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SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

February
1995

'Mitochondrial Eve'

by Greg Egan

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and others

Anne Gay
interviewed



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interzone

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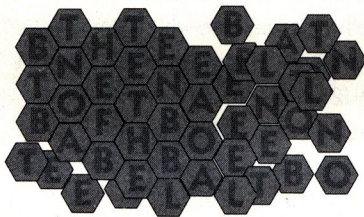


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Interaction

Dear Editors:

It's fine for Charles Platt to be in permanent depressed comedown mode after his 1960s trip, but it's not so fine for him to try and cloud our brains with the same bitterness that clouds his. The deliberately morose and world-weary tone of "The Selling of Science Fiction" (*Interzone* 89) obscures neither his muddle-headedness, nor his mistaking cynicism for intellectuality. *Of course* all the nightmare shit he takes such pleasure wallowing in is real – embarrassingly real. Yes, the big publishers *are* pathetically short-sighted, uninterested in investing even small amounts of money in bringing new talent to the world's notice. Yes, the editors *do* often have no feeling other than contempt for their material. Yes, big-name author advances *are* shamefully large. Yes, there is a lot of dreck. But don't be fooled: it's not that a lot of modern sf is crap, it's just that a lot of modern crap is sf.

Literary junk food for general consumption is always going to be mass-produced in vast, highly profitable quantities – why should we care if they've stolen some of our tropes, and written "sf" or "fantasy" on the spine? We've had an influence on the mass consciousness – is that bad? Sure, a large number of people might think sf means *Star Trek* – but we know otherwise, don't we? And *IZ* readers are hardly the *only* lovers of quality sf, "looking to the literature for intelligent speculation." In fact, there are more of those now than there ever were in the 60s. Don't do them the disservice of confusing them with the mass audience.

Platt's complaint that "'experimental' sf... barely exists any more" is insulting. Not only does it exist, it would do so on a much greater scale if writers and artists weren't dissuaded from trying to publish it by articles like this, whose message is basically: "There's no hope – give up." It'll only ever be published on a small

scale, of course – and not via the system that Platt hates. Did he, did anyone, really expect such material to have its own prestigious publishing lines, alongside the big imprints? Did we really imagine sf with lots of money would be just the same as sf with no money, only better paid? I guess we did – Platt certainly did – but, in retrospect, that was never on the cards. Big publishing is big publishing. When there's a lot of money in anything, the only thing that's ever created is more money.

None of this means that sf has failed, or is in crisis, the way not only Platt but also Moorcock, Ballard *et al* continually trumpet it to be (recognize any connection amongst those names?). It simply means that the enormous expansion of sf has actually been more of a dilution – so much so that now it can be hard to see the whisky for the water. But we still get a good two fingers of it in *IZ* every month, don't we? And naturally we should be happy at each and every sf book of genuine quality that *does* get published through the mainstream system. Large numbers do. It isn't easy, and there's not too much money in it – but was there ever?

Beyond that – if you want a new revolution, for heaven's sake *start one*. Quit moping about the end of the old one, which is all you're doing. As well as being discouraging, it can also get just a weeny bit irritating. Maybe it would be nice to experience once more the illicit thrill of breaking rules and establishing new ones, in a climate where everything is new and all original contributors are prized. But the entire monolithic sf community as it is now can't go *back* to being like that, as Platt half-suggests it should in his final paragraph – the idea is ludicrous. The shock of the new can't be had from things that are no longer new, and it's insofar as influential people like Charles Platt continue yearning for the past that the newness and currency of sf will continue to deteriorate. But, as

happened with cyberpunk, there will be moments when something new happens, something unquestionably relevant, that starts small but *does* get published and read, *does* grow. With the new technology coming into existence there will be outlets for such work which bypass altogether the publishing grab-fest. If Charles Platt thinks he can encourage creativity with a completely negative article like this, he's mistaken. Try to look to the future, Charles – that's the business you're in, after all. Happy 50th birthday in advance, by the way.

Jason Wingate

London

Editor: *Well, as it happens, Charles Platt has (in effect) put his money where his mouth is, in that he has been busy editing a whole issue of Interzone for us – number 94, due out in March. It will contain ten original stories, by writers ranging from Piers Anthony to Michael Blumlein. It should be very interesting, and perhaps criticisms of Charles's views ought to be held in abeyance until people have had a chance to read that issue.*

Dear Editors:

Hello from the US! I'm thrilled to be able to use my e-mail to write you. Just a note to let you know how much I enjoy the magazine. Charles Platt is always a favourite of mine and his essay on "The Selling of SF" was great reading. I'm often amazed at the shit that sells (aren't we supposed to be on the "cutting edge," all of us sf readers who deal with issues mainstream fiction doesn't address at all? I read mainstream fiction too but for different reasons. Who in God's name designs/decides what goes on the cover of an author's work? I'm embarrassed to be seen reading some good books just because of the covers...

Next, I like the magazine's new look. It's cleaner but still "user friendly." Good job. As always I enjoyed the stories. It's nice to see something from David

Garnett – I buy just about every British anthology I can find here in the US, so his name, if not his own fiction-writing, is familiar.

Last, I'd like to find names of those people in Eastern Europe who are looking for magazines and/or paperbacks. I wrote to one fellow whose address you included in a past issue. He was in Czechoslovakia I think – no reply yet. Perhaps you could print my address and they could write me?

William Dennehy

709 Albemarle St.

El Cerrito, CA 94530, USA

Dear Editors:

I'm glad to read that you now have an Internet address

[interzone@cix.compulink.co.uk – Editor].

I'm writing this on a commuter train with my palmtop computer. When I get home, I'll upload it to my desktop computer, run it through the spell guard in my text editor, then send it to you via CompuServe. I don't have to print it out or prepare an envelope. You should receive the letter the same day I composed it. It will cost me about three cents to send this note. It would cost almost 20 times that to send a physical letter that may or may not arrive sometime in the next two weeks. Sometimes, new technology really does make things better – unlike, say, over-use of the automobile.

I read most of *IZ* 89 before I decided that I like the new layout. My first reaction, based on the differently-weighted characters used in the titles, was mildly negative. But it did grow on me... But please, please go back to the uncoated paper you used when you first started. It prints darker, and reflects less, making it much easier to read. Since that paper was whiter than your current coated stock, it also provided a far better background for the art. I'll bet it's cheaper, it appears to last better, and, probably, it's more ecologically correct.

While I am writing, I especially enjoyed Sean McMullen's piece, "A Ring of Green Fire," a fine story told with a beautiful but nicely restrained style. David Garnett's "A Friend Indeed" was also a pleasant read. Ben Jeapes's "Giantkiller" has to be counted a

technical success for achieving the near-impossible: creating a sympathetic door-to-door salesperson. May I suggest that Jeapes build on his achievement by attempting the truly impossible: create a sympathetic telemarketer?

Donald F. Robertson

San Francisco

Dear Editors:

I have no wish to treat recent developments in the magazine as some kind of matter of personalities, but Paul Brazier's comments in his recent appearances in your pages (especially the letter column in *Interzone* 90) seem to make this unavoidable. The following is not intended as an assault on Mr Brazier, but some of the things he has said do need arguing with.

Firstly, I have to say that the recent changes in the magazine haven't been – in my eyes – a vast success. It's bad enough that your typeface has changed from something functional (that is, readable), if conventional, to something that is at best hard to read, and at worst pretentious and overly fussy as well as hard on the eyes. The announcement that this typeface was specially designed, and is being reworked even now – a process that I assume diverts money from other purposes – suggests that your priorities have become badly scrambled. There are thousands of "off-the-shelf" fonts on the market, many of them excellent; don't you and Mr Brazier have anything better to do with the money from my subscription?

Nor is Mr Brazier's editorial style particularly impressive. To take a trivial instance; if a correspondent offers a definition of sf, an editor can either ignore it, discuss it, or say that the subject is old and futile. Any of these responses would be justifiable. However, to say that the subject is old and futile, and then to discuss it further, makes the editor look very silly indeed.

And lastly, Mr Brazier's attitude to the magazine he is now influencing is scary. He admits that he started a magazine of his own because *Interzone* didn't provide what he wanted. Fair enough, but some of us did rather like what *IZ* was doing; are our opinions being considered when

Mr Brazier is let loose on the magazine we buy? In fact, he declares blithely that *IZ* should "take its place as the flagship of British sf fandom." And that scares me.

Because it should not. *Interzone* is an sf short story magazine with a fine sideline in critical and interview pieces; it is not a "fannish" publication in the sense I understand the word. Fandom is an interesting and complex phenomenon (some of my best friends are fans, blah, blah), and at best it is a dynamic and supportive adjunct to the fields of sf publication and criticism – but it can also be horribly introverted, clannish, petty and silly. At its worst, fandom seems determined to keep sf locked in an unventilated ghetto mentality. If I ever think that *IZ* is turning into a fanzine – if it ever seems determined to become the house journal of UK fandom, rather than a bloody good fiction magazine – then I will cancel my subscription.

Phil Masters

Editor: *Points taken. You are mistaken, though, if you think we are "diverting" your subscription money to pay for the redesign of fonts. The typeface which Paul Brazier has used in the last four or five issues of Interzone was originally designed (tailored, rather) by him for his short-lived magazine Nexus. The changes which he is now making in response to readers' comments are at his own expense. As I've said before, we'll keep Paul's nose to the grindstone until we are all (or, at any rate, as many of us as can be expected, given that tastes differ widely) happy with the results of the redesign.*

Paul Brazier adds: *I took up and discussed Mike Cobby's definition of sf because I started that hare running in the first place. But, more importantly, most of my reply to him was not to reject his definition, but to point out that he wasn't actually defining anything.*

More importantly still, I regret the remark promoting Interzone as "the flagship of British sf fandom." I agree with everything Phil Masters says here. What I ought to have said – what I wanted to say – was that "Interzone should take its place as the flagship of British sf." Nothing said here has affected that view, and I hold to it. I hope all of Interzone's readers do too.



With hindsight, I can date the beginning of my involvement in the Ancestor Wars precisely: *Saturday, June 2, 2007*. That was the night Lena dragged me along to the Children of Eve to be mitotyped. We'd been out to dinner, it was almost midnight, but the sequencing bureau was open 24 hours.

"Don't you want to discover your place in the human family?" she asked, fixing her green eyes on me, smiling but earnest. "Don't you want to find out exactly where you belong on the Great Tree?"

The honest answer would have been: *What sane person could possibly care?* We'd only known each other for five or six weeks, though; I wasn't yet comfortable enough with our relationship to be so blunt.

"It's very late," I said cautiously. "And you know I have to work tomorrow." I was still fighting my way up through post-doctoral qualifications in physics, supporting myself by tutoring undergraduates and doing all the tedious menial tasks which tenured academics demanded of their slaves. Lena was a communications engineer – and at 25, the same age as me,

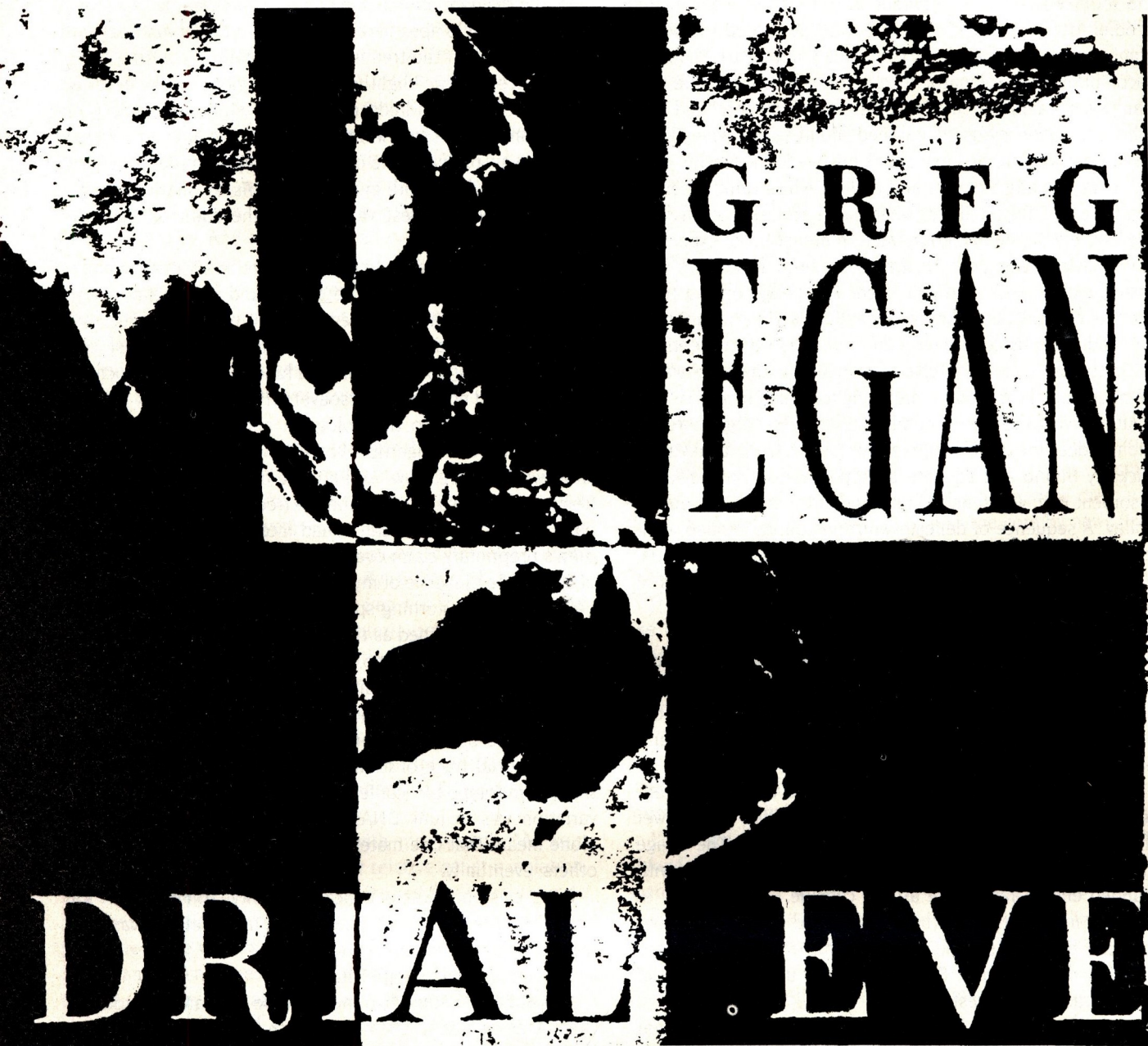
she'd had real paid jobs for almost four years.

"You always have to work. Come on, Paul! It'll take 15 minutes."

Arguing the point would have taken twice as long. So I told myself that it could do no harm, and I followed her north through the gleaming city streets.

It was a mild winter night; the rain had stopped, the air was still. The Children owned a sleek, imposing building in the heart of Sydney, prime real estate, an ostentatious display of the movement's wealth. ONE WORLD, ONE FAMILY proclaimed the luminous sign above the entrance. There were bureaus in over a hundred cities (although Eve took on various "culturally appropriate" names in different places, from Sakti in parts of India, to Ele'ele in Samoa) and I'd heard that the Children were working on street-corner vending-machine sequencers, to recruit members even more widely.

In the foyer, a holographic bust of Mitochondrial Eve herself, mounted on a marble pedestal, gazed proudly over our heads. The artist had rendered our hypothetical ten-thousand-times-great grandmother as a strikingly beautiful



Illustrations by Noel Bateman

woman. A subjective judgment, certainly – but her lean, symmetrical features, her radiant health, her purposeful stare, didn't really strike me as amenable to subtleties of interpretation. The aesthetic buttons being pushed were labelled, unmistakably: *warrior, queen, goddess*. And I had to admit that I felt a certain bizarre, involuntary swelling of pride at the sight of her... as if her regal bearing and fierce eyes somehow "ennobled" me and all her descendants... as if the "character" of the entire species, our potential for virtue, somehow depended on having at least one ancestor who could have starred in a Leni Riefenstahl documentary.

This Eve was black, of course, having lived in sub-Saharan Africa some 200,000 years ago – but almost everything else about her was guesswork. I'd heard palaeontologists quibble about the too-modern features, not really compatible with any of the sparse fossil evidence for her contemporaries' appearance. Still, if the Children had chosen as their symbol of universal humanity a few fissured brown skull fragments from the Omo River in Ethiopia, the movement would surely have vanished without a trace. And perhaps it was simply

mean-spirited of me to think of their Eve's beauty as a sign of fascism. The Children had already persuaded over two million people to acknowledge, explicitly, a common ancestry which transcended their own superficial differences in appearance; this all-inclusive ethos seemed to undercut any argument linking their obsession with *pedigree* to anything unsavoury.

I turned to Lena. "You know the Mormons baptised her posthumously, last year?"

She shrugged the appropriation off lightly. "Who cares? This Eve belongs to everyone, equally. Every culture, every religion, every philosophy. Anyone can claim her as their own; it doesn't diminish her at all." She regarded the bust admiringly, almost reverently.

I thought: *She sat through four hours of Marx Brothers films with me last week – bored witless, but uncomplaining. So I can do this for her, can't I?* It seemed like a simple matter of give and take – and it wasn't as if I was being pressured into an embarrassing haircut, or a tattoo.

We walked through into the sequencing lounge.

We were alone, but a disembodied voice broke through the

ambience of endangered amphibians and asked us to wait. The room was plushly carpeted, with a circular sofa in the middle. Artwork from around the world decorated the walls, from an uncredited Arnhem Land dot painting to a Francis Bacon print. The explanatory text below was a worry: dire Jungian psychobabble about "universal primal imagery" and "the collective unconscious." I groaned aloud – but when Lena asked what was wrong, I just shook my head innocently.

A man in white trousers and a short white tunic emerged from a camouflaged door, wheeling a trolley packed with impressively minimalist equipment, reminiscent of expensive Scandinavian audio gear. He greeted us both as "cousin," and I struggled to keep a straight face. The badge on his tunic bore his name, Cousin Andre, a small reflection hologram of Eve, and a sequence of letters and numbers which identified his mitotype. Lena took charge, explaining that she was a member, and she'd brought me along to be sequenced.

After paying the fee – a hundred dollars, blowing my recreation budget for the next three months – I let Cousin Andre prick my thumb and squeeze a drop of blood onto a white absorbent pad, which he fed into one of the machines on the trolley. A sequence of delicate whirring sounds ensued, conveying a reassuring sense of precision engineering at work. Which was odd, because I'd seen ads for similar devices in *Nature* which boasted of no moving parts at all.

While we waited for the results, the room dimmed and a large hologram appeared, projected from the wall in front of us: a micrograph of a single living cell. From my own blood? More likely, not from anyone's – just a convincing photorealist animation.

"Every cell in your body," Cousin Andre explained, "contains hundreds or thousands of mitochondria: tiny power plants which extract energy from carbohydrates." The image zoomed in on a translucent organelle, rod-shaped with rounded ends – rather like a drug capsule. "The majority of the DNA in any cell is in the nucleus, and comes from both parents – but there's also DNA in the mitochondria, inherited from the mother alone. So it's easier to use mitochondrial DNA to trace your ancestry."

He didn't elaborate, but I'd heard the theory in full several times, starting with high-school biology. Thanks to recombination – the random interchange of stretches of DNA between paired chromosomes, in the lead-up to the creation of sperm or ova – every chromosome carried genes from tens of thousands of different ancestors, stitched together seamlessly. From a palaeogenetic perspective, analysing nuclear DNA was like trying to make sense of "fossils" which had been forged by cementing together assorted bone fragments from 10,000 different individuals.

Mitochondrial DNA came, not in paired chromosomes, but in tiny loops called plasmids. There were hundreds of plasmids in every cell, but they were all identical, and they all derived from the ovum alone. Mutations aside – one every 4,000 years or so – your mitochondrial DNA was exactly the same as that of your mother, your maternal grandmother, great-grandmother, and so on. It was also exactly the same as that of your siblings, your maternal first cousins, second cousins, third cousins... until different mutations striking the plasmid on its way down through something like 200 generations finally imposed some variation. But with 16,000 DNA base pairs in the plasmid, even the 50 or so point mutations since Eve herself didn't amount to much.

The hologram dissolved from the micrograph into a multi-coloured diagram of branching lines, a giant family tree starting from a single apex labelled with the ubiquitous image of Eve. Each fork in the tree marked a mutation, splitting Eve's inheritance into two slightly different versions. At the bottom, the tips of the hundreds of branches showed a variety of faces, some men, some women – individuals or composites, I couldn't say, but each one presumably represented a different group of (roughly) 200th maternal cousins, all sharing a mitotype: their own modest variation on the common 200,000-year-old theme.

"And here you are," said Cousin Andre. A stylized magnifying glass materialized in the foreground of the hologram, enlarging one of the tiny faces at the bottom of the tree. The uncanny resemblance to my own features was almost certainly due to a snapshot taken by a hidden camera; mitochondrial DNA had no effect whatsoever on appearance.

Lena reached into the hologram and began to trace my descent with one fingertip. "You're a Child of Eve, Paul. You know who you are, now. And no one can ever take that away from you." I stared at the luminous tree, and felt a chill at the base of my spine – though it had more to do with the Children's proprietary claim over the entire species than any kind of awe in the presence of my ancestors.

Eve had been nothing special, no watershed in evolution; she was simply defined as the most recent common ancestor, by an unbroken female line, of every single living human. And no doubt she'd had thousands of female contemporaries, but time and chance – the random death of daughterless women, catastrophes of disease and climate – had eliminated every mitochondrial trace of them. There was no need to assume that her mitotype had conferred any special advantages (most variation was in junk DNA, anyway); statistical fluctuations alone meant that one maternal lineage would replace all the others, eventually.

Eve's existence was a logical necessity: some human (or hominid) of one era or another had to fit the bill. It was only the timing which was contentious.

The timing, and its implications.

A world globe some two metres wide appeared beside the Great Tree; it had a distinctive Earth-from-space look, with heavy white cumulus swirling over the oceans, but the sky above the continents was uniformly cloudless. The Tree quivered and began to rearrange itself, converting its original rectilinear form into something much more misshapen and organic – but flexing its geometry without altering any of the relationships it embodied. Then it draped itself over the surface of the globe. Lines of descent became migratory routes. Between eastern Africa and the Levant, the tracks were tightly bunched and parallel, like the lanes of some Palaeolithic freeway; elsewhere, less constrained by the geography, they radiated out in all directions.

A recent Eve favoured the "Out of Africa" hypothesis: modern *Homo sapiens* had evolved from the earlier *Homo erectus* in one place only, and had then migrated throughout the world, out-competing and replacing the local *Homo erectus* everywhere they went – and developing localized racial characteristics only within the last 200,000 years. The single birthplace of the species was most likely Africa, because Africans showed the greatest (and hence oldest) mitochondrial variation; all other groups seemed to have diversified more recently from relatively small "founder" populations.

There were rival theories, of course. More than a million

years before *Homo sapiens* even existed, *Homo erectus* itself had spread as far as Java, acquiring its own regional differences in appearance – and *Homo erectus* fossils in Asia and Europe seemed to share at least some of the distinguishing characteristics of living Asians and Europeans. But “Out of Africa” put that down to convergent evolution, not ancestry. If *Homo erectus* had turned into *Homo sapiens* independently in several places, then the mitochondrial difference between, say, modern Ethiopians and Javanese should have been five or ten times as great, marking their long separation since a much earlier Eve. And even if the scattered *Homo erectus* communities had not been totally isolated, but had interbred with successive waves of migrants over the past one or two million years – hybridizing with them to create modern humans, and yet somehow retaining their distinctive differences – then distinct mitochondrial lineages much older than 200,000 years probably should have survived, too.

One route on the globe flashed brighter than the rest. Cousin Andre explained, “This is the path your own ancestors took. They left Ethiopia – or maybe Kenya or Tanzania – heading north, about 150,000 years ago. They spread slowly up through Sudan, Egypt, Israel, Palestine, Syria and Turkey while the interglacial stretched on. By the start of the last Ice Age, the eastern shore of the Black Sea was their home...” As he spoke, tiny pairs of footprints materialized along the route.

He traced the hypothetical migration through the Caucasus Mountains, and all the way to northern Europe – where the limits of the technique finally cut the story dead: some four millenia ago (give or take three), when my Germanic two-hundredish-great grandmother had given birth to a daughter with a single change in her mitochondrial junk DNA: the last recorded tick of the molecular clock.

Cousin Andre wasn't finished with me, though. “As your ancestors moved into Europe, their relative genetic isolation, and the demands of the local climate, gradually led them to acquire the characteristics which are known as Caucasian. But the same route was travelled many times, by wave after wave of migrants, sometimes separated by thousands of years. And though, at every step along the way, the new travellers interbred with those who'd gone before, and came to resemble them... dozens of separate maternal lines can still be traced back along the route – and then down through history again, along different paths.”

My very closest maternal cousins, he explained – those with exactly the same mitotype – were, not surprisingly, mostly Caucasians. And expanding the circle to include up to 30 base pair differences brought in about 5 per cent of all Caucasians – the five per cent with whom I shared a common maternal ancestor who'd lived some 120,000 years ago, probably in the Levant.

But a number of that woman's own cousins had apparently headed east, not north. Eventually, their descendants had made it all the way across Asia, down through Indochina, and then south through the archipelagos, travelling across land bridges exposed by the low ocean levels of the Ice Age, or making short sea voyages from island to island. They'd stopped just short of Australia.

So I was more closely related, maternally, to a small group of New Guinean highlanders than I was to 95 per cent of Caucasians. The magnifying glass reappeared beside the globe, and showed me the face of one of my living 6000th cousins. The two of us were about as dissimilar to the naked eye as

any two people on Earth; of the handful of nuclear genes which coded for attributes like pigmentation and facial bone structure, one set had been favoured in frozen northern Europe, and another in this equatorial jungle. But enough mitochondrial evidence had survived in both places to reveal that the local homogenization of appearance was just a veneer, a recent gloss over an ancient network of invisible family connections.

Lena turned to me triumphantly. “You see? All the old myths about race, culture, and kinship – instantly refuted! These people's immediate ancestors lived in isolation for thousands of years, and didn't set eyes on a single white face until the 20th century. Yet they're nearer to you than I am!”

I nodded, smiling, trying to share her enthusiasm. It was fascinating to see the whole naïve concept of “race” turned inside out like this – and I had to admire the Children's sheer audacity at claiming to be able to map hundred-thousand-year-old relationships with such precision. But I couldn't honestly say that my life had been transformed by the revelation that certain white total strangers were more distant cousins to me than certain black ones. Maybe there were die-hard racists who would have been shaken to the core by news like this... but it was hard to imagine them rushing along to the Children of Eve to be mitotyped.

The far end of the trolley beeped, and ejected a badge just like Cousin Andre's. He offered it to me; when I hesitated, Lena took it and pinned it proudly to my shirt.

Out on the street, Lena announced soberly, “Eve is going to change the world. We're lucky; we'll live to see it happen. We've had a century of people being slaughtered for belonging to the wrong kinship groups – but soon, *everyone* will understand that there are older, deeper blood ties which confound all their shallow historical prejudices.”

You mean... like the Biblical Eve confounded all the prejudices of fundamentalist Christians? Or like the image of the Earth from space put an end to war and pollution? I tried diplomatic silence; Lena regarded me with consternation, as if she couldn't quite believe that I could harbour any doubts after my own unexpected *blood ties* had been revealed.

I said, “Do you remember the Rwandan massacres?”

“Of course.”

“Weren't they more to do with a class system – which the Belgian colonists exacerbated for the sake of administrative convenience – than anything you could describe as enmity between *kinship groups*? And in the Balkans –”

Lena cut me off. “Look, sure, any incident you can point to will have a convoluted history. I'm not denying that. But it doesn't mean that the solution has to be impossibly complicated, too. And if everyone involved had known what we know, had felt what we've *felt*” – she closed her eyes and smiled radiantly, an expression of pure contentment and tranquility – “that deep sense of belonging, through Eve, to a single family which encompasses all of humanity... do you honestly imagine that they could have turned on each other like that?”

I should have protested, in tones of bewilderment: *What “deep sense of belonging?” I felt nothing. And the only thing the Children of Eve are doing is preaching to the converted.*

What was the worst that could have happened? If we'd broken up, right there and then, over *the political significance of palaeogenetics*, then the relationship was obviously doomed from the start. And however much I hated confrontation, it was a fine line between tact and dishonesty, between accom-

modating our differences and concealing them.

And yet. The issue seemed far too arcane to be worth fighting over – and though Lena clearly held some passionate views on it, I couldn't really see the topic arising again if I kept my big mouth shut, just this once.

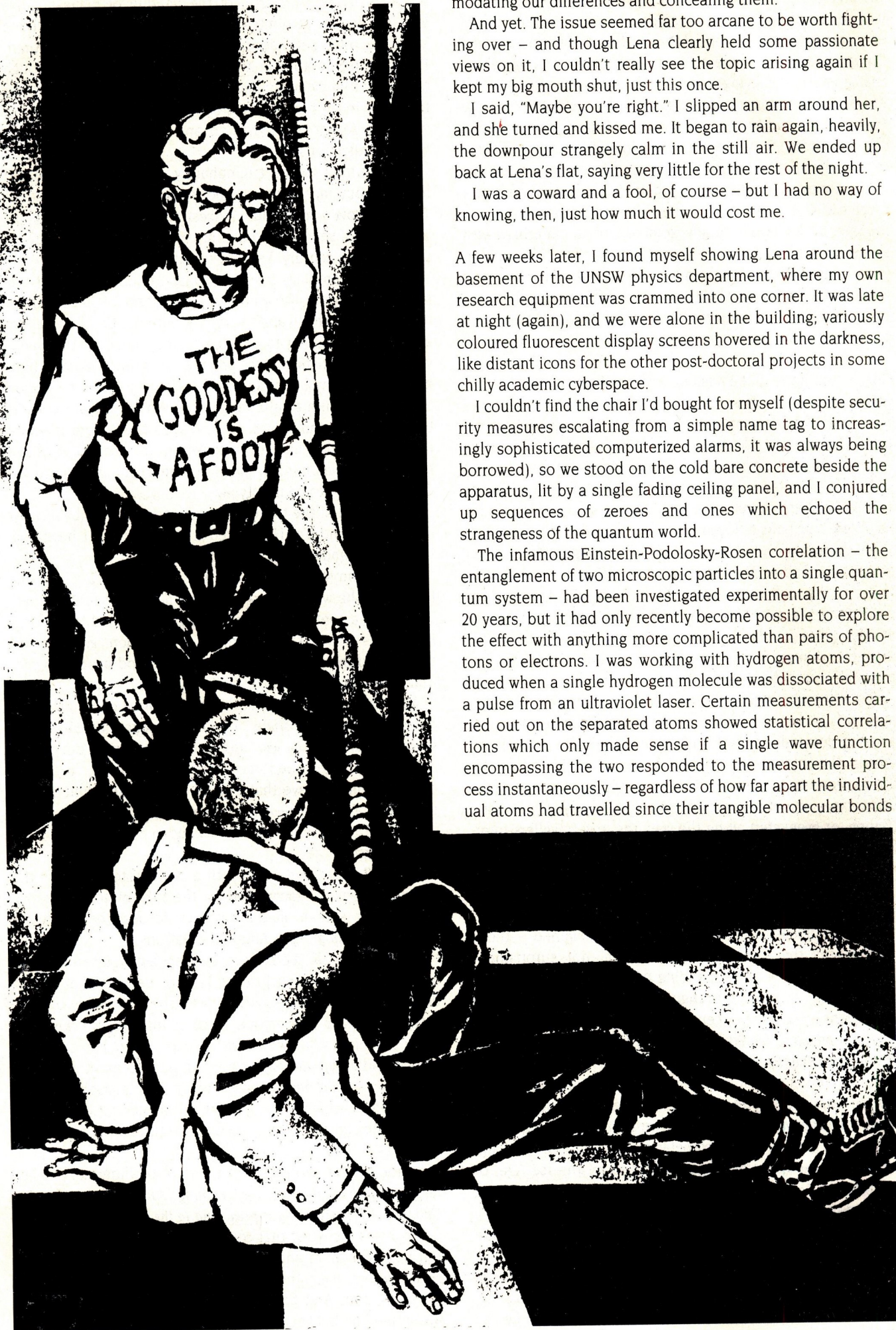
I said, "Maybe you're right." I slipped an arm around her, and she turned and kissed me. It began to rain again, heavily, the downpour strangely calm in the still air. We ended up back at Lena's flat, saying very little for the rest of the night.

I was a coward and a fool, of course – but I had no way of knowing, then, just how much it would cost me.

A few weeks later, I found myself showing Lena around the basement of the UNSW physics department, where my own research equipment was crammed into one corner. It was late at night (again), and we were alone in the building; variously coloured fluorescent display screens hovered in the darkness, like distant icons for the other post-doctoral projects in some chilly academic cyberspace.

I couldn't find the chair I'd bought for myself (despite security measures escalating from a simple name tag to increasingly sophisticated computerized alarms, it was always being borrowed), so we stood on the cold bare concrete beside the apparatus, lit by a single fading ceiling panel, and I conjured up sequences of zeroes and ones which echoed the strangeness of the quantum world.

The infamous Einstein-Podolsky-Rosen correlation – the entanglement of two microscopic particles into a single quantum system – had been investigated experimentally for over 20 years, but it had only recently become possible to explore the effect with anything more complicated than pairs of photons or electrons. I was working with hydrogen atoms, produced when a single hydrogen molecule was dissociated with a pulse from an ultraviolet laser. Certain measurements carried out on the separated atoms showed statistical correlations which only made sense if a single wave function encompassing the two responded to the measurement process instantaneously – regardless of how far apart the individual atoms had travelled since their tangible molecular bonds



were broken: metres, kilometres, light-years.

The phenomenon seemed to mock the whole concept of distance – but my own work had recently helped to dispell any notion that EPR might lead to a faster-than-light signalling device. The theory had always been clear on that point, though some people had hoped that a flaw in the equations would provide a loophole.

I explained to Lena, "Take two machines stocked with EPR-correlated atoms, one on Earth and one on Mars, both capable of, say, measuring orbital angular momentum either vertically or horizontally. The results of the measurements would always be random... but the machine on Mars could be made to emit data which either did, or didn't, mimic precisely the random data coming out of the machine on Earth at the very same time. And that mimicry could be switched on and off – instantaneously – by altering the type of measurements being made on Earth."

"Like having two coins which are guaranteed to fall the same way as each other," she suggested, "so long as they're both being thrown right-handed. But if you start throwing the coin on Earth with your left hand, the correlation vanishes."

"Yeah – that's a perfect analogy." I realized belatedly that she'd probably heard this all before – quantum mechanics and information theory were the foundations of her own field, after all – but she was listening politely, so I continued. "But even when the coins are magically agreeing on every single toss... they're both still giving equal numbers of heads and tails, at random. So there's no way of encoding any message into the data. You can't even tell, from Mars, when the correlation starts and stops – not unless the data from Earth gets sent along for comparison, by some conventional means like a radio transmission – defeating the whole point of the exercise. EPR itself communicates nothing."

Lena contemplated this thoughtfully, though she was clearly unsurprised by the verdict.

She said, "It communicates nothing between separated atoms – but if you bring them together, instead, it can still tell you what they've done in the past. You do a control experiment, don't you? You make the same measurements on atoms which were never paired?"

"Yeah, of course." I pointed to the third and fourth columns of data on the screen; the process itself was going on silently as we spoke, inside an evacuated chamber in a small grey box concealed behind all the electronics. "The results are completely uncorrelated."

"So, basically, this machine can tell you whether or not two atoms have been bonded together?"

"Not individually; any individual match could just be chance. But given enough atoms with a common history – yes." Lena was smiling conspiratorially. I said, "What?"

"Just... humour me for a moment. What's the next stage? Heavier atoms?"

"Yes, but there's more. I'll split a hydrogen molecule, let the two separate hydrogen atoms combine with two fluorine atoms – any old ones, not correlated – then split both hydrogen fluoride molecules and make measurements *on the fluorine atoms*... to see if I can pick up an indirect correlation between them: a second-order effect inherited from the original hydrogen molecule."

The truth was, I had little hope of getting funded to take the work that far. The basic experimental facts of EPR had been settled now, so there wasn't much of a case for pushing the measurement technology any further.

"In theory," Lena asked innocently, "could you do the same with something much larger? Like... DNA?"

I laughed. "No."

"I don't mean: could you do it, here, a week from tomorrow? But – if two strands of DNA had been bonded together... would there be any correlation at all?"

I balked at the idea, but confessed, "There might be. I can't give you the answer off the top of my head; I'd have to borrow some software from the biochemists, and model the interaction precisely."

Lena nodded, satisfied. "I think you should do that."

"Why? I'll never be able to try it, for real."

"Not with this junkyard-grade equipment."

I snorted. "So tell me who's going to pay for something better?"

Lena glanced around the grim basement, as if she wanted to record a mental snapshot of the low point of my career – before everything changed completely. "Who'd finance research into a means of detecting the quantum fingerprint of DNA bonding? Who'd pay for a chance of computing – not to the nearest few millennia, but to the nearest *cell division* – how long ago two mitochondrial plasmids were in contact?"

I was scandalized. *This* was the idealist who believed that the Children of Eve were the last great hope for world peace?

I said, "They'd never fall for it."

Lena stared at me blankly for a second, then shook her head, amused. "I'm not talking about pulling a confidence trick – begging for a research grant on false pretences."

"Well, good. But –?"

"I'm talking about taking the money – and doing a job that has to be done. Sequencing technology has been pushed as far as it can go – but our opponents still keep finding things to quibble about: the mitochondrial mutation rate, the method of choosing branch points for the most probable tree, the details of lineage loss and survival. Even the palaeogeneticists who are on our side keep changing their minds about everything. Eve's age goes up and down like the Hubble constant."

"It can't be that bad, surely."

Lena seized my arm; her excitement was electric, I felt it flow into me. Or maybe she'd just pinched a nerve.

"*This* could transform the whole field. No more guesswork, no more conjecture, no more assumptions – just a single, indisputable family tree, stretching back 200,000 years."

"It may not even be possible –"

"But you'll find out? You'll look into it?"

I hesitated – but I couldn't think of a single good reason to refuse. "Yes."

Lena smiled. "With quantum palaeogenetics... you'll have the power to bring Eve to life for the world in a way that no one has ever done before."

Six months later, the funds ran out for my work at the university: the research, the tutoring, everything. Lena offered to support me for three months while I put together a proposal to submit to the Children. We were already living together, already sharing expenses; somehow, that made it much easier to rationalize. And it was a bad time of year to be looking for work, I was going to be unemployed anyway...

As it turned out, computer modelling suggested that a measurable correlation between segments of DNA could be picked out against the statistical noise – given enough plasmids to work with: more like a few litres of blood per person than a single drop. But I could already see that the technical

problems would take years of work to properly assess, let alone overcome. Writing it all up was good practice for future corporate grant applications – but I never seriously expected anything to come of it.

Lena came with me to the meeting with William Sachs, the Children's West Pacific Research Director. He was in his late 50s, and *very* conservatively dressed, from the classic Benetton AIDS ISN'T NICE T-shirt to the Mambo World Peace surfing dove motif board shorts. A slightly younger version smiled down from a framed cover of *Wired*; he'd been guru of the month in April 2005.

"The university physics department will be contracted to provide overall supervision," I explained nervously. "There'll be independent audits of the scientific quality of the work every six months, so there's no possibility of the research running off the rails."

"The EPR correlation," mused Sachs, "proves that all life is bound together holistically into a grand unified meta-organism, doesn't it?"

"No." Lena kicked me hard under the desk.

But Sachs didn't seem to have heard me. "You'll be listening in to Gaia's own theta rhythm. The secret harmony which underlies everything: synchronicity, morphic resonance, transmigration..." He sighed dreamily. "I *adore* quantum mechanics. You know my Tai Chi master wrote a book about it? *Schrödinger's Lotus* – you must have read it. What a mind-fuck! And he's working on a sequel, *Heisenberg's Mandala* –"

Lena intervened before I could open my mouth again. "Maybe... later generations will be able to trace the correlation as far as other species. But in the foreseeable future, even reaching as far as Eve will be a major technical challenge."

Cousin William seemed to come back down to Earth. He picked up the printed copy of the application and turned to the budget details at the end, which were mostly Lena's work.

"Five million dollars is a lot of money."

"Over ten years," Lena said smoothly. "And don't forget that there's a 125 per cent tax deduction on R&D expenditure this financial year. By the time you factor in the notional patent rights –"

"You really believe the spin-offs will be valued this highly?"

"Just look at Teflon."

"I'll have to take this to the board."

When the good news came through by email, a fortnight later, I was almost physically sick.

I turned to Lena. "What have I done? What if I spend ten years on this, and it all comes to nothing?"

She frowned, puzzled. "There are no guarantees of success – but you've made that clear, you haven't been dishonest. Every great endeavour is plagued with uncertainties – but the Children have decided to accept the risks."

In fact, I hadn't been agonizing over the morality of relieving rich idiots with a global motherhood fixation of large sums of money – and quite possibly having nothing to give them in return. I was more worried about what it would mean for my career if the research turned out to be a cul-de-sac, and produced no results worth publishing.

Lena said, "It's all going to work out perfectly. I have faith in you, Paul."

And that was the worst of it. She did.

