing. Try it, y' fat git.”

"Fuck off. I wanna be a real serious musician."

"No, Paul," says Kez, nervously. "That'd be, like, suicide."

"I'd be bloody good."

"You'd be a fat git with a big gob on yer," says Dave-E.

Kez looks pained. "Are we still, like, mates?"

"Number six, number ten, number..." Arn flicks through the autologue chart listings for the last six weeks. "Number 26, number 39, number 51, number 73." He slams the paper on his desk and stares into space. "They're slipping. Two weeks in the top ten for *Don't Sweat It* and everyone stops ordering. This week we had seven people download it into their systems. Seven. It ain't good enough. It ain't good enough at all."

THIS WEEK'S POPSTASY STAR PROFILE: Crazy dude!

It's Dave-E from the Gets!

EYES: Two of 'em, last time I counted. I think they're a sort of mud colour.

HAIR: Yeah. Ha ha. It's kind of dark brown. So's the stuff on my head...

FAVOURITE DRINK: I like a pint of beer, with some nuts.

FAVOURITE FOOD: I like nuts, with a pint of beer.

DREAM DATE: A roomful of female mud wrestlers (We said he was a crazy dude!).

STAR SECRET: I played this gag on Paul and the other guys last week, made 'em believe we were gonna do music for this documentary. I really had 'em going. Course, now they'll know the truth, won't they?

SEX APPEAL: (Here's one for the gals who like a sense of humour. Birrovalad, is our Dave-E, but I bet he'd tickle a fancy or two!)

"Listen, lads. While they're setting up these cameras, I want you going through that dance again."

It's Arn. We're on the holo-vid stage for the latest Get Hot shoot, *Swallow My Pride*. It's next month's release, available on the autologue lines with a bonus track. The next five weeks are full of promotional appearances.

If it doesn't make number one, Get Hot are in big trouble.

Arn watches them take position. For no particular reason, the set resembles a Roman arena. The routine will be intercut with lion footage.

"Paul," he says. "What's with the shirt?"

Paul looks surprised. Clearly he doesn't have an answer.

"Great! Then get the shirt off. Show some flesh."

"There's a lotta flesh to show," says Dave-E under his breath.

"He can breathe in. Now, you. Yeah? Are you wearing boxers or something?"

"What, like me?" Dave-E pulls one of his famous comic faces.

"Just are you or aren't you?"

"Yeah, I've got some boxers on, but..."

"Then get the trousers off. I want you selling it. I want hormone-crazed girls demanding to see this. It's called *Swallow My Pride* right? Well, I want it so far in their faces that they have to swallow it."

"Yeah, great. Yeah," says Jonny, stripping down to his tan and G-string.

Paul doesn't look so pleased.

"What are you waiting for?"

"I... I don't think it's right." He shuffles forward, hesitates and looks at the floor. "We should be, like, maturing and getting credibility instead of..."

"Listen, kid," says Arn. "I've got a concept here. The concept's this: you prance around showing everything except the parts they won't show on H-MTV."

"Er... No, sir." Paul buttons his shirt. "I refuse. I mean, it's a song about the dangers of nuclear waste, right? And..."

"It's a song about oral sex," says Arn. "Dorkin and Baustein wrote it on my instructions. It's about cramming a gob full."

Paul pales noticeably.

"It's about getting some hot pork," says Arn, slowly stepping closer. "It's worded to get every pre-teen girl moist at the thought of what puberty's gonna give 'em."

They're standing close now. Arn breathes cigarette fumes in his young star's pretty face. "Do you want reminding of your own mortality, boy?"

"No, sir." Paul begins to shake. "But, I was thinking, if we went, like, more subtle, we'd last longer and sell more and... maybe I could go solo, or..."

"Fuck yourself, kid. This world's about plastic pop. If it ain't plastic, then it don't pop. Got it?"

"But..."

"You're heading for a meltdown."

Paul's will snaps. He rips off his shirt and stumbles back to begin the dance routine.

"And don't forget to hold that stomach in," says Arn.

*Ooh baby, you're a dream come true,
I'd love to show you a thing or two.
I'll take you on a journey - an incredible ride,
Ooh, come on, hot buns... Just swallow my pride...*

Review of the latest release in Chart Musik:

Swallow My Pride by Get Hot (PopMedia Profile Ltd) Poor Gets. From the classic piano ballad, *Flex It*, to the beautifully sung *Suck My Love* of the first album, they've come to this. We should have smelled a rotten cod with *Don't Sweat It*, but this takes the biscuit. This is all tinny cymbals, weak vocals and crap lyrics. "Ooh, baby you're a demon too," is one (well, sounds like it). Still, nice H-V, if you like meatheads in the raw...

THIS WEEK'S POPSTASY STAR PROFILE: It's tall, dark, mysterious Jo from Get Hot!

EYES: Emerald green, like emeralds. (Smoochilicious, says us at *Popstasy*).

HAIR: Dark... all over.

FAVOURITE DRINK: Something dark and exotic, like a brown ale!

FAVOURITE FOOD: Oysters, tomatoes, powdered rhino horn. That kinda stuff.

DREAM DATE: Haven't met her yet, but I'm hoping she'll come soon...

STAR SECRET: I like going round my pad in the nude. I just love it. Letting it all hang out. Whenever the

guys come round I make 'em wait ages, but I still open the door in the altogether.

SEX APPEAL: (Creamy, steamy and dreamy. This guy's waiting to tell a secret, but we reckon you'll have to work it out of him in the bedroom!)

“Great news, dudes!” Dave-E's jumping round the room in a pair of boxers that barely conceal his genitals. He's waving a copy of the latest autologue chart.

“Oh, like, that's... Oh, easy.” Kez grins and blushes. “Is it... top ten?”

Dave-E laughs and throws his arms round Paul's bare shoulders. Paul's been ignoring him, impersonating an intellectual.

“Look at it, man.”

Paul looks up from the book he's pretending to read. It takes a moment for his eyes to read down the listing. Where is it?”

“There.” Dave-E points.

“Oh, like, let's see.” Kez joins them, staring intently at the page.

Jonny leaps across the floor, wearing only an athletic support. His grin lasts longer than it ought to.

“Number 15,” says Paul, sounding a little afraid.

“The guy can read,” says Dave-E. His fake smile falls away. He slaps Paul's shoulder and goes to stare at himself in the mirror. He's getting shadows under his eyes.

“Number 15...” Paul says it again, gazing through the page. “Shit. We're washed up. I knew that holo-vid was...”

“You didn't know fuck,” Dave-E shouts. “If you'd held your gut in...”

“Hey,” says Kez. “Like, it's too late for inclementations now. We're...”

“Finished,” says Paul. “No concerts. No interviews. No solo career.”

“At least we won't fade into obscurity,” says Dave-E, heavy on the bitterness. He opens a can of his favourite cider and takes a gulp.

Four pretty boys in their late teens stare at the floor and the stack of old reviews in the corner.

“It's like this,” says Arn. He's doing lunch with Dorkin and Baustein. The restaurant's expensive and secluded. Every band accountant dines there.

“The new guys aren't ready. They're growing, but not quick enough. That means we've only got the Gets.” He shakes his head between mouthfuls of smoked salmon. “Now, I know you're only writers and wouldn't know a publicity machine from a monkey's dong, but I've spoken to the guys in PopMedia Profile and they're stuck. We need something big to push the Gets one last time.”

Dorkin and Baustein look at each other with concerned eyes.

“I was thinkin' suicide,” says Arn. “A good old fashioned rock'n'roll death, and we could tie it in with a ballad from *Don't Sweat It*.”

“Oh, no, Arn,” says Baustein. “I mean...”

“These are living people here, Mr Hutchins, you can't...” Dorkin looks at his lobster. “Well, you can't.”

“Don't kid yourself. They're the same as any other charting band. I mean, shit, ain't that the whole idea?”

“But, Mr Hutchins...”

“I know. I know.” Arn puts his knife and fork down. “These are clean-cut lads, they don't touch drugs, they only talk about sex, and rock'n'roll suicide ain't fashionable anyhow.” He shrugs. “But we've got a problem here. I mean, you write the songs and these guys ain't inspiring you.”

“Perhaps... Well, it's only an idea, but, perhaps if we talked to them and got a real feel for them,” says Dorkin.

Arn's shaking his head. “I've got faith in you people. It ain't the songs. Could be the singer. He's half-a-stone over and girls don't go for lardboys.”

“But, Arn, he does have a good voice,” says Baustein.

“Yeah, but it's Kez with the sex appeal. Kez's got the looks and the...” Arn's brow lowers. He's having an idea. “We split the band and take Kez solo.”

“I... I don't think it would convince, Mr Hutchins,” says Dorkin. “Besides, it's Paul that wants to go solo and... well.”

“It's just a word or two in the right ears,” says Arn. “A mention in a gossip column, a couple of lines in a teen paper. We could do it.”

“And... and what about the others?”

A shrug. “You know how it goes.”

Dorkin pushes his lobster away.

“Could you do it? Could you write for Kez as a solo artist? I'm talking sex here, verging on dirty. I want something that'll get glands pumping.”

“Well, Arn, I suppose we could, but...”

“It won't have to last. A couple of hits and he can go the same way as the others.” Arn smiles. “We'll have the new band by then and they're real hot. We're thinking of calling them *Flesh Pots*. What do you think?”

Extract from *Monika's Juice*, gossip column in *Smash Sounds*:

“Well, rumour has it that things aren't hunky dory with the hunky Gets. Seems there's a buzz in the air that one of 'em's going to make the break and strike out on his own. And a little birdie's chirped the name Kez in my shell-like...”

The copy of Dostoevsky that Paul carries for reasons of image slips to the dressing-room floor. He's reading *Smash Sounds*. The other Gets are on stage rehearsing a routine for the last show of the *Don't Sweat It* tour. He doesn't hear the music thumping through the walls.

“Bastard,” he says. “Bastard!”

He throws down the magazine. He's got business to engineer.

“Where in the name of sweet fuck is he?” Arn's pacing backstage. The theatre's half full of screaming girls.

“Have you seen him?” He grabs Dave-E's shoulder.

“How'd I fuckin' know where he's at?” Dave-E pulls away. “He could be out on a cake-eatin' binge.”

“It's a bit serious this, isn't it?” says Kez, oiling his chest.

Arn sighs in frustration. “PopMedia Profile'll have my arse over this.”

Jonny grins as a make-up artist asks him to drop his trousers. They've got a new routine worked out for the final song.

"If he don't show..." Arn looks threatening.

"He will, man. He will," says Dave-E. "He'd fuckin' better, the fat-gutted bastard. I always thought he was a... There he is, man."

Arn turns, cowboy hat pulled low over his eyes.

"Just kiddin'," says Dave-E.

Paul walks in three minutes before the show starts. He won't say where he's been. There's no time to tell him about the new routine. Arn bundles them onto the stage and the stamping feet subside as Get Hot throw their arms in the air and begin the set with *Ooh! So Sad*.

Three more up-tempo numbers follow, then a quieter section at the piano for *Flex It, Suck My Love* and *Lay Me Down (And Take Me)*, a song from the new album. After this it's back to the dancing with *Swallow My Pride, Don't Sweat It, Come on! Come on!* and four tracks from the first album. They even throw in a version of an old Marvin Gaye track, but the audience doesn't recognize it.

Arn watches them intently. They've got a charm, he supposes. It's a shame they're past their prime. He'll start *Flesh Pots* younger, say 15; make sure he gets full mileage.

The finale draws near. Get Hot strut to *Play With Me*, swap the beat round and go straight into *If You Want To*. Then comes the self-titled *Get Hot and Dance*. As Paul holds the last note, the others turn on the final beat and drop their trousers. The audience goes wild.

Paul frowns and looks over his shoulder. He stares in horror, mouth open, song choking in his throat. Printed in large red letters across six tanned buttocks are the words *Get Hot*.

Despite threats, he refuses to do an encore.

Extract from a tabloid interview after the final gig of the tour:

The hunky singer with Get Hot talks exclusively to your super soaraway Stamp. "I've heard the rumours," says Paul, 19. "But these other papers have got it wrong." The teenage idol of millions adds, "There's a lot of bad feeling going down in Get Hot, and me and the guys have held it together as long as we can."

Now he reveals the terrible truth only to the sensational searing Stamp. "I'm the one leaving the band," says the five-foot 10-inch superstar. "I've got some great songs together and I'm going solo."

Wearing nothing but a revealing leather thong, he adds, "I mean, the guys are great, but they're not saints, if you know what I mean. Dave-E's trying to hide his drug addiction and it makes him really tough to work with, Jonny's had a string of gay lovers, and Kez is struggling to come to terms with his attraction for farm animals."

"I could tell you about his love-feast with three alsatians, but I don't want to hurt him. They're great guys." However, the bleach-blond bombshell that broke a billion hearts admits, "It's time to go our separate ways."

"Get your arse in here now!" Face calm, Paul steps into Arn's office. He's avoided the band all day, but Arn tracked him down in a small downtown club and forced him to his office.

"You've blown it, you shit. You've blown it big."

"I know," he says, quietly. "I wanna buy my own contract. I wanna sign to a new label."

Arn smirks. "There's not a label on this Earth'd take you on, boy. And you don't earn that kind of money."

"No," he says, "but I might. If I'm solo."

"You ain't going solo. We'll recoup some of the losses you've made us on recycling. The rest we'll write off as a tax loss."

"Please, Mr Hutchins. I'm really serious about this. I really want..."

Arn grabs him by the throat and pushes him back against the wall. His head impacts with a gold disc.

"You don't know the first thing about business. You've got ideas above your station, and I'm gonna remind you, you little shit."

Paul gasps for breath, but the hand takes time to release. He falls to the floor, rubbing his neck. Arn seizes his arm and drags him to the door.

"Get up, you fucker. Get up. I'm gonna show you your replacements. I'm gonna show you how it's gonna be from now on."

Arn jerks him out into the corridor like a rag doll and throws him in the lift. He sprawls on the metal floor as the big man presses a button for the basement. The doors close with a hiss.

"No," he says. "I didn't mean it."

"You meant it." Arn sneers. "This has been coming for a while. Now shut your mouth."

The doors open. There's a smell, so familiar to Paul. It's the smell of the womb. There's a hum of machinery, but it's soon drowned by voices. Dave-E, Kez and Jonny appear. Their clothes are torn, their perfect hairstyles crumpled.

"You fucking arsehole!" screams Dave-E. "You've sold us down the river. Now we're all for it."

"I didn't... I didn't want it like this," Paul protests.

Jonny isn't grinning. He sneers.

"Why did you do it, like?" says Kez.

"'Cause of you," says Paul. "You doing the dirty and going solo. You didn't even tell me. I read about it in *Smash Sounds*."

Kez looks nonplussed. He looks at Arn Hutchins. The big man in the cowboy hat slowly shakes his head and mouths the words, "Forget it."

"I didn't know, Paul. Honest I didn't." Kez's pretty-boy face shows fear.

"None of you know shit," says Arn. He looks beyond them to the shadows where record-company guards wait for orders. "We're going to the tanks."

Dave-E screams and tries to make a break for it. A guard grabs him, rips his shirt. When he struggles, the guard expertly breaks his legs with a truncheon. Dave-E collapses to the floor.

The group turns a corner, Arn at the head. Green light bathes their faces.

Huge tanks dominate the chamber. Inside are four bodies. They're naked, discoloured by the fluid that shapes and hurries their growing cells. They have muscles like melons, unnaturally large genitals,

faces that are crude and only partly formed.

"Meet the *Flesh Pots*," says Arn, "your replacement. We should have 'em ready for the Christmas market. Dorkin and Baustein are doing the material, PopMedia Profile are getting the image. You're gonna help, lads."

Paul can't take his eyes from the tanks. Suppressed memories lurch into his mind, memories of growing, of being trained, of personality shaping, of gene styling.

"What... what's that mean?" says Kez. "Like, how can we help?"

Arn grins. "What used to happen to useless vinyl, lads? They melted it down, made new pressings from it. You've got cells, haven't you?"

Paul thinks he's miscalculated, but he knows nothing lasts forever. A week in pop's a long time. And the kids have short attention spans.

Stuart Palmer has contributed one story to *Interzone* before: "The Discontinuum Kitchen" (issue 55). He lives in Hull, Humberside.

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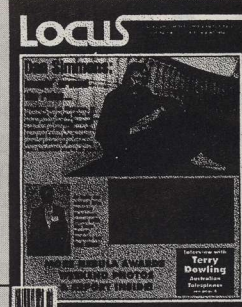
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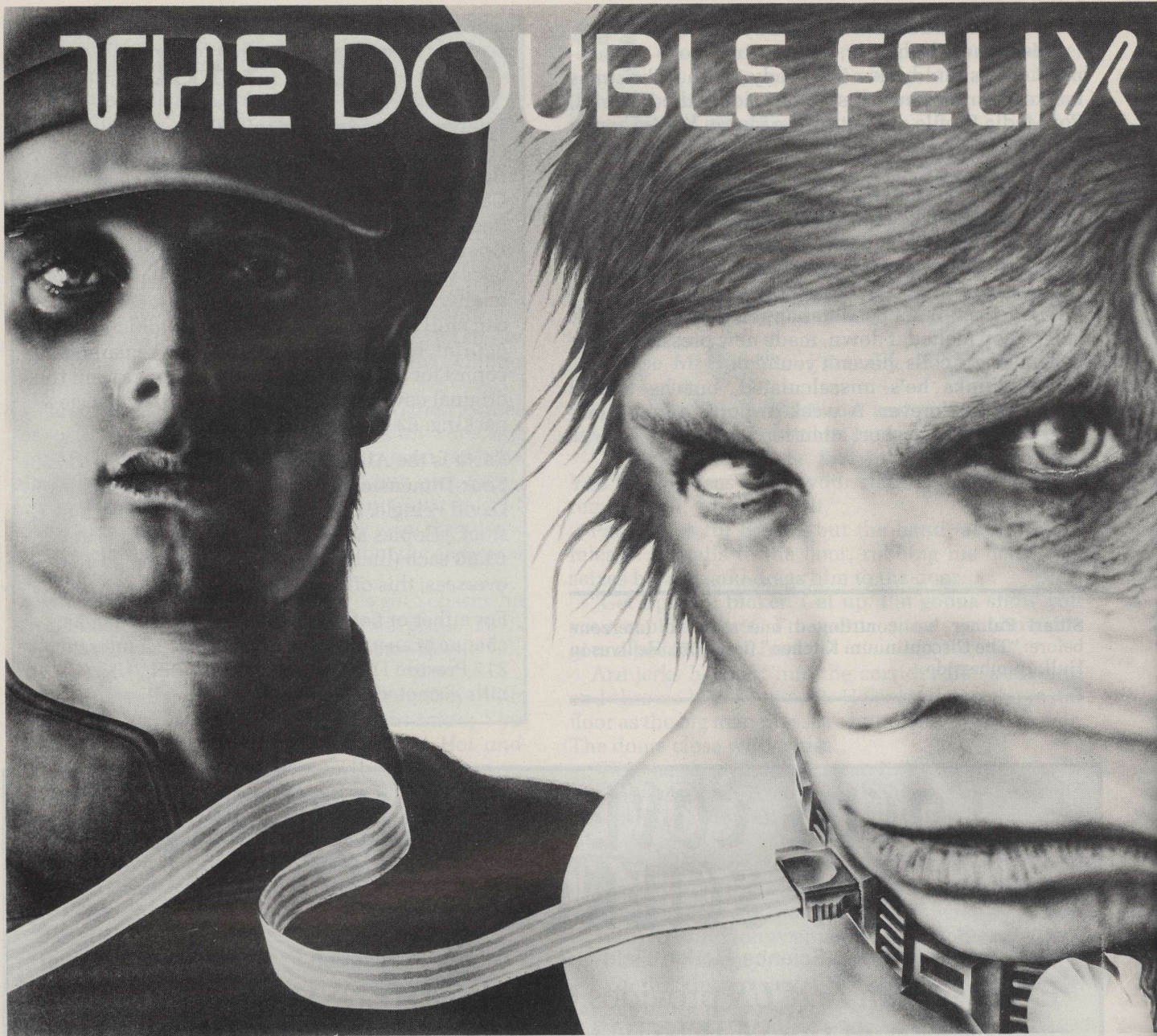
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THE DOUBLE FELIX



Most funerals, not surprisingly, are tearful affairs, and that of Felix Wren was no exception.

