

interzone/90

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SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

December
1994

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Garry Kilworth
Kim Newman
and others

Non-fiction by
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David Langford
Nick Lowe
Brian Stableford

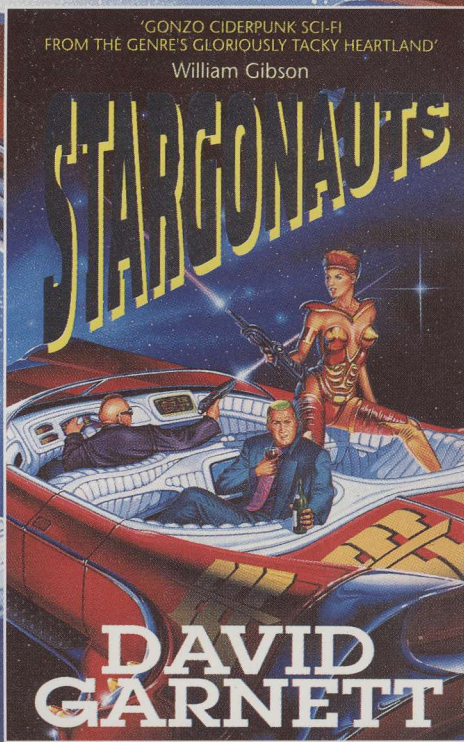


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WILLIAM GIBSON

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SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

No 90

December 1994

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NEVER REGRET, NEVER EXPLAIN, NEVER JUSTIFY...

...has always seemed a useful professional maxim to me. A poem cannot be explained by the poet: the poem is the most concise and accurate expression of what the poet was trying to say; any explication can only undercut the authority of the poem. This is true in all walks of life – my acts are their own best explanation – and seems to me rather the flip side of the old saw about “a bad workman blames his tools.” So I was more than a little discomfited when David Pringle asked me to edit the correspondence about the new look for *Interzone*. After all, if I am to be the designer/typesetter/production person, then I work for David and answer to him; on the other hand, though, if I *am* to take more of an editorial role, then I should be prepared to move up into the front line occasionally. and answer directly to you.

So I have conflicting emotions about this. Nevertheless, I will try to respond sensibly, and give a balanced view of the letters we have received – although some will be more difficult than others. For instance:

I have been disappointed for some months now with the overall quality of the magazine. For me the new design of the last two issues is the last straw. Therefore, with regret, I must tell you I do not wish to renew my subscription.

P. Keating

Frankly, I can't see why this person bothered to waste a stamp unless the sole intent was to demoralize us. I don't mind criticism, but there is no criticism in this; there is simply a statement of opinion that we can't do anything right.

Of course, I did ask for letters of comment on the new design and editorial, but I really wanted to know whether or not people liked what they saw, and if they did not, what it was they didn't like – suggestions on how to improve it are also gratefully received. In some ways, the following is a model letter.

Dear Editors:

Sorry, but I did not like issue 88. No I am not a “moaning minnie”, far from it. Change is always welcome in my opinion. But issue 88 seemed untidy, inconsistent and confusing. In fact the general presentation felt amateurish and seeing as a subscription renewal slip was enclosed, I seriously considered not sending it back.

The story content did not help, it was below your usual standard in my personal opinion. “Unlikely Meeting” by Keith Roberts wasn't even a story, it was advertising and pretty poor advertising at that. Thank heavens Barrington Bayley was on good form with the only story I really enjoyed. So now issue 89 has hit the mat and to my utter confusion, I like it! There are still things that niggle but my subscription renewal is enclosed – for six issues at least.

Comparing the two issues the differences are only superficial but they seem to make a big difference. To list them would make a long letter indeed, but the whole feel is of pulling things together after a massive upheaval. One thing in particular however is the “Books Reviewed” pages, which was always low on my agenda, now seems to invite me to read.

So I do hope that the improvements continue, and that next time I shall feel confident enough to renew my subs for a year.

Trevor C. Baker, Stevenage

I am particularly pleased with the comment about the reviews pages. I have long thought that this was the single area of *Interzone* that most needed a thoroughgoing spring clean, and it is gratifying to receive this kind of confirmation. But my final aim is to make the entire magazine look as inviting.

(I considered selecting specific comments from the letters to respond to, but then you wouldn't have got the kind of overall impression that the letter above gives. Instead, I have included mostly complete letters, and responded to the points made one at a time in between.)

Dear Editors:

Interzone 88/Nexus demanded (literally) a closer than usual scrutiny of its image and contents, and mindful of Paul Brazier's “moaning minnies” concern I approached this issue with an open mind.

Although sf fandom, I am sure, has its share of luddites, the majority of us should be expected to accept any changes to our environment at least philosophically. However, I have grave reservations about the *Nexus* influence on *Interzone*.

Considering Paul Brazier's *forté* is graphic design it is a shame that the issue is riddled with irritating cross gutter graphics and contrived word wraps that detract from the content of the page. “Dead Space for the Unexpected” was particularly poor in this respect, especially on the title page. The whole feel of the magazine suggests that a newly acquired copy of “PagePlus 3.0” and a floppy disk from “Fonts-U-Like” has been used with tasteless abandon.

It seems churlish to mention the plethora of typos (check out “Ortygia”) but what's good enough for the *Guardian*...

On the other hand, from a content point of view the issue had much to commend it. I particularly welcomed Tom Shippey's article, and the Ortygia quartet gave an interesting behind-the-scenes look at the lives of sf writers. The standard of fiction was as we have come to expect (I even enjoyed the somewhat indulgent “Kaeti” story) and the inclusion of the “Café Duo” vignette was inspired.

So what am I saying? I suppose #88 was a good issue spoiled by an attempt to dress it up with funky graphics and a hip image. After all, we want sf as a genre to be taken seriously don't we? The old two-column-style with relevant tastefully-placed illustrations gives *Interzone* weight and credibility and allows excellent fiction to be read without distraction. This may be a case of “if it ain't broke don't fix it.”

I regret the passing of *Nexus*. I was not a subscriber and maybe I and others like me have lost the opportunity to support what I'm sure was an excellent magazine. As such I wish Paul well in his association with *Interzone*. May he treat it and its readership with respect.

Steve Bowen, Ashford

Dear Editors:

I think Paul Brazier's statement of principles and intent in Issue 88 (the *NexyZone* edition) does not augur well for the future of *IZ*. In "Disappointing Futures" he began by blurring the edges of sf ("impossible to define," "science fiction is what editors of sf magazines buy"). He then went on to split sf into *Engineering Fiction* – anything saliently involving gadgets and technology – and *Science Fiction* which is all about helping us become better people, helping people "cope with the data flow." Of course, *Science Fiction* is what he likes.

Mr Brazier declares early on his enjoyment of *Analog* and other *Engineering Fiction*, but this enthusiasm appears to have had little influence on the fiction contained in issue 88. On the contrary, those seven stories seem to have been chosen to specifically exclude even the slightest oily whiff of *Engineering Fiction*. Woolly vagueness is *in*: dynamic, dramatic plotting is *out*. Genteel, reflective coolness is *in*; visionary intensity is *out*. Let's ditch all that gaudy rubbish, the robots, the starships, the aliens, *and* the cyberpunks, and "perhaps science fiction will rise to its proper place of pre-eminence in the literary world" (my italics).

Need a definition of sf? OK, try this: a science-fiction story is one which, if the science-fictional premise is taken out, ceases to work as a story. Sf is about perspectives on the future, about the transformation of reality and personality, written with verve and skill, written to be entertaining and unsettling. After all, he insists that "sf is what I, an sf editor, buy, remember."

Yes, I think we will remember.

Mike Cobley, Ayrshire

I have to say that the reason I started my own sf magazine was not to "compete" with *Interzone* (as many people have thought) but rather to publish a magazine that contained the sort of article I wanted to read, which *Interzone* did not, so Steve Bowen's comments about the content are particularly welcome. I wanted the emphasis to be writerly, almost gossipy, and to be *about* sf rather than simply a magazine of science fiction short stories. Mike Cobley belabours me for claiming to like the "engineering-fiction" so beloved of *Analog*, but not publishing stories that even remotely resemble it. Why should I? *Analog* does an excellent job already (and I have at last been catching up on my reading in that department lately).

It has already cornered the market, and it would be as futile to compete with *Analog* as it would have been to compete with *Interzone*.

As for a definition of sf – it's a tired, old and futile argument, and one I mentioned only to try and divert any such discussion into more fruitful areas. Mike Cobley's "definition" is not a definition as I understand the term – saying "raspberry ice-cream isn't raspberry ice-cream if you take the raspberry out" does not help us define raspberries either. Self-referential circular arguments are not definitions. I don't dispute the point, but I bet every reader of this page can name a solid sf book that does not fit his "definition" – which is precisely why I want to move the discussion. Such discussions are in-looking and self-serving, and in my view this navel-gazing is the fundamental source of the decline of the influence of sf in the real world. My aim was to make us turn around and look out into the real world so that, instead of roping sf off from what we see, we could try to find ways of relating sf to that world,

Dear Editors

You asked for comments on the *Nexus* issue (*IZ* no 88). I have only just finished reading the magazine, for reasons I will explain.

The stories were fine – I especially liked "Dead Space for the Unexpected." The non-fiction was fine. I got rather bored with the almost-fiction of "Ortygia House." Nick Lowe was, as always, good to read. I prefer more book reviews, but at least I didn't feel compelled to buy yet more books this month.

Artwork and layout were fine too. But the big problem, which made reading this issue a bit of an ordeal, is the typeface. Compared to *IZ* 87, it is all paler, thinner and often smaller. Reading the non-fiction articles was a real struggle and I gave up when it came to the grey panels in Gwyneth Jones' interesting article, "New Books Received" and "Small Ads," all of which I would normally read.

Could we have bolder, larger fonts, please?

Sheila Thomas, Saffron Walden

We have had many comments about this font. My second great problem with *Interzone*-as-it-was was the awful cluttered look of the page that was given by printing in Melior on tight leading. I had intended to spend quite a long time experimenting before I changed anything in *Interzone* at all. I

can't even remember whose idea combining the two magazines was, but I was nervous to say the least about sending out *Nexus* 4 as *Interzone* 88. However, increasingly it seemed like the ideal solution to several problems. However, *Interzone* is seven millimetres less tall than *Nexus*, so I had to do a surprising amount of rejigging to fit the contents of *Nexus* into the *Interzone* grid, and the result was in some cases rather cluttered or shrunken text. Combined with the typeface which was designed specifically for *Nexus*, it made some things very difficult to read. The page design is maturing and I hope that as a result the font is less difficult to read. Also I am in the process of having the font reworked to make it more even and slightly bolder. The results should be on show in the next issue of *Interzone*. The point is that the design you see is not fixed. I will keep tweaking it until David stops complaining, and he naturally complains if you complain. If the worse comes to the worse, I may yet have to come up with a completely new design and typeface. The *Nexus* design was specifically aimed at accentuating a different editorial attitude from *Interzone*'s. Only time will tell whether or not it is adaptable to the *Interzone* stance.

Dear Editors:

Please inform me what will happen to my remaining subscription to *Nexus*, now that *Nexus* has merged with *Interzone*.

I also have a subscription to *Interzone*. I hope the merger works out for you.,

David P. Dunning, Walthamstow

Thanks very much for your good wishes. Any outstanding subs for *Nexus* have been transferred to *Interzone*. Anyone who already had an *Interzone* subscription has had their *Interzone* sub extended by the outstanding amount of their *Nexus* sub.

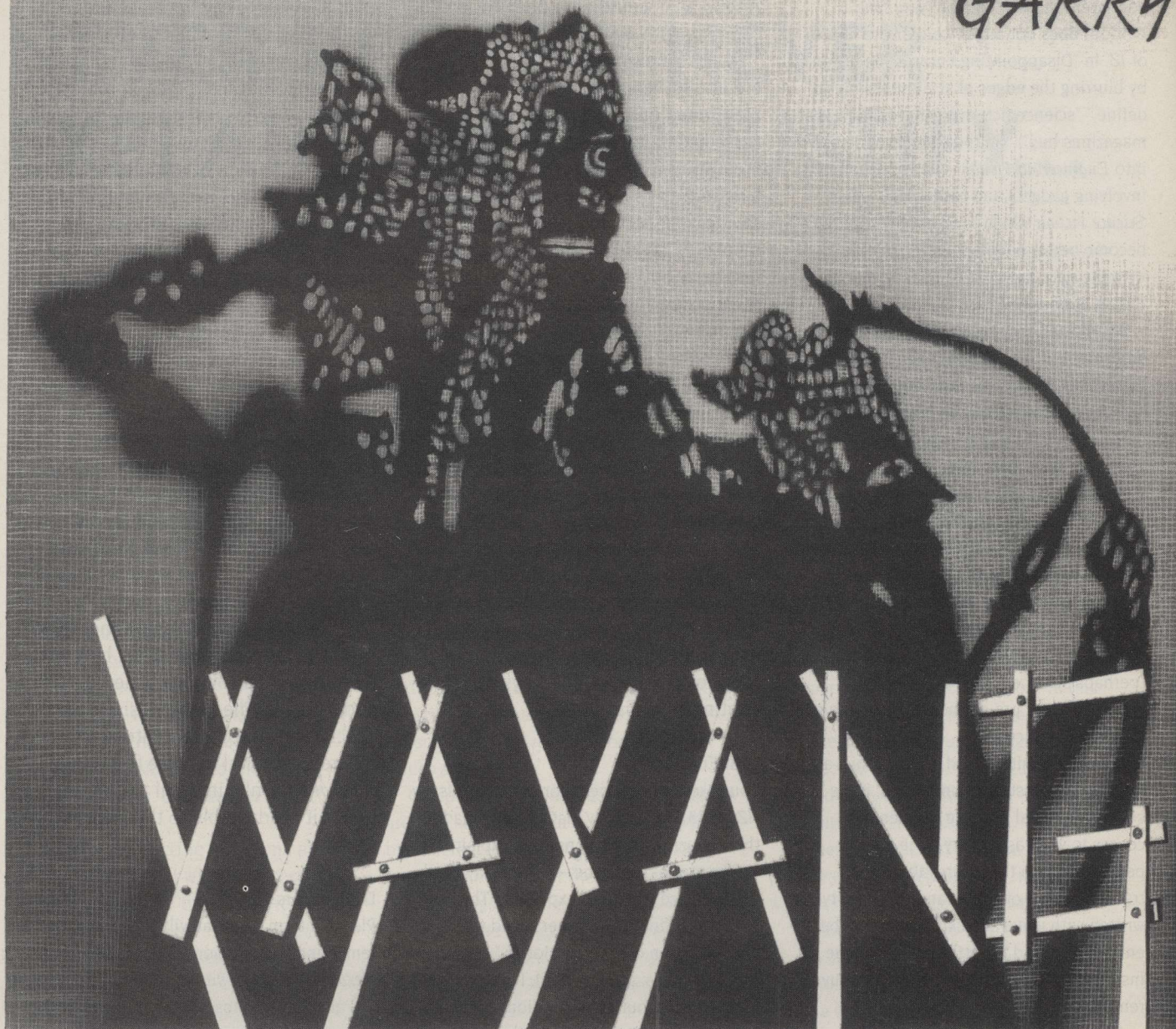
Dear Editors:

"MY FAVOURITE SF MAGAZINE."

A few comments on *Nexus* and *Interzone*.

Layout: *Interzone* has always looked a bit staid, and could use some smartening up. The new look is OK, tho' not compelling: the innumerable typefaces, column widths and line spacing and the multiplicity of ikons (including the clunky-looking space invader "X" (*Nexus*?) logo come across as

continued on page 35



She closed the door gently and was gone, and her leaving made little difference to the ambience of the room.

I lay on the rough-hewn bed, with its carved end posts, for another hour, just staring at the ceiling. Then I got up and went out onto the balcony. It was 5.30 in the evening and the sun was setting on the Balinese rice terraces. A beautiful, light-green landscape surrounded the hut, the tiers dropping away to the front and rising above behind. The hut seemed to be floating like some forgotten gazebo in an emperor's garden. Beyond the fields, in the far distance, was Gunung Agung, one of the many dominating active volcanoes.

The duck herders were calling in their flocks on the rice terraces. The herders carried bamboo staves, twice the height of a man, which slimmed out to whip thin at the top and were arched, weighted by coloured rags. They stuck this in the ground and their ducks gathered around it. When they

finally left, the ducks following, the tall crooks made the herders appear stately, like princes in the midst of a gabbling rabble. I sat in the rickety bamboo chair and drank some cold tea. It was the forest at the back of the town that had frightened her. The mosquitoes, even the cockroaches and snakes, didn't bother her as much as they did me, but the forest had troubled her. We had been out walking and I insisted we follow a path through the undergrowth. She would have none of it, saying she didn't like the shafts of light lancing the lace-work canopy. They worried her, especially when there was a breeze, stirring the branches, causing the patterns on the ground to change.

What are you afraid of? I had asked her.

Of getting lost, she replied.

But there's a path through to the other side, I said.

Not that kind of lost, she had answered – *lost forever*.

This answer was incomprehensible to me and I gave way to

KILWORTH



the shadow puppet, made of similar rice stalks, is a kind of shadow puppet, and the shadow of the puppet is cast on the screen. The shadow puppet is a kind of shadow puppet, and the shadow of the puppet is cast on the screen.

my temper, shouting at her, calling her an idiot. It was, I saw now, inexcusable of me, but the damage had been done. I was not forgiven. Later she told me she was leaving.

We had been thrown together in a vernacular hut in the middle of rice fields and I guess it had put a strain on the relationship. Maybe it wasn't the forest? Maybe it was us – or just me? Maybe she'd discovered, after seven days together, seven nights together, she just didn't like me? Or that our cultures were too different? Hell, I didn't know.

Anyway, I sure as heck wasn't going to stay on Bali now and thought I might go to the coast tomorrow, to find a ferry.

I went indoors again and had an all-over wash in the mandi at the back. A kind of concrete bath with a saucepan for splashing water over oneself, the mandi substituted for a shower in the cheaper accommodation. I was on a backpacking holiday, using the *Lonely Planet Guide*. It meant I was free to do as I wished, go anywhere I pleased, and pick up what-

ever accommodation was available. Nyoman, a local woman, had attached herself to me several weeks ago, and I had begun to think we were in love with each other, but those feelings had evaporated.

I dressed in shirt and slacks, and remembering the mosquitoes, thick socks. Then with torch in pocket I took the raised narrow paths down to the town, which happened to be Ubud, the place of the artists and carvers. Everywhere there were paintings for sale, and textiles, and wood carvings. I had already bought a root carving of a lizard emerging from its hole, and a painting of Garuda surrounded by villagers. Nyoman had persuaded me to buy both the carving and the picture.

Nyoman was fashioned in the fey mould of the Balinese. She had dainty limbs and a light step. She had the shy smile and quiet demeanour. I was beginning to miss her already.

As I walked down the main street, pieces of paper were thrust into my hands by hopeful touts. There was one invit-

ing me to an “old ritual dance – *sanghyang* – a trance dance in which Rama sets out to rescue Sita from the clutches of the Demon King assisted by a huge army of monkeys.” The flier wasn’t clear whether the monkeys were with Rama, or with the Demon King, but knowing the local monkeys it was probably the latter. One had bitten Nyoman on the ankle when I wasn’t looking.

There were the usual Barong and Kris dances, a *dedari* dance and a *jaran* dance, but the one that took my attention immediately was an invitation to a *wayang kulit*.

I had read a good deal about the shadow puppet plays and I knew that tourists did not often get invited. The *wayang kulit* had religious significance and was actually performed mostly in temples during the day: was for some reason necessary to the temple rituals. The *dalang*, or puppet master, was a consecrated priest, a mystic, and was regarded with some awe.

I went back to the man who had given me the *wayang kulit* flier.

“I can go to this?” I asked.

“Yes mister.”

“How much?”

He named me a figure in rupees, which seemed reasonable. One might bargain for a bemo taxi, or a carving, but not for a ticket to a shadow play.

“I’ll take one,” I said.

“Two?” he asked, seemingly puzzled. He had obviously seen me with Nyoman.

“No, *one*,” I replied, firmly.

He nodded and then looked me in the eyes. “You want for someone to come with you?”

I stared at him for a moment, then said, “You mean *you*?”

He smiled disarmingly. “I can tell you about the shadow puppets. It will mean nothing otherwise.”

I nodded. He was right. Although I knew a good deal already the *wayang kulit* was immensely complicated and complex, full of heroes and heroines, demons and ogres, and a cast of hundreds. I might enjoy the spectacle, but I would have only a vague idea what was going on. The stories were from sacred classical literature, written originally on palm-leaf manuscripts, and brought to life mythic beings from both the natural and supernatural worlds. It would help to have someone with an inherent knowledge of the art.

“You’re hired,” I said. “How much?”

He shook his head, smiling. “You pay my ticket.”

All he wanted was to get to see the show himself. That was fair enough. He knew I would probably tip him too, but that wasn’t an essential, only a possible extra.

“What’s your name?” I asked.

“Ketut,” he replied, and I remembered that Balinese have only four first names – Wayan, Made, Nyoman and Ketut – which they give to their children in that order. After Ketut, the sequence is begun again. My companion was his parent’s fourth, or eighth, or twelfth child.

I left Ketut, promising to meet him outside the Frog Pond Inn at seven. The shadow puppet show was in a village just outside Klungkung, the centre of an old Balinese kingdom. It was some 30 kilometres away and would take us at least an hour on the poor back roads, past endless Hindu temples and lily ponds, banana plantations and wayside shrines.

Walking towards the Frog Pond Inn, where I intended to eat, I strolled past the open shops and looked round suddenly, half-expecting to see Nyoman behind me. She had fol-

lowed me around in life for so long I now took her presence for granted. A very quiet woman with little to say, happy to be with someone without imposing her personality upon them, much of the time you almost forgot she was there. It was only when you noticed some change, perhaps in the light, that you remembered she was accompanying you. These were not conditions I would have wished on her, or anyone, but were a fact of her existence. I used to tease her, saying she must be a closet Carmelite nun, and had taken a vow of silence.

It was not just me who saw her in this way. In a crowd, at a party, she was hardly noticed. Even if someone took the trouble to speak to her, they did so self-consciously, as if they were afraid they might be accused of talking to themselves.

The street was empty behind me and I continued my stroll.

Ketut met me at the arranged time and we boarded a rickety bus full of German tourists bound for Klungkung. Just over an hour later I was sitting with a bottle of Fanta in my hand, in a palm-leafed long hut, lit only by a single 25 watt bulb which dangled, bare of any shade, from the central rafter. Around me were several Germans, one or two Australians and New Zealanders, and half a dozen British tourists.

The rest of the room was jam-packed with locals, children and adults. The Balinese are a small, dusky, ethereal people – self-effacing and diffident – with a lightness of form which made me feel like a pantomime oaf. They seemed so much closer to the living earth on their volcanic island, a garden land of blooms and lush greenery, volatile yet with a deep, delicate beauty.

In front of me was a makeshift raised booth. I had already walked around this object. There was a white cotton screen illuminated by a coconut-oil lamp, whose light was soft and evocative. Under the lamp, cross-legged, inside the booth, sat the *dalang*, the puppet master. He was meditating when I passed by him: preparing himself for the performance during which he would exceed the bounds of reality, for himself and his audience, if not in actuality.

The *pusaka*, or puppet chest, passed down through families as an heirloom, stood at the end of the booth.

Within arm’s reach, down either side of the booth, were the shadow puppets, made of buffalo hide. They were flat, intricate cut-outs of gods, heroes and heroines, painted and chiselled according to precise traditional requirements.

“First tonight is a Hindu myth,” whispered Ketut. “*Kala Purana*. In this the demon-god Kala wishes to devour twin brothers born in the week of Tumpek Wayang. The *dalang* Empu Lègèr conquers him by shadow play and purifying . . .”

“You mean ritual exorcism? A shadow play within a shadow play, eh?” I wanted to show that I had taken the trouble to read some of the background myths. “Is this the one where Kresna smashes the demon king’s head to pieces?”

“No,” replied Ketut. “That is *Bomantaka*.”

I could hear by the reverent tone he used that he regarded the shadow theatre with intense seriousness.

“You believe this is very holy?” I asked him.

He nodded, slowly. “The wayang has hidden secret wisdom concerning the meaning of life.”

“You said *first* – are there two shows tonight?”

“Yes. Second comes *Bima Suci*, where the Pandawa brother Prince Bima is sent into the forest by a false priest to fetch holy water. Bima is attacked by ogre but he slits its throat with his long fingernail, *waspenek* . . .” Ketut showed me

one of his own long nails and drew it across his neck. "The ogre's soul becomes the god, Indra. Bima takes the head of the ogre back to the Brahmana priest who sent him into the forest and the priest then confesses the holy water is in the middle of the ocean.

"Bima meets large snakes there and cuts off their heads, but he dies in the water. When he is dead he asks the god Tunggal three questions: why does man have to die? why does man dream? what is the purest thing on earth? Tunggal says man dies when the gods leave his body, man dreams to let his soul out to wander and nothing on the earth is flawless, even flowers, though the god of love, Semara, is the purest in heaven.

"When the Tunggal answers the questions, he opens his legs and the Prince Bima goes into his body through his phallus. In heaven Bima finds the holy water in a gold casket on a five-tiered shrine. He takes this and goes home, to rejoice with his family. The lying priest is punished."

He had obviously memorized this passage of English translation from a guide book of some kind, but before I could comment the electric light went out and a hushed atmosphere seized the spectators in this monochromatic drama.

The lamplight was even more subtle now, illuminating the screen with a deep yellow glow. It might have been the moon behind that cotton divider. The musicians in the small orchestra began playing on percussion instruments and the Tree of Life appeared in shadow form on the screen. Then characters began to enter, the epic unfolded, while the *dalang* recited the story at the same time as manipulating his puppets.

Very soon I was lost in the enthralling play on the screen before me. The puppets were handled with such rapidity, such skill and deftness, that after a while the rhythms of the shadows became a mesmerizing sequence of dexterous movements before my eyes, hypnotizing me. It did not matter that I did not fully understand the plot, or that many of the characters were anonymous to me, it was the vibrant shadows creating dramatic stimuli that held me spellbound, commanded absolutely my attention. I drowned in the performance.

Arrows flew across the screen, sword fights were enacted, and surely, surely, there were at least a dozen characters, a dozen voices, at any one time in the thick of great battles, while the *dalang* only had one mouth, one pair of hands? How were these wonders achieved, if not by mysticism and magic? This holy man behind the screen was himself a puppet of the gods, his mind wholly engaged by them, his hands assisted by theirs. There was a kind of wizardry in force, in which the priest was but the master, and we the audience were his neophytes.

The music was insistent, adding to the mesmeric voice, the hypnotic movements. At times it was monotonous, dulling my senses to the point of utter receptivity; at other times it was sweet and beguiling, persuading me to open my perceptions; and lastly it could be almost cacophonous, loudly demanding my attention and my submission.

We were participants too, in the frenetic activity being played out on the screen, this battle involving men and gods, demons and monsters. Our hearts were black shadows awaiting the deadly dagger; our eyes perceived threats to our personal safety; our hands itched to wield weapons.



These were not simply dark images, icons flitting across a screen: they were immediately true.

We were drawn into new ways of comprehending reality, sitting in that room.

The battles on the screen became more frantic, more intense, until the villains were vanquished and the heroes victorious.

The two performances had taken almost five hours during which many of the tourists had left quietly and gone home. I guessed that many of them had got bored, especially since they could not take flash photographs, the curse of the modern traveller.

I staggered outside the long hut to get some air, grateful for the perfume of the frangipani blossoms after the closeness of so many bodies with their unavoidable human smells. Then just as the bus was about to leave, I realized my watch had gone from my wrist. Using my torch I searched the immediate area, but couldn't see it anywhere.

"Hold the bus," I said to Ketut, and went back inside the hut to look around where I had been sitting.

I couldn't find the light switch, so I used my torch to search the floor.

While I had my head down, there was a sudden *clack* from the platform above. It sounded as if someone was still there. When I looked I saw that the lamp was still on at the back of the booth. It was quiet and still in the hut now: a kind of hushed hallowed silence had descended upon the place in the absence of the *dalang*. Then the *clack* came again.

I switched the torch off and tip-toed up the steps to the platform and stared in the booth, the temple of this priest-wizard with the magic hands.

Surprisingly, it was empty except for the shadow puppets, still in their sockets ranged along both sides of the booth. Had one of them slipped and made the sound I had heard? Their strange cut-out heads and bodies looked sinister in the flickering yellow glow. There was fat Merdah, and Tualèn, and big-bellied Sangut, the great hero Kresna, and the *kakayonan*, the tree of life and sacred centre of the universe.

Their colours – the ochres, cobalt blues, blacks, Chinese yellows, whites, pinks – all glistened attractively in the lamp-light. Their stillness made them appear strangely menacing after the frenetic activity they had shown during the performance. It was as if they were awaiting a signal to leap into violent action, like a cat that appears not to be paying attention to a bird until the bird hops within reach of its instant spring.

I stared at the flat, cut-out puppets, fascinated by the elaborate filigree work upon their decorative forms. Narrowed eyes stared back at me, steadily, unmoving. It was difficult not to think of these pieces of leather as animate in the smoky atmosphere from the lamp. Which one of them had moved in its socket? They were all at a slight angle, none of them poker-straight in their holders.

I could smell the strong fragrance of the coconut oil burning, trapped inside the booth. There was also a residue stink of sweat and activity, and underlying smells of hardwood and buffalo hide. This heady mixture of scents made me feel a little giddy.

For some reason I felt impelled to enter the booth, and did so, my heart beating faster than usual. I gazed at the lamp which hung from the rafters. In the original palm-leaf manuscript of the myth *Sigwagama*, the lamp was played by

Brahma himself, while Iswara was the *dalang* and Wisnu the musical instruments. That Brahma was light and could create shadows made him the most powerful of the three, even though the manipulator was Iswara and Wisnu played with the senses.

I happened to glance behind me as I was crawling into the central space and saw my own shadow on the cotton sheet. I suddenly thought, what am I doing here? I might be guilty of desecrating some holy place. If the *dalang* returned, or one of his assistants, I might be in serious trouble.

Yet I did not turn and go. I was transfixed by my own dark shape on the sheet, where so recently the myths had been re-enacted. My silhouette now stood frozen where gods had played, where heroes had run, where ogres had danced. There was a strange sensation of looking into another world, of standing alone on the threshold of a mythical kingdom. I was like some shambling giant, lurking at the gates, waiting to be told that I might enter and take my place amongst the lower shadow forms.

At that moment, while I stared at my foreshortened silhouette on the screen, the door opened at the back of the hut. One of the puppets moved in the breeze from the outside, dropped forward, with a *clack*, so that its shadow fell across my shadow. Staring, I saw that it was the puppet of Kala, Lord of the Demons, which had slipped in its holder. His frightening outline had closed with mine on the white screen.

A chill went through me.

"Are you there, mister?" said Ketut, softly.

I scrambled out from behind the booth, feeling shocked. Ketut's eyes opened wide when he saw me. I tried to explain that I thought perhaps one of the musicians might have picked up my watch and left it there, but I don't think he believed me for one moment. He looked at my hands, probably expecting to see I had stolen a puppet, but when he saw this was not so, he murmured that we should be catching the bus.

What he did see, however, and this surprised me as much as it did him, was that my watch was still on my wrist.

We were mostly quiet with one another on the way back. The bus was being jolted this way and that, by an uneven road full of potholes. I couldn't understand why I thought my watch had been missing, when it had been on my wrist all the time. Had I been hypnotized in some way, during the performance? It was the only explanation I could give for such an mistake.

With the constant jarring I began to develop a pain in my shoulders, which began to make me feel ill.

I did manage to ask Ketut, "What is the main function of Kala? What does he do?"

Ketut replied, "He eats men."

By the time we reached Ubud I was in agony. Ketut kept looking at me: sidelong glances which told me that my appearance was not good. When the bus stopped, he hurried off, thanking me over his shoulder for buying his ticket. I made my way to the rice terraces, where my path lay.

I didn't need my torch. It was a full moon. The peaked houses, their rooftops sweeping upwards to horned points in the Indonesian manner, were casting shadows on the ground. Clustered together as the houses were, the shadows tended to be complex criss-crossings of shade. There were latticework fences too, which overlaid these designs on the

ground. I tried to avoid their dark networks, since they reminded me of the shapes of puppets cast on a cotton screen.

I reached the forest in front of the rice terraces and again the shadows locked and interlocked: this time they were moving, as the treetops of the canopy was blown by the wind. They formed and reformed figures on the forest floor, and this time I *had* to walk through them, since I could reach the rice terraces no other way. As I hurried through them, they seemed to gather to one single giant shape, which stalked my own shadow.

I began to run. It was as if I were being pursued through the trees by some predator, and my heart was banging against my ribs, though I didn't dare look behind in case I saw something unreal. I was absolutely convinced now that I had been hypnotized and I was not going to allow the art of the hypnotist to fill my eyes as well as my head with fictitious horrors.

I emerged onto the terrace paths, feeling safer out in the open fields, with no trees to cast shadows.

How was I going to shake this fantasy that gripped my consciousness? Someone was having a very cruel joke at my expense. I was sure that once I was in my hut, with the artificial light on, I could break the mood and shed these terrible feelings.

As I hurried along I saw a man coming towards me, a duck herder, probably on his way home from a friend's house.

Since the path was narrow, with room for only one person, I stopped so that we could step around one another carefully. The man obviously did not notice me until the very last second, when he almost ran into me, and then his eyes went white around the edges. He stared at me for a second, as if peering into a dark hole, then muttered what sounded like a prayer or chant, before stepping into the paddy water and hurrying on. He looked back once, before he reached the drop to the next tier.

Watching him I had the terrible feeling that he had hardly been able to see me, yet it was extremely bright under that great moon. The deleterious pain in my shoulder began again.

I looked around me and saw that I was standing under a duck herder's crook, left sticking in the mud. The rag on the top fluttered in the breeze, casting a changing shadow near my own dark shape. There, in the light of the full moon, I saw that the rag's shadow had formed itself into the puppet shape of Kala, the devourer of men.

Kala's form was eating my shadow.

Already much of my shadow had been consumed, in the streets, in the forest, and now under the staff's rag. There were great chunks missing from around the shoulders and the back. My neck was now a gander's neck, with a huge grotesque head perched on top, where the shadow had been eaten away.

I recoiled quickly in horror, only to see Kala's black form dart forward and begin feasting again, as the wind increased in strength and bent the duck herder's pole.

The pain was excruciating now.

I laughed out loud, hysterically, the sound echoing over the rice terraces. Surely, surely this was just some trick of the light? This was no Brahman lamp, this moon, and I was no *wayang kulit*, no shadow puppet.

Yet, on the other hand, it occurred to me that in any shadow world the shadows must be the main characters, and

the objects that cast them subordinate to the shadows' needs and desires.

I was in their world at the moment, the world in which they held sway. I had entered through the dimension of the *wayang kulit*, which had seduced my mind into passing through the gate, and the power was in the hands of the shadows.

My own weak shadow was now a ragged thing as the ravenous Kala moved over it, devouring it ferociously, as a starving wolf consumes its kill.

I turned and ran, heading for my hut, desperate to get out of the light of the moon before my shadow was totally destroyed, for the man who casts no shadow is not there. He no longer exists in this world.

When I reached the hut the voracious Kala, using the waving palms around the hut to cast his shape, began feasting once again. Weak now, I fell on the steps of the hut, unable to shake off the dark creature on my shadow's back. By the time I was able to crawl through the doorway, little was left except a few wisps of me. I felt ravaged, tattered, my shadow a weathered black banner that had been through many battles, many seasons.

I lay in the safety of the darkness feeling shaken and terrified. Awake for several hours my mind ran away in a panic, knowing that the sun would rise the next morning, and most likely the moon at night. I was trapped inside this hut, unable to turn on the light. Kala must have been laughing, knowing I would have to come out some time. So long as he was patient, I would be delivered to him eventually.

The next morning it was bright sunny day and I cowered in the corner of my hut, afraid to be caught in any of the beams that cut through the gaps in the curtains. At three o'clock however, the sky clouded over and a tropical storm threatened. It was soon dark enough for me to leave the hut without casting a shadow.

I hurried out to find Ketut.

At first he tried he ignore me, but when he saw how distressed I had become, he motioned for me to step off the street into the house of his parents.

"You must help me," I cried, watching the distant lightning on the horizon getting closer by the minute.

Ketut listened to my story and then told me we had to find the *dalang* quickly. He took me by the hand and led to me to a temple at the end of Monkey Forest Road. By this time it was raining hard – a torrential monsoon downpour that could drown a cat if it didn't find shelter – and I had no fear of shadows. The pressure of the rain caused palms to genuflect, turned dirt streets to muddy rivers, and lowered visibility to zero.

Once in the gloom the temple's recesses, with the rain thundering on the metal roof, Ketut went off to find the *dalang*. He reappeared a little later.

"Come," he said, beckoning me towards a small room. "The *dalang* will help you."

I entered the room in which the same *dalang* sat cross-legged in the centre of a large palm-leaf mat. A small, wiry man with dark eyes, the *dalang* motioned for me to sit down on the mat. I did as I was told, knowing I was in his hands completely.

Ketut said, "He wants you to turn sideways."

A profile. Right. Once I was in the correct position, the *dalang* took out a wad of dirty cloth and unrolled it. In it were

a row of small chisels and knives, which glinted in the dull light from the doorway. He began cutting and shaping a piece of stiff hide, scraping out hollows, chiselling holes, perforating the tough leather, working swiftly. I realized what was happening, of course. He was making a *wayang kulit* from my silhouette.

I was to be a shadow puppet.

While the *dalang* was working, Ketut left me alone with him, returning after a few minutes.

Once the form was cut, it was painted and hung up to dry. Ketut said, "Later the *dalang* will add the sticks. You must now go back to the darkness of your room. Tonight the *dalang* will use your puppet in the story of *Bomantaka*."

"What will happen? How will that help me?" I asked.

Ketut said seriously, "Your shadow must kill the shadow of Kala, king of the demons, to free yourself of him."

A chill went through me. I didn't dare ask what would happen if my shadow failed. What if Kala killed *me* instead, then ate my puppet's shadow? Would that mean the end of me too? *The man without a shadow is not there*. I knew it would probably mean my death too, as well as that of my shadow.

I went back to my hut on the rice terraces to find Nyoman had returned. The shutters to the hut were still closed and it was hot inside. She was lying on the bed in the darkness. She patted the bed beside her.

"Come," she said, "you must lie with me. Ketut called me on the phone and told me what has happened."

There were no more words needed. I lay down beside her and waited. She held my hand. I think I fell asleep just as the ducks were being called in for the night.

I am behind a rock near the trunk of the Tree of Life. Sooner or later all things must pass by the Tree. It is a huge growth, reaching halfway to the clouds, and spreads its canopy massively over a third of the world. Here and there a great branch dips to the earth, then rises again as a mighty river of bark. In its flourishing vast network of leafy branches, more numerous than the blades of grass in the true world, are all manner of creatures, real and unreal: birds and beasts, mythological beings and monsters. Their forms proliferate. Spots, stripes, dark and light, but no colour, for this is the land of shadows. They decorate its foliage. They are part of the tree, growing with it, from it, in it. They are its fruit, its nuts, its buds and blossoms.

As well as growing and nourishing every known creature, except man, the aboreal god is a provider of real fruits: figs, oranges, grapefruits, limes, lemons, walnuts, hazelnuts, coconuts, grapes, bananas and every fruit known to humankind as well as those fictitious delicacies which adorn the mosaic walls in forgotten temples deep inside the last jungles.

There are greys within greys, shade upon shade: there are as many delicate monochromatic tones as the colours of the real world in the Tree of Life, hiding some things, revealing others, constantly unfolding new wonders, endlessly concealing old ones. It is life, uncurling like a fern, twisting in agony like a wounded creature, cryptically opening a flower of stunning shadowed beauty here, secretly closing a faded bloom there.

This is the wonder under which I wait, a long curved dagger in my right hand, my heart beating madly with fear. What if I fail? What if the great Kala swallows my shadow, my soul? Shall I then be *nothing* in the universe?