We loved each other – and we were, both, using each other. But I was the one who kept on lying about what was soon to become the most important thing in our lives.

In the winter of 2010, Lena took three months off work to travel to Nigeria in the name of technology transfer. Her official role was to advise the new government on the modernization of the communications infrastructure – but she was also training a few hundred local operators for the Children's latest low cost sequencer. My EPR technique was still in its infancy – barely able to distinguish identical twins from total strangers – but the original mitochondrial DNA analysers had become extremely small, rugged and cheap.

Africa had proved highly resistant to the Children in the past, but it seemed that the movement had finally gained a foothold. Every time Lena called me from Lagos – her eyes shining with missionary zeal – I went and checked the Great Tree, trying to decide whether its scrambling of traditional notions of familial proximity would render the ex-combatants in the recent civil war more, or less, fraternal towards each other if the sequencing fad really took off. The factions were already so ethnically mixed, though, that it was impossible to come to a definite verdict; so far as I could tell, the war had been fought between alliances shaped as much by certain 21st-century acts of political patronage as by any invocation of ancient tribal loyalties.

Near the end of her stay, Lena called me in the early hours of the morning (my time), so angry she was almost in tears. "I'm flying straight to London, Paul. I'll be there in three hours."

I squinted at the bright screen, dazed by the tropical sunshine behind her. "Why? What's happened?" I had visions of the Children undermining the fragile cease-fire, igniting some unspeakable ethnic holocaust – then flying out to have their wounds tended by the best microsurgeons in the world, while the country descended into chaos behind them.

Lena reached off-camera and hit a button, pasting a section of a news report into a corner of the transmission. The headline read: Y-CHROMOSOME ADAM STRIKES BACK! The picture below showed a near-naked, muscular, blond white man (curiously devoid of body hair – rather like Michelangelo's *David* in a bison-skin loin-cloth) aiming a spear at the reader with suitably balletic grace.

I groaned softly. It had only been a matter of time. In the cell divisions leading up to sperm production, most of the DNA of the Y chromosome underwent recombination with the X chromosome – but part of it remained aloof, unscrambled, passed down the purely paternal line with the same fidelity as mitochondrial DNA passed from mother to daughter. In fact, with more fidelity: mutations in nuclear DNA were much less frequent, which made it a much less useful molecular clock.

"They claim they've found a single male ancestor for all northern Europeans – just 20,000 years ago! And they're presenting this *bullshit* at a palaeogenetics conference in Cambridge tomorrow!" I scanned the article as Lena wailed; the news report was all tabloid hype, it was difficult to tell what the researchers were actually asserting. But a number of right wing groups who'd long been opposed to the Children of Eve had embraced the results with obvious glee.

I said, "So why do you have to be there?"

"To defend Eve, of course! We can't let them get away with this!"

My head was throbbing. "If it's bad science, let the experts refute it. It's not your problem."

Lena was silent for a while, then protested bitterly, "You *know* male lineages are lost faster than female ones. Thanks to polygyny, a single paternal line can dominate a population

in far fewer generations than a female one."

"So the claim might be right? There might have been a single, recent 'northern European Adam'?"

"Maybe," Lena admitted begrudgingly. "But... *so what?* What's that supposed to prove? They haven't even *tried* to look for an Adam who's a father to the whole species!"

I wanted to reply: Of course it proves nothing, changes nothing. No sane person could possibly care. But... who made kinship such a big issue in the first place? Who did their best to propagate the notion that everything that matters depends on family ties?

It was far too late, though. Turning against the Children would have been sheer hypocrisy; I'd taken their money, I'd played along.

And I couldn't abandon Lena. If my love for her went no further than the things we agreed on, then that wasn't love at all.

I said numbly, "I should make the three o'clock flight to London. I'll meet you at the conference."

The tenth annual World Palaeogenetics Forum was being held in a pyramid-shaped building in an astrofurfed science park, far from the university campus. The placard-waving crowd made it easy to spot. HANDS OFF EVE! DIE, NAZI SCUM! NEANDERTHALS OUT! (*What?*) As the taxi drove away, my jet-lag caught up with me and my knees almost buckled. My aim was to find Lena as rapidly as possible and get us both out of harm's way. Eve could look after herself.

She was there, of course, gazing with serene dignity from a dozen T-shirts and banners. But the Children – and their marketing consultants – had recently been "fine-tuning" her image, and this was the first chance I'd had to see the results of all their focus groups and consumer feedback workshops. The new Eve was slightly paler, her nose a little thinner, her eyes narrower. The changes were subtle, but they were clearly aimed at making her look more "pan-racial" – more like some far-future common descendant, bearing traces of every modern human population, than a common ancestor who'd lived in one specific place: Africa.

And in spite of all my cynicism, this redesign made me queasier than any of the other cheap stunts the Children had pulled. It was as if they'd decided, after all, that they couldn't really imagine a world where everyone would accept an African Eve – but they were so committed to the idea that they were willing to keep bending the truth, for the sake of broadening her appeal, until... *what?* They gave her, not just a different name, but a different face in every country?

I made it into the lobby, merely spat on by two or three picketers. Inside, things were much quieter, but the academic palaeogeneticists were darting about furtively, avoiding eye contact. One poor woman had been cornered by a news crew; as I passed, the interviewer was insisting heatedly, "But you must admit that violating the origin myths of indigenous Amazonians is a crime against humanity." The outer wall of the pyramid was tinted blue, but more or less transparent, and I could see another crowd of demonstrators pressed against one of the panels, peering in. Plain-clothes security guards whispered into their wrist-phones, clearly afraid for their Masarini suits.

I'd tried to call Lena a dozen times since the airport, but some bottleneck in the Cambridge footprint had kept me on hold. She'd pulled strings and got us both listed on the attendance database – the only reason I'd been allowed through the front door – but that only proved that being inside the

building was no guarantee of non-partisanship.

Suddenly, I heard shouting and grunting from nearby, then a chorus of cheers and the sound of heavy sheet plastic popping out of its frame. News reports had mentioned both pro-Eve demonstrators, and pro-Adam – the latter allegedly much more violent. I panicked and bolted down the nearest corridor – almost colliding with a wiry young man heading in the opposite direction. He was tall, white, blond, blue-eyed, radiating Teutonic menace... and part of me wanted to scream in outrage: I'd been reduced, against my will, to pure imbecilic racism.

Still, he was carrying a pool cue.

But as I backed away warily, his sleeveless T-shirt began flashing up the words: THE GODDESS IS AFOOT!

"So what are you?" he sneered. "A Son of Adam?"

I shook my head slowly. *What am I?* I'm a *Homo sapiens*, you moron. Can't you recognize your own species?

I said, "I'm a researcher with the Children of Eve." At faculty cocktail parties, I was always "an independent palaeogenetics research physicist," but this didn't seem the time to split hairs.

"Yeah?" He grimaced with what I took at first to be disbelief, and advanced threateningly. "So *you're* one of the fucking patriarchal, materialistic bastards who's trying to reify the Archetype of the Earth Mother and rein in her boundless spiritual powers?"

That left me too stupefied to see what was coming. He jabbed me hard in the solar plexus with the pool cue; I fell to my knees, gasping with pain. I could hear the sound of boots in the lobby, and hoarsely chanted slogans.

The Goddess-worshipper grabbed me by one shoulder and wrenched me to my feet, grinning. "No hard feelings, though. We're still on the same side, here – aren't we? So let's go beat up some Nazis!"

I tried to pull free, but it was already too late; the Sons of Adam had found us.

Lena came to visit me in hospital. "I knew you should have stayed in Sydney."

My jaw was wired; I couldn't answer back.

"You have to look after yourself; your work's more important than ever, now. Other groups will find their own Adams – and the whole unifying message of Eve will be swamped by the tribalism inherent in the idea of recent male ancestors. We can't let a few promiscuous Cro-Magnon men ruin everything."

"Gmm mmm mmmn."

"We have mitochondrial sequencing... they have Y-chromosome sequencing. Sure, our molecular clock is already more accurate... but we need a spectacular advantage, something anyone can grasp. Mutation rates, mitotypes: it's all too abstract for the person in the street. If we can construct exact family trees with EPR -- starting with people's known relatives... but extending that same sense of precise kinship across 10,000 generations, all the way back to Eve – then *that* will give us an immediacy, a credibility, that will leave the Sons of Adam for dead."

She stroked my brow tenderly. "You can win the Ancestor Wars for us, Paul. I know you can."

"Mmm nnn," I conceded.

I'd been ready to denounce both sides, resign from the EPR project – and even walk away from Lena, if it came to that.

Maybe it was more pride than love, more weakness than

commitment, more inertia than loyalty. Whatever the reason, though, I couldn't do it. I couldn't leave her.

The only way forward was to try to finish what I'd started. To give the Children their watertight, absolute proof.

While the rival ancestor cults picketed and fire-bombed each other, rivers of blood flowed through my apparatus. The Children had supplied me with two-litre samples from no fewer than 50,000 members, worldwide; my lab would have put the most garish Hammer Horror film set to shame.

Trillions of plasmids were analysed. Electrons in a certain low-energy hybrid orbital – a quantum mixture of two different-shaped charge distributions, potentially stable for thousands of years – were induced by finely-tuned laser pulses to collapse into one particular state. And though every collapse was random, the orbital I'd chosen was – very slightly – correlated across paired strands of DNA. Quadrillions of measurements were accumulated, and compared. With enough plasmids measured for each individual, the faint signature of any shared ancestry could rise up through the statistical noise.

The mutations behind the Children's Great Tree no longer mattered; in fact, I was looking at stretches of the plasmid most likely to have stayed unblemished all the way back to Eve, since it was the intimate chemical contact of flawless DNA replication which gave the only real chance of a correlation. And as the glitches in the process were ironed out, and the data mounted up, results finally began to emerge.

The blood donors included many close family groups; I analysed the data blind, then passed the results to one of my research assistants, to be checked against the known relationships. Early in June 2013, I scored 100 per cent on sibling detection in a thousand samples; a few weeks later, I was doing the same on first and second cousins.

Soon, we hit the limits of the recorded genealogy; to provide another means of cross-checking, I started analysing nuclear genes as well. Even distant cousins were likely to have at least some genes from a common ancestor – and EPR could date that ancestor precisely.

News of the project spread, and I was deluged with crank mail and death threats. The lab was fortified; the Children hired bodyguards for everyone involved in the work, and their families.

The quantity of information just kept growing, but the Children – horrified by the thought that the Adams might out-do them with rival technology – kept voting me more and more money. I upgraded our supercomputers, twice. And though mitochondria alone could lead me to Eve, for book-keeping purposes I found myself tracing the nuclear genes of hundreds of thousands of ancestors, male and female.

In the spring of 2016, the database reached a kind of critical mass. We hadn't sampled more than the tiniest fraction of the world's population – but once it was possible to reach back just a few dozen generations, all the apparently separate lineages began to join up. Autosomal nuclear genes zig-zagged heedlessly between the purely-maternal tree of the Eves and the purely-paternal tree of the Adams, filling in the gaps... until I found myself with genetic profiles of virtually everyone who'd been alive on the planet in the early ninth century (and left descendants down to the present). I had no names for any of these people, or even definite geographical locations – but I knew the place of every one of them on my own Great Tree, precisely.

I had a snapshot of the genetic diversity of the entire

human species. From that point on there was no stopping the cascade, and I pursued the correlations back through the millennia.

By 2017, Lena's worst predictions had all come true. Dozens of different Adams had been proclaimed around the world – and the trend was to look for the common paternal lineage of smaller and smaller populations, converging on ever more recent ancestors. Many were now supposedly historical figures; rival Greek and Macedonian groups were fighting it out over who had the right to call themselves the Sons of Alexander the Great. Y-chromosomal ethnic classification had become government policy in three eastern European republics – and, allegedly, corporate policy in certain multinationals.

The smaller the populations analysed, of course – unless they were massively in-bred – the less likely it was that everyone targeted really would share a single Adam. So the first male ancestor to be identified became "the father of his people"... and anyone else became a kind of gene-polluting barbarian rapist, whose hideous taint could still be detected. And weeded out.

Every night, I lay awake into the early hours, trying to understand how I could have ended up at the centre of so much conflict over something so idiotic. I still couldn't bring myself to confess my true feelings to Lena, so I'd pace the house with the lights out, or lock myself in my study with the bullet-proof shutters closed and sort through the latest batch of hate mail, paper and electronic, hunting for evidence that anything I might discover about Eve would have the slightest positive effect on anyone who wasn't already a fanatical supporter of the Children. Hunting for some sign that there was hope of ever doing more than preaching to the converted.

I never did find the encouragement I was looking for – but there was one postcard which cheered me up, slightly. It was from the High Priest of the Church of the Sacred UFO, in Kansas City.

Dear Earth-dweller:

Please use your BRAIN! As anyone KNOWS in this SCIENTIFIC age, the origin of the races is now WELL UNDERSTOOD! Africans travelled here after the DELUGE from Mercury, Asians from Venus, Caucasians from Mars, and the people of the Pacific islands from assorted asteroids. If you don't have the NECESSARY OCCULT SKILLS to project rays from the continents to the ASTRAL PLANE to verify this, a simple analysis of TEMPERAMENT and APPEARANCE should make this obvious even to YOU!

But please don't put WORDS into MY mouth! Just because we're all from different PLANETS doesn't mean we can't still be FRIENDS.

Lena was deeply troubled. "But how can you hold a media conference tomorrow, when Cousin William hasn't even seen the final results?" It was Sunday, January 28th, 2018. We'd said goodnight to the bodyguards and gone to bed in the reinforced concrete bunker the Children had installed for us after a nasty incident in one of the Baltic states.

I said, "I'm an independent researcher. I'm free to publish data at any time. That's what it says in the contract. Any advances in the measurement technology have to go through the Children's lawyers – but not the palaeogenetic results."

Lena tried another tack. "But if this work hasn't been peer-

reviewed – ”

“It has. The paper’s already been accepted by *Nature*; it will be published the day after the conference. In fact,” I smiled innocently, “I’m really only doing it as a favour to the editor. She’s hoping it will boost sales for the issue.”

Lena fell silent. I’d told her less and less about the work over the preceding six months; I’d let her assume that technical problems were holding up progress.

Finally she said, “Won’t you at least say if it’s good news – or bad?”

I couldn’t look her in the eye, but I shook my head. “Nothing that happened 200,000 years ago is any kind of news at all.”

I’d hired a public auditorium for the media conference – far from the Children’s office tower – paying for it myself, and arranging for independent security. Sachs and his fellow directors were not impressed, but short of kidnapping me there was little they could do to shut me up. There’d never been any suggestion of fabricating the results they wanted – but There’d always been an unspoken assumption that only *the right data* would ever be released with this much fanfare – and the Children would have ample opportunity to put their own spin on it, first.

Behind the podium, my hands were shaking. Over 2,000 journalists from across the planet had turned up – and many of them were wearing symbols of allegiance to one ancestor or another.

I cleared my throat and began. The EPR technique had become common knowledge; there was no need to explain it again. I said, simply, “I’d like to show you what I’ve discovered about the origins of *Homo sapiens*.”

The lights went down and a giant hologram, some 30 metres high, appeared behind me. It was, I announced, a family tree – not a rough history of genes or mutations, but an exact generation-by-generation diagram of both female and male parentage for the entire human population – from the

ninth century, back. A dense thicket in the shape of an inverted funnel. The audience remained silent, but there was an air of impatience; this tangle of a billion tiny lines was indecipherable – it told them absolutely nothing. But I waited, letting the impenetrable diagram rotate once, slowly.

“The Y-chromosome mutational clock,” I said, “is wrong. I’ve traced the paternal ancestries of groups with similar Y-types back hundreds of thousands of years – and they never converge on any one man.” A murmur of discontent began; I boosted the amplifier volume and drowned it out. “*Why not?* How can there be so little mutational diversity, if the DNA doesn’t all spring from a single, recent source?” A second hologram appeared, a double-helix, a schematic of the Y-typing region. “Because mutations happen, again and again, at *exactly the same sites*. Make two, or three – or 50 – copying errors in the same location, and it still only looks like it’s one step away from the original.” The double helix hologram was divided and copied, divided and copied; the accumulated differences in each generation were highlighted. “The proof-reading enzymes in our cells must have specific blind spots, specific weaknesses – like words that are easy to misspell. And there’s still a chance of purely random errors, at any site at all – but only on a time scale of millions of years.

“All the Y-chromosome Adams,” I said, “are fantasy. There are no individual fathers to any race, or tribe, or nation. Living northern Europeans, for a start, have over a thousand distinct paternal lineages dating to the late Ice Age – and those thousand ancestors, in turn, are the descendants of over 200 different male African migrants.” Colours flashed up in the grey maze of the Tree, briefly highlighting the lineages.

A dozen journalists sprang to their feet and started shouting abuse. I waited for the security guards to escort them from the building.

I looked out across the crowd, searching for Lena, but I couldn’t find her. I said, “The same is true of mitochondrial



HOUSE WIFE

Sylvia M. Siddall

Cherry must have been an illegal import. Maybe she was shipped over from one of those mysterious East European bio-engineering centres, out in the middle of nowhere and not subject to the rigorous inspections that we assume are in place to protect us from rogue organisms. Maybe. Or maybe she was a prototype of an abandoned model, accidentally released into the larvae pens. Or maybe she was neither.

She joined the family when I was eleven and just starting to find out about the mysterious creatures called girls. Cherry was a girl as far as I was concerned, a long-haired, long-legged coltish being who wiggled when she walked. OK, so her skin was greyish and all the secret, incipient organs inside her gave her a thicker body than any of the real girls I met at school, but Cherry was undoubtedly female. She had to be, of course, being born parthenogenetically. I often wonder what her mother was.

For two years Cherry climbed trees, played all the latest mind-games, came to school and generally made a pretty good attempt at being a girl. She did not attend the same classes as me; naturally she needed to learn different skills. Not for her the boring old history, maths, science; instead she learned deportment and cookery, the nuances of polite society, gardening and art. Division of labour, I suppose you'd call it.

We'd play games, Cherry and I. We sensed that my parents did not approve of our closeness, of our giggled secrets and the way in which we looked at one another. They should have bought her earlier, then she would have been out of bounds like any normal sister but we were introduced at just the wrong time. The old hormones were starting to buzz round, I suppose. Cherry always seemed older than me, as girls often do, and she led me on. She would squeeze her plump, ripe body into the secret space behind the garden shed and there we would lie, whispering, pressed close and shivery-hot.

"What are you going to be when you grow up, Harry?" she asked, stroking my thigh with a finger-tip.

"I'll be a scientist like Mum."

"Just because you want to look good in a white coat?"

"Mum doesn't wear a white coat, she's too important. What are you going to be?"

"You know," she said.

"I don't," I told her. "Go on, tell me."

"Shan't."

"Yes you will."

"What'll you do if I don't?"

"I'll show you."

"Ooh, what a bully!"

Then when I was almost bursting out of my underpants, she would wriggle away and run across the garden, laughing, her long hair flying. She was a witch, a tease, a siren. In the end I caught her behind the shed, in that damp-smelling and earwiggy gloom, and held her down while I forced my tongue into her mouth. She fought, but not very hard. The next time she did not fight at all.

For a couple of months that summer we would sneak away together at every opportunity. I don't think my parents realized, they thought I was too young and of course they trusted Cherry to act as she should. Then in the autumn things started going wrong.

My father remarked over the dinner table that Cherry was putting on weight. I listened in a cold sweat, not daring to speak.

"To be expected," Mum said calmly, helping himself to more gravy. "Where is she?"

"Gone to her evening class. How long do you think it'll be now?"

"Couple of months I should think. You'll be losing your little friend, Harry."

"Where is she going?" I asked, although I had a horrible feeling that I knew. Yet their obvious satisfaction both puzzled me and eased my fears.

"She's growing up," Dad said obscurely.

When she came home, I looked at Cherry critically. Her stomach was so large and round that it strained the elasticated waist of her loose skirt and her t-shirt. She walked heavily, like an old woman. These changes had come about slowly, I had not noticed until now how much her shape had altered. I cornered her in her room and said almost hysterically, "Why didn't you tell me?"

"Tell you what?" she asked, sounding bored, as if speaking to a small child.

"That!" I only meant to tap her stomach but she moved towards me and I pressed my hand hard against her. Her insides growled and boiled, it felt like holding a nest of puppies inside a balloon, all tumbling around together.

"It isn't any of your business," she snapped. She had been terribly bad-tempered recently. "Leave me alone."

I obeyed with some relief. If she was not going to accuse me of anything, I certainly was not going to confess.

She grew fatter and more lethargic by the day, until she no longer went out, just shuffled from her room to the dining table and back. She ate everything she could lay her hands on. I came across her devouring a raw cabbage, holding it and biting at it, swallowing with barely a moment to chew. I began to fear that she would explode.

"Free-living phase almost over," Mum said laconically.

Cherry groaned and ran her hands across her huge body. "I hope so. I feel quite gross."

Mum just laughed and went off to work.

Cherry disappeared on a Sunday. She left her room neat with the bed made, her clothes folded into piles, her possessions packed in boxes. It was as if she had closed a door in my face.

We found her tucked in the cupboard under the stairs, curled up, hugging herself, covered in peculiar thick strands like giant cobwebs. Dad warned me not to touch her and we left her there for three weeks. When we brought her out, the stringy stuff covered her so thoroughly that not an inch of skin was to be seen and the chrysalis had gone brown and hard. Dad wrapped her in a sheet and we put her in the back of Mercedes and told her to take Cherry out to the plot Mum had bought years before. I went too, out of curiosity.

There was a wooden building there like a workman's hut. Of course Mercedes couldn't tell me anything, she just carried out her instructions and then made whimpering noises until I scratched her above her windscreen and called her a good girl. She and I had been inseparable once, I remembered how she used to chase sticks and practise her emergency stops as she caught them. She was always more fun than Minnie, who was a silly yappy little thing without an ounce of intelligence. It was while Merc was parking herself next to the oak-tree that the revelation came to me. I had not lost my Cherry after all. One day I would have her back again.

We went out to visit her a couple of times but all we could see was the occasional movement inside her leathery brown pupa. Merc and Minnie had been just as boring but they had only pupated for a couple of weeks. Cherry was almost a year.

Finally Minnie came to let Mum know that Cherry had emerged. I don't know how Minnie and Mum communicated, Minnie would snuffle and yelp and somehow each understood the gist of what the other was getting at. We called Merc and all rushed over to welcome her.

I don't know what I expected, certainly not the grey, green-roofed box that squatted next to the hut. This could not be

my Cherry, surely? Dad patted her walls and spoke to her but she did not reply. No vocal equipment yet. She probably did not hear him either. She was very busy in her silent organic way, putting out hyphae into the good rich earth, photosynthesizing through her roof, arranging herself to take best advantage of her immediate surroundings.

By now I was involved with exams and dating a fire-brand called Donna who demanded much of my spare time and energy. It was some weeks before I told Merc to make a detour after school and take me past Cherry's plot.

How she had grown! In place of that featureless little box there soared a neat house, grey of wall and green of thatch. Cherry had eyes, old-fashioned mullioned windows, their little diamond-patterned panes twinkling in the sun. She had a pretty red door with a brass knob and knocker, a letter box and a little sign saying "Cherry Cottage." She had put up a garden wall and a red gate painted to match her door. She had not yet got around to details like garden paths or curtains or a chimney but she was already oozing personality.

When Merc and I called next, Cherry's gate and front door stood open. I told Merc to graze outside the garden. The garage had a shuttered look about it, as if Cherry was not quite ready for full occupation. I went into the garden, admiring the neat gravel path and the beds of bare earth all waiting for the seeds and cuttings of our choice. There was even a table with an umbrella and a barbecue on the lawn. I stuck my head in the front door, sniffing the odour of polish and pot-pourri, and called out, "Cherry? Hello?"

There was a soft sound, as if someone inhaled gently, and then Cherry replied. "Hello Harry. Do come in."

Her voice was deeper than I recalled, a furry, seductive, amused sound, the voice of a woman. "It's perfectly safe," she added as I hesitated. "I'm all ready for you."

I stepped in. "I'm sorry there are no flowers," Cherry said sadly. "But I haven't had time to grow any yet."

"That's OK," I assured her, then with a rush of pleasure, "You're beautiful as you are."

Indeed she was. Her hall had a floor of polished wooden blocks, gleaming like a fresh conker, while the walls were dazzling white and the ceiling had exposed black beams. She had grown curtains of an elegant print – she was always good at textile design – and her staircase was a graceful curve. I wandered deeper into her rooms.

Everything was lovely, from the stone inglenook fireplace to the pale carpets, the exquisite furniture and super-modern kitchen. She had no ornaments or books, we would choose those for ourselves, and of course she could change the colour and fabric of her furnishings overnight as easily as Merc altered her paintwork. Yet Cherry had decorated herself so tastefully that I could not imagine how we might improve on anything. I told her so.

"I'm glad you're pleased," she said. "Feel free to explore."

"Do you mind? I mean, you're not quite ready yet, are you?"

"All I want is to have someone living in me," she told me in her soft purr. "That's why I'm here."

I went up into the bedrooms. The big room, obviously for my parents, was all done out in blue and white, very airy. The guest room was pale green. Then I opened the door to what I assumed was my own room.

Oh, such a nest of erotic delights! She had made a room for a sultan, what with the great mound of silk cushions on

the floor, the eastern tapestries and paintings that were just on the right side of erotic to be stylish, the dark, sweet perfume and the cooler already stocked with chilled wine! There was an *en suite* bathroom with a deep marble pool and piles of fluffy towels. As for the bed, the great soft mound of patterned silks, why it was all ready for the reception of some dark-eyed houri! I threw myself across it, sinking down into the billowing quilt, and lay there gazing up at the mirror on the ceiling. Softly, the bed began to massage my shoulders. Upholstered fingers kneaded the muscles down my back. The heavy curtains slowly drew themselves closed across the window and the door sighed shut. From nowhere, music began to play, something languorous and soothing, all weeping strings and sighing woodwind. I let myself relax.

"I missed you, Cherry."

"Did you?" she breathed. "As much as I missed you?"

I laughed. The massage was so sensual that I was becoming quite aroused and I wished that Donna was here. The room was getting warm. I could see myself in the mirror, spread on my back, my jeans bulging and the bed rippling gently around me. I unfastened my zip and pulled off my sweat-shirt.

"That's better," Cherry sighed. I undressed and kicked aside the clothes. I turned over, burying my face in the sweet-smelling sheets and realized that they were scented with her own perfume. The bed moulded itself beneath me, when I closed my eyes I could feel the soft swell of Cherry's belly and breasts pressing up to meet me. It was as if she was one of those carved bas-relief sculptures, standing away from but not quite free of her background. The pillows parted and warm breath gusted across my face. "Oh, Harry," Cherry murmured. "It's been so long." Padded protuberances came up to wind around my back and my throbbing cock found itself encountering a warm, elasticated slot in the bed. She was damp and sleek and she sucked me in.

Later, when I had bathed in the pool and allowed myself to be towelled dry, I dressed and went out with her soft call to "come again, Harry, darling!" ringing in my ears. Why was I such an idiot?

All I told Donna was that I was going to show her a secret. I had visions of spreading her out on that wicked bed, seeing her driven wild by the soft caresses from beneath while I applied myself on top of her. I thought it would be the ultimate in sexual experiences, having her and Cherry together, making it with my girl and my housewife.

"Cherry, this is Donna," I called as we went in. Merc had garaged herself, finding a bucket of water and bowl of feed all ready and waiting. Cherry's slight pause did not register with me at the time.

"Hi, Donna," she said. "Welcome to Cherry cottage."

"Hi," Donna replied without much interest, just being polite. "Guess your folks like oldy-worldy stuff, do they?" She peered around, shaking her hair out of her eyes. It had not occurred to me that our choice would not be everyone's.

"There's coffee in the kitchen if you'd like it, just fresh brewed," Cherry told us.

"Haven't you got anything stronger?" Donna wanted to know. There was another of those pauses.

"Of course," Cherry purred. "Take a look in my cooler."

I had a beer, Donna chose a screwdriver. She wandered about a bit, staring out of the windows, before I suggested that we took a trip upstairs. Donna flashed me one of her

looks that told me that she knew what I was thinking, but climbed the stairs in front of me. She had a lovely bum.

She laughed when she saw the bedroom but it was not a nasty laugh.

"Let's see if you can live up to your Eastern promise!" she said, draining her glass and tossing it aside for Cherry to clear up. I was almost dizzy with frustrated desire by now. We undressed each other and Donna suddenly swore. "I didn't bring any bloody contraceptives. You didn't, did you?" she accused me. Of course I had forgotten all about that.

"If you look in the little drawer in the bedside table, you'll find what you're looking for," Cherry said sweetly. Sure enough, there was a little pack of three in a cellophane wrapper.

The bed did a gentle massage, that was all, no more erotic than making love on any old conventional love-bed. Donna lived up to my expectations though, and I think I lived up to hers, from the noises she made. Afterwards we smoked a joint each and watched the smoke curl up to the mirror. Cherry was silent, no mood-music, no conversation, it was as if she had switched herself off. I started to wonder if I had upset her. Maybe I should not have brought Donna here. Could a house actually be jealous?

I hustled Donna and myself into our clothes, trying not to let my panic show. Yet the bedroom door opened when I grasped the handle, the stairs bore our weight, no teeth grew out of the woodwork of the hall. The front door even curled open as we went towards it, and once outside I laughed at my foolish fancies.

"Thanks, Cherry," I said with a wave.

"Don't mention it, Harry," she called softly. "See you soon!"

Donna started feeling ill in Merc, on the way home. It must have been the joint we had smoked; she complained of stomach pains and Merc had to stop to let her be sick. She felt better after and went home with dire warnings of what she would do to me if she was ill, as if it was all my fault that her parents had strong feelings about under-age smoking and under-age sex.

A week later, her father came storming round to inform us that his little girl was five months pregnant and what was I intending to do about it? I denied everything. Five months ago I was only just starting to take her out, never mind getting inside her knickers. He went off unsatisfied and I convinced my parents that she must have been dumped by some boy who left her up the duff, and she had taken up with me for someone to blame it all on. It wasn't some other boy, though, was it? Cherry's "contraceptive" was really a "conceptive," I had unwittingly helped Cherry to put something monstrous inside Donna. God knows what she's going to give birth to, maybe she'll have a house. I can't ask my parents for help without admitting what I got up to with both Cherry and Donna. I don't know what to do. I wish her door wasn't red, it looks so much like a mouth. We're moving in next week and I don't think she'll ever let me go.

Sylvia M. Siddall makes her fourth *Interzone* appearance with the above story. Her earlier pieces were "Kingfisher" (issue 30), "Thylacine, Thylacine" (issue 44) and "The Perils of Unprotected Sex" (issue 84). She lives in Wellingborough, Northants.

The Bells of Hell Go Ting-a-Ling-a-Ling



Anne Gay,
author of
three sf novels
with a fourth
imminent,
talks to Sally
Ann Melia

If you didn't have pen and paper would you still tell stories?

Oh, yes. I have this image in my mind. A symbol. It is represented by the torch: the burning brand in the darkness. All the way through history, people have squatted around the fire telling stories. Stories to keep out the night, stories to bind people together, stories to strengthen them. From the darkness of distant history, from the shaman telling stories about the fire in the cave, stories are like relay batons — passed on through time — and now I hold that baton for a short time. I'm telling stories now and soon I will pass it to future generations Marianne (my daughter) and I tell each other stories. My Dad used to tell me stories. His were more anecdotal than anything else, although he did like to make them up sometimes. It's a nice thing to do. There are other people who share stories with me, and I share stories with them. You can really only do it well with people you are close to.

What is the latest novel called?

To Bathe in Lightning, to be published by Orbit in March 1995. It follows *Dancing on the Volcano*, set on the same world, with the same people. It's the further adventures of Irona, her personal development. Many years ago, I was working as a store detective in a large boutique. The manager had been sitting on a veranda in Africa when she had been hit by lightning. She survived because her feet had been on a wrought-iron balustrade. The lightning had gone straight through her. So, in *To Bathe in Lightning* the characters go searching for lightning. The book is also about facing up to what is difficult.

At the end of *Dancing on the Volcano* the first two groups of settlers are anticipating the arrival of a third wave of settlers. Is that part of *To Bathe in Lightning*?

No, it's not about settlers, but about another form of contact with Earth. No people actually arrive — not physical bodies. A new form of transfer is sent through to them. When Irona and various other people return to Earth, they go by mind-transfer. With the advent of mind-transfer, you have a new concept of the link between mind and body. This is best illustrated by the character

Regen: the guy has serious problems. He's very twitchy and nervous; he has all sorts of mannerisms, part mind-to-body but also body-to-mind. So if Regen was put into a better body, what would he be like? Well he would still twitch, and scratch, and jump even though he had no physical reason to do so, because all these mannerisms were a problem of Regen's mind — except that, in time, the new body should suppress most of the mannerisms.

I'm surprised Irona and the others wanted to return to Earth. The Earth we saw in *Dancing on the Volcano* is highly oppressive, since half of the population are either drugged-up or vegetating, manipulated by a small percentage of the population. There are also mechanical devices called Eyes and Arms — and Ears as well, which are sort of listening devices. Where did you get the idea for such a grotesque future from?

I think it is from *Protect and Survive*, an HMSO booklet about what are we supposed to do in the case of nuclear war, how local government and so forth go into shelters, and how the rest of the population is the brushwood. Actually, it was something mentioned by Jasper Carrott in one of his comedy routines: we are the brushwood. I thought, "Bloody hell! This is never right!" — and I looked it up and it is! We are the brushwood, we are expendable, dispensable.

So the manipulation of the population described in *Dancing on the Volcano* draws a parallel with manipulation in contemporary society?

Yes, it does. I mean, so many people don't even bother to vote. So many people are happy to be followers, not rousing leaders. I'm also a bit dubious about those people who get to be leaders: a lot of people get to be in power because they look good, because they have charisma, because they draw people to them. Look at Ronald Reagan — how did he get to the White House? Because he had a great attraction for people, he had been in the pictures. Once he was in the White House, what did he do? Don't you remember the *Spitting Image* ongoing joke about the missing brain? So the story is

about the power behind the throne. Twiss, in *Dancing on the Volcano*, thinks he has superstar status, only he has to have someone to tell him what to think. So it's a story of the kings' advisers, the king-makers, all that stuff.

Is Irona sometimes very weak?

Yes, she is, and it is because of this duty thing. She has been brainwashed to look after people. She has to look after things, she has to take care of things. It's like service, not social service so much, but looking after other people. All the way through, Irona knows that the moment she can snatch any pleasure she's got to pay for it. For in a way, you do have to pay for pleasure in life. This is my observation. A lot of the time, the bad guys actually win because they don't give a damn. They will just do what they want anyway. It is all very nice to be brought up in a world where you have Disney cartoons and John Wayne in his white hat, where everything works out for the best. In real life, it rarely goes that way. If you look at Italy, the people who are supposed to be responsible to the citizens are being shot by the Mafia; but even in the UK there are all sorts of power interests, people in government are getting back-handers left, right and centre, contracts, consultancies, all sorts of things. No, it would be nice if the good guys won, but they don't. The meek shall inherit the Earth, but how long are they going to keep it?

In *Dancing on the Volcano*, you use the idea of immortality...

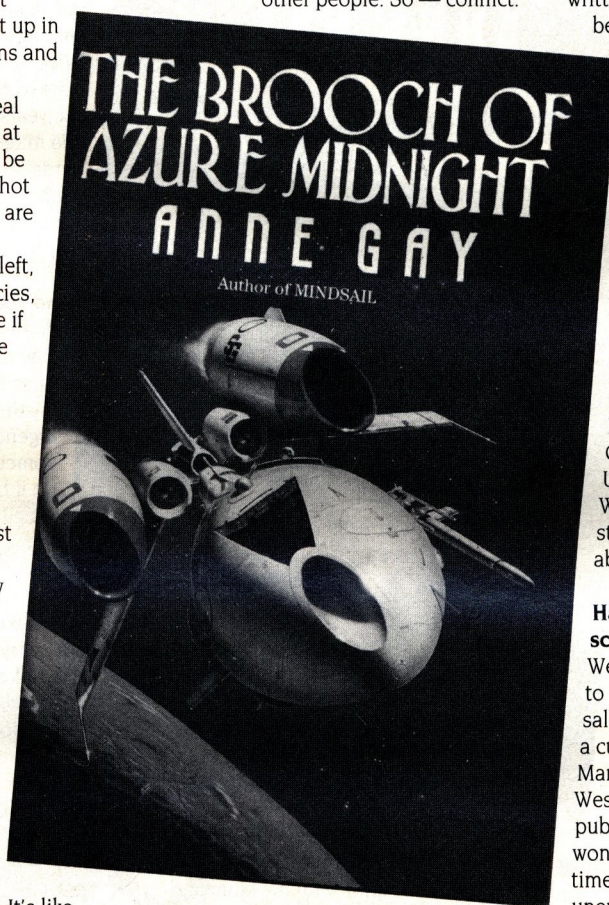
You would think immortality solves everything. Instead, your problems just go on over many years. So they dance on a volcano, that is the only way they can gamble with death; it is the only form of risk taking. It is the release from the relentless sameness of their problems. People really need to take risks: today, people hang-glide, climb mountains and take all sorts of strange risks. A guy was killed the other day driving at 170 miles per hour. Those people convince themselves they have taken a hundred and one precautions; they convince themselves they can survive. It's like the soundtrack to *Oh What a Lovely War* — do you remember that tune? "The bells of hell go ting-a-ling-a-ling for you but not for me. Oh death where is thy sting-a-ling-a-ling, where grave thy victory?" My Daddy said they used to sing that when he was in the army. You have to believe it is only going to happen to other people.

Also in *Dancing on the Volcano*, the settlers have omnipotent agricultural machines, but once these machines are stolen they are helpless — not one seed or spade between them.

That brings us into the political arena, because this is based on a real conflict. The story started with a newspaper clipping and a photo of an old woman with the most fascinating face, a real geography of wrinkles, showing character — only she is screaming,

she is running away. I can't remember the details; in any case, it doesn't really matter. The fact is these jobs went out to shoot up a beautiful old town just for entertainment. Some of those places are 2,000 years old with olive groves and wheat planted all around. These kids go around shooting, just for the hell of it.

Dancing on the Volcano is about conflict. Conflict with yourself, conflict with other people within a relationship, whether it's a man-woman relationship, friend-friend, parent-child — on a national or international scale. The whole thing is about conflict. Even when the settlers arrive on a brand new planet, even when the settlers have these machines that do everything for them, even when they are offered paradise on a plate. Still there are people who want more than other people. So — conflict.



One theme common to your novels *Mindsail* and *Dancing on the Volcano* is the barrenness of woman — the despair of both Tolhalla (*Mindsail*) and Irona (*Dancing*) who have only one child, and that child is stolen from them. Is this something personal to you?

Yes, having had six dead children and one live one. It's very distressing to experience.

Was it healing to write about it?

Yes, you kind of externalize it. It just becomes words. I tend to notice at writers' workshops, the people who haven't any children get hypersensitive even to constructive criticism — and I mean constructive criticism, because destructive criticism is not the point of a decent workshop. I always find it very strange when people start: "This story is my baby." Why? Then they get very upset when all you

are doing is saying, "well I like that very much and the structure is very good but what if..." It is only the people who haven't had kids who say "This story is my baby," because you can't imagine what it is like to have a kid until you've had a kid.

Let's talk about *Mindsail*. Was this the first book you wrote?

It was my first published book. What happened was, I got this phone call from John Jarrold. "Here's the news," he said. "Are you sitting comfortably? We've decided to buy *Mindsail*." There was this long silence. Some incredible phrases came to mind, but I didn't actually say anything. John Jarrold was going: "Are you all right? Anne? Are you all right?" That was how I published my first book. Although it was not the first book I had written, no. I wrote two and a half books before *Mindsail*. Of those, one didn't get published at all; another one keeps getting as far as editorial boards. The publisher can only publish so many books a month: at the editorial board meeting, they all debate the issue, which books will be published this month. It got to that stage twice. And so a friend of mine is going to read it over the summer then come back and tell me what's wrong. The third is a kid's one. I find it actually very hard to write kids' books, so I just never finished it.

Anything published outside the UK?

I've had some short stories published in Germany and the USA. No novels in the USA — they say they are too English. What I can't understand is how people can still be xenophobic when they are talking about books that are set in space.

Have you thought of moving out of the science-fiction genre at all?

Well, I've done one historical novel. I'd love to do a cowboy, only Westerns are not very saleable at the moment. The other novel is a current-day novel, a reflection of life — Mary Wesley, that sort of thing. I think Mary Wesley is brilliant to take up writing and get published at 70. That was the most wonderful thing about adult education: day-time classes tend to be pensioners and the unemployed — obviously, only certain sectors of the community — but it was great to see that a lot of the pensioners had far more go about them than some of the younger people. I taught them for seven years when Marianne was small and I didn't want to have a full time day-job. So I did bits and pieces here and there, and it was really hard, because at the same time as working you've still got to get the daughter from the child minder, do the dinner, wash up. It was quite hard.

How long have you been on your own?

Four and a half years — well, four and a half years since we, Marianne and I, stopped living in that house and got a place of our own. But it comes down to the question: what is "on your own"? What is isolation? You don't necessarily have to live in your own house to be isolated.

It is another thing that comes through your female characters – they are all isolated. Is that a theme you like to explore?