It need not have been, of course. Felix himself would have told everyone as much, had he simply remembered to do so before the inconvenience of his expected, if not entirely predictable death. If the mourners had only known about Tosh and the very special collar he wore, they all would have had cause for stunned rejoicing.

Except, of course, for the murderers.

From the front row of the packed church – where sat the lovely widow, Mrs Wren (formerly the titled but impecunious heiress Galina Balyban, great-granddaughter of an exiled White Russian count) – to the last few pews packed with Felix's employees from Wren BioHarmonics and with his old classmates from the California Institute of Technology, tears flowed and sobs were choked back. Even the minister delivering the eulogy was having trouble maintaining his composure.

Now, it seems likely that even the worst person

who ever lived and died probably enjoyed a mourner or two at his funeral: Stalin's aged mother, for instance, assuming the dictator hadn't had her shot by then, might have wept over her boy's casket. But the tears flowing down during this particular funeral were neither sparse nor crocodilian. Felix Wren had been well loved. Everyone who had ever had any dealings with him had come away with respect and affection. The general consensus had been that Felix was a prince among the rabble. And now, every time anyone glanced at his closed coffin, they were struck anew by the pain occasioned by his unfortunate accidental death at so young an age.

Undeterred by his own sniffles, the minister was entering his peroration.

"And it seems only fitting that Felix should have perished in the manner he did, at home in his beloved workshop, searching for yet another product to benefit mankind. How a researcher of Felix's experience could have failed to take adequate precautions against the accidental needle-stick that injected the fatal compound into his veins must remain forever a

PAUL DI FILIPPO

Illustrations by Gerry Grace



mystery, and is not for us to ponder. The authorities" – here the minister glanced toward the rear of the church, where a lone hardbitten man stood awkwardly by the door, hat in his single hand – "are satisfied that Felix's death was strictly an act of God, one of those inexplicable mishaps all too familiar to us poor mortals. And perhaps God in his wisdom had some –"

"Will you get that goddamn tongue out of my ear!"

The hush that followed this astonishingly indelicate and decontextualized admonition resembled the silence one might encounter deep within the innermost chambers of the Carlsbad Caverns. Suddenly, birds half a mile away could be heard singing their vernal songs through the open church doors.

All eyes were now riveted on the lithe form of the black-suited Widow Wren as she shot to her feet and spun around to glare at the man sitting next to her. Beneath the black lace veil softening her features, a look of rage contorted her face for a moment, and, quivering, she seemed ready to launch into further vituperations. But then, with a visible effort, she

recovered herself. Regarding the congregation with a look of pained contrition, she suddenly slapped a hand to her skirted behind and shrieked. And whereas her first imprecation had been delivered in the distinct tones of a Tennessee fishwife, the exclamation that now emerged was couched in a strange Ruritanian accent.

"I – I – I've been stung in the rear!"

The man on whom her wrath had been momentarily focused now stood. A large shambling fellow wearing a chauffeur's uniform about half a size too small and a visored cap half a size too large, he possessed a face reminiscent of one of history's lesser despots, crowned with bowl-cut black hair.

"Lemme help your Ladyship outa this solemnical and requisitive tent-show," said the man, taking the widow's arm in an overfirm grip.

Mrs Wren spoke through her reactivated sobs. "Yes, please, Staggers. I – I'd like to wait in the car."

The pair proceeded down the church aisle. When they were halfway to the door, the minister resumed his speech, and attention refocused on the altar.

At the door, the lone man who had been standing approached them. The empty right sleeve of his suit-coat was neatly folded and pinned.

"Mrs Wren. Mr Stagers. Mind if I have a word with you?"

"No, of course not, Detective Stumbo. But we should step outside in deference to the deceased."

The man seemed barely to repress a snort. "Sure."

A white stretch limo with opaque windows sat on the gravelled crescent drive before the church. The trio stopped by its left rear door.

Detective Stumbo snugged his hat on, freeing his solo hand to filch a cigarette from a pocketed pack. He lit a wooden kitchen match with a flick of his thumb and puffed the cigarette alive. For a few taut seconds, he regarded the widow and her chauffeur with eyes that had in the past actually been employed by the FBI to wordlessly end hostage negotiations. Then he spoke.

"I just wanted you to know, Mrs Wren, that although the department has officially closed the case on your husband's death, I intend to keep on pursuing it on my own. I'm not convinced that we've learned everything there is to learn yet. It seems to me there's a few loose ends —"

The woman brought forth a dazzling smile and directed it at the detective. "I appreciate your concern, Mr Stumbo — Grady, if I may. But I'm perfectly content with the results of the investigation. It seems like a waste of time for you to keep on probing — as well as a painful stimulus to a poor wife simply trying to forget such a tragedy."

The chauffeur spoke up. "Yeah. And it don't sound too legal neither, you fuckin' around on your personal time where you don't — ow!"

Mrs Wren converted the aftermath of her kick into an innocent weak-ankled stumble. "Oh, I feel faint... Do we really need to discuss this further right now, Detective?"

"No, of course not. But I'll be in touch."

The chauffeur stepped forward. "Just to show there ain't no hard feelin's, Dumbo, let's shake!"

Grady eyed the outstretched right paw coolly for a moment before answering.

"Pigs must have wings these days, since snakes have hands."

So saying, Detective Grady Stumbo moved off toward his car, a battered red Ford Escort. Soon, he was driving away.

"Haw, haw!" laughed Stagers. His glance fell on the Widow Wren, and his manner reverted to savagery. He yanked open the limo door in a highly non-professional manner.

"Get in, you dumb bimbo!"

Hustling the widow inside, he quickly followed, slamming the door behind him.

Once inside the privacy of the capacious car, Stagers began shaking his ostensible employer.

"Now, what's the idea of makin' a scene like that in there?"

Mrs Wren, a bored expression on her face, said nothing, and Stagers soon grew tired of agitating her flesh without compensatory reaction, and so released her.

"Are you done?" she calmly asked.

"Yeah, for now — oof!"

Mrs Wren unlocked the club she had made of her interlinked hands and stretched her manicured fingers while Stagers rubbed the rapidly purpling jaw she had smashed.

"You idiot! Feeling me up in church like that! I told you that we had to keep everything looking proper until the heat died down. Isn't it bad enough that that sneaky cop obviously still suspects us, without you practically writing him a confession?"

Rather than seeming angry, Stagers appeared pleased with Mrs Wren's gumption. Leering, he said, "I couldn't help myself, babe. You just get me so worked up."

Stagers placed a big hand on the widow's knee and attempted to slide it up her skirt, but she knocked it away. However, she seemed not entirely displeased, despite her next words.

"I rue the day you ever found me again. If I had my way —"

"If you had your way, you'd still be whinin' about how that jerkola husband of yours was wastin' his fortune our fortune — followin' them crazy ideas of his. If it wasn't for me, you never woulda had the courage to bump him off."

"I suppose..."

Stagers reapplied his hand, and it met with no resistance. "Cold one minnit and hot the next. Jus' like the old Perfidia —"

Bristling, the woman said, "Didn't I tell you never to use that name, even when we're alone!"

Stagers laughed rudely. "Oh, it wouldn't suit your Ladyship's plans now, would it, if all your new friends was to find out that the rich bitch Gasolina Bellyband who gets her picture in all the papers — even the Atlanta ones — was really Miss Perfidia Graboys of Pine Mountain, Georgia. Or as she was otherwise once known for about a year, Mrs Rowdy Stagers."

Rowdy's hand was now high up Perfidia's skirt, while the other one was busy inside her unbuttoned blouse. Her head lay back on the cushioned seat, painted eyelids closed.

"You bastard. You stinking bastard. But you always did know what I liked. A hundred times better than that wimpy little Felix..."

There was silence for a busy minute. Then Perfidia spoke.

"Do you know what the first thing I'm going to do when we get home is, Rowdy?"

"Mrmph..."

"I'm going to have you kill that horrid dog Felix loved so much.

"Yes, I think old Tosh will be the first thing I attend to."

Your average specimen of the Komondor breed of canine weighs upwards of one hundred and fifty pounds and resembles a small loveseat festooned with long dreadlocks. The matted Rasta hair typical of the breed obscures the dog's face, giving it a fathomless expression which effectively conceals its sometimes ignoble intentions.

Felix Wren had owned three Komondors in his life, in sequence. The first had been named Marley, the second Cliff. The current one was named Tosh.

Tosh padded nervously now from one end of Felix's

well-appointed workshop to the other. Ever since his master's death, he had been inconsolable. Penned in his outdoor run, he had barked incessantly, throwing his huge bulk against the wire in an effort to escape. The sight of either Perfidia or Rowdy had been enough to drive him to violent paroxysms.

Fearful that the grief-maddened pet would eventually break free and besiege them in the main house, Perfidia had ordered Rowdy to transfer the dog to Felix's lab. Rowdy equipped himself with a pole-mounted snare; Tosh snapped it in half, and Rowdy felt himself lucky to escape with even one pants leg. Only a tranquilizer dart administered by a compliant vet had succeeded in rendering the beast temporarily manageable. (Rowdy had argued for killing the monster outright, but Perfidia had countered that such a move would appear too suspicious, and should be postponed until at least after the funeral.)

The familiar smells in the lab seemed to have quieted the dog somewhat, and he now no longer raged, but merely whimpered and paced, claws clicking on the linoleum.

Around Tosh's neck was a curious collar. Hard to detect beneath his dreadlocks, it seemed to be composed of burnished, chunky metal lozenges, save for a single oval link of transparent crystal wired to its neighbours.

A digital clock atop a littered workbench flipped from 11:59 AM to 12:00 PM.

Tosh suddenly stiffened as if electrocuted, and fell to the floor.

A wave of distortion blurred the dog's body. It was as if it had been placed in the middle of an invisible oven, an oven whose superheated air was making the dogbody waver and shift, melting, warping, recohering the shaggy form into –

The body of a slim, red-haired and freckled man, naked except for Tosh's collar.

The man opened a pair of guileless blue eyes. He reached up and felt the collar, loose around his neck.

"Wow. It works. It works!" The man sobered. "Poor Tosh." He patted his own head. "Sorry, boy. We'll get you back soon."

An expression as of memories reintegrating themselves wrinkled the man's face, and he sobered even further. "What am I saying? Poor Tosh? Poor me! They – they murdered me! My own loving wife! Well, I suspected it was coming, but I never imagined it would happen so soon. I thought they were going to spend a little more time working themselves up to it. Still, I should have guessed. Galina never brought me lunch before. I was so amazed – even if it was only a peanut-butter and banana sandwich – that I never heard that rascal Stagers come in behind her –"

Breaking off, the man got to his feet. "Gosh, I have to remind myself Tosh isn't here any more – or at least not as such. I'm so used to talking to the old boy –"

The man took a coverall down from a hook and donned it, along with a pair of chemical-stained sneakers. "I don't suppose this is the safest place for us to hang around, is it, Tosh? But there're things I still need to do without being interrupted. Now, where could we – Of course! Priscilla Jane's!"

Picking up the receiver of a phone, the man dialled. "Hello, Priscilla Jane? This is Felix. Felix who? Your boss, Felix Wren. Do you know any other Felixes?"

It's not that common a name. Hello? Priscilla Jane, are you there?"

Felix hung up the phone. "Funny. We got disconnected. Oh well, I suppose it's just as quick to go over there as to call again."

From a plastic bin, Felix grabbed a handful of necklaces and bracelets of varying sizes, all otherwise identical to the one he wore, and dropped them in various pockets. He picked up a laptop computer, and moved toward the lab door.

The sound of a car entering the grounds of the mansion reached Felix's ears.

"Oh-oh."

Felix darted outside, hoping to elude the returning new owners of his home before they saw him.

But he was too late.

The car halted opposite his workshop while he was still framed in the doorway. His treacherous wife and chauffeur emerged. Busy talking, they at first did not see him.

"– and the dog should suffer! Shoot one paw at a time, Rowdy."

"Haw, haw, Perfidia, that's the style!"

Felix's vision was washed with crimson hues. Before he could stop himself, words spilled out.

"It's not bad enough you killed me, now you're planning to torture poor Tosh!"

Perfidia and Rowdy were nailed to the lawn. Their eyes assumed the dimensions of peeled onions. Perfidia staggered and clutched the chauffeur. Rowdy's colour drained into his boots.

"Gallop'n' Jesus! It's a ha'nt!"

Felix smiled. If they only knew. He was ten times more miraculous than a ghost.

Walking calmly across the lawn away from the frozen couple, Felix could not resist uttering a small "Boo!"

That shattered his wife's immobility.

"Ghosts don't carry computers, Rowdy! I don't know who he is, but we've got to stop him!"

"Gotcha, babe!"

Rowdy advanced slowly but determinedly on Felix.

Felix began taking off his clothes. This apparently insane action gave Rowdy pause, but he soon resumed his cautious stalking.

Felix flipped the laptop's screen into position and opened a window. He jacked a cable from the laptop into a small port on the necklace he wore.

"Do you think sixty seconds will be enough, Tosh?" Felix asked the air.

"Buddy, you ain't gonna get more'n three seconds," growled Rowdy.

Felix clucked his tongue. "Such ignorance."

Then he tapped ENTER.

The improbable transformation which had wrought Tosh into Felix now recurred in reverse.

A snarling, slavering, vengeful dog sprang up, whipped his head around to disengage the computer tether, then focused on a stunned Rowdy. The man began to back away. With a yelp, Perfidia fled toward the house. Rowdy turned and sprinted after her.

Tosh was on him within a few yards. With one huge bound, he knocked the chauffeur to the ground. Rowdy's head bounced off an ornamental cement lawn frog, and he was still. Tosh lunged for the unconscious man's throat –

Felix found himself with a mouthful of uniform.

"Yuck!"

Climbing off the still-breathing chauffeur, Felix retrieved his clothes and computer. His wife – Perfidia? Is that what Staggers had called her? How strange everything was becoming! – was nowhere to be seen. Doubtlessly, she was on the phone to either the police or the dog warden. It was past time for him to leave.

Spitting out a shirt-button that had lodged itself under his tongue, Felix set out for Priscilla Jane's.

Priscilla Jane Farmer hung up her phone and began to weep.

Damn that morbid prankster! He had had Felix's voice and goofy intonations down to a Tee! And he would have to call just when she was congratulating herself on being all cried out. Now she'd have to work her way through another bout of runny nose and hot tears and inflamed eyes. And all without benefit of tissues, since she had used them all up, and was hardly in the mood to go out for more. Those damn scratchy paper towels and damn clumsy hanks of toilet paper would have to damn well do!

And while she was damning people and things and life in general, Priscilla Jane felt she may as well toss in a good goddamn for Felix Wren himself!

"Wha – why'd he have to go and die anyhow?" Priscilla Jane wailed. "So stupid! Sticking himself with a dirty old needle! I'll bet a million dollars that wife of his had something to do with it! Bitch! I begged him not to marry her. I spotted her as a gold digger from the first! But would he listen to me? No, of course not. Oh, I was a great secretary and Gal Friday, sure enough! Who helped him build the damn business from nothing? Hah! But when it came to personal things, would he take my advice? No! And I – I could – I could've made him so happy!"

Priscilla Jane grabbed the wheel of her wheelchair and spun herself about until she was facing the kitchen doorway. Half-blinded by tears, she propelled herself forward. On her way, she bumped clumsily against a table and knocked a vase to the floor. It shattered.

"Damn! Damn, damn, damn!"

Just as she was pulling down three or four towels, the doorbell rang.

Rolling to the front door, Priscilla Jane called out irritably, "Who is it?"

"It's Felix, Pee Jay. Let me in!"

A pang of grief mixed with a bolt of fear shot through Priscilla Jane. My God, the lunatic caller was here! How had he found where she lived? What did he want? He must be insane, to be mimicking a dead man this way –

"Uh, sure – Fuh-Felix. One minute. I – I'm not dressed –"

"Priscilla Jane, are you okay? You sound weird. Listen, I'm in a bit of a rush. Could you please hurry?"

The phone was in her hand and she was jabbing 911. I sound weird? "Right, I'm hurrying."

The voice of the man on the other side of the door assumed aggrieved tones.

"Priscilla Jane, something tells me you don't trust me. Whatever you do, please don't call the authorities. My wife's bound to learn from them where I am, and she's still trying to kill me."

The operator was on the line. "Hello? Hello? Do you need help?"

Priscilla Jane spoke. "Uh, no, sorry, my, uh, cat accidentally dialled. Goodbye!"

Back at the door, Priscilla Jane secured the chain. "What do you mean, 'trying to kill you'?"

The voice of her old employer said, "Well, she is. I mean, she did kill me once – with the help of that fellow, Staggers – but it didn't take, and now I'm back, in the flesh. Well, not the same flesh exactly..."

Priscilla Jane snorted. "You're back. The same but not the same. Yeah, right..."

The mock-Felix grew exasperated. "Priscilla Jane, I can't fool around any more. I'm coming in."

All her first-floor windows were burglar-barred. "Just you try it, Mister!"

From the far side of her door came the sound of – computer keys clicking? Something rattled around the door handle.

Then her solid oak door turned to a Japanese screen, all bamboo and translucent tissue paper. The silhouette of the Felix impostor loomed frighteningly.

The intruder stepped through with a ripping noise.

Once inside the man calmly opened the fragile sagging door and removed a bracelet from the altered outer knob.

The door instantly resumed its normal appearance and structure, save for a ragged, splintery gash down the centre. Considerately, the mock Felix closed it.

Priscilla Jane found herself somehow on the far side of the room, without any memory of having scooted there.

The man turned to face her.

There could be no doubt. It was Felix. The late Felix. Felix the deceased.

Now the man was next to her. She must have blanked out for a few seconds. He was patting her on the shoulder the dumb way Felix always did, with a seemingly real hand.

"Gee, I'm sorry, Pee Jay. I never stopped to think it might be a shock to people to have me return from the dead. I keep forgetting not everyone knows what I know. Say, did you actually see my corpse? I wonder if I could get a look at it? Do you think they've buried it yet?"

Only Felix would be unworldly enough not to consider the possibility that his ghost might not be heartily embraced, and also adolescently fascinated by the notion of seeing his own dead body. It had to be him.

"Yes, I did see your corpse, you idiot, and it was as real as you are now! What's going on?"

Felix sat. "It's a long story. You know how I've been working on the theories of Rupert Sheldrake for the past few years, don't you?"

"Sure. That nut who believes in those nonsensical 'morphic fields.'"

Felix sighed. "It's not nonsense, Priscilla Jane. It's true. Everything Sheldrake hypothesized about his fields is true. And I've learned how to control them."

"Maybe you'd better refresh my memory. All I can remember is some stuff about tits."