Lone warriors have passed me by, armed to the teeth with an extraordinary arsenal of weapons – spiked objects, deadly pointed missiles, strange ropes and leathers – some of which I can only guess at the use. Bands of brigands, monsters, ogres, fairies and giants, all have wandered past, some clearly looking for war, others avoiding it.

Armies too have marched by the enormous trunk, their feet and horses' hooves thundering on the hard dark earth, their generals magnificently arrayed in dull armour.

Sometimes these armies meet on the plain to fight and the air sings with arrows, nails with spears, clatters with the blades of swords. Thousands fall, their blood mingling with the dust, and heroes rise out of the dead, silvery heroes shining with pure brilliance, their sword in one hand, the Ring of Truth in the other. Their followers rally, inspired by the magnificent spectacle of light-rising-from-darkness, to clash again with the foe, to send them fleeing north, west, east and south, over the fading edges of the world, into the void which surrounds the land of shadows.

Around me the lone and level plain falls away on all sides, disappears at the edges into misty regions of the unknown, where perhaps lurk even more grisly creatures – perhaps some that would stop a man's heart dead just by their mere appearance?

I hear a sound behind me! Out of a cave-hole in the ground a giant, horned serpent has appeared. Sparks fly from its eyes. Its foul breath has the stink of brimstone and flames hiss from its nostrils. Its tail, when it appears, is a club of spikes, each tipped with some terrible toxin whose drips instantly wither the leaves on shrubs. Bat-wings unfold with leathery cracklings. As it moves towards me, scales drop from its skin, razor sharp, to slice and bury themselves into the earth like skimmed metal shields.

It opens its mouth to reveal not just two, but rows of fangs each as long as the curved knife I hold in my hand. It prepares to strike, rearing back, and I have only my dagger to protect me. As the beast's head descends, jaws open wide, I fling the dagger down its throat with all my strength. The creature screams in agony, writhing away from me, thrashing its loathsome coils in the dust beneath the Tree of Life. It squirms and convulses, tying itself in knots, until finally it disappears back down the dark tunnel from whence it first emerged.

At that moment Kala appears on the horizon, taller than six ordinary men, his great feet pounding the earth. He roars, triumphantly, and I now know it was he who sent the serpent, to wrest my weapon from me. Kala, the great evil one, king of the demons, devourer of men, comes thundering over the plain. His face is a cruel mask of savagery. There is no mercy in his lustful eyes, only DEATH and GREED, both of which are his rulers. His arms have the strength of mighty apes, his legs the power of stallions. From his chest armour and shoulder straps dangle a thousand shrunken skulls – eaten men – and from his hips and thighs dried gristle and rattling bones. A belt of human hair supports the scabbard of his terrible scimitar.

Kala, humpbacked, thick-chested and starey-eyed, a dwarf figure fleshed into a giant, has magic in those hands that can bend the strongest metal. There is sorcery in those feet that can crush rocks to powder. He believes he is invincible, but he has been destroyed, many times, by a great hero. He wants my flesh, my bones, my soul. He wants to devour me. He has tasted of my shadow and is now obsessed with the

tang of me on his palate. He must have me to gratify his insatiable appetite for the bodies and souls of men.

I am helpless against his onslaught. My dagger has gone, tricked from me by the demon-king. There is nowhere to run to, for the world is too small to hide from Kala. I stand and wait in terror as his ferocious form pounds towards me.

In the suspended moment before I am snatched up into his brutal jaws a figure leaps from behind the trunk of the Tree of Life. It is Nyoman armed with two bright swords. Nyoman, sheathed from head to foot in black leather armour. Nyoman, light as a dancer on her feet, dextrous as a juggler with her weapons. She stands before Kala, challenging him with her stance, her bright blades swishing the air before his eyes, slicing away the darkness he has trailed with him across the plains.

"Nyoman!" I shout.

Kala lunges at her with a heavy arm. Despite her swift reactions Kala catches Nyoman a glancing blow, knocking her into a wild spin. She regains her balance and springs back to confront him. A slashing swipe from Kala's nails shreds her leather armour down the left side. Kala laughs, sneers and shakes his head in contempt. He believes himself to be invincible against mortals. I see dark blood flowing from Nyoman's wounds and pain in her eyes, but she does not flee, nor turn her back on her purpose. She skips out of the way, slashing at the hand as it descends for the third time.

Kala has grown too confident, believes his victim to be an easy mark. The attack is lazy, almost disdainfully slow. It is as if he can hardly spare the time to crush such contemptible creatures as we. Mortals are like insects to him.

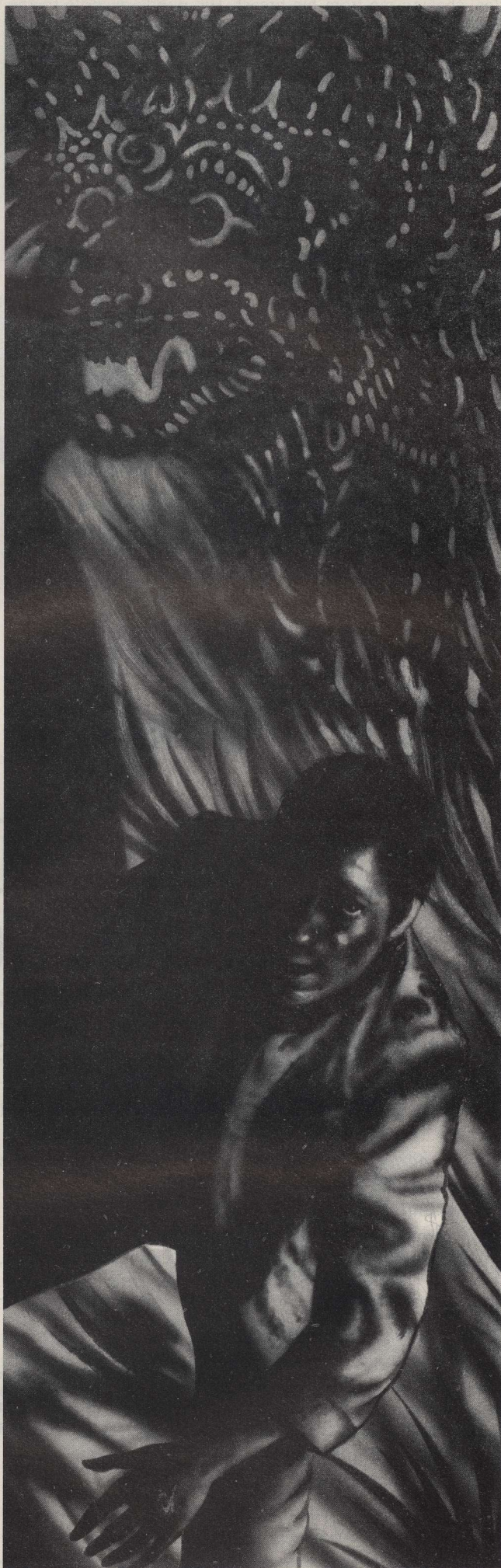
But even insects have painful stings. This time Nyoman's swords pierce the great hand. Dark blood spurts forth from the wound and Kala screams in agony and rage. He stamps with his horny heel, trying to squash this little warrior. Nyoman leaps aside, plunges the blades into Kala's tender instep. It is a deep wound and Kala's eyes open wide in disbelief and agony. While he hesitates the blades open the wound even wider, from the bridge to the heel, severing the tendon.

Kala clutches at a branch on the Tree of Life as he staggers back, his foot gushing blood. The branch is unable to support his great weight and snaps away. He falls, crashing to the dust, and the world shakes as in an earthquake. Nyoman leaps onto his chest and begins stabbing this way and that, at the throat, in the shoulder joints, at the eyes. Kala is blinded. In his terrible sightless fury he grips the small figure on his breast, but his fingers slide from the oiled leather armour. She is a slippery lizard, unable to be grasped, dancing the dance of death on Kala's form.

"Quickly," she calls to me, "it must be you who delivers the mortal stroke."

Nearby is the branch which was torn from the Tree of Life. Where it has broken away the torn end is sharp, like the jagged point of a stake. I snatch this weapon, jump onto Kala's chest, and plunge the stake into his heart. There is a flood, a fountain of blood shoots forth, high as a cedar. Kala lets out a loud, hollow moan, which fills every crevice in the land of shadows, and echoes back and forth through the distant mountains and valleys on the edge of the world.

Kala quivers and shimmers like a black poplar in the wind, his protruding eyes full of the terror of DEATH, the GREED in them shrinking rapidly as the light fades, and his armour rat-



bles, shaking me from his breast. His pupils dwindle to the size of black gnats and his limbs wither. His teeth rot and crumble in his mouth. Down between the massive thighs, his once huge phallus shrivels until it resembles a tiny root. His scrotum bag deflates like a dead puffball and splits open: a dusty powder spills out and blows away on the warm night breezes, seeding the grasses with impotent evil.

Kala is dead.

"Thank you, Nyoman," I say, "I owe you my whole existence."

"I am yours and you are mine," she says, then she walks away, over the lone and level plains.

I stare at the giant Kala and shudder. Even in death he is a terrible sight. Then the wonderful Kresna, comes out of the east, his blue-black form shining with holy beauty. His tall, handsome figure comes to stand beside me and I feel the glow of his Goodness, and Righteous Wickedness, filling my heart. His hand is on my shoulder, as he tells me, "Someone has done my work for me..."

I awoke from my dream in the safety of the darkness and found myself on the bed. I remembered someone shared the other half.

"Nyoman?" I whispered. "Is that you?"

"Yes," she replied in her quiet voice. "Don't worry, my darling."

She folded her wraith-like form around me, holding me in the nothingness of her touch.

"A terrible thing has happened," I cried, my voice seeming to fade a little. "A frightening thing."

I clung to her in my distress, needing comfort, needing her sympathy and companionship.

"I know," she said, running her light fingers through my hair. "Now we're the same and we can be happy together. You do feel happy, don't you, darling? You do want to be with me?"

I knew I was safe now, even in the moonlight, safe from Kala, as she opened the shutters and we saw the tattered remains of my shadow next to the ragged shade she herself cast. I had not noticed until now, that her dark twin was such a shabby creature: a stray mongrel amongst shadows, thin and wasted: a shadow that had been ravaged, yet one that had, eventually, emerged victorious from the struggle of life over death.

It was true that though I myself had a certain substance, my form was a nebulous thing, undefined and indefinite. I was now that forgotten person in the crowd, unnoticed, to be disregarded by my fellow creatures. I was myself as evanescent as a shade, as elusive as Nyoman, and my reply choked in my throat as I tried to express my utter and eternal love for her.

Garry Kilworth's last story for *Interzone* was "The Ragthorn" (with Robert Holdstock, issue 74), which topped our readers' popularity poll for 1993. His earlier solo piece "The Sculptor" (issue 60) topped the poll for 1992. Garry lives in Essex and is the author of numerous novels and short-story collections.

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John couldn't work out how the black leather straps attached to his Horst Wessel belt. Michael, the Minister for War, slapped away his fumbling fingers and examined the problem, like John's mother tying his school tie for him when he was eleven and couldn't penetrate the mysteries of the knot.

"You've got the holster on the wrong side," the Minister sighed. "It must be arse-backwards."

John felt his face burn with blush as he got untangled and sorted out.

"I hope that Webley isn't loaded," the Minister said. "You might shoot yourself in the foot again."

"I've never shot myself in the foot."

"That's not what the foreign press say."

The Minister was comfortable in full combat gear and field marshal's helmet. He gave a heel-clicking salute and a sly I-want-your-job chuckle. Most days, John would be happy to give away his job, but with the foaming example of the Iron Duchess before him, he knew that in United Britain the lot of ex-Prime Minister was even worse than being a serving PM.

Clocking himself in a monitor, John thought he looked silly in uniform, a prat dressed as a tin stormtrooper. It had been worse when he was a lad doing his mandated year in the Mosley Youth, knock-kneed in lederhosen. Some of the Cabinet loved climbing into tight black britches and hanging decorations on their bulging black chests, but John had wanted the D-Day celebrations informal. He had hoped he would be allowed to get away with his nice grey suit. Maybe a colourful anorak if history repeated and the 5th June was unseasonably rainy.

The Duke of Edinburgh went up the line of uniformed ministers, grinning ferociously like an inspection sergeant, noting each mismatched button or smudged jackboot. The Royal Family were really into the spirit of the 50th Anniversary of the D-Day landings. The Duke's brothers strutted around London in their old SS uniforms, mainly let out around the waistlines. The Duke plainly hoped to embrace the Reichskanzler on the beaches, reenacting the famous photograph of Edward hugging Hitler.

The only people out of uniform in the marquee were Security Service men, who favoured long black coats which billowed over their holstered machine pistols, and the press contingent. Drops of rain fell like pennies on the canvas canopy, which made SS people jumpy. John had ordered there be no repetition of the unfortunate incidents of the Royal Funeral, when fire was opened on a dignified row of dissenting parsons.

The President came in, smiling and laughing, surrounded by pretty girls in Otter Guide uniform who held umbrellas over his head like an honour guard. Until last week, the President had not been coming but the troubled administration, needing to cement new European trade deals, opted to remove the human rights issue from the negotiations. John had not met the President before. Americans always wanted to talk straight to the head honcho. Whenever they needed to sort something, the yanks got into a huddle with the Reichskanzler.

SLOW NEWS DAY

Kim Newman



zler. It had been different under the Duchess. Then United Britain's voice was at least as shrill as Greater Germany's.

John was in two minds about remembering the past, recent or remote. He was half-afraid the Duchess would turn up in her flamboyant uniform, a blue-haired Boadicea (Boudicca they were now supposed to call her), and make speeches to journalists, dropping acid hints about her successors. The Minister of Internal Security was only partly joking when he suggested it would be fit if the Duchess were taken up on her oft-repeated desire to return to the Iron Val-

ues of the Occupation and be allowed to vanish into Night and Fog.

"John," the President said, sticking out a crushing hillbilly bear paw, "good to see ya. Have you been ill?"

"Just a touch of hay fever."

"Better take it easy. That's a killer."

Cameras clicked as John and the President smiled. Britain had come close to severing relations with the States when the leader of Old England did the rounds of American talk shows, promoting his memoirs. Under broadcasting restrictions, OE representatives were dubbed by actors in British news bulletins. John was mightily ticked off that OE people were invited to the White House but the Reichskanzler had vetoed any formal reprisals. It had taken long enough to get the Americans to the table, and Greater Europe couldn't afford whinging little Britain scuppering the deal. There was a big Old English lobby in the States, though there was a crack-down on the smuggling of funds and weapons to terrorists in Europe.

The President's smile broadened as he passed on from John to the Duke of Edinburgh. They went into a huddle, almost like schoolgirls. John had no idea the two knew each other. He wondered if they were talking about him. If they were, SS microphones would pick it up. He doubted a report would get further than Michael, the Minister of Internal Security, who usually suppressed information that might upset his PM. John supposed he should be grateful someone thought of his feelings.

The President and the Duke went, arm-in-arm, over to that corner of the marquee where the veterans clustered, proud in uniforms they had worn and medals they had earned. They were all very old. Specialist nurses stood behind their wheelchairs. Those who had served in the Occupation were exempt from the Elderly Persons Act, and entitled to places in State Heroes Homes. United Britain war pensioners were the envy of Europe. German veterans were lucky to get their cyanide pills sugared.

"Blind old gits," the Home Secretary, yet another Michael, said. "If they were weaselly enough to join the Fifth in '43, they were all out for the main chance. Some of the sneaks probably faked records. Everybody was doing that when I were a lad. If you had the SS grill a couple of codgers, you'd find half of 'em were on the beaches resisting the Invasion of Liberation, not joining in the liberating."

The Home Secretary was a notorious cynic. As a schoolboy, he had begun his political career by informing on his father, an OE Group Leader.

"They don't like it up 'em," the Home Secretary quoted.

If anyone thought of the Heroic Fifth Column these days, it was as they were in Dad's Nazis, the popular BBC comedy programme which made figures of fun of the dedicated but buffoonish patriots who assisted the Germans during the Occupation, wiping out the last traces of the Traitor Regime.

The Home Secretary hummed the Dad's Nazis theme tune, "Who Do You Think You Are Kidding, Mr Churchill?" He'd been drinking steadily in the hospitality suite.

"Watch out, the mikes will pick you up."

"Don't panic, don't panic," the Home Secretary continued.

A rustle of excitement whispered through the marquee. The Reichskanzler's helicopter was sighted over the channel. Time to go outside.

It was still not really raining but high wind turned droplets of

stray water into liquid bullets that splattered against uniforms. There was a complex protocol as to who was allowed to troop out when. Dodderly veterans, under their own steam or aided by nurses, were given precedence.

Crowds thronged outside, on the downs that bordered the cliffs of Dover, and below, on the pebble beach. UB and swastika pennants were held high. A tide of fish 'n' chip papers swarmed around everybody's knees.

Nearby, the almost-completed Channel Tunnel terminal was swathed under thick sheets. The original idea was that the Reichskanzler would arrive for the Anniversary on the first bullet train through the Tunnel. But there had been delays.

There was a huge cheer as the wheelchair brigade appeared, followed by a warm welcome for Royalty and the President, and some modest clapping for the PM and cabinet. John thought a TV personality with a frosted hairdo got a slightly bigger hand than he did. That was possible: Susan who did a news show for housewives, was very popular, especially since her well-publicized announcement that she would bear an extra son for Britain.

Cloud was so heavy the Reichskanzler's helicopter could not be seen. It had been sighted only on radar. Everyone looked out over the flat, grey channel, waiting.

It was time to think of those 50 years ago who had also looked out, waiting. In fear of their lives, the Fifth Column had readied for the Invasion of Liberation, clearing the way for the German army to bring Britain into Europe, to exterminate the traitor elements that had usurped the government of the day.

John was expected to make a speech, praising these heroes. His PPS had written something down, but for the life of him, he couldn't remember where. He had checked his pockets but found only the speech he had made last week, attacking indigents who were begging in the streets and clogging up the British autobahns with their caravans. It was notably the first time in 40 years the word "gypsy" was used in public. John had not expected that to cause the kerfuffle it did.

If he were to be skipped over among all the speeches, no one would notice. The ceremony was bound to run over time. Kenneth, the Minister of Propaganda, had passed on a message from Rupert, the DG of the BBC, that it was vital the ceremony be concluded in time for the telly to switch back to coverage of the snooker finals.

The helicopter surged out of the cloud, a giant insect bristling with impressive weapons. The Reichskanzler insisted on flying a Messerschmitt Assault Ship, as deployed with such devastating effect in the recent Oil War.

The crowd gasped enormously as the chopper swooped overhead. One touch of a button and they would all be dead. If the Luftwaffe of 1943 had had such marvellous machines, the landing which had lasted a bloody 13 hours would have been executed in seconds, the Invasion of Liberation would have been over within a week.

The helicopter made a landing precisely on the swastika staked out on the grass of the downs. The Reichskanzler bounded out, arms spread, tummy wobbling, fists waving. The crowds cheered. Despite his problems at home, the Reichskanzler was always popular in the UB. The British loved a jolly fat man.

John was conscious of his own meagreness. His sunken

chest was not served well by his snug black shirt. In uniform, the Reichskanzler looked like a victorious sumo wrestler.

The Royals swept forward to greet the German leader. This was the image of the anniversary that would be transmitted around the world. The embrace of Edward VIII and Hitler had not been in 1943 but two bloody years later. Edward had returned from exile, not stood on the beaches to greet the liberator who restored him to the throne.

The President and the Reichskanzler bowed formally, and shook hands. The American was officially "someone we can do business with," despite his sabre-rattling about conditions on the Eastern European Homelands.

After the speeches, the Reichskanzler officially said hello to John. It was the least he could do.

"A shame about the Tunnel, hein?"

John shrugged.

"There will be an Inquiry into the delays?"

John mumbled. There was, by now, an Inquiry into the Inquiry about the delays.

"Maybe the Tunnel will be open by Atom Day, in 1995."

That would commemorate the bombing of Leningrad, which ended the War in Europe.

"Or maybe we should wait for the centenary."

The Reichskanzler laughed, agitating his entire enormous frame. Liking his joke more and more, he slapped his thighs, and repeated it in German to his entourage, then in English again to the President and to the media. The Reichskanzler's laughter spread as he restated the remark, infecting the laughing crowd. John tried to look amused.

The Duchess would have faced the Reichskanzler down, and reminded him it was German insistence on adherence to rigid schedules that had jerry-built the first third of the Tunnel and caused the delays, as leaks were shored up, in the first place.

Three snake-shapes appeared out on the sea, surfacing U-boats. Bubble rafts popped up like corks, bearing stormtroopers. A handful of crack troops were to re-enact the initial landing.

The crowds on the beaches would have cheered but rain suddenly poured down, prompting a swift retreat towards canopies. Most of the VIPs had their own shelter, but John and the Michael-heavy Cabinet were squeezed out.

"We forgot Fatty takes up as much room as our entire government," the Home Secretary said, nodding at the dry Reichskanzler. "Then again, he combines all our offices and jobs. That's one thing about proper non-parliamentary fascism."

Wetsuited stormtroops in lightweight scuttle helmets padded up to the pebbles, a little bewildered. They had expected a better reception than cringing holidaymakers.

The Home Secretary had a fit of giggles.

A platoon of goose-pimpled Page 3 girls darted out to pose with the Germans, polythene sheets held over their hair. They were led by Mr Spotty, an inflatable children's TV character. Hardy paparazzi followed to record the moment. Quite a few people were laughing in the rain.

"Mustn't grumble," one of the nurses said to her wheezing charge. "Lovely weather for ducks."

The veteran, Iron Cross and Order of St George on his woolly jumper, was trying to say something.

Smudge pots went off on the beach and simulated battlesmoke wafted past soldiers and Page 3 girls. Mr Spotty

mimed panic.

"If we'd had those in '43," the Home Secretary said, nodding at the topless lovelies, "Fritz would never have got past the beaches."

"If Mr Spotty had been PM instead of Churchill, Hitler would have crumbled," said John.

"If Mr Spotty were PM now, we'd be a more popular government," rumbled the Home Secretary.

There was a controversy in Germany. Some surviving veterans of the Invasion of Liberation were unable to attend the commemoration because all the accommodation was taken by politicians and generals and newspeople. The tabloids, who had more than their share of pre-booked hotel rooms, ran stories about little old ladies in the Home Counties cheated of a reunion with the now-shaky Aryan superman they had welcomed with open cami-knickers in 1944.

John privately wondered if things might not have been better if the Traitor Regime had put up a better resistance and beaten off the Invasion of Liberation. Maybe he wouldn't have all these problems to deal with. He briefly considered resigning and appointing Mr Spotty his successor.

"You're popular now you're just a fathead in a blow-up suit," he thought, "let's see how you do in the polls when you're closing down British mines and importing coal from the Ruhr."

Mr Spotty comically ran away from the stormtroopers, who waved guns at him.

It was time for John's speech. His PPS had kept it safe and gave it to him when he needed it.

"We must remember we are celebrating not a British defeat but a British victory," he began, "a victory over that part of ourselves which was inefficient, was heartless, was impure, was ignoble..."

Even he didn't listen to the rest of what he said. Mr Spotty was distracting everyone.

The ceremony swept past. As John spoke, news cameras turned away, following the Reichskanzler and the veterans back towards the cliffs, where the stormtroopers were to demonstrate the proper use of scaling ladders.

He finished his speech. There was some helpful applause.

The rest of the Cabinet left him near the water's edge and went to join in the fun. John felt empty and wet. Sodden socks squelched in his jackboots. His glasses were smeared with rain.

The day was so overcast he couldn't see marker buoys two hundred yards out, let alone the land beyond the Channel. The U-boats submerged, leaving cigar-shaped fast-vanishing whirlpools.

He snapped the button off his holster, pulled out the Wobley and looked out to sea. He hadn't fired a shot since his Patriotic Service. The pistol was heavy and oily.

John pointed his empty gun towards the rest of the world and said "bang bang."

Kim Newman has previously appeared in this magazine with such stories as "The Next-But-One Man" (IZ 19), "Famous Monsters" (IZ 23), "The Original Dr Shade" (IZ 36), "The Big Fish" (IZ 76) and "The Pale Spirit People" (IZ 79). He is also the author of a memorable trio of alternative-world stories written in collaboration with Eugene Byrne, "In the Air" (IZ 43), "Ten Days That Shook the World" (IZ 48) and "Tom Joad" (IZ 65). He lives in London and has written many novels.

Whenever this column wishes a story about good taste in bookselling, we turn reverently to Barry R. Levin in California – whose Fall '94 catalogue was forwarded by scores of readers. Imagine, if you will, "THE MOST HORRIFYING COPY OF ANY VAMPIRE NOVEL"... Poppy Z. Brite's *Drawing Blood*, which, thanks to the helpful chap who committed suicide by setting himself on fire with a Molotov cocktail next to a mailbox containing copies of the book's limited edition, can now be offered in the rare state "Odor of burning human flesh otherwise fine in slipcase." Only \$600.00! Though filled with a strange inability to comment, one does wonder about marketing the Barry R. Levin Horror Novel Price Enhancement Kit, comprising a jar of petrol and a pork chop.

THE NIGHT LIFE OF THE GODS

Poppy Z. Brite mused, "It would be a wonderful experience to read the book cover-to-cover with the odor of burned human flesh rising from it. I'm a pretty fast reader, so the smell wouldn't have time to dissipate."

Harlan Ellison's latest reported convention performance revealed his feelings about computer nets: "Like asking a survivor of Dachau how you feel about ovens!" (He has been criticized on Internet. He has also been praised. He has additionally been criticized by people using old-fashioned typewriters, but his opinion on these was not sought.) Also on Mensa: "A vast group of defectives who don't get laid regularly."

Lionel Fanthorpe clobbered Guy N. Smith's March "world record" for bashing out words in 24 hours. "I'm the new world Champion with a total of 22,871 words against Guy's previous record of 16,000. I'd have done a lot more if the computer hadn't crashed four times... I think that cost me at least three hours' production time during which I should have done another 4-5,000." Besides raising sponsorship money for the Samaritans, all this is aimed at the *Guinness Book of Records* – which apparently doesn't acknowledge older, mightier feats of speed-writing performed by Messrs Hubbard, Malzberg and Fanthorpe himself, owing to lack of experimental controls.

Cecelia Holland still believes that William James's "Sunfall" sf trilogy (Orbit) draws unduly on three of her books, notably *Until the Sun Falls*: "literally hundreds of correspondences." She sent Orbit some illustrative examples and mere months later heard that James could not comment owing to a cardiac problem. An ultimatum, including a request that distribution of "Sunfall" be put on hold, has apparently produced zero response – causing Holland to state: "I am proceeding to file a suit against both James and Orbit."

Ansible LINK



David Langford

Keith Roberts suffered a second leg amputation in the wake of the MS first diagnosed in 1990; his eyesight is also badly affected. It was feared that he would never be able to leave hospital, but the rehabilitation team reportedly remains optimistic.

Jane Yolen, celebrated tool of Satan, continues to wallow in her manifold villainies... boasting that owing to her occasional habit of wearing a long black outfit with sun, moons and stars on it, one US student teacher has refused ever again to attend a certain children's literature conference because it invites evident witches to speak. *Yolen to Professor/Organizer*: "Flunk her. You don't want her teaching children... oh, never mind. I will turn her into a newt."

INFINITELY IMPROBABLE

Publishing Follies. Yet another tale of a bright new graduate who came straight from university into publishing – at Pavilion Books, who do occasional half-price offers on their titles. The new recruit was assigned to write letters notifying authors of the discounting, and thus: "Dear Mr Grahame, We thought you would like to know that your title *The Wind in the Willows*..." A similar missive went to a Mr C. Dickens.

Hugo Awards. You read it here last! Novel: Kim Stanley Robinson, *Green Mars*. Novella:

Harry Turtledove, "Down in the Bottomlands." Novelette: Charles Sheffield, "Georgia on My Mind." Short: Connie Willis, "Death on the Nile." Non-Fiction: John Clute and Peter Nicholls, *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*. Dramatic: *Jurassic Park*. Pro Editor: Kristine Kathryn Rusch. Artist: Bob Eggleton. Original Art: Space Fantasy Commemorative Stamp Booklet, Stephen Hickman. Semi-Prozine: *SF Chronicle*. Fanzine: *Mimosa*. Fan Writer: Dave Langford. Fan Artist: Brad W. Foster. Campbell Award: Amy Thomson.

Secrets of the Rejection Slip. Two writers, Alan Wilson and Alan Black, were awarded £109 compensation by a small claims court after demonstrating that the Arts Council of Wales refused them a grant *without reading* all of their submitted manuscript – certain of whose pages had been, and remained, strategically glued together. Shocking! Mr Pringle's rejection forms may in future contain a check-box for: "Pages were stuck together and, not knowing the nature of the sticky stuff, I don't propose to risk my health by investigation."

Arthur C. Clarke Award. Submitted so far ... Gollancz: Gwyneth Jones, *North Wind*; Paul McAuley, *Pasquale's Angel*; Ian McDonald, *Necroville*; Phillip Mann, *Stand Alone Stan*; Ian Watson, *Fallen Moon*. HarperCollins: Pat Cadigan, *Fools*; Simon Ings, *City of the Iron Fish*; Michael Marshall Smith, *Only Forward*. Headline: Storm Constantine, *Calenture*; Mike McQuay, *State of Siege*; Melanie Tem, *Revenant*. Hodder & Stoughton/NEL: A. A. Attanasio, *Solis*; Ben Bova, *Death Dream*; Harry Turtledove, *Worldwar: In the Balance*. Millennium: John Barnes, *Mother of Storms*; Greg Egan, *Permutation City*. Serif: Steve Aylett, *The Crime Studio*. Also promised, besides more from HarperCollins and NEL ... Headline: Dean Koontz, *Dark Rivers of the Heart*. Orbit: David Garnett, *Stargonauts*; Mary Gentle, *Left to His Own Devices*; Rachel Pollack, *Temporary Agency*. Only Legend seem to feel that not one of their 1994 titles is worthy. As for the front-runners, my lips are sealed... but horror epics and short-story collections seem unlikely "best 1994 sf novel" winners.

Amazing Originality from Point Fantasy: Peter Beere's *Doomsword*. "...He is the greatest threat this world has ever known. If he takes the Doom Sword he will be invincible; he will destroy our lands and make the world his slave. Until eternity we will walk in the pain Kalidor has planned for us. Darkness will serve him as he now serves the dark, and his armies and fiends will rule for ever more. And now this is possible, for you have returned the sword.' / 'I couldn't help it,' Adam said moodily. 'It wasn't my idea, it just happened that way.'" *But there's one slim chance!* "...If it was mine I would try destroying it. I would plunge it in the Fire.' / 'What, in this camp fire?' / 'In the Eternal Fire,' she said, 'which burns within the hills beyond the Bridge of Doom...'"

MUSIC and MAGIC

Gael Baudino

interviewed by

David V. Barrett



GAEL BAUDINO is a harper, and until recently she was a minister of Dianic Wicca. This seems a good background for someone who has written a highly unusual fantasy about music and magic, *Gossamer Axe*, so it's the first thing we talk about.

Dianic Wicca, briefly, is a women-only, shamanistic variety of paganism. Like most modern paganism, it venerates the Goddess, and is very closely linked to nature and the turning of the seasons. Everything affects everything else. In the Native American tradition they use ritual and shamanistic drums to affect reality; Wicca, in any of its many varieties, is to do with inner development, with transforming oneself – and through that, others. Magic works by the alteration of probabilities in the world, says Baudino.

“The world is a complex, inter-relating, functioning



organism, and we don't recognize it as such," she says. "The countryside – to think of it as threatening or adversarial – it isn't, we impose that view on it. It acts as it has always acted. Intelligence is not a *lingua franca*, a way to communicate with aliens; it is a means of understanding our surroundings."

These ideas quietly permeate her three sets of books, which are quite different from each other. "They all say what they needed to say – different themes and approach to the world, all grounded in my spirituality. It's non-denominational – a way of looking at the world."

This is where Gael Baudino is coming from in her fiction.

Gael Baudino was a special guest at Mabinogicon, a small British convention devoted to music and magic in fantasy in 1991. But apart from that she is practically unknown in the UK, and not particularly well-known even in her native United States. There she has had eight books published; here, only three of the *Strands of Starlight* series, from Orbit/Little Brown. No UK publisher has yet taken up her other books, the *Dragonsword* trilogy and *Gossamer Axe*.

We start with *Gossamer Axe*.

Christa is a harper, living in present-day Denver, which is just down the road from where Baudino lives, in Englewood, Colorado. She's a good teacher of the harp; she should be: she's a 6th century Celt. With her lover Judith – Siudh Ní Corb – she made the mistake of entering the world of faery, and in good Tam Lin tradition the Sidh try to hang on to the two of them. Christa – then Chairiste – managed to escape, by stealing and playing the chief bard Orfide's harp, and was

flung into the future, to France in 1782. Judith was left behind, kept as entertainment for the king. The magic of Orfide's harp – now Christie's – keeps her young as she travels over the years through Europe, and eventually to the USA.

There are natural crossing points between our world and the world of faery, and Christa decides she will try to rescue her lover. Using the harp won't work – she's tried it several times; she may be good, but so is the chief bard. What he won't be expecting, though, is the raw power of a heavy-metal band, as unknown in 6th-century Ireland as in

the world of faery. Christa teaches herself guitar, forms her band, and plays hard driving rock music at one of the crossing points to weaken Orfide's hold over Siudh/Judith and rescue her.

It's an unusual and well-written book – and it's perfectly obvious (even before reading the bio-blurb) that the author knows both music and magic. How much is she Christa?

"Not very much," says Baudino. "But she is how I would like myself to be." In fact the names Christa and Judith are a tribute to the two women who died in the Challenger shuttle disaster.

The publisher that her agent first sold the book to wanted her to cut out the lesbian aspects, and some subsidiary characters with AIDS; instead, she took the book back and sold it to New American Library.

"AIDS is of this world and it's something we have to deal with, so that section stayed. I like to make things real so you can climb into the world and experience it – hence the harp and guitar." And about the lesbian characters? "It's appropriate. It makes readers think. We can be a transformative force in the world."

Too often in fantasy fiction, characters accept the unbelievable all too easily; but not in *Gossamer Axe*. When Christa reveals herself as a 6th-century Celt to her band, says Baudino, "they had to accept her and carry her through and risk their lives for her. One throws up, one faints, one gets hysterical. I try to create *real* reactions – I'd be out of there! People *wouldn't* accept easily. For Christa, friends, loyalty and love are important to her. Helping people out. Little inconsequential things like that."

Her characters do have a tendency to behave like

real people. How real are they to her?

"They have to be real when I write them; I have to run the experiences through the characters, and they have to respond not for my convenience but because it's within their character. I'm putting feeling and life into them, drawing them from ourselves – good and bad. Characters are projected parts of ourselves, not external entities – compare dæmons in ceremonial magic. The purpose is to transform and integrate them into yourself. In Jung's terminology, we have a moral obligation. Christa is a philosopher's stone."



As for a Celtic harpist playing heavy-metal rock'n'roll: "I try to bring disparate elements together in my work. I think it was H.G. Wells who said you only allow one impossible thing in a book. I probably bend the rules a little bit in *Gossamer Axe*, but I let it pass."

What about the use of music in magic? – it reads very much as if this is based on experience.

"I consciously created a working relationship between music and magic, because that made the story. My own use of magic is spiritual."

Baudino uses music as a tool for influencing the outside world – for magic, for healing, for contacting other realities, for seeing what lies beyond our realm. It's simply a tool, she says, just like a screwdriver; it can be useful, but it *could* be used to stab someone.

The heavy-metal band in the book feels completely real; the harper Christa played heavy metal, and so has the harper Gael – but the main thing she discovered in rock music was disillusionment, with the whole mess of rehearsals, gigs, rivalries. It's all horribly familiar to any rock musician; and it's all there in the book.

This gritty and often unpleasant reality comes into all her books, taking them way out of the usual run of fantasy. Yes, she has dragons in a sword-and-sorcery world, elves in a mediæval setting, faery in a Celtic setting – and yet she manages to avoid most of the usual twee clichés that smother the majority of fantasy novels using these tropes.

Strands of Starlight is set around 1350 in Europe; "Imagine a slash between France and Germany, and then insert about 300 miles." Miriam, a young healer, is brutally raped by a man she has healed – an experience which scars her and drives her for the rest of the book. She is helped by elves, who teach her swordsmanship as well as magic; these elves are no little people, but human-sized and shaped, and yes, their ears are pointed.

In the village where Miriam is taken by the elves, Christians, elves and followers of the Goddess live peacefully together. At the heart of the book is a scene in which the local priest, an elf, and a priestess bless each other; the religious differences between the three are less important to them than their desire to make the world a better place for all. This is at the centre of Wiccan belief, says Baudino: to manifest divinity in the world – you are a piece of divinity, and should act that way. *Strands of Starlight* is no piece of romantic medieval fantasy: the Inquisition is alive and well and looking for heretics, witches and elves.

The second book in the series, *Maze of Moonlight*, is set 50 years later, in 1400, very much in the real world of the Middle Ages.

"You have the problems of out-of-work soldiers raping and pillaging in the gaps in the Hundred Years War because that was all they knew."

By book three, *Shroud of Shadow*, which is set in 1500 AD, the elves, already an endangered species in *Strands of Starlight*, have just about died out. "There's not a speck of magic, and no-one has drawn a sword," she says.

But elves and humans have interbred over the centuries, and in the fourth book, *Strands of Sunlight*, the blood wakes up; "it's about the reawakening of the elves in Denver." Here there's a problem for British readers. Orbit first brought out book one, *Strands of Starlight*, as an expensive C-format paperback in 1990; most people I know bought the cheaper

US paperback instead. Now, four years later, with the fourth one just out in the States, Orbit is reissuing the first one, with the second and third, as sensibly-priced standard paperbacks. But apparently they're not taking the fourth book, believing, according to Baudino, that British readers won't have any interest in events set in contemporary Denver.

British readers, I'd imagine, are going to be annoyed with Orbit for denying them the final volume in the series.

Gael Baudino's launch into the murky world of novels and publishers was unusual. She'd been writing for 15 years, but nothing happened till 1987 – and then "I sold about six books in six months."

An agent read a story of hers in a 1985 *Fantasy & Science Fiction*, and took her on. Byron Preiss, a book packaging company, wanted a series of sword & sorcery novels including dragons and a super-magical sword, with the protagonist coming from our world. Baudino had a draft of exactly this, written some years before; she dug it out, and sold it. The title was imposed by the publishers, she says, for simple commercial reasons.

Compleatists may wonder why there were two different American editions of *Dragonsword*. "The manuscript that I had in my files was poorly written... basically an early attempt. Byron Preiss, though, could see that I'd done essentially what they wanted in it, and they just asked me to double its length (it was pretty short) by fleshing it out and bringing it up to my current standards." Byron Preiss sold the book to Lynx, who published it and then promptly folded. Roc bought the second and third and managed to acquire the first, which gave Baudino an opportunity to check it through at galley stage. "I managed to catch a few errors, and one glaring mistake that no one has ever noticed – and no, I'm not going to tell you what it was!"

For the first hundred pages of *Dragonsword* the plot is somewhat familiar: Suzanne Helling, a plain, dumpy junior lecturer in medieval history, is zapped from present-day California to find herself called Alouzon Dragonmaster, tall, strong, stunning and the wielder of a sword with which she is supposed to defend the classic Celtic-clone land of Gryllth. It's nicely enough done, but there have been plenty of other versions of the same thing.

What makes this one different is that Baudino isn't satisfied with writing yet another heroic sword-and-sorcery fantasy novel, with magical swords cleaving the heads from the evil enemy, in which the more guts, blood and ichor spilt, spurting and dripping on every page, the better – though there's more than enough of that to satisfy even the most hardened heroic fantasy addict.

She uses all these trappings of standard fantasy, true, but then she turns them on their head. For example, Suzanne searches for the Grail. "Quests are like heroes – they're lies," says Baudino. "When Suzanne finds the Grail, it is an outward sign of inner change."