That again is an expression of aspects of reality. One of the things that I find quite difficult to write about is friendships. I don't know why. I find it hard to write about, even though I have some wonderful friends. I can't say I'm a lonely person particularly, but I do find it very hard to write about friendships. Reality can be so fragile. I really hate lies, people who tell lies. Every now and then my daughter, as all daughters do, tries to put one over me. "Oh, we went to the cinema tonight." She did that a few weeks ago. I thought: "No, you didn't." So I got her downstairs with her friends upstairs. I asked all the normal questions: what film did you see, which cinema was it at, what time was the show? And it was a total load of crap. I have said to her, "you can lie to me when you are any good at it," my theory being that if a kid has enough nous to work out a coherent lie, then possibly they have enough nous to look after themselves in a serious situation. But I never lie to her.

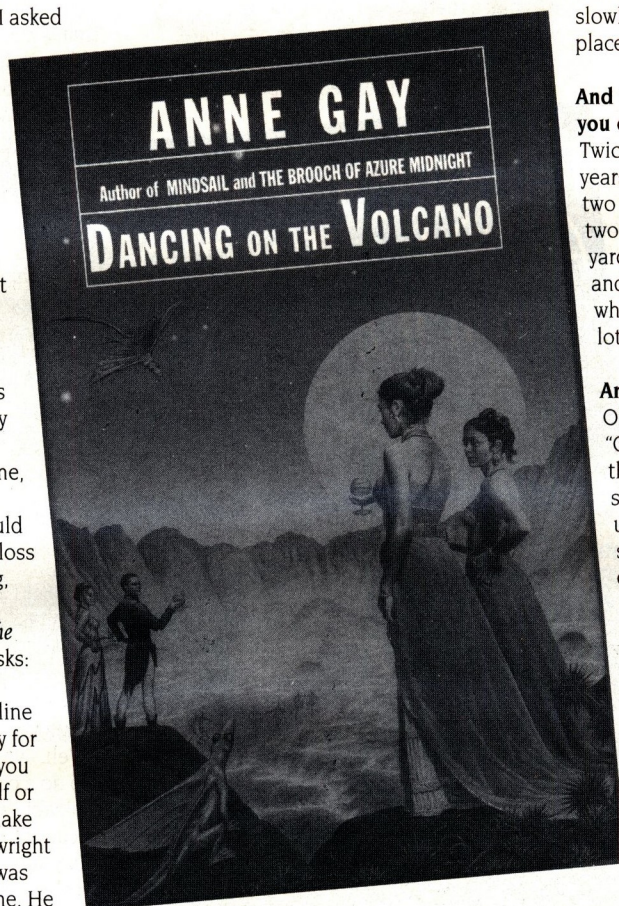
Never?

No. I don't believe in bringing up kids in cloud-cuckoo-land, for when reality hits they feel a massive disappointment. My parents lied to me, they let me down, by making it seem that if you were good, everything would be fine — the world would be candyfloss and sunshine. But that was colouring, not deceit.

There was a Spanish play called *The Skylight* which explores reality and asks: "what is reality?" It is an absolutely wonderful play, because the bottom line is that you have to take responsibility for yourself and for your own actions. If you are going around hiding from yourself or hiding from other people then you make your life impossible to live. The playwright was not necessarily an optimist. He was writing under a very oppressive regime. He was sentenced to death but the sentence was commuted to 30 years. Franco, as you probably know, had various playwrights and other people shot. No, the optimism in his work was that if you can take responsibility for yourself, and live your life to the best of your ability, then you might actually get somewhere. Some people hide things from themselves behind screens. You can see people doing this, people try and make out they have no weaknesses. They accomplish this by hiding a part of their character from themselves, by projecting onto other people, by putting them down, either overtly or subconsciously. All that is unnecessary. If you faced up to your problem, you would be a hell of a lot better off. Then you have a lot of people, not just women, but more often women than men in my experience, who are really smart, they have a lot of courage, a lot of ability and so forth, but they are so shy. They have been so damaged they would rather just hide away. They don't want to go out into the world. They are scared of having

friends, because a friend might find out who they really are. By restricting their abilities they are damaging themselves even more. They are perpetuating the myth that has been thrust onto them, that they are a second-class citizen. People believe an awful lot of negative ideas about themselves, because other people have put them down.

Some people want to know the truth, some people don't. Like people with terminal diseases — some of them need to be told, because then they will fight against the disease, do all the things you can do to fight against a disease; others would rather just not know.



Have you worked in a hospital?

No, I lived in a hospital with my Mum and Dad, from birth to 18. And yes, I am extremely good with blood. I am really good with bandages and first aid, but I get squeamish with people puking, and with noxious odours. I have met an awful lot of doctors who I really don't like. The younger ones, fresh out of medical school, are great. They still care, but after a bit you just become the leg in bed 17. It was quite funny: one of the times I was in hospital, the bed was numbered "A1 M1." I felt like a junction in Hatfield. In fact it was worse than that, it was totally taste-free. I was in a ward where lots of people had just had miscarriages (me as well). The doctor was an Asian lady who was enormously pregnant and wearing a sari. So when she came onto the ward, her belly was sticking out of the top of her sari. Really taste-free – I mean, why couldn't they put her on a different ward? Insensitive.

I have developed a serious allergy to

penicillin: I get to the stage where my heart stops and people have to come and start it up again with adrenalin and atropine and things like that. Basically, I nearly died. What was that like? Well... I don't know whether you know *Fritz the Cat*, but in one of those cartoons one of the crows died. These crows were supposed to represent negroes; they would act real cool and always get into fights. Then this one crow gets shot. His vision shrinks and shrinks and shrinks, his whole world is going black. It was the same for me, in addition to immense physical pain, I found myself staring out a shrinking tunnel, a tunnel of spiralling fireballs. My sight narrowed down to nothing. My heart beat slowly down. Burning sensations in lots of places. Floppiness. Such things.

And this happened several times? Were you out of circulation for a long time?

Twice. It was horrid. It took me years and years to be able to walk any distance. About two years ago I got as far as being to walk two miles. At one point I couldn't walk 50 yards. It was awful. I didn't die, obviously — and in each case, having got into a situation where I nearly died, I found I had a hell of a lot of new energy when I didn't.

And you were writing all this time?

Oh, yes. You get lots of people who say, "One day I will right a book." It is one of those things that people put off, and they say they will do it in a bit. There is no urgency, no rush. There has got to be something that gives you the impetus to do it because a book takes a hell of a long time to write. So I found that the illness made me really get on and do it, as opposed to being dilettante about it.

I like *The Brooch of Azure Midnight* very much indeed. How long did it take to build and research this far-future Sol system?

I don't spend huge quantities of time on research. I went to the library and looked at a book on the solar system.

For the bits where I wasn't sure about — what it would be like on Mars, how would you get an atmosphere to stay on Mars, why isn't there very much atmosphere at the moment? — I asked a science teacher. She told me that on Mars, given the very low air pressure, the moisture vapour on your eye will boil away. This leads to ulceration and so forth. I thought, "Great!" and I wrote it in. When I am working on a book, I think about my world, I think about the people in it, what they look like, what they talk like, what they have for breakfast on Tuesdays. I have a very good idea about how I want everything to be, then I ask people what I have to do to make it like that, and what changes are needed to make it work. My phone bills are astronomical as a result of saying: "If you do this, what would happen? What would occur next?"

It takes somewhere between a year and a year and a half to write a book. I am trying to get quicker, to do a book a year, but the trouble is I have a full-time job – teaching is a job where you have to bring loads of stuff home in the evening – and I've also got a

daughter to look after, a social life to look after, and I occasionally sleep.

Do you work straight onto a word processor?

I make pages and pages of notes. I have file index cards, one for each character, one for major cities, geographical things, major political things, and I keep those up to date so that a person who has blue eyes on page one still has blue eyes on page 201. I work out the plot in a lot of detail before I start. You can't keep control unless you are sure where you are going.

All your books are told from one person's viewpoint, and sometimes that viewpoint is distorted. Why is that?

When you are in any situation you can only see things from your own perspective. You can use your imagination and try to think how other people perceive things, but you do only see things from your own point of view. So to suddenly to have an omnipotent narrator who knows what everybody does and is thinking, well, that is cheating. Life just isn't like that.

How much reading do you do?

Actually, I am very bad at current affairs; I keep getting people's names wrong. I don't generally get a paper; in the holidays I get a Sunday paper, but I still haven't read last Sunday's. I read it in bits, you know, sporadically. I don't like the news as such. All news is basically the same. Somebody has

been murdered, but it is a different name. Somebody has been raped, but it is a different name. It is all the same stuff: somebody having a war, somebody else doing other nasty stuff. I pick up a lot more from reading novels and talking to people and plunging into technical tomes — because I've only got O-level General Science, you know.

One person I am fascinated by is Catherine de Medici. Absolutely fascinated. You know the word Machiavellian? Well Machiavelli wrote *Il Principe*, *The Prince*, for Catherine de Medici before she was born, before they knew whether it was going to be a boy or a girl. They assumed since it was a first-born that it was going to be a boy. Now the Medici were Dukes of Florence, but Florence was supposed to be a republic; the government they had was a kind of Roman senate of sorts. Well, Catherine's mum died within days of Catherine being born. Her dad died shortly afterwards of some fever that was going around. So this poor little kid was brought up, heir to vast estates, and grand-niece to the Pope, and she was taught this Machiavellian system as she grew up. When she was nine or ten, the enemies of Florentine republicanism came in with a mercenary army and overran the city. Catherine de Medici went into hiding in a convent; only, the invading army wasn't having that — she was taken out of the convent, stripped naked, had her head shaven, then hung in chains outside the walls of the convent for everybody to throw

things at her and jeer at her. This hardly counts as a happy childhood. At the age of 14, the Pope decided, she was to marry one of the sons of the king of France. This was a political alliance, she had no say whatsoever. The guy in question was ever so much older than she was: he had had huge traumas of his own, and a rotten stutter. He was seriously emotionally damaged, didn't want her in the first place, didn't like Italy, didn't like the Italians, knew that this was a political thing and thoroughly resented it. Anyway, what with one thing and another, the king died, then all the other people in line to the throne died, her husband died, and so Catherine de Medici ended up being Regent of France. During her Regency, in 1571-72, she ordered the massacre of the Huguenots. And why? How do you get from being a hurt scared little girl who has been seriously bullied, to being a person who orders a massacre of 10,000 people in one city in one night? Fascinating psychological development. Why the Huguenots? Why not the Pope?

So what will the next book be?

The next novel will be called *Sunstrip*. It is set on a world which is very much going into decline, a world that no longer rotates on its axis, with a sun side and a night side. The only part the inhabitants can live in is the area between night and day, the twilight zone. It is due out some time, maybe, in 1996 — with my lifestyle and publishing schedules, you never know.



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NIGHT OF THE JABBERWOCK

Richard Evans, Gollancz sf boss, had a fearful hospital crisis of pneumonia plus liver failure but is now convalescing and able to toy with the occasional MS. Meanwhile Jo Fletcher is standing in for him at Gollancz, in a whirlwind of slushpile clearance: "Richard isn't going to recognize his office without all those familiar old manuscripts," muttered one author on receiving a huge parcel of yellowed paper...

Simon R. Green put things in perspective at the recent Novacon, where Graham Joyce was guest of honour: "Huh, how does *he* get to be guest when he's only published three novels? I've done 14." His time will come.

L. Ron Hubbard continues to pile up posthumous glories, this time the Ig Nobel Prize presented by *Annals of Improbable Research* magazine to those whose achievements "cannot or should not be reproduced." The Literature trophy inevitably went to L. Ron "for his crackling Good Book, *Dianetics*, which is highly profitable to mankind or to a portion thereof."

Christopher Priest's fabulous movie career continues to, er, continue. *The Quiet Woman* has been optioned for a feature film, joining his earlier *Fugue*, *Glamour* and *Wessex* in this eerie filmic limbo and leading the author to speculate that if three out of four projects fail, he might at last be in with a chance. "All four are low-budget art-house movies, though. I do wish they would Think Schwarzenegger when they read my books! They did once with Phil Dick..."

J. I. M. Stewart died in November, aged 88. He was famed for his witty, donnish and sometimes surreal "Michael Innes" detective thrillers, whose McGuffins were occasionally sf-flavoured (biowarfare in *Hare Sitting Up*, mind control in *Operation Pax*): he also wrote a few ghost and semi-sf stories under his own name.

Jules Verne has a new book coming: his second novel *Paris in the 20th Century* was locked in a family safe from the time of its rejection in 1863 until 1989, and has now been published in France. When the English-language edition appears, will Verne's mind-boggling predictions of 1960s motor cars, universal electrification and fax machines put him in line for his first Hugo award?

Ian Watson, modest as ever, boasted that his Games Workshop tie-in novel *Warhammer 40,000: Harlequin* sold all 300 hardback copies available at the Games Day event (patronized by 5,000 blood-crazed Warhammer game fans). But pride goeth before a nasty surprise: Games Workshop deplored the novel's popularity and banned it from their own shops for fear that it might divert money from all-important game sales. Enraged by this sabotage of the spinoff deal, book publishers Boxtree are said to be protesting bitterly.

Ansible LINK



David Langford

INFINITELY IMPROBABLE

Weird Science. You may have thought Kim Stanley Robinson's *Green Mars* was hard sf. Not so, implies the write-up in *Fire and Water* (the HarperCollins newsletter), explaining how to reach this particular Mars: "Cross the astral belt..."

Lies, Lies. The "Liar's Panel on How To Get Published" was a popular World SF Convention event. *Gene Wolfe*: "What is the quickest way to get a response from an editor?" *Dave Hartwell*: "Use different fonts in the text." *Wil McCarthy*: "Use upper and lower case in the middle of a word." *Joe Haldeman*: "I JUST USE ALL CAPS." *DH*: "Perfume your MS so that it is easy to distinguish from others in the stack..." (Old Spice was recommended.)

Too Good To Check. Seen the ads for "Venus Classics of Historical Erotica" — a Victorian/Edwardian porn book club? Or its sleazier modern bedmate "Venus Editions Collection of Erotica"? Both come from New Era Press. It would be too beautiful for the human mind to contemplate if this were the same New Era that handles L. Ron Hubbard in the UK.... "When first published these books were FORBIDDEN!" — it *does* sound like the grubby ad copy for *Dianetics*, you know.

Evolution, the 1996 British Easter SF Convention, has switched venues from Brighton to the Radisson Edwardian Hotel

near Heathrow. Contact address: 13 Lindfield Gdns, Hampstead, London, NW3 6PX. The 1995 Easter event, "Confabulation," will be in London Docklands: contact 3 York St, Altrincham, Cheshire, WA15 9QH.

Everything You Know Is Wrong! So you thought Doc Smith's Kim Kinnison and the First Lensman were different characters in different books? Or that the ship in Brian Aldiss's *Non-Stop* was emphatically *not* travelling to the stars? Or that Robert Silverberg's *Nightfall* was an expansion of, rather than a sequel to, the Asimov story? These and other common fallacies are exploded in Edward James's definitive *Science Fiction in the 20th Century*, published by Oxford University Press....

Mab Sêr is a new small-press sf magazine from the "Welsh Speculative Writers Foundation": A4, 38pp, £1.90 from 7 Woosnam Close, Penylan, Cardiff, CF3 7DN. But the title has already changed to *Beyond the Boundaries* ... presumably in hope of luring the English monoglots who failed in droves to buy issue one, assuming wrongly that its contents must be in Welsh.

Staying Ahead. From "The Sky Is Burning" by Harlan Ellison, (1958): "... the Moon, which we had reached in 1963, or Mars that we had circumnavigated in 1966 ..." (*Ellison Wonderland*, 1962) Alternatively: "... the Moon, which we had reached in 1969, or Mars, on which we had landed in 1976..." (*The Essential Ellison*, 1987). These days Mr Ellison is not only a bestselling author but an expert advisor on meeting single people, explains the letterhead of the US "Great Expectations" dating agency.

More Football. It's not just a typo but a contagious meme. Following Jerry Pournelle as noted last issue (but in another publication, a Pan flyer for the rabid anti-Green polemic *Fallen Angels*), Larry Niven too has been credited with co-writing the blockbuster *Football*. Will this follow the authors all their lives, just as Brian Stableford is pursued by a chimerical Stapleford? (The powerful semantic attractor of Olaf Stapledon has a lot to answer for.)

Disney's Language Lessons: Swahili. One watcher of the movie *The Lion King* found a smattering of Swahili useful to translate the names (*Simba* = lion, *Shenzi* = barbarian) — but had to resort to a dictionary for the warthog *Pumba*, which he now insists means "excretion from under the foreskin."

Ten Years Ago. Robert Holdstock was a convention guest who turned a greyer shade of pale when (following his jocular request for bebies of naked dancing girls) the committee presented him in public with a jiggling "strippergram" ... leading to a storm of audience complaints about innocent sf fans, some of them mere babes in arms, being exposed to the alien terror of the female breast.

Sarah really noticed her first nose in the lift. Up until then she had thought little about them, unless they were especially large, or especially flat. She herself was blessed with a petite one, and therefore had never trodden the sad paths of nasal self-hatred.

The nose initially looked quite ordinary, as did the tall, balding person that it belonged to. The nose, the person and herself were the lift's only occupants on a trip up 20 stories to her workplace.

It seemed the journey would pass in silence. Sarah had occasionally seen Mr Balding around her office, but they had never been introduced. Neither broke the ice now.

The nose had other ideas. At about level ten, it began to twitch. At level 15 it erupted.

It was the most disgusting thing Sarah had ever seen. Mr Balding didn't even *try* to find a handkerchief. Two large dribbles of viscous green fluid were expelled from his nostrils, and hung, glistening, as far down as his chest.

"Scuse me," he said in a voice entirely lacking nasal overtones, and sniffed, and sniffed again. Still no sign of a handkerchief, just a sniff. And then another sniff, and then one huge sniff which kept going and going. It was like watching an inexperienced spaghetti eater sucking up two recalcitrant strands; spinach-flavoured it would have to be from the colour, perhaps covered with avocado dip. The sniff continued until the stuff was entirely sucked back inside.

"Pardon me," the voice came again, this time sounding as if the green gunk was layered, syrup-like, around the vocal chords. Balding cleared his throat expectorantly.

At level 20 the lift doors sidled open and Sarah raced out, mind full of spinach pasta being ingested nasally. Fortunately, she made it to the loo before she gagged.

From then on she seemed to see Mr Balding everywhere, and she began to watch noses, not just his but everyone's. It was perhaps the memory of their capabilities.

That evening, Sarah told Ben about it after they had made love, and he snuffled his fortunately small nose all over her, doing an exceptionally good imitation of a pig. She fought him off.

"You weren't there, it was revolting," she informed him.

"Well, I think it was very ecologically sound of him," he said.

"What?" she replied.

"Well, just think of it all. What are there, five billion people on the planet. Imagine the tonnage of bogeys there would be if everyone just expelled what they had. Imagine the waste-disposal problems. I think the great bogey recyclers should be congratulated. How about starting a recycle snot programme – a truly green campaign? How about a green nose day?" He started to laugh and whatever else he was going to say was lost under the pillow she deposited on his head.

"You're disgusting," she said.

"Well, we all have them," he replied in a muffled tone. "And you needn't be so prim, sometimes I've caught you..." Ben's speech was completely curtailed when she sat on the pillow. He quickly gave in.

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Jeffrey Alcock

Everyone at work had colds, the height of a mid-winter batch of them. It had never bothered Sarah much before, but the incident in the lift had sensitized her. Now she watched the sodden handkerchiefs, the dribbling hooters, the red conks – she had not realized before how many words there were for a nose. Her office was filled with nasal explosions large and small, her litter bin full of other people's paper handkerchiefs.

As cold germs cut an ever broader swathe through her office, Mr Balding became a more frequent visitor. Wherever the red noses were at their thickest he would be there, as though enjoying the company of fellow sufferers. The man had a perpetual cold.

Sarah prided herself on her logical point of view, and she began to wonder: what was the point of it all? Why would the body have such a strange reflex? What was the use of shooting supersonic mucus at everyone else? It was a great way to infect the rest of the species with the particularly nasty germ that you'd just caught. So why did everyone do it?

Things came to a crunch when Ben caught the current bug and started sniffing self-pityingly around the house, reduced to a mush. If there was one thing she couldn't stand it was a sniffer.

"Use a bloody handkerchief," she told him after the 15th sniff.

"Han't go' one," he mumbled sniffily and then let out a terrific sneeze, which considerably humidified the room's atmosphere.

Aghh, she said silently.

"Blesh me," he said after a while in a self-pitying tone.

"What?" she said eventually.

"I shaid blesh me," he replied, carefully enunciating the sibilant words.

"Why did you say that?"

"Well, you never shaid blesh you, sho I shaid..."

"No, why do *we* say that?"

"What?"

"Bless me."

"Dunno, you don't shay it anyway."

It seemed it was time for some sympathy, and there was little point in trying to keep away from him; his speeding mucus had probably homed in on her already.

The next day she looked it up. The use of the saying, the reference book noted, dated back to medieval times, when it was widely believed that after you sneezed the soul was momentarily expelled from the body, and any passing devil could leap in whilst the house was empty. Saying bless you returned your soul to home.

What a curious belief, she thought. *How could such a superstition come about? Well, I'm not superstitious, and I'm not going to start now.* So no matter how many hurt looks Ben gave her, she still wouldn't save his soul.

Sarah sailed through the rest of the winter with the smugness of someone who consumes three times the recommended R.D.A. of vitamin C each and every day. Sarah never got colds, well at least hardly ever. The only time she managed to catch them was on holiday. She had a theory that her immune system went on vacation too. Unfortunately for her, her early summer holiday featured some midnight skinny dipping, and it really wasn't quite warm enough for it. So she returned to work with an absolute stinker.

On her first day back, entering the lift, she came across Mr

Balding. Sarah had the strangest feeling that he'd scented her cold from a distance and had been lying in wait. Just as before they were the lift's only occupants as they rode to the 20th floor. This time though Mr Balding's nose was quiescent and it was Sarah's that tickled abominably. She didn't want to sneeze right now, not in front of him, not after what had happened last time.

It was impossible, the itching was unbearable. She could feel the sneeze arriving in a rush, an explosion, a nasal orgasm. She groped for her tissue and clutched it to her nose, but it was too late.

"Achoo," she nosed noisily.

Sarah was earlier than Mr Balding had been, it was only the tenth floor.

Silence descended whilst she mopped her nose. Well, it didn't look as though he was going to say anything. How nice it was to find someone else who wasn't superstitious, despite his unsanitary habits.

She turned to him to make light of her cold, and stopped with her mouth half open. His eyes weren't the nondescript colour she thought she remembered from before. They were green, dark streaky green, the same colour as his... had been.

They seemed to fill the lift as he loomed over her, though she was vaguely aware through peripheral vision that the lift was stuck on the 13th floor.

Mr Balding began to sniff, not the little sniffs that Ben made, but the enormous sniff that she had witnessed before. This time, though, there was nothing to sniff up, no disgusting act of ingestion to perform.

Except, slowly she began to feel quite woozy, light-headed, *as though as though he's sucking me out, as though he's sucking my soul out of my body!*

Sarah fought to clear her head. Suddenly superstition seemed very important.

"Bless me," she tried to say, but no sound came through her frozen lips. In fact she could now see her own face; she was outside her body, floating towards Mr Balding.

And she knew who he was. It was another expression she had never understood, but this time it was because it was wrong.

Everyone had heard of the bogeyman that frightened little children. Wrong, wrong, wrong! It was the Bogeyman who lurked around sneezers waiting for that careless moment, not the Devil. It was the Bogeyman who lived on all those revolting nasal expulsions, like a parasite, but waiting all the time for the offering of his favourite sweetmeat: the soul.

Ben had been partly right after all, though he would never guess, and Sarah would probably never be in a position to tell him. *Poor Ben*, she thought. *Keep saying blesh me.*

Sarah tried to come to terms with the fact that she was going to be sniffed up like a snorted drug. And what was going to occupy her shell, she wondered. Presumably some of that disgusting gunk.

That would explain a few things. How many people had already been taken over by the Bogeyman? How many were already full of green goo where their souls should have been? In Sarah's opinion quite a lot.

She realized that none of this wave of inspired theorizing would get her out of her predicament. Her disembodied mind thought furiously. What could she do? Sarah remembered that in these situations the victim was usually allowed to fight for her life: a fiddling competition or a game of chess,

not that she was any good at either. Anyway she could hardly challenge her antagonist whilst floating immaterially across the room towards his nostrils.

Then inspiration struck her. *Concentrate*, she told herself, *concentrate*. Sarah had read about all this out-of-body stuff when an old boyfriend had been through a Californian phase. It all depended on whether or not she could manifest herself just a little bit. If she really concentrated could she turn just a part of herself back into some form of reality?

Those enormous sniffing nostrils were upon her now. *Concentrate, concentrate*, and she was inside, being split into two for the passage past tree-trunk-girthed nasal hairs, and then over the sensitive olfactory surface with all those thousands of nerve endings.

Now, she thought, thinking of feathers, pepper, dust and more feathers. For a moment she felt that she *was* composed of feathers.

Her rate of passage slowed, stopped, jerkily started again, stopped and then she could feel the rush coming.

"Ah... Ah... choo." Sarah finally really knew sneezing at first hand as she hurtled out and hit the lift walls at greater than Mach 1.

With a great effort of will she grouped her ectoplasmic self back together again and headed home. Uncertain of the correct entrance, she returned from whence she came, heading for her nose. It was the right tactic. Moments later Sarah was looking out of her own eyes.

"Bless me," she said, the words falling over themselves to escape from her mouth. With a victorious look, she turned to the just sneezed Bogeyman.

"And bless you," she finished triumphantly.

The Bogeyman glared at her, an awful green glare, but impotent. She had him. As she watched, he began to leak green from his nostrils, to weep mint tears. Sarah covered her eyes, saying "bless me," and "bless you," as often as she could, like a mantra. There were horrible slurping noises coming from across the lift, but she knew that if she looked she would be put off spinach for life.

Eventually the sound stopped and the lift whirled into action. Sarah opened her eyes and Mr Balding was standing next to her, a slightly concerned look on his face.

"Bless you," she said tentatively.

"And bless you too, young lady," he said pleasantly.

They reached the 20th floor and parted company. Her direction took her past a man on a ladder changing light-bulbs. He seemed entirely innocent, but Sarah scrutinized him carefully. Now she knew a thing or two.

Very cautiously Sarah stepped *around* the ladder.

Jeffrey Alcock has lived and worked in Denmark for three years, but is now back home in Swindon, Wiltshire. The above is his first published story. He tells us that his girl friend still refuses to say, "Bless you."

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
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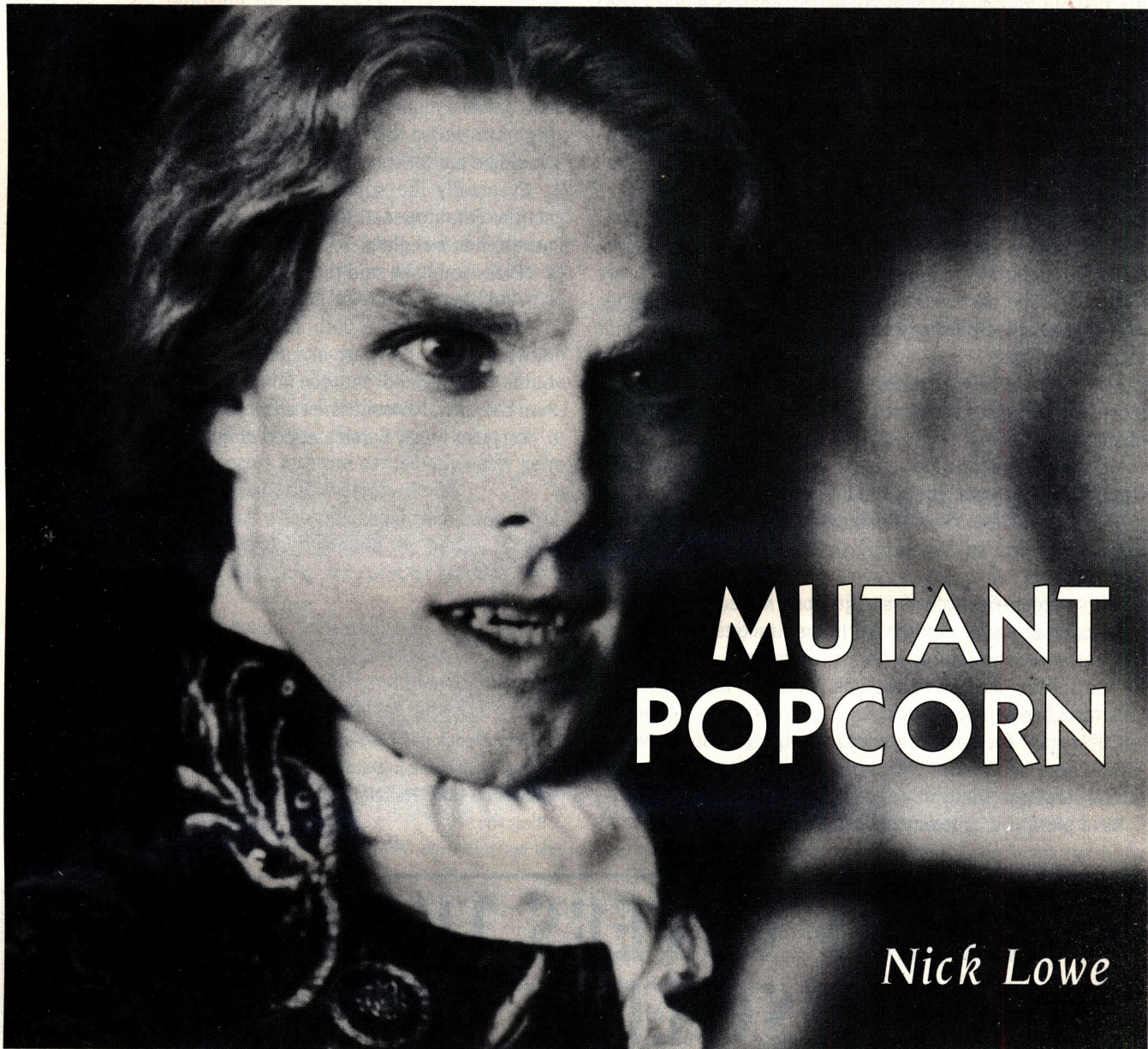
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MUTANT POPCORN

Nick Lowe

Novels and films: two species, forever entwined, forever apart; one cheap, fragile, and filled with one mortal's blood, the other bought at a fearsome price and sustained by that blood to a vast existence that is both more and less than the life of humans. Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire* has flirted with the dark gift of movie immortality for close on 20 years – long enough to have mothered a whole mortal generation of fleshly offspring and spiritual apostles – before finally succumbing to the kiss of another being in the exchange of creative juices with Neil Jordan. Like the bond between her haunted hero Louis and his tragic Svengali Lestat, it's a relationship that has swung between intimacy and enmity, poison and adoration, before arriving on our screens after a tempestuous crossing of continents and years to beguile a new and sceptical audience with its long, slightly ravaged, but still enticing story.

Lovers of the novel are bound to have grievous misgivings about letting Rice herself anywhere near the screenplay, given that she's spent the past decade systematically unpicking the threads of what she originally

wove, draining the life from her original conception and characters in a series of sequels so inept, flabby and unfeeling as to leave you wondering whether she's reading the same novel as she wrote. Sympathies certainly must go to Jordan, whose uncredited work on the script has presumably had to fend off helpful revisionist suggestions from both the notoriously possessive author and the notoriously dopey Hollywood* backbrain (whose own earlier attempts to soften the novel have been amply and hilariously documented). But as it turns out, the outcome could have been a lot worse; the Lestat character is by no means the nasty, shallow-minded ogre of the first novel, but at least he's not the dashing heroic adventurer of the second whose random kills in *Interview* turn out to be carefully-selected gourmet sinners. "Evildoers are easier, and they taste better," the Tom Cruise version does instruct Louis early on in a flash of the *Vampire Lestat* vampire Lestat; happily, however, most of the rest of the film is spent disregarding this wisdom in both practice and principle ("Evil is a point of view," he later opines, in a merciful abbreviation of one of those

interminable religious discussions with which the Chronicles become increasingly inflated; "God kills indiscriminately, and so shall we"). There's certainly an awkward feeling of incompleteness and compromise about the movie Lestat, who simply isn't nasty enough to warrant Claudia's revenge – especially as the early stages of the Louis/Claudia bond are pretty much elbowed off the screen. But at least we don't get any of the Egyptian daftness, or Lestat's pop career, which is merely hinted at by his choice of in-car listening at the end. Harder to understand is the decision to *reduce* Lestat's part by deleting his central and climactic role in the Paris section, without which the climactic event of the entire plot is left weirdly stranded and unmotivated. While some structural changes were certainly inevitable (the novel's nowhere-going East European escapades are wisely binned apart from the unforgettable passage about the black Mediterranean, and the original ending is far too muted and frankly novelistic for the screen), this one seems an offence against narrative form, and leaves the worrying suspicion that it may have been lost because

it's the Lestat character's one completely irredeemable act: no use to a movie that carries the series title already in the opening credits, when the later novels whose blood must keep sequels alive have lost interest in Louis altogether.

This apart, it's remarkable how much of the feel of the book gets through. Admittedly, somebody has decided that the novel is a jolly sight too homoerotic for our mass sensibilities, so that, among other surgical adjustments, Louis acquires a gratuitous late wife and child

(signifying, lest we doubt, that this is a chap who does it successfully with ladies), and is drawn to Lestat and his life-in-death in the first place not by cravings for the other but by a grieving widower's distaste for life. More decisively yet, he spurns the advances of aesthetic fellow-spirit Armand, where in the novel he accepts them with enthusiasm and shacks up for a century of homogamous companionship. Jordan gets away with as much bickering-queens and wrist-job action as he can, but (unlike his leads in earlier pictures) these stars have careers invested in the sexual orientation of their images, so we never come quite as close as the novel can to the alluring vision of an omniseual eroticism in which the limits and categories of mortal desire

are effortlessly transcended. There's much more space for danger in the seemingly unfilmable relationship between Louis and the child-vampire Claudia, the more so as the dearth of persuasive five-year-old actresses has forced a doubling of her age with some not very convincing dressing-down. In the event, as one would hope but not by any means expect from Jordan's earlier essays in odd couplings, it's managed with extraordinary delicacy and daring, easily the finest thing in the film, and comes as near as anything in a movie can to capturing the seductive confusion of sexual and familial bonds that carries the novel's overwhelming emotional charge.

None of the casting works terribly well, with the floorwiping exception of little Kirsten Dunst - who's so good it's scary in several ways at once - while the vampire look makes more use than one would wish of opera hats and cloaks, unconvincing lenses, and something nameless stuffed into Brad Pitt's cheeks. But both authors give good prose, and the dialogue is very good; there are fabulous touches of Jordanian visual invention (the Theatre show, Claudia's charcoals of the sunless Med) and poetic wit (the play with dolls, the beguiling twist about

Louis's nights at the movies). Most ironically, given Rice's unusually prominent assertion of her moral rights, it's the most definitively Neil Jordan film so far: haunted heroes sucked by their unknown desires into the shadows of the world for an irregular narrative of forbidden liaisons, deadly pursuits, pitiable child-women, and moral and sexual boundaries confounded. The director's cut of *High Spirits* must have been something like this, but this is the first to put it all together with a ton of money, great

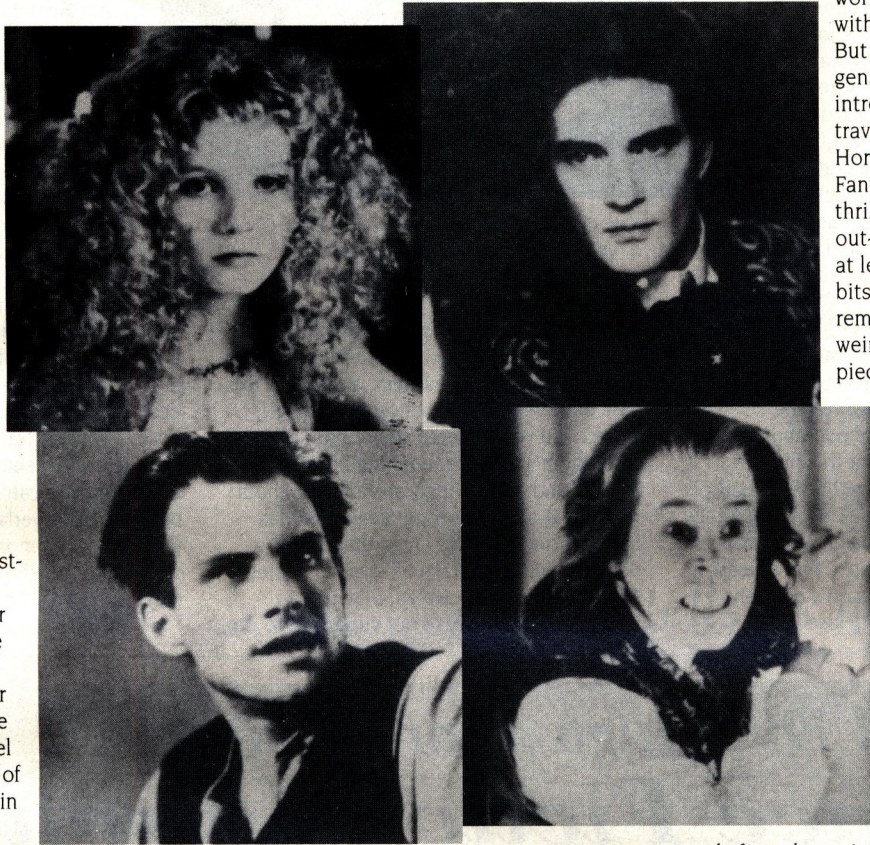
sandwiches ("it's the mercury levels") and treehouses, who regulates his choices by the probability of accidents. Dad spells the moral: "you can't live your life based on statistics; you have to take some chances." Fortunately, he fetches up in a magical library where he is befriended by the featured voice talents of Patrick Stewart, Whoopi Goldberg, and Frank Welker as three animated tomes, whom he then has to use his enchanted library card ("your passport to the wonderful, unpredictable

world of books") to take out with him through the exit. But! the exit lies three genres away, so that the intrepid chums must first traverse the realms of Horror, Adventure, and Fantasy, encountering thrilling highlights from the out-of-copyright classics, or at least those few remaining bits that haven't been remade lately. This yields a weird menagerie of set pieces mysteriously centred

on Robert Louis Stevenson, in the meandering course of which our hero has (the Pagemaster has afterwards to explain) "prevailed over evil" (I missed when that was) and "found the courage to face your own fears." And sure enough, on his return to live action he stops wearing a cycle helmet and shins straight up the ladder into the treehouse,

and after a bare sixty minutes the credits roll on all the adventure your attention span can hold.

The Pagemaster is a film for very young children, so better be prepared to fend some questions: "Daddy, why are they doing that?" "Mummy, why are all the books so old?" "Uncle Waylon, why are there no women or persons of colour in the canon?" But what's most remarkable is the way the whole invitation to literacy camouflages itself in the fleece of its bitterest rivals. The whole storyline is built like a computer game, with three levels to get through and a set of objects to be rescued, and generous voiceovers from the hint book to help you past the hard bits. Throughout, the experience of books is assimilated to that of movies, delivering instant gratification and sensational spectacle without the effort of reading: open *The Hound of the Baskervilles* and Scooby-Doo's evil twin jumps right out. And boy, these books are fun! *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* is about this guy who turns into a scary monster and chases you round the house; *Treasure Island* is about this big mean pirate and a treasure map; and suggestions for further reading include a cool kids' story about a huge white whale who chases you and tries to eat you. A



Clockwise from top left: Kirsten Dunst as Claudia, Antonio Banderas as Armand, Stephen Rea as Santiago, and Christian Slater as Malloy in Interview With The Vampire
Facing page: Tom Cruise stars as Lestat in Interview With The Vampire

material, and nobody from the studio running after it with a snapping pair of scissors. He deserves better than to have to make something of vol. 2.

On our other screen, for younger viewers, the troubled interface between books and movies is explored with alarming explicitness in *The Pagemaster*, which sets out to persuade the postliterate generation that reading is way cool and more exciting than cartoons by chucking Macauley Culkin into a phenomenally unexciting cartoon in which he "checks out" the magic of books. One of those extraordinary films whose complete lack of irony about its own contradictions is more resonant and meaningful than anything in the movie itself, this thing of shreds from *Time Bandits* and patches from *The Neverending Story* begins with Mac in best Milky Bar Kid form as a weedy squirt, scared of anything that might be fun like tunafish

particularly bemusing feature is the choice, and arrangement, of genres, in which a cinematic model seems to have got uncomfortably superimposed on the literary. It's strange, at least, to see horror included (admittedly in a fairly tame old-monster-movie guise, but since when was Stephen King – who predominates in glimpses of the shelves – recommended reading for under-tens?), sf and animals out, and a severely old-fashioned brand of fantasy ("brave knights, mythical fairies, ferocious dragons") elevated to the summit of the hierarchy and personified, naturally, as a gurl. But don't worry, guys: reading books is hip, risk-taking, and inextricably associated with dangerous bike stunts and sleeping close to the edge. Mind you, you'll still be a sad specky git with weird lips and no friends, but your parents will respect you, and of course you'll always have your books.