"Tits? Oh, you mean the birds whose behaviour helped Sheldrake formulate his theories. Well, they're quite interesting, but hardly the main thrust of his argument. How can I put it briefly...? Look, everything has a form, doesn't it? From atoms to molecules

to higher organisms to galaxies, every object has its characteristic structure and shape and properties. That's what Sheldrake's interested in, and why he calls his theory 'formative causation.' Anyhow, it's Sheldrake's contention that all forms originate in and are stabilized by what he calls morphic fields. Invisible, omnipresent, all-pervasive nets of energy which both shape and are shaped by all of creation, in a perpetual flux of two-way feedback. And it's not just forms which these fields influence, but also more numinous things, things like behaviour, ideas, instincts, repetitive motions, memories – a whole host of items. All of life and inanimate matter, in fact, come under their sway."

"And these morphic fields have brought you back from the dead?"

"Please, Priscilla Jane, don't be silly. You make it sound like the fields have free will and intentions. I'm quite proud to say that I did it myself.

"You see, human consciousness is not contained in our bodies. All of a person's memories and personality reside in external morphic fields, as does the template of our bodies. Our everyday existence is a complex interaction between gross matter and these subtle webs of energy. And because morphic fields are eternal, so are our individual selves."

"You're telling me that everyone who ever lived and died is still present in some unreachable medium?"

"Hardly unreachable, Priscilla Jane. I've reached it. That's how I brought myself back." Felix fingered the necklace around his throat. "All it took was this."

Priscilla Jane squinted. "Is that Tosh's collar? It is! Why are you wearing your dog's collar, and how could it bring you back to life?"

Felix removed a bracelet from his pocket and fingered it thoughtfully. "Do you see this crystal, Priscilla Jane? Nothing like it and its cousins have ever existed before. It's synthetic and it's flawless, a lattice without the usual imperfections found even in the finest diamonds. I had them grown in microgravity. As such, it's infinitely tuneable. One of these can be made to vibrate complexly at any frequency, from nanohertz to gigahertz. Just like the quartz crystal in your watch, only infinitely more precise."

"And?"

"Vibrations are the key, Priscilla Jane. Everything vibrates ceaselessly, from the quantum level on up. And a structure's distinctive pattern of vibrations is how it attunes itself to the relevant morphic fields, much like a radio receiver tuning in a certain station. Hydrogen atoms vibrate one way, and so are susceptible to the hydrogen-atom morphic field. Sharks vibrate another way, and are governed by the morphic field for sharks. And Felix Wren vibrates in accordance with the Felix Wren field, which is a subset of the general human field, of course. There's not usually any confusion among people's fields, because as Sheldrake says, 'You resemble yourself more than you resemble anyone else.'"

"I still don't see –"

"I've found that a demonstration is generally more convincing than any amount of lecturing. Let me show you."

Felix leaned forward and clasped the bracelet around Priscilla Jane's wrist. He plugged his computer into it.

"There's a battery-powered chip in each of these gadgets that's hardly smarter than the one inside a digital clock. It can do only a few things: turn power off and on as instructed, read transduced vibrations from the crystal, or induce other vibrations. And of course, it can communicate with my laptop here.

"Now, the first thing we need to do is attune the crystal to you, get a readout of your personal vibratory pattern." Felix's fingers roved over the keys. "There, it's done. Your unique pattern's on file on CD. Quite simple, actually. Hardly more than a couple of megabytes. But that's because the highest-level pattern contains millions of pointers to the subsets that make up Priscilla Jane. Each of those is at least a megabyte too, but all you need are the pointers. It's neat.

"Anyhow, the end result is that the crystal you're wearing – powered by the batteries and instructed by the onboard chip – is now radiating the same vibrations as your mind-body gestalt."

"Rather redundant, isn't it?"

"Well, yes, right now. But if I were to remove your bracelet and fasten it to another living creature of approximately the same mass –"

Seeing where he was heading, Priscilla Jane interrupted. "It would swamp their natural vibrations. But why living? Why not a hundred and twenty pounds of beach sand?"

"Ah, that's one mystery neither Sheldrake nor I can answer. He has his theories about entelechy and vitalism, a special quality of living systems. Whatever the reason, you can't make inanimate matter resonate to the patterns of life. And that includes corpses, unfortunately, or I'd simply reclaim my old body. But to confirm your perceptive guess: the bracelet would indeed overpower the natural vibrations of whoever it was touching, and transform the individual into another Priscilla Jane."

"And that's how you came back from the dead?"

Felix smiled. "Exactly. You see, I was my own subject for all my experiments. I had my vibratory pattern on file. When I first began to suspect that Galina – or Perfidia, as she seems to prefer to be called – was out to kill me, I took certain precautions. Months ago, I put a morphic resonance collar on Tosh. The chip was instructed to watch its internal clock and activate its crystal with my pattern if 72 hours had passed. Every three days, just before the deadline, I rebooted it for another 72 hours. Once I died, there was no one to do so, and Tosh turned into me."

"Felix – why didn't you just go to the police if you thought they were trying to kill you?"

"I had no real proof. But what was more important, I knew my murder would provide the perfect test of my equipment."

Priscilla Jane looked at Felix in astonishment. "So you're telling me that you *allowed* yourself to be killed, just to prove your theories, and that you're here now only because you've taken over Tosh's body. That you're some kind of cybernetic weredog."

"Correct. If I were to remove this collar, or the batteries died, I'd instantly revert. And I'm very grateful to the old boy for lending me his protoplasm. Naturally, I've got his pattern on file, and as soon as I can figure out some ethical way of restoring him without giving up my own existence, I will."

Priscilla Jane studied Felix for a minute before delivering her verdict.

"I believe you're Felix —"

"Good!"

"— and you're nuts! Somehow, you escaped being murdered, but the shock drove you insane. Galina stuck a dummy or an anonymous stranger made up to look like you in the coffin. Then she locked you up, but you got free..."

Again, Felix sighed. "Priscilla Jane, why would you make up such a convoluted story when the truth is the simple facts I've laid before you? What can I do to convince you? Ah! Tell me again why you're in that horrid wheelchair, Pee Jay."

"That auto accident when I was 20."

Felix began working on his laptop. "What I didn't mention is that all past states of an organism are also maintained in the morphic repository. It shouldn't be too hard to isolate the traces of Priscilla Jane Farmer's 19-year-old self. I've written simple pattern-searching routines. Hmm... Eureka! Of course, I'll have to separate the body fields from the mind fields — Ha-ha, mind fields, that's good! It wouldn't do to have you become as foolish and naive as you were at 20, when you ran that red light —"

"I beg your pard —"

Priscilla Jane gulped at the odd sensations that had shivered through her. "Felix. What did you do?"

Felix calmly unplugged the computer from her bracelet and said, "Weren't you paying attention, Pee Jay? I thought I trained you better than that. Now get up out of that chair. We've got lots of things to do."

Priscilla Jane obediently stood.

And promptly fainted.

Detective Grady Stumbo was not in the habit of talking aloud to himself. He had emerged from the Tiger Cages of the Viet Cong without resorting to that stratagem, though it had cost him an arm. He had survived 20 rough-and-tumble years on the force without developing such a quirk. Innumerable cases had been cracked without resorting to interrogating himself. But there was something about the death of Felix Wren that had broken down all his carefully shored-up compunctions against self-interlocutory abuse.

As he drove with one-handed dexterity toward the Wren estate, Detective Stumbo found himself recounting salient facts of this most puzzling case, along with the startling recent developments that had dragged him out just as he was settling behind a large stack of paperwork, having returned from Felix Wren's funeral and the unsatisfactory attempt at unsettling that damned widow's complacency.

"No bruises or signs of struggle on Wren. Almost like he cooperated, for Christ's sake! He knew the killers, that's certain. But no prints on the needle other than his. That's easy enough to arrange, though. That Stagers is a bad one. Record a mile long. Been in and out of the pen more times than a hungry hog. Georgia boys think he killed his wife, but they never found her corpse. He claimed she ran away. Couldn't pin anything on him without a —"

Stumbo removed his hand from the steering wheel and smacked his forehead. His old Escort began to track over the centre line, and he pulled it back.

"Of course! What a fool! She *did* take it on the lam. New identity too. Countess Balyban, my ass!" Stumbo forced himself to cool down. "But even so, I still can't nail them for Wren's murder. It's all circumstantial. The most I could get them for would be forgery, bigamy, kids-stuff. If the will mentions her by name, she'd probably even still end up with the money. If only there was a witness..."

Using his knees to steer, the detective went through his cigarette routine. "Maybe this latest action is the break I need, though. An intruder in Wren's lab. Could be an employee who knew something. Accomplice who had a falling-out, trying to pick up evidence we missed to cover his own ass? The dispatcher said the bitch sounded really upset. Maybe she's gonna crack. Something crazy about a dog, too. Could there be a clue in the kennel? I thought we searched it good... Shit! It still doesn't add up! Now, what was Stagers' wife's name...?"

Stumbo got on the radio. By the time he was pulling into the Wren property, he was muttering, "Perfidia, Perfidia —" Then, a shout: "Yeah, that old Ventures tune!"

Feeling as if he had cracked the whole case, Detective Stumbo parked confidently in front of the mansion, emerged and strode to the front door.

Rowdy Stagers appeared in answer to the bell. He was holding a wet cloth stuffed with icecubes up to a large goose-egg the colour of a tropical sunset on his forehead.

"Oh, it's Lefty," said the chauffeur. His heart didn't seem to be in the insult, however. Something had obviously shaken him greatly. "C'mon in, her Ladyship's got a few bones to pick witcha."

Perfidia was pacing up and down the long parlour, chewing on one set of elegant fingernails. If she swallowed all that paint, she'd poison herself. Stumbo was gratified to see her so upset. With any luck, he'd leave her even worse off.

Spotting the cop, Perfidia halted and glared.

"You! Why'd they send you?"

"Rank hath its privileges. Now, Mrs Wren, I'd like to get the details of this incident straight. There was some confusion over the phone. You arrived home from the funeral —"

Marshalling her considerable strength of character, Perfidia assumed her usual hauteur. "We pulled in to find an intruder in my poor husband's private lab. Obviously, he was much more than your common criminal, or he would have concentrated on plundering the house. Perhaps he was an industrial spy. You're so convinced that my husband was the victim of foul play, Detective Stumbo. Did you ever consider professional greed as the motive? Wren BioHarmonics is the leader in its field. Competitors are unscrupulous. Yes, the more I think on it, the more likely it seems. If I were you, that's where I'd concentrate my efforts."

Stumbo repressed a grin. "Certainly. I'll give that angle all the consideration it's worth. Was the intruder anyone you recognized?"

Perfidia blanched. "No. A complete stranger."

"Hmmm. There was something about a dog. Would that be your husband's dog?"

Rowdy broke in. "That's the fucker! It nearly killed me! I want that bastard smoked! Why, the only thing

that saved me from gettin' my gullet torn out, accordin' to Perf –"

The widow cleared her throat. "What Mr Staggers means to say, Detective, is that the intruder seems to have enlisted the affection and cooperation of my late husband's pet. I'm not sure how. Perhaps the criminal is an insider in my husband's firm, and known to the dog. Felix used to bring the beast to work with him, God knows why. It's untamed and savage, practically rabid in fact."

"Yeah," chimed in Rowdy. "If I was you and I seen it, I'd shoot first and offer it a Milkbone second."

They seemed fixated on this poor dog. It didn't make sense...

"Let's take a look at the lab, shall we?"

Crossing the spring-fresh lawn, Stumbo noted crushed grass corroborative of the scuffle described. In a patch of mud, he spotted the imprint of an unshod human foot.

"Was the intruder barefoot?"

"No."

"Yeah."

"Oh, Detective, how could we be expected to notice such a thing? We were frightened out of our wits! Maybe he was, I can't say for sure."

Stumbo let it go, and they went inside the workshop.

"Does anything appear out of place or missing to you?"

Stumbo watched Perfidia's face as she looked about. Her attention snagged on an empty plastic bin, then jerked away.

"No, nothing, Detective. But I'm not totally familiar with my husband's work..."

"Okay. I'm going to look around for a minute or so, then I'll be gone. Oh, yes, I'm waiting for a call from the station too."

Stumbo began poking about. As he moved, he whistled. At first tunelessly, then segueing into the Ventures' "Perfidia."

The Widow Wren maintained an icy composure in the face of her namesake ditty. Rowdy Staggers was not so mindful. He soon began tapping his foot and nodding his head to the beat. The woman eyed daggers at him, but he was oblivious. At last he burst out, "Hey, I ain't heard that tune your Daddy liked so much for nigh on 20 years."

Perfidia had reached the boiling point. "Idiot!"

Rowdy realized what he had done. "Uh, I mean my Daddy! Yeah, it was my Daddy who dug the Ventures. He was an old surf-bum from way back –"

Perfidia growled, "Shut up!"

Just then the phone in the lab rang. Stumbo picked it up.

"Yeah, yeah, fine. Thanks." He hung up. "There was a call placed from this phone an hour ago. I assume neither of you made it. No? Very good. We now have the next link in this case. I'm leaving now. But you can rest assured that I'll be back – Mrs Staggers."

Stumbo left the lab. Recovering from his stupefaction, Rowdy made a move to stop him, but was restrained by Perfidia. As the motor of the Escort came to life, she spoke.

"No, it's too late now, Rowdy. The damage is done, thanks to your stupidity."



"You weren't no shinin' example of a criminal mastermind yourself, babe. I thought you was gonna piss your pants when he asked about the ghost's footprint."

"Let's drop it. We were both to blame. We have to decide what to do next. I've had some time to think. Rowdy, I believe that Felix really *has* come back to life. We saw how he changed himself into a dog and back. Assuming we weren't both hallucinating, then we witnessed a miracle! If he could do that, he could do anything! Maybe he cloned himself, built an improved, shape-changing body. Whatever it is, though, it makes all the money in the estate look like the coins in a beggar's cup. We've got to track him down and get his secret."

Greed overspread Rowdy's features. "Yeah, you're right, babe, as usual. We won't just be rich, we'll be fuckin' kings and queens!"

Perfidia's eyes narrowed. "I think the operative word is 'gods,' my dear. Or goddesses."

"What are we waitin' for, then? We gotta follow Dumbo right now, so's he brings us to your zombie hubby!"

Perfidia held up a hand. "Watch."

She picked up the phone and punched REDIAL.

Five rings, and a machine engaged. "Hello. Priscilla Jane is pulling wheelies on a skateboard ramp right now. If you want to leave a message —"

Slamming the phone down, Perfidia rasped, "That cutesy-poo secretary twat of Felix's. If she thinks she's going to get anything out of my pigeon — I'll kill her!"

Rowdy reached inside his chauffeur's jacket and removed a wicked-looking Intratec nine-millimetre semiautomatic pistol.

"No, babe, let me. I always did like shootin' people more'n dogs."

Legs were really quite amazing things.

After ten years without them, Priscilla Jane found that the whole notion of personal mobility resembled some of the farther-out concepts of robotics experts. The hinges, the tendons, the flexing toes, the constant shifting of one's centre of gravity — the process seemed like something scribbled on Marvin Minsky's dinner napkin.

Luckily, her body had not forgotten how to manage things quite well by itself, without the intervention of her shocked mind. How could it have? This was not her 30-year-old untuned carcass being forced to walk. This was her original 19-year-old frame restored to her, complete with all its ingrained somatic routines.

Right now, Priscilla Jane lifted up the hem of her shirt for the umpteenth time and looked at the crimson welts on her midriff. She remembered quite well how she had gotten those: some roughhousing at a beach party, where she had lunged into the water without looking and scraped her belly across some barnacled rocks.

As best she could recall, the wounds made eleven years ago had about another two weeks to heal completely.

Dropping her shirt, Priscilla Jane looked toward Felix, where he sat on her couch.

Her reborn employer had gotten involved with her cat. Priscilla Jane had watched as long as she could

before turning away. Some of the changes Felix was putting her pet through were just too unsettling to witness. She was pretty certain he was doing no permanent damage to poor Peabrain. On the other hand, a man who would encourage his own murder for intellectual reasons was perhaps not bound by the same ethical strictures as others...

At this moment, Peabrain — who had started out wearing one of the morpheic bracelets around his waist — now crouched in the middle of the charmed circle of links, which had dropped off as he altered. The body her cat now possessed, Priscilla Jane surmised, must have been one of the feline's distant ancestors, a small shrewlike creature. (What Felix had done with Peabrain's extra mass, she did not know. Obviously, in the process of experimenting on the cat he had found some way of storing it.)

"Why doesn't it run away?" asked Priscilla Jane.

Felix looked up. His expression, a familiar one, told her he had forgotten anyone was with him.

"I've shut off its gross motor-activity fields. But there's no point in keeping this antique critter here any longer. I've learned all I can from your cat."

Felix tapped some keys, and good old Peabrain reappeared, none the worse for its regression. Felix removed the bracelet from the cat, which scampered away. He stood.

"As you might have guessed, Pee Jay, I'm trying to refine and extend the range of my temporal searching abilities, with regard to living things. It was one of the major projects left unfinished at my demise, and finishing it is imperative. But I find I need a different class of subjects. Is there a zoo nearby?"

Felix's question unnerved her. "Why, sure, a private one. The Southside Wild Animal Farm. But Felix — do we really have to go there? Shouldn't we be doing something more practical? What about bringing your wife to justice?"

Felix smiled. "For what?"

"Why, for your murd — Oh..."

"Absolutely correct, Priscilla Jane. There's no way my coming forward could not make matters worse. If I'm accepted as the real Felix, then there was no murder committed, and nothing to prosecute Perfidia for. Perhaps charges of attempting to defraud the life insurance company are even brought against me. On the other hand, if I'm declared an impostor, then my own motives are questioned, and I might end up in jail. And the worst possible scenario is that someone thinks to run DNA tests on both me and my corpse, and the results show we're identical. Everyone knows I have no twin brother. Imagine how confused my poor mother would be by all the questioning. She always said I was as much trouble as two kids. Maybe she'd end up agreeing that I was twins. Mom always was highly suggestible. No, I don't want to put her through that quite yet, so soon after I made it necessary for her to attend my funeral. And I'd probably get locked up in some government lab as a freak, subject to the moronic questioning of lesser scientists. In all cases, though, nothing is accomplished and much valuable time and freedom are wasted."

"But how can you stand to let that, that murderess walk away with everything you and I built over the years?"

"Wren BioHarmonics was a mature company, Pee

Jay. It wasn't fun any more for me. I'm much more interested in this new technology. I believe it has many interesting possibilities, perhaps even some market potential."

Priscilla Jane snorted. "Bringing anyone who ever lived back from the dead, repairing any kind of bodily damage, and Lord knows what else – I would say that your talents for understatement, Felix, have survived your death intact."

"Thank you, Pee Jay. A good scientist always resists hyperbole. I take it you have transportation available for our trip to the zoo...?"

"My van."

"Let's have a look."

Felix and Priscilla Jane left the house by the gashed front door.

Her customized van boasted a wheelchair lift operating out the side cargo door. Clamps on the floor in the driver's position allowed her wheelchair to be secured in place of the missing fixed seat. All traditional pedal controls were mounted on the steering column and were hand-operable.

After studying the setup, Felix said, "Well, let's haul your wheelchair out here so we can get going –"

"No! I refuse ever to sit in that contraption again!"

"But Pee Jay, you're being quite unreasonable. The chair is an integral component of this well-designed vehicle..."

Felix tapered off. He studied Priscilla Jane's glower for a moment, then said, "I'm forgetting emotions again, right?"

"Right."

"Thanks, Pee Jay. I need you around."

"Don't mention it. Now help me with a kitchen chair."

They had finished settling the captain's-style kitchen chair into place behind the steering wheel, and Priscilla Jane was seated in it, testing visibility and ease, when a dented Ford Escort pulled into the drive.