Without revealing too much of the plot, why is it that Gryllth seems shadowy and insubstantial? Why can its inhabitants not remember more than ten years back? And why, in this world presumably across the galaxy, do the people speak English (always useful!) and have sword hilts and cloak clasps with recognizable Celtic designs? Baudino, unusually for this sort of book, answers these questions; and her answers lead on to far more major moral questions on

good and evil, culpability, responsibility... It becomes a challenging book.

"I can't write stories about absolute good and absolute evil," she says, "hence *Dragonsword* – I'm subverting the genre. I set out to write the story as it should be. Right from the beginning there are clues – Suzanne is from Kent State University, and so is antithetical to that world view." Kent State was where four student protestors against the Vietnam war were shot dead by state troopers in 1970. "Society had killed its children, and it had killed them not because they had done anything heinous (like serial murder, for example), but rather because the children had espoused a political and social viewpoint different from that deemed acceptable by the majority." Baudino's anger at the killing and injustice, filtered through the viewpoint of Suzanne/Alouzon, drives all three *Dragonsword* books.

They're by no means an easy read, or even at times a pleasant one. "It's hard for me, the characters and the readers," Baudino says. "The second and third Dragon books are very intense because I was full of anger when I wrote them – I was writing about Vietnam." Indeed, because Vietnam is in Suzanne's personal past, we find equivalents of napalm and other modern weapons being used against Alouzon and the people of Gryllth.

Who are the influences on her writing?

"Tolkien got me started in writing, though not in style – I abhor absolute good and evil. Donaldson put me on the track of fantasy that wasn't easy – *Covenant* is a leper. Suzanne is put through the meat grinder in these books. It defines the character, and it rings true."

How would she herself cope, in Suzanne's place?

"*Covenant* fought the magical world, and thought he was going crazy. I'd run and throw up if I was thrown into a medieval world."

So why does she write fantasy? "Because my ideas keep getting out of hand. Science fiction is more concerned with things rather than people – I'm interested in the character, not the technology. I focus very firmly on the people." But it turns out that she doesn't read fantasy or sf at all.

"I don't take drugs, I just push them. I don't find them particularly interesting – but I enjoy what I do."

Baudino had short stories in *Amazons 2* in 1981 and *F&SF* in 1985, and a contemporary fantasy in the Roc anthology *The Magic of Christmas* a couple of years ago, and has sold a story to the forthcoming *Sisters in Fantasy III*, but that's about it. Like most writers, "I have stuff in my files which will never see the light of day."

There's a scene near the end of the third *Dragonsword* book where a decaying corpse is climbing out of its grave; this is an image close to Baudino's heart. "I want to write a story where the corpse opens its eyes and everyone starts cheering... i.e. to take an image that people would normally find horrifying, and transform it."

Transformation: as she says, that's what magic's all about.



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On the Last Night of the **FESTIVAL OF THE DEAD**

Darrell Schweitzer

*"...then all things which have been begun shall be finished."
– The Litanies of Silence.*

On the first night of the Festival of the Dead, they were laughing.

All the capital rang with mirth; fantastic banners and kites festooned the towers and roofs of the City of the Delta. The streets swarmed with masked harlequins bearing copper lanterns shaped like grotesque faces which sang through some trick of flame and metal. That was a kind of laughter too.

On the first night, Death was denied. Children crouched by the canals and floated away paper mummies in toy funeral-boats. Black-costumed skeletons ran from house to house, pounding on doors, waving torches, shouting for the living to emerge and mingle with the dead. Revellers swirled in their shrouds, their death-masks revealing their ancestors, not as they had looked at the close of life, but with rotten features hideously, hilariously distorted.

That was the joke of it, that everyone was masked and no one knew who anyone else was. All gossip and insult and roguery might be done with impunity. Nothing mattered. Death itself was a jest. Surat-Hemad, the crocodile-headed Devourer, god of the Underworld, could be mocked.

But it was nervous laughter. Inevitably, even on the first night of the festival, some of the restless dead actually returned from their abode in *Tashé*, that shadowy country which lies beyond the reach of the deepest dreams. So the possibility was always there, however remote, that the person behind the mask, either speaking or spoken to, might actually *be* a corpse.

If not something far stranger.

"Is this the house of the great Lord Kuthomes?" the person who had knocked at the door said, holding out a small pack-

age wrapped in palm fronds.

That was all the two servants who answered could remember: the soft voice, the diminutive messenger with long, dark hair; probably a child, gender uncertain. The mask like a barking dog, or grinning jackal, or maybe a bat. Plain, scruffy clothing, maybe loose trousers or just a robe; probably bare-foot.

They'd merely accepted the package and the messenger ran away.

Their exasperated master took it from them and ordered them beaten.

Lord Kuthomes tore the fronds away and held in his hands a small wooden box, cheaply made of scrap materials, without any attempt at ornamentation. The box vibrated slightly, as if something inside it were alive, or perhaps clockwork.

Thoughtful, ever on guard against the trick of some enemy – for he *was* a great lord of the Delta and he had many enemies – he carried it to his chamber. As he entered, living golden hands on his nightstand lifted a two-panelled mirror, holding it open like a book.

Kuthomes sat on a stool, a candle in one hand, the parcel in the other, gazing at the reflections of both in the black glass. The hands shifted the mirror, showing the image in one panel, then the other.

As he had so many times before, Kuthomes searched for some hidden clue which might reveal treachery or useful secrets. He was a magician of sorts, though not a true sorcerer, wholly transformed, reeking of poisonous enchantment. His art sufficed to unravel such lethal puzzles as one Deltan lord might design for another. In this mirror, he had often learned the weakness of some rival. Once he had even reached *through* the glass and torn out a sleeping man's heart.

He hefted the box. It weighed perhaps two ounces. But he had an instinct about such things. He sensed strangeness,

and in strangeness, danger.

But when he held the box up to the mirror, even with the candle positioned to shine through the delicate wood, he saw only his hands, the box, and the candle's flame. The depths remained inscrutable; they did not even reflect Lord Kuthomes's silver-bearded face.

The box stirred, humming like one of those metal lanterns the harlequins carried. For an instant, Kuthomes was furious. A festival-night *joke*? He would have crushed the thing in his hand and hurled it away. But that same caution which had made him a great lord of the Delta again prevailed.

He placed the object down on the night stand, took a delicate calligrapher's knife, and, by candlelight, began to chip away at the thin wood. There were no envenomed needles, no springs, no magic seals waiting to be broken. The fragments fell away easily.

Inside was a sculpture about two inches high, of a laughing corpse-face, its head thrown back, gap-toothed mouth stretched wide. Inside the mouth, a tiny silver bell rang of its own accord. Kuthomes touched the bell with the tip of his knife and the ringing stopped.

Outside, the mob laughed and roared. Drums beat faintly, muffled, far away.

He laid the knife down on the table top, and the ringing resumed. It wasn't a matter of a breeze or a draught. He placed the whole object under a glass bowl and the bell still shivered.

He knew, then, that this was no thing of the living world, but a death-bell, manufactured in *Tashé* itself by dead hands, then borne up, like a bubble rising from a deep, muddy pool, through the dreamlands of *Leshé*, until it was present, very substantially, at the doorstep of Lord Kuthomes of the Delta. It was a token, a summons from the dead.

"Whoever has sent this," he said aloud, "know that I shall find you out and wrest your secrets from you, though you be already dead. You shall learn why Kuthomes is feared."

He rose and prepared himself, performing the four consecrations, forehead, eyelids, ears and mouth touched with the Sorcerer's Balm, to shield him from illusion. His midnight-black sorcerer's robe came to life as it closed around him, its delicately glowing embroideries depicting a night sky never seen over the City of the Delta; the stars of Death, the sky of *Tashé*.

He regarded his reflection in the mirrors, only the robe visible in the darkness, like some headless spectre.

The original owner of that robe, he recalled, had been headless toward the end, but well before he died, before others carried the remains away and finished the unpleasant, perilous business. He knew that to kill a sorcerer is to become one. The contagion flows from the slain to the slayer. Therefore a sorcerer must be disposed of carefully, by experts, not such dilettantes as he, who might occasionally require that the serpentine motif on a jade carving come to life on cue, or a sip of wine paralyze the will, or the face of one man be temporarily transformed into that of another. These were stock-in-trade for any lord of the Delta, to be applied as deftly as a surgeon's knife.

But no, he was not a sorcerer.

Therefore he also carried a curious sword in a scabbard underneath his robe, its strong steel blade inlaid with intricate, ultimately mystifying silver designs. It was the weapon of a Knight Inquisitor, one of those fanatic warriors from the barbarian lands across the sea, a sworn enemy of all gods

but the Righteous Nine and especially of the Shadow

Titans, who breathe sorcery like a miasma into the world. The sword was proof against all the magical darkness.

But Kuthomes, merely a man, had strangled the Knight Inquisitor with a cord, years ago, when he was younger and had the strength for such things.

He put on the jewelled, brimless cap of his rank and took up the death-bell in his hand, then passed silently through the halls of his own house in vigorous, graceful strides. He crossed the central courtyard. Up above, someone hastily closed a shutter. Even on such a merry night, it was ill luck to look on Lord Kuthomes in his sorcerer's aspect.

A single lamp flickered in the atrium. There were still palm fronds on the floor, and a stain where the servants had been beaten. That would be cleaned up on his return, or made larger.

He slipped out into the street.

By now the night was almost over. Stars still shone overhead, but the sky was purpling in the East. He found himself in an utterly dark street, without a single lantern hanging from a doorway, a channel of featureless exterior walls. Higher up, the balconies were empty, the shutters invariably locked.

He stretched out his palm and held the death-bell up level with his face. It laughed at him, but slowly now, the faint tinkling interspersed with silence.

Several streets away, someone shouted. A horn blew a long, trailing blast that began as music and ended in flatulence. Something fell and broke, probably crockery. Then silence again.

He walked confidently along that dark street until he stumbled, cursing, over what looked like an enormous, long-legged bird left broken and sprawling.

But Kuthomes did not fall. He regained his footing, crushing the death-bell in his hand. The thing felt like a live wasp, scraping to get free. Hastily, he opened his hand, then stood still, gasping.

Gradually he made out an inert reveller in some absurd costume: trailing cloth wings, tatters and streamers, a crushed and shapeless mask. There must have been stilts somewhere, or else a crowd had carried the fool aloft. In his younger days, Kuthomes might have given the fellow a kick to the ribs, but now he merely spat, then continued on his way.

He tried to follow the delicate voice of the bell, turning where it seemed to ring louder or more frequently. But his ear could not actually tell. He wandered through the maze of streets, once or twice passing others, who hurried to get out of his way.

In a market square, he faced the East. Dawn's first light sufficed to reveal the solitary figure standing there: very short, clad in shapeless white, arms akimbo, bare feet spread apart, face hidden behind some cheap animal mask.

"You there!" Kuthomes dropped the insistent bell into his pocket and stepped forward, but the other turned and ran. For an instant he thought it was a dwarf, but the motion was too agile. A child then. He couldn't tell if it was a boy or a girl.

He pursued until his breath came in painful gasps and it seemed his chest would burst. Again and again he saw his quarry, near at hand but out of reach, vanishing around a corner at the end of an alley, on the other side of a courtyard, or gazing down on him from a balcony or from a bridge over a

canal.

"Do not dare to trifle with me!"

Bare feet padded on cobblestones. Hard boots clattered after.

But in the morning twilight Kuthomes could go no further. He had to sit down on a stone bench and lean back against a wall, gazing out over the central forum of the city. All around him the temples of the major gods faced one another. The rising sun made the rooftops and the many statues gleam. Divinities, kings, and heroes lining those rooftops and perched on pillars and ledges seemed momentarily alive, gazing down benevolently or wrathfully, each according to their nature. Yawning pedlars opened their stalls. A flock of pigeons stirred, murmuring on the steps of the temple of Bel-Hemad, the god of new life, of springtime and forgiveness. But the house of Surat-Hemad, the lord of Death, was still a mass of shadows and black stone, the eyes of the carved crocodile head over the doorway aglow like faint coals with some mysterious light of their own.

Kuthomes half-dozed, exhausted, enraged that he had been the object of a *joke* on the first night of the Festival of the Dead. He set the death-bell in his lap, and still it rang, a far more serious matter than anybody's joke. He laid the sword of the Knight Inquisitor across his knees, and the ringing stopped. When he put the sword away, it resumed.

He couldn't think clearly just then, weary and angry as he was, but he was certain that he was proof against illusion, and that there was an answer here somewhere, in the haze and dust and fading shadows. If he concentrated hard enough, he would have it, and his revenge, later.

Was he not Lord Kuthomes, feared and respected by all?

Eventually he fell asleep on the bench and dreamed, strangely, that he, the feared and respected Lord Kuthomes, had ventured alone into the city at night, and that the city was empty. All the revellers, soldiers, courtiers, even the Great King himself had fled before him, and Lord Kuthomes's heavy footsteps echoed in the empty palace, even in the vast Presence Hall where he mounted the throne with the double crown of the Delta and Riverland on his head.

He sat still and silent in his dream, the crown on his head, crocodile-headed sceptre in his hand, gazing into the empty darkness, until he heard the sound of the tiny death-bell approaching.

Someone shuffled and emerged from behind a column. Kuthomes stiffened and beheld a tall, cloaked figure approach the throne slowly, tottering like a very old man; no, swaying side-to-side like a crocodile reared up, imitating a human walk. The thing opened clawed hands when it stood at the foot of the throne. The face beneath the hood was indeed that of a crocodile. In the open hands, nothing at all.

Here was one of the *evatim*, the messengers of Surat-Hemad, whose summons may never be resisted or denied. Kuthomes shrank back in his stolen throne, knowing that all his magic and even the silver sword were useless.

But the other tore off a crocodile mask, uncovering a laughing corpse face identical to that which held the death-bell, head back in a paroxysm of hilarity or terror, mouth agape. In the unimaginable depths of its throat, a tiny bell rang insistently.

Then the apparition breathed *laughter*, neither harsh nor exactly gentle, impatient, with a touch of petulance, and at last a voice spoke from those same black depths, soft, definitely feminine, a young woman's voice, maddeningly famil-

iar. In his dream, it was too much effort to recall. He almost recognized the voice, but not quite.

"Do you not know me?" the other said.

"No," he replied.

"Ah, but you did once, long ago."

"How long ago was that?"

She only laughed for a brief instant. Then the laughter was gone and the bell rang.

Lord Kuthomes shook himself out of his dream and found himself on the bench at the edge of the dusty forum, in the blazing mid-day sun. The bell, in his lap, still rang. No one had dared to disturb him, of course. Those who gaped in wonder suddenly turned their faces away, pretending not to have seen.

He took up the bell again and lurched to his feet, shouting for an old woman to fetch him a litter. When she had done so, she held out her hand for a coin. He patted his pockets, found nothing, then scowled and spat, tumbling into the litter, drawing the curtain behind him. The bearers set off, the litter lurching, swaying. Kuthomes felt sick

by the time he reached his house.

Inside the atrium, the palm fronds and the stain on the floor were still there.

Later. There would be time for that later.

On the second night of the Festival of the Dead, they were dancing.

This was a more sombre time. The streets and rooftops echoed with stately music. Paper masks from the first night floated in the canals or littered the streets. Now people wore beautifully carved and adorned wooden masks, ageless, ideal visages which did not so much hide the identity of the wearer as abstract it, like a name written in intricate, illuminated letters.

Musicians, clad in dark cerements and masked in imitation of the *evatim*, moved slowly from house to house, to palace and hovel alike, excepting no one, summoning the inhabitants to dance, to mingle in the wide forum before the temples of the gods. On this night the dead would truly return in great numbers, out of the dreams of *Leshé* and the darkness of *Tashé*, climbing up from the Great River and the city's many canals to walk among the living. It was a night of portents and revelations, of sorrows and bittersweet joys, reunions, secret dooms and frequent miracles.

Lord Kuthomes had rested and bathed. He had pored over such books of sorcery as he owned and could read, unable to find any answer to the riddle before him, but still certain some enemy had laid a trap.

He would be ready. Once more he anointed himself four times and put on his sorcerer's robe. Once more the silver sword pressed against his thigh. This time even he wore a mask, beautifully wrought, set with gems and feathers until the features of Lord Kuthomes had been transformed into some fantastic, predatory bird.

When the revellers reached his door, he gave them such coin as custom required, then stepped out into the throng, moving along the dark and crowded streets, into the forum where moonlight shone on the roofs of the temples and the many bronze and golden statues. The gods seemed to be watching him alone, waiting for something to happen.

Even the Great King, Wenamon the Ninth, was there with all his lords and ladies, all of them masked, to do homage to Death. Kuthomes took his rightful place in the great circle of

their dance. Once he held the warm hand of Queen Valshepsut, who nodded to him, and he to her, before he yielded to the King. Around and around dancers turned, as the musicians followed, pipes skirling, drums beating stately, muted time. Acolytes with lanterns or torches pursued their own paths at the periphery, the intricate revolutions imitating the cycles of the universe. In the centre, priests of Death stood motionless in their crocodile masks.

Or were those perhaps the true faces of the *evatim*? The fancy came to Kuthomes that many of the faces around him, in the royal circle, in the crowd, were not masks at all.

In the midst of them was one who did not dance, who clearly did not belong: some scruffy urchin in a paper mask that was probably supposed to be a fox, in shapeless white trousers and shirt, bare feet spread apart, arms this time folded imperiously. He could see the figure clearly.

He broke through the dancers. "You there! Stop!"

But the boy was gone.

Then someone, whose touch was very cold and dry, whose grip was like a vise, took him by the hand and whirled him back into the dance.

He hissed, "Who *dares*?"

But the other merely bowed, with both arms spread wide, then straightened and stepped back, in a half-formed dance step. He discerned a slender lady in rotting funeral clothes, but that meant nothing on this night. Her mask was plain and featureless white, with mere round holes for eyes and mouth.

Now the rhythm of the dance changed. The music slowed and the circles broke apart. Dancers clung to one another, drifting off in pairs into doorways and alleys, beneath canopies, there to unmask.

The stranger led Kuthomes into the darkness beneath a broken bridge, far from the crowd, into silence. They stood on a ledge above the black water of a canal. The other lifted Kuthomes' mask off and made to throw it away, but he snatched it back and held it tightly against his chest. She twirled her own white mask out over the water, where it splashed, then drifted like a sparkle of reflected moonlight.

"Do you not remember me?" she said, speaking not Deltan but that language universal among the dead, yet known only to sorcerers among the living and never uttered aloud. Kuthomes could make out enough: "...your promise... long ago. Our assignation. Complete what you began."

He cried out. He couldn't break free of her arms. Her breath was foul. Her filthy hand pressed over his mouth.

When she let go, he managed to gasp, "Name yourself..."

"Remember poor Kamachina..."

Then she was gone. He heard a splash. The black water rippled. He stepped out of the shadow of the bridge, into the moonlight and stood still, amazed and afraid.

The absurd thing was he didn't know any Kamachina. It was a common female name in the Delta. There must have been hundreds of servants, daughters of minor nobility, whores, whoever. He searched his memory for a specific Kamachina. No, no one. He tried to laugh, to tell himself this was another, tastelessly misconceived joke, that even the dead could blunder.

But then he got the death-bell out of his pocket and held it on his palm. The bell still rang,

steps of the black temple of Surat-Hemad, who created the crocodile in his own image.

The temple doors formed the Devouring God's jaws. Bronze teeth gleamed by torchlight. Within the great hall, two red lanterns burning above the altar were the all-seeing eyes of Death. In the vaults beneath the altar, in the belly of Surat-Hemad, dead and living commingled freely, and the waters of dream, of *Leshé*, lapped against the shores of the living world and those of the land of the dead. On this night, of all nights, the borders were freely crossed.

The doors swung wide. Twenty or so pilgrims entered.

Dark-clad, bearing the death-bell and his sword, but unmasked, Lord Kuthomes filed in with the others, circling thrice around the altar and the image of the squat-bellied, crocodile-headed Surat-Hemad, then descended into the deeper darkness of the vaults. He walked among stone sarcophagi containing the mummies of great or wicked men, who might return at any time they chose to inhabit such earthly forms.

He placed his hand on the carven effigy of some lord of centuries past. The mummy within stirred and scratched.

His mind was clear, though he had not rested after the second night. He had searched his books and gazed into his mirror for long hours, coming up with no revelation at all. He knew, then, that he could only confront the dead and allow them to speak. His fate, perhaps, was no longer in his own hands.

All things return to Surat-Hemad, so the prayer went.

Yes.

Still he could not remember a specific Kamachina. He didn't know who the boy was either. The child's significance, in particular, eluded him. He did not fit.

All things –

He had even consulted a true sorcerer, an ancient creature deformed and transformed by the magic within him, who walked in swaying jerks like a scarecrow come alive in the wind, whose head flicked constantly from side to side like a bird's, whose noseless face was a mass of scars, whose metal eyes clicked, whose hands were living fire. The sorcerer laughed slyly in a multitude of voices, and turned away.

A priest of Bel-Hemad had merely shaken his head sadly and said, "By the end of the third night, you shall know who this lady is. I am certain of that." Kuthomes had offered a fantastic sum of money, enough to startle even the priest.

"What is this for?"

"Help me escape. There must be a way."

The priest had merely shrugged, and Kuthomes stalked away from the priest's house, muttering to himself, striking people and objects in blind rage, pacing back and forth to fill the hours until the sun set and the third night of the Festival of the Dead began. The waiting was the worst part.

Dread Surat-Hemad, may all things be completed and finished and laid to rest, the prayers went.

Lord Kuthomes did not often pray.

Now he walked among the tombs of the ancient, sorcerous dead, the carven, laughing corpse-face in his hand, the tiny bell in its throat tinkling. Like all the others, he followed the sputtering tapers held aloft by the masked priests of Death, until all had gathered in an open space before a vast doorway.

A priest touched a lever. Counterweights shifted somewhere. Stone ground against stone, and the doors slid aside. Cold, damp air blew into the musty crypt, smelling of river

mud and corruption.

Here was the actual threshold of the world of the dead. Beyond this door, he knew, down a little slope, black water lapped silently. Funeral barges waited to carry the dead – and the living – into *Leshé*, where madmen, visionaries and sorcerers might glimpse Lord Kuthomes passing through their dreams.

Kuthomes hoped they would know and remember whom they had seen.

At the threshold, the tiny death-bell stopped ringing. Kuthomes threw it away, certain it was of no further use.

He reached under his robe and drew out the silver sword.

"You won't need that." A warm, living hand caught his wrist. The voice was soft, but not feminine, speaking Deltan, accented very slightly. The boy.

Kuthomes slid the sword back into the scabbard. "Who are you?"

"One who will guide you to your trysting place. Lord Kuthomes, the Lady Kamachina awaits."

"Explain yourself, or die."

"If you kill me, you will never know the answer, will you?"

"There are slow methods, which inspire eloquence..."

"But hardly worth the exertion, Lord. Come with me, and all will be made clear."

Kuthomes hesitated. Slowly, the other pilgrims crossed the threshold. What could he do but follow? The boy was waiting.

Hand-in-hand, the two of them passed through the door and into absolute darkness, where not even the priests with their tapers dared accompany them. The only sound was the sucking of boots in the mud. The boy seemed to know where he was going. Kuthomes allowed himself to be led. They groped their way into a barge and sat still, among many other wordless pilgrims.

Then they were adrift, and gradually stars appeared overhead, not those seen over the Delta on any summer night, but the stars of Deathlands, of *Tashé*.

He discerned crocodile-headed things in the river, thousands, floating along like a great mass of weed; but their bodies were pale and human, like naked, drowned men. These were the true messengers of Death, the *evatim*.

Someone in the company shrieked, stood up, and did a frantic, whirling dance, hands waving and slapping as if in an attempt to fend off invisible hornets. He fell into the river with a splash. The *evatim* hissed all as one, the sound like a rising wind.

Someone else began strumming a harp. A song arose from many voices, a gentle, desolate lyric in the language of the dead. From out of the air, from far beyond the barge, more voices joined in.

Many wept. Kuthomes was unmoved, impatient, tensely alert.

The boy took his hand again, as if seeking or offering comfort. He couldn't tell which.

They were deep into Dream now, and the visions began. Some of the others cried out from sudden things Kuthomes could not see; but *he* was able to behold vast shapes in the sky, half human, half-beast, like clouds moving *behind* the stars, pausing in some incomprehensible journey to glance down at those in the barge below. These might have been the gods, or the Shadow Titans, from whom all sorcery flowed. Kuthomes had no idea. He did not choose to ask the masked

boy beside him, who, he was certain, *did* know.

From *Leshé*, Dream, as they passed over into the realm of Death, the rest of the adventure was like a dream, inexplicable, without continuity.

Once it seemed that he and the boy sat alone on the barge. The boy closed and opened his hands, and blue flames rose from his scarred palms. Kuthomes removed the boy's shabby mask, tossing it out among the *evatim*. By the blue light, he could see a very ordinary face, soft, beardless, with large dark eyes; a man-child somewhere in the middle teens, with tangled dark hair. Part of one of the boy's ears was missing. That struck Kuthomes as merely odd.

"Who *are* you?" he whispered in the language of the dead.

In that same tongue the boy replied, "A messenger."

"One of the *evatim* then?"

"What do you think?"

"You seem alive."

"Death, also, is a kind of life."

In another part of the dream they walked on water, bare-foot because the river would not hold up Kuthomes as long as he wore boots. Ripples spread on the frigid surface. They walked through a dead marsh in wintertime. Among the reeds, skeletal translucent birds waded on impossibly delicate legs.

Later still, the sky brightened into a dull, metallic grey, without a sunrise, but with enough suffused light that Kuthomes could see clearly. He and the boy walked for hours through sumptuous dust, until they both were covered with

it. A wind rose. Swirling dust filled the air. By tricks of half-light and shadow, in the shifting dust, he seemed to make out buried rooftops, part of a city wall, a tower. But all these crumbled away when he touched them, then reformed again somewhere nearby.

Sometimes he saw faces on the ground before him, or in walls or doorways. He made his way through the narrow streets of a city of dust. The boy led him by the hand.

Here was the silently screaming dust-face of Lord Vormisehket, stung by a thousand scorpions; and here Adriuten Shomash with his throat still cut, sand pouring out of the nether mouth beneath his chin. Lady Nefiramé and her three children confronted him. She had hurled herself into a well with the children in her arms. So many more, faces and bodies sculpted out of transitory dust, forming and reforming as Kuthomes passed, dust-arms and hands reaching out for him, crumbling, reaching again.

He saw many who had been useful to him for a time, then inconvenient: Akhada the witch; Dakhumet the poisoner, who hurled tiny darts fashioned like birds; even the former king himself, Baalshekhthose, first and only ruler of that name, whose sudden ascent and decent both Kuthomes had brought about.

The boy dragged him on, pulling at his arm, completely plastered with the grey dust so that only his eyes seemed alive.

Kuthomes felt indignant anger more than anything else. Why should these phantoms accuse him? Such deeds were the stuff of politics. Those who wielded power must be, by the nature of that power, above the common morality.

It was only when they came to a halt by a broken bridge over a dust-choked canal that Kuthomes recognized where he was. Here, in dreams and dust and ash, was a replica, shifting and inexact but a replica nevertheless, of the City of the Delta, of a disreputable district where, many years before, he

had promised to meet someone by that bridge.

In this place of dreams and death, amid the dust, the memory came back to him, clearly, like a book opening, its pages turning.

She was waiting for him, tall and slender in her dusty shroud. He knew her even before she spoke, before the caked dirt on her face cracked and fell away like a poorly-wrought mask to reveal empty eyesockets and bare bones. Her voice was gentle and sad and exactly as he remembered it. She spoke in the language of the dead.

"Kuthomes, my only love, I am your beloved, Kamachina, whom you once promised to marry and make great."

He could not resist her embrace, or her kiss, though both revolted him.

"I never knew what happened to you," he managed to say at last.

He had been 17, an upstart from outside the city, youngest of many sons, driven out of his village with few prospects, ridiculed by the great ones of the Delta, desperate for recognition, for a position of any sort. He had dallied with a girl, the daughter of a minor official. Already he was precocious in the ways of the court, though he had yet to set foot inside a palace. His lies had the desired effect, with hints of plots and of suppressed factions soon to rise again; with the implication that Kuthomes was not who he seemed at all, but perhaps a prince in disguise, whose true name would make the mighty tremble. With this and more he secured introductions, a position. In exchange for the favour of the girl Kamachina, he promised to make her family great.

Later, when she pressed her claim and became inconvenient, he put her off, all the while whispering that she and her father were both mad, obsessed with absurd plots. At the very end, there had been the assignation at the bridge. The two of them would exchange marriage vows but keep them secret until the time was right for the revelation.

"But you never came," she said. On that final, sacred night of the Festival of the Dead, when uttered vows are binding forever, he had betrayed her, and, in her grief, she had flung herself into the canal and drowned. "I truly loved you," she said. "You were my every, my only hope."

"I... did not know."

"I was great with your child. Did you know that?"

"I... had not seen you in several months."

"I could hardly confess such a thing in a letter."

"Someone might have intercepted it," he said.

She dragged him to his knees, then lay by his side in the cold dust.

At last he broke free, stood up, and brushed himself off.

"But all this was almost 40 years ago. How can it matter now?"

She reached up and took him by the hand. "Among the dead, time moves much more slowly."

He looked around for the boy and saw him crouching nearby in the dust, hands folded over his knees, watching dispassionately.

"Is that your son?"

"I have no son," said Kamachina, reaching up for Kuthomes. "My child is still within me, waiting to be born." Once more she dragged him down into her irresistible embrace, pressing her corpse-mouth against his. Kuthomes screamed. He fought her, drawing his silver sword, striking her again and again, slashing her head off, hacking her body to pieces.

But it was no use. She merely reconstituted herself, a thing of dust and dead bones, sculpted by some magical wind.

She caught his wrist in her crushing grip and made him throw the sword away.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I did what I had to do. I didn't know... If I could help you, I would, but it's too late..."

"What is begun on the last night of the Festival of the Dead," she said, embracing him once more, "is sacred, inviolate, and must always be consummated."

So it was that Lord Kuthomes came to dwell in the country of the dead with his Lady Kamachina. He was mad with the terror of it all for a long time. It seemed that he sat on a throne, and ruled as emperor among the corpses, but slowly, subtly, they turned from him, perverting his every command, until at last he was cast down, reviled, trampled into filth. He shouted that he was a great lord, that he was *alive* and they mere corpses, but they only laughed at him.

Dead hands tore his entrails out of his body, lifted his bleeding heart up before his face; dead lips drank his blood and devoured him. So it seemed, in his madness, though each time he awoke, he found himself whole. He tried to bear all this in the manner of a great lord, silently plotting his revenge, but that was absurd, and before long he too was shrieking aloud at the hilarity of the idea.

"How shall I be revenged against myself?" he asked the ghosts. "How?"

They could not answer him.

All the while Kamachina was with him, touching him gently, whispering of her love. She alone did not mock him, nor injure him in any way, but her love was the worst torment of all.

In his madness his mind opened up. The speech of gods and of the Titans poured into him. There were many revelations, passed through Kuthomes into the dreams of men who awoke in the living world.

Gradually his pain and his madness lessened, and it seemed he had merely backtracked along a path he had once taken, then set out on another. His old life became the dream, the fading memory. Now he came to see himself dwelling, not in dust, but in an austere palace of massive pillars and black stone, there waited upon by ghosts, while his wife's belly swelled with his child.

"Is it not the duty of a lord," she said, "to provide for the comfort of those beneath him?"

He supposed it was. He didn't know any more.

He sat with her in her garden of leafless trees and brittle stalks, listening as she spoke or sang softly in the language of the dead. He learned to play a strange harp made of bones as delicate as strands of silk. He came to behold the growing life in that dead garden, the nearly invisible leaves and blossoms like sculpted smoke, and he ate of the fruits of the trees, which tasted like empty air, and was sustained by them. After a while, he could recall no other taste.

She was delivered there, in the garden. The mysterious boy appeared once more, to assist the birthing.

"Who *are* you?" Kuthomes asked. "Can you not tell me at last?"

"I am the sorcerer Sekenre," the boy said.

"But, but, one so young —"

"For sorcerers too, as for the dead, time moves differently. I was 15 when my father caused me to slay him, filling me

with his spirit, and the spirits of all his victims, and the victims of his victims, all united in one, who must sometimes struggle to remember that he was once a boy called Sekenre. My voices are like a flock of birds. We are many. But for 300 years and more, my body has not aged. I have learned and forgotten many things, as you, Kuthomes, have learned and forgotten."

"I too have a hard time remembering who I am sometimes," said Kuthomes. "We are alike."

"You are the loving father of this child." The boy Sekenre reached into Lady Kamachina's dead womb and lifted an infant girl out in his hands. Kuthomes thought his daughter looked more like a delicate carving than a child: skin translucently white, eyes open and unblinking, the expression severe.

Sekenre passed the baby to Kuthomes, who rested it in his lap.

"The world shall fear this one," Sekenre said, "but not for any evil in her. She is a mirror of the evil in others. In a hundred years' time I shall need her as my ally, against an enemy yet unborn." "Therefore you have directed all these things, my entire life, to your own purposes."

"Yes, I have," said Sekenre.

Kuthomes shrugged. "I suppose one has to do such things." He felt, vaguely, that he should be angry, but there was no passion left in him. Kamachina smiled and took the child from him.

Ghosts gathered around them, whispering like a faint wind.

On the last night of the Festival of the Dead, Lord Kuthomes emerged from the vaults beneath the temple of Surat-Hemad

in the City of the Delta. He had grown very old. His once tall, vigorous figure was bent, his silver beard now purest white. No one knew him, or the bone-pale girl he led into the world.

His daughter clung to his arm, her eyes dazzled even by the gloom of the inside of the temple; amazed at everything she saw, whispering to him, for comfort, then out of excitement, chattering softly in the language of the dead. The grave-wrappings she wore had partially fallen away, revealing almost transparent skin. She seemed more to float on the air than to walk.

Outside, she had to cover her face from the starlight. Kuthomes found a discarded mask for her.

They walked through streets he remembered now only from his dreams. She had so many questions he could not answer. He took her tiny hand in his and led her to a place he had dreamed, where a certain magician was waiting. This man would nurture her for five years before an enemy killed him, bore her off, and came to regret the prize.

But these things were Sekenre's business.

Kuthomes departed without even bidding his daughter farewell, then hurried back to the temple of Surat-Hemad, and descended into the vaults, so that what had been begun on the last night of the Festival of the Dead could at last be finished.

Darrell Schweitzer makes his first fiction contribution to *Interzone* with the above story. He lives in Strafford, Pennsylvania, and is well known in the USA as a critic and editor. His published novels are *We Are All Legends* (1981), *The Shattered Goddess* (1982) and *The White Isle* (1989); his short-story collections are *Tom O'Bedlam's Night Out* (1985) and *Transients* (1993).

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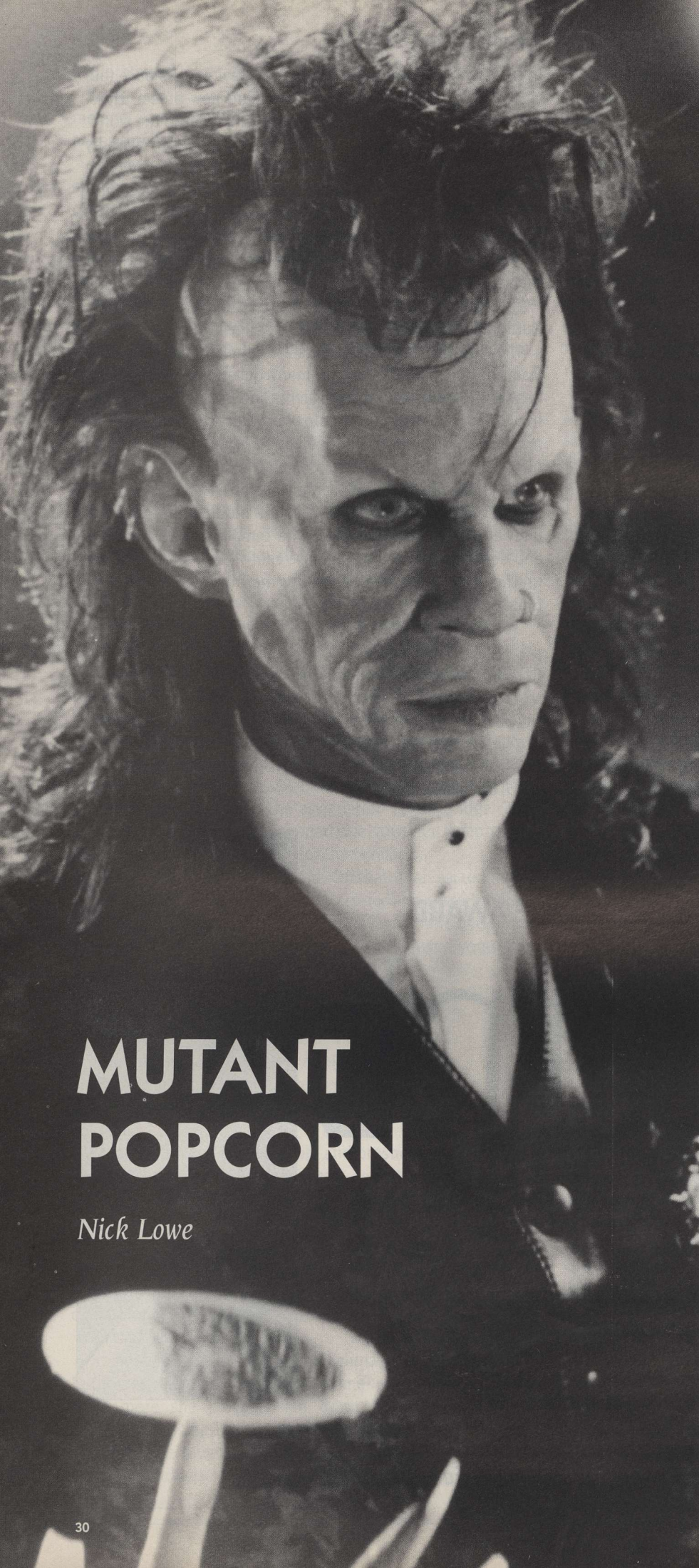
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MUTANT POPCORN

Nick Lowe

Prologue: *Fifteen Months Earlier*. Tight shot of flipchart. Voice of executive (off L); hand appears from time to time, circling key phrases on each page with different-coloured marker pens as he speaks:

"... Okay, let's put it all together. We've identified the key audience sector as WHITE MALES 12-16, and the brief was to devise a movie that would ADDRESS the CORE MARKET HEAD-ON, which we decided meant TAKE THEIR LIVES & MAKE THEM BIGGER. And then we started thinking about WHAT the TARGET AUDIENCE ACTUALLY DOES, and we had a bit of trouble with this one till Sue-Lynn came in with the decaf and everyone got talking about her Pauly. So now we have SPLATTER VIDEOS, SULKING IN ROOM, BAD WHITE DANCE MUSIC, NO FRIENDS, PISSING ABOUT ON COMPUTER, PARENTS MIGHT AS WELL NOT EXIST, COMPLETELY ALIENATED, and these two which Sue-Lynn rated most basic, CD-ROMS and WANKING. So we started thinking about a concept that would take each of these and if you will WRIT IT LARGE, and what would come out would be the ULTIMATE TEENAGE FANTASY MOVIE. And then we were asked to consider any possible problems, and Lester suggested that by the time the movie actually comes out CD-ROM will be a naffed-out technology fit only for taping to the cover of every technology mag on the rack, stuffed not with electrifying futuristic thrills but with pointless fonts, save-disabled demos of software you can't afford, and mystifying bugfixes for drivers for products you've never heard of. But we decided probably ONLY IN ENGLAND. So we moved on to casting, and clearly that kid out of T2 is hot to be hot, Janey thought she remembered he was called RICKY CUBIT, and we figured we could market him as THE NEXT RIVER PHOENIX. They'll like that in Promotions Development; I can't see how anything could stop us going with that. O-kay," (begin fade) "I think we can all congratulate ourselves on a highly creative meeting. Max, my friend, any more of that party dust?" (etc., ad lib, and fade out).