Tom Cruise as the vampire Lestat with Indra Ove as a courtesan in Interview With The Vampire

As usual in movies, Christmas itself is completely and inoffensively secularized, eliminating even the hint of a hint of pagano-Christian antagonisms in the storyline; while even without Danny Elfman's gothic ransacking of the melodic minor scale, the musical numbers are a wonderful pretext to abandon the pretence of narrative on the slightest excuse in favour of montages of bizarre throwaway images or bravura displays of expressive craftsmanship. I'm a bit suspicious of this proprietary auteurism, with Burton (not unlike his hero) asserting his titular rights to be known as the author of this work over the director and legions of artisans who actually made it; but it's impossible not to note with a tear and a wink the familiar Burton themes of estrangement and creation, the hero yet again doing his lonely business in his high tower while the languishing heroine pines by the heavy iron gates. In any case, this movie has been so long arriving that a whole Halloween has passed, and we're only weeks away from the real-best real-Burton movie (the live one, from a book, about a life). Scary people, authors: can't live with them, can't live without them, and you can't even get free of them by dying into everlasting life, because even those hungry, amoral, inhuman movie people still need their rich dark juices to survive.

Nick Lowe

A rather more transgressive introduction to genre theory for the young came in Tim Burton's *Nightmare Before Christmas*, with its fearful warning against the unnatural commingling of popular traditions – a touch ironic, given that this film for Halloween '93 finally arrived here as part of the festivities for Christmas '94. Completely eyepopping, a *Yellow Submarine* for stop-motion, and a "Tim Burton's" film at least in the generic sense that it's on a different substance from everything else in the

industry, *Nightmare* disposes of all the impossibilities in its premise with every appearance of effortlessness: a plot just this side of nonexistent, a concept so silly ("I expect you've wondered where holidays come from") as to be indistinguishable from genius, and a terrifyingly stern moral about nothing at all ("It's wrong! *wrong!*" bodes Sally, as the audience agree that they'll never make the mistake of, erm, confusing Christmas and Hallowe'en, or whatever exactly it is that they're not supposed to do).

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ON THE RECEIVING END

*Christopher Evans,
the author of
Aztec Century,
tells us how it feels
to be an sf novelist*

How do writers feel when a book is actually published – when it finally goes public, out there into the big wide world to earn its keep? You'll probably get a variety of answers, depending on whom you ask, but it's not an area that's been much explored. I want to try to fill a few of the gaps, with particular reference to science fiction books and the kinds of reception they receive. In passing I'll also have something to say about certain aspects of modern science fiction itself.

As readers, one thing that's important to remember is that you're usually a year to 18 months behind the writer in terms of what he is actually producing (I'm going to use the male pronoun because it's me that's talking, and we all know that even when writers appear to be making general points they are actually discussing themselves). When that latest hardback or paperback finally appears pristine on the shelves, or stacked in neat little piles in your favourite book shop, when you finally clutch it to your bosom or curl up in bed with it that night, ready to enter this newly minted world of a favourite author's imagining – well, there's a good chance that your author may at that very minute be hunched before

a screen, tearing out what little hair he has left or smoking too many cigarettes, wondering where the next sentence of his current creation is going to come from. Of course he'll be out there when needed, to autograph copies or give talks to interested parties while the new book is still current, but in his private mind he's more likely to be preoccupied with the work-in-progress, the thing he is actually trying to write now. Or he would be, if it wasn't for the feedback he now begins to receive in the form of comments from friends and acquaintances who've read the new book, and of course from book reviews themselves, if he's lucky enough to get any.

When a new book is published most writers if they're honest hope for unadulterated praise. They want the book to be admired, loved, respected – they want to be told that it's the best thing they've done yet (though of course the one they're working on at the moment will be even better). If they're not already successful – which is the condition of most writers – then they fantasize that the new book will be the one that will bring them a higher profile, lead them to a wider readership, a big American sale, film rights, a fat contract for their next offering or three. It might

even, if they're lucky, pick up an award or two. This sort of wishful thinking is what keeps many writers going; without it, most would probably go barmy – or go barmier than they are already.

The trouble is, is that praise is never unadulterated, and there are always nits to be picked, no matter how appealing a book may be to a readership. And if you ask writers about the reviews they've received, even for books which have had a positive reception, many will often tend to remember those very nits, and will, if challenged, promptly launch into an extended defence of any perceived flaws, accusing the reviewer of being stupid, prejudiced, or of having a hidden agenda. The golden rule here is that the writer can only seldom admit that any criticisms of his work are actually justified.

At a science fiction convention earlier this spring, I was standing in the foyer waiting for the lift to arrive when a figure shambled up to me. He was a person I had seen before at conventions, someone whose face was familiar but whom I had never actually spoken to. Quite politely, he asked me if I was Chris Evans, and when I said I was, he then told me that he'd enjoyed all my

previous books but hadn't liked *Aztec Century*. Perfectly reasonably, and without any hint of malice, he explained that he hadn't liked the ending at all but that *he* was probably at fault but there it was. And then, in the manner of a considerate person who has just executed a slightly painful but necessary task, he moved on, half-smiling to cover his embarrassment at the fact, it seemed to me.

I stepped into the lift, the doors closed, and I began to ride up. I studied myself in the mirror, but it was really that person's face I was seeing. "You swine," I told him in a venomously polite whisper, and I was thinking: "You've just told me that my baby is ugly."

I also went on to think other things – like why the hell haven't you ever come and told me you liked any of my previous books until you found one you didn't? – but this was the raw immediate reaction. "You've just told me my baby is ugly."

Of course there's nothing original in the notion that books are writers' babies, but it does explain their sensitivity to criticism. In most jobs these days you're likely to get some form of feedback on your performance, whether its couched as "staff appraisal," "peer review," or whether it's a good old fashioned rollocking from the boss. But I would submit that none of these is quite so *personal* as a dismissive review or someone cornering you at a convention and telling you what a load of old rubbish your new book is. A book not only takes months or even years to write, it is also, assuming that it wasn't written in great haste to fulfil a solely mercenary contract, invested with a degree of the author's own character.

Assuming that the book was written with sincerity, then it is, by definition, a facet of the author himself, an infant brought into the world by a form of parthenogenesis. An infant produced after months or years of labour which is mute, defenceless: it cannot answer for itself. So the writer, as both parent and offspring, can scarcely tolerate any charge that his child is less than adorable. He may develop a thicker skin as he grows older and more inured to the trials and tribulations of the writer's life; but some barbs will always have the power to wound.

Reading reviews of your own book is an odd business, because the book often becomes grist to the reviewer's particular mill and sometimes ceases to be quite the book you had written at all. John Clute in *Interzone* detested the character of Princess Catherine, the protagonist of *Aztec Century*, to an extent which quite surprised me because I don't see her in the same way as he does at all. I'm not saying he was wrong in his reaction, merely that he has read a slightly different book from the one I wrote. Eugene Byrne in another review saw it as an enjoyable romp with SEQUEL written all over it. I'll return to the subject of sequels a little later. Andy Sawyer in *Foundation* spotted both the Margaret Thatcher references, which pleased me no end; I liked his review the best not simply because it was favourable – he said my baby was

handsome – but because I most clearly recognized the book I had written in his extended commentary on it. Which was a great relief, because sometimes I don't even recognize myself when I read what others have written about me. That's another matter I'll return to presently.

Aztec Century was also short-listed for the Welsh Book of the Year Award, which meant that I was briefly in the limelight of the Welsh literary world and was reviewed in the *New Welsh Review* by a lecturer in English at St David's College, Lampeter. She was understandably intrigued by the character of Bevan in the book, "A Welshman with a Mam," who is in fact quite crucial to the entire story: without him, I would never have been able to write the novel. She spent a while detailing the alternative history which forms the backdrop to the novel, and ultimately tended to see it as a tract against the horrors of the 20th century. Dilip Argawal in *Critical Wave* also spent a lot of time on the invented history of the world, though in his case he felt that the details tended "to tantalize rather than inform." He thought

W

riters

*who haven't produced
sequels to successful
books are actually
in the minority.*

my "New Indies Pox," which the Spanish take back to Renaissance Europe and which devastates the population, was "credible," whereas another John Clute implied it wasn't too plausible. Well, you can't please everyone. Science fiction reviewers – and readers, too – tend to be finicky about "world building," fretting unduly, it always seems to me, over whether the fictional world could really exist given the writer's scenario, worrying over the bits the writer hasn't explicitly elucidated in the text. I always think that this is rather like arguing over the foundations of a cloud castle: if it floats nicely, then why not sit back and enjoy the spectacle? Of course some sort of internal consistency is important, but when reviewers do too much quibbling over the details of an invented world I have this urge gently to tap them on the shoulder and remind them: *It's ALL made up.*

As an aside here, I hope I'm not sounding churlish or dismissive, because I've actually enjoyed reading all these reviews; they've helped me see *Aztec Century* from other people's perspectives. But it probably won't surprise you when I say that none of them has quite grasped the essence of the book as far as I'm concerned. Of course that may well be because I've failed to deliver it properly in the novel itself, but then I can't

possibly allow myself to think that, can I? To return to the baby metaphor: I went through the labour, slapped its bum to get it squawking, changed its nappies and wiped away its possets. I know where its habits and birthmarks are, I understand its habits and appetites intimately. It would be really hard for me to accept that those traits in it which I find so endearing might actually be invisible or even irritating to others.

Science fiction is still a very literal-minded medium, and sf readers have this hunger to know more and more about an imagined world they've enjoyed inhabiting. This is not a trait generally found in non-sf readers, who might devour historical or contemporary novels without worrying about the details: they know that they can confirm them or otherwise from exterior sources; most won't bother because they can assume sufficient knowledge or research on the writer's part to take the information on trust.

This isn't true with certain kinds of science fiction. If I said to you: "Prendergast took a 747 to Honolulu and spent the week surfing," you know very well that 747s, Honolulu and surfers all exist and probably have handy mental pictures of all three to summon up imagery which will pass muster and – this is the crucial point – *be sufficient* for your purposes as a reader. But if I say to you: "Prendergast took a nautiloid shuttle to Praxis Prime and spent the week in a swap-parlour" this may well be not sufficient as far as the reader is concerned, even if the author only intends it as a bridging paragraph between one part of the story and the next. The science-fiction reader may now have the urge not only to know what this nautiloid shuttle exactly looks like but may also begin to wonder how it was built or even, if it is a *living* craft, what sort of technology enabled it to be *grown*? Is Praxis Prime a city, a planet, or some kind of space station? What exactly goes on in a swap-parlour? Mind transference? Something sexual? Or is it just futuristic jargon for something as boring as a pawn shop? That's P-A-W-N shop.

If the sentence is a bridging paragraph, then the author may decline to tell you because it is not relevant to his tale, but in a science-fiction story it may well have implications far beyond its "realistic" or mundane equivalent. The point here is that practically all science fiction deals in some shape or form with invented worlds, and often *the information about those worlds exists only on the page*. If a book is successful, readers will clamour for more, preferably with maps, glossaries, detailed histories and genealogies, and maybe even the address of a suitable tailor who will have the costumes made. A lot of readers seem to love this sort of thing, and here I part company with them. As much as I might enjoy a good piece of world-building, once is enough. In the words of Kingsley Amis: *More means worse.*

It seems to me that in recent decades

science fiction (and even more so, fantasy) has succumbed to a plague of sequelitis. (Here I want to distinguish between series of books which were actually conceived as such and opportunistic follow-ups, prequels and spin-offs to popular titles, sometimes by different authors. It's this second lot I'm railing against.) Writers who haven't produced sequels to successful books are actually in the minority these days. It's easy to see why it's such a growth area. Not only do readers like the comforts of familiarity, but writers can expand and elaborate on proven ingredients, usually with less imaginative investment than they would need to invent a wholly new fiction. With rare exceptions, the results disappoint. Remember Fred Pohl's marvellous *Gateway*, and the wonderfully mysterious Heechee? Didn't you want to know more about those aliens? And weren't you disappointed as successive sequels revealed more and more and the very mystery which actually made them so fascinating and credibly alien was dissipated? Remember *Dune*? And its interminable sequels? Did *2020* have as much impact on you as *2001*?

There are other examples, but the point I want to make here is that sequels or spin-offs usually disappoint, no matter how eagerly they are awaited, because the writer can seldom recapture the sheer sense of imaginative freedom that marks the initial creation of a new world. He is already constrained by what has gone before, and he usually has an urge to fill in all those very gaps that tantalized in the first book. So sequel-writing becomes a form of literary book-keeping, and the constraints on the writer's imagination increase. And as more and more of the world is spelled out, so it seems to me to become more restricted and artificial.

The gaps that exist in any invented world are actually filled, or should be, by your own imagination as a reader. Even if that imagination is inarticulate – even if you don't consciously think about it – you'll have some awareness of the fictional world extending way beyond the boundaries of what is actually portrayed in the story. Reading is a creative process, and the space between the words is just as important as the words themselves. A good writer will plant sufficient information and clues for you to make up the rest yourself if you so wish, and you then have a far more intimate relationship with the world of the book. The trouble is that most science-fiction readers feel they want to be told more, even if only so that they can indulge in a favourite genre pastime of checking to see whether the author is still keeping his cloud castle aloft. Again, this is a form of literary book-keeping, and to my mind it has very little to do with the business of creative fiction. Providing the given facts of an imagined world are reasonably

consistent, then *you should make up the rest of it yourself*. Having the writer do it for you will inevitably disappoint.

Why have I spent so much time over this particular issue? Well, it's partly because *Aztec Century* has been more successful than my previous books, and because it has a somewhat ambiguous ending which leaves various plot threads hanging. I know my publishers would like me to write a follow-up, and no doubt some readers feel that way too. But I have to be honest and tell

get the reaction he expects to them. The funny thing is, though, that the details of a writer's life also tend to become fictionalized so that, as I mentioned earlier, it's sometimes hard to recognize yourself in biographical descriptions. Once upon a time sf writers were so invisible to any kind of critical establishment that they might just as well have not existed; but today reference books and commentaries on the field abound. Science fiction has become more respectable – though not so respectable that sf titles are reviewed with the same sort of regularity as crime books in the national newspapers.

This new respectability, this detailed attention that writers in the field often now receive, is something of a mixed blessing, at least for the writer himself. Critics are entitled to their opinions about your books, but when they do potted biographies of you in which details, even minor details, of fact or emphasis are wrong, then you have this sense of your own self slipping away, of someone slightly other than you occupying the public arena. So I discover from the *Encyclopaedia of Science Fiction* that I am a "UK chemist," which conjures up visions of me in a white coat behind the counter at Boots, dispensing haemorrhoid ointment and corn plasters. I discover from *Twentieth-Century Science-Fiction Writers* that I have written something called *Science Fiction As Religion* with Stan Gooch. Who is this person? I ask myself. He certainly isn't me.

Of course I'm nit-picking here: these are actually minor errors of fact or emphasis, but they're about *me* rather than my books, and so they're something I think I'm entitled to be grumpy about. It must be far worse for real celebrities like the Elton Johns and Princess Dianas of this world, who are subjected to relentless media scrutiny, but for the writer there's the irony that words, the very tool of his trade, are being used to undermine, however mildly, his own sense of self. For the record, I am a Chemistry graduate but not a chemist; it must have been Dr Christopher Evans who co-wrote *Science Fiction As Religion* with Stan Gooch since I had never even heard of it until someone sent me a photocopy of my entry in *Twentieth-Century Science-Fiction Writers*. What I am these days is a middle-aged school teacher who writes the occasional book during his holidays; and no critic is going to take that away from me.

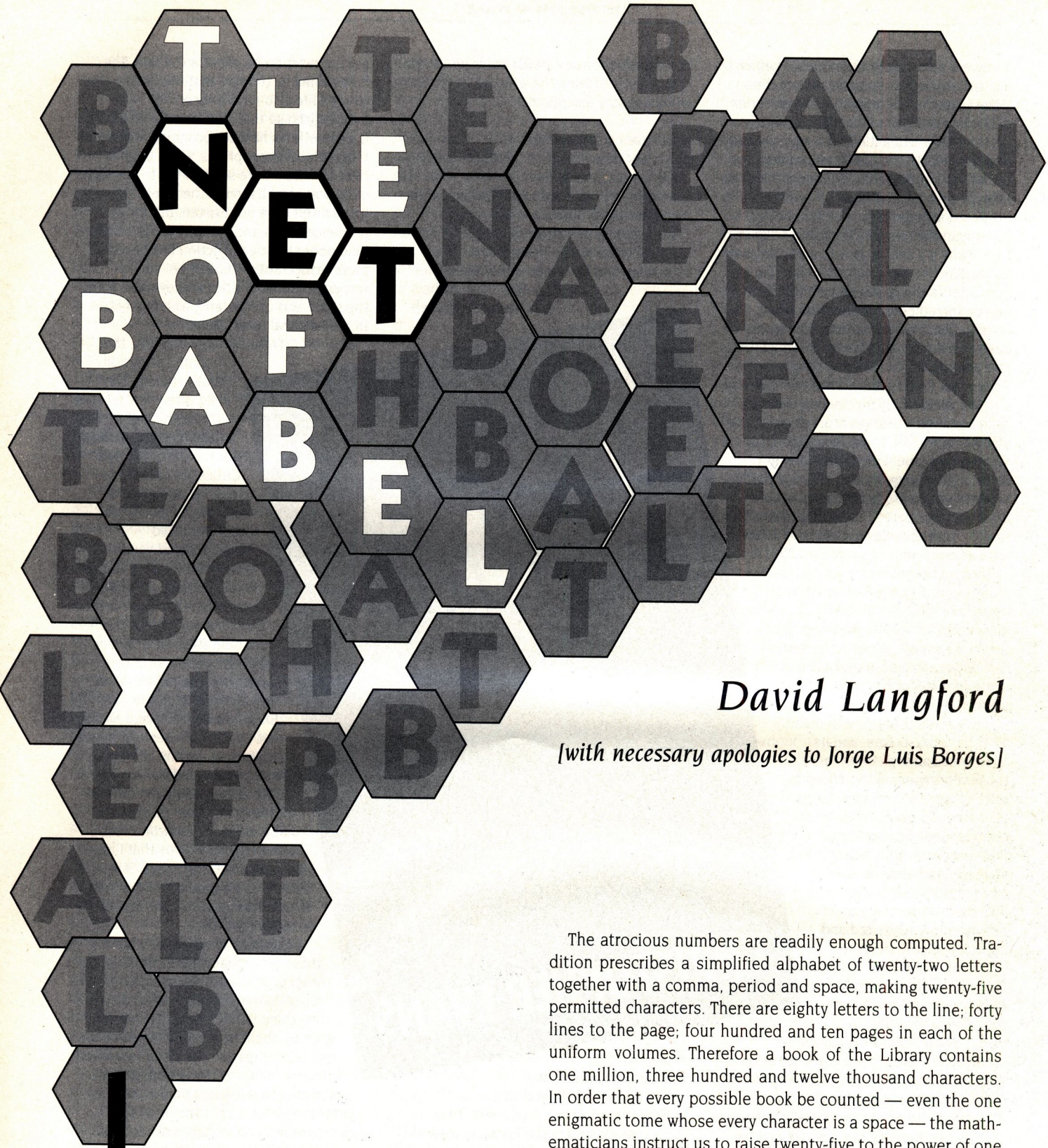
By the way, in case you've read *Aztec Century* and were wondering about the ending – It was all a dream.

Christopher Evans



you that *Aztec Century* was written as a one-off; and any ambiguities or unresolved issues that remain at the end of the book are meant to be that way. Of course I had already extended the story some way beyond the end of the book in my own mind even before I had finished writing it, but I'm going to try to resist the temptation actually to write a sequel. It's partly to do with the reasons I've outlined above, but also because I'm a rather idle and spasmodic writer. I spend so little time actually at the keyboard that I tend to want to try something new whenever I give myself the opportunity.

Writers' books become public property once they're published, and it's probably futile for the writer to complain when he doesn't



David Langford

[with necessary apologies to Jorge Luis Borges]

The atrocious numbers are readily enough computed. Tradition prescribes a simplified alphabet of twenty-two letters together with a comma, period and space, making twenty-five permitted characters. There are eighty letters to the line; forty lines to the page; four hundred and ten pages in each of the uniform volumes. Therefore a book of the Library contains one million, three hundred and twelve thousand characters. In order that every possible book be counted — even the one enigmatic tome whose every character is a space — the mathematicians instruct us to raise twenty-five to the power of one million, three hundred and twelve thousand.

Numbers are wearisome and, some say, heretical: the books of the Library contain only lower-case letters and the marks of division already alluded to. Nevertheless the above calculation may be readily found in the new Library, spelt out in words ... as may any number of erroneous renderings, or subtly plausible refutations. How different from the old days when men toiled through seemingly endless volumes of gibberish — or perhaps cryptograms, or languages not yet evolved: being exhaustive, the Library necessarily contains the full tale of the future, and of every possible future.

The result of that laborious calculation is a number of fewer than two million digits. We are not so constructed as to

In the end the old Library was disbanded as being an irrational construct, and new devices were supplied in its stead. A golden age ensued, until like all golden ages it became leaden. Now my withered fingers hesitate over the input keys, searching, searching.

Certain commentators had fallen into the easy error of describing the Library as infinite, thus failing to grasp the true enormity of its magnitude. As it has been written, the Library was never infinite but something more dreadful: exhaustive, all-encompassing. Such words as *infinity* are too often scrawled as a magical charm against thought. Those terrible hierarchies of the finite can break the mind as the bland symbol ∞ does not.

comprehend such figures. Look, I perform a child's conjuring trick with notation, and now the unwieldy total lies crudely approximated in the palm of my hand: more than ten to the power of ten to the power of six, less than ten to the power of ten to the power of seven. It seems a mere nothing.

Yet, as a scientist once put it to me... Imagine the old, unthinkable Library. Imagine it physically condensed, with each fat volume somehow inscribed on the surface of a single electron. There are not electrons enough in our universe (that figment of astronomers' whims) to be writing-tablets for so many books. Imagine an inexhaustible supply of electrons, impossibly crowded together like peas in a jar, filling the whole of the space between galaxies, out to the far limits of vision. There is not space enough in our sky to contain sufficient electrons. All the space we know will suffice for a total number of such infinitesimal books which might be written not in millions of digits, not even in thousands, but in little more than one hundred and twenty. A bagatelle, not worthy of our awe.

The Library is both exhaustive and exhausting. But now it has been transfigured. Observe: in place of the old days' interminable weary lattice of hexagonal chambers, I and my colleagues inhabit a single, vast, crimson-walled hexagon. Instead of the long bookshelves there are desks arrayed against each wall, and on each desk that many-keyed device which places all the Library's volumes under my hand.



Now I touch the Library to life. The glowing letters above the key-array begin: *axaxaxas mlo*, the first words of the first page of the first book. We do not know the mystery of the ordering, which sophists say should place at the beginning a volume which is blank or throughout its length reiterates the letter *a*. The devisers of the Library were subtler. One heresiarch declared that the works were ordered by the receding digits of some transcendental number like *pi*, paying out forever like a magician's chain of coloured scarves. Others hoped to find the books arranged by meaning or truth ... but, on the evidence of that minute part of the Library we have studied, this is not so. Chaos or seeming chaos reigns throughout the whole vast informational sea; the tiny islands of meaning we have found are scattered like primes in the ocean of numbers, according to no visible plan.

The golden or leaden key that unlocks the Library is the inbuilt search facility. One prepares a text of any length, sets the searching into motion, and the Library's own devices will swiftly trawl that sea of data. A glad chime sounds when the sought words are found. Since it is an article of faith that the Library truly is exhaustive, all these text searches should necessarily succeed no matter what is searched for ... as indeed they do. Every find is a sacrament and a vindication.

Like so many I have commanded a search for a volume of one million, three hundred and twelve thousand successive repetitions of the letter *a*, and likewise of all the other letters. Each of these monotonous works occurs once in the Library. Their numerical positions hint at no pattern...

This same act of data-searching may be performed with a darker purpose, a blasphemous hope that the chosen word or phrase or sentence or treatise will not be located. Cultists have striven to construct utterances so twisted and infamous as to be impossible to the holy Library: in vain. Every child is tempted to scan for some such phrase as "This sentence is not contained in the Library," and to giggle when the glowing letters seem to assert it. The Library, however, does not

assert; nor does it deny. It simply is.

Yet it is not, as a contending sect would have it, a mere mirror that reflects whatever we offer up to it. Each text sequence that we locate in the Library is a tiny pinpoint of order engulfed in that chaos of raging alphabets. A moment's thought indicates that my name, your name, any name, must be present an enormous number of times in as many contexts. Each successive search discovers the name in a new setting of surrounding text... almost always nonsense, but not – we know – always so. The millionth or the billionth such context may thrill with numinous revelation.

A certain paragraph from Pierre Menard's recension of *Don Quixote* is a famous example. On only its fourteen hundred and twelfth occurrence in the Library it is immediately followed by the words *not to be*. The placing of this fragment from Shakespeare's best-known soliloquy hinted at an obscure truth. Other juxtapositions of Menard, Cervantes and Shakespeare were at once sought for and (of course) triumphantly found. The ensuing school of thought flourished for a generation until lost in schisms.



From time to time it is still whispered that the Library may be incomplete, owing to its shackling to a historical tradition of so many letters on a page, so many pages in a volume. Might greater insights require a greater Library whose notional volumes are twice, three times, ten times as long? This argument is inept. A work occupying even a hundred thousand volumes can be shown to be present in the Library, since each separate volume must be present. It is merely necessary to locate the sections and read them in the proper order ... a task scarcely more arduous than the finding of any other undiscovered truth or falsehood in the Library's intangible immensity.

(Less idle is the converse proposal that great truths may exist within a small compass, and that a miniature Library might be constructed which merely contained within itself all possible *pages*, or even all possible *lines* of eighty characters. The number of entries in an exhaustive list of lines would, it seems, be relatively tolerable despite still challenging the maximum theoretical storage capacity of our universe. Mystics still debate the accidental or abominable fact that this number has one hundred and eleven digits.)

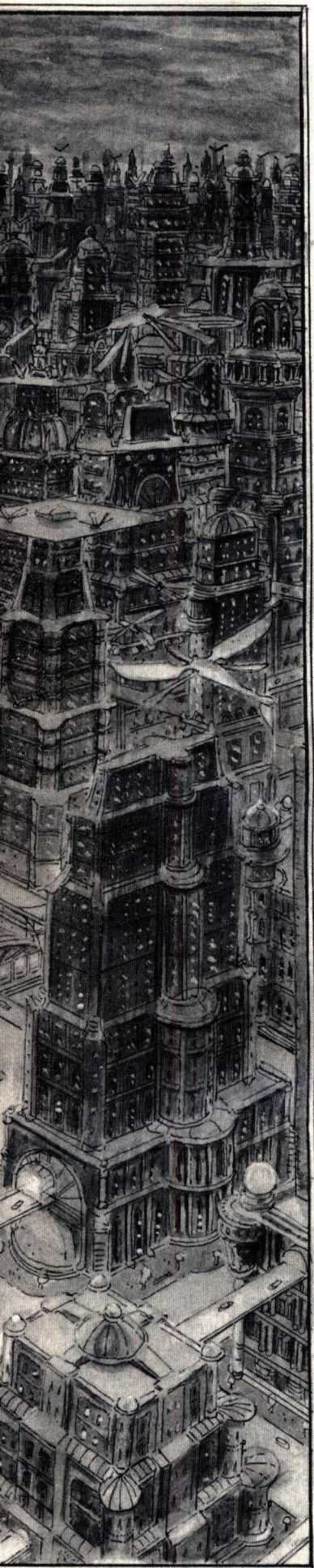
Our priesthood avers that the supreme reward of creativity is known when a "new" writing is invested with significance by the inevitable discovery of its pre-existing presence in the Library. The vindication lies in the finding, not in mere conjecture. Others have not hesitated to deny this dogma.

Thus it may be seen what advantages we enjoy over the past librarians whose entire lives might be spent in traversing the hexagonal cells of their conjectural, physical Library, without ever encountering a book that held a single intelligible sentence. As my own long span of Library-searching ticks to its close, I think again and again of those times when so little could be found. Now every volume lies instantly within our grasp, and we possess a far greater understanding of our identical impotence. I would that I lived in the old days.

David Langford is well known to *Interzone* readers as the contributor of the *Ansible Link* column. This story was accepted for publication, and final text was supplied the same day, via e-mail. Thus it could be considered a cautionary tale...



"AN AWESOME GRANDEUR"



THE HUNGER AND ECSTASY OF VAMPIRES

BY BRIAN STABLEFORD

Author of "The Magic Bullet"

"The Bad Seed"

Illustrated by SMS

PART TWO

London, January 1895. The narrator, a mysterious foreign gentleman who has been introduced in the Prologue as "Monsieur le Comte," is in flight from a scandal in Paris (involving the daughter of one Arminius Vambery). In England, the Count is invited by the playwright Oscar Wilde to accompany him to an unusual soirée at the home of an acquaintance, Professor Edward Coplestone. There they meet six men – the scientists Sir William Crookes and Nikola Tesla, two young writers named Wells and Shiel, as well as a Dr Watson and a Mr Holmes – who have assembled to hear Coplestone's account of his recent strange experiences. The professor, an expert in shamanism, has taken a mixture of drugs which allows him to leave his body, in the form of a so-called "timeshadow," and travel into the future. He narrates the events of two such journeys: in the first he has discovered a far-future world where normal humans are "milked" for their blood by a vampire-like race of "Overmen"; in the second he has reached a further point in futurity where the Overmen no longer have a need for blood and have used their scientific skills to transform the old human race into tribes of mindless satyrs, centaurs and other beings from mythology. Amid grumbles of "plagiarism" from young Mr Wells, the eight listeners discuss Coplestone's wonderful story, mostly maintaining an attitude of scepticism as the professor reaches the climactic point in the narrative of his second journey...

Copplestone stopped speaking, more haggard and drawn than he had been before. The doctor had risen, and was at his side. "It's too much, Ned," he said, softly. "You cannot go on – not tonight, at any rate."

"I must," said Copplestone. "Don't you see that? *I must!*" The professor was clearly distressed. My companions moved uncomfortably in their chairs. Most of them must have been convinced that Copplestone was deranged, but I thought differently. *What if it were true?* I thought. *What if there is truth in this – perhaps polluted by fear and fancy, but truth nevertheless?* I, at least, did not want the professor to stop. I wanted to hear the story's conclusion.

"Tomorrow is another day," said Watson firmly.

Copplestone laughed bitterly, but the laugh dissolved into a cough. "I know *that*," he whispered. "I must go on. There is so much to *explain*. I will try to be brief, in the interests of saving my strength."

I wondered whether he really feared that the inhabitants of the far future might be able to reach back through time and snuff out his life like a candle-flame. Why would they want to, even if they could? Did he think that this was the one and only chance he would have to communicate the secrets he had learned? Could he possibly be arrogant enough to suppose that the entire future of the human race might depend on what he said to us tonight – that destiny itself might be set aside if he could only empower us to act, and save the human race from the fate which awaited it? Whatever the reason, he was determined not to bring his discourse to a close while he still had the strength to speak.

"The sun had set," he continued, "and twilight had all but faded from the sky. The perch to which the bird-machine had brought me was high on the side of a mountain, and I looked out over a huge plain, covered from horizon to horizon by a vast city. All of its streets and most of its buildings were richly illuminated, and the tallest buildings loomed up above the streets with an awesome grandeur. In the largest buildings light shone within thousands of windows, brighter by far than the diffuse illumination which had leavened the gloom of the barn where the overmen of old bled their human cattle, although it had the same curious blue-violet tint, which my eyes still found uncomfortable.

"I could see tiny flying-machines moving between the buildings. The streets were laid out with remarkable precision, in a vast rectangular grid. Traffic flowed along each and every street in an endless stream, but it was difficult to see any details of the vehicles even though each one lit its own way with twin violet beams. At each intersection the passage of the vehicles was restricted by changing lights which shifted from turquoise to vivid blue to pale violet and back again, in endless succession.

"Copplestone?" said a voice behind me, and I turned.

"There were two of them; one male and one female. Their faces resembled the disembodied head which had questioned me during the flight, but these were real individuals of flesh and blood. They were dressed entirely in black, the male in a suit which displayed his contours as closely as my white 'clothing' displayed mine, the female in a narrow ankle-length skirt. That touch of quasi-human femininity struck me as a remarkable oddity, and I had to wonder yet again whether it was not the sort of detail which betrayed the influence of my own imagination – evidence that this was, at least in part, a

dream.

"The male spoke again, in a voice redolent with wonderment: 'Are you *truly* Copplestone?' He was speaking English, and the words came from his own lips without the aid of any translation-machine, but he pronounced the words as if he were uncertain whether they could possibly mean anything. To him, I was as much a creature of myth as the satyrs and the centaur had been to me. In a world which was to him a long-lost antiquity I had appeared, and disappeared, and there had been no way of knowing whether I would ever return – and yet, there had been hope enough that I might warrant keeping some kind of watch, even for millennia. And there were overmen with leisure and interest enough to have learned to speak a long-dead language, in order to immerse themselves more fully in the study of a long-dead culture. The female came closer, and reached out a delicate hand to touch my forehead. It was as if she wanted to make sure that I had substance enough to be touched.

"I felt quite calm. All my fear had ebbed away, and I was perfectly composed. Later, I wondered whether I might perhaps have been mesmerized, but at the time I simply accepted my condition as natural, and I cannot say that I saw anything at all in her catlike eyes to make me suspect that her gaze might be making my soul captive. The man led me inside the house as soon as his consort stepped back. Its walls were all curved, without a single corner to be seen, and its tiled roofs were like conical turrets. They took me into a room lit by violet light, but dimmed the light so that it would not hurt my eyes. There were no screens on the walls here, and no control-panels – only furniture of a fairly commonplace kind, and a strange device like a fountain enclosed in a globe of glass, where some dark fluid circulated in an agitated manner. Because of the peculiar lighting I could not judge its colour, but they took me to stand before it, and told me frankly what it was.

"'We no longer need living beings to manufacture our sustenance,' said the male. 'We are masters of all flesh now, and could alter ourselves if we wished it, so that we might eat any and every food – but we are what we are, and this is the nourishment for which nature and history shaped us.' He let some out into a goblet, and drank it, so that I should be certain what he meant, and what he was. There was no renewal of my former horror. I knew what kind of a world I was in, and I understood. My hosts indicated that I should seat myself on a low sofa, and I complied. They apologized for the awkwardness of the conversation which I had had with the disembodied head, explaining that it was a simulacrum, whose capacity for action was limited. They went on to explain a great deal more.

"I learned that the spies set to watch for me were tiny machines of a patient kind, which represented no considerable investment of effort. Even so, it was an effort which only a handful of persons out of the billions who dwelt on the earth thought worthwhile, and the machines had been designed in such a way that I might be brought to people who might be able to speak with me, rather than taking me to some public place where I might be paraded before crowds and exhibited as the marvel I undoubtedly was.

"They explained to me very earnestly that my species had long ago given way to a higher and better one, according to the dictates of the ineluctable laws of evolution, and was now known only by fragmentary relics. They assured me, however, that there had been no war of conquest, in which their kind had risen up against and defeated mine. According to their

account, the human race had destroyed its own civilization, and all-but-obliterated its own heritage in a long series of increasingly destructive wars. Everything mankind had built had been destroyed, in the space of little more than a century. Their grasp of our chronology was vague, but they believed that the chain of disasters began in the 20th century and was complete by the end of the 21st. After that, they said, there were no calendars left to chronicle the disastrous decline of once-civilized men into utter barbarity. According to their judgment, the intellectual flowering of our race had been hardly less brief than the life of a mayfly; *their* civilization, by contrast, had lasted for more than 10,000 years.

"I accepted this news with equanimity, and did not doubt *then* that I was being told the truth. What they were saying did not seem in the least incredible while I bathed in that purple light, listening to the susurrus of the blood which swirled in the ornamental fountain.

"You cannot begin to understand,' the male told me, 'how incredible it is that we are conversing with a ghost from the remotest antiquity. No one now believes in the reality of ghosts; we have long since cast such superstitions aside. It will be difficult to persuade our contemporaries that your appearance here is not some kind of cunning deception on our part. The machines we use nowadays are so very clever in manufacturing appearances that there is no proof we could offer that you really are what you seem to be. Indeed, we are acutely aware of the possibility that you are a hoax perpetrated upon us by malicious acquaintances.'

"I am real,' I said, oddly helpless in the face of his apparent need for reassurance.

"Can you possibly imagine,' he said, very softly, 'how little has survived into our world from yours? It is not merely the passage of time which has erased the record of your civilization but the extremes of destruction achieved by your own wars. We know only a little more about your nineteenth century than we do about periods two or three thousand years earlier. We have less than a thousand texts written in the language we are now speaking, and almost all of them are incomplete.'

"I could not help but think of Shelley's poem about the ancient emperor whose shattered statue rested half-buried in a sea of sand, vainly bidding its discoverers to look upon his works and despair.

"What are you?' I whispered. 'How did it come about that *your* kind became lords of the earth, feeding on the blood of men like me?'

"He was enthusiastic to persuade me that I ought not to think of his ancestors as evil creatures. Had men not been domesticated, he said, the race would have become extinct. He told me that there still remained a possibility that our ultimate descendants might once again become sentient, in a future as remote from his present as his era was from mine. If that came to pass, he said, those new men would reckon his kind the saviours of mankind, not its destroyers.

"It is the law of life,' said the female. 'New species emerge, achieve dominance, and are superseded in their turn.'

"As you, too, will be superseded,' I said, with neither irony nor bitterness. 'She shook her head. 'Not so,' she said. 'There is an end to the sequence, when a species becomes master of its own evolution, by obtaining direct technical control over the hereditary material. Your species came close to attaining such control, but destroyed the civilization it had built before it was able to make use of what it had learned. I do not mean

to insult you, but our kind is better than yours: we are more rational, less violent. We are not warlike, and we have less capacity for hatred than your kind had. What we have built we have kept. Our mastery of the earth's biosphere is so complete that we can never be replaced. As you have seen, we have long since ceased to be dependent on the foodstuffs supplied to us by men, and we have adapted ourselves so that we are able to walk abroad in daylight quite comfortably – although we naturally prefer the night.'

"They went on to tell me about the origins of their own kind. They admitted that their remote ancestors were predators who fed on the blood of mammals, including humans, but denied that they were vampires of the kind which featured so luridly in human folklore. Theirs, they said, was a natural species which lived invisibly on the margins of human society by virtue of their powers of mimicry. When I objected that their eyes would make it impossible for them to pass for men, even in the darkness which they favoured over daylight, they assured me that they could alter far more than the shape and colour of their pupils. The female had not seemed to me to be unusually pretty or unusually ugly by human standards, because there was little in her face which could command my attention save for her peculiar complexion and her disconcerting eyes, but now she exerted herself to become more attractive – by human standards, that is. Her cheekbones shifted, and the lines of her face became more distinct; her eyebrows grew darker and her eyelashes longer. The changes were subtle, but quite devastating.

"She laughed delightedly when she saw my reaction. 'So I *can* do it!' she said, as though she had not dared to believe it. 'What an atavism I am! Is this truly the lure that my foremothers used for the seduction of human brutes?' She began to change again, this time far more ambitiously. I watched emotionlessly as her skin coarsened and became hairy. Her nose was elongated into a snout, her hands changed into paws and her legs shrivelled. She completed the transformation into the likeness of a huge wolf, but began to change back almost immediately. As soon as her face was once again capable of bearing a smile she grinned very broadly. She was pleased with herself.

"I took the appropriate inference readily enough; I understood what various means her remote ancestors had used to capture their prey, and why the only record of their existence which existed in the 19th century was a mere whisper of legend, heavily polluted by nightmarish fantasy.

"I understood the awful truth – and the hideous danger which lurked unseen in my own world."

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"So your ancestors were not merely vampires but also werewolves,' I said to them. 'It is a wonder that you did not rule the world long before my own day. Or were the rumours of your invulnerability greatly exaggerated?'

"Not greatly,' said the male. 'The shapeshifting abilities our ancestors had were associated with considerable powers of self-repair and immunity to most diseases, but... how well do you understand the mechanisms of evolution?'

"I understand the theory of natural selection very well,' I told him.

"In that case,' he said, 'you will understand that in the economics of evolution there is a correlation between lifespan and reproductive fecundity. Most natural species invest

almost all of their energy in profligate reproduction, because it is easier for an organism to lay a thousand eggs than to preserve a few individuals against the destructive pressures of the environment; nevertheless, evolution eventually produced organisms which exploited the reproductive advantages of parental care, and had by necessity to become more long-lived and more cunning. You will understand why humans must invest a far greater proportion of their energy in self-repair and self-preservation than most lower organisms – and why the species destined to replace mankind was even longer-lived, and produced even fewer offspring. For hundreds of thousands of years, while humans lived as hunter-gatherers, their total numbers were stable, and the number of my ancestors steadily increased. But when humans underwent the spectacular population explosion which followed the discovery of agriculture, my ancestors were ill-equipped by nature to keep up. It was not until the catastrophic fall of the fragile human empire that they were enabled to emerge from hiding and claim their birthright.'