"Uh-oh," said Priscilla Jane.

"Who is it?"

"The policeman in charge of investigating your death."

Felix stepped back into the shadowy interior of the van and removed a bracelet from his pocket. He began programming its crystal, while whispering.

"This is not someone who can be expected to understand our situation, Pee Jay. If we can't talk our way out, I've got something in reserve."

The car stopped adjacent to the van, and Detective Stumbo emerged.

"Miss Farmer –"

"Yes?"

"I need to speak with you. About an hour ago you received a call –"

Stumbo froze. "Where's your wheelchair? How did you get out here on your own?"

"Um, I –"

The detective's holstered pistol hung above his right hip. In an eyeblink, it seemed to leap into his left hand.

"Get out. You and whoever's in there with you. And take it slow."

Priscilla Jane swung her amazing but shaky legs to the ground and stood. Felix emerged from the open

side door. They both took a few steps closer to the stunned cop, then halted. Recovering, Stumbo sized them up, then nodded sagaciously.

"A crippled secretary who's not crippled, and her dead boss who's not dead. It's not what I expected, but I can see how it fits. You two and the other two were in it together for the insurance." (Felix bestowed an I-told-you- so look on Priscilla Jane.) "Then someone got greedy, and there was an argument. You decked Stagers – though I don't see how a pipsqueak like you could – frightened your wife, then took off with the dog." Mentioning the dog made Stumbo nervous; he swung his gun in measured arcs. "Where is it anyhow? I hear it's a killer."

"Tosh? He's not here – as such. And in any case, he wouldn't hurt a fly. Oh, he hates my wife and chauffeur, but that's only understandable, since he realizes they murdered me."

"Oh, come off it, Mr Wren. The jig is up. No one's going to believe in a talking dead man."

Felix sounded impatient. "But it's true. I'm only here conditionally. My renewed existence is quite precarious, just like Pee Jay's new legs. Old legs, rather. That's what I'm trying to fix now. If you could just see your way clear to allowing me a few more hours freedom, I'm sure I can wrap things up efficiently. Then I'd be happy to turn myself in and explain. It won't take long, I promise. First, you see, I have to visit a zoo. Pee Jay assures me there's one nearby that'll do fine. Then, assuming I'm successful – and I generally am – a quick trip to Mount Shasta –"

"That's enough. I don't have time for your crazy bullshit. I'm taking both of you in, and putting out an APB for Stagers and his wife."

Bafflement washed over Felix's face. "You don't mean –? You do. That faithless woman. She didn't even wait until my corpse was cold before remarrying. Now I'm really angry! Well, I'll give them a piece of my mind, should they dare show up again. But right now, your case interests me. When did you lose that arm?"

Stumbo answered automatically. "'Sixty-eight."

"Thank you." Felix began tapping the keys of his laptop, which was still cabled to the bracelet.

"Hey, what do you think you're doing? Stop that! C'mon now, bring that stuff over here."

Felix closed the distance between himself and the cop. "What should I do with these?"

"Put the computer under my stump."

Felix complied, and Stumbo clasped the laptop under his armpit. "What about this lovely bracelet? I took it from my lab. It could be evidence, you know."

"Drop it in my coat pocket."

"You're sure?"

"Quit joking and do it!"

"All right."

Felix detached the computer cord and deposited the morphic crystal in Stumbo's jacket. Then he began to count aloud. "Ten, nine, eight..."

Stumbo backed off. "What's going on? The thing can't be dangerous, you and the girl are wearing them. You're bluff –"

"...one," said Felix, and Stumbo crumpled to the ground, unconscious.

Bending over the detective, Felix retrieved his laptop.

"Standard morphic field for human sleep patterns. It'll shut down in 60 minutes. By then, we should be far away."

On the edge of hysteria, Priscilla Jane giggled. "It's not a morphic field then, it's a 'morpheus field.'" She pulled herself together. "We'd better get going, Felix. Before anyone else shows up."

Behind the wheel, with Felix in the passenger's seat, Priscilla Jane put the van in drive and was just releasing the hand brake when a pickup truck pulled into the fenced yard.

"Who —?"

"It's my gardener's truck," explained Felix. "They must have decided the limo was too slow and conspicuous."

The truck blocked their exit. Perfidia and Rowdy emerged. The chauffeur held a gun.

Felix was busy programming another crystal. "Drive toward them slowly, Pee Jay. I need to get within throwing distance."

The van crawled forward. Perfidia and Rowdy moved off to Felix's side of the drive, standing by the truck's front bumper. When the van's nose was a few feet from the truck, Priscilla Jane stopped. Perfidia spoke.

"Felix, dear, we need to talk. I realize you're a tad upset over our recent, um, misunderstandings. I imagine your death was not pleasant, despite its temporary nature, and I hope you'll be big-hearted enough to accept our sincere apologies for any inconvenience we might've caused you. But surely you can see that it's best for all of us to cooperate, now that we know all about your secrets."

"Yeah," chimed in Rowdy. "Get your asses outa that van before I cooperate you both fulla holes."

Felix craned his upper body out the window. He held a bracelet. "Perfidia, I don't mind particularly about my murder. I realize that you acted out of sheer animal instincts. But what I do object to is your disgracing my good name by consorting with this ape. Blinded by your glamour as I was, I doubt I ever really knew you, but I certainly can't count on you now. Just be glad I'm not the type to indulge in petty revenge."

Tossing the bracelet into the bed of the truck where it landed softly atop a sack of manure, Felix retreated inside the van. "On three, Pee Jay, gun it. One, two, three!"

The pickup truck turned into ping-pong balls.

For a millisecond, the thousands of celluloid spheres maintained the shape of the truck. Then they collapsed in an avalanche whose closest edge skittered under, over and between Rowdy and Perfidia, upsetting their footing and tumbling them to the ground.

Out on the street, Priscilla Jane made a hard left that nearly overturned her makeshift seat. Shots rang out behind them.

Smiling, Priscilla Jane turned to Felix and said, "Mister Moose, I presume."

"It's something everyone of our generation should get to do at least once in their lifetime."

Rowdy lowered his gun and kicked vengefully at a herd of innocent ping-pong balls.

"That bastard's startin' to really piss me off!"

Perfidia was casting frantically about. Spotting Stumbo's car, she said, "Quick, this way!"

At the car, Rowdy yanked open the driver's door. "No fuckin' keys!"

"There's the cop! Looks like Felix knocked him out somehow. I bet the keys are still on him —"

Quickly, Rowdy was beside the recumbent Stumbo. As he stuck his hand in the detective's coat pocket, a look of blissful peace softened his coarse features, and he collapsed atop Stumbo.

Perfidia made an instinctive move toward her unconscious partner, then stopped herself.

There was no telling what curse Felix had left here, or whether it would affect her if she touched the two men. Chances were, however, given Felix's benevolent sentimentalism, that the effect was both harmless and temporary. The two appeared to be merely sleeping; doubtlessly, they would awaken within some reasonable period.

Gritting her teeth, Perfidia sat herself down on the lawn to wait.

To her surprise, she found herself speaking aloud.

"The cop might've learned something we don't know. It'll be good to take him along. Felix and that bitch can't escape. They're too innocent, too naive, like children. And when we catch up — well, whatever Felix knows is probably on that computer of his. I can work it as good as him. If he doesn't want to play along —"

A look of utter bloodthirstiness that would have sent a Maori warrior fleeing in retreat contorted Perfidia's beauty. "He died once, he can always die again. Only this time, very, very, very painfully."

Priscilla Jane was curious. As she toiled down the highway, she found herself full of questions.

"If you were to shut off that bracelet you tossed into the gardener's truck, Felix, would the truck reappear?"

Felix was looking idly out the window, like someone who had never ridden in a car before. Like a dog, actually. Priscilla Jane felt that she loved him more than ever. If only —

"No," her employer answered after a moment. "But only because the original mass of the truck is too dispersed to be reactivated by the nascent truck fields. Just like your front door. When I restored its natural fields, the rip remained, because I had created gross macroscopic disorders while it was altered. Morphic fields are not magic, Pee Jay, though they might look that way. There are some constraints. For instance: suppose I were to alter your bracelet so that all your haemoglobin turned to cyanide."

He said it so matter of factly, that Priscilla Jane shivered.

"You'd die almost instantly, in a quite horrible fashion too. If I tried then to reimpose your original template on your corpse, it would be futile. That vital spark of entelechy would be gone from that particular lump of protoplasm. So you see, there are limits to what can be done with morphic fields."

"Let's talk about something more pleasant."

Felix redirected his guileless blue eyes on her. "Pee Jay, you brought the subject up —"

"I know, I know. And I'm sorry I did. Tell me, Felix

– What kind of plans do you have for these fields – assuming we survive?”

Immediately, Felix exhibited a contagious excitement. “Well, first of all, I don’t intend to start bringing people back from the dead left and right. It’s too unethical. Every such instance would mean the effective cancellation of some other organism’s right-to-life. Look at how I’ve had to usurp poor Tosh’s existence. No, it just won’t do. Every individual gets their stay on earth, and then must make way for newcomers. And although one’s disembodied personality fields are not ‘running,’ so to speak, in the same way they are when one is alive, I seem to have vague memories of a quite satisfying postdeath existence. It seemed to me as if I were still participating in things, through the other members of the species. So, that’s just the way life is. I don’t quite agree with the setup, but I don’t intend to change it – at least until I do some more thinking.”

Priscilla Jane’s reply was drenched in a sarcasm she knew would be completely invisible to Felix, but she couldn’t help herself. “Oh, by all means!”

“On the other hand, I don’t see anything wrong with bringing back selected individuals for temporary stays, using volunteer host bodies. Wouldn’t it be quite useful to resurrect, say, FDR, during a major political crisis? Aren’t there a few modern problems that Socrates or Buddha or Einstein could help us with?”

“Then there’s the obvious medical aspect, which I believe you alluded to earlier. Although a cure like yours is totally reliant on continued wearing of a morphic crystal, I don’t imagine such a burden would be regarded as intolerable by the average patient.”

“Oh, I imagine not!”

“There are a host of lesser ways humans could benefit directly from temporary use of morphic fields. Instant experts, for instance. Every skill – intellectual or kinesthetic – is stored in a morphic field. By tapping these, you could become as talented as the person who originally laid down the pattern. Then, there’s enhanced personal memory access. The only reason we forget is that the vibratory pattern of our physical brains changes with age, cutting off the resonance with one memory field or another. There’s really no need to allow this to happen any more.”

“Of course not!”

Felix was just warming up. “I imagine that people might be a little leery at first of occupying instant buildings or of using instant tools or instant machines which owe their very existence to an innocuous-looking crystal. But with appropriate failsafes in place, and with continuous safety exhibited over a long period, people should come around.”

“Who wouldn’t?”

“Not to pretend that morphic technology doesn’t present its own peculiar dangers. The potential for biological harm is certainly real. Sports, monsters and chimeras of all sorts could be created by mixing and matching the morphic fields of different species. But the inorganic realm offers scope for mischief too. Turning Hoover Dam or the World Trade Centre into matchsticks is quite possible. Extending a mile-wide tunnel down to the magma would be a little trickier. You’d have to take into account the separate morphic fields of every type of matter from the surface on

down, and then convert them to vacuum, say, while simultaneously building diamond tunnel walls. But with enough computing power, I could do it.”

“I don’t doubt it!”

“There are quite a few applications of deeper complexity which I won’t get into here, mostly involving teleological chreodes and the cosmological morphic fields. But now we’re talking galaxies, and I believe your question was implicitly limited to Earth.”

Priscilla Jane was silent for a moment. “Anything else?”

“Not at the moment, no.”

“Correct me if I’m wrong, then. Basically, you, Felix Wren, boy inventor, all on your lonesome, intend to pick up the entire globe by its heels and shake it until the loose change falls out of its pockets.”

Felix looked hurt, and Priscilla Jane felt bad. But she had to knock some sense into him. Couldn’t he see what he was unleashing?

“Such a metaphor, Pee Jay, however colourful, puts the worst possible interpretation on my motives. You know I’ve never been interested in money. I only care about advancing human knowledge.”

“I wish money was all that motivated you! You’d be a thousand times less dangerous! You’re going to advance the human race right out of resemblance to anything we know!”

Felix looked sober. “Don’t imagine I haven’t thought of such things, Priscilla Jane. But there’s never been a scientific genie which has ever been rebottled. I’m smart, but I’m not unique. Someone else was bound to discover this sooner or later. Look at how simple it all is. No, the only thing to do now is to try to use the technology purposefully and wisely, for the benefit of everyone. Actually, in conjunction with my near-term goals – which include stabilizing both my existence and yours – I’m hoping to get some advice on how to proceed.”

“Advice! From who? God?”

Felix did not smile. “Not precisely.”

Priscilla Jane was afraid to ask Felix to get more precise.

The exit for the Southside Wild Animal Farm slid up on them, and they took it.

Apparently seeking to further mollify his companion, Felix said, “It’s not like morphic fields haven’t always been subject to fluctuations and primitive attempts at control, Pee Jay. Take several phenomena generally considered to be magic. Shapechanging can be seen as instances of a human gaining mental control over his vibratory patterns, and altering them at will. Possession and multiple personality disorders are plainly cases of one’s vibratory patterns changing sufficiently to resonate with other human – or non-human – patterns held in the morphic repository. Reincarnation might occur unpredictably, when a growing embryo – usually quite unique and historically unprecedented – chances to lock onto a pattern that’s already existed once. This explains quite neatly why not everyone has memories of other lifetimes. I could continue...”

Priscilla Jane’s head felt as though someone had it pinned in the grip of a giant nutcracker. “No, thank you. I’ve got quite enough to chew on for now.”

Ahead of them now, on a busy two-lane secondary road spotted mostly with gaudy, tawdry businesses,

loomed a sign for the Southside Wild Animal Farm. They entered, parked, and left the van. Admission was five dollars apiece.

"I'm afraid I'll have to ask you to pay, Pee Jay. There was no money in these clothes I was forced to wear, and naturally Tosh —"

"Loan you ten dollars and get a new pair of legs? A bargain at twice the price."

"I'm glad you're enjoying them, Priscilla Jane."

Inside, Felix ignored the rather seedy cages containing such bedraggled and snaggletoothed specimens as lion, goat and ostrich, and instead made a beeline through the crowd of visitors to the reptiles.

He stopped at a fence, and Priscilla Jane caught up with him.

The shoddy waist-high fence — straight and unbarbed — was erected at the very edge of the alligator pit, whose floor was four feet below the watchers. In the pit lazed a single somnolent gator over six feet long.

"Oh, he'll do nicely," said Felix.

And before anyone could stop him, he had clambered over the fence and dropped into the pit.

Everyone except Priscilla Jane screamed. She was so mad at Felix for not warning her of what he planned that she was rooting for the gator.

Opening first its left eye, then its right, the animal spotted Felix. It slithered sinuously toward him, and its jaws began to split open.

Felix stood his ground unconcernedly. When the beast was nearly atop him, he tossed a cabled bracelet like a quoit into its maw.

The gator instantly froze.

Felix tapped a few keys, and the gator began to go through disturbing bodily changes similar to those Peabrain had endured.

Remembering Priscilla Jane, Felix turned to reassure her.

"This data should complement nicely what I already have, Pee Jay. I might take the time to explore a few sidechains as long as I'm here."

Mass panic reigned immediately around the alligator pit. Guards and keepers were running up; sirens could be heard in the distance.

"I'd suggest speeding things up, if possible, Felix."

A keeper stood beside her. "What's he doing to Wally? Do you know this guy? Is he crazy, or what?"

"Or what," said Priscilla Jane. "Definitely or what."

The shapes the gator was exhibiting were becoming more and more primitive and outrageous. People were fainting.

Then, without warning, a full-sized brontosaurus occupied the cage, its head towering over the suddenly silent crowd, its tail draped atop the adjacent monkey-house.

Felix held up his computer, to show Priscilla Jane that the tether to the ingested bracelet had pulled away from the laptop's port. Looking up, Priscilla Jane could see it dangling from the bronto's jaws like a waterweed.

"A slight miscalculation," he admitted sheepishly. "How that extra mass slipped in, I'll never know. You really shouldn't have rushed me, Pee Jay..."

The crowd melted into frenzied flight, the likes of which Priscilla Jane estimated might not have been seen since the last woolly mammoth stuck its trunk up the caveman's loincloth.

Priscilla Jane leaned over the fence and extended a hand. "Come out of there right now, you irresponsible idiot!"

Felix clambered out with her assistance. "Luckily, I've got a spare cable back in the van."

Helicopters could be heard in the distance. Someone was shouting over a bullhorn. Priscilla Jane imagined she heard a tank approaching. No, they couldn't have responded so quickly. But soon.

"We've got to get out of here, Felix. Now!"

They started jogging toward the admission booth. Her legs remembered how, but it still felt weird.

"Is Dino ever going to move?" gasped Priscilla Jane as they reached the van. Cars were tangled at the exit, and she realized they were bottled in.

"I've never subjected the electronic components of a bracelet to the effects of gastric acid before. And certainly, if I had thought to do so, I would not necessarily have chosen dinosaur stomach juices. As the suicidal scientist said just before he stuck his head into the accelerator beam, 'Results are unpredictable.'"

Priscilla Jane snorted, then said, "Maybe you can get back to the pit and fix it —?"

"How? One morphic crystal is equal to another. A second one would only muddy the patterns of the first, with chaotic results. No, I suggest that we continue with our quest. How far away from Mount Shasta are we?"

"Less than an hour."

"Let's go then."

"Go? How? Are you going to ping-pong that whole crush and all the people in it?"

"Of course not! Do you think I'm some kind of monster, Pee Jay? Just drive toward the fence."

At the chainlink separating the zoo's lot from the McDonald's next door, Felix used a bracelet to dissolve a large section and they drove calmly off.

"A second exit should alleviate the confusion a bit also."

Regaining the highway, they began to make speed north.

Priscilla Jane glanced in her exterior rearview mirror for a sign of Dino stirring.

But she saw something worse.

"Felix, someone's after us! It's Detective Stumbo's car, and he's driving, but he's also got —"

A bullet pinged off the van.

"Perfidia and that lout, Stagers?"

"Yes."

Felix located his spare cable, dug out a bracelet and began programming it. Shots continued to ring out.

"I hadn't wanted to try this. It's very chancey. But it looks like I'll be forced to now."

Priscilla Jane felt sick. "What? What is it?"

"The spacetime-continuum's spatial traits are subject to morphic resonance also. Every location resonates to both its physical configuration and the events that have occurred in it. The reason we're going to Mount Shasta is that it's the closest place to us with the particular kind of spatial resonance I'm after. If I can impose Mount Shasta's special place-field on us and the van —"

"We should instantly teleport there?"

"Very good. The 19-year-old Priscilla Jane would never have caught on so fast."

Felix finished and hung the bracelet from a knob on

the dashboard. "It's on a thirty-second delay. We've got to be motionless by then, or we'll plough into who-knows-what at our destination."

Priscilla Jane began to slow. "But they'll catch up with us!"

"There shouldn't be any problem. I'll try to stall them."

Slowing, slowing, Priscilla Jane began to pray.

The Escort pulled up alongside them, on Felix's side. Felix stuck his head out.

Priscilla Jane watched as, from the rear side window of the Escort, a leering Rowdy aimed, fired, and blew the top off Felix's skull.

The highway vanished.

In the front passenger seat of Detective Stumbo's commandeered car, Perfidia Staggers, *née* Graboys, also once known as Countess Galina Balyban, turned around and smacked her second-most-recent husband across his jaw with the barrel of Detective Stumbo's 45, enhancing the lurid bruise she had given him just that morning.