End prologue: *Fifteen Months Later*.

Straight into main title: **Brainscan**.

Michael (Ed Furlong) is a totally alienated 16-year-old. His mother is dead. His father is permanently away on business. This makes him feel even more alienated. His only satisfactions are got lurking in his room – a complete boy's fantasy world of impossibly expensive hardware, huge teen-gothic decor, and his *own fridge*. (Woah. This guy "rules.") There he likes to read *Fangoria*, play with his voice-activated phone, and, er um, train his telescope on the babe next door, who is secretly hot for him and takes her bra off when she knows he's watching. His one societal activity is running the "Horror Club" at school. "A very sad boy," is Det. Frank Langella's too-true verdict. But everything changes when Michael dials 1-800-555-FEAR for the first CD of *Brainscan*, *The Ultimate Experience in Interactive Terror that Interfaces with your Subconscious in a Process Not Unlike*



Above and left: scenes from *Brainscan*.

Hypnosis. Soon Brainscan's Mephistophelean gamesmaster has Michael high on a virtuality more real than real, an interactive slasher movie in which You Are the Killer that leaves Michael thrilled-out with the serious munchies and glugging lo-fat till it dribbles down his chin. But, crashing chords! the virtual murder turns out real, and Michael is sucked into a horrid moonlight career as a serial knifeman – his exemplary anti-censorship stance ("I don't think erections rape people; people rape people") progressively undermined by Brainscan's defiance of academic studies to insist on identifying him with the perpetrator rather than the victims of violence. As the stakes rise and the Iron-Maiden-type summonses to end it all grow more insistent, he finally has to choose between slashing and humping the girl he er um dreams of, and just as hell gapes he wakes to find it was all a cathartic fantasy manufactured by his subconscious to deal with his feelings of alienation and that, so that now he can trash his technology and leave his room to party with the crowd and ask his dream girl for a date and generally go around hugging everything in sight and saying I love you to all the people he mutilated horribly while he was a serial sicko.

The instructions for enjoying *Brainscan* are relatively simple: you need to be in a mood to admire conceptual slickness, a hearty contempt for reason, and the general dash of trying to find something intelligent yet dumb to say about live-action games,

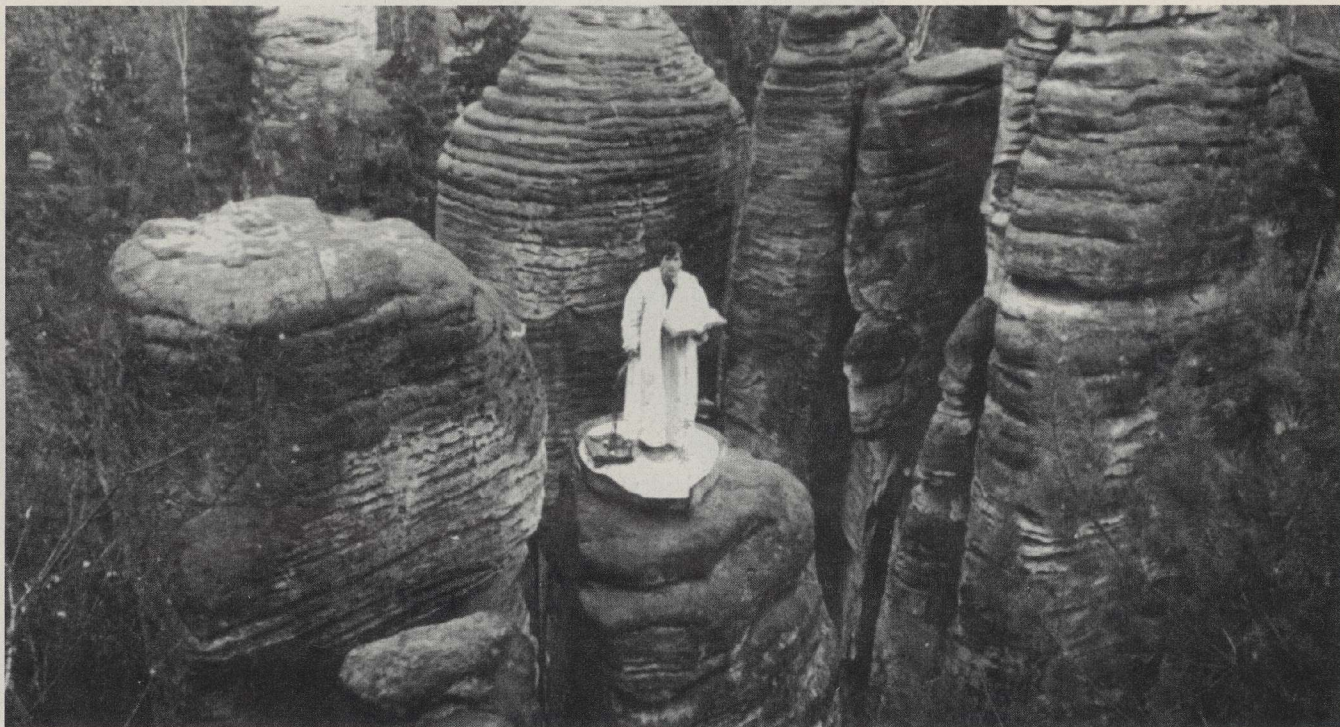
horror video, and the impact of recreational technology on the social and moral development of youth. You also have to be predisposed to forgive a particularly dreary Freddy-cloned hypervillain, some at best so-so dialogue, direction, and performances, and a representation of the heroine that's hardly exonerated by the revelation that it was all just a masturbation fantasy. It's all smartly assembled with an excess of delight at its own ingenuity; transparent as vacuum, and just as full of holes. But for anyone doing *Doctor Faustus* for GCSE, this knowing, meretricious teen sf update is a playtime treat. Hang on for the *or-was-it?! bit* three screens into the end titles, which conjures back the spirit of the entire movie in making no sense at all.

Act II: exactly the same, only search and replace Montreal with Prague, Hollywood with Czech/BBC copro, and

daft juvenile genre romp with living legend makes first full-length feature post the revolution. The press notes for Jan Svankmajer's own *Faust* offer the deadline-pressured western journo a helpful readymade interpretation: "man cannot free himself from his own anxieties any more than the change of a political regime can alter the foundations upon which civilisation has been built." That should certainly play well in the west, where everything out of the junior democracies is required to be about the funny smells on the winds of change and the ambivalent blessings of being able to



Below right and overleaf: *Faust*



launch your own edition of *Playboy*. (The South African one is extraordinary – the letters pages are full of these confessions from mixed-up Boers about their lifelong yearnings for “dusky women.”)

If you squint with your brain at an angle, it does stop just an inch or two short of a flagrant misreading, because the key idea in Svankmajer’s ironic upending of the myth is that his Faust is no cosmic rebel but a sanguine victim of sardonic manipulation by the Valdes and Cornelius characters and the half-glimpsed puppeteers behind them, and his deepest crime the obliging passivity with which he’s coaxed down the path to damnation. Whereupon you can see the western hacks nod sagely and twitch over their pads, scribbling *allegory of czech proletariat under stalinism etc god I hope this pen’s actually working*. To the extent that Svankmajer’s *Faust* is a contemporary, middle-aged Prague everyman, and hence presumably his irrisistance is imagined as typical, it’s probably permissible for westerners to write this one up as another of those cynical plus-ça-change pieces, in the same way as 15 years ago we used to try to out Tarkovsky as a dissident at his western press conferences. But that’s what Svankmajer gets for making a film that, as usual, leaves careful space for the reader to implant his own subtext. Such are the embarrassments of returning control to the consumer; you let people read in what they like, and they’ll read in what they want.

For Svankmajer is the Budweiser of cinema: like Tarkovsky, fetishized in the west (particularly the UK, where he’s been for a decade far the best-known contemporary Czech film-maker, a style god endlessly pilfered by animators, designers, and adboys) but comparatively taken for granted domestically, where he’s been part of the furniture for 30 years and his classical Prague-school surrealism seems anything

but exotic and novel. Now, I daresay our local fixation with Svankmajer is indeed due partly to insufficient exposure to the rest of the iceberg and partly to that same western infatuation with all things Prague, undisputed hip capital of the universe, that has 40,000 Americans and scarcely any Brits in a permanent state of hanging-out. All the same, I ought to put on record my persistent naive conviction that Svankmajer is a total brainflipped genius, and that *Faust* is the most idea-packed, if not necessarily most satisfying, work of his life.

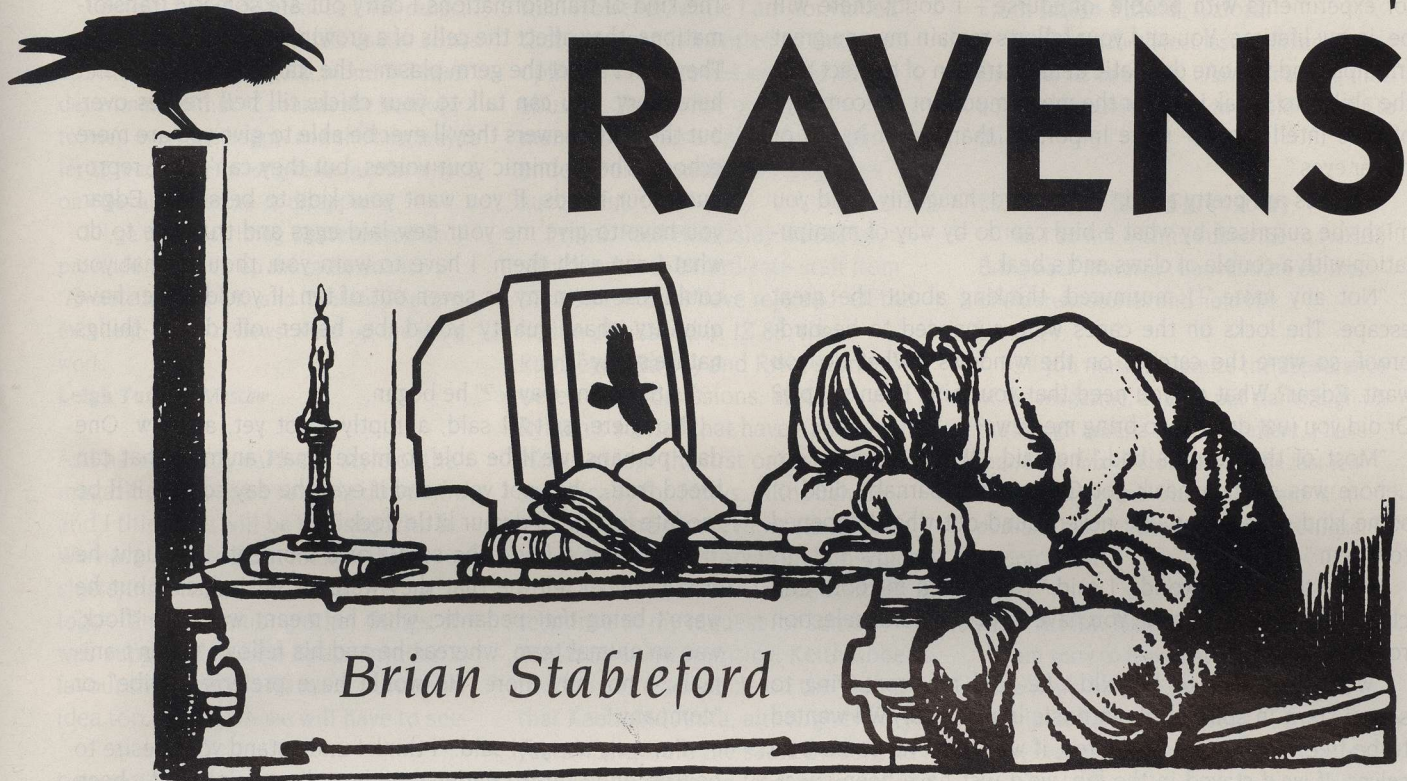
Like his earlier full-length feature *Alice*, *Faust* is a narrative subject that offers a pretext for an arbitrarily loose chain of free set pieces, at times coming over like a series of short films stitched end-to-end, incorporating whatever zingy image or experiment he feels like on the morning. But unlike *Alice* it’s a collage text, patching together scenes from Marlowe, Goethe, Gounod, Grabbe’s *Don Juan und Faust*, and Czech puppet-theatre versions in a deliberately fragmented, stylistically discordant cubist take on the subject. (This is compounded in the English-language version, which puts the translated texts into a banalistic contemporary doggerel while leaving Marlowe’s dialogue deliciously intact.) The disappointments are that, as in *Alice*, the pacing is chaotic (the first invocation of Mephistopheles is a wonderful pageant of crazily unpredictable images, but the result of bunging in every image that would fit is that it goes on out of all proportion to its job in the narrative), some ideas thrown away so fast you scarcely catch them and others laboured till you wish they’d just go away, and – probably least rewarding to the western fan – there’s comparatively little actual animation. What there is, as in most recent Svankmajer, is an astonishing mix of techniques, here jumping between live action, pixillation, lifesized and miniature puppets, claymation, and stop-

motion, smearing over the links with his characteristic heightened sound, jagged cuts, and surrealistic jumps to closeup. But fans may find the central emphasis on puppetry, while an interesting exploration of the filmmaker’s own earliest roots, less spectacular and accessible than the kind of thing he’s lionized for in the west. Certainly the animated sequences are by far the most impressive – particularly the Golem scene, where a clay infant is boiled up in a bottle, mouth widened with a penknife and a spell stuffed in, followed by a breathtaking sequence as it comes wonderingly to life, ages and decays before the eyes, and is savagely uncreated by its maker. In one way the sparseness with which stop-motion in particular is deployed actually builds a sense of the uncanny, since in the Svankmajer universe every inanimate prop is watched with a sense that it’s about to twitch into life, usually violent, unpredictable, and cruel. It’s just a shame it doesn’t do it as much in this one.

But then, the message of *Brainscan* is that if you really desire the movie of your dreams, you’re going to have to do the one in your head. And this is precisely where, for alienated youth, Svankmajer offers healthier things to do in the privacy of your bedroom than send yourself blind with interactive fantasy. It actually wasn’t that long ago that, fired up by *Alice* and a freeze-frame through *Dimensions of Dialogue*, I went through my own period of amateur homage with a clockwork camera, the living-room table, and the contents of sock drawer and refrigerator. (Kids love doing stop-motion; I heartily commend this to divorced fathers on access days.) It went on for most of a year; we were just starting to get the hang when they stopped developing Standard 8. So come on, all you troubled teens: raise those spirits and do it! *do it!* You know all you need is a fistful of old technology.

Nick Lowe

The Unkindness of RAVENS



All lovers of exotic collective nouns know that a group of ravens is an “unkindness,” although most dictionaries stubbornly refuse to confirm the fact. Perhaps it has something to do with the raven’s reputation as a bird of ill-omen: the “sad-presaging raven” which “does shake contagion from her sable wing,” as Marlowe puts it.

Perhaps I was a fool to create an unkindness of ravens when all common sense pointed to African grey parrots as the most suitable subjects for the crucial experiment. I could say, I suppose, that I made the choice on economic grounds, ravens being considerably cheaper than African greys, but the simple truth is that it was the only *poetic* choice. All the greatest scientists have well-crafted aesthetic sensibilities.

It should, I suppose, have been the one I christened Nevermore who came rapping, rapping at my window three years after the great escape – but it wasn’t. Nor did I possess a bust of Pallas on which he might take his station once I had let him in; he had perforce to make do with the tower of my computer system, at which I had been working long into the dreary night. He was so close that I might have reached out my hand to stroke his glossy coat of feathers, but I knew that he wouldn’t suffer it and so I stayed my hand.

“Hello, Edgar,” I said, quietly. I recognized him, of course. All ravens are not alike to those who know them well, and Edgar was my child – *entirely* mine, no matter what manner of black-clad automaton had laid the egg from which he hatched.

“Hello Doctor,” he replied, with a self-confidence that testified to considerable practice. It was evident that he and his companions had not quit the lab in order to be free of the burden of speech. “Are you staying long?” I asked, although I knew that he would have to leave at least once more, to

report back to his siblings.

“Just a flying visit,” he replied. A raven’s voice is quite uninflected when he speaks for himself, although they can mimic the emotional overtones of overheard speech, so there was nothing in his tone to signify that Edgar meant the remark as a comic play on words. I wasn’t sure whether he did or not. One has the same trouble with conversational programs that will play on a PC; one is never certain that their occasional forays into humour are – or can be – intentional.

“I could shut the window to imprison you,” I pointed out. “Now I know what you can do I needn’t be as careless as I was three years ago.”

“If you try to keep me here against my will,” he said, flatly, “I’ll never say another word – and if ever I get the chance, I’ll take your eyes out with my beak.” No parrot would ever have been so bloodcurdlingly matter-of-fact, but ravens are hunters and scavengers by nature, haunters of the dying and consumers of the dead.

“Why come back at all, if that’s your attitude?” I asked him. “Surely you don’t think you owe me anything? I only made you, after all. I only performed the embryonic transformations which raised your bird brain to near-human levels of achievement. I never asked you to think of me as God.”

“I don’t,” he said, unnecessarily. “How’s the great work going, doctor?”

“Fair to middling,” I told him. “Same old problems. It’s easy enough to transform lower forms of life, but there’s no demand for smart cockroaches and clever crabs. Sharks, frogs and crocodiles can go so far and no further because they can’t talk, and because they can’t talk they can’t learn to think in a pseudo-human way. It’d probably be the same with

dolphins, rats and cats, but the transformations are so very difficult it's well-nigh impossible to put the proposition to the test. Something there is about a womb which resents the interference of genetic engineers. There are no licences yet for experiments with people, of course – I doubt there will be, in my lifetime. You and your fellows remain my one great triumph, and the one dramatic demonstration of the fact that the ability to speak is by far the most important concomitant of pure intelligence – more important than clever hands or clever eyes."

"My eyes are pretty good," Edgar said, haughtily, "and you might be surprised by what a bird can do by way of manipulation with a couple of claws and a beak."

"Not any more," I murmured, thinking about the great escape. The locks on the cages were supposed to be bird-proof; so were the catches on the windows. "What do you want, Edgar? What do you need that you think I can supply? Or did you just drop by to bring me news?"

"Most of the news is bad," he said. "We're down to six. Lenore was shot. A hawk got Clementine. Barnaby died of some kind of infection. We never found out what happened to Hugin."

"It's a tough old world," I said. "Nature red in tooth and claw. You want to be wild, you have to play natural selection roulette."

"We didn't want to be wild," he told me, contriving to sound stern in spite of his intrinsic limitations. "We wanted to be free. We needed to be free, if we were ever to be ourselves. If we'd stayed in the lab, we'd just have been specimens. We couldn't be birds unless we learned to fly, and we didn't want to be mere echoes any more than you wanted us to be."

He was showing off, of course. He wanted to show me what a smart guy he was, and how three years without anyone to talk to but his fellows hadn't impeded his intellectual development in the least. He wanted to show me that all he'd needed was the raw material of words and their meanings, and that everything else had flowed from that. At least, I *think* he wanted to show me; it's so very difficult to be absolutely sure. Conversational programs provide such a good imitation of intelligence without being capable of wanting anything – or of intending anything, or of caring about anything – that we always have to hesitate about reading too much into the things other entities say to us, especially if the entities in question are big black birds.

"I take your point," I said. "I understand. In your place, I'd have done the same thing." I think I was telling the truth. Sometimes, we have to be suspicious even of our own motives, our own desires, our own powers of empathy.

"I know you would," he said. The light above and behind him threw the shadow of his dark head across my keyboard, so that the shadow of his beak seemed to point at my heart like some threatening dart. "What do you want, Edgar?" I said, again. "What is it that you can't provide for yourselves? What is it that you need from me?"

"You know what it is," he countered – and if any final proof were required that he really did have authentic intelligence of a pseudo-human kind, that was it. "You always knew. You always knew that one day we'd have to come back."

Of course I knew. Of course I'd always expected him back. The only surprise was that it had taken him so long. Ravens are proud and stubborn; they prefer to laugh at fate while

there's a chance that fate will back down – but fate never does, of course. Fate doesn't know the meaning of kindness.

"I would have told you if you'd asked," I said. "I would have explained, if only you'd given me the time to get around to it. The kind of transformations I carry out are somatic transformations; they affect the cells of a growing embryo selectively. They don't affect the germ plasm – the transformations aren't hereditary. You can talk to your chicks till hell freezes over, but the only answers they'll ever be able to give you are mere echoes. They'll mimic your voices, but they can't ever reproduce your minds. If you want your kids to be smart, Edgar, you have to give me your new-laid eggs and trust me to do what I can with them. I have to warn you, though, that you could lose as many as seven out of ten. If you'd rather have quantity than quality you'd be better off doing things nature's way."

"Is there any way – ?" he began.

"No there isn't," I said, abruptly. "Not yet, anyhow. One day, perhaps, we'll be able to make smart animals that can breed true... but not yet – and if ever the day comes, it'll be too late for you and your little flock."

"We're not a flock," he said. For a moment, I thought he was going to tell me that they were an unkindness, but he wasn't being *that* pedantic; what he meant was that "flock" was an animal term, whereas he and his fellows weren't animals – not any more. He would have preferred "tribe" or "company."

"I'm truly sorry," I said. "I think I understand your desire to be free, and I think I understand how disappointing it's been to find that your freedom is qualified and circumscribed. If you decide to come back, I'll try to explain the myriad ways in which human freedom is qualified and circumscribed. You're not alone, you know. You never were. I've always been ready to open the window." I knew that I'd won, and that the great escape was over. I knew, and was now confident enough to be assured that I'd *always* known, that my children – my very own unkindness of ravens – were coming home.

"You know, doctor," he said, although he was quite unable to contort his croaky voice into any simulation of feeling, "there's something about you that I never liked. It's not your cleverness as such – it's something about the way you set it out. If we do come back, it's not because we love you. I wouldn't want you to think that it was."

Such, I suppose, is the unkindness of ravens. The all-inclusive collective noun for our own species is, of course, humanity.



Brian Stableford has recently published *The Carnival of Destruction* (Pocket Books, UK; Carroll & Graf, USA), the long-awaited third volume in his philosophical fantasy trilogy which began with *The Werewolves of London*. He is now engaged in writing another trilogy for Random House/Legend. His novella "Les Fleurs du Mal" was the main story in the October 1994 issue of *Asimov's SF Magazine*, and he has another brilliant short novel, "The Hunger and Ecstasy of Vampires," coming from us next month.

continued from page 5

cluttered. The adverts are still the best laid-out bits of the magazine;

Content: not as different as I was expecting. The reminiscing by writers comes across as self-indulgent. A regular monthly *Nexus* department within *IZ* sounds the best way to keep everyone happy, and the best way to let *IZ* readers get a long-term feel for what's on offer and approve or disapprove.

I'll go on subscribing whatever you do, provided you keep up the story quality. "Ansible Link" is OK, and "Mutant Popcorn" excellent: sharp reviews. Keep up the good work.

Leigh Turner, Moscow

As I have already said, the style of the magazine should be settling down now, and I think you will be pleased with it. We have stripped out many of the cluttering pieces; the 'X' was the *Nexus* logo – and yes, among other things, it was supposed to be a Space Invader. I favour the monthly *Nexus* department idea too, but again we will have to see.

Dear Editors:

I have to say, I didn't think much of the *Nexus/Interzone* crossover. Ryman's story was very boring, Christina's was okay but ordinary, and non-sf despite the setting. The Keith Roberts was a self-indulgent advert – embarrassing! The Uncle River was just crap (unworthy of a more constructive analysis), as was Ramseyer's "Café Duo." The Bayley was just a run-of-the-mill typing exercise. The Palmer was the weak element in the quite successful Ortygia idea.

Of the non-fiction, the regular *Interzone* stuff was up to its usual high standard – I even found the Clute a relief! The Tom Shippey and the Jeff Noon interview were interesting too. But the Chuck Connor piece (I refuse to dignify the title by reproducing it here) really was insulting.

Paul Brazier has managed to attract some big names, but they are obviously of the opinion that "it's only *Nexus*, we can send him stuff that we know is third rate." His reference to "moaning minnies" annoyed me partly for this reason – as if he, too, knows he's publishing third rate stuff by first rate authors, and wants to pre-empt the criticism he know he's going to get for it.

Paul Beardsley, Havant

Oh dear, that "moaning minnie" gibe of mine has caused an awful lot of comment. It was intended to stimulate people who would otherwise merely nod with approval to put pen to paper.

After all, as this letter shows, it is far more fun to hurl abuse than to say, "I liked it." And, I have to say, we have had letters even more abusive than this. However, while I am convinced that everyone is entitled to their own opinion, they are not entitled to be abusive. That is not only bad manners but also unhelpful in our endeavours to make this magazine successful.

I think Paul Beardsley would be surprised at the third-rate stuff from big names that I have rejected. Of the fiction published in *IZ* 88, the Ramseyer, Bayley and River stories were cold submissions; all Geoff Ryman's stories that have appeared in *Nexus* except the first one were written specifically for *Nexus*, although he promised me film reviews (and I have another cracking story from him which I hope will appear here in due course); in response to my request for some autobiographical writing, Keith Roberts tried to write an article on the premise that Kaeti and Anita, although twenty years apart, were the same person; he gave up, and instead let them meet and fight it out in this story; Christina Lake's was written in response to a conversation Christina and I had on our way to a writers' workshop in South Wales; and Jessica Palmer's "Ortygia," while written for herself, was offered to me personally, not merely as a cold submission (and gave rise to the rest of the Ortygia feature). Of the non-fiction, Shippey's essay was, as stated, lifted from a Mexican programme item; Chuck Connor's was written to order (and I have another brilliant piece from him waiting in the wings, if I can convince David...); Lisa Tuttle's and Chris Priest's pieces were both commissioned; and Colin Greenland's diary, although Ortygia-based, was one of the series commissioned for *Nexus*.

Thus, a large part of the content of *IZ* 88 would not have existed without *Nexus* having generated it. I too regret the passing of *Nexus*, despite the large hole it made in my finances. It generated so much excellent new writing that I remain very proud of it, but it suffered too much from my need first and foremost to keep a roof over my head and food in my belly. I would like to keep its spirit alive, but that must be with the active compliance of *IZ* readers – the last thing I want to do is drive readers away from *Interzone*.

As space is limited, I'll finish off this column by extracting a few comments from other letters.

From **Julian Fifield, Oxford**:

Thanks for the latest issue (88) and especially its new look. I have for a long time hoped that some attention would be paid to this.

From **Hilary Gee, Shrewsbury**:

No, I do not wish to subscribe to *Nexus*. Bring back *Interzone*! Concentrate on lots of different stories and hold the critiques...

...If you must modernize the appearance of the magazine, at least put clarity high on the design criteria... as to content, I have found the mix of stories over the last few years pretty good. A bit more "hard" sf if possible maybe. Otherwise, it ain't broke, so don't fix it.

From **A.F.M. Nash, West Ealing**

I am sorry to hear that you have had to close down *Nexus*. Even sorer that you have joined *Interzone*. I used to subscribe to it but eventually gave up for a number of reasons. I will not be going back to it now but I hope its editor puts aside some space dedicated to *Nexus*.

I have also received several oral comments similar to this last. They seem to refer to an ancient controversy over the funding of the original establishment of *Interzone* in 1982. There is no benefit to be had from rehearsing the argument here, but I was surprised to learn that, although I had been aware of this for many years, David Pringle was unaware of it until a couple of years ago. Some sf fans are like elephants – long memories, thick skins, and no ability to communicate their grievance. It is a shame, though. If they had come out and made their challenge, *Interzone* could have either owned up and made restitution, or successfully defended its case. As it is, the magazine has carried an unexplained millstone of ill-will in the fannish world for many years. It's about time the sf fans concerned either came clean with their accusations, or ceased their muttering behind their hands. Either way, this issue should be resolved now, so that *Interzone* can take its place as the flagship of British sf fandom and lead us into the sf renaissance we are all working towards.

Paul Brazier

KATHARINE KERR



“I’ve always loved Britain so much,” Janet says. “It’s going to be wonderful, this couple of weeks. I haven’t had a vacation in so long. Jam tomorrow, jam yesterday.”

Rosemary smiles. Ever since they met at Oxford, some 40 years ago now, they’ve kept in touch across the Atlantic by phone calls and faxes, e-mail and bulletin boards, the occasional paper letter, the even rarer visit. They have shared their careers, their divorces, and their family news during those years, as well as this long-standing joke about Janet’s lack of vacations.

“Well, then.” Rosemary supplies the punch line. “I’d say that you’ve finally got your jam today.”

“Finally, yeah,” Janet says, grinning. “And the view from here is an extra helping. It makes me feel all John of Gauntish. This sceptred isle and like that.”

They are standing at a window on the top floor of the Canary Wharf office building, rising among the ruins of the Docklands. Since they are facing west, London stretches out before them into the misty distance on either side the Thames, glittering in the bright sun of a warm autumn day. All along the banks the new retaining walls rise, bleak slabs

of concrete, while the river runs fast and high between them. Janet can pick out the complex round the Tower and the new barricades round its ancient walls, protecting them from tides gone mad. Just east of the Tower, near what used to be St Katharine’s Docks, huge concrete pylons, hooded like monks in sheet metal, rise out of the river. Boats swarm round, workmen overrun them, all rushing to finish the new barrier before the winter sets in.

“Well,” Janet says. “Maybe not John of Gauntish. Rosemary, this is really pretty awful, the floods, I mean.”

“If the new barrier holds...” Rosemary lets her voice trail away.

Janet considers her friend for a moment. In the glittering light Rosemary looks exhausted. Her pale blonde and grey-streaked hair, carefully coiffed round a face innocent of make-up, somehow emphasizes the dark circles under her eyes. Along with a handful of other MPs, Rosemary fought long and hard to get the barrier built further east, just upriver from the old one, argued and insisted that the East End should be saved, that millions of people and their homes not be abandoned – but in the end, more powerful interests won. Engineers could guarantee the barrier if built at this loca-

ASYLUM



Illustrations by Noel Bateman

tion, and of course, it cost much less than her counter-proposal. As a sign of social impartiality, the Docklands, an embarrassment to British business for the last 40-odd years, have been left beyond the new barrier as well.

"We'd best go down," Rosemary says.

"Yeah." Janet turns, glancing round the lobby toward elevator doors that hang not quite at a right angle to the floor. "How long do you think this building's going to stand?"

"Well, we don't get earthquakes here, you know, like you do at home." Rosemary smiles briefly. "The Free University will probably be able to use it for some years yet. After all, the predictions are vague — about the warming trend, I mean. No one can pinpoint the rise year by year. It may even have peaked."

"That's true, of course. And if they get the embankment built up along here, well, that'll hold for a while more."

"If they do. If, my dear."

During the ride down neither woman speaks, both listen, rather, to every small creak and rattle that the cage and cables make. Ground water and shifting terrain have begun to damage the ever-so-delicate array of wires and power conduits upon which 20th-century buildings depended. When

the doors open smoothly at the ground floor, Janet lets out her breath in relief. She's glad, as well, to get outside to air that needs no artificial circulation.

On the small flagstone plaza students gather, chattering among themselves under the huge canvas banner, lettered in red, announcing the conference at which Janet has just been the featured guest. "Women's Gains: A Century of Progress." A century of crawling forward would be more honest, Janet thinks. Even on this lovely afternoon, the work to be done haunts her. She reminds herself that this is a vacation, that she has left all the files from outstanding cases at home, that her law practice will survive without her for two weeks and her new book will as well. Besides, her assistant back home has her itinerary, and he can always call if he really needs her.

"It was a good speech, you know," Rosemary says abruptly. "It was one of those that makes me think, my god, I know someone famous!"

Much to her own surprise, Janet blushes.

"Oh now really," Rosemary says. "Sorry."

"No problem. And I have to admit, I wallowed in all that

applause. But you should talk! Lately you've been in the media lots more than me."

"Only as a crank, my dear. Another Liberal Party crank, flogging her unpopular ideas."

"Well, don't you think that's what I am? Back in the States, I mean. A small 'l' liberal crank at best. A tool of Satan is more like it."

They look at each other, grimace, shrug, and walk across the plaza. In the shade of the low embankment, near the steps up to the RiverBus dock, someone has set up a table and folding chair. A young woman lounges in the chair; a monitor and set of input tablets lie on the table. Nearby stands a man of about 50, short and compact, his dark curly hair streaked with grey, his skin the light brown of Thames mud. At the sight of Rosemary he waves vigorously and grins.

"Jonathan, hullo!" Rosemary drifts over. "Have you met Janet? Janet Corey. Jonathan Richards."

They shake hands and smile. Jonathan wears a stubbornly old-fashioned shirt, white and buttoning up the front, with long sleeves rolled up just below his elbows.

"I'm manning the trenches today." Jonathan waves at the table and the monitor. "Petitions."

"Petitions for what?" Janet asks.

"Raising the banks round the Free University. I'm its bur-sar, you see, and I'm not looking forward to rowing to work every morning."

"Well, yeah, I guess not." Janet glances at the low dirt bank, topped with a thin layer of asphalt. "That won't hold long, if the predictions come true."

Jonathan nods, glancing at Rosemary, who sighs, reaches up to rub her eyes with the back of one hand.

"We keep introducing the special requisition," Rosemary says. "Perhaps if you do get some show of popular support..."

"Just so. Hence the petitions." He grins at Janet. "I'd ask you to sign, but obviously you vote elsewhere."

From the river drifts the sound of an airhorn — the hovercraft on its way to dock. Muttering goodbyes, fumbling in their handbags for pass cards, Rosemary and Janet hurry up the steps. Out on the water the hovercraft is pausing, backing, working its way through the crowd of small boats and barges, which are scurrying out of its way in turn. On the dock, down by the gangplank two men in the blue uniforms of the RiverFleet huddle over a portable media link. Janet can just hear the announcer's midget voice say, "deteriorating situation in Detroit" before music carries it away.

"Er, excuse me," Janet says. "Could you tell me what that was about?"

At the sound of her flat American voice the officer nods agreement. "I hope you're not from Detroit," he says. "There seem to have been more riots. Fuel oil rationing, I believe it was."

"Probably. It usually is. Thanks; thanks very much."

As she follows Rosemary down the gangplank to the boat, Janet wonders at herself, that she would take the news of "just another riot" so calmly.

News, bad news, dogs her holiday. As she leaves London, heading north on the Flying Scotsman, she reads of riots spreading all through the Rust Belt, from Chicago in the west to Baltimore in the east. Pictures of the American National Guard quelling riots scroll past on the media screens that hang from the girders in the Edinburgh station. By the next

morning, British time, the first deaths have occurred; the waiter in the hotel dining room informs her, his voice grave, as she helps herself to whole-grain cereal from a stoneware crock at the buffet. Seven young men, two young women, shot as they tried to loot — food in every case, he thinks it was.

"How dreadful." I'll never get used to this, at least. "How awful. Ohmigawd."

He nods, hesitating, glancing round the nearly empty dining room, where a profusion of white linen lies on sunny tables. In a far corner two elderly men eat behind matching newspapers.

"We had an American gentleman in earlier," he says at last. "He joked about it."

"No! Oh god, that's really awful. What did he say?"

Again the glance round. "He said that in his day, young people had the sense to loot luxury items, like televisions. Said he didn't know what was wrong with them, nowadays."

Janet cannot speak; she merely shakes her head.

"I didn't know what to answer," he says.

"I wouldn't have, either. You know, most Americans who can still afford to travel have, shall we say, rather right-wing leanings these days. The rest of us don't."

He smiles as if relieved, but she feels like a hypocrite, lumping herself in the category of "the rest of us" when she so obviously wears expensive slacks, a silk shirt, when she so undeniably is spending her vacation on expensive foreign soil.

"Shall I bring tea to your table or coffee?" the waiter says.

"Tea, please. Thank you."

For the next few days Janet tries to bury herself in problems of the past in order to ignore those of the present. She climbs up the rock of Din Edin, as she always thinks of it, where the Gododdin built their fortress. She knows too much about Mary Queen of Scots to romanticize her, finds herself avoiding the guided tour through the castle, and merely stands, looking down at the fang-sharp grey city below, while white stormclouds pile and build in the blue sky. That night, while she listens to the news on television, it rains. As an aside, almost an afterthought to the real news, the announcer speculates on how long the Holy Isle of Lindisfarne will remain above sea-level. The restored castle on its smaller version of Din Edin's rock is safe, of course, but on the flat, villagers stubbornly cling to ancestral land which sinks into a rising sea.

On the morrow, guidebook in hand, Janet wanders through the National Museum of Antiquities. She spends much of her time there studying the Pictish standing stones. Across the marble floor of a vast hall, decorated with murals of the Highlands, the newly completed collection stands, tucked away from acid rain as the Highlands themselves cannot be. The present, it seems, cannot be avoided.

In her hotel bedroom that night, while she writes postcards to her only child, Amanda, to her nephew Richie's family up in the Sierra Nevada, and finally, to friends, she flicks on the news out of habit and lets it rumble half-heard until American voices raised in anger force her to watch. Just a few seconds of footage make it plain that Congress has deadlocked over the question of imposing military law on rioting cities. Janet watches fat senators invoke God's name until at last the screen changes to local news, good news: the child who wandered away from his family last night has been found, chilled to the bone but unharmed.

Janet windows the screen into four, then flips channels, finds at last among the meagre 64 available on British television an international news feed, which turns out to be devoting itself to the droughts in Central Africa.

"Damn!" She flicks the monitor off. "But really, you know, you are supposed to be on vacation?"

Yet, all too soon, America invades her holidays across the bridge of the media. At first the troubles at home appear toward the end of a broadcast and only in the evening programme, but slowly they pull ahead and begin appearing on the morning feed as well. By her fourth night in Scotland, they've taken precedence over the Parliamentary debates about preserving British farmland. On the night that she reaches York, American news — the spreading of riots into Sunbelt cities, where fuel oil shortages provide no excuse — has inched in front of the ongoing discussion of whether King William should abdicate. By the time she reaches the Lake Country, the lead story and the headline in the newspapers as well have become **REGULAR ARMY UNITS SUPPLEMENT NATIONAL GUARD IN AMERICAN CITIES.**

Military law declared, generals replace mayors all across the nation — and in many pulpits though not all, preachers and priests announce that God is punishing America for pride and sin. The Times runs a special feature on the situation, which Janet reads, twice, sitting in the lounge of a small hotel, at a diamond-paned window, under a wood ceiling certified Tudor. Janet stares at the pictures of torn streets, impassive soldiers, smug preachers, for a very long time. All at once, she finds herself afraid.

The outcome reaches her in Cardiff. She has just emerged from the National Museum and crossed to the park where Iolo Morgannwg's gorsedd circle stands, a miniature henge of reddish stone. The morning's rain has stopped, leaving the pale grey civic buildings clean and gleaming, the sky a parade of sun and cloud, the grass between the slabs of Iolo's fancy bejewelled with drops. By the kerb a small electric truck dispenses whipped ice cream, and Janet debates buying a cone, setting her ever-present fear of cholesterol levels against the girlishness of this day. Not far away a group of teenagers huddle round a media kiosk — a newsstand, she suddenly realizes, not a video viewer, and without really thinking she drifts closer, hears the announcer mentioning Washington D.C. and drifts closer still. One of the boys looks up; she sees a familiar face, dark bangs, blue eyes, the busboy from her small hotel.

"You're the American, aren't you?"

"Yes, as a matter of fact."

Silently he steps to one side to let her have his place in the huddle. The announcer, mercifully, is speaking English.

"...riots feared in San Francisco. Units of the National Guard are moving into the city's centre in spite of scattered resistance."

Earthquake. Her first thought is natural disaster, the quake hit at last, the waiting over, and looters in the street. The announcer drones on.

"Although news lines are down all across the nation, it would seem that the only resistance to the coup does lie in California. Leaders of the junta report that the control of other major cities passed peacefully into their hands early this morning."

Nightmare, not earthquake.

"How well those reports may be trusted remains to be seen. An emergency session of the European parliament has

been called for later today. Earlier, the prime minister made this announcement outside Number Ten Downing street..."