"I immediately realized that I had acquired information which might be of incalculable value, provided only that the future which I had contrived to see was a future of *contingency* rather than a future of *destiny*. If I could warn my fellow men of the fate which awaited them and prompt them to take action, their reduction to the hideously ignominious status which I had glimpsed during my first expedition might yet be avoided.

"I know what you are thinking,' said the female. 'But I urge you to remember that were it not for my kind, yours would have become extinct. You must abandon all thought of alerting your fellows to the presence in their midst of my kind. At best, they would think you mad; at worst, you might ensure the extinction of all intelligent life on earth.'

"And our kind *did* triumph,' added the male, 'for are we not here?' He, evidently, believed that his was the future of destiny – but how could he believe otherwise, even if his world were no more than a phantom of contingency? He could hardly be expected to accept the possibility that he and the cosmos which contained him were mere figments of my imagination, although that seemed plausible enough to me.

"You must understand,' said the female, 'that the only hope for the future of your species rests with ours. We are masters of nature now, and it is in our power to make of mankind what we will. What you saw today in the forest is but one more chapter in a continuing story, and there may yet be a new ascent of man to sentience and civilization.'

"Why, I wondered, was she so anxious to make this point? For the first time, I wondered whether I might have been mesmerized, and whether my two generous hosts might be exerting themselves to impress some kind of command upon my dulled mind.

"No!' I said. 'I will not...' But I felt myself slipping away from that peculiar discussion into darkness.

"No!' cried the male. 'You must not go! There is so much more we have to say, so much more we need to learn... Stay, I beg you!' He did not seem to realize that I had no control over the duration of my expedition.

"I awoke, and found Dr Watson beside me, anxiously assisting me to wakefulness. I was, I fear, in a parlous state..."

It seemed that the memory of that parlous state was sufficient to recall it, for even as Copplestone spoke he began to perspire very freely, and the tremor in his hands grew into a convulsion which shook his whole body. Although he tried

with all his might to remain where he was, he slid from his chair onto the carpet. The doctor and the curly-haired young man both sprang to his aid, but they could not straighten him out, let alone deliver him from the fit. So completely had the professor's narrative captivated me that I could not help but wonder whether this might be the wrath of the unborn inhabitants of an unmade future, recoiling from the uncertain mists of time to strike at the man who threatened the very possibility of their existence. In that instant, I desired with all my heart to be part of a crucial moment in the history of this world and the million futures which might conceivably proceed from it. I longed to forget my own petty embarrassments and heartaches.

It cannot possibly be a tissue of petty lies, I told myself. What an adventure the man has had! Even if it has wrecked him, body and soul, has it not been worth it? What traveller ever had such a tale to tell?

In time, the fit ran its course. It left Copplestone unconscious, but seemingly at peace. In the meantime, I arrived at certain conclusions, and made certain decisions. From that moment on, whatever the destiny of the world might be, mine was set in stone.

"I am very sorry," the doctor said. "You all know how desperate Copplestone was to tell the whole of his story, but I do not think there any possibility of his being able to continue. He must be allowed to sleep. Perhaps those of you who have no other engagements might care to return at eight o'clock tomorrow, so that Copplestone can acquaint you then with the substance of his third... shall I say *vision*?"

I could not find it in my heart to admire Watson's pedantry. He was not a fool, but he was blind to the riches of Copplestone's achievement. They all were, even the most brilliant of them. The men of letters could only see it as a bold fiction, the men of science as a wild farrago of superstitions. I was the only one who could see *hope* in it.

Everyone agreed that what the doctor proposed was the best course. The manservant and the doctor removed Copplestone to his bedroom while the rest of us made preparations for our departure.

"Well," Wilde said to me, "we have had our money's worth, have we not? What a magnificent liar the man is! If he had not told us of his long experiments with mind-addling drugs I would immediately have proclaimed him a genius, but I fear that he has relied too much on the power of chemical hallucination to be given all the credit for his accomplishments. Even so, it is a fabulous tale! I wish I had the courage to steal it, but the altercation between our host and young Wells has made me wary. Still, it might be worth doing, given that the deftness of *my* hand could improve it out of all recognition..."

"Be careful, Oscar," I said, making a feeble attempt to mimic his witty manner of speech. "You might start a fashion, and then where would we be? Every Tom, Dick and Harry would be producing visions of the future. Within a dozen years we'd have a thousand different fever-dreams to choose from."

"True," he said. "It's probably best to leave such things to Mr Wells – that way the fad will surely be stillborn."

As we put on our coats and hats the conversation continued in a muted fashion. Apart from myself only the British scientist had brought his own carriage, but he and I offered to accommodate all our fellow guests in our spare seats. On comparing destinations it became obvious that the most convenient use of our resources would be for the two young men

to travel with Crookes and Tesla while I took the others. Watson and his dour companion were headed for Baker Street, which was very near, and only a little out of my way. I had already resolved to pay a short visit to Piccadilly before returning home.

There was some delay while the doctor convinced himself that Coplestone could safely be left to the care of his servants, and in the end he had to hurry out to the carriage, where his friend had already taken his seat. I tried to dismount for politeness' sake but the doctor – who was fumbling at his coat-buttons – cannoned into me and dropped his bag. We both bent to pick it up, and collided yet again. I took advantage of the confusion to pluck the envelope containing Coplestone's formula out of his jacket, as slickly as the best pickpocket in Paris. I slipped it unobtrusively into my coat. As soon as we were under way, I asked the doctor what he thought of Coplestone's remarkable adventures.

"I reserve my judgment," he said. "But I'll say this much – if he cannot be persuaded to give up this damnable drug, I fear for his very life. He simply will not understand how ill he is."

"And you, sir?" I asked his friend, who had hardly said a word all evening. "What is your opinion?"

He looked at me very steadily with his solemn grey eyes. "It is the strangest tale I have ever heard," he said, gravely, "but I pride myself on my scrupulous use of logic, and I find it difficult to accept the reality of the art of prophecy. It is easier by far to believe it the record of a sequence of hallucinations. I would be interested, however, to hear your opinion of what we have heard."

"I hardly know what to make of it," I said, in a calculatedly off-hand manner. "I have neither Wilde's love of fabulation nor Wells's intense interest in the distant future of mankind – and I had difficulty following parts of the narrative. English is not my first language."

"Nor, I think, is French," said the doctor's friend, "although your accent has more of Paris in it than echoes of your native land, and your clothes were purchased there. Some of your consonants sound Slavic, but whatever its origin might really be, Luard is certainly not a Slavic name. I have known only one other man with a physiognomy similar to yours, and he claimed to be Russian – unfortunately, his name and title proved to be false, and I never did manage to ascertain his true origins. Like yourself, he was an uncommonly fastidious man, who took little or no pleasure in food and wine, and found tobacco smoke distasteful."

I was not at all amused by this speech, which seemed more than slightly insulting. It was on the tip of my tongue to say

that I hoped he did not suspect my name and title of being false, but I knew only too well that one should never tempt fate in such a fashion.

"Come come, Holmes," said the doctor, uncomfortably. "This isn't one of your damned investigations." He, at least, was conscious that acceptance of the hospitality of my carriage carried a certain burden of obligation.

"It is ingrained in the nature of Englishmen to dislike everything foreign," observed Wilde, with mocking disingenuity. "I fear, Count, that you will find many people in London morbidly fascinated by the fact that you hail from somewhere east of Calais."

"I meant no offence!" protested the doctor's friend, with apparent sincerity. "I was merely indulging my curiosity."

In order to change the subject, I turned to Wilde and asked him what he made of young Mr Wells and his inordinately bleak vision of the future.

"Young men often dally with an extreme bleakness of outlook," Wilde answered. "They think it romantically interesting. In fact, it is merely the measure of their own cowardice in the face of the stings and darts of outrageous fortune. If they are fortunate, they learn to grasp life's nettle. If not, they gradually transform themselves into pusillanimous old men weighed down by acrid regret – and need no shapeshifting gift to accomplish the metamorphosis."

The doctor and his neurasthenic companion would not join in the conversation; their minds were obviously on other matters. It was of no consequence; the carriage was turning and slowing down.

"Here is Baker Street," I said mildly. "Tell me where you want to be set down."

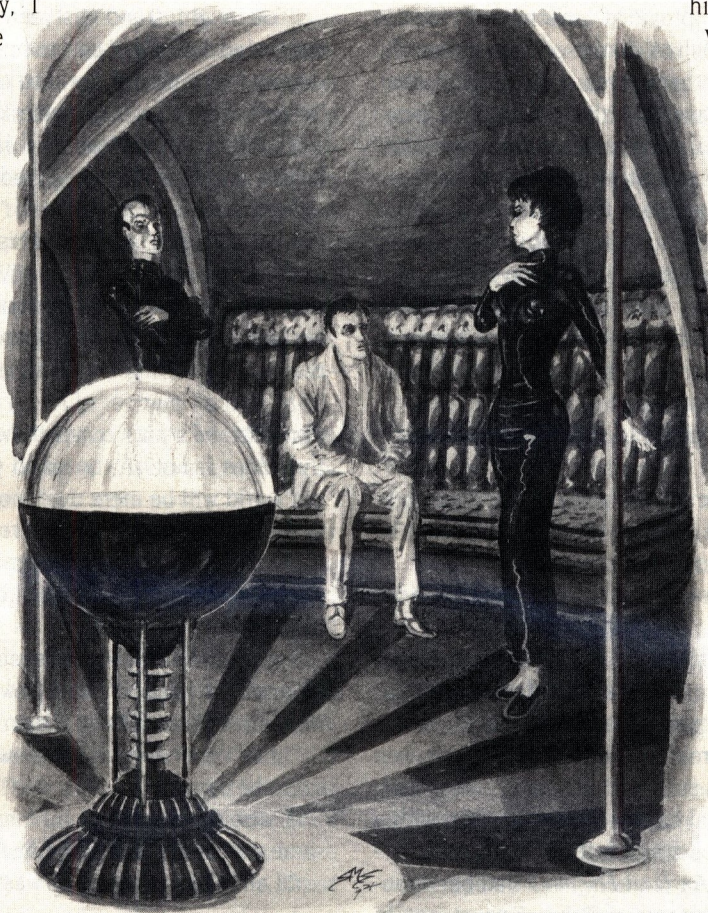
Our *au revoirs* were polite enough, but a trifle frosty.

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"Forgive them, dear boy," said Wilde, once we were under way once again, "for they know not what they are. A consulting detective, indeed! I am by no means devoid of conceit, as you know, but such a tedious delusion is hardly worth entertaining – and yet Watson is as famous a literary man, in his own way, as I am. Do you read *The Strand* at all?"

I confessed that I did not. "As Coplestone rightly says," I added, "there are so many periodicals these days."

"And the only ones worth reading are in French," he agreed mournfully. "Even Lane's *Yellow Book* is conspicuously thin-blooded. I wish it were not so difficult to obtain the *Mercure* in London. Now there one may find dreams which have delicacy of



"WHAT AN ATAVISM I AM!"

form as well as bravery of vision. The best French writers always display an appropriate nicety, even when they treat such brutal themes as the vampire. The French vampires of Nodier and Gautier are far more beguiling than their English kin."

"Are there any English vampires?" I asked.

"Not so very many," he replied. "In prose, there is little more than that ludicrous excrescence which Polidori tried to pass off as Byron's, and the interminable penny-dreadful adventures of the appalling Varney. There is le Fanu's 'Carmilla' of course, but le Fanu is yet another Trinity man. I believe Stoker is enthusiastically researching the history and folklore of vampirism, so I dare say the world may soon be over-blessed with Anglo-Irish vampires. You will not understand this, being a civilized man of the world, but Trinity is a Protestant college in the heart of a Catholic country, built on an ancient cesspit, and it provides uncommonly fertile ground for the growth of feverish tales of exotic outsiders. The Anglo-Irish sometimes think themselves more English than the English, because they have to strive so hard to avoid being Irish, but the English will never support their pretence."

I could not fully appreciate the bitter undercurrent of feeling in this flippant commentary, but the mention of Stoker reminded me that Copplestone had thought of inviting him to hear the story he had just related. Wilde's revelation that Stoker was thinking of writing a vampire story might provide the explanation of that fact, but I was by no means happy to learn it. What unfortunate inspiration, I wondered, might Arminius Vambery have communicated to Stoker?

"Do you know anything about this project of Stoker's?" I asked.

Wilde shrugged. He had turned his face away, as though to look out of the window of the carriage. "Not a great deal," he said. "I told you earlier – we no longer see one another."

"Oh yes," I murmured, without thinking. "You once liked his wife."

"Loved," said Wilde acidly. "I would have married her myself, but for the twin fears of poverty and the pox. And now..." He trailed off. I was amazed that he said so much. He was tired, and he had had more than a little to drink, but even a man as naturally garrulous as he would surely never have said such a thing in the normal course of conversation with a man he hardly knew. It was not difficult, though, to follow the abandoned line of argument. *An Ideal Husband* had been running for a week and *The Importance of Being Earnest* was in rehearsal. Wilde was set fair for great fame and fortune, and his future was surely brighter by far than Stoker's, whatever their comparative prospects had been ten or 20 years ago. As for fear of the pox, if he meant by that what I thought he meant then he must have overcome that fear by the time he married Constance Lloyd. Conventional wisdom, I knew, taught that a man diagnosed with syphilis must take the mercury treatment and suffer two years abstinence from sexual intercourse.

"Oscar," I said on impulse, "I fear that I may not be able to remain in London very long."

"Why?" he asked.

"Because certain rumours will doubtless follow me from Paris. I think your friend Stoker has heard them already, and he is sure to repeat them if he discovers that I am here – and I fear that Mr Holmes's infernal curiosity will easily root them out, if he has the inclination to try."

"I wish I could say that I never listen to rumours," he said carelessly, "but I always do. I am the subject of so many, and

although I pretend to like it... as it happens, I am thinking of going away myself. A clairvoyant I know has foretold that I shall make a pilgrimage to Algeria, and now I have Copplestone's assurance that such prophecies ought to be taken seriously I dare not flout my destiny. Perhaps you ought to come with us."

"Us?" I queried.

"I could not think of going alone to such an uncivilized place," he said, "and poor Bosie is so cut up about Drumlanrig's death. His brother, you know. Even Queensberry liked Drumlanrig, a little."

"I never go so far south," I told him. "I cannot abide the sun, and its light is so horribly fierce in those latitudes. I like London's grey light much better, and I shall be very sorry to leave."

"You might stand fast against the rumour-mongers," he suggested, mildly. "Let them say what they like, and be damned – or haul them into court for libel. Either would be better than a shooting-match, don't you think?"

I looked at him long and hard, wondering how much he knew – and how much he cared.

"Sometimes," I murmured, "I wish that poor Mourier had fired at my heart, and found his mark."

"But only sometimes," said Wilde, with patient understanding. "We all think ourselves monsters, occasionally – but once we look away from the stubbornly unflattering mirror, there is the world awaiting us, in all its welcoming glory, full to the brim with all manner of lovely lies. If nothing else, a tale like Copplestone's puts our petty woes into their proper perspective, does it not? A thousand years hence, you and I and all our world will be mere dust, not even a memory – and no one will know or care what we were, or what we did, or even what we wrote. Let us to our playground, my friend, to amuse ourselves while we may. We shall be long enough dead, when the time comes."

I wished that I could take matters so lightly, and bring such eloquence to the cure of my own heart's sickness, but he and I were not the same kind of man.

"Shall I collect you tomorrow?" I asked him, as he got down from the carriage.

"I would not miss it for the world," he assured me. "The same time, the same place. I promise that I shall not be late."

Of all his promises, that was worth the least.

It was so late by the time I reached Piccadilly that the vast majority of the night-birds had returned to their roosts. A few stray wisps of mist drifted about the gas-lamps. The raucous music which spilled from the closed doors of the all-night drinking-dens was muffled by doors and curtains set to keep the winter cold at bay.

I found the person I sought at her station beneath one of the wrought-iron lamp standards. She smiled as she saw me approach. She was very pale, and her pallor bore the subtly lustrous bloom which was an infallible sign of consumption. She made no attempt to cover it with powder. The smallpox which had visited her in youth, as it visited all the city's poorer children, had left but a single visible scar on her face: an oddly star-like mark on the cheek beneath the left eye. Her dark eyes were bright, almost luminous as they caught the lamplight. She had lovely hair, which she kept in very neat trim.

"My Russian Count," she said, as I halted before her.

Her voice was low and her pronunciation perfect. I had

been attracted to her as much by her voice as her features; I could not abide dropped aitches and revolting pet-names, and could never understand why so many English whores took pride in Cockney vulgarity. I took her hand in mine, and raised it momentarily towards my lips. It was very cold.

"You should not be outside," I said hypocritically. "You should retreat indoors, as your sisters do, and place yourself near a blazing fire." She had chosen to remain outdoors because she was waiting for me, although she had no reason to believe that I would come to her tonight. She was bound to wait for me, by virtue of the mesmeric spell I had put on her.

"Will you walk with me, my dear," I said, and she nodded. We strolled off in the direction of Green Park, whose Stygian darkness masked the commerce of the district. The ground would be iron-hard and icy, and she had every right to expect greater comfort from a man of my station, but it would have required a little more courage than she had to raise an objection. She had nothing to fear; I had not the slightest intention of laying her down upon the frosty turf. I took her along the pavement to a spot equidistant between two of the street-lights. I had no difficulty in making out her features, but she must have been nearly blind to mine. I looked long into her eyes, but it is a cliché of cheap fiction which says that a mesmerist must use the authority of his gaze, and it was more for my sad and sombre pleasure than to extend my dominion over her spirit. I knew that I had only to stroke her cheek a little, and fold my protective arms round her, to make her completely mine.

"Oh my love!" she murmured. It was not a trick of the trade. Perhaps she did speak softly to more casual acquaintances but there was no dissimulation in her voice now.

"There is something you must do for me," I whispered, my lips just a breath away from her delicate ear. "It should not be difficult."

"Anything," she said, almost imperceptibly. She wanted nothing other than to be my slave. How could she?

I pressed a sovereign into her hand, but had to close her nerveless fingers around it to make sure that she held on to it. "Do this for me," I said, "and I will give you everything that is within my power to give." There was hypocrisy in this, but there was a kind of honesty too. For once there was substance in my seductive promises. "Tomorrow, I will take you home with me. It may be late when I come, but I *will* come. Trust me, Laura. Trust me."

"My name..." she began, but I put a finger to her lips to silence her.

"Your name," I told her, "always has been, and always will be Laura."

She had tilted her head back, bared in that curious instinctive gesture of submission which civilized humans somehow retain: the purely animal gesture of surrender, which offers the throat to a conqueror as a token of faith in the mercy of the strong. She was completely in my power.

I lowered my head, and kissed her on the throat to seal our pact.

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Needless to say, Wilde was not ready when I arrived to collect him. By way of apology he explained that he had been run ragged all day, in a hopeless attempt to catch up with his belated start.

"Irregular hours do not seem to disturb *you* in the least," he

observed, with a hint of feigned resentment. "You could not have gone to your bed before five last night, and yet you seem perfectly refreshed. You look ten years younger than I do, although I cannot believe that you are."

"Nonsense," I said, knowing full well that the last thing he wanted was a confirmation of the fact that I was older than he – although of course I was. "You are as handsome as ever, and now that night has fallen the gleam is returning to your own eye. We are two of a kind, you and I; we only come to life after dark, when even the workers of the world must retreat from their toil to the world of thought and imagination: the world where truly *human* life is lived."

More hypocrisy, I thought, *more seduction*. But how could one possibly have a conscience about lying to a man who prized great lies far above the humble truth?

"All the workers of the world do not toil by day," he remarked, as my good Bavarian took advantage of a rare stretch of clear road to whip his team to a fast trot. "Actors work by limelight, and even playwrights sometimes find inspiration in what common men would call insomnia."

"That is not work," I said, "no matter that it is the means by which some men earn their coin. *Work* is what happens in the fields and in the factories, producing the bare necessities of life. Wheat and meat, clothing and shelter, are the means of physical survival, and their production alone may qualify as authentic toil. The theatre belongs to the life of the mind, to the fabulous realm of luxury and whoredom which is merely the means by which men make life *worthwhile*."

He looked at me curiously, but did not smile, as I had hoped he would. Perhaps he felt insulted by my implication that what playwrights did was a kind of whoredom rather than a species of true labour.

"Modern factories take no account of day or night," he said soberly. "Machines do not care for the sun, or for sleep, but only for power – and because machines are blind and tireless, the men and women who attend them must work shift after shift around the clock. Perhaps it was Wells, and not Coplestone, who read the meaning of their common dream more perspicaciously. Perhaps the tribute of blood was in truth being paid to the machines themselves, not to the overseers whom Coplestone carelessly called vampires."

Wilde's was the fashionable socialism of the upper classes, scrupulously benevolent and safely abstracted from over-extravagant demonstration, but it was by no means insincere. He might have felt a deeper and more painful hatred of social injustice had he been apprenticed to a blacking factory or a draper's shop, but his vision could not be faulted on grounds of clarity.

"I had not thought to find you in such a serious mood," I said, half-apologetically. "I hoped that the anticipation of more gorgeous fabrications would have helped you to be gay."

He made a visible effort, then, to throw off his tiredness and the slight peevishness with which it had infected him.

"You are right, my friend," he said, "as you almost invariably *are*. We are two of a kind, despite that you are nobly born and I am not. We are true aristocrats of the mind and of the heart. Forgive me for envying your composure. Ever since I wrote the terrible parable of Dorian Gray I have become acutely conscious of the aging process, and there are times when I simply cannot help feeling old. My mind is brilliantly young, but my flesh..."

"I would readily trade my sturdy flesh for an artist's soul, like yours," I told him.

He looked at me in the strangest way. "I once wrote a tale

of a fisherman's soul," he said, "which was cast out to roam free, rather as Coplestone's soul has roamed, but was so corrupted in the process... oh, enough of this dour allegorizing! Let us look forward; let us fix our minds on the remotest future, on the world of the overmen, whose mastery of nature has permitted the transcendence of all frailties. Tell me, Count, do you suppose that the gift of thought will be restored to poor, deprived humanity in Coplestone's third vision? Do you think that they might somehow turn the tables on their vampire conquerors?"

"The good ought to end happily, the bad unhappily," I quoted, casually. "That is what fiction means. But Coplestone so ardently desires to present us with truth and *not* fiction that he will surely disregard such elementary rules. No, I cannot believe that he will end his story as conventionally as that. I trust, however, that he has kept the best of his surprises up his sleeve, and that he will have something to reveal which none of us could possibly anticipate."

I permitted myself a private smile as I said it, thinking that there might be one surprise which I could anticipate – but I spoke more truly than I knew. Because of Wilde's tardiness we were the last to arrive at Coplestone's house, and the last to learn of his death.

We were shown into the dining room, where the others awaited us. The table was not laid but they were all seated around it, very solemnly. The doctor had taken the place at the head of the table which Coplestone had occupied the night before, and he beckoned us impatiently to be seated.

"This is terrible news," said Wilde. "How did it happen?"

"Coplestone died in his sleep," said the doctor sadly. "I had given his manservant an instruction that the professor was not on any account to be disturbed, and it was not until noon that he finally crept into his master's room and found him dead. The man has poisoned himself with his damnable drugs."

"We cannot be certain of that, Watson," his friend put in mildly.

"Surely, Mr Holmes," said Wilde, less sarcastically than he probably intended, "you can't think that Coplestone was murdered?"

"If he was," said Holmes quietly, "I doubt that we could prove it. But he *was* robbed, and on that account I think we must reserve our judgment about the precise manner of his death."

"Robbed?" said Wilde. "What was stolen?"

"The vial which he showed to us last night," said Holmes. "The vial which he intended to offer to us, so that one of us might venture to confirm that his supposed visions of the future were accurate."

"But that surely cannot matter," I put in smoothly. "Dr Watson still has the formula."

"I fear," said the doctor, blushing beneath his whiskers, "that I have not. As soon as I became aware of the theft from Coplestone's laboratory I checked my pocket, and found that the envelope had disappeared. It must have been removed from my jacket while it hung in the closet last night."

"Not so, Watson," said Holmes. "Had someone entered our rooms, their visit would have left evidential traces. However reluctant you are to admit that your pocket was picked, it happened."

"But who would do such a thing?" asked Wells. "And why?"

"Perhaps the thief did not care to compete with others for

the privilege of using the drug," said Holmes.

"I doubt that the competition would have been fierce," said Tesla drily. "Had the thief known that Coplestone lay dead in his bed, he could have been reasonably certain that there would be a dearth of volunteers."

"Perhaps the professor's worst fears were justified," I suggested cynically. "Perhaps the vampires who rule the world whose secrets he penetrated did indeed contrive to find a way to reach back into time, so that they might cancel out his discovery, thus promoting their contingent future to the security of destiny."

This was not a line of inquiry which Holmes desired to explore. "This is a *serious matter*," he said sternly. "Coplestone is dead, and the remainder of the drug has been stolen. I accuse no one, but the fact remains that the only people who knew in any real detail what Coplestone believed he had discovered are here in this room. The doctor and I have questioned the servants, but neither of them had any real idea of the nature of their master's work, and no evident motive for the theft."

"I cannot see that any of us had an *evident* motive," said the American. "There was nothing in what we heard last night to suggest that Coplestone's visions were anything more than mere delusion, and Mr Wells gave us some reason to suspect that the delusion may have had a perfectly ordinary seed in something he had read or heard about."

"As far as I can see," Wells put in, "there are only two people in this room who had ample opportunity to seize both the vial and the formula. Has anyone else been to this house today, except for Dr Watson and Mr Holmes?"

"That," said the great detective, seemingly untroubled by the back-handed accusation, "is one thing we ought to ascertain."

Understandably, no one confessed to having visited the house. I assumed that no one had. I had not; there had been no need, when I could so easily send another in my stead.

"Are you certain, doctor," said Crookes, "that Coplestone did not get up after you put him to bed last night? He might have removed the vial himself. Perhaps he discarded the compound, having thought better of his offer to let us poison ourselves with it."

"We did not find the marked vial," Holmes said. "That suggests..."

"This is a waste of time," said Tesla. "If we're here to listen to the third part of Coplestone's story, let's hear it. Otherwise, I'll be on my way. I've no intention of sitting here while Mr Holmes interrogates me."

"How is it," I enquired curiously, "that we may hear the third part of the story, given that poor Coplestone is no longer alive to tell it?"

"I discovered that there is a written record of Coplestone's third vision," the doctor explained. "It must have been made immediately afterwards. His suspicions regarding the attempts which might be made by the people of the far future to prevent his publicizing his discoveries, however absurd they may have been, were quite real. The verbal accounts which he gave us of his first two dreams were, of course, much fuller and more considered than this written version of his third dream, but..."

"Oh, get on with it, man!" said Wilde intemperately.

The doctor looked around for moral support, but there was little to be found, even from his friend. The doctor, somewhat shamefacedly, left the room to fetch the relevant document.

"Let us leave the matter of the theft to one side, for now," said the detective equably. I noticed, though, that his eyes were fixed on me. I wondered what he might possibly have deduced or found out that inspired him to favour me with such a glance, but I was very careful to meet his gaze without the least hint of discomfiture.

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"You must remember," said the doctor, "that these documents were not intended for publication. There is doubtless much of Coplestone's experience that is omitted altogether, and what passes for straightforward reportage is continually interrupted by comments, questions and what I can only describe as philosophical rhapsodies. There is much herein which remains wholly mysterious to me."

In the privacy of my thoughts I echoed Wilde's admonition, but at last he began to read.

"I must be calm. I must at least *try* to make a sober and intelligible record. To put pen to paper is to diminish the experience ludicrously, perhaps to distort it utterly, but I must *try*."

"The hill again, less steep. The forest very different: huge trees, far taller and straighter than anything known on earth in my own time; the foliage ranging from turquoise to purple, the light filtered through the canopy subdued and bluish — comfortable to the eyes of overmen?"

"Machines everywhere: tiny metal cells able to associate, like the golem, transforming themselves into complex 'organisms.' What are the limits of their virtuosity? How many different kinds are there? Why did organic life not evolve according to this pattern, so that hordes of protozoans might come together to take whatever form might suit their temporary circumstances? Could the shapeshifting overmen be the product of some such evolutionary sequence?"

"The machines immediately responded to my presence. It mattered not at all that ten thousand years or more had passed since my last manifestation; once a society has *true* history, nothing can be lost or forgotten, and machines are exceedingly patient. It would not have mattered to those watching for me had I never embarked upon my third expedition; they would have waited forever, without impatience or disappointment. No flying machine this time. No journey. No confrontation. No locking of curious stares by man and overman, victim and vampire, primitive and sophisticate. Had I realized what was happening I would have been frightened and appalled, but the process of possession was invisible and painless. The insectile machines came, saw, associated, did

their work and dissolved.

"What the machines did was to make more machines, even tinier than they: ephemeral machines whose magnitude was akin to that of the bacterial organisms which are the agents of many diseases. They *infected* me with the 'artificial germs' which they had made. Were the mechanical germs specifically designed to infect a timeshadow rather than a whole body? If so, how? Does the ability of the machines to employ this mode of communication imply that the overmen have now added this kind of precognition to the repertoire of their mental abilities? *How complete is their mastery of time? Have they, at last, become managers of contingency, architects of destiny?*"

"Other questions now have to be added to those which occurred to me as the knowledge of what had been done to me was slowly made clear. Did the infectious agents bind so intimately to my timeshadow that I brought them back with me? *Might they be the seeds of my destruction?* Difficult to

believe; more likely that only that which I sent forth can possibly return — but perhaps this is mere wishful thinking. In 30,000 years, what might men *not* accomplish? I mean *overmen*, of course. If the overmen are to be believed, mere men are too violent to be capable of much achievement, too ready to destroy one another and hence to destroy their species...

"What, in the end, did I actually *do* in the course of my third excursion into the future? I walked to the top of the hill, found a gap in the forest canopy, beneath which green grass grew. (Left for my benefit? Surely too narcissistic an interpretation?). There, I could see blue sky, white clouds, and the sun. Later, I was able to see the stars... the same, fixed stars we see today. I was able to see everything that was *constant*, everything which linked my world to the world in which I had come. I

was allowed to see that nothing truly fundamental had changed. All I actually *did*, with my absurdly heavy-seeming half-body, was go to the crest of a hill and sit down on the grass, for half a day and half a night. And yet I saw the whole world of the overmen, in all its grandeur and glory!

"It was surely not an experience planned and executed solely for my benefit, but a kind of adventure available to any and every inhabitant of that fabulous era. In that far future, no mind will require the carriage of the body to go wandering, nor will any require the kind of crude separation which my compound induces. Perhaps the overmen have finally mastered the art of timeshadow projection (far more cleverly than I, if so), but it is likely that they have not bothered, because they have something far better. They have machines



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which can infect a body like the agents of disease, but are designed for creation rather than malaise. They have machines too tiny to see, which breed in the blood and swarm about the brain – even the anaemic fluids and shadow-brain of a timeshadow – and thus induce the brightest and most brilliant of fevers: the fever of experience; the fever of memory; the fever of knowledge.

"I wish I could say 'wisdom' instead of knowledge. Perhaps that was what the machines were designed to give me. Perhaps, if I had not been an attenuated timeshadow, the overmen could have filled me with all their wealth of understanding. Perhaps, on the other hand, they *do* fear the vicious circle which might result from the communication of too much knowledge from future to past. Perhaps they were careful to give me a vision without coherence: a dream censored of all that might enable me to hasten its actualization. There is no way of knowing...

"I have walked on the surface of the planet Mars, which we see but dimly through our telescopes: the arid, near-airless Mars of pink sands and jagged ridges, awesome clefts and gouged-out craters; the Mars of *my* today. And I have walked on the surface of *their* Mars: the Mars of the overmen; the moist, scented Mars of purple skies and blue-black forests; the Mars of seemingly-eternal half-light; the Mars of gargantuan gliders and gossamer-winged sky craft; the Mars of *their* today...

"I have walked on the surface of Titan, satellite of Saturn, which is to us a mere point of light: the Titan entombed by many kinds of ice; bare, brutal, lonely Titan. I have walked, too, on the Titan of the overmen: the Titan of crystalline cities; the Titan of domed jungles; lush, lovely, hectic Titan. And from both stations I looked up at Saturn itself; at Saturn's rings; at the gaseous face whose features had, in the second instance, at last begun to change, to harden, to become distinct...

"I have seen the worlds inside the asteroids: the hollow worlds whose inhabitants remake themselves because they had no need of legs. I had no need to walk there either, and so I flew, on wings which were a part of me, and danced four-handed jigs all around the decorated walls...

"I have seen the earths which orbit other stars: the myriad earths, the countless Edens. I have trod the streets and soils of worlds where life has followed other paths than ours. I have seen, and *known*, sentient creatures made in every image and none, some like earthly animals or plants, others seemingly, mineral and some without fixed form at all. I have heard their speech and their music – and I have seen too that these species, like the overmen, obtain in the end command over their own forms, attributes and ambitions. I have seen the wonderful wilderness of life in the sidereal system: the life of a million worlds; the life of a thousand starfaring cultures; the life which fills the great gaseous clouds between the stars; the life which is irrepressible, uncontainable, ever-changing. I have watched the meetings of the minds and bodies of different species, have been party to their communions, their mergings and their separations...

"I have not seen mankind. In all of that, *I have not seen mankind*.

"The satyrs and the centaurs passed into oblivion without eventual issue; the descendants of my own kind never found an upward path of progress to follow for a second time. *Homo sapiens* will die, and will be gone for ever; ours is a broken strand upon the loom of destiny, *but it does not matter*. Our kings and queens, our capitalists and merchants, our servants

and factory-hands, will give no children to this vast unpatterned confusion, but all that we are and represent – our every thought, our every property – is there. In this great scheme, the overmen are our brothers and not our conquerors; they are our heirs, our ambassadors to the universe. In this vast overarching scheme, *all* species are our brothers, our other selves. We are life, and life is everywhere, the image of God in which we are made is neither a face nor a form nor even a soul, but a movement, an *impulse*, a *will* to exist, to grow and to change, to be and to become...

"I have seen the worlds which the overmen have come to know, and I have seen that I belong there no less than they. Is it an illusion? Is it simply an effect of my infection by the tiny machines which they left to tutor me? How can I know? How can I know whether any of it is more than mere illusion, or some feverish effect of this infection which I have unleashed upon myself with my seer's potion, my subtle poison, my loquacious oracle?

"While I lay on that hillside I was dreaming. It was *all* a dream, and a dream inside a dream at that... but within the dream within the dream there were further dreams, worlds within worlds. Like a spark of light, and as fleet, I soared among the stars. I saw the sidereal system from without, and from its light-filled heart. I saw stars born from dark dust, and I saw stars die, in vast explosions which left behind mere shrinking embers, which collapsed until nothing was left of them but the purest form of nothing, the ultimate blackness, the shadow of eternity. I saw, outside the sidereal system, other such systems, each one surrounded by a cage of darkness so huge and so dense as to beggar the imagination, and I saw these systems extending to unimaginable distances, millions upon millions of them, all flying apart as if they were the debris of an explosion which was the universe itself...

"It is oddly easy, now, to believe that the universe itself is *not* something still, settled, made and left for dead, but rather something happening, and happening *violently*, something growing and changing, and that time itself is a headlong rush. We think of ourselves and our world as calm things, nearly tranquil, almost still, *but we are not*. We are universes ourselves, filled with tiny creatures, fevered by their intangible attentions. There is so much darkness in the world without, and in our inner being too, that we think of existence as a faint and flickering thing in a great illimitable void, *but it is not*. The darkness of the void without and the void within reflect the limitations of our senses, and not the absence of process. Within and without, we and the world are far more alive than we know, and it does not matter, in the end, that each and every one of us will die, that the race of men will die, that the race of overmen will die, that the universal explosion itself will leave behind nothing in the end but the purest form of nothing, the ultimate blackness – because *everything* is a part of *everything*...

"That is the one and only truth, the one and only destiny." Did I truly dream all that, or did I simply *come to know* it? Is it a conclusion reached by my own effort, or something the machines fed into me, already whole, roiling rhetoric and all? Does it *matter*, given that it is there inside me, woven into the fabric of my soul, capable of flowing from pen to page? How shall I tell others what I have seen? Above all, slowly and gently, one step at a time. Were they to read this without adequate preparation they would simply think me mad. Perhaps I *am* mad. Perhaps the function of the machines which invaded me was to derange me, to make certain that my glimpses of

the future could not change the past. But that would probably be unnecessary. Is there any hope at all of alerting men to the presence in their midst of those whose descendants will be the overmen? If they could be alerted, could they do anything to alter their fate? Could they become less warlike, less self-destructive, less blind to their destiny? It is a conundrum I cannot hope to solve alone; I must have help.

"I saw... how can I possibly record all that I saw? How can I even remember it? It is fading already in my consciousness, dying like a dream which the waking mind tries with all its might to trap and hold, but loses in the end... and after all, what I *did* was to lie upon the grass, staring up into the darkening sky, watching the stars come out. All else was but an illusion, a disease of the brain, a disturbance in my soul... except, of course, that it was all real: preserved, synthesized, packaged, projected into the theatre of my mind by some infinitesimal fantasmagoria or

kinematograph, but quite real. I have walked upon the surface of the planet Mars, today and tomorrow. I have seen the planet dead and I have seen it brought to life. I have seen tomorrow's creators labouring in their laboratories to make and reshape life. I have seen the hustle and bustle of Creation: not the work of a mock-fatherly God overfond of prohibitions and petty acts of vengeance, but the work of men who are able to manipulate germ-plasm, who have mastery of the mysteries of the flesh. I have not seen the maker of stars crying *fiat lux* into the darkness, but I have seen the makers of overmen and the remakers of worlds, busy in the crucible from which all the Golden Ages of the future will be born. I have come face to face with the black eyes of the infinite, and met their terrifying stare – not bravely enough, I admit, but not so steeped in terror as to be struck blind... or dumb... or dead.

"It was not all seeing and hearing, of course. The things which infected my brain, to bring the news of infinity and eternity directly to my synapses, were masters of all the senses, and all the emotions. I felt the texture of the future, the rhythm of the spheres, in the secret chambers of my heart...

"What nonsense! Am I not a man of science, a man of precision? What respect will anyone have for me if I descend to such fatuous nonsense? And yet... the machines which undertook the task of my education *did* try to make me feel what no human could ever feel for himself; they *did* try to communicate to me what the existence of an overman is like, from the standpoint of an overman's self-regard. What little did I salvage from that, and how can I possibly describe it? I

have looked at the world with an overman's eyes. I have responded as he would respond. I have stood in the shoes of an overman of my own day, of my own present, and have looked at my fellow men with *his* eyes, with his fearful and resentful heart, with his *hunger*.

"I have felt the hunger of vampires... the hunger and *ecstasy* of vampires. I am the prey, privileged to have felt the anticipatory surge of the predator's blood; I am the unwary, privileged to have felt the uncalm consciousness of the hidden; I am the human, privileged to have felt the triumph of the superhuman. I have tasted and *understood* the hunger and ecstasy of vampires. I have seen the altar on which mankind is to be sacrificed—and I have worshipped at that altar. I have stood in the shoes of an overman of the far future, too. I have known what it is to have tamed hunger and ecstasy, to have brought them to heel, to have made them docile.



"THE TITAN OF THE OVERMEN"

"*They wanted me to stay!* That which possessed me begged me to stay and not return, begged me to consent... but I could not. I could not do it. I dared not do it. My sense of duty was stronger, in the end, than their temptation. Perhaps I *am* mad. I have known the peace of the ultimate overmen, and would not accept it as a gift. I have been in Heaven, and threw myself out, like a sinful angel, to fall through all eternity into the blackness of the pit. Yes, I am mad; but I have known *ataraxia*, the perfect peace of mind – which comes not from the strangulation of emotion, not from the transcendence of the passions, not from mechanization or denial or anaesthesia but from *discipline*, from *control*... and I have understood what it was in men that had to die, lest mankind itself should die...

and, of course, *did* die... to be replaced by something gentler, kinder, wiser, *better*... something which emerged from the dark edges of nightmares, from the anxious recesses of myth, to be – when seen in its own light – something merely *different*, and not so very different at that: a blurred mirror-image, but recognizably akin. A brother. A *blood*-brother.

"If only we could recognize what we truly are, we would surely be less afraid of what we are not. If only we could see the monster which we are making of ourselves, we might be able to see that which is less than monstrous in the images of fear and hate which our minds conjure up so vividly and so prolifically...

"I might have stayed, but I did not. I chose to return, to my poor poisoned self. If only...

"I am ill, but not because I have carried back any vestige of that glorious delirium with which the machines of the far

future infected me so carefully. They are gone; I cannot doubt it. I am ill because of what I have done to myself. Watson was right about the dangers. I am poisoned. In seeking to gain intelligence of the future I have cut myself adrift from the present. Did the seers of old understand that there was a price to pay for overmuch success? Did the sybils who served the ancients fully understand their self-sacrifice? Why did I not stay? Why did I not accept the gift that was offered? God how my arm aches! What a rack my grip upon the pen has become!

"I ought to write all day and all night, until I have wrung from my inarticulate heart every last vestige of the knowledge by which I have been possessed, but I cannot. If I am to tell my story at all I must tell it orally, all of it—tell it in a single night, if I can, to men that I can trust. If only I knew a hundred who might understand. If only I knew ten.

"If only..."