"You fucking fool!"

Dropping his own pistol in a blind rage, Rowdy lurched toward her, eager hands plainly intent on fastening round her neck.

Perfidia fired a shot through the roof of the car, nearly deafening them all. Taking the hint, Rowdy subsided back into his seat.

"Pull over!" Perfidia now ordered Stumbo.

They stopped in the breakdown lane. No one seemed to have noticed the fatal gunplay or the vanishing of the van. Or, if they had noticed, they had neglected to report it amid the general confusion now dominating the region. Whatever madness Felix had unveiled at the Southside Wild Animal Farm was using up everyone's limited attention.

Rowdy seemed to have regained the modicum of reason he normally possessed. In hurt tones he said, "Jesus, Perf, what the fuck is up? When I woke up, the first words outa your mouth was about how we're gonna croak Felix. Then, when I do what you said, you lay into me!"

Perfidia too seemed to be making an effort to master her emotions and think rationally. "We were supposed to try to get him to cooperate first, remember? But it's too late now, so just forget it. The question we have to answer now is, where did they go?"

"Speakin' personal-like," said Rowdy, "I wasn't never really convinced Felix was alive again. Supposin' he was a spook. He probably just vanished back to spookland and took the girl and van with him."

"If that's the case, then there's nothing to go after. No, I prefer to believe Felix is – was – really alive. In some crazy way, his actions are too meaningful for any kind of ghost..."

Perfidia faced the silent detective, who returned her gaze with his own medusal look. If he had been unnerved by being taken hostage and witnessing a bloody murder, he didn't show it. One-handed, he fetched and lit a smoke for himself.

Perfidia gestured at him with the gun. "You. What do you think?"

Stumbo exhaled. "I think you're both going down for murder one."

Rowdy growled. "Fat chance, you stupid dick."



Once we get that computer of Felix's, nothing will stand up against us. Tell 'im, Perf! Say, how are we gonna get it?"

"Shut up. Tell the truth, Grady, or I'll take that other arm out of commission. Did Felix mention any destination other than the zoo?"

Stumbo calculated. He wanted to find Wren and the girl – or rather, Wren's corpse – as much as these two did. If leading them there was the only way – and so it seemed – then he would have to do it, and hope for some reversal of fortune when they arrived.

Stumbo took his time grinding out his cigarette before he replied. Might as well make them sweat.

"Shasta. He said something about Mount Shasta."

"That's where he is then," exulted Perfidia. "He found some superscience way to get there instantly, and took it. Now the girl is sitting there alone, probably without a clue about how to work Felix's bag of tricks. We've got to get there before she learns – Let's move!"

Stumbo merged with the traffic and accelerated.

From the direction of the zoo, a tremendous bellow resounded like the foghorn of the gods.

Rowdy laughed. "Don't that sound just like some kinda dinosaur!"

Once already today, Priscilla Jane had told herself she was finished mourning for that damn Felix. She really, really should have known better.

Now she tried to convince herself again that her tears were finished.

The van sat in the middle of a small tree-ringed clearing occupied otherwise only by a rough-hewn picnic table. At the moment of their transition, they had still been moving at about 20 miles per hour, but Priscilla Jane had been able to brake in their new location without hitting anything.

A rutted dirt road led away from the clearing and down the mountainside. Priscilla Jane knew it quite well, as she had been gazing at it intermittently through her tears for over an hour.

Priscilla Jane sat at the picnic table. Now that her grief had exhausted itself and her, she was trying to nerve herself up to return to the van, where Felix's shattered body still rested, slumped in its seat.

She supposed she shouldn't have indulged herself in the orgy of tears, what with a pack of murderers hunting her. But the clearing had felt so safe, and she really couldn't hold back her feelings any longer. But now it was time to do something. Only she wasn't quite sure what.

All she knew was that it began with going back to the van.

So she forced herself to walk, her 30-year-old mind overcoming the shakiness of 19-year-old legs.

Seated in the kitchen chair behind the steering wheel, she steeled herself to look at Felix.

Luckily, his head was resting on his right shoulder, the damage hidden. If not for the blood, she could almost pretend he was sleeping...

Just to hear another voice, she flipped on the radio.

"– last seen heading south on Route Five. Scientists have so far convinced the National Guard not to fire on the mysterious brontosaurus, but Major Tompkins insists that force is still an option –"

Priscilla Jane snapped the radio off.

"Damn you, Felix! Look what you've done! I know, I know, it was just a minor glitch in your plans for a Utopia none of us even wants! And now you're counting on me, aren't you? I'm supposed to bail you out somehow, just like I always do. Maybe I can go out and tackle a goddamn grizzly bear or walk 40 miles to steal a dog, just so I can stick your stupid necklace on it, just so you can come back to life again. Or maybe –"

Priscilla Jane stopped dead, horrified at the notion that had come to her. "No. I don't believe it. You don't actually expect me to – You do! Oh, you wicked, wicked man! Well, I've got news for you, buster! I'm not going to fall for it. You've caused enough grief for everyone already. Why should I give you a chance to cause more?"

Making a move as if to climb out of the van, Priscilla Jane stopped, then reseated herself.

"I hate you, I hate you, I hate you!" she told Felix's corpse.

Crying again, trembling, she removed her own bracelet, instantly feeling her cherished legs go dead.

Leaning toward Felix, she grabbed with both hands the morphic collar around his bloody neck. –

– And Felix was looking down at his own mutilated corpse. Finally, he had gotten his wish. On reflection, it had been an unwise desire...

He realized that his hands – formerly Pee Jay's, of course – were clutching the dog-collar around the corpse's neck, and he could feel no matching collar around his own neck.

Felix was touched. She must really care for him. How had he not seen it all these years...?

"Thanks, Pee Jay," he whispered huskily. "I'll make it up to you real soon now. I promise."

Carefully unfastening the collar that permitted his renewed existence, Felix donned it.

The coverall-clad form in the passenger seat reverted to that of poor Tosh, whose head now illustrated the impact of the slug from Rowdy's gun. Another casualty of this whole unfortunate escapade...

"Well, I can't waste time wishing I had managed things differently. Besides, the human factor is to blame. In any case, there's work to be done."

So saying, Felix left the van.

At the picnic table he laid all of his bracelets and necklaces out in a line – save for two, which he reserved in the pocket of the sweat pants Pee Jay had been wearing. He mated each gadget to the next in line, finally closing the loop to form a single circuit roughly six feet in diameter. This hoop of some seven morphic crystals he carried to the edge of the clearing. There, he draped it from some low tree branches so that the circle of links just touched the rocky ground. "Contact with the earth is essential," Felix informed the air as he cabled his laptop into a convenient port.

Felix addressed both of his temporarily disembodied companions as he worked the keyboard.

"Three-point-five billion years, Tosh. I imagine a dog would have a lot of trouble conceiving of that much time. Not that the average human being would have it much easier, would they, Priscilla Jane? But that's how long ago life began on this planet, according to best estimates. It's a lot of time to search through for what I'm after. But the data I got at the zoo really improved my routines. I figure it shouldn't take

much more than an hour to run through the whole Archeozoic. By then, I should be able to detect the first manifestations of Gaia."

Felix opened a new window on the screen, and a colour image of the Earth as seen from space appeared.

"Exactly how far I'll have to go before Gaia's signature field is fully developed, I can't really say. Complexity theory was never my strong suit. Maybe all the way into the Cambrian. Why can't I get Gaia's reading in the present? Good question, Tosh. Her signature pattern seems to be swamped by all the subpatterns of the higher organisms which she contains. Maybe it's the fault of my equipment, I don't know. But I'm counting on the sacred fields of Mount Shasta to help. It's a place that has resonated to Gaia throughout recorded history."

Felix finished his instructions and struck ENTER. The interior space defined by the circle of morphic crystals filled with churning whiteness like curdled milk.

Detaching his cable, Felix realized what had been constricting him across the chest, and blushed. He took off Priscilla Jane's shirt and removed her bra.

"Hope I didn't stretch your, uh, intimate apparel on you, Pee Jay. You can have it back as soon as you need it. Speaking of which, I may as well prime these last two crystals..."

When he was done, Felix lay down on the table, looking skyward with head cradled atop his arms.

As long as he had his shirt off, he might as well catch some sun.

Returning to life twice in one day was hard work. He must have dozed off.

The sound of an approaching car woke him.

By the time he got to his feet, the car had stopped and its occupants emerged. Rowdy gripped and steered Stumbo by the detective's lone arm. The chauffeur's pistol was stuck in his waistband. Perfidia had her gun in hand.

The Widow Wren wore a look of hatred like a mask of maggots. "You! How many times do I have to kill you!"

"Has it ever occurred to you, Perfidia, that violence is not necessary at all?"

Perfidia made an inarticulate noise of rage. Keeping Felix covered, she moved to the van and glanced inside. She smiled. "The dog finally got his. Good, good. Now - where's the girl?"

"Priscilla Jane loaned me her body, Perfidia, in an act of nobility you would probably find impossible to imagine."

A look of absolute avarice replaced the mask of hate. "So, that's it. You can jump from body to body. Even better than I imagined! I'll be immortal, forever young!"

Felix clucked his tongue chidingly, and turned to Detective Stumbo. "Did you keep that bracelet I gave you, Detective?"

"Yeah, I've got it right here in my pocket."

Felix looked at Priscilla Jane's watch. "Good, very good."

"Shut up! I know a bluff when I hear one. If you know what's good for you -"

Perfidia saw the milky oval now. "What's that? What are you doing?"

"Just summoning a friend."

"Well, stop it right now -"

Rowdy's shout made heads turn.

The pinned right sleeve of Detective Stumbo's coat had popped its fastening, as the Detective's missing right arm materialized.

Before anyone else could react, Stumbo had snatched the pistol from Rowdy's trousers and fired at Perfidia.

His shot caught her in the shoulder, while her mis-aimed blast nailed Rowdy in the leg.

Both of the criminals collapsed howling to the ground.

"Very good, Detective. I was hoping I could count on your quick comprehension and reflexes. Now, with your permission, I'll fix our two victims up."

Stumbo pointed his gun hesitantly at Felix. "You're not going to kill them, are you?"

"What if I said yes?"

Stumbo regarded his restored arm wonderingly. "Oh, what the hell am I worrying about them for? Go ahead."

Felix walked first to where Perfidia lay groaning.

"It's not that I hate you, Perfidia. It's just that I realize I truly love someone else."

He placed the bracelet from his left pocket on her wrist. She glared malevolently at him through her pain. Then he walked to Rowdy. The chauffeur's knee appeared to have been pulverized, and he was drifting into shock.

"You, sir, are lower than a dog. So I plan to raise you up."

The last bracelet was bestowed on Rowdy.

"Remember our earlier countdown, Detective? Perhaps you'd do the honours..."

Stumbo recited, "Ten, nine, eight..."

On one, the crystals went to work.

"Felix..." said Priscilla Jane. She looked down at herself, dressed in Perfidia's clothes. "Where, how -?"

"Woof! Woof! Woof!"

Tosh was ripping Rowdy's uniform off with his teeth and claws. In seconds, he was free of all but the jockey shorts, and went bounding joyfully around the clearing.

Stumbo dropped his gun and massaged his brow with both hands. "Holy Christ -"

Felix went to help Priscilla Jane up. Standing, she hugged him tightly.

A woman's voice suddenly resonated across the clearing. It was like wind in the trees or water over stones or snow sifting through pines, and carried a mother's warmth. It stopped even Tosh in his tracks.

"Who summons me?"

Felix gently untangled himself from Priscilla Jane and turned toward the circle of crystals.

A naked woman stood within the links. Wheat-coloured hair, rose-tinged skin, violet eyes. Felix was reminded of Botticelli's Primavera.

The incarnate form of the planetary morphic field.

Felix coughed nervously. "Ahem, yes, Gaia, it was I. You see, I'd like a little help, if you'd be so kind. I've learned how to use morphic fields in a read-only fashion, so to speak. But if you could teach me how to write on them, I'd be able to make a few permanent changes in myself and my friends so we could dispense with these clumsy mechanisms."

Gaia stepped forward out of the charmed circle, and Felix gulped. He had theorized that, once born, she

would be self-sustaining, which was what he was after himself. But to actually see it –

Gaia fixed him with a perceptive and not entirely friendly stare. "You are the one responsible for the recent tampering with my creatures that I have felt?"

"Well, yes –"

Gaia flung up her arms. The sky darkened, thunder clapped, and a zigzag crack opened in the earth.

"It is forbidden!" she roared, her voice now an avalanche of sound. "I will not have it!"

"But Gaia, if the laws of physics and biology permit –"

"Then I shall change your precious laws!"

Gaia brought her arms down.

Felix closed his eyes, ready to die for a third time. Nothing happened, and he opened them slowly.

Gaia was gone. The circle of morphic crystals was dull and dead, impotent as so much costume jewellery.

But Priscilla Jane and Tosh and he himself still existed. And Detective Stumbo was two-armed.

Felix removed his collar. No change.

The others doffed theirs, including Tosh, who snapped his with a paw inserted between collar and neck.

Stability for all.

Felix remembered to breathe. "Apparently, we did not go back to the status-quo-ante. My best guess is that Gaia's self-sustaining field touched us and stabilized our own changes, before she shut things down."

"For how long?" asked Stumbo.

"Permanently, I imagine, now that morphic resonance is an inactive discipline."

Tentative smiles broke out.

"So I won't lose my arm."

"And I won't turn back into Perfidia."

"And I won't turn back into Priscilla Jane. And Tosh, good old Tosh, won't ever turn back into –"

"Rowr, rowr, rowrdy!"

Paul Di Filippo last appeared here with the amusing two-parter "Walt and Emily" (issues 77-78). He is a prolific writer of short stories and has recently become a regular book reviewer for *Asimov's SF Magazine*. He has also written entries for the forthcoming *St James Guide to Fantasy Writers* (Gale Research, 1995), including, appropriately enough, one on the humorous fantasist Thorne Smith. Paul continues to reside in Providence, Rhode Island, a city famous for its horror-fiction associations.

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Gather Yourselves Together

A previously unpublished novel by

Philip K. Dick

By 1952, a young Philip K. Dick had been successful with numerous sf short stories and decided to try a serious, mainstream novel. Set in 1949 amongst the evacuation of American businesses from mainland China, *Gather Yourselves Together* is a steamy, claustrophobic tale of two men and a woman isolated by circumstances and alienated from each other by their pasts – or lack thereof. Middle-aged Verne Tildon and half-his-age Barbara Mahler are forced to put aside the lingering resentments and frustrations of a Stateside love affair in order to do the job they've been assigned, preparing a factory compound for transfer to the approaching Communists. Carl Fitter is the unsuspecting young man who finds himself embroiled in their tensions, and around whose sexual awakening with Barbara the novel is structured. Never before published, this early novel reveals Philip K. Dick's obvious talent and skill in a manner quite unlike any other book he was ever to produce.

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I have forgotten, if I ever knew, who coined the phrase “the rediscovery of the future,” but it recurred constantly as I read through Gardner Dozois’s heavyweight eleventh annual collection of **The Year’s Best Science Fiction** (St Martin’s Press, \$26.95 & \$16.95). There are 23 authors represented, from nine magazines including *Interzone* (two strikes), but there’s also every appearance of a house mood. The future has been rediscovered all right, and its manners and customs are shocking.

It had always been frightening, but the threat used to be monotonously crude: when it didn’t fail safe, those not cleared for Level 7 would be left on the beach. Yet there has always been a subtler threat, exemplified by *Brave New World*, *Player Piano*, *The Tomorrow File* and *Stand on Zanzibar*: the temptation to modify first our way of life and then our physical (and thus our spiritual) being, using techniques which many can apply but no one can fully understand, and whose interactions are impossible to predict, will become irresistible—for all that they’re all experimental and subject to development/revision, the short-term allure will be too insistent, the prospect of losing out (or being left behind) too mortifying. Designer drugs, interactive full sense-spectrum VR, AI downloading, computer-enhanced memory, protean sexuality, nano-surgical body-maintenance, genetic modification of everything that breathes including ourselves—all will have an unstoppable momentum, which will lead them into collision with the norms of all societies, our own hard-wired perception of what it is to be human and every religion so far invented (to say nothing of those sf writers invent *ad hoc*). These entities have formidable momentum of their own, and the kindly spirit of humanity may be distorted or crushed in the crash. Even if what emerges is recognizably human in form, its pleasures and aspirations may brand it with the marks of the beast and the machine in equal and hateful measure.

To add to the disquiet, a number of the early sf “prophecies” on these lines are starting to come true. There is mass unemployment directly attributable to automation and mitigated by make-work schemes (Vonnegut); the FBI is investigating traffic in transplant organs which may well have been extracted from people who had neither given informed consent nor been certified dead (Niven); there is agitation to modify the living language and the masterpieces of the past so as to bring both into line with current political fashion (Orwell); we don’t quite have “gouge matches between women” as popular TV entertainment (Anderson) yet, but now women’s Queensberry Rules boxing is here, I’m not betting.

There’s also a strong sense that no trends of this sort can be blocked, let alone reversed; the information super-highway concretes over the carefree meadows of our imaginary innocence with the ruthless geometry of a rollerball court.

I have long regarded Greg Egan as the premier current exponent of this kind of writing, so it was no surprise to find his “Chaff,” from *Interzone* #78, had been chosen, nor to read Dozois’s note that he had contributed five stories to the last three of this series. Dan Simmons’s “Flashback” (which I describe in *Interzone* #83) is another natural, but so are the contributions of Ian R. McLeod (the alienating effects of extended life), Bruce Sterling (the deracinating effects of mass entertainment), Nancy Kress (the lethal side-effects of physical excellence recklessly cultivated) and Don Webb (the directly lethal effects of letting human desire interact with quantum reality)—which just happen to be the first four tales in the book.

Such is the tone of Dozois’s collection, and while it is not the only class of vision on offer, it is presented so often, with such skill and with such conviction, that the few mavericks give the impression of primitive survivors, invited to display the bucolic crafts of a more innocent age for the amusement of the sophisticated—and not always to best advantage. Stephen Utley’s “There and Then” strongly recalls both Robert Siverberg’s “Hawkbill Station” and Poul Anderson’s “Wildcat,” but has a lot less point than either; Charles Sheffield’s “Georgia on my Mind” is a hi-tech version of “The Ugly Chickens,” re-vamped as a shaggy-dog; Rebecca Orr’s “Alien Bootlegger” is an over-complicated variant on the “Morons from Outer Space” idea, played straight (Pat Cadigan more wisely plays it as a Whitley Streiber joke). The stories written in the principal mode are not only more serious than the rest, they have better credentials as science fiction. Indeed, some of the others are out-and-out fantasy, including Connie Willis’s “Death on the Nile,” one of those stories about people who don’t realize they’re dead, Jack Cady’s hugely enjoyable “The

Super-Highways to the Post-Human

Chris Gilmore

Night We Buried Road Dog,” which recycles an idea from Nabokov in the style of vintage Simak, and the one big dud of the book, Neal Barrett’s vulgar and sentimental “Cush” (which is also racially offensive, though not, I think, on purpose).

But just one big dud (and a damp squib from Mark Rich) is good going for a book this size, and with Dozois’s “state of the genre” Summation in the price for nothing, it’s outstanding value.