"Ohmigawd." Janet hears her voice tremble and skip. "Ohmigawd."

The young men are watching her, she realizes. One steps forward and touches her elbow. "I'll flag you down a cab."

She can only nod, not speak, merely stands and trembles until at last the compu-cab pulls up to the kerb.

Back at her hotel room the telephone blinks, signalling messages. Janet hits the button, stands in the middle of the room and listens, merely stands and looks at striped wallpaper while Rosemary's voice, harsh with unfamiliar urgency, asks if she'd heard the news. A second call, from her daughter, Mandi, left behind in San Francisco — for this Janet watches the phonevid. Mandi's face is dead pale, her hands shake, even as she assures her mother that she's all right. When Mandi begs her to call as soon as she can, Janet finds herself speaking aloud, "of course, dear," in answer. A third message — this from her assistant, a terrible connection, Eddie's voice chattering fast over the sound of traffic. The phonevid shows only static.

"I'm calling from a payphone. I hope to god you get this. Don't come home. They ransacked the office this morning. It's Seven Days in May. They took the files. Don't come home. Stay where you are."

Other voices break into the background of the call. Eddie curses. A click, the message over. Janet sits down in a blue-flowered chair next to the telephone, rewinds the tape, and listens to all three messages again. Clever of Eddie, to use the name of an old video to tell her everything she needs to know. The army's been in her office. Half her discrimination cases pended against various military bureaucracies. There is no doubt now who will win them.

Her mouth is dry, her hands shake, and she feels abruptly cold, gets up to find a sweater, stares numbly round the room while she tries to remember what made her stand up, sits down again. She should call Mandi, reaches for the phone, stops herself. Doubtless they, this vast, suddenly ominous "they," will have tapped Mandi's phone by now. Will they go to Mandi's flat and take her away like the files?

"Her engagement will save her." Janet hears her own voice tremble, continues speaking aloud just to hear a voice in the room. "She's Army now herself, really. She's going to marry an officer. He'll take care of her. Jack's a good guy."

Unless he has chosen to honour his sworn oath to the Constitution and refused to go along with the coup? Jack's stationed in California, after all, named by the announcer as the one place offering any resistance. But who's resisting? Military units? Street gangs? Libertarian and survivalist fighter packs? All of these in some patched-together coalition?

"I've got to call my daughter."

Janet reaches for the phone, pulls her hand back. If she calls, she might implicate Mandi in ... in what? Something, anything, being the daughter of a liberal, who knows now what the word, crime, may mean. They've taken my files. They know all about me. They know about my daughter. When the phone rings, Janet screams. She gulps a deep breath and picks it up on the third pair of rings.

"Janet? Thank god." Rosemary's voice, slightly breathless, precedes her image, irising onto the phonevid. "You've heard?"

"Sure have."

"Well, look, the maglev train runs from Cardiff to London every hour up until seven o'clock tonight. Call me once you've bought your ticket and I'll arrange to have you met at Euston. It's going to take a while, so we have to start the process as soon as possible, and of course you'll have to declare, so you'll need to be at my office tomorrow morning."

"Declare? Rosemary, wait, slow down. What process?"

"Applying for political asylum, of course. Janet, my dear friend! I've just been briefed by the Foreign Office. You can't go back. You'll be arrested the moment you step off the plane. They're rounding up anyone who might oppose them. It's horrid."

Janet stares at the stripes, blue and white and grey.

"Janet? Janet, look at the camera. Are you all right?"

"Yeah, sure, sorry."

"Well, this has all been a bit of a shock, I'm sure."

Janet restrains the urge to laugh like a madwoman.

"At any rate," Rosemary goes on. "Do get packed up and get yourself down to the station. Wait, someone's talking ..." A long pause while Rosemary chews on her lower lip. "Good god! Janet, listen. I'll have a ticket waiting for you there. They might have taken over your accounts. Your cards might not work. I'll contact your hotel, too."

"Already? They might have cut people's cards off already? Oh God, they must have been planning this thing for years!"

"Yes, it would certainly seem so. The Foreign Office are shocked, really shocked. They've been keeping an eye on something called the Eagle Brotherhood, but they had no idea of just how high it reached. Well. I'll brief you later. Just get to London, so you can declare."

"Of course. Should I keep an eye out for assassins?"

"Good God, don't joke!"

"Okay. Sorry. I'm on my way. Oh, Rosemary, wait!"

"Yes, still here."

"Don't worry about the train ticket. I've got a BritTravel pass. They couldn't have touched that."

"Right. I'll just ring up your hotel, then."

Janet crams clothes and her bedtime book into her suitcases, checks the bathroom and finds her various toiletries, crams them into plastic bags and stuffs them into a side pocket of the biggest case. She carries the luggage down herself, reaches the hotel desk to find the clerk talking to Rosemary, writing down her charge numbers to settle the bill. The clerk pauses, her dark eyes narrow with worry, with sympathy.

"It's all been taken care of, ma'am."

"Thank you. Could you call a cab for me? Or wait, will they take a BritTravel card?"

"They will, yes. Best of luck to you, ma'am."

"Thanks."

Janet restrains the urge to add "I'll need it" like a character in an old video.

On the maglev, the trip to London takes a bare hour. Through polarized glass Janet sees the countryside shoot by, clear in the far distance, blurred close to the train. Although she's used to thinking on her feet, having practised for years in front of hostile judges, today she cannot think, can only worry about her daughter, her assistant, her sometime lover and closest friend, Robert, and all the other friends in their politically active circle, all left behind in San Francisco. I alone have escaped to tell you. She leans her face against the cool glass and trembles, too tormented to weep.

At Euston she hauls her bags off the train, finds a luggage cart and ladles them in, then trudges down the long platform, leaning on the cart handle for support like some bag lady, drifting through the streets with all she owns before her. As she emerges into the cavernous station hall, she sees two things: the enormous media screen on the far wall, and Jonathan Richards, wearing an old-fashioned tweed jacket flung over an old-fashioned blue shirt, hurrying to meet her. On the screen a man in uniform stands in the Oval Office next to a pale and shaking president. Across the boom and bustle of the hall the general's words die before they reach her.

"Hullo," Jonathan says. "I'd hoped to see you again on a better day than this."

"Yeah, really."

"Rosemary rang me up and pressed me into service. She's afraid that sending an official car would attract too much attention."

Janet starts to answer, but her mouth seems to have frozen into place. Attract too much attention? From whom? Does the coup have the power to pluck its enemies from the streets of foreign cities?

"Rather a nasty situation all round," Jonathan says. "Here, I'll push that cart. The wheels always stick on these beasts." Nodding, Janet relinquishes the handle. As she follows him through the crowd she is trying to convince herself that she's simply too unimportant to be a target, but her new book rises in her memory, and its brisk sales – *Christian Fascism: The Politics of Righteousness*. She thinks: *You saw this coming, you've seen it for years, why are you so surprised?*

Jonathan has spoken to her.

"I'm sorry," Janet says. "I missed that."

He smiles, his eyes weary. "Quite understandable. I'm just abandoning the cart. We go down the steps here."

Books and papers heap the back seat of Jonathan's small electric Morris. He slings the luggage in on top of them, hands Janet into the front seat, then hurries round behind the wheel. As they pull out, Janet realizes that night's fallen. Street lamps halo out bright in a rising mist.

"Where are we going?"

"Rosemary's flat."

"Ah. Thank you. I mean, really, thanks for coming down like this."

"Quite all right."

During the drive out to Kew, where Rosemary lives in a huge walled complex of townhouses and gardens, Janet says very little. Her mind searches for its old humour, tries to find some quip or irony, fails, trails away into wonderings about Mandi and Robert. Suddenly she remembers that Robert talked about leaving the city during her vacation, about going up to her mother's old house in the mountains. If he has, he will be safe; up in Goldust her family knows him, and they will take him in if he needs it. If he left. Will she ever know?

"Jonathan? Have you heard if the phone lines to the States are down?"

"It seems to depend on where you want to call. The various media have their own links, of course. The new programme that I was listening to on the radio implied that private calls are difficult, and the farther west you want to go, the worse it is."

"I was thinking that might be the case, yeah."

"We'll get some sort of underground news network set up

down at the university as soon as we can. Hackers." He glances her way briefly. "For a respectable sort of person I happen to know a remarkable number of hackers."

"They'll see it as the best game in the world."

When they reach the flat, Rosemary's housekeeper lets them in, takes the luggage from Jonathan and takes it away. They wander into Rosemary's yellow and white parlour, all slender Eurostil furniture and wall paintings. Rosemary loves florals, and on the display screens glow Renoirs and Monets, each garden blooming for some minutes, then fading to allow the next to appear. Jonathan heads straight for a white wooden cabinet.

"Drink?" he says.

"Gin and tonic, please. I bet Rosemary's on the phone."

"She'll be hoarse before the night's out, yes."

Janet sinks into the corner of the pale leather sofa only to find herself confronted with a picture of her daughter, a snapshot she herself took on the day that Mandi graduated from college. Rosemary has had it enlarged and printed out, then framed in a yellow acrylic oval. In her dark red robes and mortar board Mandi looks overwhelmed, no matter how brightly she smiles for her mother's camera. She is pale and blue-eyed, like her grandmother, and her long blonde hair streams over her shoulders. All at once Janet's eyes fill with tears. She shakes them away and looks up to find Jonathan holding out a glass.

"I'm so sorry," he says.

She nods and takes the drink.

"You must be worried sick about your daughter."

"I am, yeah." She takes a sip before she goes on. "But actually, I was thinking of my mother. I'm really glad she didn't live to see this."

Jonathan sighs and flops into an armchair opposite. He is drinking something golden-brown, scotch, most likely, sips it and seems to be searching for something to say. Wearing a crumpled blue suit, Rosemary steps in to the room. Her red scarf slides from her shoulder and falls without her noticing.

"Hullo!" She smiles at Janet. "It is so good to see you safe."

"Thanks. Really, thank you for all the help. I don't know what I'd have done without it."

"I'm sure you'd have thought of something, but I'm glad I'm placed as I am. Sorry I was on the phone when you arrived. I've been being courted. Rather nice, really."

"By the party whip, I assume?" Jonathan hands her a drink.

"Exactly." Rosemary sinks down into the other corner of the sofa. "Thank you, darling." She pauses for a long sip. "This is the situation. Emergency session tonight in a few hours. Labour want to threaten an immediate boycott of all American goods and services and to call for immediate restoration of democracy. The Tories, of course, do not. Enough Labour members may bolt to make our votes important. The Labour leaders are willing to be accommodating. I pretended to have doubts about the boycott for the sake of the British middle class." Rosemary smiles briefly. "And so you'll get the embankment, Jonathan, to protect the Free University."

"Brilliant!"

"Tremendous!"

Jonathan and Janet raise their glasses and salute her.

"Corrupt, actually," Rosemary says. "But there we are." She turns Janet's way. "I'm having some information transmitted to my terminal for you. About applying for asylum. We'd best get that underway tomorrow. They're setting up a board to handle the applications, you see."



"Do you think there'll be a crush?" Jonathan said. "Most of the Yanks I've met lately will be overjoyed at the developments."

Rosemary shrugs.

"The coup wouldn't have struck without being sure of having a broad base of support," Janet says. "They've been building it for years. Mostly by playing on the crime issue — you know, the need for order in our embattled streets. And of course, moral values. The so-called family values."

"It's always order, isn't it?" Jonathan says. "The excuse, I mean, for military governments. We must have order. Keep the people in line."

Janet nods agreement.

"Anyway, we'll have dinner before I go," Rosemary says. "Have you remembered to eat today?"

"No." Janet allows herself a smile. "Not since breakfast. Kind of a long time ago now."

"Thompson will be serving soon, I should think. You know, I have no idea what sort of questions the Board will want answered during the asylum proceedings. Your books and career should be enough to satisfy them you're in danger. I hope they don't want an actual threat or your presence on some sort of list. How long do you have left on your tourist visa?"

"Close to two months."

"Splendid! Surely that should be enough, even for a bureaucracy."

"Even for a British bureaucracy?" Jonathan puts in, grinning.

Rosemary groans and holds out her glass for a refill.

"It's a good question, though," Janet says. "I'll have to have some visible means of support, won't I?"

"Oh here." Jonathan pauses on his way to the liquor cabinet. "Surely that won't be a factor in the Board's decision."

"It might," Rosemary breaks in. "The junta are bound to put pressure on our government in turn. They do have all the bombs, you know. I imagine they'll be able to force a very strict adherence to the rules and regulations for this sort of thing."

Jonathan thinks, chewing on his lower lip.

"Well, here," he says at last. "The Free University sponsor lecture series. There's no doubt that you'd be a major attraction, Janet. First, a series of public lectures featuring your book: Christian fascism — its roots and rise. Then a proper course for the student body: American Fascism, the historical background. I foresee no difficulty in getting the Committee to approve it."

"No doubt they'll thank you." Rosemary turns a good bit brighter. "And of course, the book! It's only just come out here, and my god, what a publicity event!"

Janet tries to laugh and fails.

"But what about the money from that?" Rosemary goes on. "Does it go to your agent in America?"

"No, fortunately. She has a co-agent here in London, and David gets all monies received and converts them to pounds before he sends them on. I'll call him tomorrow. He can just send my agent her cut and let me have the rest. Oh my god. My agent!"

"Oh now here," Rosemary says. "You don't think she'll be arrested?"

Janet shrugs helplessly. She has absolutely no idea which of her acquaintances might be endangered by the simple act of knowing her.

"It sounds to me," Jonathan says, "that one way or another you'll do very well for yourself."

"Yeah, it does, doesn't it? If I don't mind being a professional exile."

Although Janet meant the phrase as irony, it cracks out of her mouth like a pistol shot. Rosemary sighs and watches her, worried. Jonathan busies himself with refilling glasses.

"Well, sorry," Janet says. "It's not like I have a lot of choice."

"Just so, darling. Do you want to try to ring Mandi? It can't put her into any worse danger than she's already in."

"Just from having a mother like me? Oh god. But yeah, I do. I'll just go into the other room."

"The green guest room. The one you had before."

Janet sits on the edge of a narrow bed in a pool of yellow light and punches code into the handset. Halfway through, at the code for the San Francisco Bay Area, a string of whistles and shrieks interrupt.

"I'm sorry, but we cannot complete your call as dialled. Please attempt to ring through at a later time."

"Damn!"

Later that night, when Rosemary has gone off to the Houses of Parliament and Jonathan to his home, Janet lies on the bed in her green and white guest room and watches the late news. Footage of tanks rolling down American streets, soldiers standing on guard in front of banks, here and there the ruins of a shelled building — and yet it seems clear that the coup has faced little resistance, except out in the American west. The east, the south, and the capital belong, heart and soul, to the coup and the Christian right. Utah as well has declared for the new government, as have the southern counties of California, but up in the mountains, the Rockies, the Sierra Nevada, the rain forests of the Cascades — in the high places even the spokesmen for the junta admit that a campaign of "pacification" lies ahead of them. There are no reports at all from Alaska. All network links seem to be down. Since the Native Americans there have been sabotaging government installations for the past 15 years, Janet can guess that they've found sudden allies among the whites.

It doesn't matter, Janet knows. In the end the coup will win, because the areas that resist matter little to the economic life of the country. They can be cut off and starved out until their cities fall to the neo-fascists. Perhaps Alaska will stay free, an instant republic. Down in the continental United States, up in the mountains, a guerilla war may continue for years, an annoyance but no threat to the new government, fought by a patchwork army of libertarians, survivalists, and honourable men.

The newscast changes to a parade through Washington, rank after rank of soldiers, Army and Marines marching through the rain. Past the Lincoln Memorial — Janet lays down the remote to wipe tears from her eyes. Yet she cannot stop watching, finds herself staring at the screen, puzzling over some small detail. She finds the close-up function, slides it on, zeroes her little white square over one soldier, clicks — and sees upon his shoulder the new patch added to his dress uniform, a white cross on a blue ground. She punches the screen back to normal so hard that the remote squalls in protest.

The end of the newscast shows the Senate voting extraordinary powers to the new chief of government security, that is, to the head of the coup, an Air Force general named James

Rogers, and, almost as an afterthought, establishing a new office of public security, to be headed by a certain Colonel Nicholas Harrison. One picture catches Janet by surprise — she hadn't expected Rogers to be black, just somehow hadn't expected it.

Janet flicks off the terminal. For a long time she lies on the bed, staring at the blank screen, until at last she falls asleep with the lights on.

Morning brings coffee (real coffee served in a big mug by the ever-efficient Thompson), the sound of rain pounding on the windows, and memories. On the nightstand lies a telephone, its little screen a green gleam of temptation. Call my daughter. Don't dare. Thompson opens one pair of curtains to grey light, smiles, and leaves again.

Janet gets up, flicks on the news, and dresses, gulping down the coffee in the intervals between zipping up her jeans and pulling a sweater over her head. The American coup has taken over the television as well as the United States. Janet windows the screen into four, finds a silent feed station for one, mutes the sound on two other programmes, and lets the BBC announcer drone at low volume while she unpacks her suitcases.

Except for Seattle the coup now controls every city in the continental United States. The BBC expect Seattle to surrender at any moment, guarded as it is by only two regiments of National Guard and some armed citizens. Since Russia and Japan have both offered their protection to the new Republic of Alaska, it will probably stand. In all three programme windows video rolls endlessly, tanks, Congress, dead bodies, fighter planes, refugees streaming north into Canada from Seattle and Detroit. On the silent feed maps flash; Janet takes a moment to click on the western states and freeze their image upon the screen. She zeroes in on San Francisco, clicks to magnify, sees a street map covered in a thin wash of red, too cheerfully raspberry for even metaphorical blood. The junta holds the city, the bridges are secured.

The search function throws a box on to the screen.

"Do you wish to see a news feed from the city you have selected?"

"Yes."

The BBC disappears, and an ITV reporter pops into focus, standing in Civic Centre. Behind her rises City Hall, grey and domed in a foggy morning, but the high steps are strewn with corpses. Janet begins to tremble. She sits down on the edge of the bed and clasps her mug in both hands while the reporter, pale and dishevelled, speaks in a low voice of a night of horror, of teenagers firing handguns at tanks, of teenagers shot down by those who were once their countrymen. The camera starts to pan through the pollarded trees of the skimpy plaza. A siren breaks into the feed; the reporter shouts something into her microphone; the feed goes dead.

Janet raises the remote and clicks the monitor off. She cannot watch any more of those pictures. Yet she must see more, she must know more. She raises the remote again, then hurls it onto the carpet. *You'll feel better if you cry. Why can't you cry?*

She cannot answer.

"More coffee?"

Thompson at the door, holding a tray — a silver pot, a pitcher of milk, a plate of something covered by a napkin.

"Yes, thanks. Is Mrs White at home?"

"No, ma'am. She's gone to her office."

"Ah. I thought so."

Thompson sets the tray on the dresser, then stoops and picks up the remote. Janet takes it from him and without thinking, flips the monitor on again. An ITV executive stands before a studio camera, speaking very fast and very high while sweat beads on his high forehead. As far as he can determine, his crew in San Francisco have been arrested, hauled away like common criminals despite every provision of the UNESCO media pact signed just last year in Nairobi. Janet changes the station out from under his indignation. This time a search on the strings "San Francisco" and "northern California" turn up nothing, not on one of the 64 channels.

Janet makes the BBC and the silent feed into insets at the top of the screen, punches up the terminal program, then glances round for a more convenient input device than the TV wand. On the dresser, next to the silver tray, lies a remote keyboard. She picks it up, looks under the napkin — croissants, which normally she loves. Today they look disgusting. She sits on the floor with her back against the foot of the bed and rests the keyboard in her lap while she runs a quick search on documents filed under her name. She finds two directories created and set aside, coded for use, ASYLUM and JANETSWORK. Once again, Rosemary proves herself the hostess who thinks of everything.

When Janet brings up the first directory, she finds more than a meg of docs listed, including the full text of the Special Circumstances Immigration Act of 2028 and a sub-directory of material pertaining to the famous Singh case that triggered the writing of said legislation.

"It's a good thing I'm a lawyer. Hey, I better get used to saying solicitor."

Janet cannot laugh, wishes she could cry. In her mind sound the words, "call your daughter." All morning, as she studies the government-supplied infofiles and readies her application on the official forms, she pauses every ten minutes to try Mandi's number, but the phone lines stay stubbornly down. While she works, she glances often at the two inset windows, where footage of the States in chaos silently rolls by. Finally, toward noon, she transmits the completed application to the office LOC number listed on the form. As an afterthought, she prints out a copy, wondering if perhaps she should go down and apply in person as well. When she calls Rosemary's office, she gets Rosemary herself. Even on the tiny phonevid Janet can see dark smudges under her friend's eyes.

"I'm surprised you're there."

"I just popped in to the office for a minute," Rosemary says, yawning. "Have you transmitted the application?"

"I did, yeah. Yesterday you said something about going down to New Whitehall. Do you think I —"

"No, don't! I've heard that pictures are being taken of Americans entering the building."

"Taken? By whom? Wait, no, of course you can't tell me."

Rosemary's image smiles, very faintly.

"I'll just check to make sure the transmission's been received, then," Janet says. "And stay here."

"Yes. That would be best. I'll be back for dinner. If you'd just tell Thompson?"

"Of course."

Rosemary smiles again and rings off.

Janet returns the monitor screen to four windows of news. When she runs the search program, she finds one station

with taped video from San Francisco, looping while serious voices discuss the news blackout. Colonel Harrison has issued a statement assuring the world media that the blackout is both regretted and temporary, that the telephone service has been disrupted by rebel sabotage and that it will be restored as soon as possible. No one believes him. As the video reels by, about an hour's worth all told, Janet watches like a huntress, her eyes moving back and forth, studying details, searching desperately for the images of people she knows, seeing none, even though she stays in front of the monitor all day, watching the same loop, over and over.

"Rosemary was quite right," Jonathan says. "The committee are beside themselves with joy. How soon can you give the first lecture? That was their only question."

"Wonderful," Janet says. "In a couple of days, I guess. I'll have to call Eleanor — that's my editor — and see if she can send me a copy of the book. I didn't have one with me, and I don't have any cash, and I can't stand asking Rosemary for pocket money. She's done too much for me already, feeding me and like that. Maybe I can squeeze an advance out of HCM. God knows the book's been selling like crazy over here."

"HCM?"

"HarperCollinsMitsubishi. My British publisher."

Jonathan nods his understanding. On a day streaked with sun and shadow they are walking through the gardens in the centre of the condominium complex. Although the trees have dropped their leaves, the grass thrives, stubbornly green. All round the open space rise white buildings, staggered like drunken ziggurats.

"No word from the immigration people yet?" Jonathan says.

"None. But it's only been a couple of days since I filed the application."

"They probably haven't even looked at it, then. The morning news said that over two thousand Americans have applied for political asylum in various countries. Quite a few business people were caught in Europe, I gather. A lot of them have come here."

"Yeah. I heard that three times that number are just going home." Janet hears her voice growl with bitterness. "Happy as clams with their new theocracy."

"Um, well, yes." Jonathan sighs, hesitates before continuing. "At any rate, I've got the University's contracts for the public series and then for the course of study. I'll transmit them to you tonight, so you can look them over. We'll need to get handbills out for the lectures, by the way, and some notice to the media. We'd best start thinking of a general title."

"That's true. I wonder if I'll get hecklers? Oh well, they'll be easier to handle than the ones back home."

"Rosemary told me once that you'd — well, had some trouble with thugs."

"Oh yeah. They beat the hell out of me. It was after an abortion rights rally, maybe what? Thirty years ago now. I had bruises for weeks. And a broken arm."

"Horrible, absolutely horrible! It's lucky you weren't killed."

"A lot of people were, back in those days. Doctors, nurses. Doctor's wives, even." Janet shudders reflexively. She can still remember images of fists swinging toward her face and hear voices shrieking with rage, chanting Jesus Jesus Jesus. "All in

the name of God. No, that's not fair. In the name of the warped little conception of God that these people have."

"The history of an illusion. Living history, unfortunately."

"Yeah, very much alive and well in the US of A. I suppose abortion's the first thing the new government's going to outlaw."

"They have already. The Times had a list, this morning, of the various acts they've pushed through your Congress. Quite a lot for just a few days' work. The junta released the list, you see. They're holding press conferences for official news as well."

"I should look that over." Janet tries to muster an ironic laugh, can't. "Well, there goes my life's work, right down the drain. What do you bet that I've been on the wrong side of every law they've just passed?"

"Doesn't sound like my idea of a fair wager at all." He hesitates, frowning down at the gravelled walk. "Rosemary said there's been no word of your daughter."

"That's right, yeah. Well, no news is good news. The Red Cross doesn't have her name on any of the casualty lists. It hasn't appeared on any of the lists of political prisoners, either."

"That's something, then. Some of my young friends are working on getting a network pieced together. Perhaps they'll run across something."

"How can they even reach the States with the phone lines down?"

"Satellite feeds of some sort. Military, probably. I've asked them not to tell me more. And then they can maybe get in through Canada. Somehow. As I say, I don't really want to know."

That evening Janet goes over the contracts from the Free University, finds them fair and the proposed payment, generous. Since the money will come from a special fund, the cheque will no doubt be slow in coming. She decides to call her agent tomorrow and ask him to see about an advance from the publishers.

"But who knows when we'll get it?" Janet says. "Rosemary, I hate sponging on you like this."

"Oh please!" Rosemary rolls her eyes heavenward. "Who was it who fed and housed my wretched son when he was going through his loathsome phase? He leached for absolutely months."

"Oh, he was no trouble, really, since I wasn't his mother."

They share a laugh at the now-respectable Adrian's expense.

"Well, you're not any trouble, either," Rosemary goes on. "In fact, that reminds me. I had a phonecard made up for you — on my account, that is. It'll be weeks before you can open your own, and you'll need access."

"Well, I will, yeah. Thanks. I wonder when I'll be able to phone home."

They both find themselves turning in their chairs, glancing toward Mandi's picture on the end table.

"Sometimes I'm sorry that I waited so long to have a child," Janet says. "Here I am in my 60s, and she's just getting married. God, I hope she's still getting married. Jack means the world to her."

"She's not like us, no."

In the photo Mandi smiles, tremulous under her mortarboard, the English literature major with no desire to go to graduate school.

"I just hope she's happy." Janet's voice shakes in her

throat. "I just hope she's all right. You know what the worst thing is? Wondering if she hates me, wondering if she hates what I am."

"Oh, surely not!"

"If they won't let her marry Jack? If they call her a security risk?"

"Oh God, they wouldn't!"

"Who knows? Look at the things that happened back in the 1950s, with that McCarthy creature. Witch hunts. It could happen again. I won't know how she feels until I get through."

Rosemary is watching her carefully, patiently. Janet concentrates upon the changing gardens on the display screen, view after view of Giverny fading one into the other.

"They'll have to restore the telephones soon," Rosemary remarks at last. "Business people are howling world-wide. The more centrist Tories are coming round, even. Imagine! Tories actually entertaining thoughts of a commercial boycott! I hear the European parliament is considering a strong resolution to embargo. It's supposed to come to a head tonight. Then we'll take it up tomorrow here, if it passes. Of course, it's just a call for embargo, not a binding act."

"The junta won't care."

"What? Half of America's wealth is in trade!"

"I know these people. They'll be willing to plunge the country into poverty, if that's what it takes to keep it isolated and under control. Of course, if they do that, they'll lose a lot of their support among the middle class and the corporate types. So what? It's a little late for those people to be changing their damn minds now."

"Yes. Rather."

"Well, I mean, that's just my opinion."

"It's one of the best we have, isn't it?"

"What?"

"Well, you have lived there." Rosemary shakes her head. "It's so odd — I read your book, and yet I thought you were being something of an alarmist. I suppose I didn't want, I suppose no one wanted to believe it possible, like that ancient novel, what was it called, the Wells?"

"Nineteen Eighty-Four?"

"No, that's Orwell. The other Wells fellow. It Can't Happen Here. That was it. I think."

"Well, it hasn't happened here, just there."

"Yes." Rosemary hesitates for a long moment, then sighs. "Yes, but that's quite bad enough."

Janet was always good at waiting. In discrimination cases waiting served as a weapon, asking the court for a postponement here, a recess there, playing a hard game with powerful opponents who knew that every day they waited without settling was another day for her team to gather evidence, to sway public opinion, to demand another investigation, to serve another writ. But none of those waits ever involved her daughter.

Over that first fortnight of exile, Janet evolves a ritual. Every morning she scans the news, both media and hard copy, for information about the American telephone shut-down, as the papers have taken to calling it. Then, on the off-chance that she missed something, she calls Mandi's number four times a day, mid-morning, mid-afternoon, dinner hour, late night. She never gets through. Since the junta has stopped all out-going calls, Mandi cannot call her. Janet assumes her daughter knows where she is, that she must



realize, by now, that her mother will be sheltering with the woman Mandi's always considered her aunt. Every now and then some military spokesman announces that service will be restored soon, very soon. Oddly enough, the infamous Colonel Harrison has disappeared, and a new chief of public security appears now and again on the news. Janet assumes that Harrison has fallen victim to some sort of internal purge; fascists always do fall out among themselves, sooner or later.

Some news does get released: the names of casualties, the names of those imprisoned. Unlike South American dictatorships, which at least realize their crimes to be unspeakable, this junta sees no reason to conceal their victims in silences and mass graves, not when they believe themselves the agents of God on earth. Amanda Elizabeth Hansen-Corey never appears among the names, not on either list. Janet reads each three times through, very slowly, to be absolutely certain of it. By doing so she finally spots Eddie's name, spelled out formally as Jose Eduardo Rodriguez, who has been sentenced to six months imprisonment for assisting an enemy of the state.

"Oh, Eddie! How horrible, how unfair!"

Only much later does Janet realize the full significance of the charge. She herself, of course, is the enemy of the state to whom they referred. She has now been publicly branded as a criminal.

The students at the Free University call their building Major's Last Erection, a name that's been handed down for the last 40 years or so, even though few people remember who the major in question was. A prime minister, Janet tells them, not an army officer at all. Few seem to care. Several times a week she goes down to Canary Wharf, ostensibly to meet with Jonathan and the Curriculum Committee, but in reality to sit around and drink tea with a group of women students. Like most of the students at the university, Rachel, Mary, Vi, and Sherry come from working-class backgrounds; indeed, they all work, waitressing part-time, mostly, to keep themselves in school.

Vi — small, skinny, and very pale, with ash-blond hair and watery blue eyes — always wears black, black jeans, black shirts, black cloth jackets, since she can't afford leather. Unlike the rest, she knows computers from the inside rather than merely being able to use what BritLink offers the average citizen. Her father was a repairman for the computer end of the Underground; he helped his daughter put together her own system from obsolete parts when she was seven years old.

"It was for my birthday, like," Vi tells Janet. "I was ever so pleased with it, too, all those lovely games it could play. 'Course, I'd never seen a real system then, mind." She grins with a flash of gold tooth. "But it was a good time, anyway, and it got me off to a good start."

Good start, indeed. When the other girls leave for their jobs, Vi takes Janet up to the thirteenth floor of the office building and a room officially labelled, "Computer Laboratory." They march through the ranks of official students learning programming and pass through a door into a smaller room, where Vi's boyfriend, Harry, has put together another system from spare parts — but these, state of art and pilfered, probably. Janet never asks. Vi is installing a remote feed to a satellite hook-up in the pub where Rachel works over in Southwark, just a few blocks from the cathedral. This

particular pub features sports on television and thus owns its weak link-up quite legitimately, but it's also close to various corporate offices with strong links and remote feeds to other satellite systems.

"Piece of cake," Vi says. "Once we link up to the Goal Posts' feed, we can bleed into anything within a couple of kills."

"Kills?"

"Sorry. Kilometres. And then." Vi smiles with a flash of gold. "And then we'll see. You don't want to know any more."

"That's very true." Janet grins at her. "I don't."

At Janet's first public lecture so many people turn up to buy tickets that the University Audio/Visual crew set up a video link to a second auditorium to accommodate the overflow. At the second lecture, scheduled for the largest hall available, two unobtrusive men in dark blue suits appear upon the platform as Janet arranges her notes. Jonathan introduces them as Sergeant Ford, Officer Patel.

"The Foreign Office thought you'd best have some protection," Ford remarks. "You never know these days, do you now?"

"Ah, well, no, I suppose not." Janet is annoyed to find her hands shaking. She shoves them into the pockets of her blue blazer. "You're from the Foreign Office?"

"No, ma'am. Scotland Yard. They just had a word with us, like."

"I see. Well, thank you."

During the lecture Ford sits on the platform while Patel stands at the back of the hall. After the lecture they follow, staying close but not too close, as she goes to lunch with Jonathan and several students. When she returns to the condominium, Patel escorts her while Ford follows in an unmarked car. At the gate to the complex, Patel has a few murmured words with a new security guard. Janet has never seen security guards at the gate before. From then on, she sees guards every day.

On the 17th day of her exile Janet receives a telephone call from the Immigration Office. Her application for political asylum is being processed. If her application is accepted, she will be issued a "red card," a visa allowing employment, good for a two years' stay in Britain, at which point her case will need to be reviewed. Janet, who knows all this, senses trouble.

"Is something missing on the application?"

"Well, not exactly." The blonde and pink-cheeked girl on the phonevid looks sorrowful. "It would be a good thing, you see, if you had a bank account or some sort of financial arrangement. We can't legally require this, but ..."

Janet has heard many such "buts," fading with a dying fall, in her career. "I understand. Thank you very much. I'll attend to it."

"Fine. Just transmit a one oh oh four seven, will you?"

"A what?"

"A change or correction to an application form. The parameters should have been transmitted with your packet."

"Yes, of course. I do remember seeing the file now."

On the high street in Kew stands an imposing Eurostil building, all glass front and slender columns, a branch of Barclay-Shanghai-Consolidated. Armed with several large checks, one from her publisher, another from the Free University's public affairs fund, Janet walks in one sunny afternoon to open a checking account. Does she have references?

Well, she can give them. But does she have the references with her, signed and ready? By British citizens, please. With the situation in America so dodgy, they are worried about money transfers and suchlike. Surely she understands? No, she does not understand. She has cheques drawn upon British banks in her possession, paper cheques, stamped and validated for instant deposit. Ah. Another manager must be called.

This manager, tall and grey, sports incredibly refined vowels. Janet tells her story once again, waves the cheques about, mentions Rosemary's name several times. He understands, he tells her, but with the situation in America so dodgy, they would prefer to have a British co-signer. Janet tells him, with some vehemence, that she is not a minor child or a halfwit. The manager bows several times in an oddly Japanese manner and apologizes as well. He drops his voice, leans forward in a waft of lemon-drop scent.

"The real problem is that you've not got your red card."

"If I don't have a bank reference, I won't get one."

He blinks rapidly several times and looks round the cream-coloured lobby. Janet does, as well, and spots a large brightly coloured poster.

"It says there that any one can open a Christmas Savings Club account. 'From nine to 90 years of age, all are welcome.' It must be a special deal, huh?"

The manager blinks again and stares.

"I want to open a Christmas Club account," Janet says, as calmly as she can manage. "According to your own advertising, I may do so any time before 15th November. It is November 11th today."

"Ah, why, so it is." He sighs in a long drawn-out gush of defeat. "If you'll just step up to this counter?"

Janet deposits over a thousand pounds in her Christmas Savings Club account and receives in return a bank number, an electronic access number, and a passbook with a picture of Father Christmas on the front. Later that day, she brings up the bank's public information files on her terminal and spends several hours studying them. As she suspected, holders of one account may open another electronically. She opens herself a checking account, transfers most of her Christmas Club monies into it at a mere one per cent penalty, and has two numbers to transmit to Immigration on Form 10047.

On the 27th day after the junta killed the United States of America, their underlings restore full international telephone service to the corpse. Thompson brings Janet the news with her breakfast.

"They say the service isn't at top quality yet, Ma'am."

"As long as I can get through, I don't care."

Janet checks the time: seven o'clock here, minus eight makes damn! eleven at night there. Mandi will most likely be asleep, but Janet cannot wait. Even reaching her daughter's answering machine will be better than nothing.

Picking up the handset gives her a moment of doubt. Will this call bring Rosemary trouble? For a moment she considers the shiny plastic oblong, studded with buttons. Somewhere inside it lies the white strip of encoded optics that sum up Rosemary's identity as a communicating being. Somewhere in a vast computer is the Platonic ideal of this actual number, the electronic archetype which gives this physical object its true meaning, its being. Frail things, these archetypes, and so easy to destroy with one electric pulse,

one change of code. What if the junta is automatically wiping codes that dial certain numbers? Could they do that?

Not to a British citizen's account, surely. Janet punches in Mandi's familiar number. Although the call seems to go through smoothly, after two rings a long beep interrupts. A switch of some sort — Janet can hear a different ring, oddly faint. Her hands turn sweaty — FBI? Military police? At last a voice, a taped voice:

"I'm sorry. The number you have reached is no longer in service. Please access the directory files for the area which you have attempted to call."

A click. A pause. The message begins again. Janet hangs up with a fierce curse.

Gulping coffee, she throws on a pair of jeans and a striped rugby shirt, then sits on the floor cross-legged with the keyboard and the remote wand in her lap. Switching the terminal over to remote phone mode takes a few irritating minutes, but at last she can dial on-screen and start the long process of accessing the international directory number. The British memory banks still show Mandi's numbers as functioning. She should have expected that, she supposes. When would they have had time to update? If indeed the junta will ever allow them to update.

On her next pass Janet tries the normal directory number for San Francisco. Much to her shock she reaches it. For all their talk of rebel sabotage, obviously the junta had disabled the phone system at some central source, some master switch or whatever it might be, so that it could be restored cleanly and all at once when they had need of it again. In this directory she finds Mandi's old number clearly marked as out of service.

When Janet tries a search on Mandi's name, she turns up nothing. A moment of panic — then it occurs to her to try Amanda Elizabeth Hansen-Owens, Mrs. Sure enough, such a name appears, cross-referenced to John Kennedy Owens, Captain. *My daughter is married. I wasn't there.* In the next column, however, where a telephone number should appear, Janet finds only code: UNL-M. She windows the screen in half, leaving Mandi's entry visible, and in the Help utility finds at last the decipherment of codes. UNL-M. Unlisted, military. For a long time Janet stares at the screen. She wipes it clear and turns it off, lays the keyboard and the wand down on the carpet beside her.

At least Mandi has been allowed to marry her officer. At least. Even if the little bastard has hidden her away from her mother. Don't be ridiculous! She'll call you. She's not dumb. *She knows you're at Rosemary's. Or that Rosemary will know where you are.*

Or, Janet supposes, she herself could call friends in California and see if they know Mandi's new number. Mandi had a job in a bookshop — perhaps she could call there? But she was going to quit when she married, because she would be living on base, too far away. Perhaps her old employer will have her new number? The thought of Eddie's prison sentence stops Janet from calling him. She should wait until the situation settles down, until the normal traffic on the telephone lines picks up. Surely the junta won't be able to tap every call, surely they wouldn't bother, not just on the off-chance that she and all those other enemies of the state might say something subversive in a casual conversation.

At lunch, in a little Italian restaurant near the Houses of Parliament, Janet tells Rosemary of her morning's frustrations.

"I'm honestly afraid to put people at risk by calling them," Janet finishes up. "Or am I just being paranoid?"

"I don't know. You're quite possibly being realistic. A dreadful thought, that, but there we are." Rosemary contemplates her wine glass with a vague look of distaste. "Poor Eddie. I only met him briefly, of course, during that last flying visit, but he was such a nice fellow. It's so awful, thinking of him in prison."

"I'd hate to have the same thing happen to Mandi's boss or any of my friends."

"Well, of course. Or your nephew. What was his name? The one who's so good with horses."

"Richie. Although, you know, he's probably the safest person I could call. He lives way the hell up in the Sierras, and I can't imagine anyone suspecting him of subversion, up in that tiny little town."

"True. What about Robert?"

"Yeah. What about Robert?" Janet lays down her fork. "I went back later and looked for his number on the directory. It's been taken out of service, too. But I've never found his name on the lists. Of the prisoners, I mean." Janet's voice breaks. "Or the casualties."