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The doctor looked up from the manuscript. "I fear," he said, "that Coplestone had reached the limit of his endurance, and the limit of his legibility. He did try to continue, but there are only a few more words I can decipher. He tried to make a list of some kind... perhaps topics to be added to a later draft. To the best of my estimation, the list is as follows: *Hist Reconst. Great War. Wire and Gas. Vs don't kill. Hide in Comfort. Atom Bomb. Birth Pills. Silicon Clips. Vs love flying. Thrive in cities: art light. Land on moor. Great Plague War. Oceans die, then rise. Ozone shield. Shapeshifters immune to rad poison. Proofs: Cathode rays. Transistors.* There are half a dozen other items of which I can make no sense at all. At the foot of the last page, separate from the rest of the text, four names have been scribbled: Crookes; Wilde; Shiel; Stoker."

My overloaded train of thought was jolted very slightly by that last name, but there was too much to wonder at.

What a reward I have reaped by following my instinct! I thought. What a wise providence it was that led me to steal the elixir and the secret of its making! Everything is clear now. All my wicked, wretched, wilful life has been naught but an enigmatic prologue, a prelude to this moment. How can I doubt it? All my life I have been groping towards the kindly light, not knowing how blind I was. Now, at last, it is clear.

Even Wilde, I knew, could not possibly complain about a lack of imaginative excess in the peculiar diatribe which we had just heard... but even a man like Wilde might struggle in vain to penetrate the meaning of it. Infectious machines! A universe of teeming vermin! Existence as explosion! The ultimate nothing! Was even Wilde, I wondered, capable of seeing it as something more than a mere fever-dream, not far removed from gibberish? For myself, I had no doubts. If Coplestone had not seen the future, he had certainly seen *something*: something that no man of this or any earlier time had ever seen before.

Let it be the future! I said to myself silently. *Great Father of us All, let it be the future of destiny!*

"We have heard the story," Holmes said impatiently. "Each of us will doubtless make of it what he will. There are more important matters which now require consideration."

"On the contrary," Wilde said. "We are here at Coplestone's invitation, for a purpose which he defined. Our first duty is to do what he required of us: to exchange views as to the precise implications of what he had seen. We have accepted the man's hospitality, and we owe him that."

The detective threw up his hands. "Oh, very well!" he said. "Justice is rarely swift, but it is inexorable." He looked at me as he pronounced this blatant lie. I looked calmly back.

"Perhaps," said Wilde, effortlessly usurping the doctor's role as chairman, "Mr Wells would like to begin, as he has been enthusiastic to point out certain similarities between Coplestone's vision of the future and his own."

"I freely admit," Wells said slowly, "that the similarities are, in the end, less striking than the differences. Nevertheless, the similarities are still a matter of some interest to me. I will accept that no conscious imitation can have been involved, but the possibility remains that someone who read the first version of my story in the *Science Schools Journal* might in the course of the last few years have communicated its contents to Professor Coplestone in such a manner that he built a fantasy of his own upon their foundation. I regret, however, that I cannot seriously entertain Sir William's hypothesis that I am a true seer who has caught a confused glimpse of the same future which Coplestone has seen in more detail. I favour the less dramatic but more likely hypothesis that Coplestone and I are both products of our milieu and our moment. We shared the same present day for some 30 years, and probably acquired much the same understanding of it. Although he was older than I and born into a different class he must have undergone broadly similar educative experiences. He found Darwin's theory of evolution, as I did, and realized with a shock as profound as any religious enlightenment what it implies about the precariousness of man's tenure upon the earth. He came to appreciate, as I have, that the rapid advancement of technology will very soon equip our armies with weapons so powerful that we might easily destroy civilization before learning to curb our primitive impulses. If he and I have visited the Delphic Oracle of the modern imagination and come back with similar prophesies, it is because the Age of Reason has now reached the stage at which secure rational foresight is possible.

"There is, of course, much in Coplestone's vision which is merely idiosyncratic. He knew this, and freely admitted the probability that his vision would be polluted, in the way that all our dreams are polluted, by random imps of perversity. In each and every one of us there is a constant battle being fought between a higher, rational part and a lower, animal part. Coplestone's vision is clearly haunted by a strange darkness which persists in populating his imagined future with phantoms – the phantoms which he calls *vampires*. I do not think that we should take Coplestone's vampires any more literally than we take Polidori's *Vampyre*, or Christina Rossetti's goblins. They are, I think, *symbols*: symbols of something which lies within us, but which we feel, in concert with the prudery of our times, that we ought to exorcize or deny.

"I believe that Coplestone protests far too much when he insists that his overmen are not men at all, but some other species which has lived since the dawn of time among men, mimicking them in order to prey upon them. We must look for the source of Coplestone's imaginary vampires in the blood which is supposedly their nourishment: the blood which carries the chemical messengers which are the bases of our feelings, our desires and our passions. It is clear, I think, from the tenor of the professor's narrative – especially in the final part, which is surely the product of a purely subjective delirium – that he could not quite escape the essential truth. Despite all his attempts to distance himself, he ended up identifying with the vampires, seeing as they saw and feeling as they felt.

What he saw in that final vision is far more closely related to his private mental life than to any meaningful picture of what the future could or will be like. The heavy emphasis on the idea of infection proves that, to my mind, beyond the shadow of a doubt.

"In brief, I think that there may be a little truth in the earlier phases of Coplestone's story, but I cannot believe that it arrived there by any occult means, and I do not think that the story has any real relevance to the question of whether the future which will come to be is already destined, or merely contingent on decisions and discoveries we might or might not make."

It was an impressive speech, in its way, and I was glad to hear it. I suspected that it would set a sober and sententious tone for what would follow, and might well draw the entire discussion into a blind alley. I had not the slightest objection to such a deflection.

"Thank you," said the doctor. "Mr Shiel, would you like to comment on what your friend has said?"

The curly-haired man hesitated before replying. His experience, I think, had been a little closer to mine than to his friend's. He had felt the same shock, the same thrill... but he was *young*, and confused. He did not know as yet how far to trust the wisdom of his soul.

"It might easily take half a lifetime," he said eventually, "fully to digest the implications of what we have heard these last two nights. In broad terms, Wells is probably right. We cannot doubt that Coplestone really experienced these things, and we must be prepared to consider, if only as an hypothesis, that there is *some* truth in his vision. It does seem probable that the vampires of his dream are not what Coplestone took them to be... but I wonder whether it might not be the case that the final vision was the *most* rather than the least truthful: the one *least* confused by the impish froth of pure dream. I wonder whether that incredibly hectic and vivid vision might not have been the grasping of the very essence of evolutionary process and universal destiny..."

He was warming to his task now. "If there is a lesson to be learned from this dream," he went on, "it is a lesson in the politics of evolution, and the irresistibility of progress. If there is a revelation in it – and I am prepared to entertain the notion that the mind of God is occasionally reflected in the tinier thoughts of man – it is a revelation which speaks to us of the way in which life is forever destined to *climb* towards dizzy heights of enlightenment. The arrogance which informed men that they were at the centre of creation, that the earth and the universe entire had been made for them, is something which must now be put away with other childish things; we must realize and understand that there will indeed be *overmen* whose task it will be to take up the torch of progress when our imperfections lead us to exhaustion. We should not see this supersession as a terrible thing, but as a confirmation of the fact that our sojourn upon this earth has not been in vain, and that the gift of our blood – which is surely symbolic of the heritage which we shall pass on to our successors – is well worth the giving. The fact that our species is, indeed, doomed to disappear should delight us rather than disappoint us, once we understand that we are to give way to another which is better and bolder, which will build so magnificently on foundations that we have laid as to become godlike in ambition and achievement.

"If what we have heard is a dream and only a dream, then I

will say this: men who can dream such dreams are already overmen in embryo. To the extent that the future is not predestined it must be built out of the dreams of the present; if men were not capable of dreaming such dreams as this they would be unable to produce futures of any kind akin to that provisioned here, and that would be a tragedy. Let us not worry unduly as to the exact truth or falsehood of this particular vision; let us be profoundly glad that a man has proved himself capable of dreaming thus, and let us hope that we ourselves might not be incapable of similar triumphs."

I saw one or two of the others – including Wilde – smile indulgently at Shiel's wild enthusiasm, but Sherlock Holmes was the only one whose eyes were raised impatiently to heaven.

It was Crookes who took up the thread. "I am naturally disappointed," he said gravely, "that the insights into the nature and possible applications of electricity which Coplestone hoped to offer us have not materialized, but I have more than one field of scientific interest, and Coplestone's adventure bears on the other as well. We are on the threshold of a new era of discovery in the science of apparitions and communication with the spirits of the dead, and what Coplestone has achieved is yet another proof of the reality of apparitions. If his story is to be taken seriously – and I cannot doubt its sincerity, although its conclusion may be no more than a delirious episode – then the intriguing possibility is raised that at least some apparitions may be what Coplestone calls *time-shadows* rather than shades of the departed, and it may well be that some of the confusion which presently arises in the course of communication with what are assumed to be spirits is accountable in these terms. I would like to bring Coplestone's story to the attention of my colleagues in the Society for Psychical Research, some of whom may be better qualified than I to speculate about the possible reality of vampires. Tesla, of course, will not agree with me..."

This was an unwise inclusion in what might have been a much longer discourse. Tesla, as Sir William had anticipated, did *not* agree, and wanted to make his disagreement clear. "It'd take more than a few suggestions about the nature of ghosts to recompense *me* for the loss of Coplestone's supposed discoveries in electrical science," he said. "And when a promise like that is made and not fulfilled, an American begins to smell hokum. I know all about your English regard for the word of a gentleman, but it seems to me that this whole thing is a straightforward hoax, or a tissue of fantasies generated by monomania. Coplestone exaggerated his understanding of Darwin's theory of evolution if he couldn't see that any ability to see the future, drug-assisted or not, would be so advantageous to any critter that had it that it'd be selected out in no time at all – and yet we're supposed to accept that men, who do have it, will get replaced by vampires, who don't. I guess he intended to get around that with all this shilly-shallying about the future of destiny and the future of contingency, on the grounds that the prophetic gift would only be useful if it actually allowed us to *change* things, but I don't buy it. I think we've been taken for a ride here. I don't know why, but I think we've been fed a pack of lies, just like Mr Wilde here keeps saying."

"I fear," said Wilde, "that my earlier comments may have been open to misinterpretation. When I referred to Coplestone's story as a lie, the word was not intended as an insult. Quite the contrary – the modern world's dedication to vulgar truth is something I deeply regret, not because I have any-

thing against the truth, but because the modern notion of truth has become so very narrow. The modern obsession with petty facts and meaningless measurements distresses me almost as much as the triviality of modern mendacity – for I would never dignify the banal deceptions of politicians and advertising men by calling them *lies*.

"Lies, to my mind, are grandiose products of the imagination, which enlarge the truth rather than diminishing it. When I describe Coppelstone's experience as a lie I mean to imply what he attempted to convey by speaking of it as a vision or a hallucination, admitting its inevitable pollution by the hopes and fears hidden in the recesses of his inmost soul. Even if it had been a lie in the sense of being a manifest fiction – like the story which Mr Wells has described to us – I would argue alongside Mr Shiel that it might nevertheless constitute a veritable fount of wisdom. Let us not occupy ourselves with the vulgar matter of whether Coppelstone's account is false in any trivial sense – rather let us concentrate on what it has to teach us because and in spite of the fact that it is a lie of unparalleled boldness and magnificence.

"What Coppelstone tells us, in brief, is that the universe in which we live is a more wonderful place than our half-blind senses and meagre minds can easily perceive or imagine. That is surely true – or, at any rate, we ought to hope fervently that it might be. He informs us, too, that we should not be overly vain about the accomplishments of mankind, which might easily evaporate in a reckless moment in order that we may give way to a better species, the fact of whose supersession would naturally embody both our most intimate fears and our most daring ambitions. That too is true – or, again, we should certainly hope so. Perhaps most importantly of all, Coppelstone tells us that we are capable, each and every one of us, of adventures of the mind far bolder than any we have so far dared to undertake, and that however dangerous or confusing such adventures may turn out to be, the brave man will not shirk them. Can anyone, even for a moment, doubt the truth of *that* – or doubt, at any rate, that they ought to wish with all their hearts that it *might* be true?"

I looked around. There seemed to be some who did doubt it.

"I could not have put it better, Oscar," I said, drily. I did my best to sound flippant and ironic. "Indeed, *no one* could have put it better. There is not a word to add."

Even Wilde – whose appetite for flattery was insatiable – frowned a little, as if to say that he had meant what he said more seriously than my casual endorsement implied.

Holmes was still impatient to turn the discussion towards matters of his own concern. "I have a keener appetite than Mr Wilde for the separation of the improbable from the impossible," he said. "For myself, I am less interested in the possibility that Coppelstone's story may contain hints about the actual shape of the far future than the probability that it contained clues as to a motive for robbery. We know that Coppelstone intended to offer all of us the opportunity of using his drug to put his story to the proof – and we know that someone has taken the trouble to reserve that privilege entirely to himself. But what motive could possibly have impelled anyone to do such a thing? If Sir William or Tesla really believed that the drug might disclose new insights in electrical science one of them might have thought it worthwhile monopolizing the advantage, but they have not been given adequate grounds for believing that. If Wells or Shiel felt that the drug might be an invaluable aid to the furtherance of their budding literary careers, they might have thought it worthwhile to take

possession of the formula, but like Wilde they surely have confidence enough in their own powers of invention."

"Whereas I," I put in smoothly, "have no conceivable motive at all. It is clear, therefore, that it was Holmes who picked his friend's pocket, and Holmes who removed the vial while Watson was busy with Coppelstone's corpse. It only remains for Holmes to tell us why on earth he did it!"

There was a ripple of laughter, not because what I had said was hilarious, but because everyone was embarrassed by Holmes' dogged insistence that a crime had been committed and that someone seated at the table must therefore be a blackguard. The detective's scowl deepened, but he must have known that had he charged me with the theft the laughter would have increased. Even so, I was grateful that we were at that moment interrupted, when Coppelstone's manservant brought in a message which he gave to the doctor.

"It is a report of the *post-mortem* examination," Watson said, when he had scanned it. "Coppelstone's death was due to the general deterioration of his vital organs caused by long use of certain poisonous compounds. There was no evidence of any ingestion of poison within the last 24 hours. There is a separate note to the effect that in the absence of any evidence of breaking and entering, Scotland Yard will not be mounting an investigation of the missing vial. The matter is officially closed..." He trailed off, leaving something unsaid.

"It may be officially closed," said Holmes darkly, "but it is not ended."

It was Crookes who took it upon himself to prompt the doctor, although I too had guessed what it was that had perplexed him.

"How great was the deficit?" asked the man of science.

Watson looked up, clearly embarrassed.

"Come now," said Crookes. "The doctors at King's may not have considered the matter significant – after all, the weight of a body is a simple datum, if you have nothing with which to compare it – but *you* have been weighing Coppelstone before and after his experiments for some little while. *How much weight had Coppelstone's corpse lost?*"

"About three stones," said the doctor, with a sigh.

"Death is not the end," said Crookes, as though he were quoting the final line of a mathematical proof. "This we know."

"But he did not drink the contents of the vial," the doctor said. "The *post mortem* confirms that."

"Perhaps," said Crookes, "he no longer needed the drug, once he had learnt the art of astral projection." "You aren't saying, I hope, that he might *come back?*" said Tesla.

Crookes shook his grizzled head. "He opined that the body which a timeshadow left behind would not survive mortal damage to the timeshadow – but it is possible, is it not, that a timeshadow might survive the death of the body? It is, I think, certain that a feebler phantom invariably does. Is it possible that whatever Coppelstone encountered in the farther reaches of his expedition *could* reach back to his point of origin, not to destroy but to *save* him? Perhaps, in the end, Coppelstone overcame his fear of attack, and found himself able to accept the invitation which the world into which he went made to him."

"This is madness," said Tesla.

"This exchange of views does not seem to be getting us anywhere," said Holmes acidly.

"You are right," said Wilde. "Perhaps we expect too much of reasoned discussion – or of our own ability to make use of it."

We are only human, after all. Each of us is locked within his own theories, imprisoned by his own prejudices. There can be no proof of anything that we have heard. Even if we still had the drug, and one of us the courage to use it, there would be no proof. It is, and must remain, a rough-hewn but nevertheless brilliant lie. Coplestone might have done well to remember the story of Cassandra – the wise parable which reminds us that prophets, no matter how accurate they may be, can *never* command belief. Mr Holmes, do you have a specific charge to bring against one of us, or may we go?"

"I have no charge to bring, *at present*," said Holmes. "But you may be sure that the matter of the formula and the vial will not be forgotten."

I offered the detective and the doctor a lift in my carriage, but Holmes declined. I was not surprised. I suspected that I had not seen the last of Mr Holmes, and that when we met again it would not be as friends.

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The inevitable came to pass some 72 hours later, when I returned to the house which I had rented in a quiet *cul-de-sac* off the Edgware Road. Holmes must have lain in wait for some considerable time. He did not show himself immediately, but waited until the carriage had been driven round into the mews. As I set down my burden in order to bring out my keys he called my name from the bottom of the flight of steps which led up to the front door. I turned to confront him.

"How pleasant to see you again, Mr Holmes," I murmured.

"The pleasure is mutual," he assured me, with even greater insincerity. "I apologize for the lateness of the hour. May I help you with your case?"

"No thank you," I said. "Its contents are delicate." "I presume that it contains the last of the ingredients required to make up Coplestone's formula," he said.

I smiled wanly. I opened the door before turning to meet his gaze again. "Enter freely," I said politely, "of your own will."

When our coats and hats were hung up I conducted him into the sitting-room. The fire had burned low, there being no servant in the house to maintain it; when I had lit the candles I added more wood, and stirred it with the poker until the

embers flared. I offered Holmes the armchair to the right of the hearth and went to the sideboard where there was a decanter of whisky.

"Would you like a drink?" I asked. "I have no liking for alcohol myself, but I keep a little for my guests."

"I think not," he said. Apparently he suspected that I might poison him, although my only desire was to help him to relax. Lest that should prove impossible, though – I did not know how seriously to take his reputation as a man with a preternaturally sharp mind – I opened the right-hand drawer of the sideboard and took out the gun which rested there. When I turned with it in my hand, I saw that Holmes had a gun of his own. He was touching his chin lightly with the barrel.

"What you have there," he observed, "is an antique duelling pistol, which can only fire one shot. What I have here is Dr Watson's old army revolver, which is a more accurate weapon by far and is fully loaded with six bullets. I think I have the advantage, don't you?"

"Can you be fully confident of the efficacy of *any* gun, Mr Holmes?" I asked him mockingly. Have you spoken to Vambéry about me?"

"The professor is in Budapest," Holmes replied, "But I spoke to someone who was at the Beefsteak Club five years ago, when Vambéry entertained the party with bloodcurdling tales of the vampires of Eastern Europe."

"Then you must know that garlic and a crucifix are better tools than a pistol to keep a

vampire at bay. Have you a sharpened wooden stake about you, perchance? We have quite a while to wait until dawn, I fear. I suppose you will be anxious until you see that I will not vanish away, nor shrivel to dust beneath the rays of the sun."

"You rarely go out by day," he said off-handedly. "That much I have ascertained."

I sat down, not more than eight feet away from him. I did not point my gun at him, nor did he point his at me. I knew that it would be some time before he relaxed sufficiently to be mesmerized, but the hour was late and his chair was comfortable.

"My skin and eyes are extraordinarily sensitive to sunlight,"



"I THINK I HAVE THE ADVANTAGE"

I told him. "London's grey pall is far less of a menace than the bluer skies of Italy or Greece, but my habits were formed in brighter climes and London's night-life is so much more interesting than its daylight routines."

He looked at the candles on the mantelpiece. "Even indoors," he observed, "you seem to like gentle light. Would you prefer it, perhaps, if the candle-flames burned violet?"

"You seem confused as to which kind of vampire I might be," I observed.

"There is no such thing as a vampire," he informed me. "I am not a superstitious man, Count Lugard. Still, it would be interesting to hear *your* version of Arminius Vambery's story – and your reasons for stealing Copplestone's formula from Dr Watson's coat while he was clumsily boarding your carriage."

"Where is the good doctor?" I asked. "According to his accounts of your adventures you rarely go anywhere without him – except, of course, to that sanatorium in Switzerland to which you retired a little while ago for a rest cure. How are your nerves now, Mr Holmes?"

"Copplestone's manservant confessed his misdemeanour," Holmes said, blithely ignoring the fact that we were talking at cross-purposes. "I know that the girl was in the house, and that she had the opportunity to take the vial. She was seen talking to a person of your description – and she has *not* been seen in Piccadilly for three days. The other ladies of the night thought that odd, given that she had stuck so religiously to her pitch for some weeks previously, regardless of the winter cold. On the lookout for someone, they said. Someone special."

"What do you suppose I have done with her?" I asked lightly. "Do you think she scratches even now at the lid of her coffin, desperate to escape in order that she might slake her hunger for human blood?"

"What *have* you done with her, *Monsieur le Comte*?" He spoke the phrase as if it were the deadliest of insults.

"Much as I did with Vambery's daughter," I muttered, tiring of the game. "No more and no less. I can tell you where to find her, if you really want to, but she would not tell you anything about the vial if she could."

"But you *do* have the vial," he said, "do you not?"

"Arminius Vambery is quite mad," I said quietly. "You must have realized that. On all subjects but one he plays the *savant* to perfection, and without dissimulation, but in regard to that one subject he is the victim of a terrible delusion. If only he were not so anxious to talk about it to anyone and everyone... but that is the form and fabric of his madness. The preposterousness of the story does not detract from its fascination as a tale, more's the pity. As Oscar would doubtless observe, a vivid lie is so much more memorable than a dull and naked truth."

"It is the dull and naked truth," he assured me, "that I have come here tonight to ascertain."

"Very well," I said. "I will tell you the dull and naked truth. I debauched Vambery's youngest daughter. I used her as I had used many others. It was heartless, perhaps cruel – but I have always been a villain, by instinct and by inclination. I seduced the girl, in a spirit which had naught to do with love. Later, I regretted it very bitterly, but I claim no credit for that; I know that it cannot excuse me. Vambery swore revenge, and would have called me out had he any competence with sword or pistol – but he had naught but the mind and sinews of a professor of languages, and the capacity for obsession which academic study requires and rewards. The seduction of his daughter drove him half-mad; her suicide completed the process. He could not fight me, so he found other ways to strike

out at me. Alas, I would far rather he had aimed a bullet at my heart than do to me what he has done these last ten years.

"The dull and naked truth is that my name really is Lugard; the notion that I obtained it by reversing the name Dragul is Vambery's fantasy, as is the absurd proposition that I am the reincarnation of Vlad Dragul, called Tepes or the Impaler, whose name is usually Latinized as Dracul and sometimes rendered Dracula – 'son of Dracul' – in order to distinguish him from his like-named father. It is also Vambery's fantasy that I am one of the undead, who subsists by drinking human blood, and that what I did to his daughter was unnatural and accomplished by magic. The dull and naked truth is that what I did to his daughter was *entirely* natural, even if a little of the mesmerist's art was employed in its accomplishment. No one, it is said, can be persuaded even by mesmerism to do anything which flatly contradicts her own will – but the professor was quite unable to accept that, and felt compelled to invent an alternative account which absolved his beloved child from *all* hint of blame.

"As the late Professor Copplestone scrupulously pointed out to us, a man's vision is ever apt to be polluted, perverted and confused by his hopes, fears and fancies. Vambery made himself vulnerable to fears and fancies of the worst kind, and he has pursued me throughout Europe with dark rumours and direct slanders. He has done his best to ruin my reputation, and to make a demon of me in the eyes of my fellow men. No one believes him, of course – but the lie is so very gaudy, so very *entertaining*, that it is repeated anyway. No one really believes that I am Dragul incarnate, nor that I am a vampire which feeds on the blood of my fellow men... but that does not prevent the whispers and the sly glances, and the universal acceptance of the notion that however I accomplished the feat, I did worse than murder Laura Vambery. Vambery has succeeded, after a fashion, in making a vampire of me in the eyes of my fellow men. His caustic lies have stripped me by degrees of every vestige of the respect that is my due by virtue of birth, wealth and station.

"If Wilde's friend Stoker really is writing a book based in the supposed occult wisdom of Arminius Vambery, I shudder to think what further shadows might be cast upon my life. You ought to sympathize with that, Mr Holmes, as one who has some experience of the way in which a real life may be confused by myth. If it is difficult to live up to a heroic reputation, think how much more difficult it might be to live down a monstrous one!"

He was sitting less rigidly now. As his curiosity was fed, he was possessed by a soothing tranquillity. What a strange being he was!

"In a way," I told him, lowering my voice almost to a whisper, "I wish I *were* a vampire. Then, I could not be hurt by Vambery's lies, and Laura Vambery could have risen from the grave to become my consort. And in my inmost heart, I wish that every word which Copplestone spoke might be true, that all humanity might be doomed and damned, and that *vampires* might inherit the earth, worrying no more about the stupid hatreds of blind, mad men. Alas, I fear that Copplestone may have been no less a victim of his fears and fancies than Arminius Vambery. The dull truth and the dull tragedy, my dear Holmes, is that you are quite right: *there is no such thing as a vampire.*"

"Then why," he said, with what was clearly intended to be devastating simplicity, "did you steal the professor's formula, and the remainder of his drug? Do you hope to make money

selling it?"

"You know better than that, Mr Holmes," I purred. "Do you think my life of leisure is sustained by dealing in opium and absinthe? My wealth needs no such supplementation. It was my villain's instinct which made me steal the vial and the paper; once having concluded that I wanted them, it was the most natural thing in the world for me to take them. For a while, I considered the possibility that the impulse was not entirely my own – that it might have been planted in my soul by one of Copplestone's overmen, reaching back through time to make sure that the secret would not die with him – but you and I know better than to entertain such nonsense."

I knew that I was on safe ground. This was a man whose watchword was *When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however implausible, must be the truth*. That, at least, was the watchword of the doctor's literary invention, and I knew by the haunted expression in his eyes that *this* Holmes was trying desperately to live up to his legend. I, on the other hand, knew perfectly well that if, when one has eliminated the apparently impossible, one is left with something unworthy of consideration, one must re-examine one's assumptions regarding the limits of possibility.

"So you took the vial, although you already had the formula, out of simple dog-in-the-manger selfishness?" he said.

"Of course," I said gently. The man had little understanding of the true wellsprings of human action; he could not have begun to comprehend my motives, because they could not have met his crude standards of rationality. He could not have begun to comprehend what Arminius Vambery's malicious madness and the love for Laura which I had belatedly discovered in my desolate heart had made of me. He did not have imagination enough to see where obsession might lead a man with a soul as dark as mine. Oscar Wilde might have understood, but Wilde was about to set sail for the desert sun with his handsome Judas, leaving me alone and friendless.

"I must ask you to return the formula," said Holmes formally. "You may keep the vial, but the formula was consigned to the care of Dr Watson, and is his by right."

"The written formula no longer exists," I said regretfully. "I have destroyed the paper I took from Watson's jacket."

"I can't believe that," he said – but he said it mechanically, like an automaton. He was mine, now, and I could play him as I wished.

I leaned forward. "You might yet be surprised, Mr Holmes," I said, "by your own capacity for belief."

He was staring at me now, wide-eyed. I did not have to meet his gaze; no true mesmerist requires an awesome stare or a bright and spinning object to captivate the imagination of his victim. As to whether a mesmerized man can be instructed to do something contradictory to his own will... who can know what a man's will might permit, and what it might forbid? I was in a mood to be bold. "Listen to me, Holmes," I said, in a velvet-smooth tone. "Listen to me, and I will tell you the *real* truth..."

I told him, very painstakingly, that everything Arminius Vambery had said about me was true: that I *was* a vampire, and must be destroyed. I told him to return, between one and three hours after dawn, armed with a wooden stake, which he must drive through my beating heart. I told him not to be afraid, because he would find me unconscious and unresisting. I assured him that I would not crumble to dust, but that he would find my body lighter by a least three stones than it

was at present, and that this would be an unmistakable proof of all that I had said.

By the time I finished, he was nearly asleep. It was apparent to me that his rest cure had been terminated too early. I was able to take the gun from his uncannily steady hand. I checked the chambers; it was fully loaded. I put it back in his hand, and gently roused him from his trance.

"Go now," I told him, gently. "Come back after dawn. You know what you must do."

He looked at me in bewilderment. For a few moments he did not know where he was or why. He put the gun away, but I had to help him with his coat and hat. When I opened the door for him, he departed meekly – but he recovered himself sufficiently as he descended the steps to turn and face me, and say: "This matter is not finished, Count Lugard. Depend on it."

"I do," I assured him, as I raised my hand in a salute of farewell. I watched him from the doorway while he disappeared into the shadows of the night. There were still three hours and more until dawn.

I collected my case, took a candle from the sitting-room, and went down into the cellars of the house.

Laura lay in her coffin, perfectly at peace. Her wan face was lustrously clear and her dark eyes seemed almost luminous. The small star-like mark on the cheek beneath her left eye stood out very clearly. Her lovely hair was neatly gathered about her finely-chiselled features.

"Soon," I whispered. "Soon, my love!"

She did not wake while I did my work; she might as well have been truly dead. Nor did she wake when I pricked her arm with the needle, injecting the drug into her arm.

"Never fear, my love," I said. "There is a better world for such as you and I, and a path which might lead us there, hand in hand. I have laid my last nightmare, played my last trick, and the time is come for expiation and redemption. I have found my destiny, and it is within my grasp."

I found that I was weeping, and wiped the tears from my eyes with my sleeve. How could any man ever have thought that I was heartless? How could any man ever have condemned me as a monster, forever doomed to remain outside the human community?

I filled the syringe again. I knew that no one else would ever be able to use Copplestone's elixir, unless the world of men were to produce another man with his peculiar fascinations – and refrained, meanwhile, from obliterating the ancient but precarious wisdom of the tribesmen he had visited. No one else could ever follow us into that glorious world where violent and vapid mankind was naught but a myth and a memory.

Before taking my appointed station and injecting the drug into my own arm I reached out to touch the cold forehead of the lovely victim of my lust. I wanted to feel the faint warmth of her forgiveness before I escorted her into the misty reaches of the worlds beyond the world.

"We leave nothing behind but a sunless world of dismal madmen," I told her softly. "We are bound for the vivid and effulgent future, when we shall revel and rejoice in the hunger and ecstasy of vampires."

Brian Stableford and his wife Jane live in Reading, Berkshire, with an Aga cooker, no pets, and the most amazing collection of sf/fantasy books.

Popocatapetl (Urinating Dog)

John Clute

Here is a Story. It is not a tale of great consequence, though it embodies in small compass something of the quiet glamour of harmony one feels on completing the title story in *The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye: Five Fairy Stories* (Chatto & Windus, £9.99) by A. S. Byatt, author of *Possession* (1990) and *Angels and Insects* (collection, 1992; reviewed in *Interzone* 68). Here is the Story. A week or so ago, I purchased some books of sf and fantasy interest. Most of them were the normal sort of thing, by known writers. One – *The Duchess of Popocatapetl* (1939) by W. J. Turner – was not, and as a consequence it sat on my table awaiting some orienteering insight that might fix it in my mind, for I had bothered to remember no more about Turner than that he'd written a couple of pamphlet-length poems which incorporated elements of the fantastic. (*The Duchess of Popocatapetl* seems to be a narrative, of a kind not infrequently encountered between 1900 and World War Two, in which a fantasy framework is woven, with gentlemanly vacuity, around a mildly satirical tale about modern England; but that is another story.) So it sat on my table, in its attractive 1930s dustwrapper signed EB, awaiting its frame.

A friend, knowledgeable in books of this sort, came by, and said, O dear, W. J. Turner. But he had not, in fact, ever encountered the title, and sat down to examine it. There's something interesting – he said – about the cover. And something in my own subconscious, which must have been mulling over that EB, welled up and I said, Edward Bawden. Which it turned out to be. But that's not the story. Later the same day, another friend came by, a somewhat older man, an Australian named Keith who has lived in England for many years, and he said, Ah, W. J. Turner. I've read *Blow For Balloons*, you know.

I did not know the book. It turned out that Turner was an Australian who had lived much of his life in England, and that *Blow for Balloons* was the second volume of a trilogy – decorously filigreed with fantasy elements – of which *Duchess* was the conclusion. The only thing he's remembered for – said Keith – is, of course, the Popocatapetl poem. Only worthwhile thing he ever wrote. Essence of romance. It transported me when I was young. Not in here, though, he said, having examined *The Duchess*.

I had never heard of the poem. The next day I returned to Byatt's *The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye*, the title story of which is an eloquently nested sequence of stories within stories, set within a late-20th-century frame. The protagonist is a woman in her mid-50s, a narratologist whose husband has left her for a younger woman, but who has found herself suddenly at peace and liberated – as though she had entered a new story – by the fact of his departure. She travels to Turkey, and after several stories have been interwoven into the increasingly elated structure

fails to recognize that her golden boy psychopomp – whose name is Tadzio – closely resembles Tadzio, the golden boy psychopomp who conveys Aschenbach into the realm of death in Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice* (1913). But that's not *this* Story. She goes on to tell the djinn that, one day, she discovered a poem "which said how it was, to live in his company," the company of the psychopomp. She then recites the poem, without giving the name of the author, as though we (who are reading the story of the stories she is telling) should recognize it immediately. It begins:

*When I was but thirteen or so
I went into a golden land,
Chimborazo, Cotopaxi
Took me by the hand.
My father died, my brother too,
They passed like fleeting dreams.
I stood where Popocatapetl
In the sunlight gleams.*

And the skin on the back of my own 1994 neck prickled, as though a psychopomp had breathed into my ear. Once upon a time, which is exactly how "The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye" begins: "Once upon a time, when men and women hurled through the air on metal wings, when they wore webbed feet and walked on the bottom of the sea, learning the speech of whales..."

The narratologist's poem is, of course, W. J. Turner's "Romance," the only poetry by him that survives in Helen Gardner's *The New Oxford Book of English Verse* (1972), though W. B. Yeats – very eccentrically, because most of Turner's work is De La Mare and water – gives him a lot of space in *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse 1892-1935* (1936). It is precisely the right kind of poem to have transfixed Byatt's narratologist at the time – nearing 1950 and the epoch of St Trinians – when she'd have been in her teens and peculiarly prone to the wan mexicali-chinoiserie of its vision of the Thresholdry of transcendence. And her memories of the poem – 40 years later in Ankara, two pages before she makes her second wish, which is to have the djinn love her (i.e. fuck her thresholds till she's all inside outside) – have some of the same recuperative effect as the web of stories she hears and tells. Though it



of the frame tale, she buys a "flask with a high neck," of the kind known as nightingale's eye. It contains, of course, a djinn. The remainder of the long frame tale follows the protagonist as she astutely makes three wishes. In one of her conversations with the djinn, she tells him stories about the Imaginary Friends she had created as a child. One concerns a girl who disguises herself as a boy. A second, featuring a psychopomp figure who stays by her and walks in her dreams, lacks overt narratological interest, though it seems remarkable that the protagonist explicitly

seems quiet in the telling. "The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye" is in fact a densely woven, intricately knotted Safety Net of Story. It reads like jewels mapping the back of a magic frog. And the good life the narratologist crafts from the Net, and from the Three Wishes she has been granted, is in the end (where it belongs) the kind of good life fantasy grants. For fantasy ascends the Fall. It leaves you in the fount, where Once and After are the one thing.

The other stories assembled in *The Djinn* – two of them extracted from *Possession* – convey a similar sense of elated prudence.

It is possible to detect, in the crapulous literary pages of the UK quality press, an exceedingly gingerly sense that Terry Pratchett must be treated with *some kind of respect*, though just how to get intimate enough with the Discworld to accomplish this, while managing not to breathe the air of the ghetto, is clearly something of a problem. So – in *The Guardian* and elsewhere – reviews have appeared of *Interesting Times* (Gollancz, £14.99) which convey a sense while it's all right to praise Pratchett down your nose, it should also be kept in mind that comedy is so easy to write it's not really worth taking the time to describe any comedy in particular, and that Terry Pratchett – who writes successful comedies set in a fantasy environment – must therefore be a comedy writer *doubly dumb*, the sort of idiot savant you'd only crush by attempting to analyse, and in any case to try to describe his work in terms that grant it conscious meaning is frankly a bit like taking a sledgehammer to crush a pea.

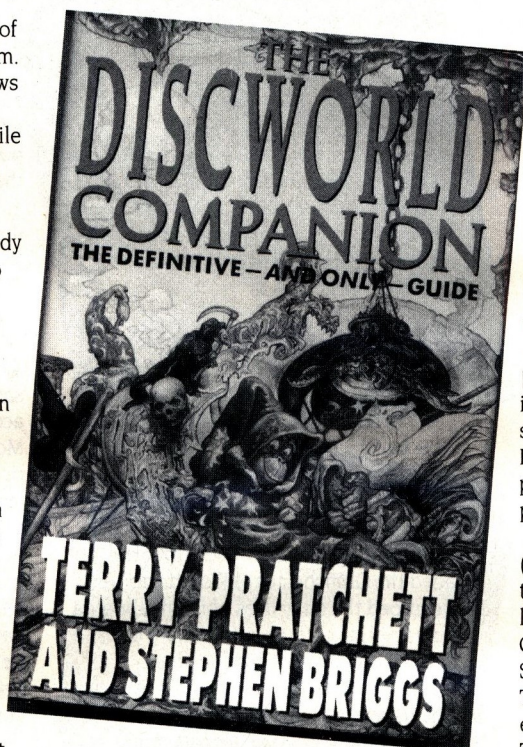
The fact that Pratchett is successful in an environment – fantasy – usually fatal to the comic impulse – which generally requires buoyed props to operate properly, props (that is) whose bottoms are ballasted by some hint that they represent real things operating, and bouncing back, within a falsifiable real world – is ignored. The *Guardian* reviewer *does* say – hyperbolic praise being a form of condescension – that Pratchett constructs better than Dickens, but no details in substantiation of this peculiar claim penetrate the Chestertonian stupor of the utterance, nor is it in the event conspicuously wise to make high claims for the structure of *Interesting Times*, which is one of Pratchett's less through-composed works. So perhaps we should slip away from the high table, back to the world.

Interesting Times: Lord Hong, wicked grand vizier to the emperor of the Counterweight Continent, in an elaborate manoeuvre to ensure his own succession to the throne, arranges for Rincewind – for his appearances in earlier Discworld volumes, please see *The Discworld Companion* (Gollancz, £14.99) by Stephen Briggs and Pratchett, which is extremely thorough and calm and *decent* about its only superficially silly task of providing an alphabetical guide to a nested farrago of comic novels – to be sent from Ankh-Morpork to help foment a rebellion which will certainly end in tears, you bet, because Rincewind is so incompetent he is incapable of spelling wizard correctly; and

therefore, in the chaos, Lord Hong will be able to take over. It is, in other words, a precarious clatter of a plot-pretex, and the outcome depends, more than usual in recent Pratchett, on the jokes.

These – believe it or not (urinating dog) – are as good as ever (urinating dog, urinating dog). The swipes at Chinese civilization (the Counterweight Continent being essentially an analogue of China) are marginally more pious than seems entirely wise, however, just slightly *bullying* in a manner also more common to the later, burden-of-office-ridden Pratchett. Rincewind himself gains some solidity as the tale advances – reminding one of the author's increasing tendency to sift gravitas down upon his favoured protagonists till they stand alone after the book has crumbled, ready to enter the next intact.

Cohen the Barbarian, who also



appears in *Interesting Times*, is granted the same increased density of pixel.

It is perhaps the case that one always wants the very best, another *Small Gods*, or *Men at Arms*, perhaps; and *Interesting Times* does not quite rank with either. But the passage-work remains astonishingly deft, and the timing of the humour makes you think you're reading music, full score. Which is enough for the month.

A short note. In *Arthur Machen & Montgomery Evans: Letters of a Literary Friendship, 1923-1947* (Kent State University Press, \$26), Sue Strong Hassler and Donald M. Hassler have put together, with transparent affection, aspects of the record of a friendship between Machen in his old age and a young American (1901-1954) who outlived him only a few years, and who assiduously assembled the letters here printed (and other material made use of by the Hasslers in annotating their edition).

It might be argued that Machen – who had become something of a mumpsimus in the

deranging aftermath of the Great War, which had (after all) destroyed the world he'd spent his best years banging around in – is not best served by so assiduous a presentation of one narrow correspondence, especially when he was, as the Hasslers make clear, an extremely voluminous letter-writer. It is not entirely clear, given a sense that he corresponded copiously with many people, just how genuinely intimate he was with Evans, a rich young man who had a great amount to gain from closeness to the jovial, avuncular, financially strapped, elder icon: Evans certainly gained a kind of father, vicarious fame (he was himself insignificant as a writer), and (one guesses) ample confirmation of his own slightly unsavory conservatism (there is something not entirely pleasant about the few letters from Evans that the Hasslers print).

Machen himself comes across as a kind of J. B. Morton without a Beachcomber mask to spit into, but increasingly tolerable as the rhythm of his letters becomes more relaxed; and it is not really his fault that he survived so long into the lunar reaches of this century, which was not his. The Hasslers have done a good and deeply sympathetic job of annotating, illustrating, explaining the life and the milieu, though they have sometimes seemed slightly adrift in their fixing of the UK context. Machen (for instance) writes Evans on 8th February 1929, saying he awaits "the Kegan Paul book [which Evans is sending him] with great interest." The Hasslers' footnote at this point says only that "Kegan Paul was a partner in Routledge & Kegan Paul, a firm which pioneered the publishing of inexpensive, popular novels."