For good or ill, Dozois represents the height of fashion. A.A. Attanasio’s *Solis* (Hodder & Stoughton, £16.99) uses much of the same vocabulary, but is in spirit an unashamed throwback to the gung-ho days of “ready, aim, extrapolate.” It’s a short book with a simple story: Charles Outis, a near contemporary of ours, has his head frozen after death, hoping to awake to a life of ease and wonder. He finds himself in a future where the human race has engineered itself into a variety of sub-species and there are interesting industrial projects all over the solar system, but the milk of human kindness is as scarce as ever. He is officially dead, and without legal rights; the only reason he doesn’t wind up in the pig-swill is that he is commercially exploitable as “wetware” in various distasteful and undignified modes. Or is that the case? From another viewpoint he is a genuine antique, with an intrinsic rarity value which he hopes will lead to a better life—including, perhaps, a restored flesh-and-blood body. An “Androne” (a powerful robot controlled by an AI) and a more-or-less unmodified woman take up his cause, and we’re off on a wild flight from danger and injustice through the fearful wonders of Belt-based industry and the Mars of two millennia hence.

Both brain-in-a-box stories and temporal exile stories have been done often before, most notably by Larry Niven. This one is done well, with some vivid writing, but for me not quite satisfactory; Attanasio’s postulates don’t really fit his story. With such formidable AIs available, the need for brain-in-a-box wetware isn’t credible, and while I can swallow the

physical variety of human sub-species, I gag at the variety in brain-power. At this epoch the whole system is controlled by the Maat (no relation to the Egyptian Feather of Truth), who have wisely modified themselves for maximum intelligence. All primary industries exist to serve their hidden purposes, which are never even hinted at, and the best all other varieties can do is bid for sub-contracts.

The trouble with this is that the Maat got where they are by directed evolution, something that common, unmodified people can, by definition, get started. After that, the only problem is whether there is any theoretical limit to how clever you can become. Clearly, a significantly superior sub-species will be able to solve the problem of making its offspring yet cleverer than itself if that problem is soluble, which offspring will be able to work their own improvements, and so forth. In a few generations you reach either godhead or an asymptote. The question of what would happen if someone tried to equal the Maat is of far more interest than any addressed in *Solis*, which leads me to the conclusion that despite some very mild rude bits near the beginning, when Charles is being used to facilitate pornographic VR, *Solis* is really a juvenile, *pace* Hodder's marketing people. Try it up to age 14.

Outside VR there can be few sexual opportunities open to a brain-in-a-box. Attanasio's other novel this month, **The Moon's Wife** (NEL, £5.99) is very different in style and content; specifically, it brims with sex. Had it come to me anonymously I'd have laid it at Deborah Grabien's door.

It's written in the first person from the viewpoint of Siggy Lindo, an accounts clerk who opens the story with no current attachment, no immediate ambition beyond obtaining a professional accounting qualification and nothing more vexatious than her dependent and vapid mother to contend with. Then she receives the suit of the Moon God, and her troubles begin. The Moon's courtship is by any standards unequivocal; Siggy's brain has a rare but minor physiological peculiarity, which allows him, without physical contact, to bestow upon her a major orgasm, daily at moonrise. This he does, to her intense embarrassment, not least because moonrise occurs at intervals of 24 hours and 50 minutes, so she can't plan her daily routine around it. The pleasure she derives from these lewd intrusions is almost worse than the embarrassment, since it is independent of her mood, her resistance or her cooperation. She feels like the victim of Larry Niven's *tasp*, and is further disquieted by visions of the spirit world and the fear that she may be going mad. Reasonably

enough she enters a mental institution as a voluntary patient. As tends to happen in cuckoos' nests, there her troubles get worse.

Her fellow inmates include Daniel Schel, a near-catatonic whose hold upon and interest in his own life are at such a permanently low ebb that the Moon can easily take him over, body and soul, in order to consummate his love for Siggy in a more conventional fashion. Or is that it? For Daniel is no voluntary inmate: he's there for having gruesomely murdered his daughter and half-murdered his wife in a crowded restaurant seven years earlier. Of course, he says it was an accident, but he would, wouldn't he? He'd have gone to the chair if he wasn't so obviously bananas. Thus, when the two break out and go to ground the heat is on. Moreover, the ground they've gone to belongs to two old witches (literally) who head a cult of Moon-worshippers, and regard themselves as very much interested parties in the Moon's current incarnation (his word) and marriage. Nor is this all: a malevolent entity called Ashera Feraille (agent of the Dark Side of the Moon?) has been activated by their union, with unspecified but hostile intent.

Is Siggy sane? Is Daniel? Is the Moon – assuming the entities are separable? (Are they? Siggy loves the Moon as a god and Daniel as a man, but she can't really say which is which.) Is the company of sane witches (assuming they aren't crazy witches) so preferable to that of mad women who just believe they're witches? It's an enjoyable set of questions, but if you want any answers, read the book. The story is a trifle thin, with most of the talk in the first two thirds and almost all the action in the last, but it's full of excellent descriptive passages, especially of costumes, interiors and scenes of chthonic magic.

Attanasio's books so far have all been different, so if you know his work you're just as likely to hail this as his best or his worst so far. On the other hand, anyone who enjoys Deborah Grabien should rush out and buy *The Moon's Wife* – if it wasn't his, it would be her best yet.

Contrary to the belief of some, the reviewer (well, this reviewer) strives always to be fair to the books and helpful to their authors. I can't remember having found that more difficult than with Mary Corran's debut novel, **Imperial Light** (Millennium, £15.99).

It's a fairly standard S&S tale, written from the alternating viewpoints of Kyria, a young girl from a fishing village, and Hilarion, heir to the local empire. It has fallen on evil times: brigandage by land and sea is rife, trade has slackened off, there is

frequent drought, the towns are crammed with starving unemployables and worst of all, three generations ago a malevolent priesthood called The Order of Light ousted the easygoing traditional religion in favour of their own, which involves human sacrifice, rejection of the People of the Sea (merfolk), and the subjugation of women. Kyria is chosen for sacrifice but escapes, is recaptured and winds up on a prison island from which a Sea Man rescues her; meanwhile Hilarion gets wind of a priestly plot to murder his grandfather and install himself as puppet ruler. In order to fulfil a prophecy, Kyria is given a set of "lightstones" by the Sea People, which she must convey to sundry traditional temples, including the great Temple of Ammon, which will be re-vitalized thereby. Will she succeed? If so, what catastrophe will the lightstones precipitate? Will Kyria and Hilarion find love, and will it be with each other? If so, how will a girl of her background cope with the empire?

This is standard stuff, but in many ways Corran does it well; the characters make sense, the construction is solid and there's very little naff writing (though at one point a flint and steel become first "amenities" and then "accoutrements" in the same paragraph – I suppose the editor had nodded off). The pace is varied, neither rushing the reader nor getting bogged down, yet I found myself sympathizing with the editor – there's a persistent failure to arouse interest. The faults are subtle, but pervasive: linking dialogue is wooden, especially when it involves stock characters like guards and servants, and descriptive passages don't contain the telling detail that would bring them to life. There's an animal called a drome, for instance, which may be a variety of dromedary, but we never get a description of its appearance or habits, or what it's like to work with.

More seriously, the feelings of the principals are stated clearly enough, but there's no empathy. For example: Kyria, like all her people, has a lightstone surgically implanted in the palm of her hand. At one point hers is cut out, at another she has a replacement fitted. The first operation is painful, and involves a loss of identity; the second even more so, but gives a feeling of restored completeness. OK, but what's it like to have a self-luminous crystal permanently embedded in your hand? How does it affect your manners, your use of hand-tools, your love-life, your symbolism? We are given no hint.

Again, if your heavies are evil priests they need an evil theology. There are many valid approaches to that. You can invent a new one out of whole cloth (Farmer, *The Lovers*); you can extrapolate the worst features of existing ones (Atwood, *The Hand-*

maid's Tale, Heinlein, Farnham's Freehold); you can parody existing ones (Banks, Consider Phlebas); you can simply make the whole business ridiculous (Vance, *passim*). Corran does none of these – she just makes them megalomaniac hypocrites, with no explanation of what motivated them to become what they are.

What motivates Corran is all too obvious. She has her characters hector each other about the iniquities of the dower system, the merits of sexual equality, the undesirability of a politicized priesthood and other easily defensible doctrines. Such tub-thumping may be worthwhile in India or Iran, but it's superfluous in a work of fantasy published in Britain.

She also introduces those great enemies of credibility, good gods. Entities of this sort are best avoided, since the reader can't help noticing that if they'd just get their collective finger out there'd be no story – assuming they're genuine gods, and not lesser beings soliciting worship under false pretences. Kyria perceives this problem and wrestles with it, but she reaches no good conclusion, and the gods offer more visions than assistance until a *deus ex machina* at the climax. Kyria and we remain as ignorant of their nature and intentions as she was at the outset.

To summarize, this is a book with many commonplace virtues, but without moral purpose or intellectual flair. Current standards are too high for its technical competence to command a hearing for it.

(Chris Gilmore)

Anything Goes Brian Stableford

There was a time when genre fantasy was a mere annexe of the science-fiction marketplace. Nowadays, fantasy has the marketplace clout and the classic motifs of science fiction are increasingly being relegated to the status of stock ideas which can be deployed without discrimination alongside the traditional motifs of fantasy. It has been necessary to invent a special category of sf (“hard science fiction”) to distinguish that fugitive enclave of the marketplace where some sense of intellectual responsibility supposedly still holds, while more or less anything goes outside its beleaguered walls.

Philip José Farmer's “World of Tiers” series, launched in 1965 with *The Maker of Universes*, was one of the early successes of this hybrid school of sf-motif-enhanced fantasy. It established a multiverse of worlds created by demigod-like beings, obligingly connected by a series of problematic

gateways which could be unlocked in various ways – including playing tunes on a magical musical instrument. **More Than Fire** (Tor, \$20.95) brings the series to a belated end, picking up where *The Lavalite World* inconclusively let off in 1977 and restoring its hero, Kickaha, to a dwelling-place where he might rest content. On the way to this alleged retirement, of course, he has to dispose of his old enemy Red Orc (several times over, by courtesy of a cloning process) and come to terms with an ancient enigmatic alien who might well destroy the entire multiverse if only he can figure out the operating code of Computer Creation Central. The plot moves swiftly enough to carry along any reader sufficiently involved not to notice or care that the whole thing is entirely arbitrary. The author wields his miracle-working powers with the casual carelessness which befits a true veteran, but the plot is unfortunately unenlivened by the kind of quirkily provocative inventiveness which was once Farmer's hallmark.

Diana Wynne Jones made her name with a series of deft and witty novels which juxtaposed their fantastic motifs with the substance of everyday teenage life with a frank and refreshing disregard for incongruity. **Hexwood** (Methuen, £11.99) takes this process a step further by juxtaposing a complex set of fantasy and sf motifs with what seems to be the everyday existence of its young heroine, and letting the mixture proceed according to its own bizarre logic. Unlike Farmer, who simply recruits a new motif every time his plot needs to be moved on, Jones carefully unfolds the hidden consequences of her premises into a rich and very strange pattern. Although the author clings hard to certain axioms which anchor the book within the fantasy genre, refusing to fake a rationalization of its magic as some kind of super-science, she also retains the kind of science-fictional curiosity which searches assiduously for a sense of wonder in expanding imaginative horizons, and the story contrives to attain a most unexpected conclusion. Like most of Jones' books, *Hexwood* will amply reward adult readers as well as the teenagers who are its primary target audience.

If anyone can lay claim to being the chief pioneer of this kind of hybrid fiction within the sf pulps it is Jack Williamson, whose earliest stories infused standard sf scenarios with Merrittesque colour and extravagance as long ago as the late 1920s. It is astonishing that a man in his 80s should still be able to produce a novel as lively and as lucid as **Demon Moon** (Tor, \$22.95), but there is not a trace of exhaustion or senility about it. It does not have the groundbreaking verve of some of his earlier exercises in the same vein (most notably

the classic *Darker Than You Think*) or the visionary scope of his recent modernized space opera *Lifeburst* but it is an eminently read-able “planetary romance” in which the human colonists of a world afflicted at thousand-year intervals by alien visitations from a wayward red dwarf star struggle to understand and come to terms with these phenomena with the aid of competing belief-systems. Williamson's science-fictional conscience, unlike Jones's, does insist that at the end of the day everything must be rationalized and all superstition dispelled, but he retains all the melo-dramatic instincts of the very best pulp fiction, and he milks the fabulous imagery for all it is worth. When one considers the various kinds of ossification which afflicted the later works of pulp giants who began their careers much later than he did, Williamson's achievement in remaining wholly *compos mentis* and retaining such a healthy measure of imaginative agility is quite awesome.

In spite of its insistence on construing apparent magic as superscience *Demon Moon* is still fantasy disguised as science fiction, but such is the nature and pace of recent developments in information technology and biotechnology that it really is possible to produce scenarios in which many images and motifs previously monopolized by fantasy writers can indeed be equipped with a science-fictional logic. The interface between inner and outer space, re-mediated by drugs, computers and biological engineering, might well become very blurred indeed in the near future – a prospect which is fully appreciated, and to some extent welcomed, by the smarter members of the nascent cyber-culture whose ideologies and mythologies have been borrowed from the Whole Earth movement and cyberpunk sf.

Sometime *Mondo 2000* contributor Lance Olsen's new novel, **Tonguing the Zeitgeist** (Permeable Press, \$11.95) is far more bizarre than any of the titles cited above although its fictional universe (or multiverse) is much more limited and much more subjective than theirs. It is an effortlessly challenging work which breezily tramples down a host of petty prejudices and preconceptions in the course of compiling the ultimate rock-and-roll novel, reaching a conclusion which is both extraordinarily horrific and very funny. Those so inclined may read it simply as a savagely satiric analysis of the mechanics and ethics of the music industry, but it is rather more than that and very stylish too. It serves to remind us that a world where anything goes – unlike a literary genre where anything goes – would be a profoundly uncomfortable place to be.

(Brian Stableford)

Levitation and Masturbation

James Lovegrove

Walt Rawley, the hero of Paul Auster's *Mr Vertigo* (Faber, £14.99), is a smart-mouthed, sassy, savvy 12-year-old street-kid who thinks he knows everything and needs nobody, until he meets Master Yehudi, a mysterious former vaudevillian, who picks Walt up from the gutter and promises to teach him to fly. The promise fulfilled, Walt and Master Yehudi take their act – Walt the Wonder Boy, also known as Mr Vertigo! – on the road, emptying the pockets of amazed audiences all across America. Walt becomes “the hottest child star since David loaded up his slingshot and let ‘er rip.” Then, as is so often the case with child stars, it all goes disastrously wrong, and Walt is forced to fall back on his skills as a fast talker and thinker to survive, gradually pulling himself up out of the ashes and reclaiming his dignity. If the ability to fly was a difficult skill to learn, how much harder are the lessons that failure has to teach him.

The Mid-West in Depression, a levitating boy and his magician-mentor – we seem to have strayed into the October Country. But whereas Bradbury sees magic inherent in everything, even that which is ordinary, Auster paints a hard gloss of mundanity over anything which might conceivably be called magical or supernatural. Walt's training under Master Yehudi is humiliating, cruel, even tortuous, and the Master himself is a dark, dream-haunted, sometimes terrifying figure – Mr Dark with a crisis of confidence. Walt's Uncle Sam is a thoroughly nasty piece of work (“Not only does he smell bad,” says Master Yehudi, “but he's mean and ugly to boot”), and all the characters who show any kind of care or love for Walt are damaged or crippled or disadvantaged in some way or other. The price of humanity, Auster seems to be telling us, is pain.

For all that, this is a dream of a book. Dialogue and background evoke down to the tiniest particle of dust an America that has disappeared from everywhere except our imaginations, and Walt, as narrator, is appealingly frank and without self-delusion. Willingly we accompany him as he takes us through the ups and downs of his rollercoaster life, the triumphs and disasters, sitting right there in that gaudily-painted car beside him, hands gripping the rail, knuckles white, our mouths drawn back in stupid, delirious grins. And when the ride has ended, slowly we climb out, sad to be returning to our normal lives, but

secretly wondering if we might not just go back for one more turn.

Walt's career as Mr Vertigo is curtailed by his discovery of the pleasures of masturbation. Arno Strine, the narrator of Nicholson Baker's *The Fermata* (Chatto & Windus, £14.99), makes a career out of doing virtually nothing else but masturbate. Arno has the ability to stop time, a skill he employs solely to satisfy his voyeuristic desires. While the rest of the world is frozen between tock and tick, he moves freely, undressing women and admiring their naked bodies or planting dildos and homespun pornography in their paths and observing their reactions. His right hand is kept furiously busy; so much so that towards the end of the book he develops repetitive strain injury of the wrist.

Baker himself is suffering from another kind of R.S.I. – Relentless Strangulation of an Idea. From a concept that would have made for an interesting short story by, say, Dick, he has extruded a whole novel which, in spite of its length, is flaccid and fails to stimulate. Imagine a letter in *Fiesta* stretched out over 303 pages, and you have a pretty good idea how plotless and pointless *The Fermata* is.

The writing, too, though of a somewhat higher standard than the average Reader's Wife can manage, defies enjoyment. The prose is as stiff as over-whipped egg-white, larded with puns, linguistic erudition and bizarre pseudonyms for genitalia, and the observation of minutiae, from which Baker has already crafted two shorter, better books (*The Mezzanine* and *Room Temperature*), is so intricately detailed it could bring on a headache in even the most ardent anal-retentive. The book bristles with an arsenal of preposterously-named dildos (the TorqueMaja Desnuda, the Armand Klockhammer Jr.), yet in spite of such Carry-On cleverness fails to arouse a titter, let alone arouse and titillate. One to put back on the top shelf.

Streamskelter (Pan, £4.99), a first novel by Simon Harding, also deals with sexual obsession, although in this case it is the adolescent passion of a boy, David Roberts, not only for his best friend Rupert's girl, Samantha, but for a faerie queen who now haunts his adult self's dreams and makes his nights a sweaty turmoil. Glaistig, as beautiful as she is baleful, as murderous as she is majestic, casts a long green shadow over David's childhood, and as he gradually unveils to us the source of his nightmares and the reason for Rupert's incarceration in a lunatic asylum, that shadow grows thorns and darkens.

The story is unpeeled layer by layer, as though David is picking apart a golf ball, heedless of the old childhood

wisdom that at the centre of every golf ball is an acid which, if released, could burn a hole through the world. The narration is informal, colloquial, frenetic, a mad tumble of cadences and word association, imprecise in its use of tenses – there is a sense of desperation here, of someone with a tale to tell and little time in which to tell it.

Evocatively conjuring up a provincial childhood in the 1970s (references to Gary Glitter, Scooby Doo and *The Golden Shot* are all present and correct), Harding is clearly in command of his craft, and there are some pearls of description: “wiry hair, this way and that like a goat's behind”; locked-up Rupert is “a hand-grenade hair-cut in dead man's trousers.” However, the spectre of Iain Banks looms large over every page of the novel. Its wheels-within-wheels structure, for instance, echoes that of *Espedair Street*, and almost everything that there is to be said about weird, isolated, hyper-imaginative children has been covered in *The Wasp Factory*. This is not to Harding's detriment, though, for *Streamskelter* has invention and energy to spare. It would appear that a whole new sub-genre is in its birth throes. Faeriepunk, anyone?

DC Comics's Vertigo line, for “mature readers,” have just released two hardback graphic novels. In *The Mystery Play* (\$19.95), by Grant Morrison and Jon J. Muth, a staging of the Mystery Play cycle in a small English town is brought to an abrupt halt when the actor playing God is murdered. Whodunit? Who knows? Certainly not Detective Sergeant Frank Carpenter who, it seems, is looking for the solution to a mystery of a very different kind: that of his own identity. For while Carpenter (watch that surname) has all the quirks and idiosyncrasies that are *de rigueur* for the contemporary fictional detective (for example, he believes that everything connected with a murder, no matter how trivial, is significant: “the flight of birds, the shape of clouds, the positions of the stars, items discarded by passers-by”), he is also, it transpires, quite mad. He may not even be a detective at all.