Her mouth full, Rosemary nods in the best sympathy she can muster. Janet leans back in her chair, turns a little, too, to look over the crowded restaurant, and sees Patel standing at the door.

"It must be time for me to head out to the Free You," Janet says. "There's my bodyguard."

"Well, he can wait while you finish."

"I'm not hungry any more. I don't know who I'm more worried about, Mandi or Robert. Robert, I guess. At least I know now she's married."

"And she'll call. She must know that I'd provide for you, one way or another."

"Yeah. You're right. She'll call."

But Mandi never does call, not that day, not the next, not for the entire week after service is restored. Janet wakes every morning to a winter come at last, stands by her window and looks out on slate grey skies, afraid to leave the flat and miss her daughter's call, which never comes.

"I suppose she's just afraid," Rosemary says.

"I hope she doesn't hate me."

"Why should she? She's been allowed to marry Jack."

"Well, maybe so. Do you know what I really think? She's disowned me. They may even have made her do it, for all I know. But I do know she's got too much to lose by associating with me."

"Oh my god! No!" Janet shrugs, finding no words.

"I'm so sorry," Rosemary says at last. "But I think you're right."

"Yeah? So do I."

With Officer Patel trailing behind, they are walking across the plaza in front of the Free University. Around them students in long hair and American blue jeans drift by. Some wear crumbling leather jackets; others, bulging canvas coats decorated mostly with pockets. A few carry books as well as the standard terminal units.

"It's very odd, this place," Rosemary says. "Do you suppose they actually learn anything?"

"I'm about to find out. It's not exactly a new idea, though, a free university. The ones back home have been around for a long while, anyway. Well, I suppose the junta's closed them

now."

"I suppose so, yes." Rosemary pauses, watching a particularly grubby couple saunter by. "Better to give them this than to have them rioting again, anyway. Not that they were real riots, compared to yours."

"Um. Maybe so." Janet stops walking and points to a small crowd, standing by the steps up to the RiverBus dock. "There's your photo op."

"Right. I see Jonathan. I suppose I'll have to wear that silly hard-hat he's carrying, even though nothing's been built yet."

Today the work starts on the new flood barrier round the university. Wearing plastic hardhats, men in suits stand uneasily next to men in work clothes wearing solid metal ones. Sandbags, the first, temporary line of defence against the river, lie scattered about and rather randomly. The media, minicams and mikes at the ready, cluster near a van serving tea in foam cups. When Rosemary trots over, Jonathan does indeed hand her the yellow hat. She puts it on as the cameras close in.

In the middle of the night Janet wakes from a dream of San Francisco in late afternoon, when light as gold and thick as honey pours down the hills and dances on the trees. There is no light in the world like the muted sun of Northern California. Sitting up in bed she weeps, knowing that she will never see it again. She will never see her daughter again, either. She knows it at that moment with a cold hard twist of sickness in the pit of her stomach.

And she weeps the more.

The phone call from Immigration comes some ten days before Christmas. Janet's application has gone through. Would she please pick up her red card in person? They require a witnessed signature and a look at her old passport. For the occasion Janet puts on a grey suit that she's just bought at Harrods – severe trousers, a softened jacket with pleats – and wears it with a peach-coloured silk shirt suitable for a woman her age. As she combs her hair, she looks in the mirror and sees her face as a map: all the roads she's taken are engraved on her cheeks and round her eyes. For the first time in her life she feels old. *There's nothing for me to do in Britain but die here.* The image in the mirror saddens and droops. What can she do against the men who taken over her homeland? She can write and lecture, yes, but it's so little, so weak, so futile. Perhaps she should just give up, live out her last years as an exile, write poetry, maybe, teach for a pittance at the Free University and keep her mouth shut. *My big mouth. Look at all the trouble it's gotten me into.*

She turns and hurls the comb across the room. It bounces on the bed, then slides to the floor with a rattle.

"I will not give up. I'm only a mosquito, maybe, on their ugly hide, but goddamn it, I'll draw what blood I can."

During the cab ride down to the Immigration offices, Janet begins planning her next book. Since her research material has no doubt been confiscated by the junta, she will have to write a personal memoir, hazy on hard facts, but if she works on the prose, she can make it sting. She will dedicate it to Mandi, she thinks, then changes her mind. She refuses to make danger be her last gift to her daughter.

Picking up her red card turns out to be easy and anti-climatic. Two clerks look at her passport, one asks her to sign various documents. In front of the pair Janet promises, quite sincerely, that she will refrain from attempting to overthrow

the British government. The first clerk hands her a packet of paper documents and the small red card, laminated in plastic.

"Keep this with you at all times," he says. "And your passport, I suppose. We've not had any guide lines on that, but you might as well."

"Thanks, then, I will."

When she leaves the building, Janet finds herself thinking of her mother, of her mother's house up in Goldust, her nephew's house, now. It was a wonderful place to be a child, that house, with the mountains hanging so close and the big trees all round. She remembers hunting for lizards in rock walls and rescuing birds from her mother's cats, remembers thunderstorms bursting and booming over the high mountains as well as drowsy days of sun and the scent of pine. What if she had never left the mountains? What if she'd married Jimmy, the boy in high school who loved her, married him and settled down to get pregnant the way most girls did up in the mountains, or maybe taken a job in the drugstore till the babies came. She wouldn't be an exile now, drifting down the streets of a city that will never be hers, no matter how much she loves it. She would have gone crazy, probably. She reminds herself sharply of that. She always knew that she would have to leave Goldust from day she learned to read and found a wider world beyond the hills.

But Mandi would have been happy in that house. She loved visiting her grandmother. Mandi might have been happy living in Goldust, too, safe and tucked away from the world.

Driven by her memories, Janet finds herself drifting to the nearest card phone, built into a red plastic slab inside a red plastic kiosk, sheltered from the sound of traffic plunging past. While she fumbles through her wallet, out the door she sees long lawns behind wrought iron fences. It should be safe to call Richie, it really should. Why would the authorities bother her nephew, a rural teamster? But he might know where Mandi is, he really just might know.

When Janet slides the card through the slot, she can feel her shoulders tense and hunch. With shaking fingers she punches in the code, hears other beeps, and then rings. The phone is ringing. By the most slender of all links she's connected again, for this brief moment, to the Sierra, to Goldust, to what was once her mother's house. She can picture the yellow telephone, sitting on Richie's old-fashioned wood slab desk, right next to the pictures of his family in their red acrylic frames. Three rings, four — a click, and the room changes. She can think of it no other way, that the piece of space at the other end of the line has changed, grown larger, as if she could see the shabby wicker furniture, scattered with cats.

"Hello." The sound of Richie's voice brings tears to her eyes. "You have reached 555-5252. Richie, Allie, and Robert aren't home right now. Please leave us a message, and we'll call you back."

Another click, a long tone. Janet hesitates, then hangs up fast. She cannot risk leaving a message, tangible evidence to some kangaroo court, perhaps, that Richie knows a traitor. As she takes her card out of the slot, the names she heard finally register. And Robert. Not just Richie's name, not just his wife's name, but Robert's name as well.

"He made it to the mountains. Oh thank god."

Janet reaches for her wallet to put the card away, but her fingers slip on the vinyl, and she nearly drops her purse. She

glances round: two people have queued up to use the phone. Her paranoia stands at the head of the line. What are they really, this Pakistani woman in the pale grey suit, this Englishman in pinstripes? Agents, maybe? She pretends to drop her purse to gain a little time, squats, cooing unheard apologies, collects her things, shoves the card away along with the wallet and the handkerchief, her stylus and her notebook, her US passport that used to mean so much. With a gulp of breath she stands, settles the purse on her shoulder, and lays a hand on the door. The Englishman is looking at his watch. The Pakistani woman is studying a tiny address book.

Janet gulps again, then swings the door wide and steps out. The Pakistani woman slips into the booth; the Englishman drifts closer to the door; neither so much as look her way as she strides off, heading blindly toward the gate into the park, searching for the safety of green and growing things. In the rising wind leafless trees rustle. Out on the ponds ducks glide. Janet smiles at them all like an idiot child. Robert is free, will most likely stay that way, because indeed, the junta have no reason to hunt him down, the apolitical artist, the popular teacher of the least political subject in the world.

But no news of Mandi. She watches the ducks glide back and forth, the midges hovering at the water's edge, while she tries to make up her mind once and for all. Will she dare call Richie again? It was stupid of her to endanger him at all, stupid and selfish. At least if the military police do try to trace that call, all they'll get is the number of a public phone near Green Park. *My daughter. I don't dare call my daughter.* She doesn't want me to. She feels her joy at Robert's safety crumple like a piece of paper in a fist. She sobs, staring at an alien lawn, at the roots of alien trees. Overhead white clouds pile and glide as the wind picks up strong.

Rain falls in curtains, twisting across the Thames. In yellow slickers men bend and haul, throw and pile sandbags in a levee six bags across and as high as they can make it. The thin yellow line, Janet thinks to herself. In a slicker of her own she stands on the RiverBus dock and watches a red lorry, heaped with sandbags, drive down the grey street toward the workers. Struggling with a bent umbrella Vi scurries to join her. Drops gleam in her pale blonde hair.

"Dr Richards tells me you got your red card."

"Yesterday morning, yeah. There apparently wasn't any problem. Just the usual bureaucracy stuff. The guy who needed to sign the red card was on vacation. That's all."

"That's super."

"Well, yeah. I'm glad, of course." Janet turns away to watch the men unloading the lorry. "I wasn't looking forward to being deported and thrown in prison."

"We wouldn't a let that happen. Me and the girls, we'd a thought of something. Hidden you out, y'know? here and there. There's a lot of us, y'know, all over this bleeding island. Girls like me and Rach and Mary and the lot. We think you're super, y'know, we really do, and we're networked."

"Do you?" For a moment Janet cannot speak. She recovers herself with a long swallow. "Thanks. I'm kind of glad I don't have to take you up on that."

"Course not. It wouldn't a been any fun." Vi grins, a twisted little smile. "But you've got the asylum, so it doesn't matter, right?"

"Right. But tell everyone I really appreciate it."

Creators of Science Fiction – 1: Stanley G Weinbaum

Stanley G. Weinbaum was perhaps the most remarkable of all the writers recruited by Hugo Gernsback to the fledgling pulp genre of science fiction. By the time he turned his attention to the sf pulps they had been in existence for eight years, but once his first story, "A Martian Odyssey," had appeared in the July 1934 issue of *Wonder Stories* he threw himself into the wholesale production of similar materials. Seventeen months later he was dead, struck down by throat cancer at the age of 33, but within that interval he made a deep impression. "A Martian Odyssey" was one of a handful of landmark stories whose publication brought about an instant change in attitude to one of the central motifs of the new genre, and the work Weinbaum left behind at his death offers abundant testimony to support the proposition that had he lived he would have become the leading writer in the field and a major force in its evolution.

Weinbaum was born in Louisville, Kentucky in 1902. He graduated from the University of Wisconsin in 1923 with a degree in chemical engineering, but his principal ambition was to be a writer. He wrote several novels in the 1920s and early 30s but published only one, a serialized love story called *The Lady Dances* signed "Marge Stanley" (his wife's name was Margaret). One of these novels was pure science fiction and another was a horror/sf hybrid, but they were not written with the pulps in mind. The sf novel, *The New Adam*, was published as a book in 1939, with a blurb insisting that it "far surpasses the best of science fiction". It was subsequently serialized in *Amazing Stories* – which had by then been acquired by the book's publishers, Ziff-Davis – although it was distinctly ill-fitted to the action-adventure policy which editor Ray Palmer had adopted. The horror/sf novel, originally titled *The Mad Brain*, finally appeared from one of the specialist sf publishers in 1950 as *The Dark Other*.

The fact that *The New Adam* could not be published at the time it was written – like several other novels subsequently picked up by the pulps, most notably John Taine's *The Time Stream* (written 1921; serialized in *Wonder Stories* 1931; in book form 1946) – is eloquent testimony to the difficulties faced by writers of speculative fiction in the 1920s. Although "scientific romances" had enjoyed a brief vogue in the UK in the 1890s publishers had become extremely reluctant to issue works of that kind by the time World War I broke out, and very few middlebrow magazines would consider such stories for publication; futuristic and

interplanetary fiction were considered suitable for the boys' papers, but not for adult consumption. This situation was mirrored in America, where certain highly-colourful kinds of interplanetary and other-dimensional fantasy were very popular in the pulp magazines but were not considered appropriate fare for more sophisticated readers.

The New Adam is a thoughtful and painstaking account of the life of a superhuman: one of the first members of a new and mentally advanced species destined to replace *Homo sapiens* much as that species had replaced *Homo erectus* in the distant past. Weinbaum gives careful and intelligent consideration to the question of what the next step in human evolution might involve, and also to the problems which such an individual would necessarily face in growing up, effectively as a "feral child" in a society of his intellectual inferiors.

The New Adam was not the first novel to attempt something along these lines, and the evidence of the text suggests that Weinbaum had probably read John Beresford's tale of a doomed infant prodigy *The Hampdenshire Wonder* (1911) as well as familiarizing himself – superficially, at least – with such relevant philosophical ideas as those of Friedrich Nietzsche and Henri Bergson. It is remotely possible that he was aware of the existence of a novel translated from the French of "Noelle Roger" (Helen Pittard) which bore the same title as his own, issued in the UK in 1926, but the Roger novel is an anxious melodrama in the same vein as John Russell Fearn's pulp extravaganza *The Intelligence Gigantic* (1933; in book form 1943); Weinbaum's novel, by contrast is much more akin to Olaf Stapledon's *Odd John* (1935), which similarly extrapolates the tale told in *The Hampdenshire Wonder* by having its central character survive into adulthood and encounter others of his emergent kind.

The first part of *The New Adam* describes Edmond Hall's youth and adolescence under the heading of "The Pursuit of Knowledge." A brief interlude explains his contemptuous rejection of the pursuit of political power and his commitment instead to "The Pursuit of Pleasure" – which is actually a eupsychian quest for personal fulfilment. This quest is, of course, doomed, not because of any innate deficiency in Edmond but because the world cannot provide an appropriate context. This part of the narrative is basically the tale of the protagonist's loving but ultimately

unsatisfactory marriage: a union which cannot succeed despite the best will of both parties. Nor can this unstable atom of community be profitably traded for a relationship with the female of his own species he eventually encounters, although he does contrive to perpetuate their genetic heritage by impregnating her.

The New Adam is unusual in several ways. Its protagonist is treated with the utmost sympathy; unlike the Hampdenshire Wonder and *Odd John* he is straightforwardly offered to the reader as a character with whom he (or she) might identify. Unlike almost all previous fictitious superhumans – and many that were to follow – Edmond Hall is not emotionless, although he does lack a sense of humour. Both these features anticipate the kind of superman who was to eventually become a science-fictional stereotype extensively featured in the pages of John W. Campbell Jr's *Astounding Science Fiction*, although Edmond Hall's parapsychological powers are more muted than theirs and his ambitions more modest. The two scientific romances Weinbaum's novel most resembles include acidly bitter criticisms of contemporary society and the intellectual powers of contemporary man, and the figure of the superman is invoked in order to credit a special privilege to those criticisms; *The New Adam*, by contrast, is not so much a work of social criticism as an eccentric exercise in hypothetical existentialism. Like Nietzsche and his disciples, who were constantly on the lookout for the "overmen" among and within us, Weinbaum was employing the imaginary superman as a device in the search for better answers to the age-old question of how men should live. *The New Adam* is not an outstandingly well-written or well-thought-out account, but it is a bold attempt to do something new.

The Dark Other is much inferior to *The New Adam*, but it examines an obliquely-related hypothesis. It is a Jekyll-and-Hyde story whose hero has a sub-cerebral tumour which is actually a brain in miniature housing an independent personality. This premise could easily have been the basis of a melodrama that could have slotted into the pulp market with ease, but as in *The New Adam* Weinbaum develops it in the context of a love story. The story is another account of a relationship which seemingly cannot succeed, through no fault of the parties involved. The father of the heroine, a scientist, ultimately finds an explanation of what is happening, but the *deus ex machina* which sets the situation to rights seems distinctly unconvincing.

It is not clear why Weinbaum chose to develop such exotic materials as love

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stories – although that was, of course, the kind of story he was trying consistently to write and sell. It seems unlikely that it was a purely commercial decision, and even the most superficial examination of his meteoric career as a pulp sf writer cannot help but observe the same fascination with hopeless sexual attraction emerging in his work and threatening – in spite of the author's concerted attempts to pander to his market – to take it over. The theme seems to have had some deep personal significance for him.

"A Martian Odyssey" is – on the surface, at least – a thoroughly masculine story. The birdlike alien Tweel is referred to throughout as "he," but in the light of recurrent themes in Weinbaum's other works it may be significant that the focal point of the story is the attempt made by the human protagonist to form a mutually beneficial alliance with "him" even though his thought-processes are so unhuman that the two can find few points of equivalence between their languages. The story was a revelation to the readers of sf – who were already forming a core community of obsessive fans, urged on by Gernsback's invention of the "Science Fiction League" – because it was the first story to formulate a picture of a whole and radically alien ecosystem. It insisted that life on another world need not mirror that of earth in any obvious respect, but that however different it might be there might still be scope for intelligent beings to recognize one another and to form a tentative moral community, aiding one another against the merely animal and vegetable perils afflicting them.

This was a world-view radically different from – and much more congenial than – the convention which cast intelligent aliens as monstrous potential competitors in a universal struggle for existence, implicitly hostile to mankind. It is entirely probable that Weinbaum was not the only person spontaneously to discover this alternative perspective – Raymond Z. Gallun's "Old Faithful" (1934) appeared only five months later and P. Schuyler Miller's "The Forgotten Man of Space" (1933) had anticipated it in one significant respect – but "A Martian Odyssey" was such a vivid story that it made its point in a uniquely striking fashion. Its brisk and breezy style was far slicker than the clotted and heavily didactic manner which Gernsback and his successor as editor of *Amazing Stories*, T. O'Connor Sloane, had fostered hitherto. This new lightness of tone was to be swiftly and widely copied.

Weinbaum followed "A Martian Odyssey" with "The Circle of Zero," a tale of precognitive visions with rather pompous philosophical overtones. It was rejected (although it was eventually to be published posthumously in 1936) and Weinbaum quickly reverted to the formula that had already proved itself, producing "Valley of Dreams" (1934) and "Flight on Titan" (1935). His later work in the same vein includes "Parasite Planet" (1935), "The Lotus Eaters" (1935), "The Planet of Doubt" (1935) and

"The Mad Moon" (1935). "The Valley of Dreams" was a sequel to "A Martian Odyssey", which likewise appeared in *Wonder Stories*, but the managing editor of that magazine, Charles Hornig, unaccountably rejected "Flight on Titan"; this and all the subsequent "Martian Odyssey" pastiches were sold to the much higher-paying *Astounding Stories*.

The best of these exuberant planetary romances are "Parasite Planet" and "The Lotus Eaters," two stories set on Venus – which is here assumed to keep the same face perpetually turned towards the sun, so that life flourishes only in the twilight zone. The second story features a memorable account of the fatalistic world-view of a highly-intelligent plant, whose destiny is to provide fodder for mindless predatory omnivores. These two stories and the



inferior "Planet of Doubt" feature the same hero and heroine, whose ongoing romance never quite runs smoothly but is firmly cemented nevertheless.

Weinbaum embarked upon a new venture for *Wonder Stories*, producing a series of frothy comedies about ingeniously absurd inventions. The first of these was "Pygmalion's Spectacles" (1935), which was followed by a trilogy featuring the eccentric scientist Herman van Manderpootz: "The Worlds of If" (1935), "The Ideal" (1935) and "The Point of View" (1936). Although they are determinedly non-serious there is nothing formulaic about their inventiveness. The first story features a kind of Virtual Reality, the second extrapolates the notion of an infinite continuum of alternative worlds and the fourth suggests that the world might look very different from different subjective points of view; all these were early treatments of ideas which were to be greatly elaborated by later writers.

Weinbaum soon diverted his attention from this kind of calculatedly light-hearted work to a more ambitious project that was clearly much dearer to his heart: "Dawn of

Flame," a long science-fictional love story set in a post-holocaust world. The world in question is ruled by the autocratic Joaquin Smith, and the story features an encounter between an unsuccessful rebel against Smith's empire and the autocrat's sister, a *femme fatale* nicknamed the Black Flame. Apart from its setting the story has no fantastic content at all, save for the turning-point of the plot, which ensures the impossibility of a romance between the two protagonists.

"Dawn of Flame" was rejected because of the dearth of fantastic material and lack of action, so Weinbaum revised it thoroughly, expanding it to novel length as *The Black Flame* by adding various superscientific devices and a few battle scenes. It transpired, however, that the pulps were not yet ready for a science fiction love story, however elaborately decorated. It was not until Weinbaum's reputation had brought him (posthumously) to legendary status that *The Black Flame* was used to launch the first issue of *Startling Stories* in 1939; "Dawn of Flame" quickly followed in its companion magazine, *Thrilling Wonder Stories*.

Following the publication of "A Martian Odyssey" Weinbaum had acquired a specialist agent, Julius Schwartz, and had made contact with a group of local writers calling themselves the Milwaukee Fictioneers, whose leading light was the veteran Ralph Milne Farley, a prolific author of Burroughsian planetary romances and a significant contributor to the development of time travel as a theme in pulp science fiction. Weinbaum and Farley collaborated on several stories for the pulps, two of which were science fiction novelettes of no great distinction. Although Weinbaum was by far the better writer he wrote the first drafts which were then expanded by Farley – a method which suggests that the older writer (perhaps with the best of intentions) was exploiting the younger man's extraordinary verve. Both stories feature charismatic anti-heroines, but that is virtually the only thing that marks them as Weinbaum's work.

Either because he was so prolific or because he was frightened of being typecast Weinbaum thought it politic to disguise some of his stories under a pseudonym; he wrote two as John Jessel. The first of them was "The Adaptive Ultimate" (1935), the story of a girl suffering from tuberculosis who is "cured" by a drug which enables her body to adapt perfectly to any environment. She becomes a superhuman *femme fatale*, and is perceived as a danger although she seems to be more sinned against than sinning. She is treacherously destroyed by the man she loves – who realizes too late the arrant cowardice of his fear that she might have taken over the world. The story was later to be dramatized for radio and TV; a movie version was released as *She-Devil*.

The ideas in the second John Jessel story, "Proteus Island," seem to have been derived from Nathaniel Hawthorne's "Rappaccini's Daughter" and H. G. Wells' *The Island of Dr Moreau*, but the more interesting part of the

hypothesis – the genetic engineering of an artificial ecosystem in which no two individuals belong to the same species – is unfortunately subsumed by the less interesting sub-plot, which (unsurprisingly) concerns a seemingly-hopeless romance. The story failed to find a market until it was revealed to be Weinbaum's work, at which point it sold on the strength of his by-then-posthumous reputation and appeared under his own name in *Astounding* in 1936.

Weinbaum was already ill when he wrote "Proteus Island," but he assumed that his symptoms were complications following a routine tonsilectomy. He continued working at full stretch, producing yet another *femme fatale* story, *The Red Peri* (1935). This was a space opera featuring a glamorous female pirate which was intended to be the first of a series, but no others were ever written. He managed to produce only two more stories of his own – the last of his "Martian Odyssey" clones, "The Mad Moon," and a rather hackneyed space opera whose heroine is nicknamed the Golden Flame but does nothing to deserve the epithet, "Redemption Cairn" (1936) – but he never stopped work even when the true seriousness of his condition became clear. The last thing he completed was the first draft of a novella intended for revision by Farley which eventually appeared as "The Revolution of 1960" (1938), a curious tale in which a dictator's place is taken by his sister – who employs synthetic testosterone to sustain her masquerade – who then falls in love with the rebel destined to topple her regime; it may be regarded as yet another attempt to rework the basic materials of "Dawn of Flame."

A couple of minor stories produced before Weinbaum began to write for the pulps – one of them subsequently identified by Sam Moskowitz as a pastiche of a story by George Allan England – were rescued from among Weinbaum's papers. His sister Helen – who went on to produce about a dozen more stories for the minor sf pulps and *Weird Tales*, the later ones under her married name, Helen W. Kasson – completed one further novelette which appeared as a collaboration. All of these were, however, trivial works. It was the two stories of *The Black Flame* (which are combined into one in the book text of 1948) and *The New Adam* which belatedly revealed what Weinbaum might have done had he been able to evolve along with the rapidly-changing field.

One can only speculate as to what Weinbaum might have produced for John W. Campbell Jr's *Astounding Science Fiction* had he not been so unkindly struck down, but some indication is given in an autobiographical sketch reproduced in the omnibus collection of his shorter works *A Martian Odyssey and Other Science Fiction Tales* (1974) edited by Sam Moskowitz. Here Weinbaum complains about the literary standard of pulp science fiction and the attitude of its writers and editors, but compensates with bold claims for the potential inherent in the genre:

There's one general weakness and one universal fallacy in the material published today... Most authors, even the best, seem imbued with the idea that science is a sort of savior, a guide, the ultimate hope of mankind. That's wrong; science is utterly impersonal and never points a way, nor is it interested in either the salvation or the destruction of the human race... Science describes but does not interpret; it can predict the results of any given alternative actions, but cannot choose between them...

Half our authors use the word "scientist" about as the ancient Egyptians used "priest" – a man of special and rather mystical knowledge that has set him apart from the rest of humanity... one visualizes either a noble, serious, erudite, high-principled superman or, depending upon the type of story, a crafty, ambitious, fiendish and probably insane super-villain. But never a real human being.

As for the weakness... It's merely that most of our writers fail to take advantage of science fiction's one grand opportunity – its critical possibilities.... It's the ideal medium to express an author's ideas because it can (but doesn't) criticize *everything*... It can criticize social, moral, technical, political or intellectual conditions – or any others... Science fiction can do what science cannot. It can criticize, because science fiction is not science... [It can] quite properly argue, reject, present a thesis, proselytize, criticize, or perform any other ethical functions.

It is, of course, interesting to look at Weinbaum's own fiction in the light of these observations. Some of it he would doubtless have found wanting by virtue of its being slanted to the demands of the marketplace, but one can nevertheless see a continual insistence on the essential humanity of scientists and the essential impersonality of science, and an unflinching interest in certain kinds of ethical questions. These come more to the fore, of course, in *The New Adam*, but they are evident in the best of the magazine science fiction too.

The question of how men should live and what their best ambitions ought realistically and rewardingly to be may seem at first glance to be a more serious matter than the question of how men ought to approach alien beings and on what conditions they ought to attempt to form a moral commonwealth with them, or the question of how an extremely intelligent plant might regard the probability of its fate. It can, however, be very interesting – and perhaps potentially helpful – to reconstitute problems of how human beings ought to treat one another and how they ought to regard the fact of their own mortality as special cases of much more general questions about all manner of real and hypothetical beings. Beneath the delightfully entertaining surface of Weinbaum's planetary romances there are indeed serious issues worthy of the attention of intelligent people. Pulp science fiction improved by leaps and bounds as other writers carried forward his work.

It would be interesting to speculate further about the psychological basis of the

near-obsession with difficult love affairs and *femmes fatales* which sits alongside the more rationally-ordered elements of Weinbaum's work, but there is too little information available to support any such speculation. His only biographer, the indefatigable Sam Moskowitz, observes his "powerful fixation on the concept of a superwoman who is tamed by love of a man" and wonders whether this is evidence of his "domination by a strong woman" or of "his subconscious wish to meet a woman who was his intellectual equal." Moskowitz – not a commentator renowned for his psychological insight – prefers the latter thesis, but is apparently unable to say anything about Weinbaum's relationships with his wife or his sister which might be relevant to this conjecture. It is not clear whether Moskowitz's failure to refer to Margaret Weinbaum while describing Stanley's last year of life might imply that they were no longer married, but she is not credited as a

copyright-holder on any of his books. Helen Kasson dropped out of sight as a pulp writer after 1941.

In an article published in the January 1938 issue of *Scientifiction: The British Fantasy Review* called "Science Fiction for Beginners" – of which the author claims, in *Astounding Days* (1989), to have no memory at all, although he re-endorses the sentiment expressed therein – Arthur C. Clarke recommended that anyone wishing to win converts to the cause of science fiction should start by providing would-be victims with the three best stories of Stanley G. Weinbaum: "A Martian Odyssey," "Parasite Planet" and "The Lotus Eaters." This advice is now a long way out of date, but the logic of the argument remains solid. These three stories capture the very essence of the best pulp sf: they stare, in an innocently wide-eyed fashion, through the window of the imagination at worlds which are gorgeously and exotically populated, and which offer unprecedented opportunities for the exploration of all kinds of ideas.

Weinbaum wrote in a period when it was still acceptable to set stories on relatively hospitable worlds within our own solar system, and the disenchanting progress of astronomical science has converted his key works into an oddly nostalgic kind of fantasy; they have to be read nowadays as "period pieces." Even so, the reader who has the kind of imagination to which they were intended to appeal in 1935 is bound to have sufficient flexibility to experience them as they were intended to be experienced, savouring their glamour and their artistry. One has to make a mental effort to gain some sense of how spectacularly original they seemed at the time, but it is well worth making the attempt.

Editor's note: The above is the first in a new series of essays by Brian Stableford (replacing his 20-part series "Yesterday's Bestsellers"). Future articles will look at the sf of Theodore Sturgeon, Philip K. Dick and many others.

LOCOMOTOR ORRERY

John Clute

The Millennium is, of course, catnip. No sf writer – or fantasist of change (which sounds like an oxymoron: but there are indeed fantasies being written which do not adhere like mucus to the prior – can sit down in front of the screen in the 1990s without whiffing the lure of 2000. It is a date which burns through measurement. It is a recidivist date: it marks a return to the “prison” of significant time, before we began to be able to portion-control our hours with exactitude, began to run down the rails of passage, over evenly spaced sleepers, nanos of the Mechanical God. The Millennium, however, is medieval. It brings echoes of seasonal rites, carnival; it makes one think of the legible world, the sundial of the bending grass. It makes one think it might be possible to relive the past, rather than simply to repeat it. It makes one think of Story.

John Crowley’s Aegypt quartet – two volumes so far, *Aegypt* (1987) and *Love & Sleep* (1994) – may quite possibly be complete on the dot of 2000, when the secret history of the world it speaks of will (one guesses) change utterly. Meanwhile, there are singletons and augurs. In the central scene in the English version of Elizabeth Hand’s *Waking the Moon* (HarperCollins, £5.99), in the heart of an edificial labyrinth inhabited by the secret masters of the world, just after a climactic scene outdoors in which a female avatar of the Goddess has taken on her guise and sacrificed a great bull and fucked a sacrificial lover, one of the learned heads of the order of *benandanti* – who have ruled the world for aeons in an attempt to prevent the Goddess from returning to claim her planet from the patriarchal gods who jumped her claim – escorts an innocent female friend of the avatar of the Goddess into an inner room, where there is an orrery. Balthazar, the gnome-sized *benandanti* savant

raised the orrery to his face and poked one of the glowing beads with a finger – the ball that was enamelled emerald green and blue, the orb that was third from the sun. [Bead, ball, orb: Hand has a tendency to iterate in threes, and the English version of her tale, her story, her narrative, is extremely long as a consequence, result, eventuation.] It turned languidly, a marble in slow motion. With a sigh Balthazar pinched it between his thumb and forefinger.

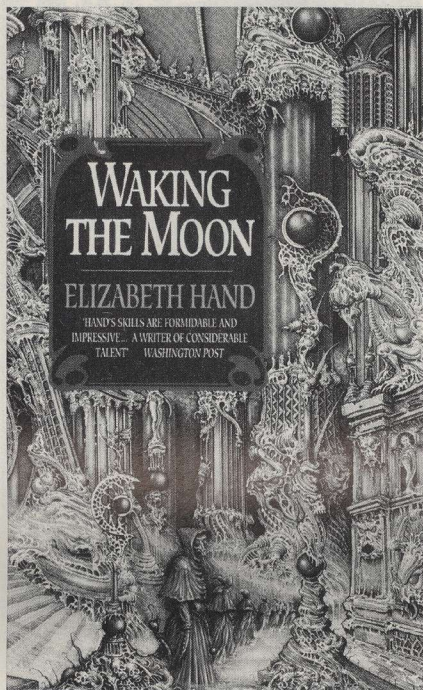
“Worlds within worlds,” he began.

In his hand the shining model trembled. A thin sound filled the air, and the hair on the back of my neck prickled. A sound like shattering crystal; a sound I had heard before. It is the sound, of course, of the world about to change. The orrery now begins to spin and to glow, suspended in the empty air. The blaze of it

candled into a single glowing mass.... a blinding silvery white, with a black core. It

pulsed like a swimming medusa, and then suddenly, soundlessly, its dark heart exploded outwards. I was staring at a spherical void, a black hole crowned by a fiery white corona. A spectral globe like a flaming eye; like a demonic moon. At its centre glowed a bloody-looking crescent. Dark liquid streamed from it to the floor.

It is the face of the Goddess, and it is a singularly effective moment – certainly for a person, like myself, who has been trying to describe for some months now (see *Interzone* 78, where Robert Holdstock’s *The Hollowing* is being reviewed) a form of the fantasy of renewal, the fantasy of the Matter of the World, which I then resisted calling Instaurated Fantasy – “instaurated” being Sir Francis Bacon’s term for profound



renewal – but have now resigned myself to calling Instaurated Fantasy. For me, trying to anatomize fantasies of significant change, this moment in *Waking the Moon* – when the Face of Glory of the orrery spinning in mid air serves as a kind of gandy dance of transformation, guiding the locomotive of the world across strange thresholds or points into an instaurated, lunar scape – serves very well as a touchstone of what it means to create images of millennial shift. (I’ve stuck a loaded term into this digression, so must digress upon the digression. Face of Glory is a term which has come – for me at least – to represent a particular sort of apotropaic mask, a threshold visage designed to signal and to warn of fundamental moments in the passage of a life – or a world – through a significant juncture-point in Time and Place. It is a Janus face, a gorgon, a medusa,

a spinning orrery. It is the face of the Moon, as Elizabeth Hand depicts the central visage of the Goddess, with huge eyes and exaggerated mouth and teeth. It is the face one finds in illustrations in neurological texts which show a manikin whose shape is distorted in order to represent the cerebral projection of sensory areas, so that the face is much huger than the rest of the body, and the eyes and mouth are enormous. It is also the face of an early-stage foetus. It is described – in terms very different from those used here – in A. David Napier’s *Masks, Transformation and Paradox*, published in 1986. Various hints of the Face of Glory are found in various sf and fantasy texts, but never as clearly as in this moment in the edifice of the *benandanti*.)

The problem with *Waking the Moon* is that – given the difficulty of building from a moment of such succinct pregnancy – we have reached only page 260 of a 598-page novel, and that much of the remaining text reads as barn-door locking after the barn has left. Which is not to say that the remaining 300-odd pages are inherently supererogatory; the portrait of the first person protagonist, Sweeney – it is her “I” in the quotes above – deepens and richens throughout, and by the end of the book she reads as one very recognizable (and extremely likeable) lady. It might have been particularly unfair to point out the *avoidupois* problem in these several hundred pages, given the fact that the American version of the book has been extensively shortened, by about 150 pages, and revised, if it were not for the fact that (to the best of my knowledge) most of these slimmings and revisions have been made to the first half of the text: with which I, for one, had no problem.

The book is couched in flashback form, told by Sweeney Cassidy – though not quite in its entirety, as there are some sequences Hand needed to convey which Sweeney couldn’t know of; and Hand is no Wodehouse (but who is?) when it comes to the technical mastery involved in woostering through profoundly complicated plots without violating point-of-view protocols. She is speaking from a more or less contemporary coign, and begins her story 20 years previously, at the nub end of the hippy era, as she attends her first class at The University of the Archangels and St John the Divine in Washington DC. It is taught by Balthazar Warnick; the subject is Magic, Witchcraft and Religion. (Hints that we are about to embark upon a Blaylock-Powers excursion into a magic-realist alternate America prove foundless.) Sweeney meets Angelica and Oliver, and falls in love with both of them. There is some toing and froing, some of it a bit touristic perhaps, though I thought it was neatly carried off. She sleeps with Angelica

(and never again with another woman) but never with Oliver. Portents gather. Magic portals are traversed by fretful *benandanti* who are beginning to worry about the the reawakening of the Goddess. Gradually we learn that Angelica and Oliver, and their ritual coupling, are somehow intrinsic with this awakening. Which seems to happen just before page 260.

The problem at this point may be my problem, rather than the book's. I found the spinning orrery so *definitive* as a signal of awakening (or instauration, one must admit) that I was not really very willing to treat it as nothing more than a false climax in a tale which – if it had continued much further telling of Angelica's sexual activities over the years after university as she attempts to *bring off* the awakening for real – I was about to think of as turning into another Wicca Frigger, which I didn't want to see happen. I didn't want to see the careful novelistic buildup of the characters, or the neatly pointed insertions of the secret history of the world which explain the underlying story, or the accumulating plangency of the immanence of profound transformations, all novelettishly eschewed. And it didn't, in the end, though it was a pretty close call, happen. Although it is impossible not to think that the climax of the book should have been moved upwards through time towards the final pages of the text (and towards the millennium, which it seems to describe too well to serve as nothing more than an augur, like some pasty on the tit of Omen), it is also impossible not to have loved the book. It is humane, engaged, clever, and (despite the risk of RSS) a page-turner.

And, at the very end, you do get the feeling that Sweeney is becoming some sort of nightingale.

They do things differently in the far south, standing on their heads all day, which is really night. (There is an Australian map of the world which has south on top, but it doesn't work: Australia itself just looks like a scallop falling into jaws.) Sean McMullen's *Voices in the Light* (Aphelion Publications, A\$12.95), which is subtitled "Book One of Greatwinter," is, one must propose, a case in point. It is set about 2,000 years after the first Greatwinter, caused – as far as the inhabitants of what is never called Australia can work out – by a combination of nuclear disasters, mistaken responses to the greenhouse effect, and other stuff. No machine dependent on electricity can operate in this world, because some sort of cosmic governing device burns the fuse whenever the trick is tried (wait till next volume for fuller exegesis). There is a thing called the Call, a walking-pace wave of compulsion which causes instant psychic surrender in any human and animal big enough to feel it; victims of the Call walk south until they reach the edge of the sea, where they plummet into the mouths of very large fishlike creatures (wait till next volume). Greatwinter is about to return, because a ringworld-like band has been constructed in

orbit around the Earth by Japanese nanoware too stupid to stop when it becomes apparent that the *first* Greatwinter has cooled the planet, and there's no need to shade Mother Earth with a sweatband to keep the sun off a bit (wait till next volume: but it looks as though the first Greatwinter and the second Greatwinter are etiologically distinct).

In this complexly ordained post-catastrophe environment, an ingenious pattern of expediences has made a sophisticated civilization once again possible. Various clockwork-activated tethers keep folk from following the Call; Australia has been balkanized into a plethora of tiny squabbling states, which are kept together by the beamflash communications network, and by the train system, which operates either by wind or pedal, depending. Into this system stalks the new Highliber (head librarian: it is one of the truly seductive aspects of this strange, constantly entrancing text that librarians, who operate the power of knowledge, are in fact themselves seen, logically enough, as figures of power), who has invented a Calculor: a computer whose calculations are done by cadres of wage-slaves, numbering in the hundreds and thousands. This Calculor (perhaps rather implausibly, given the huge number of humans necessary to operate the thing) is kept secret, and allows the Highliber to dominate much of South-East Australia. But she has constructed the device not, however, to advance her career, but (wait for the next volume) to help cope with the next Greatwinter, which only she (before the Calculor was built) has been able to deduce the coming on.