Which scumbles matters a bit. Kegan Paul (1828-1902) was an eminent publisher, but of the previous century; the C. Kegan Paul & Co list included writers like Burkhardt, Dowden, Gosse, Lang, Vernon Lee, Robert Louis Stevenson, John Addington Symonds and Tennyson; the firm he founded, which eventually became Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co, didn't in fact amalgamate with George Routledge & Sons – which had in the 19th century indeed specialized in cheap editions, though not exclusively – until the 1940s. Moreover, the whole point of Machen's reference to Kegan Paul is left out: for it was Kegan Paul that had published Evans's only book, *Prodigal Sons: or, The Future of Caste*, in 1928, in their *Psyche Miniatures* series, and it was undoubtedly that volume which Evans was sending to Machen. By referring – on another page – solely to an earlier magazine appearance of this text, giving the impression they're unaware of its appearance in volume form, the Hasslers do rather blur the focus.

This is perhaps an inevitable consequence of editing from afar. The important point of a book like this, however, is its presentation of the raw material it is bringing into the light; and in this the Hasslers' editorial work seems exemplary, their presentation full, their affection persuasive. It is a handsome volume. And it opens doors where the map had been blank. It brings light.

John Clute

A World of Their Own

Chris Gilmore

This month's offerings all show obvious defects, and the greater the book's potential, the more deplorable they are. In the case of *The Mortmere Stories* by Christopher Isherwood and Edward Upward (Enitharmon, £7.99) the defects are nothing less than tragic.

The stories were written by Isherwood and Upward in their Cambridge days, and were once far more numerous and complete than they are now; but unfortunately they were well ahead of their time, both in subject-matter and approach. Only one (by Upward) was published in Isherwood's lifetime, while the rest were allowed to moulder away, or were intentionally destroyed by Upward in one or other of his fits of melancholy. Rather like the Brontë sisters, the two invented a world of their own, which they mapped out and peopled with some care; then they created stories about it, for their own delectation. Unlike the Brontës, Ish and Up were a couple of well-heeled, hard-edged and sexually ambiguous young men, so they probably had *samizdat* circulation in Bloomsbury half in mind as well. Alas that the photocopiers of those distant days were so rare and so cumbersome! There seems to be no "wild copy" from which the fragments can be re-assembled and the lost tales recovered. What this book describes as "stories" are in most cases mere openings, hinting that frenetically decadent capers will be cut two or three pages in, but offering nothing in the end. It's a great pity, as the few which are (more or less) complete are inventive in a way that Saki might have envied, displaying an alienated cynicism to which he could only have aspired, and which is perhaps only accessible to the very young and quite unscarred.

Most date from the 1920s, but Upward's final solo effort, from 1943, plays a cruel spotlight on his intellectual decline. The viewpoint has degenerated from *jeunesse dorée* to concerned Fabian socialist. With surviving author and work alike, the effect is a bit like contemplating a battered marble torso and some fragments of limbs, and reflecting that there but for Islam would be a group by Praxiteles.

The Mortmere of the title is a village where strange people live and very strange things happen. The laws of cause and effect operate sporadically and human motivation may be shamelessly sordid or murkily secret, but seldom ranges between. There's an implicit agreement to pay lip-service to the proprieties, but the secret is too widely shared to be worth keeping, so that this sort

of thing breaks out, especially when Miss Belmare is in good voice:

"I hope I'm not old-fashioned," she was saying, "but I've no sort of use for these bloody lesbians. I believe in girls being able to give a man a bloody good clean straight fuck, and no nonsense. I hope you're with me there, even if you do wear collars fit for a eunuch."

Welken [the vicar], smiling courteously, mumbled assent.

Or this:

Miss Belmare, who was Poker champion of the village and very careful of her savings, had formed the untidy habit of reckoning accounts with the point of a sharp trowel on any available blank surface. Thus, beneath such affecting inscriptions as:

"To recall Martha Parfitt
midwife -
accidentally conceived, Michaelmas, 1761
totally putrescent, Palm Sunday, 1906.
'God touched her and she came.'" -
one found scrawled:

"Stinking Charlie owes me eleven and eight pence.

Owe Snakes arse twelve shillings."

The general effect is as if fiends from Hell had invaded the Granchester of Rupert Brooke and usurped the daily lives of its inhabitants - come to think of it, who lives there now?

I don't normally recommend share-cropping, but as Ish is dead and Up is over 90, the fragments must be fair game - if anyone out there is capable of sustaining their best standard. The ideal posthumous third collaborator should combine the qualities of Michael Moorcock c. 1972 (*The English Assassin*) and R. A. Lafferty c. 1969 (*Fourth Mansions*). If you reckon you can cut that grade of mustard, buy this book for business; the rest of you should buy it for the elegant pleasure it can still afford.

One effect of fashion on genre fiction is to produce hybrids. At present vampire books are high fashion, and so are "realistic" cop novels about the pursuit of serial killers: hence, logically enough, *Love Bite* by Sherry Gottlieb (Warner, £4.99), which recounts such a pursuit from the viewpoints of both parties.

As often happens (particularly in books by Lawrence Sanders, whose influence on Gottlieb is strong) the killer, Rusty Cadigan, is much the more interesting and excites more sympathy. She is genuinely talented as a photographer, her search for someone to love who can love her in return has pathos and most of her victims are taken from among the many categories that society

would be better without. By contrast the cops, even the principal cop Jace Levy, live narrow, sordid lives; their conversation is humdrum, their neuroses banal - *Love Bite* is a book to bring out the snob in anyone, which is why it works as well as it does. One admits intellectually that what Rusty is doing is monstrous and must be stopped, but hopes she gets away with it. Frank Herbert worked much the same trick in *Hellstrom's Hive*, and if this much slighter book is less effective in its own terms, it's because the police-procedural mode hasn't quite digested the fantasy.

Vampires can be creatures out of erotic dream/nightmare (Freda Warrington, Anne Rice), or played for grim laughs (Anne Billson) or rationalized in hard sf terms (Dan Simmons). Gottlieb falls between all three stools, with some mediocre sex-writing and a discourse about the development of poison sacs in the neophyte vampire which fails to account for their invisibility in mirrors. Moreover, in order to relate the narrative to our own world, she includes frequent and intrusive references to the big news events of the day. These seem to proceed in real time with the book's composition, and include the great fire of Hollywood and the Thomson-Hill hearings (Gottlieb is strongly pro-Hill). Other enthusiasms which she is eager to share with her public are for the Grateful Dead and Ray Bradbury, who gets a pointless cameo. I suspect that others of her friends, and herself, also get cameos under altered names. The effect is of a book with commercials, or at least product-placement, and trivializes the story.

But these are minor blemishes. The tension mounts as the police gradually and logically build up a profile of the killer, which comes more and more to resemble Rusty. Will she get away with it? Will Jace realize that she has something unique to offer him specifically, and will the offer corrupt him? All these questions are answered at the climax, but in a disappointingly perfunctory fashion, as Gottlieb is very obviously aware. To cure it she tacks on an artistically indefensible twist in the epilogue, but there's no substitute for making a proper job in the right place.

Apart from hybridization, the arts have always influenced each other. In general the effect is reckoned to be benign, offering scope for more freedom and resonances of greater complexity than would otherwise be available, but when the outside influence is very marked there can be a diminution of identity: one medium descends to the status

of an intermediate state, or appendage. Novelizations, or "books-of-the-film" are rightly regarded as a lower literary form than novels written as such whose film rights have subsequently been sold, but a book written with the film obviously in mind is hardly better.

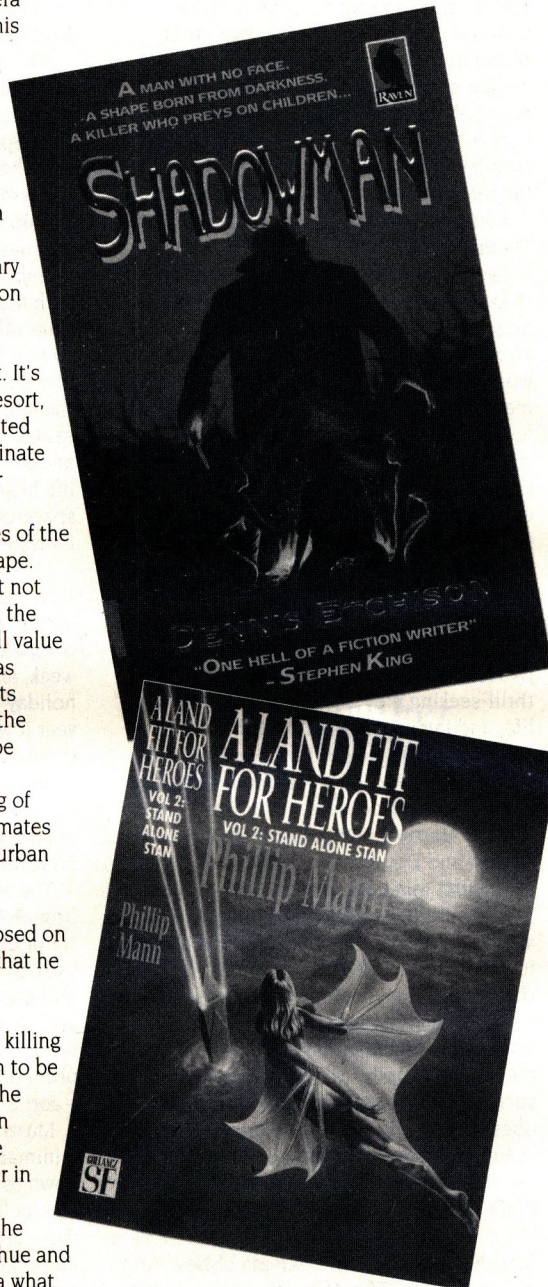
This is especially true of genre horror, where the influence of film is paramount. One can almost read a subtext featuring costings for the sets and sfx, and camera placements for the trickier shots. Dennis Etchison's *Shadowman* (Raven, £4.99) is an extreme example. Just think how your favourite director would handle a crepuscular pursuit/search through an abandoned drive-in cinema, derelict and rat-infested but with the machinery still in place (a bit unlikely, as even Etchison admits) and (of course) with an auxiliary generator so that the lights can come on when they're needed.

Apart from such setpiece scenes, *Shadowman's* dominant mood is angst. It's set in Shadow Bay, a failed pleasure resort, during the off-season. The sea is polluted with red algae; mist, rain and fog dominate the weather; and whenever a character glances at the sky, which is often, it's threatening something worse. The lives of the principal characters reflect the landscape. Jack and Leanne Martin, separated but not yet divorced, both reckon they've seen the best of their lives and got less than full value therefrom. The child they cherished has drowned in the bath, and if either starts another (which seems unlikely, given the chronic depression of both), it won't be together. Other characters include Christopher, a boy living rough; a gang of foul-mouthed pre-adolescents; the inmates of a grim children's home; a group of urban derelicts; and a squalid coven of rural hippies. Even the Chief of Police is so haunted by the memory of a girl glimpsed on a railway platform half a lifetime ago that he feels compelled to talk about her to strangers.

Someone or something has started killing local children and leaving bits of them to be stumbled over by the unwary, but as the book opens only the surviving children have any idea what's going on. It's the Man with No Face, they tell each other in the dark, but even after it/he captures Christopher and makes off with him, the pervasive accidie prevents much of a hue and cry developing. No one has much idea what to do, or any inclination to do it, except for Jack Martin and Lissa Shelby, who is on the staff of the children's home.

The development is not helped by Etchison's habit of leaping from one neurotic and ill-informed viewpoint to another without imposing any God's-eye view of what is really going on, or (crucially) anything from the aspect of the Shadowman himself. Even the culminating murder is committed off-stage, leaving us with the poor substitute of a mopping-up carried out by Christopher, well past the climax. The motivation behind the whole business proves to be disappointingly banal, and there is no rationale for either the

limited telepathic powers which some characters develop ad hoc, nor the precognitive visions (or are they hallucinations?) which Leanne experiences. Etchison is good at building atmosphere and his leading characters are believable, but between them they have swamped the plot. It is symptomatic that by the end of the book none of their interpersonal relationships has either clarified or advanced.



I reviewed the first volume of Phillip Mann's *A Land Fit for Heroes* in *Interzone* 79, but for those of you who don't possess a copy, it's set in a parallel Britain where imperial Rome never fell. The three juvenile leads, Viti, Miranda and Angus, have fallen foul of the state and taken to the woods, where there is a bucolic autochthonous culture. I deplored pedestrian language, incoherent ideas and a failure to visualize but others disagree. Someone from the *New Statesman* quoted on the cover of the second volume, *Stand Alone Stan* (Gollancz, £15.99) notes a "mythic quality," which "augurs well" for the series. *De*

gustibus (as they say in Rome): I find the same defects to the fore, not least when Miranda sets off on her travels carrying an adult human skull in a box "between her breasts." The girl's entitled to a cleavage, but this is excessive. There's a similar problem with Angus, her quondam lover: an occasional profanity under stress is acceptable, but I refuse to take seriously a young man for whom no sentence is complete until he's dragged in a fuck, a bugger or a sod (usually by the ears), or who is capable of saying, in the course of what is supposed to be a serious argument, "I think you have intellectualized yourself into a blind corner without a paddle."

As before hoary characters litter the pages, dispensing homely wisdom. If the three are alone, no matter; old codgers of both sexes, living and dead, invade their dreams with moralistic allegory. The trouble with this, as always, is that the wisdom turns out to be a self-indulgent and rebarbative exposition of the author's hobby-horses. Mann's consist of skimmings from Marx, Mill and Nietzsche, plus sundry New Age drivel, but it doesn't really matter what they are – Heinlein and Le Guin both fell into that trap, and it did neither any good.

Meanwhile Viti's father, head of the Ulysses clan, wants him back but does nothing about it, having no idea where to start looking. Thus do nearly 300 pages pass, focussed first on Viti, then on Angus, finally on Miranda while nothing of moment happens to anyone except that Angus kills an avatar of Mussolini in a brawl. Even Miranda's visit to another plane is wasted – she does nothing there, only chats with its inhabitants. Mann compensates by explaining how very significant are everyone's thoughts.

All of this might be tolerable if the thoughts were other than flab, fustian, unacknowledged (and mangled) quotes ("Damn these pickled herring", "...the only thing you have to fear is fear itself") or if Mann had any feeling for the language, but on top of the stage Yorkshire we get a dollop of stage Scots – neither making any sense in terms of the alleged history of Britannia. The narrative itself plods gracelessly (and sometimes ungrammatically – he for him, whom for who) from cliché to cliché, without grotesque howlers, but full of sentences like: "It gave with the wind, and settled, and the most Coll had to do was repair minor damage." If that was the most, what were the lesser and least of Coll's worries? No answer, because in fact Coll (Viti's adopted name) has only minor damage to repair. That takes seven words where Mann takes eleven. Two pages later we find: "Sometimes he found events from his life recalled with a vividness that was close to the original experience," by which I presumed Mann meant Viti sometimes recalled events very vividly. I was wrong, though; Viti actually re-lives them in vivid dreams. And so forth, making a dull story duller.

If I wanted to make a case against genre fantasy this book, issued in hardback by a major publisher, would be my star exhibit.

Chris Gilmore

Apocalyptic Vortex

James Lovegrove

Five years ago Clive Barker gave us *The Great and Secret Show*, which he subtitled *The First Book of the Art*. Those who struggled to the end of that lugubrious, uninvolved novel could be forgiven for looking forward to *The Second Book of the Art* with something less than baited breath, but here it is, it's called **Everville** (HarperCollins, £15.99), and the bad news is that it's more of the same, but the good news is that this time around the themes of the first book have been reconfigured into something far more acceptable and entertaining. *The Great and Secret Show* was weighed down by its apocalyptic portentousness; *Everville* is a lighter, sprightlier read. Barker's prose is as sinuously intricate as ever, but he has at last loosened up enough to give his characters room to breathe, to twist, to turn, to joke, to contradict themselves, to live. The whimsicality that made "The Yattering and Jack" one of the better stories in *The Books of Blood* has been given free rein here, and *Everville* is the stronger for it.

Most of the protagonists from *The Great and Secret Show* are back, including Grillo, Kisson and Tommy-Ray the Death-Boy, but the focus of the book is on Tesla Bombeck and Harry D'Amour and their efforts to stop the evil Iad Ouroboros, who are once again trying to gain a foothold in our world, this time through the unremarkable mid-Western town of the title. Any further attempt to encapsulate the plot would risk this issue of *Interzone* being sucked into a vortex of polysyllabic names and concepts. Barker's skills as a myth-maker are beyond doubt, but the fruits of his imagination are a typesetter's nightmare. Besides, he is not simply telling a story. In Quiddity, the dream-sea, and the realms that surround it, he has discovered a fantasy-world as rich in potential as Gormenghast or Middle Earth, and he has only just begun to explore. Consequently *Everville* is at its most exciting, and its most convincing, when it moves out of the mundane world and into the uncharted reaches of pure invention. In Quiddity, where everything is possible, where love and evil can blossom and mutate into shapes rich and strange, where the laws of magic apply in the same way that the laws of physics apply on this plane, Barker is able to exercise his considerable talents without restraint, and the results are often nothing short of wonderful.

"On Amen's Shore," a short story set deep in the heart of one of the lands that border Quiddity, is just one of 24 meditations on the theme of sex and horror that make up **Little Deaths** (Millennium, £16.99), an anthology put together by Ellen Datlow.

While hardly an original premise (this reviewer can think of at least two other recent anthologies that have sprung from similar soil), love and death *are* the two major abstract obsessions of literature, not to mention life, so their concrete manifestations, sex and horror, should in tandem offer plenty of scope for invention.

Fortunately, none of the stories in *Little Deaths* are of the "then-I-stuck-the-knife-between-her-legs" variety. Unfortunately, there are some weaklings in the pack that ought to have been culled before publication. The book is about 40,000 words too long, and the easily discouraged may well lose interest towards the end, feeling – like lovers who believe they have tried all the possible positions – that every permutation on the theme has been exhausted. This is a shame, as there are several gems here. Nicholas Royle gives us a thought-provoking take on the cult of body-piercing (which renders a similar offering by Sarah Clemens superfluous); Ruth Rendell, with characteristic dry panache, traces the inexorable descent of a thrill-seeking grey man from no-life to low-life; and Lucius Shepard contributes yet another merely magnificent piece of work, with a genuinely cringe-inducing climax. There are also fine stories from Pat Cadigan, M. John Harrison, Joyce Carol Oates, Nicola Griffith and Douglas Clegg. However, it is to the first tale, "The Lady of Situations" by Stephen Dedman, that Datlow draws our attention, describing it as being the closest to the theme of the anthology and therefore, by implication, the yardstick by which we must judge the others, putting what seems to be an unnecessary burden on the story. Happily, it is a good story, but such a display of editorial favouritism is questionable. If the other stories aren't so in tune with Datlow's vision, one might reasonably wonder whether she considers them somehow less worthy of inclusion.

Sex and horror stalk the streets of New York in Caleb Carr's **The Alienist** (Little, Brown, £16.99). A serial killer is on the loose, murdering and mutilating boy prostitutes, and the police are baffled. But wait! Wait! Before you recoil away in bored contempt, an understandable response to serial-killer overkill, be advised that this is New York in 1896. Serial killers aren't as thick on the ground as they appear to be nowadays. In fact, that nasty piece of business in Whitechapel notwithstanding, they're something of a rarity.

Enter Dr Laszlo Kreizler, psychiatrist – or "alienist," as he is known, because he studies people with mental illnesses who are said to be "alienated" from the rest of

society. With the aid of his friend (and the novel's narrator) John Moore, this withdrawn, solitary, obsessive man is determined to capture the killer before he strikes again, using all the modern (ie. Victorian) pathological techniques at his disposal. But he doesn't simply want to bring the murderer to justice; he wants to examine him, learn about the criminal mind from him. Several powerful individuals, though, have a vested interest in seeing Kreizler fail...

The Alienist is a labour of love, well written and well executed, but perhaps a little too well researched, with whole lumps of historical data dropped into the text for no other reason than to show off Carr's academic assiduity. Carr also paints a revisionist gloss over the late Victorian era, emphasizing the roles of the minority members of Kreizler's investigative team with a politically correct earnestness that rings false. And the novel is long, too long by half for what is in effect a police procedural, too long to sustain a plot that is the simplest of A-to-B narrative arcs. That said, *The Alienist* is unusual and original, and performs the miracle of breathing new life into a genre that has already, in the space of just a few years, grown stale and moribund. Well worth a look.

It is a little-known fact that Interzone staff and reviewers, as well as being ludicrously overpaid, are treated once a year to a two-week, all-expenses-paid junket to the holiday destination of their choice. This year it was New York, and it was there, in a trendy bookshop in SoHo, that your humble reviewer happened across **City of Glass** (Avon Books, \$12.00), a graphic adaptation of Paul Auster's novella, one third of his *New York Trilogy*.

The adaptation is the first of a new series from Avon Books under the heading of Neon Lit: Noir Illustrated, and is largely the work of David Mazzucchelli, who with Frank Miller is responsible for *Batman: Year One* and *Daredevil: Born Again*, two of the finest works of comics storytelling ever. It is printed in B-format, simple black and white – and it is stunning.

Mazzucchelli's artwork is a triumph of minimalist expression. Details are pared down to the simplest brushstrokes, great archipelagoes of black trip across the paper, there is a constant sense of flow and motion from panel to panel, each page is a composition in itself regardless of its component parts, images are selected intelligently, visual clues are provided to enhance Auster's metaphysical mystery – this is one of the most talented (and regrettably least prolific) exponents of the medium showing how it should be done. It is impossible to recommend this book enough, and while as far as this reviewer is aware it isn't yet available over here, you can always persuade your employer to fly you across the Atlantic in order to purchase a copy. Failing that, the cost of a return ticket to JFK would not seem too great a sacrifice.

James Lovegrove

How about this as an outline for a new children's book:

The main character is a married man – well, we assume he's married: he has a female partner – and they have a child, a baby. The man kills the baby (to stop its crying) by throwing it out of the window. When she sees what he has done, his partner berates him. He beats her to death with a piece of wood. A policeman tries to take the man into custody, whereupon the policeman is also beaten to death. Eventually, the man gets caught, tried and sentenced to hang. On the gallows the man feigns stupidity and manages to persuade the judge to try on the noose at which point he manages to hang the judge. The devil comes along and the man kills the devil. End of story.

This is for *children*? No way, the protectors of our sanity, purity and goodness would proclaim. It could never be allowed.

Oh no? I forgot to mention another character: a crocodile. *Now* does it sound familiar?

Once upon a time, Punch and Judy shows were a familiar sight up and down the teeming shorelines of British holiday resorts. Now, like donkey rides, sixpenny ice-cream cones and *Fido* footballs, they're pretty much a thing of the past. But, to those who ever witnessed one of these bizarre playlets in the flapping striped-canvas tents, the experience lingers long in the mind, even though the memory is unlikely ever to be of any use. It's lingered in Neil Gaiman's mind, for example, and, he being Neil Gaiman, he *has* put it to use.

Mr. Punch (Gollancz, £8.99), Gaiman's latest graphic offering, and once again a collaboration with artist-extraordinaire Dave McKean, centres on a young boy's encounters with a mysterious puppeteer, strange relatives and a woman whose work involves dressing up as a mermaid. It is, of course, the revered (in the *right* hands; feared in the wrong ones) rite-of-passage story, a sequence of events in which, in this case, the protagonist learns about mortality, loss and madness and... well, basically, about what a shitty world it can truly be. Only Gaiman could pull off such a clichéd yarn. Face it: only he would probably have the *audacity*. Nevertheless, audacious or not, he *has* pulled it off and the result is not only brim-full of freshness and originality but also of great compassion.

But not *all* the credit may be laid at Gaiman's increasingly kudos-festooned door. Only an artist of Dave McKean's stature and innovation has the ability to put such heartfelt words into pictures. Here, he does it with pencil drawings and he does it with paintings, he does it with photographs and even with puppets. The collective impact is breathtaking, the pair of them working together like the most practised of Vaudeville acts to produce a visual spinning-top of timing and imagery, intrigue and betrayal, illusory perception and cold reality.

The first-person narrative looks back on the time when the narrator was a young boy, sent out of the way to live with his grandparents by the seaside while his mother produces a young sister for him. With enviable simplicity and clarity, the words and

THAT'S THE WAY TO DO IT!

Peter Crowther

pictures portray, first, the strange world of out-of-season Southsea, with its empty beaches and run-down pier arcades, and, ultimately, the gradual breakdown of sanity, lonely death, the slow awakenings of comprehension and the coming to terms with unimaginable burdens of guilt.

"I find myself grasping for my roots, awkwardly," the man-child tells us at the beginning of the book, as he prepares to launch into his story. "And I wonder what my grandparents would think of me were they to meet me today. Ask their shades about me and I imagine they would pull fumbling ghost photographs from their wallets and handbags, show you a solemn child with huge hazel eyes. 'I'm afraid he's a bit of a handful,' they'd say. For them (no matter how dead they are: and death is relative, not absolute. You can be slightly dead, just as you can be slightly pregnant), for my grandparents, I will always be a small boy. I also have my mental snapshots of them: frozen moments of the past, in which the dead are captured in tiny loops of motion."

Steeped in a heady mixture of everyday ordinariness and mesmerizing surreality, *Mr. Punch* is a tale both salutary and evocative, a blending of the finest poetic prose and the truest artistic vision.

This really is the way to do it.

By the time he got around to his third novel, 1987's *Valley of Lights*, Stephen Gallagher had

demonstrated that he wasn't going to be just another horror-story writer as might have been expected after his debut *Chimera*. With the later *Down River*, *Oktober*, *Rain* and *Nightmare With Angel* – and a steady complementary stream of extraordinarily literate but often unclassifiable short stories – Gallagher moved still further away from the tradition that, in its own way, had started him off. His new book, *Red Red Robin* (Bantam, £9.99), is the icing on the cake.

Like all good stories, its strength is in its simplicity.

Living in America since 1981, ex-pat Brit Ruth Lasseter, now working in Philadelphia, determines once and for all to surface from the confines of her affair with a married colleague by approaching an escort agency for someone to accompany her to an office social function. At first sight, her luck seems to be in when her consort, Tim Hagan, several years her junior, turns out to be both attentive and charming. In fact, Hagan's charm results, on the journey home, in the pair going a little further than Ruth anticipated or even intended. But, no harm done. It is a one-off after all.

Hagan, however, is not a man to take being jilted lightly. And "no" is not a word he accepts gracefully. Following a few unwanted telephone calls and an enormous delivery of flowers, Ruth gets in touch with the police. The subsequent investigation, at first half-hearted, fails to trace Hagan but certain other discoveries that come to light cause the police to take the matter a little more seriously. Not only is Hagan not whom he professes to be but also he may have committed a few things far more unpleasant than simple harassment. Meanwhile, so intense is Hagan's pursuit of Ruth that, eventually, he slips past security into her office after creating a diversion out in the street and resorts to kidnapping her at gunpoint. It is only thanks to the intervention of Aidan Kincannon, a security guard where she works, that Hagan is thwarted but, when faced with the opportunity to stop him forever, Ruth loses heart and Hagan disappears into the night.

One year later, Ruth is still plagued by Hagan's memory.

She has now formed a relationship of sorts with her saviour, Kincannon, who was injured in the process. The police call unexpectedly to say they've found a corpse near the original scene that appears to be about one year old. Ruth and Kincannon go to investigate. From that point forward, the pair are thrown into a nightmare journey of intrigue and violence as the pursued once more becomes the pursuer and the trail leads deep into the inhospitable bayou country of Louisiana.

Red Red Robin takes Gallagher to the forefront of the narrow corridor of psychological terror that exists between horror and crime. This increasingly fertile patch – laid originally, perhaps, by Robert Bloch's *Psycho* and Davis Grubb's *Night of the Hunter* – has spawned, among many, novels from Thomas Harris (*Red Dragon*), John Sandford (*Rules of Prey*), Ron Faust (*When She Was Bad*), David Martin (*Lie to Me*), John

Lutz (*SWF Seeks Same*), Robert McCammon (*Gone South*), Charles King (*Mama's Boy*) and Lawrence Block (the Matt Scudder stories). *Red Red Robin* is a fine and worthy addition. It can surely be no mistake that it reads like a movie script just waiting for filming to begin. Watch this space...

There are a few people who are trying their level best to re-position the horror genre.

Of course, there'll always be the vampires and the were-beasts just as there'll always be another – hopefully fictional – Ed Gein waiting in the wings to do strange things with dismembered bodies. But now there are writers who recognize other problems – problems that may, in actual fact, have little to do with any external antagonist. These are problems from within.

Building on and complementing the sublimely literate tales of urban angst we've come to expect from the likes of Ramsey Campbell, Dennis Etchison, Charles Grant and Richard Christian Matheson, Joel Lane's stories are often little more than vignettes, tiny snapshots of troubled minds making sense of the absurd by emphasising the potential alienness of the everyday. And now,

thanks to Nicholas Royle's fledgling imprint – Royle himself being no stranger to this particular side of the field of macabre fiction – we get a whole collection of Lane mini-epics (17 in all) for our questionable delight.

You can't paraphrase or encapsulate these tales any more than you can explain your feelings about either Philip Glass's music or puréed suede. All you *can* say is **The Earth Wire** (Egerton Press, £6.99) is a marvellous showcase of talent, some of the passages of which demand repeated re-readings and even discussion. But, like Nick Drake's songs and Van Gogh's paintings, it doesn't do to imbibe too many at any one sitting.

Commenting on his story "Real Drowners" (not included here) for the introduction to Lockley's and Lewis's *Cold Cuts II*, I said, "Lane writes about the complexity of relationships like a young Updike..."

It's only now that I'm beginning to worry I may have sold him short.

There's been a whole slew of quality anthologies over the past months, giving rise to the cautious hope that people may just be starting to drift back to the short story form... albeit tentatively. The cream of this particular

crop must include David Silva's **The Definitive Best Of The Horror Show** (CD Publications, \$25 - about £18), whose 429 pages features 40 stories from all the usual suspects, with great work from McCammon, Campbell, Collins, Koontz, Brite and so on.

Like the equally-missed *Twilight Zone* magazine, *The Horror Show* was a consistently enjoyable and frequently excellent outlet for (let's call it...) "mainstream" horror fiction. Reading this collection makes you wonder why we didn't support it better when we had it.

Also from CD publications and edited by CD's (that's *Cemetery Dance*, the magazine) editor Richard Chizmar, comes **Thrillers** (again \$25). This one follows the format of *Night Visions*' three-or-four writers per volume with stories from Rex Miller (1), Nancy Collins (4), Chet Williamson (2) and Ardath Mayhar (1), with a foreword from Joe Lansdale.

Each writer is invited to submit 20,000 words of new material, with the emphasis on *thrills*. Sure it sounds naff, but it actually works. Miller's "Kowloon" – a new "chapter" in the continuing saga of Chaingang Bunkowski – plus Mayhar's "Winter Stalk," Collins's "The



Garlands of Fantasy

Linda and Roger Garland are a highly regarded husband-and-wife team of fantastic artists who have managed to develop nicely complementary styles of art. This is well demonstrated in a new book from Paper Tiger, **Garlands of Fantasy** (see *Books Received* pg. 63 for publisher's details) which collects more than a hundred of their pictures together with a sympathetic commentary by Nigel Suckling.

Their subject matter ranges from book jacket illustrations for David Gemmell's fiction via Tolkien and the Middle Earth to legend and literature. Shown left is a detail from Linda Garland's illustration of Tennyson's poem *The Lady of Shalott*. The caption reads –

She left the web, she left the loom,
She made three paces through the room,
She saw the water lily bloom,
She saw the helmet and the plume,
She looked down to Camelot.

Out flew the web and floated wide;
The mirror cracked from side to side;
"The curse is come upon me," cried
The Lady of Shalott.

Charity Ward" and "The Killer," and Williamson's "Dusty Death" are all top-notch.

Making it four in a row, the ubiquitous Nancy Collins also contributes strong work to two new anthologies which mark the debut of a new US publishing house, White Wolf.

Dark Destiny (\$19.99 – about £15), edited by Edward E. Kramer, is a collection of high quality stories with a low dud-count embracing the more traditional horror/dark fantasy themes, with new work from the aforementioned Collins, Harlan Ellison, the late Robert Bloch and 20 others – including some newer names and several very familiar ones – and sporting an introduction from John Skipp. But the most interesting of the two books is **Elric: Tales of the White Wolf** (again \$19.99), also edited by Kramer in collaboration with Richard Gilliam, featuring 24 short (and not-so-short) treatments of everyone's favourite pasty-faced swordsman. The contents of this volume run the full gamut of fantasy... reaching new levels of inventiveness (not to mention audacity!) *en route*. The result is a whole ancient-cavern-load of fun, particularly Tad Williams's "Go Ask Elric" and Neil Gaiman's "One Life Furnished with Early Moorcock," which

respectively top and tail the book. Good work, too, from Karl Edward Wagner (sadly missed), Colin Greenland, Nancy Collins (does she ever sleep!?) and Holder, and, just to show how it's done, from Moorcock himself. Despite the fact that it's a lovely collection, it's not one to plough through from cover to cover simply because of the extreme variety of styles. I recommend you keep it by the bed and take one dose nightly.

Still on the subject of Moorcock, the same company has released the first in a series of collective volumes set to gather together all the Eternal Champion stories. This impressive hardcover book, not surprisingly called **The Eternal Champion** (White Wolf, again \$19.99), comprises *The Eternal Champion*, *Phoenix In Obsidian*, *The Sundered Worlds* and *To Rescue Tanelorn*. Great value for those who only have tatty copies of the old Mayflower paperbacks.

Ellen Datlow's and Terri Windling's *Snow White, Blood Red* anthology a couple of years ago proved there was plenty of interest for re-workings of old-time fairy tales: the follow-up – **Black Thorn, White Rose** (AvoNova, \$22 – about £16) – merely underscores the point.

Great new work from Nancy Kress, the still under-rated Michael Cadnum, Jane Yolan, Storm Constantine, Peter Straub, Howard Waldrop (with a totally wacky take on the "The Bremen Town Musicians" called "The Sawing Boys") and Roger Zelazny. But be warned: *Listen With Mother* was never like this!

Incidentally, those who have considered buying a copy of Datlow's **Little Deaths** anthology of "tales of horror and sex" should know that the definitive version of the book is the British (and true "first") edition from Millennium (£16.99). In addition to the stories by Joyce Carol Oates, Clive Barker, Ruth Rendell, Richard Christian Matheson and 11 others which grace the Abyss edition, Millennium's *chunkier* (by 60,000 words!) volume also includes novellas by Lucius Shepard and ex-pat Nicola Griffith (who is just so good), plus stories from Melanie Tem, Kathe Koja, Barry N. Malzberg, M. John Harrison, K. W. Jeter, Sarah Clemens and J. Calvin Pierce. One of those increasingly rare occasions when you can truly say "British is best" without much fear of argument. Nice when it happens...

Pete Crowther

Moorcock and the Last New Worlds

Dave Kendall

The American South is the setting for Michael Moorcock's new novel, **Blood** (Millennium, £15.99 hardcover, £9.99 trade paperback). The central characters are aristocratic gamblers making their way downriver to the "Fault," an entrance to the multiverse. The landscape has become fragmented in the years leading up to this -- "colour spots" are the main source of power, energy pools which bubble up from another reality. Searching for more, engineers drill through the walls of the multiverse, bringing disruption and postmodern chaos.

It's no surprise then that the gamblers themselves are non-white: Jack Karaquazian, an Egyptian; The Rose, a mysterious hybrid pulled in from earlier Moorcock novels; Karaquazian's companion Sam Oakenhurst, transformed by the ghostly machinoid -- the message being that as they move away from humanity there is less need for prejudice. In this American South it is the whites who are despised and enslaved.

Alongside this narrative runs that of Captain Billy-Bob and her Chaos Engineers (parts of which appear in *New Worlds 2* and *4*) locked in a struggle with the Singularity. As the gamblers approach the Fault this "separate" fiction becomes entwined with their own -- through Sam reading the old pulp sf magazines that record the adventures of the Chaos Engineers -- and then both fictions are joined to fight the Singularity.

The gambler's narrative runs at a very slow pace in contrast with the frenzied speed of the "pulp" sections. It's hard to engage with characters of either reality. Moorcock's main interest seems to be in the form of the novel -- with its fictions colliding, melting into one -- and in recycling characters from his vast repertoire. As The Rose tells Sam: "We never die. We are however perpetually translated."

While I can admire the novel on a stylistic level, it ultimately left me

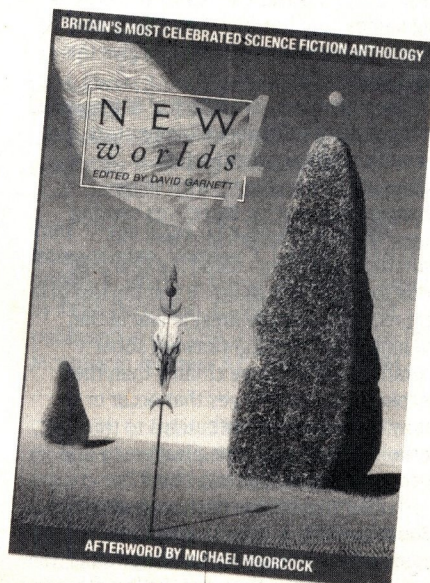
unsatisfied. I have no objections to learning of ways "to change the human condition" but I prefer to draw my own inferences from the story rather than having characters spouting rhetoric from behind thin masks.

Any mention of Michael Moorcock inevitably leads one to *New Worlds*. Sadly, the latest edition of the anthology, **New Worlds 4** edited by David Garnett (Gollancz, £6.99), promises to be the last we shall see for a while -- due to the usual lack of sales. Certainly it has lost some of the lavish production of its predecessors; there are no pictures, the biogs are pared down to the minimum. But the stories are excellent. The line-up includes work from Barrington J. Bayley, Lisa Tuttle, Ian McDonald, Elizabeth Sourbut and, of course, Michael Moorcock.

"Harringay" by Graham Charnock opens the volume, and for some perhaps epitomizes what *New Worlds* stands for. His account of the price of flesh/identity on the clone stock market is full of barely ciphered allusions to our present reality and its myths, skipping along the smooth narrative surface without engaging much more than the readers pleasure in recognition. In contrast, the other stories are plot-driven and involve the reader on various levels. Ian McDonald's "Legitimate Targets" weaves an alien love story through a tight thriller-style narrative. Lisa Tuttle extrapolates child-rearing into a future where both immortality and childhood are for sale. Bitter humour enlivens Elizabeth Sourbut's "The Last Phallic Symbol" which reveals the truth behind the ultimate alien invasion. Barrington Bayley's "Love in Backspace" gives new meaning to the phrase "flying by the seat of your pants"; it is a tale of sex and navigation on a Burroughsesque space frontier.

New Worlds will undoubtedly reappear one day, but it will be sorely missed during the wait.

Dave Kendall



From Fantasy-by-Numbers to the Intensely Imaginative

Irfan Shah

Sorcerer's Ward by Barbara Hambly (HarperCollins, £4.99) is a pleasant romp through the more conventional realms of fantasy. The plot revolves around apprentice magician Kyra Peldrin, who is haunted by dreams that appear to foretell of her sister's impending death. These lead Kyra to return to her home town in order to save her sister. The story unwinds with slight twists and turns as Kyra struggles to uncover the mysteries surrounding the premonitions. Her obstacles include a range of machiavellian characters obsessed with social manoeuvring and harbouring suspicions about all purveyors of magic. It is a stock gallery of rogues, vicious little merchants and cold beauties, all hungry for the thrill of power, which peoples the story. Kyra, however, does find allies, and together they battle to see justice done and murder averted.

This novel is nearer to fantasy-by-numbers than to any ground-breaking territory, and yet there is enough mystery, there are enough questions asked, to propel a reader through to the exciting conclusion. *Sorcerer's Ward* offers nothing really new: the usual combination of pseudo-medieval society and 20th-century morality is sprinkled with a liberal dose of magic and mysticism, resulting in a novel which is fairly conventional. One nice touch, however, is the manifestation of a weaker, more debauched form of magic than is usually to be found in such novels: it is a watered-down strain of high magic and is practised by those without the intelligence or integrity to achieve anything greater. Thus, throughout the novel there are vicious little spells causing minor injuries or even minor infatuations amongst the characters. This is potentially the most intriguing idea of the whole book, the ways in which people have to deal with the sordid consequences of a higher ideal, but it remains only a sideline to a story that has pace and mild excitement but no real impact.

Melanie Tem's horror novel **Revenant** (Headline, £16.99) offers another example of the disparity between the ideal and the execution. Tem portrays a series of characters all faced with a sense of loss so intense that it becomes almost a physical entity. They are bereaved people who cannot accept the deaths of their loved ones, who refuse to make the mental adjustments required and have somehow kept their lost ones "alive" as memories so vivid that they have become ghosts unable to break away from the material world. Tem's ghost town of Revenant is a final meeting point between the spirits

and the bereaved, where the living must either make their peace with the past or else be buried with it, literally. The town becomes the setting for a series of confrontations between past and present. However, Tem's style of writing does a disservice to her themes of loss and survival, and the large number of characters involved in the plot makes it hard for any one of them really to be explored in depth. The scenes of communication between the living and the dead are particular weak points, being handled so clumsily that the reader's ability to suspend belief is tested. When one young woman's aborted foetus floats in front of her face (with the purpose of guiding her toward the town of Revenant), the dramatic effect may be less than the author intended, especially when the foetus is described as spinning over the treetops "like a frisbee."