Morrison is playing more with literary than theological conventions here. While there are plenty of ironic jokes at God's expense (“God's dead,” “in this case... the details are in God”) and the overall structure of the book follows the traditional Christian pattern from Creation to Redemption, this is really a murder story without a solution. Apt, considering the notorious ineffability of the divine victim, but also vaguely disappointing, as loose-ended stories tend to be. Muth's luminous watercolours lend a hazy stained-glass wash to the proceedings, but while individual panels are a joy to behold, his obvious reliance on photo-reference means that his figures are

stiff and static and that the narrative does not flow from panel to panel as it should. Nevertheless, a bold and witty work.

In **The Heart of the Beast** (also \$19.95), by Dean Motter, Judith Dupré and Sean Phillips, there is also a mystery to be solved. Who is Victor, the enigmatic, eerily handsome stranger who by turns fascinates and infuriates aspiring actress Sandra? What is his relationship with corrupt surgeon Dr Andrew Wright? How does this all tie in with a newly discovered work by Rembrandt? The answer is truly a surprise, and yet the clues are littered liberally throughout the book – even the prefacing quotation is a clue.

Phillips's art (watercolour again) does the trick, although use of photographic backdrops and video images distracts from the illusion, ruining rather than heightening our suspension of disbelief, but the book is finally, fatally let down by its unconvincing characterization and by the sheer uninterestingness of its milieu, the New York art world and its associated movers, shakers and hangers-on. No one cares about these shallow people and their parties and their emptily profound statements about art and life, their affairs and their trips to the theatre and their talk of "expressing" themselves. They are fascinating only to each other, and even then only because they see themselves reflected

in their peers, and unfortunately Motter and Dupré treat them without irony, as though even the most absurd of them are worth taking seriously.

Cold and aloof and nowhere near as decadent as it would like to think it is, *The Heart of the Beast* is a prime example of the pretentiousness that occasionally blights the medium of graphic storytelling, which is at its best when it is undermining pretension.

(James Lovegrove)

Rutting Stamina Andrew Tidmarsh

I wonder how many people have read Peter F. Hamilton's first novel, *Mindstar Rising* (1993)? I have not but I have read his second, **A Quantum Murder** (Pan, £4.99) and would – with reservations – recommend it. The book is appealing because it is located in and around Peterborough (a city in the North East of Cambridgeshire) rather than Los Angeles: and I once lived in Peterborough. Hamilton supposes that, as the world has become warmer and the icecaps melted, much of eastern England has been submerged: the nation's economy has suffered and the People's Socialism Party has been in power for 10 years. More recently, however, the New Conservatives have

become the "legitimate democratically elected government" and a company under the control of a 19-year-old multi-billionaire, Julia Evans – Event Horizon – has emerged. She is informed that double-Nobel Laureate, "the Newton of his age," Professor Edward Kitchener has been murdered, and enlists her old (37, at least) friend, PSI-enhanced soldier and private eye (retired), Greg Mandel, to help. He solves the crime.

Along the way the reader's sense-of-wonder is regularly refreshed – holographic projection cubes (rather than VDUs); the giga-conductor power storage system, "the ideal...Green solution"; cyber-factories and cybofaxes; krillburgers – and the plot moves at a cracking pace. This is a real page turner. But it lacks depth: the scientific speculation is without conviction (it is, already, yesterday's news) and the characterizations – to put it kindly – are clichéd and juvenile. "Her face was heart-shaped, liberally splattered with freckles...framed by a mane of thick red hair...an all-out assault on his preferences...she looked tremendous." "(He) was twenty-one, with golden blond hair coming down to his collar...a body which any Greek god would envy...the rutting stamina of a bull in springtime." And so on. A book for an adolescent reader that leaves no taste in my aged – and cynical – mouth. Alas.

(Andrew Tidmarsh)

1993 Hugo Award Winner!

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Shaw, Harry E. *The Forms of Historical Fiction: Sir Walter Scott and His Successors*. 1984.

Bleiler, Everett F., ed. *Supernatural Fiction Writers; Fantasy and Horror*. 2 vols. 1985.

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.

Conquest, John. *Trouble is Their Business: Private Eyes in Fiction, Film, and Television, 1927-1988*. 1990.

Nash, Walter. *Language in Popular Fiction*. 1990.

Foote, Bud. *The Connecticut Yankee in the Twentieth Century: Travel to the Past in Science Fiction*. 1991.

Tropp, Martin. *Images of Fear: How Horror Stories Helped Shape Modern Culture (1818-1918)*. 1991.

Wilt, David. *Hardboiled in Hollywood*. 1991.

Books Received

June 1994

The following is a list of all sf, fantasy and horror titles, and books of related interest, received by Interzone during the month specified above. Official publication dates, where known, are given in italics at the end of each entry. Descriptive phrases in quotes following titles are taken from book covers rather than title pages. A listing here does not preclude a separate review in this issue (or in a future issue) of the magazine.

Aldiss, Brian. **Somewhere East of Life: Another European Fantasia.** Flamingo, ISBN 0-00-225000-4, 392pp, hardcover, £15.99. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; in an author's note, Aldiss describes it as the fourth volume in the "Squire" Quartet, of which the previous titles were his non-sf novels *Life in the West*, *Forgotten Life* and *Remembrance Day*; like the new Ballard novel [see below], which comes from the same publisher [Flamingo is an imprint of HarperCollins], this one is being presented as "mainstream" fiction, but it's set in the future and is certainly sf; parts of it originally appeared in *New Worlds* anthologies edited by David Garnett.) *1st August 1994.*

Alexander, David. **Star Trek Creator: The Authorized Biography of Gene Roddenberry.** Foreword by Ray Bradbury. Penguin/Roc, ISBN 0-451-45418-9, xxii+599pp, hardcover, £16.99. (Biography of the sf television-series producer; first published in the USA, 1994; this is in fact the US edition of June 1994 released in the UK by Turnaround Distribution [27 Horsell Rd., London N5 1XL].) *11th August 1994.*

Anthony, Piers. **Demons Don't Dream.** "The sixteenth chronicle of Xanth." New English Library, ISBN 0-450-59891-8, 344pp, A-format paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1993.) *7th July 1994.*

Ballard, J. G. **Rushing to Paradise.** Flamingo, ISBN 0-00-224134-X, 239pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Non-sf novel by a leading sf writer, first edition; proof copy received; it's about a crazy woman doctor who goes to a Pacific island to protest against possible French bomb tests and to save the albatross; as a kind of satire on environmentalism, set in an exotic locale, it has much of the "feel" of Ballard's past sf even if it isn't sf.) *5th September 1994.*

Baxter, Stephen. **Anti-Ice.** HarperCollins, ISBN 0-586-21296-5, 280pp, A-format paperback, £4.99. (Sf novel, first published in 1993; reviewed by John Clute in *Interzone* 80.) *11th July 1994.*

Baxter, Stephen. **Ring.** HarperCollins, ISBN 0-00-224026-2, 443pp, hardcover, cover by Chris Moore, £15.99. (Sf novel, first edition; third in the "Xeelee" trilogy.) *4th July 1994.*

Blaylock, James P. **Night Relics.** HarperCollins, ISBN 0-586-21780-0, 311pp, A-format paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1994.) *11th July 1994.*

Bova, Ben, and Bill Pogue. **The Trikon Deception.** New English Library, ISBN 0-450-58882-3, 470pp, A-format paperback, cover by Gerry Grace, £5.99. (Sf technothriller, first published in the USA, 1992; co-author Pogue was a Skylab astronaut.) *7th July 1994.*

Buxton, James. **Strange.** Warner, ISBN 0-7515-0753-9, 332pp, A-format paperback, cover by Steve Crisp, £4.99. (Horror novel, first edition; apparently a debut book by a new British writer.) *14th July 1994.*

Clark, Leigh. **Evil Reincarnate.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-85723-3, 351pp, hardcover, \$22.95. (Horror novel, first edition; proof copy received; this American author, who is new to us, has written at least two earlier horror novels, *Blood Sabbath* [1988] and *The Feeding* [1991].) *November 1994.*

Cole, Allan, and Chris Bunch. **The Far Kingdoms.** Legend, ISBN 0-09-946401-2, 563pp, A-format paperback, cover by Thomas Kidd, £5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1993.) *7th July 1994.*

Cole, Allan, and Chris Bunch. **The Warrior's Tale.** Legend, ISBN 0-09-946411-X, 485pp, hardcover, £15.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1994; proof copy received; why Legend have chosen to publish this sequel to *The Far Kingdoms* as a hardcover – when the first book, just a few months earlier, was a mere paperback original – is a mystery to us.) *October 1994?*

Collins, Paul. **Metaworlds: Best Australian Science Fiction.** Penguin Australia, ISBN 0-14-023766-6, ix+220pp, B-format paperback, cover by Grant Gittus, A\$14.95. (Sf anthology, first edition; it contains all-reprint stories by Damien Broderick, Terry Dowling, Greg Egan, David Lake, Rosaleen Love, Sean McMullen and George Turner, among others; the book kicks off with Egan's "Learning to Be Me," from *Interzone*, so the editor has taste; recommended; not on general release from Penguin in Britain – copies are available from Paul Collins at PO Box 310, Prahran, Victoria 3181, Australia, post free.) *No date shown: received in June 1994.*

Cox, Michael, and Jack Adrian, eds. **The Oxford Book of Historical Stories.** Oxford University Press, ISBN 0-19-214219-4, xvii+441pp, hardcover, £17.99. (Historical fiction anthology, first edition; proof copy received; this one is a bit marginal for us – even if the first story, "The World Without Men" by Charles G. D. Roberts, a tale of prehistory, can be claimed as sf; but it's yet another fine book in the "Oxford" series which has already included anthologies of sf and fantasy edited by Tom Shippey, as well as volumes of ghost stories, fairy tales, gothic tales, etc, edited by others; among the authors represented here who are also known for their sf, fantasy or horror are Marjorie Bowen, A. M. Burrage, Arthur Conan Doyle, Richard Garnett, Elizabeth Gaskell, Aldous Huxley, M. R. James, Naomi Mitchison, Robert Louis Stevenson and Edgar Wallace; recommended.) *10th November 1994.*

Datlow, Ellen, and Terri Windling, eds. **The Year's Best Fantasy and Horror, Seventh Annual Collection.** St Martin's Press, ISBN 0-312-11102-9, xviii+524pp, hardcover, \$26.95. (Horror/fantasy anthology, first edition; proof copy received; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen]; it contains a generous selection from 1993's crop of short fiction by such authors as Terry Bisson, John Crowley, Thomas M. Disch, Ursula Le Guin, Patricia McKillip, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Sara Paretsky, Dan Simmons, the late Robert Westall, Jane Yolen and many, many others; a classy line-up.) *August 1994.*

De Lint, Charles. **Memory and Dream.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-85572-9, 400pp, hardcover, \$22.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; the accompanying letter from editor Terri Windling describes this as a work of "Canadian magic realism" and de Lint's best book to date.) *October 1994.*

Dick, Philip K. **The World Jones Made.** HarperCollins, ISBN 0-586-21844-0, 192pp, A-format paperback, £4.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1956.) *11th July 1994.*

Disch, Thomas M. **The Priest: A Gothic Romance.** Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-091-3, 310, C-format paperback, cover by Les Edwards, £8.99. (Horror novel, first edition [?]; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen];

third in a very loose sequence which began with *The Businessman* [1984] and *The M.D.* [1991]; it's quite a month for us old-timers [i.e. those who can remember the sf excitements of the late 1960s] when we have brand-new novels by Aldiss, Ballard and Disch! [see entries above].) *7th July 1994.*

Dickson, Gordon R. **Other.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-85198-7, 378pp, hardcover, \$22.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; the latest in the author's "Child Cycle" [perhaps better known as the "Dorsai" series], which has been underway since the late 1950s.) *September 1994.*

Dozois, Gardner, ed. **The Mammoth Book of Contemporary SF Masters.** Robinson, ISBN 1-85487-297-4, xii+657pp, B-format paperback, £5.99. (Sf anthology, first published the USA as *Modern Classic Short Novels of Science Fiction*, 1994; a follow-up to the same editor's earlier *Modern Classics of Science Fiction* [1991], it contains reprint novellas by Brian Aldiss, Poul Anderson, Samuel R. Delany, Nancy Kress, Frederik Pohl, Cordwainer Smith, Jack Vance, Kate Wilhelm, Gene Wolfe and others.) *No date shown: received in June 1994.*

Eddings, David. **The Hidden City: The Tamuli, Book Three.** HarperCollins, ISBN 0-246-13847-5, 487pp, hardcover, cover by Geoff Taylor, £15.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition [?].) *23rd June 1994.*

Feist, Raymond E. **Shadow of a Dark Queen.** HarperCollins, ISBN 0-00-224147-1, 382pp, hardcover, cover by Geoff Taylor, £15.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition [?]; first in the "Serpentwar Saga" sub-series of "Riftwar" novels.) *4th July 1994.*

Flynn, Danny. **Only Visiting This Planet: The Art of Danny Flynn.** Text by Nigel Suckling. Foreword by Arthur C. Clarke. Dragon's World/Paper Tiger, ISBN 1-85028-267-6, 128pp, very large-format paperback, £10.95. (Art collection by a British sf/fantasy/horror illustrator [born 1958] whose work has appeared on a couple of recent *Interzone* covers; first edition; an attractively produced book.) *16th June 1994.*

Fowler, Christopher. **Spanky.** Warner, ISBN 0-7515-0959-0, 338pp, B-format paperback, £6.99. (Horror novel, first edition; proof copy received.) *20th October 1994.*

Goldstein, Lisa. **Tourists.** Tor/Orb, ISBN 0-312-89011-7, 239pp, trade paperback, \$11.95. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1989; proof copy received; this edition has a revised ending.) *September 1994.*

Hartwell, David G., and Glenn Grant, eds. **Northern Stars: The Anthology of Canadian Science Fiction.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-85747-0, 383pp, hardcover, \$21.95. (Sf anthology, first edition; proof copy received; it contains stories by Canadian-resident authors, including Michael Coney, Charles de Lint, Candace Jane Dorsey, Dave Duncan, Phyllis Gotlieb, Donald Kingsbury, Spider Robinson, Elisabeth Vonarburg, Andrew Weiner and Robert Charles Wilson, among others; two of the pieces, William Gibson's "The Winter Market" and Glenn Grant's "Memetic Drift," appeared in *Interzone*; there is also a reprinted essay by Judith Merril.) *September 1994.*

Ings, Simon. **City of the Iron Fish.** HarperCollins, ISBN 0-00-647653-8, 314pp, A-format paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition.) *4th July 1994.*

Kearney, Paul. **Riding the Unicorn.** Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-05767-X, 251pp, hardcover, cover by Chris Brown, £15.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received.) *8th September 1994.*

Kerr, Katharine. **A Time of Justice: Days of Air and Darkness.** HarperCollins, ISBN 0-00-224141-2, 375pp, hardcover, cover by Geoff Taylor, £15.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition [?]; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition

[not seen]; fourth in the "Time of..." sub-series of "Deverry" novels.) 21st July 1994.

Kerr, Katharine. **A Time of War.** HarperCollins, ISBN 0-586-21197-7, 485pp, A-format paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1993; the intended subtitle, "Days of Blood and Fire," has been relegated from the title page to the bottom of the front cover; third in the "Time of..." sub-series of "Deverry" novels.) 27th June 1994.

La Plante, Richard. **Mantis.** Tor, ISBN 0-812-53019-5, 339pp, A-format paperback, \$5.99. (Horror/suspense novel, first published in the UK, 1992.) June 1994.

Lupoff, Richard A. **The Sepia Siren Killer.** St Martin's Press, ISBN 0-312-11332-3, 259pp, hardcover, \$20.95. (Crime novel by a well-known sf writer, first edition; proof copy received; it's billed as a "Hobart Lindsey/Marvia Plum mystery" and would seem to be a follow-up to the author's three previous crime novels: *The Comic Book Killer* [1989], *The Classic Car Killer* [1991] and *The Bessie Blue Killer* [1994]; an added point of interest is that this is also a Hollywood novel, involving a mystery surrounding a pioneer black film-maker and an old werewolf movie.) October 1994.

McIntyre, Vonda N. **Nautilus.** Bantam/Spectra, ISBN 0-553-56026-3, 419pp, A-format paperback, \$5.99. (Sf novel, first edition; fourth in the "Starfarers" series.) 5th September 1994.

McKillip, Patricia. **The Cygnet and the Firebird.** Pan, ISBN 0-330-33085-3, 233pp, A-format paperback, cover by Ian Miller, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1993; sequel to *The Sorceress and the Cygnet*.) 8th July 1994.

Markidis, A., ed. **Deeds of Doom.** Galley Press [50 Arthur St., Surry Hills, NSW 2010, Australia], ISBN 0-646-18204-8, 224pp, small-press paperback, A\$19.95 [£11 inc. postage to UK]. (Horror anthology, first edition; it contains stories by 19 new Australian writers.) July 1994.

Mogen, David. **Wilderness Visions: The Western Theme in Science Fiction Literature.** 2nd edition. "I. O. Evans Studies in the Philosophy and Criticism of Literature, No. 1." Borgo Press, ISBN 0-89370-400-8, 128pp, small-press paperback, \$16. (Critical study of sf; the first edition appeared in 1982; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen]; an interesting work which looks at sf in the light of the American frontier experience.) Late entry: October 1993 publication, received in June 1994.

Moorcock, Michael. **Behold the Man and Other Stories.** Phoenix House, ISBN 1-897580-36-3, 409pp, hardcover, £15.99. (Sf omnibus, first edition; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen]; it contains the novels *Behold the Man* [1969], *Breakfast in the Ruins* [1971] and *Constant Fire* [originally *The Transformation of Miss Mavis Ming*, 1977]; there is no indication as to whether or not the texts have been revised; Phoenix House is an imprint of the Orion Publishing Group, who also publish many other Moorcock omnibuses in their Millennium list.) 30th June 1994.

Morris, Mark. **The Secret of Anatomy.** Piatkus, ISBN 0-7499-0202-7, 450pp, hardcover, cover by Ken Leeder, £15.95. (Horror novel, first edition.) No date shown: received in June 1994.

Rhoads, Loren, and Mason Jones, eds. **Lend the Eye a Terrible Aspect.** Automatism Press [PO Box 170277, San Francisco, CA 94117-0277, USA], ISBN 0-9636794-0-6, small-press paperback, \$9.99. (Story and essay anthology, some of which may be sf; first edition; the authors are largely unfamiliar to us, and would seem to be mainly avant-garde small-press people.) No date shown; received in June 1994.

Rogers, Mark E. **Samurai Cat Goes to the Movies.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-85744-6, 286pp, trade paperback, \$10.95. (Humorous fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; the fifth

"Samurai Cat" book; the author has provided his own black and white illustrations.) October 1994.

Royle, Nicholas, ed. **Darklands 2.** New English Library, ISBN 0-450-60436-5, xv+240pp, A-format paperback, £4.99. (Horror anthology, first published in 1992; reviewed by Philip Gladwin in *Interzone* 70; this edition contains 14 stories rather than the 23 which were in the Egerton Press first edition; there's a new introduction by the editor which says the omitted stories will form the basis of a future third volume in the series.) 7th July 1994.