There are other characters. The women (one, named Lemorellen, is superbly developed) are powerful; the men are vacillating, or shabby, or dead, or priapic. There are several storylines. The Highliber turns out to be something rich and strange (and wait for the next volume). Lemorellen is going to have to learn to forgive guys. Everyone is going to have to find out who's behind the fish that eat the victims of the Call. What is so different about the book – beyond the alluring impassivity of McMullen's presentation of the cruelties folk inflict upon one another within civic contexts – is the way in which almost every "natural" climax is told *sotto voce*, or reported via beamflash, or conveyed within fascicles of apparent trivia. McMullen has made his humans very strange indeed, but it is the strangeness of a genuine otherness; the triumph of the book – beyond the hypnotic fun of learning to understand the workings of the Calculor – lies in its sense that its cast inhabit a culture whose profound and shaping experiences are radically different from anything we might easily imagine, back here before the first Greatwinter. *Voices in the Light* reads like reportage, from the other side. If it continues as it has begun, it will be one of the shapers of our sense of how to keep on living after the orrery splits.

John Clute

A New Simak?

Chris Gilmore

It's extremely good luck for the reader when he finds a writer who can convincingly pastiche one of the great masters, now dead. Robert Charles Wilson's *A Bridge of Years* (NEL, £5.99) is closely reminiscent of Clifford Simak's very best period (which I define as beginning with *Ring Around the Sun* and ending with *Way Station*). There's a hint of Anderson's *Guardians of Time* stories as well, but the "hero," Tom Winter, is typically Simak – thoughtful, mildly melancholic, good with his hands, benevolent in a general sort of way but rather more concerned to avoid grief himself than to do much good to others. The plotline therefore confronts him with difficulty in the former department, and duty in the latter.

Having come through a bruising divorce, Winter tries alcoholism, but finds he lacks the talent. Then he takes a cheap house in a small town in Washington state, and tries to make it as a car-salesman. He loses the job in a way that absolutely justifies Sam Moskowitz's epigram about the 'saintly heresies' of Clifford Simak: when a customer comes in, prepared to pay list price for a car, Winter offers him the usual sort of discount and the sales-manager notices.

By this time Winter has realized that the house contains more than it shows. Unseen servitors keep it spotless, and control a tunnel through space and time – coincidentally to Simak's best period, though the other end emerges in a seedy part of New York rather than Minnesota. Winter decides to settle there for good, and shortly finds love – with a girl from Minneapolis, for Wilson knows what he's doing – but he is not the only party interested in the tunnel: it has at least one permanent inhabitant, a mysterious but potent "ghost," and has also been used as a bolt-hole by Billy Gargullo, a psychologically maimed boy-soldier on the run from an ill-defined but nasty army in the late 21st century. Like Winter, Billy really only wants to be left in peace, but he's too paranoid to consider community of purpose, and he's got potent weaponry.

This is a well constructed book, strong on character and detail, its Simakian sentimentality balanced with a number of interesting mysteries to tease the reader. Who built the tunnel, and why? What other tunnels ought it to connect with? What is the ghost? How fares the time-traveller it actually belongs to, and whom Gargullo

wrongly believes he has killed for good? These questions are never absent, though Wilson keeps the main plot, which centres on the unacknowledged conflict between Winter and Gargullo for control of the tunnel, very much to the fore. Gargullo is not an attractive person – he is addicted to his ageing 21st-century battle-armor, he is a virgin and probably impotent, he needs to kill at least one person every six months – yet he is very much a victim: he never chose to be any of that – it was forced upon him. Winter has his domestic and social virtues, but he's *soft* – a reactive character, in retreat from greater evils to lesser, not prepared to run the epistemological risk of trying to change the world for the better.

It's also a thoughtful book, its lack of overt pace well compensated by tension well controlled. It's the sort I'd be inclined to recommend to the kind of people who don't think they'd like sf, but who like a good read – and I'd be saying, Gentle Reader, set about it! – except – there are a couple of places, one very minor, one major, where it fails to measure up, in ways very easily put right.

As I've said before, but obviously need to say again, a woman's body is incomplete without two areolas; on the other hand, to flaunt more than one aureole at a time is definitely vulgar. Wilson (and his editor) *please take note!* There's also a glaring technical error: at one point a character has every reason to call the emergency services – she's stumbled on a badly mutilated man who's obviously (if inexplicably) alive and surely in deep shock and/or appalling pain. She *must* dial 911, but the plot demands that she doesn't – instead she calls a realtor(!). Rather than find a good reason for this idiocy (and I can think of half a dozen without drawing breath), Wilson ties her in several unconvincing knots while failing to explain her failure. CDS never loused up that way, but I'm sure Wilson's editor told him it was perfectly all right – those dumb reviewers won't notice – I mean, do they ever?

It's extremely bad luck when a writer's first novel is strongly reminiscent of someone else's, only not quite so good. The resulting comparison will be invidious, and is likely to detract from the book's positive virtues. On the other hand, I know that my readers have only limited time and money, and I owe them the reflection that if they like Maggie Furey's *Aurian: Book One of the Artefacts of Power* (Legend, £5.99) they will like Keren Gilfoyle's *A Shadow on the Skin*, which I covered in *Interzone* #77, even better.

Aurian, the young girl of the title, is a 'mage' – potentially immortal and with what used to be called psi powers. Mages can breed with mortals, and breed true as often as not, so there ought to be plenty of them, but no; female mages lose their powers during pregnancy, which deters them. How about the males, then? They have normal appetites, and their powers give them plenty of clout, but they have prejudices against that sort of thing; consequently, by

the time the book opens their *total* number is into single figures. Where did all the immortals go? *Taedium vitae* (plus the odd misfortune) seems to have done for the lot.

A contrived situation is one thing, but this contrivance is so jerry-built as to detract from the story, which is a pity because the fantasy *bildungsroman* is rather well done. Aurian is taken to the mages' academy, there to develop her powers, grow to womanhood and in her spare time become formidable with her sword. Predictably enough she also arouses the sexual interest of most of the men she meets, especially Forral, the great swordsman who trains her, and Miathan, the Archmage and villain of the piece.

Here we have more evidence of structural weakness. Miathan is represented as a cold-blooded, highly manipulative individual of great experience and cunning, accustomed to planning over decades; yet he not only blows his mind over Aurian, he shows a complete lack of psychological insight in all his dealings with her. Furey can see this, but fails to cure it with preachy little asides to the reader:

Miathan wrestled with the possibilities, falling into the classic trap of those who spend their lives plotting and scheming against others. He was convinced that the others, in their turn, were plotting to overthrow him.

Aurian consequently falls into Forral's arms, for all that he's old enough to be her father, drinking heavily and enough over the hill to lose to her in a setpiece duel.

And so the book lurches incoherently along, through individual scenes that generally work well enough. Furey's eye for detail, especially faces and postures, is good, and her ear for the language lets her down only when she ventures out of her depth: when (as often happens) people start cursing and swearing we're told it turns the air blue, but the only examples are the likes of "Great Gods!" and "Damn!" She makes good use of alternating viewpoints, maintains a cracking pace and even finds room for some broad but effective humour – which fails to compensate for crudely ineffective plot mechanisms. Forral, allegedly the best swordsman in the world, exercises against the 14-year-old Aurian with fully honed weapons and nearly kills her – to buy a pair of blunted swords would be too much trouble. Miathan, wishing to bring in an unpopular measure, knows perfectly well that his two fellow-councillors disapprove, but is still shocked when they vote him down.

It's obvious what's gone wrong. Furey started with a pretty good idea of her story; having created her characters, she was able to bring them to life, as many aspiring writers fail to do; their interaction might well have made a very good book, but because it wasn't the book she originally intended she yanks them back into line, to the detriment of the credibility, and thus the interest, of the whole. What she should have done was to go back and re-write the early pages, so that the book we have would be more securely founded.

It's fair to say that as the book progresses and becomes more episodic the structural weaknesses tend to recede; the alternating viewpoints diverge into sub-plots, but the underlying unity can take the strain. But as the faults are most prominent near the beginning, and it's over 600 pages long, I wonder how many will reach the best parts. Worse, this has all the look of a three-decker, with two forthcoming "sequels" already listed, and presumably written. If they have the same virtues they deserve to sell briskly, but if they show the same failings Furey has a long trek before she can relax at the High Table.

Where does S&S end and heroic fantasy begin? It's a matter more of pretention than talent, and Terry Goodkind's debut novel, *Wizard's First Rule* (Tor, \$23.95), takes itself very seriously indeed. I therefore categorize it as heroic fantasy, despite the prominence of sorcery in sundry flavours, and the enchanted Sword of Truth which the hero, Richard Cypher, acquires early on.

The publisher makes much of the parallels with Tolkien, but these lie principally in some close analogues among the secondary characters (Zedd ≈ Gandalf, Samuel ≈ Gollum, Scarlet ≈ Smaug), and in the central plotline, which is a standard sort of quest. Richard is selected for the role of Seeker, which is ill defined but requires self-control and self-sacrifice on an heroic scale, at a point when the Forces of Good seem likely to be overwhelmed by the local Dark Lord, a magician of great power rather ineptly named Darken Rahl (I keep expecting a posthumous "Harrumph!" from Roald Dahl). Rahl is in search of a magic box, which will allow him to enslave or destroy the world, and will die unless he finds it before winter. Richard must find it first, prevent Rahl from getting it and if possible survive himself, but that has a low priority.

A more interesting parallel lies with Guy Gavriel Kay's *Tigana*. Like Kay, Goodkind is at pains to build up a strong cast of characters, so that we care how both they and their quest fare; like Kay he presents scenes from within the heart of the enemy citadel, though Darken Rahl succeeds as a villain in a very different mode from Brandin the Tyrant; even more than Kay, Goodkind stresses throughout the concept of sacrifice. With the whole universe at stake, Richard and his comrades cannot and must not flinch from laying down their own, their friends' and each other's lives if it means a marginally better chance (there's never a really good chance) of victory for their cause, but there's never any certainty for anyone that they themselves will remain on the same side – their minds may be enslaved, so that it would be better that they were dead. Moreover, sundry prophecies suggest that is going to happen.

This tone is laid down from the outset, when the quest is triggered by the appearance of a mysterious lady called Kahlen in Richard's country of Hartland. She has escaped from the Midlands, where the box must be, through a magical

THE UNKINDNESS OF WOMEN

James Lovegrove

boundary. To get her out took the efforts of five magicians, who then killed themselves lest the details be wrung from them by torture – a sacrifice worth making, if it will bring her into contact with Richard, who may (perhaps) be persuaded to return with her, for together they can (perhaps) do what neither can separately.

The themes of sacrifice and teamwork recur constantly. Richard, Kahlen and Zedd all possess secrets which they would like to share with the others but must not, and Kahlen's also precludes her from a sexual relationship with Richard, though it's what they both desire. By contrast (and this is a book full of parallels and balanced contrasts), Richard is at one point captured by Denna, a sorceress with whom, over nearly 60 pages of sado-masochism, he falls in love, and whom he (inevitably) kills. Such a *tour de force* is structurally impossible to justify: *inter alia*, it makes the ending look hasty. But the quality of writing sustains the interest of what in other hands would be monotonous, distasteful and incredible. All this makes for a violet-hued book, and for such books extreme dignity of language is vital. This is where Goodkind falls down, rarely but glaringly, when he introduces a third major viewpoint.

A child called Rachel comes into possession of the magic box. Rachel is supposed to be intelligent, naturally good and brave enough to have been neither broken nor corrupted by a life full of arbitrary ill-treatment. To ensure there's no mistake, she is contrasted with Princess Violet (another unfortunate name – I can't forget Violet Elizabeth Bott), a child of preternatural viciousness. Such a character can work only if the reader is allowed to react to her essential dignity and the pathos of her situation. Unfortunately, Goodkind systematically robs her of both by loading her with a vocabulary of nauseating cuteness. For Rachel nothing is good or small or false; only the "bestest," the "littlest" and "pretend" will do, while the only pejorative adjective she knows is "mean." As such diction peppers her thoughts no less than her conversation, she ruins the atmosphere whenever she appears, whether solo or accompanied. Meanwhile, Violet's words are simple and unaffected, however vile their import.

There are few such lapses, and in another context they would matter less, but a book which depends on creating and sustaining an atmosphere of tragic grandeur can afford nothing naff – and there is nothing more naff than infantilism. The reader is forced to recreate the mood each time Rachel comes on to ruin it, which tires the imagination. The result is yet another fat, handsomely produced, generously marketed book which looks set fair to be remaindered and forgotten in short order because the publisher could not afford an editor. It's a pity (how often do I write those words?) because Goodkind has very few faults and many merits; but if you aspire to classic status in a heavily oversold field it is not enough to hope the good bits will excuse the bad.

Chris Gilmore

A new novel by J.G. Ballard is always an event, and *Rushing to Paradise* (Flamingo, £14.99) – his first full-length, non-autobiographical work since *The Day of Creation* (1987) – does not disappoint. Familiar Ballardian obsessions are present and correct: tropical lagoons and the alien familiarity of the underwater world; the grip of the Bomb on the 20th-century imagination; and the powerful hold that women can exert over men and the masochistic, near-suicidal desire that binds men to them. Over the course of 23 books Ballard has refined these themes to the extent that they pass almost unnoticed in his work. Indeed, so ingrained are they in our expectations of his output that they would be remarkable in their absence, and *Rushing to Paradise* is no exception.

The book tells the story of Barbara Rafferty, a disbarred doctor who expends her formidable energies on a fanatical one-woman crusade to save the albatross on the remote Pacific atoll of St Esprit, which the French are using as a military base. The birds are threatened by plans to extend the runway on the island in order to accommodate planes large enough to carry atomic devices. The French intend to resume nuclear testing in the area, and it is this that persuades 16-year-old Neil Dempsey to join Dr Barbara (as she prefers to be known, perhaps in tribute to Shaw's forthright Salvation Army heroine) on her journey to the island. Neil's father died of cancer caused by exposure to radiation

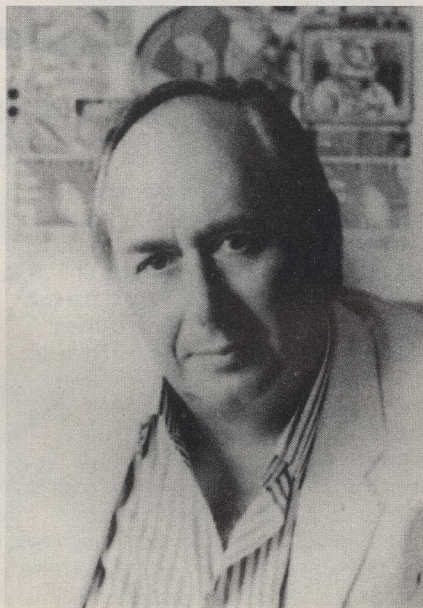
during the 1950s when he was stationed at the nuclear proving grounds at Maralinga in Australia. Believing his genes to be "irradiated," Neil is looking for an atomic apotheosis that will redeem his father's death, and expects to find it on St Esprit. However, almost as soon as he and Dr Barbara arrive, he is shot in the foot by French soldiers. The event is captured on film, and suddenly St Esprit is the focus of world-wide media attention and Neil has become and icon, a living martyr to the ecological cause. So it is that he has almost no choice but to accompany Dr Barbara back to the island – which the French have, in the face of international condemnation, relinquished – and help her set up an albatross sanctuary there.

From all over the world like-minded individuals come to assist Dr Barbara with the running of her small pocket of preservation. Inevitably, the well-intentioned environmentalists pollute their surroundings – they accidentally ground their ship on a reef, soaking the island's beaches in oil, and deliberately wreck the buildings and equipment left by the French army. Then, as endangered animals and plants start to arrive from all corners of the globe and the situation becomes less and less easy for Dr Barbara's private salvation army to cope with, they begin to bicker between themselves, finding a scapegoat for their frustrations in the German hippies who set up camp on the beach. All this is encouraged and often stage-managed by their leader. Dr Barbara's plans for St Esprit are, it transpires, subtler and more sinister than they first seemed.

To Neil's delight she instigates a human breeding programme which involves him impregnating the women on the island, but to his dismay he realizes that once he has fulfilled his biological function his services are no longer required. It turns out that the sanctuary Dr Barbara is really creating is for the one species she believes to be most threatened of all, a species to which she herself belongs and of which she is one of the most vocal, strident and intelligent representatives: woman. She is building an Eden full of Eves, in which Adams are unwelcome. Soon Neil is the only man left on St Esprit, and his struggle to survive culminates in a conflagration which, if not quite the nuclear absolution he was hoping for, is in its own localized way no less apocalyptic.

Rushing to Paradise is about the lengths to which a visionary will go to preserve a flawed dream and the readiness of weaker souls to

J.G. Ballard, author of *Rushing to Paradise*



Photograph: Jerry Bauer

be drawn into the cold glow of fanaticism like kitchen flies to the ultraviolet lamp behind the electrified grille. It is also a satire on the brand of extreme feminism which encourages women to view men as little more than mobile sperm-banks, an attitude which, in view of the way the male of our species has been known to treat the opposite gender, is both understandable and forgivable, and one that makes the affectionate regard in which most women continue to hold men all the more miraculous and mystifying. The women in *Rushing to Paradise*, though, have chosen to abandon traditional feminine tolerance, and the consequences, as Neil discovers, are dire.

Not science fiction, then, but nevertheless a glimpse of a possible future in microcosm, *Rushing to Paradise* takes the feminist claim that women couldn't do a worse job of running things and extrapolates it to a conclusion that is both plausible and, for anyone with a conscience, but especially for those of us with a Y-chromosome, alarming.

Since we are discussing idealism, what about the belief that the formation of a European super-state will usher in an age of unprecedented peace and prosperity? Brian Aldiss wholeheartedly debunks this already tarnished myth of the near future in *Somewhere East of Life* (Flamingo, £14.99). According to Aldiss, the unified Europe of the next century will not be a polyglot haven of ethnic harmony and uniform-length sausages. Rather, it will be a vast bureaucratic monolith (dominated, *natürlich*, by Germany), slowly but surely imposing political and cultural homogeneity on its member-states and on those states around it keen to become members. In other words, as Aldiss sees it, Europe is in danger of becoming another empire, rapacious and expansionist, westernizing everything it touches and destroying everything it cannot westernize.

Homo europeicus is well represented by the novel's hero, Roy Burnell, a British architectural historian resident in Frankfurt, fluent in German and involved with a Frenchwoman who lives in Spain. (Like *Rushing to Paradise*, *Somewhere East of Life* has a decidedly international flavour.) While doing a friend a favour, Burnell loses a section of his memory to bootleggers who deal in e-mnemonicvision, or EMV, a process by which memories can be transplanted from one person's brain to another. To recapture, literally, his own past, and in particular that piece of his past involving his conjugal relations with his beautiful ex-wife (for, of course, pornography is one of the logical and lucrative uses to which EMV is put), Burnell sets off through the fraying fringes of the European Union on a journey that is also a metaphysical search for something with which to fill the hollowness in his mind and at his heart. However, the cast of social Darwinists he encounters on his travels through Hungary, war-torn Georgia and the hinterlands of Turkmenistan – opportunists,

insane generals and friendly but thoroughly corrupt businessmen – would be enough to destroy anyone's faith in humanity, perhaps the most contemptible specimen being the greedy priest Father Kadredin who helps Burnell "rescue" a valuable ikon from a remote, abandoned Georgian church and whose rank-smelling sheepskin waistcoat neatly symbolizes the decay of religion and innocence.

All of this is told with panache and good humour, Aldiss piling indignity after indignity upon his Job-like hero almost as if to test him, see how far he can go without breaking – only Burnell is more resilient than he appears, for he embodies that peculiarly English stubbornness that neither superficial homogenization nor mental Balkanization can erode. Fittingly, the novel ends with Burnell achieving a kind of Nirvana playing a mad game at a mad aristocrat's house-party in East Anglia. England, in all its obstinacy and eccentricity, endures.

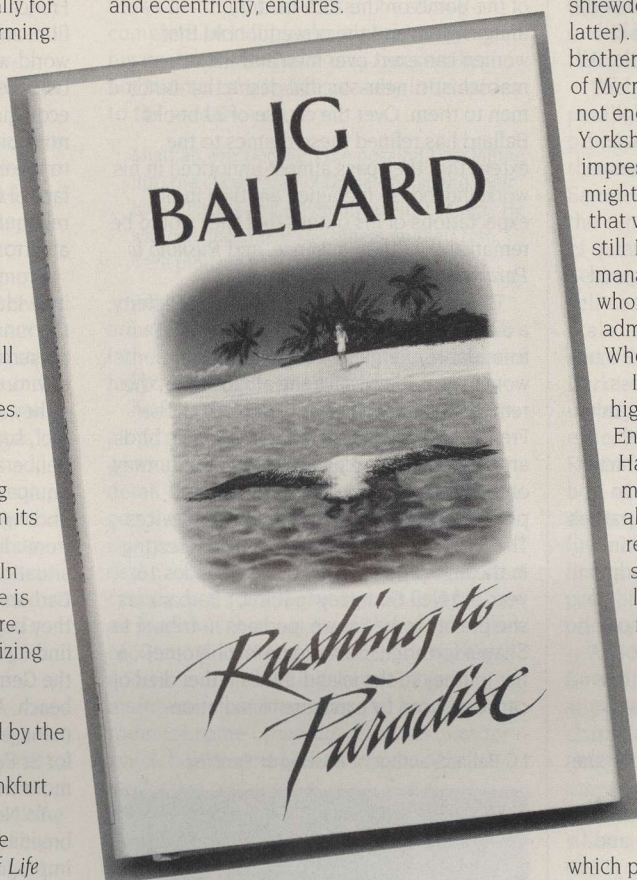
attends a séance that goes horribly wrong, and next thing he knows he's embroiled in an escapade far more fantastic than anything the real Doyle subsequently dreamed up. Among other things he is pursued by living gargoyles, rides a steam engine on a secret underground track, fends off an attack by walking mummies in the basement of the British Museum, and sits down to dinner with crazy Prince Eddy (almost inevitably a guest star in such adventures). Luckily, Doyle has an ally and saviour in the shape of Jack Sparks, Special Agent to the Queen, a mercurial, valiant and seemingly omniscient fellow, a skilled violin player, a tormented cocaine addict... Bells ringing yet?

Sparks being a "prototype" for Doyle's own famous fictional creation, Frost has fun drawing comparisons between the near-infallible Special Agent and the all-too-human Holmes, and indeed between Doyle and Dr Watson (the former somewhat shrewder in the deductive stakes than the latter). He also throws in Sparks's evil elder brother as chief villain, a cunning composite of Mycroft and Moriarty, and as if that were not enough there is a brief encounter in Yorkshire with one Abraham Stoker, who impresses Doyle not because of anything he might have written (the work of literature that would make Bram Stoker's name is still 13 years away), but because he is the manager of Henry Irving, the actor, of whom Doyle is a gushing, breathless admirer. Such is the nature of celebrity. Who remembers Henry Irving now?

It's all marvellous stuff, hokum of the highest order, a camp take on Victorian England reminiscent of the better Hammer films and those mid-1970s monster movies starring Doug McClure, all framed in fast-paced and eminently readable prose. Frost's Anglicisms are spot-on, with only the occasional lapse into Americanese, such as a reference to "corduroy pants," and some Cockneyisms of doubtful authenticity. And if the name Mark Frost sounds familiar, it is because he, along with David Lynch, was responsible for *Twin Peaks*, so depending on your attitude to that series he is either touched with genius or else one half of the team

which perpetrated the greatest hoax in broadcasting since Orson Welles interrupted scheduled programming to announce that the Martians had landed. With perhaps predictable perversity, *The List of Seven* is just about as far as you can possibly get from middle America and diners that serve cherry pie and damn fine coffee, and as moves abroad go, it is an audacious and successful one.

Unfortunately, Arrow have seen fit to lumber the paperback edition with a cover that, while beautifully executed (by Les Edwards), is entirely unrepresentative of the novel's content, and it is a syndrome that also afflicts the jacket of Ed Gorman's *Blood Red Moon* (Headline, £16.99), which sports some ghastly airbrushed nonsense that wouldn't look out of place on the front of a Dean



Mark Frost's *The List of Seven* (Arrow, £4.99) harks back to an England that endures most vividly in our imaginations, its values and social customs now, thankfully, discredited and discarded. The novel is set in Great Britain at the latter end of the reign of Victoria, that era of expansion seemingly without limit, the last time this country ever feel truly confident about itself (a confidence, as is so often the case, rooted in the subjugation of others); and its hero is no less a pre-eminent Victorian than Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, although here he is just plain Dr Doyle, impoverished medic and struggling novelist, who on Christmas Day 1884 receives a mysterious letter from a woman he has never met begging him to come to her aid. Unable to resist such an intriguing summons, he

Koontz book and bears little relevance to what lies inside. Possibly it is the sound of the first syllable of Gorman's surname that has prompted his publishers to market him as a horror-writer, for the cover appears calculated to attract only that most undiscerning of readers, the horror-junkie. This is a shame, because Gorman's work deserves better. (He was similarly shafted by whoever came up with the abortion that adorns the Blake Paperbacks edition of *Shadow Games*. Happily, I have it on very good authority that there is a circle of Hell reserved for lazy editors and inept art-directors.)

In *Blood Red Moon* Robert Payne, former FBI criminologist, is hired by a mysterious, beautiful woman, Nora Conners, to solve the mystery of who killed her daughter eight years ago. Nora believes a serial killer was responsible, and the murder of Payne's friend Mike Peary, whom she previously employed to carry out the investigation, would seem to confirm that the killer is still active. Before he died Peary compiled a list of three likely suspects, and with \$10,000 from Nora in his pocket Payne travels to New Hope, a small town just outside Cedar Rapids, Iowa, to get to the bottom of the mystery. There he discovers that Nora Conners is not what she seems, and neither are any of the three suspects.

There is nothing intrinsically new in *Blood Red Moon*. It covers no ground that hasn't been covered by Gorman himself and by a dozen other members of that exclusively wonderful and wonderfully exclusive club of American *noir* writers who keep turning out unpretentious work of a consistently high quality. Reading this novel is like slipping on a pair of old shoes so familiar and comfortable that you're quite happy to walk miles in them. Gorman writes in a gorgeous, loose, easy style that flows like limpid water over the sharp stones of the plot. He entices and you can only follow. The term "storyteller" is a debased one nowadays,

being primarily reserved for authors like Jeffrey Archer because no one can think of anything more positive to say about them, but in Gorman's case it applies in the truest sense. He is a supreme spinner of yarns, and *Blood Red Moon* is one long anecdote peppered with asides, gory interludes and eclectic snippets of local history, and decked out with an array of women nearly all of whom, in one way or another, Payne falls for. Here is a hero who genuinely loves and respects the opposite sex. One wonders what Ballard's Dr Barbara would make of him.

The seventh collection of Neil Gaiman's long-running *Sandman* comic has arrived in hardback from DC Vertigo, a handsome package at a handsome price: \$29.95. Is it worth it? That very much depends on whether you like your comics demanding, sophisticated, literate, wise, allusive, human, humane, sometimes sweet, sometimes bitter, thought-provoking, funny, often moving, and peopled with intriguing and memorable characters. Or not.

Brief Lives traces the journey of Dream and Delirium, two of the Endless (seven beings older and more powerful than the gods), to find their brother Destruction, who went into hiding three hundred years ago when the Age of Reason ushered in the advances in scientific thought and theory that would eventually, through Oppenheimer's ingenuity, render him redundant. That's the story. That's all the story. They look for him, they find him, they sit down and eat a meal and discuss their lives and their family. The end. But the process of rediscovering one another leaves none of them unchanged. Even Dream – moody, melancholic Morpheus – learns something new about himself, a truth that not only transforms him into a more approachable, more knowable, more "human" being, but also foreshadows his undoing (an event Gaiman is unfurling with agonizing slowness in the current *Sandman*

storyline, *The Kindly Ones*).

The benefit of this collection is that it allows the reader to consume at one sitting what was originally published in nine monthly parts, and so appreciate what otherwise might well have been overlooked the first time around – the structural intricacy, the subtleties, the flow. In the same way that a symphony is the sum of its four movements, *Brief Lives* is a piece, a single entity, and is best appreciated that way, in the space of an hour or so rather than in the length of time it takes to gestate a human foetus.

In short, even if you aren't a comics aficionado and don't like pictures with your words, *Brief Lives* is about as good as fantasy-writing gets. To borrow Peter Straub's succinct summation in his afterword to the book: "If this isn't literature, nothing is."

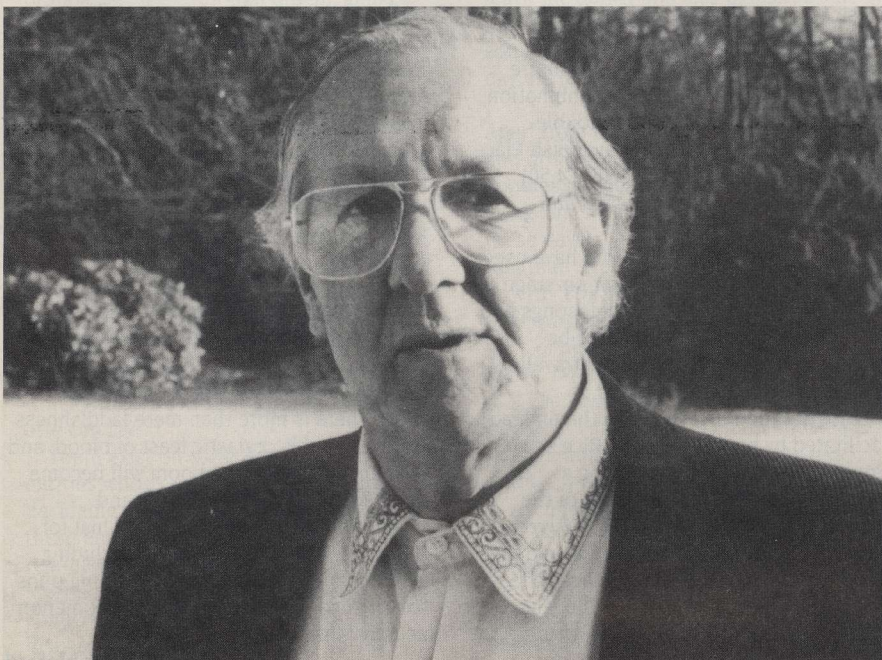
Akif Pirinçci's *Felidae* (Fourth Estate, £4.99) pulls off the neat trick of being narrated by a cat and having a cast made up almost exclusively of cats without once mentioning the word "cat". It also, thankfully, avoids lapses into anthropomorphic cuteness. Pirinçci has written a study of cat behaviour, so he knows whereof he speaks. This is no Disney cartoon. This is moggy life laid bare, all hissing, spitting street-fights and frantic back-garden copulations. It is also a detective story. Francis, our suave, wise-cracking feline hero, moves into a new apartment with his "owner", fat-slob romantic novelist and amateur Egyptologist Gustav, and shortly finds out that cats' bodies have been turning up in the area savagely murdered, their throats torn out. Curiosity being his middle name, Francis takes it upon himself to investigate. A cat's got to do what a cat's got to do, down these means streets a cat must go, and so on. His enquiries, however, uncover not just the presence of a feline serial killer in the vicinity but a weird religious cat-cult and evidence of sinister, appalling misdeeds in the past.

The fun of *Felidae* lies not so much in the discovery and unmasking of the villain as in the grafting of the themes and traditions of conventional detective fiction onto the world of cats. This Pirinçci performs with a straight face and a sly wink, aided by the translation by Ralph Noble (the original is in German) which has a hard time coping with some instances of heavy-handed irony but which on the whole is fluent, colloquial and pleasurable to read. Some of the plot devices even the most ardent advocate of feline intelligence would find hard to swallow, such as that certain cats can read and use a computer, but then if you're going to buy into the fantasy, you have to buy into it all the way – otherwise you'd be better off with the latest James Ellroy or Patricia D. Cornwell.

So, whether you are a cat-lover, or the lover of a cat-lover, or simply one of those people obliged to share living space with a member of the feline race, try *Felidae*. You will never look at that ever-hungry, perpetually-snoozing lump of fat and fur in quite the same way again.

James Lovegrove

Brian Aldiss, author of *Somewhere East of Life*



Photograph: Mark Cronin

The Seductions of Undeath

Brian Stableford

It can hardly have escaped anyone's notice that literary vampires have enjoyed an astonishing explosion of popularity in the last 20 years, with the result that vampire fiction has virtually become a genre in its own right. We are still a couple of years away from the centenary of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), which provided the definitive model of the literary vampire, but the evolution which that model has undergone in the meantime has suddenly entered a divergent phase unparalleled in the history of imaginative fiction. The literary vampire is no longer a straightforward and slightly ludicrous figure of menace but a fascinating case-study in existential and erotic confusion: a problematic character whose distinctive metahuman *angst* has somehow come to seem far more meaningful than the common-or-garden varieties which formed the focal point of Colin Wilson's groundbreaking scholarly fantasy *The Outsider*.

The great pioneer of revisionist vampire existentialism was Anne Rice, but some of those following in her footsteps have set out to explore differently reconfigured images of the vampire in such a way as to heighten even further the existential predicament and perverse sexuality of the undead. No one else has done so with such intensity, inventiveness and clarity of mind as Freda Warrington, whose pioneering work in *A Taste of Blood Wine* is now carried forward by the first of a projected series of sequels. *A Dance in Blood Velvet* (Macmillan, £15.99). This is not the kind of sequel which simply recombines established materials; the new novel carefully and conscientiously extrapolates the notion of the "Crystal Ring," exploring metaphysical corollaries of the concept while deftly employing its potential for the design of wonderfully melodramatic plots. The story neatly and scrupulously takes up the most important loose ends left dangling by the earlier volume, and moves with measured vigour towards a hectically extended climax, building a remarkable crescendo of action and emotion.

Although the author is careful not to overdo the philosophical speculation (unlike at least one person not a million miles away from where I sit) she remains well aware that she is conducting an exploration of unknown imaginative territory, and is careful to register the benchmarks around which future maps might be constructed. *A Dance in Blood Velvet* amply fulfils the promise of its

predecessor, and there is no doubt that the series will become one of the literary monuments of the nascent genre to which it belongs.

It is hardly surprising, given the intensity of her concentration on the ethics, etiquette and erotic possibilities of undeath, that Freda Warrington has become one of the two native heroines of British vampire fandom. The other is, of course, Storm Constantine – an inevitable appointment given the remarkable extent to which vampire fandom is fused with the "Gothic" subculture which emerged as an offshoot of punk but comfortably outlasted its parent. Although the figures which provided Goths with their initial stylistic cues (Siouxsie and the Banshees, Robert Smith of The Cure and Andrew Eldritch of The Sisters of Mercy) made no particular use of fantastic motifs in their songs, many of the bands which came after them have taken aboard vampiric imagery in a big way, to the extent that Thee Vampire Guild have issued an eclectic compilation album, *What Sweet Music They Make* (from 82 Ripcroft, Portland, Dorset DT5 2EE; £7.99 CD, £4.99 cassette), featuring bands from Germany, France, Finland and the USA as well as the UK. The music is varied but always extraordinarily vivid, taking aboard all kinds of suggestive sound-imagery – including emotion-enhancing cinematic music and the deep solemnities of reverent Church music – to enhance its cavorting dance-beats. The lyrics encapsulate both the menacing and erotic aspects of vampire mythology, separately and in combination. The House of Dracula offers a double cassette, *Gotisch* (from 47 Cavendish Place, Newcastle-upon-Tyne NE2 2NE; £4.50) featuring a wider range of bands and subject-matter.

While some of the bands who have used vampire imagery to shape their on-stage appearance, the content of their songs and the tenor of their publicity might be regarded simply as genre fellow-travellers there is no doubt that the kind of ideological identification with the undead facilitated by books like Anne Rice's and Freda Warrington's is nourishing a considerable creative force. One of the German bands featured on *What Sweet Music They Make*, Sopor Aeternus and the Ensemble of Shadows, has released the seven-track *Sopor Aeternus* (Apocalyptic Vision, Ahornweg 19, D-64807 Dieburg; 35DM CD) which is a remarkable

exploration of exotic musical atmospherics, ranging from the insistently anguished to the hauntingly mournful.

The literary productions of vampire/Goth fandom are numerous, featuring in such fanzines as Thee Vampire Guild's *Crimson*, The House of Dracula's *Bats and Red Velvet*, the Vampyre Society's *For the Blood is the Life* (38 Westcroft, Chippenham, Wilts SN14 0LY), the Gothic Society's *Grimoire* (138 Canterbury Rd, Harrow, Middx HA 1 4PB) and *The Penny Dreadfull* (72 Fern Dene Rd, Gateshead, Newcastle-upon-Tyne NE8 4RX). The most extensive by a wide margin is Jackie Askew's novel *SunDown SunRise* (NightShade, P.O. Box 61F, Chessington, Surrey KT9 1YQ, £6.50), in which a Lugosiesque aristocratic vampire cuts a broad swathe through the Goth community, converting a host of darkly enthusiastic acolytes before the inevitable *deus ex machina* cuts short his career (but leaves a record number of loose ends splayed in every direction). It is a work with far more zest than sophistication, but is certainly more deserving of attention than some of the books produced by commercial publishers hoping to cash in on the vampire boom. A particularly horrid example of this kind of exploitation is *Vampire: The Complete Guide to the World of the Undead* (Aurum, £12.95), which claims to have been written by one Manuela Dunn Mascetti although the bulk of its text has been untimely ripped – more or less verbatim – from Paul Barber's excellent *Vampires, Burial and Death: Folklore and Reality* (1988), of which it is a calculatedly moronic trivialization. Credit to the original is given in the small print at the end but many readers may feel that licensed plagiarism is still plagiarism and that the (mostly silly and irrelevant) illustrations serve only to add an inopportune element of travesty.

Those readers who thought that the vampire boom was a mere editorial whim whose fashionability would quickly wane have undoubtedly underestimated the extent and complexity of the matter in hand. There is more than mere faddishness involved in this orgiastic feast of blood, and it seems likely that the boom will become much louder before its echoes and reverberations begin to die – but just for this once, I shall refrain from concluding with any of the thousand excruciating puns to which commentary on this phenomenon usually falls prey.

Brian Stableford

YAWN CITY

Peter Crowther

For a while, at least, it seemed as though Stephen King had made a welcome return to top form with his latest novel *Insomnia* (Hodder & Stoughton, £15.99), an anxious story about an old man who starts waking up early. But while the writing is as accomplished as ever – reaching, in two sections at least, levels of narrative that must surely rank alongside King's best – the sheer implausibility of the complex plot and its extraordinarily alien (but somehow comically *human*) antagonists – ultimately renders the whole affair as one which perhaps should have remained in the Ideas File.

As one might expect, *Insomnia* isn't simply about the now-and-again annoyance of the occasional sleepless night, but rather Ralph Roberts's steady and inexorable build-up of waking progressively earlier every morning. First it's a little before seven, then, a few nights later, it's a little after 6.30, then a little after six, a little before six, 5.30... and so on. In much the same way that King detailed Billy Halleck's weight loss in *Thinner*, *Insomnia* describes in its first two hundred (of 650) pages the increasing de-synching of Roberts's perception of his 'world' of downtown Derry, the scene of so much mayhem in the earlier *It*. (For the train-spotter enthusiast, there are references to Mike Hanlon from that book and even, much later in the proceedings, to young Gage Creed from *Pet Sematary*.)

As is always the case with King, however, there's an apparently secondary procession of events, this time concerning the local *WomanCare* institution, which advocates freedom of choice for abortion, and the opposing *Friends of Life*, a collection of equally enthusiastic townfolk who believe that abortion is evil. So far, so good... and topical to boot.

Insomnia treads roughly the same track as *The Stand*, with the forces of darkness and light allying themselves to two opposing Earth-bound factions. It also echoes *The Dead Zone* in its use of a protagonist who, through ordeal, gains a power of sorts which he must use to save humanity... while possibly dooming himself in the process.

Over the weeks and, ultimately, months of his insomnia (as both *WomanCare* and *The Friends of Life* make their preparations for the forthcoming visit of a feminist speaker to Derry's Civic Hall auditorium), Ralph Roberts undergoes a transformation that is at once both physical – in terms of his seeming to grow younger (*Golden Years?*) – and cerebral, this latter facet allowing him to move up and down through planes of existence where he sees things which are all around us but which nobody else can see.