Rusch, Kristine Kathryn, and Edward L. Ferman, eds. **The Best from Fantasy & Science Fiction: A 45th Anniversary Anthology.** St Martin's Press, ISBN 0-312-11246-7, xvii+350pp, hardcover, \$23.95. (Sf/fantasy anthology, first edition; proof copy received; the subtitle is slightly misleading, in that it implies some kind of 45-year retrospective; in fact all the stories are chosen from the magazine's last five or so years [it's the 26th "Best of..."]; authors represented include Terry Bisson, Alan Brennert, Harlan Ellison, Karen Joy Fowler, Joe Haldeman, James Morrow, Robert Reed, Mike Resnick, Thomas Ligotti and Gene Wolfe, among others.) October 1994.

Rushkoff, Douglas. **Cyberia: Life in the Trenches of Hyperspace.** Flamingo, ISBN 0-00-654792-3, 307pp, B-format paperback, £6.99. (Non-fiction study of "today's real-life cyberpunk... a labyrinth of concepts and illicit activities, of computer networks, raves, fractals, neopaganism and the re-emergence of psychedelic drugs"; first published in the USA, 1994; proof copy received; gosh, what has science fiction wrought?; it comes with commendations from such ancient ravers as Dr Timothy Leary and Grateful Dead lyricist John Barlow.) 26th September 1994.

Sammon, Paul M., ed. **Splatterpunk II: Over the Edge.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-85786-1, 405pp, hardcover, \$24.95. (Horror anthology, first edition; proof copy received; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen]; it contains a mixture of new and reprint stories by Clive Barker, Poppy Z. Brite, Nancy A. Collins, Kathe Koja, Elizabeth Massie, Karl Edward Wagner and many others; it also, rather surprisingly, contains a profile by Martin Amis of film director Brian De Palma.) September 1994.

[ShaKe.] **Re/Search: J. G. Ballard, Edizione Italiana.** ShaKe Edizioni Underground [v. C. Balbo 10, 20136 Milano, Italy], no ISBN shown, 269pp, small-press paperback, 20,000 lire. (Illustrated non-fiction collection by a major sf author; first edition; no editors are named, but it has been put together by a Milanese group who call themselves the "ShaKe" Collective, with the cooperation of Re/Search Publications, San Francisco; although it purports to be the Italian edition of the English-language *Re/Search: J. G. Ballard* [1984], this is in fact a very different collection: all the fiction by JGB which appeared in the original edition has been dropped [it is now available in other Italian editions of Ballard's books] and in its place a considerable amount of JGB's previously uncollected non-fiction has been added; two semi-fictional pieces which appeared in *Interzone* have been added - "A Guide to Virtual Death" and "Project for a Glossary of the 20th Century" [both 1992]; a couple of older interviews with Ballard have been retained, and two newer ones have been added - the Kadrey/Pringle interview from *Interzone* and the Paul Di Filippo interview from *SF Eye* [both 1991]; there's also a fully updated bibliography; and there's even a reprinted article by David Pringle from the fanzine *JGB News*, "Reality and Invention in *The Gentleness of Dames*" [sorry, that's a back-translation of the Italian for "Fact and Fiction in *The Kindness of Women*"]; for those Italian readers who are interested in Ballard this all adds up to a wonderful feast of material.) Late entry: April 1994 publication, received in June.

Silva, David B. **The Presence.** Headline, ISBN 0-7472-1123-X, 313pp, hardcover, cover by Bob Corley, £16.99. (Horror novel, first edition [?]; a third novel by a newish American horror writer who we believe has not been published in Britain before.) 7th July 1994.

Simak, Clifford D. **The Werewolf Principle.** "Masters of Science Fiction." Carroll & Graf, ISBN 0-7867-0100-5, 190pp, A-format paperback, \$3.95. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1967.) 15th June 1994.

Strieber, Whitley. **The Forbidden Zone.** New English Library, ISBN 0-450-60400-4, 390pp, A-format paperback, cover by Melvyn Grant, £5.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1993; reviewed by Pete Crowther in *Interzone* 84.) 2nd June 1994.

Sturgeon, Theodore. **Argyll: A Memoir.** Introduction by Paul Williams. Afterword by Samuel R. Delany. The Sturgeon Project [c/o Paul Williams, Box 231155, Encinitas, CA 92023, USA], ISBN 0-934558-16-7, 80pp, small-press paperback, \$10 [\$12 inc. postage to UK or Europe]. (Autobiographical essay and letter by a major sf/fantasy author; first edition; it's a moving account of Sturgeon's relationship with his step-father, a relationship which underpinned much of the author's psychologically intense fiction; the Sturgeon Project is a major activity which that estimable rock-music/sf critic Paul Williams has taken up since resigning his ten-year stint with the Philip K. Dick Society; its purpose is to facilitate the republication of all Sturgeon's shorter work in eight or more volumes, beginning late 1994; if Williams is even half as successful with Sturgeon as he was with Philip K. Dick, then his activities should lead to a considerable resurgence of interest in the late author's work; there isn't a "Theodore Sturgeon Society" as such, but persons who order this worthwhile booklet will be kept informed of forthcoming Sturgeon items.) Late entry: July 1993 publication, received in June 1994.

Sturgeon, Theodore. **Some of Your Blood.** "Masters of Science Fiction." Carroll & Graf, ISBN 0-7867-0103-X, 143pp, A-format paperback, \$3.95. (Psychological horror novel, first published in the USA, 1961.) 15th June 1994.

Sweetman, David. **Mary Renault: A Biography.** Pimlico, ISBN 0-7126-6044-5, xiv+322pp, C-format paperback, £10. (Biography of the century's finest historical novelist [real name Mary Challans, 1905-1983]; first published in 1993; although Renault was not a fantasy writer by most standards, she has been claimed for that genre on the grounds that she sometimes used mythological themes [notably Theseus and the Minotaur, in *The King Must Die*]; however, a case could be made for her being more of an sf novelist than a fantasist: she wrote about Greek history and prehistory in a scientifically informed manner - and nobody, bar nobody, was as good as her at getting inside the skin of an "alien" culture; as Val Hennessy said in a *Daily Mail* review, "a great woman, a great biography.") 7th July 1994.

Taylor, Roger. **Whistler.** Headline, ISBN 0-7472-1014-4, 407pp, hardcover, cover by Mark Harrison, £16.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition.) 7th July 1994.

Turtledove, Harry. **Worldwar: In the Balance.** Hodder & Stoughton, ISBN 0-340-62490-6, 488pp, hardcover, cover by Bob Eggleton, £16.99. (Alternative-history sf novel, first published in the USA, 1994.) 21st July 1994.

Ul de Rico. **The Rainbow Goblins.** Thames & Hudson, ISBN 0-500-01614-3, unpaginated, hardcover, £9.95. (Fantasy picture-book for children and adults, first published in the USA [?], 1978; "Ul de Rico" is said to be a pseudonym for an artist with the unlikely-sounding name of Count Ulderico Gropplero di Troppenburg, born 1944 in Italy, now resident in France; his paintings are undeniably gorgeous, if twee, and the book is said to be a "cult classic.") 27th June 1994.

Volsky, Paula. **The Wolf of Winter.** Bantam, ISBN 0-553-40815-1, 445pp, A-format paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1993.) *28th July 1994.*

Watson, Ian. **The Fallen Moon: The Second Book of MANA.** Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-05424-7, 544pp, hardcover, cover by Jim Burns, £16.99. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received.) *22nd September 1994.*

Wells, Angus. **Lords of the Sky.** Bantam/Spectra, ISBN 0-553-37395-1, 578pp, C-format paperback, \$12.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received.) *15th September 1994.*

Wilson, Robert Charles. **A Bridge of Years.** New English Library, ISBN 0-450-60958-8, 333pp, A-format paperback, cover by Chris Moore, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1991.) *2nd June 1994.*

Wolfe, Gene. **Calde of the Long Sun.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-85583-4, 381pp, hardcover, \$22.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; the third volume in the "Book of the Long Sun" tetralogy.) *September 1994.*

Wright, T. M. **The Ascending.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-85792-2, 224pp, hardcover, \$19.95. (Horror novel, first edition; proof copy received.) *July 1994.*

Zaki, Hoda M. **Phoenix Renewed: The Survival and Mutation of Utopian Thought in North American Science Fiction, 1965-1982.** Revised edition. "I. O. Evans Studies in the Philosophy and Criticism of Literature, No. 18." Borgo Press, ISBN 1-55742-127-7, 112pp, small-press paperback, \$15. (Critical study of sf; the first edition appeared in 1988 [from Starmont House, which has since been absorbed into Borgo Press]; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen]; it deals at some length with the works of Delany, Le Guin and other sf writers who could be termed "utopianists.") *Late entry: September 1993 publication, received in June 1994.*

Novelizations, Recursions, Spinoffs, Sequels by Other Hands, Shared Worlds and Sharecrops

This is a list of all books received which fall into the above sub-types of sf, fantasy and horror (including non-fiction about shared worlds, etc).

Anderson, Kevin J. **Champions of the Force: The Jedi Academy Trilogy, Volume III. "Star Wars."** Bantam, ISBN 0-553-29802-X, 324pp, A-format paperback, \$5.99. (Sf movie spinoff novel, first edition; proof copy received.) *5th September 1994.*

Cornell, Paul. **Goth Opera.** "Doctor Who: The Missing Adventures." Virgin/Doctor Who, ISBN 0-426-20418-2, vii+238pp, A-format paperback, cover by Alistair Pearson, £4.99. (Sf television-series spinoff novel, first edition; this is the first of a new sub-series which supposedly will fill in gaps between stories in the TV series; the universe of Whoie spinoffery becomes ever more fiendishly complex.) *21st July 1994.*

Craig, Brian. **Plague Daemon.** "Warhammer." Boxtree, ISBN 0-7522-0955-8, A-format paperback, cover by Les Edwards, £3.99. (Fantasy role-playing game spinoff novel, first published in 1990; second in the "Orfeo" trilogy; it's copyright Games Workshop Ltd; "Brian Craig" is a pseudonym for Brian Stableford; reviewed by Peter Garratt in *Interzone* 45.) *14th July 1994.*

Craig, Brian. **Storm Warriors.** "Warhammer." Boxtree, ISBN 0-7522-0960-4, A-format paperback, cover by Fangorn, £3.99. (Fantasy role-playing game spinoff novel, first published in 1991; third in the "Orfeo" trilogy.) *14th July 1994.*

Craig, Brian. **Zaragoz.** "Warhammer." Boxtree, ISBN 0-7522-0950-7, A-format paperback, cover by Dave Gallagher, £3.99. (Fantasy role-playing game spinoff novel, first published in 1989; first in the "Orfeo" trilogy.) *14th July 1994.*

Dever, Joe, and John Grant. **The Secret of Kazan-Oud: The Legends of Lone Wolf, Book**

11. Red Fox, ISBN 0-09-915211-8, 288pp, A-format paperback, cover by Peter Andrew Jones, £3.99. (Fantasy novel, spun off from a series of interactive game-books by Dever which "have sold over 7 million copies worldwide"; Red Fox is an imprint of Random House; "John Grant" is a pseudonym of Paul Barnett.) *No date shown: received in June 1994.*

Dicks, Terrance. **Blood Harvest.** "The New Doctor Who Adventures." Virgin/Doctor Who, ISBN 0-426-20417-4, 287pp, A-format paperback, cover by Bill Donohoe, £4.99. (Sf television-series spinoff novel, first edition.) *21st July 1994.*

Follett, James. **Mindwarp: Prelude to Earthsearch.** Severn House, ISBN 0-7278-4621-3, 370pp, hardcover, £15.99. (Sf novel, first edition; a prequel to his BBC Radio serial and its accompanying novelization *Earthsearch* [1981].) *30th June 1994.*

Long, James D. **D.R.T. "Battletech."** Penguin/Roc, ISBN 0-451-45366-2, 281pp, A-format paperback, cover by Boris Vallejo, £3.99. (Shared-world sf novel, based on a role-playing game; first published in the USA, 1994; it's copyright "FASA"; this is the American first edition of May, "published by Roc, an imprint of Dutton Signet, a division of Penguin Books USA Inc.," with a British price sticker.) *30th June 1994.*

Maxwell, Thomas. **The Trek Universal Index.** Boxtree, ISBN 1-85283-398-X, 148pp, very large-format paperback, £9.99. (Alphabetical companion to television's "Star Trek," "Next Generation" and "Deep Space Nine" universe; first published in the USA, 1994.) *14th July 1994.*

Smith, Nyx. **Fade to Black.** "Shadowrun." Penguin/Roc, ISBN 0-451-45287-9, 318pp, A-format paperback, cover by Romas Kukalis, £3.99. (Shared-world sf/fantasy novel, based on a role-playing game; first published in the USA, 1994; it's copyright "FASA Corporation"; this is the American first edition of April, with a British price sticker.) *30th June 1994.*

Big Changes on the Way

Readers who turn first to our 'Coming Next Issue' box (page 66) will have noticed already that we're announcing a merger between *Interzone* and Paul Brazier's magazine *SF Nexus*. What this means for *Nexus* is that, in effect, that magazine will cease to exist – although *IZ* 88 will be a nearly 'all-*Nexus*' issue (containing good material by Geoff Ryman, Keith Roberts, Tom Shippey and others). What it means for *Interzone* is that the magazine will carry on in reinvigorated form – publishing stories and features just as good as (perhaps better than) those we have published in the recent past, but with a whole new visual appearance. Paul Brazier will become *IZ*'s designer and production manager, so the chances are that the combined magazine will look rather more like *SF Nexus* than the *IZ* of yore. Nevertheless, it will continue to be *Interzone*, with all the best qualities of the older magazine maintained. These changes will be implemented over the next few issues. Although we're not expecting technical difficulties please bear with us if there are any small teething problems.

– David Pringle, Editor

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THE UNLIMITED DREAM COMPANY: imported books and magazines for sale. From America, the brilliant *Science Fiction Eye* and *High Times*; from Australia, various Aphelion Books titles (as reviewed in *Interzone*). For details send an SAE to The Unlimited Dream Company, 127 Gaisford St., Kentish Town, London NW5 2EG.

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DREAMS FROM THE STRANGERS' CAFE #3: Wondrous and unusual fiction, poetry and artwork from the best and the newest virtuosos of the strange. A5, 60pp – only £1.45, or £5 for four issues! Cheques payable to John Gaunt, 15 Clifton Grove, Clifton, Rotherham S65 2AZ.

SMALL ADS

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CRITICAL ASSEMBLY I and II: both volumes of Hugo-winner David Langford's legendary sf review columns. All revised/reset; each volume 70,000 words softbound. Each £9.75 post free from: David Langford, 94 London Road, Reading RG1 5AU.

FREE LIST regularly issued of science fiction and fantasy books. Mainly P/B's. All reasonably priced. Write to: Mooncat SF, 7 King Edwards Rd., Enfield, Middx. EN3 7DA.

GOOD WRITERS WANTED. A few places are available in the Montpelier SF&F Writers' Group, based in the Brighton area. Most current members are now published. There is room for a few new members with a serious interest – especially in short stories. Meetings every four to six weeks, discussions friendly but frank. No membership fee. Please send a sample of your writing (story or first chapter of novel) to: Montpelier SF&F Writers' Group, c/o 17 Sussex Square, Brighton BN2 5AA.

FOR SALE: SF/F, horror, mysteries, etc. Books, magazines, comics. 1000's. Free search. Buying, trading. JS, 1500 Main Avenue, Kaukauna, Wisconsin 54130, USA.

DARK ASYLUM – an exciting new magazine exploring the darkside of human nature, psychosis, the grotesque and gruesome. Submissions from new and established talents required. Artists submit sample portfolio marked MANSEL, writers submit scripts marked STEVE, to Blood, Inc., 117-119 Rodsley Avenue, Gateshead, Newcastle NE8 4LA. All submissions will be answered.

SCI-FI STORIES WANTED. Don't just send your stories or ideas to *Interzone*. We are looking for contributions to a new sci-fi television series starting early next year. If you would like to see your creations animated or serialized as short dramas write to: Fuzzy Logic, St Georges Studios, 93-97 St Georges Road, Glasgow G3 6JA.

BRIGHTON AREA readers of *Interzone* are welcome to join us on Friday nights at The Mitre, a friendly pub on Baker Street (near the Open Market). A few of us meet from 9-11pm, in the smaller of the two rooms, for informal drink and chat. You'll recognize us by the copies of *IZ* or other sf publications lying around – so come along and make yourselves known. (Editors.)

SMALL ADS in *Interzone* reach over 10,000 people. If you wish to advertise please send your ad copy, *together with payment*, to *Interzone*, 217 Preston Drove, Brighton BN1 6FL. Rates: 25 pence per word, minimum of ten words, discount of 10% for insertions repeated in three issues. (VAT is inclusive.)

COMING NEXT MONTH IN INTERZONE

A surprise! *Interzone* merges with *SF Nexus* to produce a whole new look: stories by Geoff Ryman, Keith Roberts, Barrington Bayley and several others, plus interesting non-fiction by Lisa Tuttle, Tom Shippey, Colin Greenland, etc. All this, plus excellent artwork and our usual features and reviews. So don't miss the October *Interzone*, on sale in September.

November in the Netherlands. Hillcon time!

Join

Hillcon V:



Hillcon V: **ConSeal** an international SF-convention
25-27 november 1994 Dorint Hotel, Eindhoven, The Netherlands

Dutch Guest of Honour: **Tais Teng**

Professional author of SF and childrens books, illustrator, artist, King Kong Award winner, fan... to cut a long story short: a man of many talents worth meeting and listening to.

Foreign Guest of Honour: **Bruce Sterling**

Cyberpunk writer from the beginning and internet guru; he is the author of *Schismatrix* and *The Hacker Crackdown*; together with William Gibson he wrote *The Difference Engine*; and he is the editor of *Mirrorshades: The Cyberpunk Anthology*.

Some programme highlights:

- **Continuous video programme**
From Friday 18:00 uur until closing time Sunday evening; including a special film night on Saturday with a 'Life Beyond the Bomb'-theme (eight hours of horror, excitement... We hope you're not afraid of "things that go Kra-ka-BOOM in the night").
- **A continuously open games room**
Role Playing Games, board games, maybe even computer games, and whatever else we might come up with. Take part whenever you want. Take along your own favorite game. On Saturday an AD&D tournament, sponsored by the American Bookshop.
- **Masquerade**
On Sunday the traditional costume parade for those who are handy with needle or sowing machine, or who always fantasied parading as a Science Fiction or Fantasy character.

(programme may change without notice)

Membership price: f 55,- p.p.*, after October 1st f 60,- p.p.*

Children aged 4-12: f 25,- p.p. +

+ Children need to be accompanied by adult members; younger children free of charge.

* Membership for members from Currency Restricted Countries is f 25,-

Convention hotel prices, including breakfast: for a single room f 150,- per night; for a double room f 180,- per night; we can also offer cheaper alternatives nearby, if you require it.

How to become a member?

1. Fill out one form per person. Make photocopies if you come with a group.
2. Send it to *ConSeal*, c/o Richard Vermaas, James Wattstraat 13, 1097 DJ Amsterdam.
3. You can pay your membership fee by sending a EuroCheque written out for the proper amount — don't forget to fill in your bank card number. Send the EuroCheque to the above address. Please contact Richard Vermaas before trying other manners of payment.

The Last Major Dutch Convention for at least two years... Don't miss it!

- Yes, I wish to become a member of *ConSeal*
- I enclose a EuroCheque for f . . . ,--
- I want to receive more information about the convention before I join.

cs221

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I agree that my name and details may be held in a computer database.

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