There exist on these higher planes many entities whose rationale and world-view are decidedly different from our own. Some of these entities (a couple of which are eerily reminiscent of characters from one of Grant Morrison's storylines for DC's *Doom Patrol* comicbook a couple of years back) are dispassionately following a set course – though it is never clear exactly by whom

this 'work' was originally set; nor is it explained how so few can accomplish so much – while others, notably the Crimson King (a completely malign being so-named by Roberts's corporeal opponent, Ed Deepneau), seem to operate to yet another set of rules... none of which are either fair or pleasant. What is clear, however, is that there are "good" guys and "bad" guys in each group; all that remains to be determined is the interrelationship of the groups themselves... and to do it in time for the *WomanCare* rally.

The usual bit-players and offbeat characters abound – a friendly, drug-store pharmacist, a wise policeman and a collection of *Cocoon* oldster stand-ins which includes a philosophical hobo-turned-guru who seems to know all the answers – but the plot progression seems to lose its impetus by the half-way mark. The inevitable outcome is similarly unusually low-key in its delivery, with little being made of the Crimson King when "he" makes his entrance just before the final curtain, though the 37-page epilogue restores some of the faith that the meandering middle-section of the book manages to erode.

In fact, it is in this afterword (of sorts), plus an earlier section which documents in detail the final days of Roberts's wife, that King's literary light shines as bright as ever. It's as though he really only wants to tell us about the human condition and its myriad failings, foibles and frailties, preferring to leave the darker and less plausible side of the story tucked away in a drawer somewhere. One can only hope that, one day, he has the nerve to do it properly.

Apart from the welcome promise of food-and drink-excesses (not to mention gift goodies galore!), the proximity of Christmas holds one more thing to look forward to these days: a new spook-filled tale from Jonathan Aycliffe.

With *The Matrix* (HarperCollins, price unknown), Aycliffe maintains the style and pace of his earlier *Naomi's Room*, *Whispers In The Dark* (still the best, for my money) and *The Vanishment*, with sufficient frissons of fear to ensure that even the most jaded fright-follower won't take more than a sitting or two to devour the entire book.

Aycliffe's customary first-person narrative follows the experiences of Andrew Macleod who, on the untimely death of his young wife, Catriona, takes up a research position in Edinburgh where he throws himself even deeper into his already-established studies of arcane lore and occult activities.

Treatises and dusty volumes speculating on the pyramids, ley lines and the Gnostic Gospels progress to Macleod attending lectures on Atlantis, hermetic lore and alchemy, all of which the young academic embraces with almost fanatical zeal. But, as he immerses himself further into the groups and clubs operating on the periphery of standard academe and even beyond, he soon realizes that his work so far has merely scratched the surface: he wants more, but the route forward has been skilfully covered by those who have been before thus protecting them and their work from all but the most dedicated students.

It is only when he becomes involved with one group in particular – the Fraternity of the Old Path – that Macleod starts to make real progress by virtue of their extensive library. It is here, alone one cold November night, that he finds a particularly interesting tome (*Matrix Aeternitatis* – the *Matrix* of the title) jammed at the bottom of a bookcase in a small nook apparently devised by the carpenter. The book, a 1598 volume filled with talismanic devices and geometrical shapes, appears to concentrate on ritual magic, diabolical incantations and weird verse... one stanza of which begins thus:

Hee that shal come shal come quickly
And hee shal bring with him many
For that there are now with him many
And hee with them always until hee come.

But there is one more thing in the book, a small, woodcut illustration of such depravity and horror that Macleod is unable to look at it longer than the time it takes to disentangle the figures depicted. But, of course, it's long enough, and no sooner has he slammed the book shut than he hears a slithering noise in the deserted rooms above his head:

I could hear it, very soft, like seaweed on damp rocks, flapping and wriggling across the landing.

As I stood listening, it reached the first step and started down the stairs.

Although he manages to flee the library without encountering the owner of that singularly troublesome gait, Macleod is both physically and mentally drained by the incident and, once home, he is beset by strange dreams in which he hears those same noises repeated within the confines of his rooms. Unable to raise himself the following morning, he sleeps on until he is finally aroused one whole day later by a friend who, upon seeing Macleod's condition, calls for a doctor. The verdict is overwork, a condition which explains all the symptoms... save one: a rash of angry, circular red weals covering the patient's face and hands.

As his recovery progresses, Macleod returns to his work feeling somewhat refreshed but the discovery that he took the book with him that fateful night and a subsequent meeting with Duncan Mylne, a fellow member of the Fraternity of the Old Path, leads him into a spiral of events that are to take him to Morocco and the very edge of his sanity... particularly when people start to show an interest in his dead wife and, worse still, in where she is buried.

The Matrix moves along at a breakneck pace, delivering grotesqueries galore and plying the reader with a studied and lilting prose reminiscent of the old masters. If you haven't sent off your list to Santa yet, then get scribbling: this is surely one for the Christmas stocking.

And here's another.

There seems to be a strange and almost magical attraction about baseball. More than any other sport in the world, it seems to have assumed a mythos all of its own, imbuing itself with its very own legends and myths so that it is virtually an allegory of life itself.

It's the conversational common-ground for the three mid-life-crisis-stricken men in *City Slickers*; the comparison-yardstick for the narrator's estranged wife in Danny O'Keefe's 1972 song "Mad Ruth/The Babe"; while, in literary terms, it has provided the Elysian field of W. P. Kinsella's *Shoeless Joe* (adapted for the movie *Field of Dreams*), the talismanic bat of Bernard Malamud's *The Natural* and the inept team of losers in Philip Roth's unforgettable *The Great American Novel*.

And now there's another, quite possibly the best of the lot.

A book ostensibly about baseball but

also concerning bigotry, monsters (both real and fabled) and that nebulous and indefinable badge of humanity that separates us from other animals, Michael Bishop's 500-page *Brittle Innings* (Bantam, \$21.95) slides unassumingly onto the bookshelves and assuredly onto the potential best-of-the-year list of anyone fortunate enough to read it.

It's 1943. Seventeen-year-old Daniel Boles is invited to join the Highbridge Hellbenders, a small, semi-professional baseball team operating in the Chattahoochee Valley League. *En route* from his small, Oklahoma hometown of Tenkiller, Boles is violently assaulted by two soldiers, an encounter which renders the already verbally-challenged boy (he stutters) temporarily mute. It is in this sorry condition that he arrives in Highbridge to meet his team-mates, a motley assortment of draft deferrals which includes a hulking giant of a man going by the name of Henry Clerval who, it transpires, is both more and less than what he seems.

Over the weeks ahead, Boles establishes himself as a formidable player – though his prowess is not appreciated by everyone – but, as the end-of-season pennant approaches, everything he has grown to love and take for granted suddenly seems precarious. Along the way, Boles must come to terms with the

death of his father and the part he played in Boles's life while Clerval is driven to define his own existence and the long sequence of events that have brought him to where he is. And as the two men search for something that will give meaning and perspective to both their pasts and their futures, the story culminates in scenes of jealousy, betrayal, violence, death and, eventually, redemption.

Inviting inevitable comparisons to Bradbury's and Kinsella's eloquent father/son epics, *Something Wicked This Way Comes* and *Shoeless Joe* – plus Mary Shelley's eternal monster story and perhaps even Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* (with its blurring of just *who* is looking after *whom*) – *Brittle Innings* is nevertheless distinctly one of a kind and, quite simply, an altogether wonderful book. An odyssey-like journey set against a backcloth of strife, success and the way-we-were Americana, it must surely stand as a landmark of the year and, ultimately, of the entire genre.

With the possible exception of John Irving's masterful *A Prayer For Owen Meaney* – the style and approach of which Bishop echoes most impressively here – the fantastic has rarely seemed either so believable or so desirable. Full marks... and then some.

Pete Crowther

AN APOLOGY FOR HORROR

Andy Robertson

of what follows. (In this legendarium the author of *Ulysses* is claimed as Horror's brother). Unfortunately such episodes can provoke more mirth than disgust. Subtlety is definitely not Savoy's strong suit; there are too many fight scenes for my taste, an over-emphasis on violence for its own sake which only loses effect through continual repetition, and the plot line is perhaps too slow-moving and diffuse. The first issue gives away enough to make it possible to understand what is going on, and the second concentrates effectively on depicting the violent and aberrant sexuality of the protagonists, but the third really seems to mark time, doing little to illuminate either the characters or the storyline.

Despite these qualifiers, this really is excellent work. I have rarely read a comic which demands so much thought and attention. Each issue is a kaleidoscopic combination of art, poetry, photographs and text, much of it meant to communicate a mood rather than directly carry on the story. The juxtapositions are delightfully eclectic (as when Belloc's poem "The Frog" is illustrated by a man in bizarre bondage gear, or part of Yeats's "Under Ben Bulgin" subtitled Horror as *le pendule* waiting to ambush a police patrol). Coulthart's dark, clogged artwork is superb, though he is slightly better with architecture than the human figure, and the capsules of surreal prose which are

periodically embedded in the larger work are each of them little windows of madness. If only it were *slightly* closer and tighter, slightly less prone to sheer display, it would be very good indeed.

In the past both the comic *Lord Horror* and its sidekick *Meng and Ecker* have been banned as obscene and confiscated, and the same fate has befallen *Lord Horror* the novel. On top of the official persecution, Savoy have had to deal with almost universal opprobrium from the artistic establishment, having been condemned as tasteless, racist, anti-Semitic, homophobic, gratuitously violent, sexist and, again, obscene. (And to add to all his other sins Horror is apparently a dedicated family man, who has been deeply in love with one woman for more than 60 years). These accusations are accurate, though of course they apply to Horror and his coterie, not his creators, so it's a bit difficult to explain why I admire these magazines. Partly because it is refreshing to see something which sets out to shock both our self-appointed groups of censors; partly because of the very high, if variable, quality; but mostly because the sheer darkness of Savoy's anti-heroes is true to humanity and to history in a way which other recent work fails to be.

Horror, as old as our century, moves forward into the new millennium as the authentic ambassador of Buchenwald, Hiroshima and Babi Yar. His was a version of our time where Churchill was a warmonger who sent steam tick-tock men to off his brilliant rival; where Hitler was a giggling decadent he bedded; and where questions of literary taste were debated by razor. Not the real century, no, but perhaps the real century with the skin taken off. I await *Reverbstorm 4* with interest.

Andy Robertson

Savoy's weird, flawed but fascinating "Lord Horror" sequence continues with *Reverbstorm* by Dave Britton, art by John Coulthart (Savoy, £3.50), issues 1-3 of which have materialized in our office. There is no real point in making this review a defence of the whole Lord Horror ethos, comics, novel, music and all: if it be admitted that this is a genuinely vicious body of work, it is at least one which attempts real violations of real contemporary moral norms, and not just the usual tepid pantomimes of rebellion. Savoy flay and mock the cherished values of the Disestablishment with the same vigour that they use to cut away more conventional taboos, and if the result is not quite the perfect graphic novel it is certainly a very interesting one.

There is no easily coherent or explainable plot to *Reverbstorm*, though there is at least a vague linkage with the earlier parts of the series. Horror, the alternate version or incarnation of that Lord Haw-Haw who was executed by the Allies after the war, cut adrift in time and space, now broadcasts to Amerika from Tormenburgen – a sort of postmillennial fusion of Hell, New York and Auschwitz – as he once broadcast to England from Berlin. Some sort of supernatural attack is mustering, focused on his wife, unleashed by an armoured demoness whose nature remains enigmatic. As the city mutates from death-camp industrial sump to world capital to transcendent ghetto Horror takes on by turns the roles of rock star, ambassador, wizard, street fighter and aesthete.

This is above all a series which tries to shock, and it sometimes loses force through sheer self-indulgence. *Reverbstorm 1*, for instance, terminates with James Joyce down on his knees and fisting right past the elbow a street punk whose throat he has just cut, and this episode is pretty mild compared to some

RECYCLED WHO

Paul Beardsley

According to the blurb on each book in the series, Virgin's *The New Doctor Who Adventures* "take the TARDIS into previously unexplored realms of space and time." Oh yeah? In the course of reading a dozen of the novels, I have lost count of the number of props, sets, characters and situations which have been plundered from various episodes of the old TV series. New settings take a back seat.

Andy Lane's *All-Consuming Fire* (Virgin, £4.99) actually lives up to the claim more than most. It's a crossover story, in which the Doctor meets Sherlock Holmes, Conan Doyle's creation unobtrusively rationalized as a real historical figure. The bulk of the book takes the form of one of Dr Watson's narratives (latterly supplemented by diary extracts from the Doctor's 25th century companion Bernice), so that the emphasis is on Holmes' viewpoint, to begin with. My impression is that it would have worked better if it had stayed that way a bit longer, with the Doctor rarely appearing except as a mysterious figure in the background, but it is unlikely that the perceived readership could have coped with such a radical approach.

The story opens with Holmes and Watson commissioned by the Pope to recover some forbidden books. This leads to a journey through the dark heart of Victorian London, in the course of which they encounter extraterrestrial creatures, apparently supernatural phenomena, and several characters and places familiar to readers of the Holmes books. Eventually they team up with the Doctor as they pursue the main villain to India; after that, they storm yet another literary universe, that of H.P. Lovecraft's R'lyeh (consistently misspelled Ry'leh), where the last third of the action is centred.

Up to that point, the book is a likeable romp with good local colour, although the research shows through sometimes. Once on R'lyeh, however, sloppy thinking and imagining rob the story of its drive, and with that some of the book's irritants really got to me. Why, for instance, does Watson insist on quoting from T.S. Eliot poems three decades before they were written? And would Holmes *really* reveal his liberal, 1990s views on homosexuality to a contemporary? On the other hand I was pleased to see the Doctor's other companion, the gratuitously unpleasant Ace, sneakily let slip that the smart bombs she carries were an idea stolen from Iain M. Banks, and not invented by a Certain Other *Who* Author.

Terrance Dicks' *Blood Harvest* (Virgin, £4.99) and Paul Cornell's *Goth Opera* (Virgin, £4.99) have a peculiar chronology. Both feature vampires, the two authors adhering to the facts revealed by the old Hammer *Dracula* films whilst disregarding the Bram Stoker novel – their vampires get frazzled by exposure to sunlight. The Cornell is the first of Virgin's *Doctor Who Missing*



Adventures, featuring a previous incarnation of the Doctor (the fifth). From his point of view, then, this story takes place before the Dicks, which is a *New Adventure* featuring the seventh incarnation. From the vampires' point of view (and the reader's), however, *Blood Harvest* is the earlier book.

Blood Harvest begins with two main storylines, one being a direct sequel to Dicks' own 1980 TV story *State of Decay*. Bernice is left on the Vampire Planet, where she teams up with a former companion, the Time Lady Romana.

To make it more a re-enactment than a sequel, Dicks resorts to his old trick of bringing characters back from the dead, only to have them killed again later.

The other storyline is set in Prohibition

Chicago. The author has done his research well though, oddly, the Doctor and Ace have not – they are unprepared for a number of well documented historical events. Still, the idea of the Doc running a speakeasy, with a more sympathetic than usual Ace working as his gun moll, is quite appealing. Ace befriends a Marlowesque gumshoe who sometimes serves as first-person narrator, and Doc befriends Al Capone (such decent chaps those gangsters – only ever killed each other, you know). When Ace is kidnapped, Doc suspends his "no guns" rule for once and goes after her armed with a sawn-off shotgun.

Several highly derivative chapters later, they all meet up on Gallifrey, in an endgame that is a direct sequel (read "re-enactment", again) of Dicks' own 1983 TV story *The Five Doctors*.

The Cornell book is even more derivative. It takes in Tasmania and Croatia, but its real setting is clearly the playground that is the *Dr Who* mythos. The story opens in Manchester, with a vampire couple singing Smiths songs and telling jokes that would shame Russ Abbott (such as whether to have a Chinese or an Indian for dinner). Later they somehow manage to fly into deep space without being touched by sunlight, where they talk, murmur and whisper to each other across hard vacuum. It's only sf, who needs science? We also learn that nightfall in England corresponds with daybreak throughout the southern hemisphere – suggesting that the author has never actually looked at a globe.

Meanwhile, Romana is killed off-stage (only – surprise! – she isn't really), companion Nyssa is suckled [sic] by a vampire baby, companion Tegan fights off an adult vampire with a Primo Levi book, and the Doctor corners another with garlic bread – forcing it to commit suicide by pulling its own head off. With Nyssa turning into a vampire, the Doctor and Tegan team up with tortured evangelist Victor Lang and his army of exploding Christians (honestly), lorryloads of familiar names and situations turn up and repeat themselves... but I'm giving away the plot.

It's not as silly as it sounds. Actually I'm lying, it is as silly as it sounds. It's also the most anally recursive story I've read since... well, since the last one I read by Paul Cornell. But at least he's stopped treating the mythos as if it were a sacred work of art. This is pure fan fiction, tremendous, rollercoaster-paced fun for anyone steeped in the series. Not for anybody else though.

Paul Beardsley

Books Received

September 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.

Ballard, J. G. **Concrete Island**. Vintage, ISBN 0-09-933481-X, 176pp, B-format paperback, cover by Conor Brady, £5.99. (Sf/"slipstream" novel, first published in 1974; this edition contains a new two-page introduction by the author; Vintage is the quality-paperback imprint of Random House, a conglomerate which subsumes Jonathan Cape, who were the original hardcover publishers of this book; it seems Random are now clawing back [from their rival, HarperCollins] the paperback rights to all the Ballard titles which Cape originally published.) *Late entry: July (?) publication, received in September 1994.*

Ballard, J. G. **Hello America**. Vintage, ISBN 0-09-926591-5, 224pp, B-format paperback, cover by John Morris, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in 1981; this edition contains a new two-page introduction by the author, in which he says: "Cadillacs, Coca Cola and cocaine, presidents and psychopaths, Norman Rockwell and the mafia ... the dream of America endlessly unravels its codes, like the helix of some ideological DNA.") *Late entry: June (?) publication, received in September 1994.*

Barker, Clive. **Everville: The Second Book of the Art**. HarperCollins, ISBN 0-00-223985-X, 640pp, hardcover, £15.99. (Horror/fantasy novel, first edition; sequel to *The Great and Secret Show*.) *27th September 1994.*

Brosnan, John. **The Opoponax Invasion**. Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-05827-7, 223pp, A-format paperback, cover by Peter Mennim, £4.99. (Sf novel, first published in 1993.) *22nd September 1994.*

Bull, Emma, and Will Shetterly. **Double Feature**. Introduction by Patrick and Teresa Nielsen Hayden. NESFA Press [PO Box 809, Framingham, MA 10701-0203, USA], ISBN 0-915368-99-4, x+264pp, hardcover, cover by Nicholas Jainschigg, \$17.95. (Fantasy collection, first edition; there was a simultaneous signed, slipcased edition [not seen]; it contains reprinted stories, mainly from the authors' "Liavek" shared-world fantasy series, plus a few hitherto-unpublished stories, essays and poems; although they are husband and wife and share the credit for this book, the authors do in fact write separately, their stories

alternating throughout the volume.) *Late entry: February publication, received in September 1994.*

Carter, Angela. **Nights at the Circus**. Vintage, ISBN 0-09-938861-8, 295pp, B-format paperback, cover by Dominic Davies, £5.99. (Literary fantasy novel, first published in 1984; reviewed by Colin Greenland in *Interzone* 10.) *29th September 1994.*

Chalker, Jack L. **Gods of the Well of Souls: A Well World Novel**. Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-36203-9, viii+356pp, B-format paperback, cover by Paul Youll, \$10. (Sf novel, first edition; the third part of a follow-up to his original five-volume "Well World" series of the 1970s, it follows on from the recent *Echoes of the Well of Souls* and *Shadow of the Well of Souls*.) *9th October 1994.*

Compton, D. G. **Justice City**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-05838-2, 288pp, hardcover, cover by Peter Mennim, £14.99. (Near-future thriller, first edition; proof copy received; it's described as "set just ten minutes into the future, and with a hard political edge.") *24th November 1994.*

Cooper, John, and B. A. Pike. **Detective Fiction: The Collector's Guide**. 2nd edition. Scholar Press, ISBN 0-85967-991-8, x+341pp, hardcover, £39.50. (Bibliographical guidebook to the crime-fiction genre; it's beautifully illustrated with both black-and-white and colour photos of book jackets; the first edition appeared in 1988; it covers more than 150 authors, with brief biographical information and detailed listings of their first editions; there are various interesting appendices; recommended to those with the book-collecting instinct [which includes many sf fans].) *29th September 1994.*

Datlow, Ellen, and Terri Windling, eds. **Black Thorn, White Rose**. Morrow/AvoNova, ISBN 0-688-13713-X, xiii+386pp, hardcover, cover by Thomas Canty, \$22. (Fantasy anthology, first edition; it contains all-new adult fairy tales by Storm Constantine, Nancy Kress, Peter Straub, Howard Waldrop, Patricia C. Wrede, Jane Yolen, Roger Zelazny and others.) *September 1994.*

De Lint, Charles. **The Little Country**. Pan, ISBN 0-330-32107-2, 630pp, A-format paperback, cover by Keith Scaiffe, £5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1991.) *7th October 1994.*

De Lint, Charles. **Spiritwalk**. Macmillan, ISBN 0-333-63730-5, 380pp, C-format paperback, cover by David Bergen, £9.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1992; sequel to *Moonheart*; it's actually a fix-up of various novellas and short stories, some of which were first published in Canada as slim books in their own right; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen]; reviewed by Ken Brown in *Interzone* 61; the publishers are now calling themselves "Macmillan General Books" instead of Pan Macmillan, and their trade paperbacks are now presented as Macmillan titles rather than as Pan; could this be the beginning of the end for the time-

honoured Pan name?; are they going to phase it out in the same way that Grafton and then HarperCollins did the equally honoured name of Panther Books?; sacrilege!) *7th October 1994.*

Dozois, Gardner, ed. **The Best New Science Fiction: 8th Annual Collection**. Robinson, ISBN 1-85487-310-5, xlv+658pp, B-format paperback, £6.99. (Sf anthology, first published the USA as *The Year's Best Science Fiction: Eleventh Annual Collection*, 1994; it contains 23 stories by writers ranging from Brian Aldiss and Joe Haldeman to Bruce Sterling and Nancy Kress, including two from *Interzone* — "Chaff" by Greg Egan and "Lieserl" by Stephen Baxter; reviewed by Chris Gilmore in *IZ* 87.) *3rd October 1994.*

Dozois, Gardner, ed. **Modern Classic Short Novels of Science Fiction**. St Martin's Press, ISBN 0-312-11317-X, xii+657pp, C-format paperback, cover by Kim Poor, \$15.95. (Sf anthology, first published in 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, Frederik Pohl, Cordwainer Smith, Jack Vance, Gene Wolfe and others.) *13th September 1994.*

Enright, D. J., ed. **The Oxford Book of the Supernatural**. Oxford University Press, ISBN 0-19-214201-1, ix+557pp, hardcover, £17.99. (Horror/fantasy anthology, first edition; more of a commonplace book than a story-antology proper, it contains anecdotes, extracts, poems from the length and breadth of world literature, with authors ranging from Homer and Dante to Angela Carter and A. S. Byatt; the editor is a well-known poet and critic who has previously edited *The Oxford Book of Death* [1993].) *6th October 1994.*

Furness, Ray, ed. **The Dedalus Book of German Decadence: Voices of the Abyss**. Translated by Ray Furness and Mike Mitchell. Dedalus, ISBN 1-873982-21-6, 289pp, B-format paperback, cover by Claudia Andrei, £8.99. (Horror/fantasy anthology, first edition; authors represented include Hanns Heinz Ewers, Georg Heym, Thomas Mann, Leopold von Sacher-Masoch and Georg Trakl; in the usual Dedalus manner, their works are described as "wayward and degenerate... perverse and disturbing" and of a "luminous morbidity" — all intended as terms of high praise.) *15th October 1994.*

Gaiman, Neil. **The Tragical Comedy or Comical Tragedy of Mr. Punch: A Romance**. Illustrated by Dave McKean. Gollancz/VG Graphics, ISBN 0-575-05318-6, unpaginated, very large-format paperback, £8.99. (Fantasy graphic novel, first edition; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen].) *17th November 1994.*

Germain, Sylvie. **The Medusa Child**. Translated by Liz Nash. Dedalus, ISBN 1-873982-31-3, 246pp, B-format paperback, cover by Lise Weisgerber, £8.99. (Literary fantasy novel, first published in France, 1991.) *15th October 1994.*

Gibson, William. **Virtual Light**. Penguin, ISBN 0-14-015772-7, 296pp, B-format paperback, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1993; reviewed by John Clute in *Interzone* 77; there is a simultaneous "audiobook" version, read by Peter Weller, priced at £7.99 [not seen].) *6th October 1994*.

Halam, Ann. **The Haunting of Jessica Raven**. Orion, ISBN 1-85881-050-7, 124pp, hardcover, cover by Paul Young, £9.99. (Juvenile sf/horror novel, first edition; "Ann Halam" is a pseudonym of Gwyneth Jones.) *No date shown: received in September 1994*.

[Halifax, Lord, ed.] **The Ghost Book of Charles Lindley, Viscount Halifax**. Foreword by Simon Marsden. Robinson, ISBN 1-85487-263-X, xii+244+171pp, B-format paperback, cover by Marsden, £5.99. (Horror anthology, first published as two volumes, *Lord Halifax's Ghost Book*, 1936, and *Further Stories from Lord Halifax's Ghost Book*, 1937; it consists of allegedly true ghost tales by various hands, all collected/edited/rewritten by Lord Halifax between the 1890s and 1930s.) *3rd October 1994*.

Hicken, Mandy, and Ray Prytherch. **Now Read On: A Guide to Contemporary Popular Fiction**. 2nd edition. Scolar Press, ISBN 1-85928-008-0, viii+442pp, hardcover, £27.50. (Bibliographical guide to genre fiction; the first edition appeared in 1990; this second edition over 100 pages longer than the first, and much improved in its coverage; the categories include "Adventure stories; Country life; Detective stories; Family stories; Fantasies; Foreign locations; Glitz [previously 'Contemporary glamour']; Gothic romances; Historical novels; Horror stories [previously 'Macabre stories']; Humorous novels; 'Perceptive' women's novels; Police work; The saga; Science fiction; Sea stories; Spy stories; Thrillers; War stories" and a wholly new section for "Women detectives"; unfortunately, the coverage of sf, fantasy and horror is still rather hit-and-miss [e.g. Tom Holt is listed under sf, which he has never written, but not under fantasy; Harry Harrison is listed under fantasy, which he has never written, but not under sf]; still, the book is well worth having for its useful coverage of all those other categories of fiction; but beware: at least one howler, which we pointed out in our review in *Million* no. 1, has still not been corrected — the absurd assertion that Irish historical novelist Patrick O'Brian and South African thriller writer Geoffrey Jenkins are one and the same person writing under pseudonyms.) *Late entry: 24th March publication, received in September 1994*.

Holdstock, Robert. **Merlin's Wood, or The Vision of Magic**. HarperCollins, ISBN 0-00-224603-1, 234pp, hardcover, cover by Geoff Taylor, £15.99. (Fantasy collection, first edition; the bulk of the book consists of the title novel [part one of this four-part tale first appeared in *Interzone*; recommended]; to round the volume out, there are also two short stories, "Earth and Stone" [1980] and "The Silvering" [1992].) *22nd September 1994*.

Hunt, Stephen. **For the Crown & the Dragon: First Book in the Triple-Realm Fantasy Adventure Series**. Green Nebula [PO Box 491, Coulsdon, Surrey CR5 2UJ], 360pp, A-format paperback, cover by Philip Rowlands, £4.99. (Alternative-world fantasy novel, first edition; this is a self-published debut novel by a new British writer, more energetically marketed and promoted than any such we've ever seen before in this field; *Interzone* reviewer Chris Gilmore is credited as copy-editor on the book, which we trust is some sort of guarantee of quality.) *17th October 1994*.

James, Peter. **Host**. Penguin/Signet, computer disc, £12.99. (Sf/horror novel, first published in 1993; this disc, billed as "Penguin's first-ever electronic novel," will accompany the paperback release of the book [not yet received]; as well as the full text of the novel it contains various add-ons including video and audio clips; alas, the advance "review copy" received turns out to be blank.) *3rd November 1994*.

Kaye, Marvin, with Saralee Kaye, eds. **A Classic Collection of Haunting Ghost Stories**. Warner, ISBN 0-7515-0968-X, xvi+381pp, B-format paperback, cover by Ashley Pearce, £5.99. (Horror anthology, first published in the USA as *Ghosts*, 1981; it contains stories by E. F. Benson, Ambrose Bierce, Algernon Blackwood, A. M. Burrage, Charles Dickens, E. T. A. Hoffmann, Washington Irving, Nigel Kneale, Fritz Leiber, Robert Louis Stevenson, H. G. Wells and others.) *20th October 1994*.

Lane, Joel. **The Earth Wire and Other Stories**. Egerton Press [5 Windsor Court, 24 Avenue Rd., London N15 5JQ], ISBN 0-9518520-2-7, 206pp, small-press paperback, £6.99. (Horror collection, first edition; a debut book by a British writer, born 1963, whose work has appeared widely in small-press and literary magazines; the publisher is Nicholas Royle.) *29th September 1994*.

Lawhead, Stephen. **Pendragon: Book IV of the Pendragon Cycle**. Lion, ISBN 0-7459-2763-7, 390pp, A-format paperback, cover by Mike Posen, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1994.) *30th September 1994*.

Laws, Stephen. **Macabre**. Hodder & Stoughton, ISBN 0-450-60690-2, 440pp, hardcover, cover by Mark Taylor, £15.99. (Horror novel, first edition.) *20th October 1994*.

Lentz, Harris M., III. **Science Fiction, Horror & Fantasy Film and Television Credits, Supplement 2: Through 1993**. McFarland [distributed in Britain by Shelving Ltd, 127 Sandgate Rd., Folkestone, Kent CT20 2BL], ISBN 0-89950-927-4, x+854pp, hardcover, £85. (Alphabetical who's who and indices to sf, fantasy and horror films; first published in the USA, 1994; this is the US edition with a British price; although it's a mere "supplement," and a second one to boot [earlier volumes appeared in 1983 and 1989],

this is a massive work, going on 900 pages of small type; it serves to show how enormous the body of cinematic and TV sf & f now is; recommended for reference collections with a sizeable budget.) *27th October 1994*.

Mann, Phillip. **The Fall of the Families: Part Two of the Story of the Gardener**. Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-05787-4, 298pp, A-format paperback, cover by Trevor Webb, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in 1987; reviewed by John Clute in *Interzone* 22.) *6th October 1994*.

Moore, Christopher. **Coyote Blue**. Black Swan, ISBN 0-552-99597-5, 318pp, B-format paperback, cover by J. C. Whittaker, £5.99. (Humorous fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1994; a second novel by the American author of *Practical Demonkeeping* [1992]; this one seems to be pitched more upmarket, as non-genre "literary" fantasy.) *6th October 1994*.

Parish, James Robert. **Ghosts and Angels in Hollywood Films: Plots, Critiques, Casts and Credits for 264 Theatrical and Made-for-Television Releases**. McFarland [distributed in Britain by Shelving Ltd, 127 Sandgate Rd., Folkestone, Kent CT20 2BL], ISBN 0-89950-676-3, xii+419pp, hardcover, £49.95. (Heavily annotated illustrated catalogue of American-made movies which deal in ghostly and angelic themes; first published in the USA, 1994; this is the US edition with a British price; a fascinating book, full of information on the comparatively under-researched area of Hollywood fantasy, from 1914 to 1991; it's a pity that British films of similar type, such as *The Ghost Goes West* and *Blithe Spirit*, are not described in detail [though they are listed]; it's also a pity that "devil" and "witch" stories, such as *The Devil and Daniel Webster* and *I Married a Witch*, are not dealt with at any length [though again they are all listed in brief, and possibly these will form the basis of another James Robert Parish tome in the future]; nevertheless, a very useful resource.) *24th November 1994*.

Pratchett, Terry. **Men at Arms**. "A Discworld Novel." Corgi, ISBN 0-552-14028-7, 381pp, A-format paperback, cover by Josh Kirby, £4.99. (Humorous fantasy novel, first published in 1993; reviewed by John Clute in *Interzone* 79; the accompanying press release gives us some figures: Pratchett now has "over six million books sold worldwide and over three million Discworld books sold in Corgi paperback alone... Each new title sells in excess of 400,000 paperbacks and 40,000 hardbacks in the UK"; which is impressive, but it reveals that our Terry still hasn't made it to true superseller status — according to recent-ish Hodder & Stoughton publicity, Stephen King is "the most popular novelist in the history of American fiction [sic] with world sales now computed to be over 100 million," while the same publishing house [which clearly doesn't know what its left hand is doing] informs us that Harold Robbins "has achieved sales of 685 million, making him the international bestselling novelist of

all time [sic]"; the *Guinness Book of Records*, meanwhile, tells us that the late Agatha Christie has cumulative worldwide sales estimated at 2,000 million copies, making her "the world's top-selling writer of fiction"; at a humble six million, Pratchett has a little way to go yet.) *10th November 1994.*

Rankin, Robert. **The Greatest Show Off Earth.** Doubleday, ISBN 0-385-40419-0, 284pp, hardcover, cover by Ian Murray, £14.99. (Humorous fantasy novel, first edition; sequel to *The Book of Ultimate Truths and Raiders of the Lost Car Park.*) *6th October 1994.*

Rucker, Rudy. **Software.** Penguin/Roc, ISBN 0-14-017802-3, 174pp, A-format paperback, £4.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1982; second Penguin printing; what's the point of this "Roc" imprint when Penguin constantly hive off so much of their most literary and/or commercial genre material [William Gibson, Poppy Z. Brite, the "Red Dwarf" books] into the main Penguin list?; does it do Rucker any service to publish him alongside a slew of game-derived fantasies rather than alongside Gibson?; come on, Penguin, kill Roc and get back to publishing a unified list.) *No date shown: received in September 1994.*

Rusch, Kristine Kathryn. **Alien Influences.** Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-104-9, 424pp, hardcover, £15.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1994; it appears to be a fix-up incorporating various stories which appeared in *F & SF* and elsewhere; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen].) *No date shown: received in September 1994.*

Stableford, Brian. **The Carnival of Destruction.** Carroll & Graf, ISBN 0-7867-0122-6, 433pp, hardcover, \$21.95. (Fantasy/horror/metaphysical sf novel, first

edition [? — it was due to have been published in the UK by Simon & Schuster before now, but there's still no sign of it]; proof copy received; third in the trilogy which began with *The Werewolves of London* and *The Angel of Pain.*) *December 1994.*

Sterling, Bruce. **Heavy Weather.** Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-192-8, 280pp, hardcover, cover by Chris Moore, £15.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1994; Sterling's first new solo novel since *Islands in the Net.*) *No date shown: received in September 1994.*

Sutton, David, and Stephen Jones, eds. **Dark Voices 6: The Pan Book of Horror.** Pan, ISBN 0-330-33505-7, 466pp, A-format paperback, cover by Luis Rey, £5.99. (Horror anthology, first edition; it contains all-new stories by John Brunner, David Case, Nancy Holder, Kathe Koja and Barry Malzberg, Kim Newman, Nicholas Royle, Michael Marshall Smith, Mark Timlin, etc.) *7th October 1994.*

Tepper, Sheri S. **Shadow's End.** Bantam/Spectra, ISBN 0-553-09514-5, 388pp, hardcover, \$22.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received.) *15th November 1994.*

Tompkins, David G., ed. **Science Fiction Writer's Market Place and Sourcebook.** Writer's Digest, ISBN 0-89879-692-X, x+486pp, hardcover, \$19.99. (Sf/fantasy writers' guide, first edition; it contains information about all the major and minor sf magazines in the USA and the rest of the English-speaking world, plus mini-interviews with editors, reprinted advice articles, lists of agents, book-dealers, awards, etc; a useful compendium.) *No date shown: received in September 1994.*

Watson, Ian. **Lucky's Harvest: The First Book of MANA.** Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-05779-3, 537pp, A-format paperback, cover by

Jim Burns, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in 1993; reviewed by John Clute in *Interzone* 77.) *22nd September 1994.*

Whitehead, Peter. **The Risen: A Holographic Novel.** Hathor Publishing [Shepherds Cottage, Pytchley, Kettering, Northants. NN14 1EX], ISBN 0-9522035-1-0, 432pp, hardcover, cover by Alan Moore, £14.99. (Occult/horror/sf novel, first edition; the author is a British underground film-maker who has been doing eccentric things since the 1960s; his book comes with commendations from Alan Moore and Andrew Sinclair; the author photo on the inside back flap is by Mick Jagger, no less — Whitehead was once "official film diarist for the Rolling Stones.") *18th October 1994.*

Wood, Bridget. **Sorceress.** Headline, ISBN 0-7472-4490-1, 600pp, A-format paperback, cover by Paul Young, £5.99. (Fantasy novel published in 1994; reviewed by Chris Gilmore in *Interzone* 85.) *15th September 1994.*

Wright, T. M. **Goodlow's Ghosts.** Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-05720-3, 215pp, A-format paperback, cover by David Farren, £4.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1993; reviewed by Pete Crowther in *Interzone* 72.) *29th September 1994.*

Wurts, Janny. **The Ships of Merior: The Wars of Light and Shadows, Volume 2.** HarperCollins, ISBN 0-00-224072-6, 494pp, hardcover, cover by the author, £15.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen].) *20th October 1994.*

Zahn, Timothy. **Conqueror's Pride.** Bantam, ISBN 0-553-40853-4, 389pp, A-format paperback, cover by Paul Youll, £4.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1994.) *6th October 1994.*

SPINOFFERY

This is a list of all books received which fall into those sub-types of sf, fantasy and horror which may be termed novelizations, recursive fictions, spinoffs, sequels by other hands, shared worlds and sharecrops (including non-fiction about shared worlds, etc). The collective term "Spinoffery" has been coined as a heading for the sake of brevity.

Allen, Roger MacBride. **Isaac Asimov's Inferno.** Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-176-6, 244pp, hardcover, cover by Ralph McQuarrie, £14.99. (Sf sharecrop novel, first published in the USA, 1994; it's copyright "Byron Preiss Visual Publications Inc.") *8th September 1994.*

Bischoff, David. **SeaQuest DSV: The Ancient.** Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-226-6, 198pp, A-format paperback, £4.99. (Sf TV series novelization, first published in the USA, 1994; based on the TV series created by Rockne S. O'Bannon.) *June 27th October 1994.*

Eklund, Gordon. **Devil World.** "Star Trek Adventures, 8." Titan, ISBN 1-85286-532-6, 153pp, A-format paperback, cover by Alistair Pearson, £3.99. (Sf television-and-film-series spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1979.) *13th October 1994.*

Hooks, Nicky, and Sharon Burnett. **The Red Dwarf Quiz Book.** Penguin, ISBN 0-14-023662-7, xi+216pp, B-format paperback, £4.99. (Trivia book devoted to the popular sf sitcom; first edition.) *No date shown: received in September 1994.*

McIntee, David A. **First Frontier.** "The New Doctor Who Adventures." Virgin/Doctor Who, ISBN 0-426-20421-2, 294pp, A-format paperback, cover by Tony Masero, £4.99. (Sf television-series spinoff novel, first edition.) *September 1994.*

Mitchell, D. M., ed. **The Starry Wisdom: A Tribute to H. P. Lovecraft.** Introduction by Ramsey Campbell. Creation Books [83 Clerkenwell Rd., London EC1], ISBN 1-871592-32-1, 177pp, small-press paperback, £9.95. (Illustrated horror anthology, first edition; it contains a mixture of new and reprinted material in Lovecraftian vein by an unusual line-up which includes J. G. Ballard, William S. Burroughs, D. F. Lewis, Brian Lumley, Alan Moore, Grant Morrison and Don Webb, among others.) *2nd November 1994.*

Peel, John. **Evolution.** "Doctor Who: The Missing Adventures." Virgin/Doctor Who, ISBN 0-426-20422-0, 261pp, A-format paperback, cover by Alistair Pearson, £4.99. (Sf television-series spinoff novel, first edition; this one is set in Victorian England and features Rudyard Kipling and Conan Doyle as characters.) *21st July 1994.*

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