In situations so unreal, Melanie Tem presumably attempts to achieve the effect of fable. However, the novel cannot make the transition and remains a flawed psychological thriller.

The cover of **The Mammoth Book of Werewolves**, edited by Stephen Jones (Robinson, £5.99), is to a certain extent an indication of the quality to be found inside. It is a little tacky, a picture of a wolf in jeans standing next to a carcass; and this is indeed an uneven anthology. However, amidst some rather trashy examples of 90s pulp horror, there are genuine surprises, such as Manly Wade Wellman's novella, "The Hairy Ones Shall Dance," first published as a serial in 1938. Other stories, even some of those by big names, are disappointing fillers; but strange gems such as Wellman's give this book some value.

"The Hairy Ones Shall Dance" is recounted in the style of a Sherlock Holmes story. It is an endearingly archaic mystery, a supernatural whodunnit, with shape-changers and psychic detectives causing havoc in a small American town. The narrative tone seems dated but this only adds to the story's charm. It has the feel of a tale recounted by the fireside late in the evening, and its straightforward sober narrative is much more chilling than the desperate stylistic lunges that occur in so many of the other contributions to this anthology. It is a genuine pleasure to find such an oddity hidden away here.

Another highlight is the award-winning "Boobs" by Suzy McKee Charnas, one of the more successful examples of werewolf fiction which explores the theme of the lycanthrope

as an embodiment of repressed human nature. Whereas a shapechanger is usually a receptacle of evil instincts, Charnas has created a beast that represents the wildness of youth, a vivid, vicious, amoral expression of one person's feral appetite for life. The story has a contemporary setting and shows the main character, Kelsey Bernstein, having to deal with the physical manifestations of her approaching adulthood. But as well as breasts that earn her the nickname "Boobs," and periods, Kelsey has to deal with her transformation into a wolf. This is an extreme manifestation of uncontrollable physicality, presented in an exhilaratingly positive way: she exults in her lean muscular body. Her eventual murder of the school bully actually has the effect of lowering Kelsey to the bully's level; but, despite her callous indifference to the death, there is an exciting sense of the character's pleasure in her own body, its stringy, ugly, beauty and its pulsing desires, which makes this story stand out.

"Out Of The Night" by Kim Newman is another piece well worthy of the reader's attention. The author combines werewolves with the legend of Zorro in a futuristic L.A. setting. These diverse elements are packed together in a neon-bright fable which demonstrates an ability to remain imaginative within tried and tested genres that should be applauded. Many other stories in the anthology seem flat by comparison, with more horror and gore than suspense or imagination.

The last book to hand is Tanith Lee's **Darkness, I** (Little, Brown, £15.99). It is a pleasure to read a fantasist whose style is so superior to that of the average writer. I was thrown into *Darkness, I*, the third part of the "Blood Opera" trilogy, without having read the first two parts and it proved a bewildering experience; however, the strength of the writing and the wealth of characters gripped me from the start. Many of the emotions aroused in the characters seem to have very solid roots in the previous two books, and at the beginning we witness characters smouldering over past loves and feuds, the tortuous emotional aftermath of all that has gone before. Even so, the characters make their mark on the reader immediately. The Scarabae, almost a super race, live out their lives with a sense of style and tragedy, noble and calm amid the mundane realities of the modern world and its myriad inanities. The plot, or plots, twist intricately, with lost and special children, lost and special loves, all playing their part. The characters seem dispossessed, slightly alien to their environment or predicament; there's a dreamy quality to their lives, but Lee's writing involves a flurry of colours, textures and locations, and so they are never less than vivid and interesting.

The story concerns conflict between shades of good and evil, abductions, emotional games and a host of elements all handled with skill and vigour by an author who, with this book, reinforces her reputation as one of Britain's leading fantasists. A well-written, intensely imaginative and thoughtful novel.

Irfan Shah

Books Received

November 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.

Asaro, Catherine. **Primary Inversion**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85764-0, 317pp, hardcover, \$21.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; a debut book by a new American writer who happens to be a physicist and a contributor to *Analog* magazine.) *March 1995*.

Atanasio, A. A. **The Dragon and the Unicorn**. "The stunning epic of Arthurian fantasy." Hodder & Stoughton, ISBN 0-340-61765-9, 483pp, hardcover, cover by Mick Van Houten, £16.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1994.) *8th December 1994*.

Atanasio, A. A. **Radix**. New English Library, ISBN 0-340-61840-X, 466pp, A-format paperback, cover by Mick Van Houten, £4.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1981; formerly a Grafton Books title, this one presumably has moved to Hodder/NEL along with former Grafton editor Nick Austin.) *1st December 1994*.

Atanasio, A. A. **Solis**. New English Library, ISBN 0-450-60641-4, 184pp, A-format paperback, cover by Mick Van Houten, £4.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1994; this one is about a man called Charles who has his head cryonically frozen after death, then wakes up "to find his brain enslaved by a brutal technocracy"; appropriately enough, it's dedicated to *Interzone* columnist [and cryonics enthusiast] Charles Platt; reviewed by Chris Gilmore in *IZ* 87.) *1st December 1994*.

Baker, Scott. **Ancestral Hungers**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85775-6, 320pp, hardcover, \$21.95. (Horror/fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; it's a "rewritten and expanded" version of an earlier novel called *Dhampire* [1982].) *April 1995*.

Bear, Greg. **Moving Mars**. Legend, ISBN 0-09-978050-X, 452pp, A-format paperback, cover by Nick Rogers, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1993; reviewed by John Clute in *Interzone* 79.) *3rd November 1994*.

Benford, Gregory. **Furious Gulf**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-04067-X, 290pp, hardcover, cover by John Dismukes, £15.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1994; sequel to *Great Sky River* and *Tides of Light*.) *24th November 1994*.

Brown, Molly. **Virus**. Point SF, ISBN 0-590-55816-1, 248pp, A-format paperback, cover by Bob Corley, £2.99. (Young-adult sf novel, first edition; this is Molly Brown's debut novel, although she also has a non-sf novelization of the TV series *Cracker* out from Virgin Publishing near-simultaneously; Point SF is a new imprint of Scholastic Publications Ltd. [7-9 Pratt St., London NW1 0AE].) *No date shown: received in November 1994*.

Calder, Richard. **Dead Boys**. HarperCollins, ISBN 0-586-21456-9, 199pp, A-format paperback, £4.99. (Sf novel, first edition; Calder's second book, this short, densely-packed, cyberpunkish tale looks to be a sequel of sorts to his first, *Dead Girls*; I've heard that Calder's original, preferred title was *Strange Genitalia*, but presumably the publishers overruled that.) *14th November 1994*.

Campbell, Ramsey. **Der Reiseführer/The Guide**. Translated by Joachim Koerber. Illustrated by Herbert Brandmeier and J. K. Potter. Edition Phantasia [Wunschelstr. 18, 76756 Bellheim, Germany], ISBN 3-924959-26-9, 58+50pp, hardcover, no price shown. (Horror novella, first edition; published in a limited edition of 250 signed copies, with German and English texts back to back; it's available in the UK through Andy Richards, Cold Tonnage Books.) *No date shown: received in November 1994*.

Card, Orson Scott. **Earthfall: Homecoming, Volume 4**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-93039-9, 350pp, hardcover, \$22.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received.) *February 1995*.

Card, Orson Scott. **The Ships of Earth: Homecoming, Volume 3**. Legend, ISBN 0-09-949801-4, 382pp, A-format paperback, cover by Keith Parkinson, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1994; reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 83.) *November 1994?*

Carmody, Isobelle. **The Farseekers**. "The Obernewtyn Chronicles, Book Two." Point SF, ISBN 0-590-55495-6, 407pp, A-format paperback, cover by David Scutt, £3.99. (Young-adult sf novel, first published in Australia, 1990.) *No date shown: received in November 1994*.

Clarke, Arthur C. **The Snows of Olympus: A Garden on Mars**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-05652-5, 120pp, hardcover, cover by David A. Hardy, £18.99. (Illustrated study of the planet Mars, and speculation on its possible future colonization; first edition; an attractive book, many of its images computer-generated by the author and John Hinkley.) *19th December 1994*.

Cooper, Louise. **Eclipse: The Star Shadow Trilogy, Book II**. HarperCollins, ISBN 0-586-21724-X, 360pp, A-format paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition.) *28th November 1994*.

Crowther, Peter, ed. **Blue Motel: Narrow Houses, Volume 3**. Introduction by Dennis Etchison. Little, Brown, ISBN 0-316-91180-1, xiv+369pp, hardcover, cover by J. K. Potter, £16.99. (Horror anthology, first edition; contains all-new stories by Brian Aldiss, Storm Constantine, Kathleen Ann Goonan, Ed Gorman, Ursula Le Guin, Ian McDonald, Michael Moorcock and other familiar names; another strong line-up.) *1st December 1994*.

Crowther, Peter, ed. **Touch Wood: Narrow Houses, Volume 2**. Introduction by Ramsey Campbell. Warner, ISBN 0-7515-0698-2, x+372pp, A-format paperback, cover by J. K. Potter, £5.99. (Horror anthology, first published in 1993; contains all-new stories by John Brunner, Charles de Lint, Christopher Evans, Charles L. Grant, Colin Greenland, Garry Kilworth, Bentley Little, Bill Pronzini, Spider Robinson, Kristine Kathryn Rusch, Karl Edward Wagner and others; reviewed by Chris Gilmore in *Interzone* 86.) *1st December 1994*.

Duncan, Dave. **The Cutting Edge: Part One of A Handful of Men**. Raven, ISBN 1-85487-348-2, 307pp, A-format paperback, cover by Avelyn Landis, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1992; Duncan is a Scottish-born author, long resident in Canada, and not much published in the UK as yet; he is not the same person as the David Duncan who wrote a number of sf novels in the 1950s.) *28th November 1994*.

Garland, Linda and Roger. **Garlands of Fantasy: The Art of Linda and Roger Garland**. Text by Nigel Suckling. Dragon's World/Paper Tiger, ISBN 1-85028-344-3, 128pp, very large-format paperback, £12.95. (Art collection by a husband-and-wife team of British fantasy illustrators; first edition; another attractively produced book from this publisher.) *December 1994*.

Gibson, William. **Neuromancer**. HarperCollins, ISBN 0-00-225232-5, 277pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1984; this tenth anniversary edition has a new three-page author's afterword; the publishers make great ballyhoo of the fact that the novel was "barely reviewed" on its first British publication [presumably *Interzone* and John Clute don't count], yet "has become one of the most famous novels of the last decade.") 24th November 1994.

Gordon, Frances. **Blood Ritual**. "In the great tradition of Anne Rice." Headline, ISBN 0-7472-1191-4, 340pp, hardcover, cover by Chris Moore, £16.99. (Horror novel, first edition; "Frances Gordon" is a pseudonym of fantasy writer Bridget Wood [unless the latter byline is also a pseudonym; in the acknowledgments she mentions "My brother, Tony Duggan," so it's likely that her name was originally Duggan.]) 8th December 1994.

Green, Simon R. **Deathstalker**. Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-05730-0, 571pp, A-format paperback, cover by Harvey Parker, £5.99. (Sf novel, first edition [?]; proof copy received.) 16th February 1995.

Greenwood, Elizabeth. **Utopia 2000**. Book Guild [Temple House, 25 High St., Lewes, E. Sussex BN7 2LU], ISBN 0-86332-934-9, 218pp, hardcover, £14.95. (Sf novel, first edition; apparently a debut book by a new British writer.) *Late entry: 25th August publication, received in November 1994.*

Haley, Wendy. **These Fallen Angels**. "Return to the house of Danilov." Headline, ISBN 0-7472-1109-4, 250pp, hardcover, cover by Larry Rostant, £16.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1994; sequel to *This Dark Paradise*.) 8th December 1994.

Haley, Wendy. **This Dark Paradise**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-4569-X, 342pp, A-format paperback, cover by Larry Rostant, £4.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1985.) 8th December 1994.

Harbinson, W. A. **Inception: Projekt Saucer, Book One**. New English Library, ISBN 0-450-61750-5, 490pp, A-format paperback, cover by Mark Harrison, £5.99. (Sf/horror novel, first published in 1991; a UFO-based book by a Northern Irish author, born 1941, who has been writing such stuff for the past couple of decades.) 3rd November 1994.

Harrison, Harry. **Galactic Dreams**. Illustrated by Bryn Barnard. Legend, ISBN 0-09-949811-1, 188pp, A-format paperback, cover by Keith Parkinson, £4.99. (Sf collection, first published in the USA, 1994.) 1st December 1994.

Haschak, Paul G. **Utopian/Dystopian Literature: A Bibliography of Literary Criticism**. Scarecrow Press [distributed in Britain by Shelving Ltd, 4 Pleydell Gdns., Folkestone, Kent CT20 2DN], ISBN 0-8108-2752-2, viii+370pp, hardcover, £52.50. (Listing of critical books and essays about utopian

and dystopian fiction; first published in the USA, 1994; it's arranged alphabetically by subject author, from the likes of Kingsley Amis and Aristophanes to Xenophon and Zamyatin; this is the US edition with a British price.) 26th January 1995.

Holland, Tom. **The Vampyre: Being the True Pilgrimage of George Gordon, Sixth Lord Byron**. Little, Brown, ISBN 0-316-91227-1, 341pp, hardcover, £9.99. (Horror novel, first edition; proof copy received; this is a debut novel by a 26-year-old British writer who has an Oxford doctorate in literature; it features Lord Byron as vampire hero/villain.) 3rd March 1995.

Jacobs, Harvey. **Beautiful Soup**. Ringpull Press [Queensway House, London Road South, Poynton, Cheshire SK12 1NJ], ISBN 1-898051-12-7, 263pp, B-format paperback, cover by David Crowe, £8.99. (Humorous sf novel, first published in the USA, 1992 [not "1990" as it states in this edition]; reviewed by John Clute in *Interzone* 70.) *Late entry: October (?) publication, received in November 1994.*

Jacques, Brian. **Mossflower**. Illustrations by Gary Chalk. Legend, ISBN 0-09-931921-7, 431pp, A-format paperback, cover by John Barber, £4.99. (Animal fantasy novel, first published in 1988; sequel to *Redwall*.) 3rd November 1994.

Jacques, Brian. **Redwall**. Illustrations by Gary Chalk. Legend, ISBN 0-09-931911-X, 416pp, A-format paperback, cover by John Barber, £4.99. (Animal fantasy novel, first published in 1986.) 3rd November 1994.

Jefferies, Mike. **Children of the Flame**. HarperCollins, ISBN 0-586-21749-5, 374pp, A-format paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition.) 28th November 1994.

Jones, Stephen, and Ramsey Campbell, eds. **The Best New Horror: Volume Five**. Robinson, ISBN 1-85487-299-0, x+514pp, B-format paperback, cover by Luis Rey, £6.99. (Horror anthology, first edition; it contains reprint stories by Poppy Z. Brite, Edward Bryant, Harlan Ellison, Christopher Fowler, Elizabeth Hand, Kathe Koja, Thomas Ligotti, Kim Newman, Nicholas Royle, Michael Marshall Smith, S. P. Somtow, Thomas Tessier, Karl Edward Wagner and others; we're glad to see that this series is ongoing -- the publishers forgot to send us volumes three and four; one feature of the series is that it has what is perhaps the most complete "Necrology" section [i.e. obituaries of everyone with any conceivable connection to the horror field] to be found in any anthology, compiled by the ghoulish Steve Jones and Kim Newman.) 28th November 1994.

Jones, Stephen, ed. **The Mammoth Book of Frankenstein**. Carroll & Graf, ISBN 0-7867-0159-5, xiv+577pp, B-format paperback, cover by Luis Rey, \$9.95. (Horror anthology, first published in the UK, 1994; it contains the complete text of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*

plus new and reprint stories by Robert Bloch, John Brunner, Ramsey Campbell, David Case, Dennis Etchison, Paul J. McAuley, Graham Masterton, Kim Newman, David J. Schow, Guy N. Smith, Michael Marshall Smith, Karl Edward Wagner and others.) December 1994.

Jordan, Robert. **The Fires of Heaven: Book Five of The Wheel of Time**. Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-209-7, 912pp, A-format paperback, cover by Darrell K. Sweet, £5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1993; reviewed by Wendy Bradley in *Interzone* 83.) 17th November 1994.

Jordan, Robert. **Lord of Chaos: Book Six of The Wheel of Time**. Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-255-0, 901pp, hardcover, cover by Darrell K. Sweet, £16.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1994; not only does this series seem never-ending, but each volume gets bigger and bigger.) 17th November 1994.

Kadrey, Richard. **Covert Culture Sourcebook 2.0**. "Further, Deeper, Stranger Explorations of Fringe Culture." St Martin's Press, ISBN 0-312-11255-6, 215pp, trade paperback, \$12.95. (Who's who and what's what of freaky literature, music, films, technology, fashions, etc; first edition; Kadrey is the author of the sf novel *Metrophage* [1988].) November 1994.

Kirkbride, John. **Life on Urth**. Scholastic/Point, ISBN 0-590-54167-6, 301pp, C-format paperback, £6.99. (Humorous sf novel, first edition; John Kirkbride is presumably a new British writer, though we're told nothing about him; this looks like yet another attempt to jump on the Terry Pratchett bandwagon.) *No date shown: received in November 1994.*

Laymon, Richard. **Allhallow's Eve**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-4783-8, 246pp, A-format paperback, cover by Steve Crisp, £4.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1985.) 8th December 1994.

Laymon, Richard. **Beware!** Headline, ISBN 0-7472-4780-3, 279pp, A-format paperback; cover by Steve Crisp, £4.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1985.) 8th December 1994.

Laymon, Richard. **Quake**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-1136-1, 375pp, hardcover, £16.99. (Horror/suspense novel, first edition [?]; proof copy received.) 10th January 1995.

Lee, Tanith. **A Heroine of the World**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-1247-3, 375pp, hardcover, cover by Mark Salwowski, £16.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1989.) 8th December 1994.

Lethem, Jonathan. **Gun, With Occasional Music**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85878-7, 262pp, trade paperback, \$10.95. (Sf/crime novel, first published in the USA, 1994; proof copy received; a debut novel by an author who has contributed short stories to *Interzone* and other magazines.) March 1995.

Little, Bentley. **Night School**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-0816-6, 313pp, hardcover, cover by Simon Dewey, £16.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1994.) *8th December 1994*.

Lovecraft, H. P. **Miscellaneous Writings**. Edited by S. T. Joshi. Arkham House, ISBN 0-87054-168-4, xiii+568pp, hardcover, \$29.95. (Non-fiction collection by the great horror writer; needless to say, like all Arkham House books it's beautifully produced; a collector's item.) *1st February 1995*.

McCarty, John, ed. **The Fearmakers: The Screen's Directorial Masters of Suspense and Terror**. St Martin's Press, ISBN 0-312-11272-6, ix+198pp, very large-format paperback, \$14.95. (Illustrated critical studies of horror movies, concentrating on directors from Tod Browning to David Cronenberg; first edition; we are told that a British edition is due from Virgin Publishing.) *November 1994*.

McQuinn, Donald E. **Witch**. Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-37841-5, 499pp, C-format paperback, cover by Michael Herring, \$10. (Sf/fantasy novel, first edition; sequel to *Warrior and Wanderer*.) *10th November 1994*.

Newman, Kim. **The Quorum**. Pocket, ISBN 0-671-85242-6, 311pp, A-format paperback, £4.99. (Horror novel, first published in the UK, 1994; reviewed by John Clute in *Interzone* 83; this paperback has been advertised on posters all over the underground railway in London -- the publishers seem to be determined to push Newman into the big time.) *November 1994*.

Nichols, Adam. **The War of the Lords Veil**. "A new star in British fantasy is rising." Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-187-1, 372pp, hardcover, cover by Kevin Jenkins, £15.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; a first novel; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen].) *17th November 1994*.

Niven, Larry, Jerry Pournelle and Michael Flynn. **Fallen Angels**. Pan, ISBN 0-330-33599-5, 394pp, A-format paperback, cover by Mark Salwowski, £4.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1991; apparently, a British hardcover edition appeared in 1993, but we never saw it.) *2nd December 1994*.

Pierce, Tamora. **The Emperor Mage**. Point Fantasy, ISBN 0-590-55802-1, 334pp, A-format paperback, cover by David Wyatt, £3.99. (Young-adult fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1994; this is the third in a series which began with *Wild Magic and Wolf-Speaker*; Point Fantasy [Scholastic Publications Ltd.] have already released those two titles in Britain, though we didn't receive review copies.) *No date shown: received in November 1994*.

Prill, David. **The Unnatural**. St Martin's Press, ISBN 0-312-11910-0, 238pp, hardcover, \$21. (Satirical fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; a debut book by a new American writer, it takes the mickey out of

the funeral-parlour business and comes with commendations from people like Marc Laidlaw, James Morrow and Kate Wilhelm.) *March 1995*.

Richardson, Michael, ed. **The Dedalus Book of Surrealism 2 (The Myth of the World)**. Dedalus, ISBN 1-873982-36-4, 292pp, B-format paperback, cover by Bona, £8.99. (Anthology of surrealist tales and other prose pieces, first edition; authors represented include Antonin Artaud, Andre Breton, Roger Caillois, Robert Desnos and Jacques Prevert among many others; most are here translated into English for the first time.) *8th December 1994*.

Rohan, Michael Scott. **Cloud Castles**. Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-05778-5, 284pp, A-format paperback, cover by Peter Elson, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1993; third in the "Spiral" trilogy; reviewed by Wendy Bradley in *Interzone* 81.) *1st December 1994*.

Rohan, Michael Scott. **The Lord of Middle Air**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-05780-7, 253pp, hardcover, cover by Ian Miller, £15.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; set in the 13th-century Scottish borders.) *1st December 1994*.

Sheffield, Charles. **Georgia on My Mind and Other Places**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85663-6, 349pp, hardcover, \$21.95. (Sf collection, first edition; proof copy received; contains 14 previously uncollected Sheffield stories, including the Nebula Award-winning title piece.) *February 1995*.

Shelley, Mary. **The Last Man**. "The World's Classics." Edited with an introduction by Morton D. Paley. Oxford University Press, ISBN 0-19-283152-6, 479pp, A-format paperback, cover by Joseph Wright, £6.99. (Proto-sf novel, first published in 1826; this attractive volume was not actually sent to us for review [alas, Oxford Paperbacks seem to have dropped *Interzone* from their mailing list] but was bought in a second-hand bookshop; on the same occasion we saw in the same series a new edition of *St Leon*, a gothic novel by Mary's father, William Godwin, and a volume entitled [we think] *Seventeenth-Century Fiction* which contains among other things the rare 1666 proto-sf short novel *The Blazing World* by Margaret Cavendish [Brian Stableford, who was with us at the time, bought that one with enthusiasm]; a high proportion of the World's Classics series turns out to be of sf, fantasy or horror interest.) *Late entry: Spring or Summer 1994 publication, purchased in November 1994*.

Shepard, Lucius. **The Ends of the Earth**. Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-169-3, 484pp, A-format paperback, cover by Chris Moore, £5.99. (Sf/fantasy collection, first published in the USA, 1993; reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 84.) *1st December 1994*.

Simmons, Dan. **Fires of Eden**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-1428-X, 375pp, hardcover, £16.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1994.) *8th December 1994*.

Tem, Melanie. **Revenant**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-4508-8, 374pp, A-format paperback, cover by Larry Rostant, £4.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA [?], 1994.) *8th December 1994*.

Tepper, Sheri S. **A Plague of Angels**. HarperCollins, ISBN 0-00-647343-1, 583pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Sf/fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1993.) *28th November 1994*.

Tepper, Sheri S. **Shadow's End**. HarperCollins, ISBN 0-00-224176-5, 388pp, hardcover, £15.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1994; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen].) *24th November 1994*.

Turtledove, Harry. **Worldwar: In the Balance**. New English Library, ISBN 0-340-61839-6, 656pp, A-format paperback, cover by Bob Eggleton, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1994; reviewed by John Clute in *Interzone* 88.) *3rd November 1994*.

Vinge, Vernor. **Across Realtime**. Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-147-2, 533pp, A-format paperback, cover by Chris Moore, £5.99. (Sf omnibus, first published in the USA, 1991; it contains the novels *The Peace War* [1984] and *Marooned in Realtime* [1986].) *1st December 1994*.

Webber, Collin. **Ribwash**. Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-05830-7, 309pp, A-format paperback, cover by Ainslie MacLeod, £5.99. (Humorous fantasy novel, first edition; Webber's second novel.) *24th November 1994*.

Welfare, Simon, and John Fairley. **Arthur C. Clarke's A-Z of Mysteries: From Atlantis to Zombies**. Foreword by Arthur C. Clarke. HarperCollins, ISBN 0-00-647970-7, 250pp, large-format paperback, £12.99. (Non-fiction study of scientific and pseudo-scientific marvels, many of them on the fringes of sf; first published in 1993.) *November 1994*.

Yolen, Jane, ed. **Xanadu 3**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85898-1, 319pp, hardcover, \$21.95. (Fantasy anthology, first edition; proof copy received; it contains all-new stories by Claire Parman Brown [who died in a car accident in Nepal, in 1993; luckily novelist Pat Murphy, who was with her, was relatively unhurt], Jo Clayton, Nancy Etchemendy, Astrid Julian, Tanith Lee, Susan Palwick, Josephina Sherman, Midori Snyder and many others, mainly female and mainly new writers; Martin H. Greenberg is uncredited co-editor.) *January 1995*.

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, films and TV, etc.). The collective term "Spinoffery" is used for the sake of brevity.

Attwood, Tony. **Terry Nation's Blake's 7: The Programme Guide.** Virgin, ISBN 0-426-19449-7, 235pp, A-format paperback, £4.99. (Sf television-series guide, first published in 1982; this edition has been revised and expanded.) *December 1994?*

Bischoff, David. **Aliens vs. Predator: Hunter's Planet.** Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-228-2, 260pp, A-format paperback, cover by John Bolton, £4.99. (Sf movie spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1994; it's based on a graphic novel by Randy Stradley, which in turn was based on the Twentieth Century Fox films *Predator* and *Aliens*, and the designs for the first of the latter series by artist H. R. Giger.) *1st December 1994.*

Bulis, Christopher. **State of Change.** "Doctor Who: The Missing Adventures." Virgin/Doctor Who, ISBN 0-426-20431-X, 295pp, A-format paperback, cover by Alister Pearson, £4.99. (Sf television-series spinoff novel, first edition.) *December 1994?*

Dowd, Tom. **Burning Bright.** "Shadowrun." Roc, ISBN 0-451-45368-9, 280pp, A-format paperback, cover by Peter Peebles, £4.99. (Shared-world sf/fantasy novel, based on a role-playing game; first published in the USA, 1994; it's copyright "FASA Corporation"; this is the American first edition with a British price sticker.) *1st December 1994.*

Farrand, Phil. **The Nitpicker's Guide for Classic Trekkers.** "Bloopers, Impossibilities and Screw-Ups from All 79 Original *Star Trek* Episodes, All Six Movies, plus the Series Pilot, 'The Cage'." Titan, ISBN 1-85286-587-3, 393pp, B-format paperback, cover by Bob Larkin, £7.99. (Irreverent guide to the errors and inconsistencies in the famous sf TV series and film series; first published in the USA, 1994.) *15th December 1994.*

Foster, Alan Dean, and Eric Frank Russell. **Design For a Great Day.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-85501-X, 255pp, hardcover, \$21. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; this is a sort of "posthumous sharecrop"; Foster has taken an old Russell story [from 1953] and expanded it into a full-length novel; Russell, who was British, died in 1978.) *February 1995.*

Howe, David J., Mark Stammers and Stephen James Walker. **Doctor Who: The Handbook. The First Doctor.** Virgin/Doctor Who, ISBN 0-426-20430-1, 350pp, A-format paperback, cover by Alister Pearson, £4.99. (Companion to the *Doctor Who* television series which starred William Hartnell [1963-1966]; first edition.) *December 1994?*

Howe, David J., Mark Stammers and Stephen James Walker. **Doctor Who: The Seventies.** Virgin/Doctor Who, ISBN 1-85227-444-1, 180pp, hardcover, £15.99. (Copiously illustrated history of the *Doctor Who* television series in the decade specified; first edition.) *17th November 1994.*

Lewis, Sam, ed. **Talisman: A Short Story Anthology.** "Earthdawn." Roc, ISBN 0-451-45389-1, 282pp, A-format paperback, cover by Boris Vallejo, £4.99. (Shared-world fantasy anthology, based on a role-playing game; first published in the USA, 1994; it's copyright

"FASA Corporation"; this is the American first edition with a British price sticker.) *1st December 1994.*

Luceno, James. **The Shadow.** Arrow, ISBN 0-09-951621-7, 216pp, A-format paperback, £4.99. (Crime/fantasy movie novelization, first published in the USA, 1994; based on a screenplay by David Koepp [inspired by the pulp-magazine stories by Walter B. Gibson] for the film directed by Russell Mulcahy.) *Late entry: October (?) publication, received in November 1994.*

McIntyre, Vonda N. **The Crystal Star.** "Star Wars." Bantam Press, ISBN 0-593-03746-4, 309pp, hardcover, cover by Drew Struzan, £10.99. (Sf movie spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1994; the sixth of the new "Star Wars" novels by various hands to appear in hardcover.) *8th December 1994.*

Marshak, Sondra, and Myrna Culbreath. **The Fate of the Phoenix.** "Star Trek Adventures, 9." Titan, ISBN 1-85286-530-0, 262pp, A-format paperback, cover by Alister Pearson, £4.50. (Sf television-and-film-series spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1979.) *15th December 1994.*

Mortimore, Jim. **Parasite.** "The New Doctor Who Adventures." Virgin/Doctor Who, ISBN 0-426-20425-5, 306pp, A-format paperback, cover by Paul Campbell, £4.99. (Sf television-series spinoff novel, first edition.) *December 1994?*

Peel, John. **The Addams Family and The Munsters Programme Guide.** Virgin, ISBN 0-86369-837-9, 294pp, A-format paperback, cover by Alister Pearson, £4.99. (Horror/fantasy television show guide, first edition; considering its all-pervasiveness, the TV situation comedy is a comparatively unsung form of modern fiction; there have been dozens of sitcoms, both in the USA and Britain, which fall into the areas of sf and fantasy [the award-winning *Red Dwarf* is perhaps the most distinguished UK example]; so we are rather pleased to see this programme guide for two 1960s "classics"; query: this book doesn't tell us, but was the David Levy who created *The Addams Family* [inspired by the magazine cartoons of Charles Addams] the same David Levy who wrote the sf novel *The Gods of Foxcroft* [1970]?; possibly so, as *The Encyclopedia of SF* describes the latter as a "film executive and writer.") *December 1994?*

Shatner, William, with Chris Kreski. **Star Trek Movie Memories.** HarperCollins, ISBN 0-00-638416-1, 358pp, C-format paperback, £9.99. (Reminiscences by the star of the sf television series and films; first published in the USA, 1994.) *28th November 1994.*

Tyers, Kathy. **The Truce at Bakura.** "Star Wars." Bantam, ISBN 0-553-40758-9, 341pp, A-format paperback, cover by Drew Struzan, £4.99. (Sf movie spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1994.) *8th December 1994.*

Interzone 1994 Popularity Poll

This is the February 1995 issue, mailed in early January. Over the coming weeks, we'd be grateful if readers could bend their minds to rating the past year's stories, articles and illustrations. Let us know your thoughts on the contents of issues 79 to 90 inclusive (no need to wait until you've read the latest two issues, as they will count towards next year's poll).

We'd appreciate it if readers (especially those who are renewing their subscriptions) could send us answers to the following questions. Just write or type your replies on any piece of paper and send them to us before the deadline of **1st March 1995**. We'll report the results later in the spring. Any further comments about the magazine would also be most welcome.

1 Which stories in *Interzone* issues 79-90 inclusive (i.e. those with a 1994 cover date) did you particularly like?

2 Which stories in *Interzone* issues 79-90 inclusive did you particularly dislike (if any)?

3 Which artists' illustrations (including covers) in *Interzone* issues 79-90 inclusive did you particularly like?

4 Which artists' illustrations (including covers) in *Interzone* issues 79-90 inclusive did you particularly dislike (if any)?

5 Which non-fiction items in *Interzone* issues 79-90 inclusive did you particularly like?

6 Which non-fiction items in *Interzone* issues 79-90 inclusive did you particularly dislike (if any)?

SMALL ADS

SCIENCE-FICTION STUDIES: I'm missing just four issues from my otherwise complete run of this heavyweight journal – numbers 5, 17, 18 and 19. Does anyone have copies to sell or trade? (I have a spare copy of number 4 for sale or exchange.) Contact David Pringle, *Interzone*, 217 Preston Drive, Brighton BN1 6FL, UK (tel. 0273-504710).

THE ART OF DANNY FLYNN ...Hope you've already bought the book, recently published by Paper Tiger with a foreword by Arthur C. Clarke. As well as illustrating book covers, I enjoy taking on private commissions. Reasonable rates. For further information please write to my new address: Danny Flynn, 67 Sharland Close, Grove, Wantage, Oxon. OX12 0AF. (Prompt reply.)

SF/HORROR/CRIME and vintage paperback firsts catalogue. Also collectors' books and price guides, plus *Paperback, Pulp & Comic Collector* magazine (£3.50 inc. p&p). Send two 24p stamps to Zardoz Books, 20 Whitecroft, Dilton Marsh, Wiltshire BA13 4DJ.

FOR SALE: SF/F, horror, mysteries, etc. Books, magazines, comics. Thousands. Free search. Buying, trading. Write: JS, 1500 Main Avenue, Kaukauna, WI 54130, USA.

ERIC FRANK RUSSELL BOOKS WANTED: *Men, Martians and Machines* (2nd edition, Dobson, 1963) and *Far Stars* (2nd edition, Dobson, about 1964) in nice clean jackets. Also *Sinister Barrier* (1st UK, Dobson, 1967) in a fine or better jacket. Top prices paid. J. Ingham, 41 Rosemary Avenue, Earley, Reading, Berks. RG6 2YQ. Tel. 0734-869071

FREE BOOKSEARCH plus smallish (mainly paperback) list. Gary Dalkin, 5 Lydford Rd., Bournemouth BH11 8SN.

THE UNLIMITED DREAM COMPANY: imported books and magazines for sale. *Metaworlds: Best Australian SF* edited by Paul Collins (Penguin Australia) – stories by George Turner, Damien Broderick, Terry Dowling, Greg Egan & others – £6 post paid. Also, Aphelion Books titles by Sean McMullen & others; and from America the brilliant *SF Eye*, etc. For details send SAE to THE UNLIMITED DREAM COMPANY, 127 Gaisford St., Kentish Town, London NW5 2EG.

SUBSTANCE: Mature SF/Fantasy magazine featuring Stephen Baxter, Ben Jeapes, D. F. Lewis, Richard Kerr, Sally Ann Melia. First 20 subscribers receive free Paper Tiger Miniature – pocket-sized art-book series featuring Burns, Matthews, Pennington, Vallejo, White, Woodroffe. £9 for four-issue subscription. Cheques made out to Neville Barnes, 65 Conbar Avenue, Rustington, West Sussex BN16 3LZ.

BRIGHTON AREA readers of *Interzone* are welcome to join us on Friday nights at The Mitre, a friendly pub on Baker Street (near the Open Market). A few of us meet from 9-11pm, in the smaller of the two rooms, for informal drink and chat. You'll recognize us by the copies of *IZ* or other sf publications lying around — so come along and make yourselves known. (Editors.)

SMALL ADS in *Interzone* reach over 10,000 people. If you wish to advertise please send your ad copy, *together with payment*, to *Interzone*, 217 Preston Drive, Brighton BN1 6FL, UK. Rates: 25 pence per word, minimum of ten words, discount of 10% for insertions repeated in three issues (VAT is inclusive). *Overseas bookdealers:* we may be willing to trade Small-Ad space for books and book-search services – please enquire.

BAMFORD MEMORIAL TROPHY for a sf/fantasy short story of 2-3,000 words. Adjudicator: Lionel Fanthorpe. First prize £50, travel and accommodation for SF/Fantasy event of UK Year of Literature (Swansea, December 1995). Open to members of untutored writers' groups resident in the UK. For rules and entry form, please send SAE to Bamford Competition Secretary, 4 Church Lane West, Aldershot, Hampshire GU11 3LH. Closing date 31st March 1995.

THE TIME MACHINE: Past, Present and Future – July 26-29, 1995, Imperial College, London. For further details of this international conference please contact Patrick Parrinder, H. G. Wells Society, 82 Hillfield Ave., London N8 7DN.

CRITICAL ASSEMBLY I & II: both volumes of Hugo-winner David Langford's legendary sf review columns. All revised/reset; each volume 70,000 words softbound. Each £9.75 post free from David Langford, 94 London Rd., Reading RG1 5AU (e-mail ansible@cix.compulink.co.uk).

WANTED – Forrest J. Ackerman memorabilia. Contact Roger Newson, Felixstowe 277603.

THANKS VERY MUCH to the people who kindly supplied me with two "Hollywood novels" I was searching for; but I'm still in need of reading copies of the following: Jane Allen, *I Lost My Girlish Laughter* (1938); Jeffrey Dell, *Nobody Ordered Wolves* (1939); Josh Greenfeld, *The Return of Mr Hollywood* (1984); James Hilton, *Morning Journey* (1951); Frederic Raphael, *California Time* (1975); Melville Shavelson, *Lualda* (1975); Thomas Wiseman, *Czar* (1965); Bernard Wolfe, *Come On Out, Daddy* (1963); Rudolph Wurlitzer, *Slow Fade* (1984). Paperbacks preferred (if such exist). If you can supply any please contact David Pringle, *Interzone*, 217 Preston Drive Brighton BN1 6FL (0273-504710; e-mail: interzone@cix.compulink.co.uk).

TERRY PRATCHETT FANZINE #3, £2. Four-issue subscription £7. Cheques to TWK (IZ), Spinneys, Post Office Rd., Woodham Mortimer, Maldon, Essex CM9 6SX.

GROTESQUE #5 – £2.80, £10/4. BIG fiction. *Grotesque Magazine*, 39 Brook Ave., Carrickfergus, N. Ireland BT38 7TE. Quality strange manuscripts required. Subs requested.

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READ *The Gift of Ramu*: a UFO contact story with a difference. Send cheque for £2.99 to ITMA, 93c Venner Rd., London SE26 5HU.

ASTRONOMY WITHOUT A TELESCOPE by George Jenner – an interactive sci-fi story (text only) on disk for all IBM PC-type computers. LUF250 (or a £5 note at your risk.) Orders or enquiries to: george Jenner, 5 rue Jean Origer, L-2269, Luxembourg.

COMING NEXT MONTH

New stories by Brian Aldiss ("Becoming the Full Butterfly"), David Garnett, Astrid Julian and others, plus all our usual features and reviews. So watch out for the March *Interzone*, on sale in February. (The one after, number 94, will be our special "Charles Platt's 50th-birthday issue," with stories by Piers Anthony, Gregory Benford, Rudy Rucker and many more.)

CLEARANCE SALE!

In order to clear storage space, we have drastically reduced the price on our early back-issue stocks.

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#2, **Summer 1982:** stories by Ballard, Pollack, Disch, etc.

#3, **Autumn 1982:** Carter, Garnett, Kilworth, Saxton, etc.

#8, **Summer 1984:** Ballard, Bradfield, Dick, Newman, etc.

#9, **Autumn 1984:** Aldiss, Ballard, Disch, Gibson, Harrison.

#10, **Winter 1984/85:** Bradfield, Burns, Pollack, Wolfe, etc.

#11, **Spring 1985:** Langford, Shirley/Sterling, Roberts, etc.

#12, **Summer 1985:** Bishop, Harrison, McAuley, Zoline, etc.

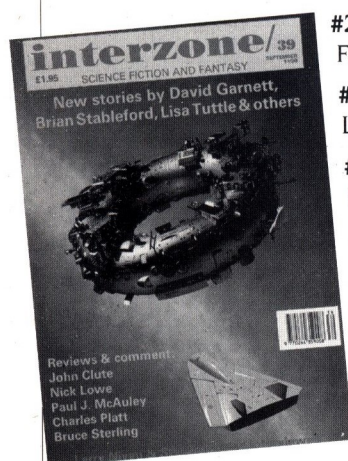
#13, **Autumn 1985:** Ballard, Bayley, Ferguson, Watson, etc.

#14, **Winter 1985/86:** McAuley, Newman, Sterling, Watson, etc.

#15, **Spring 1986:** Brosnan, Gibson, Kilworth, Reed, etc.

#18, **Winter 1986/87:** Benford, Campbell, Egan, Watson, etc.

#19, **Spring 1987:** Ferguson, McAuley, Newman, Baxter, etc.



#24, **Summer 1988:** Brown, Fowler, Mann, Stableford, etc.

#25, **Sep/Oct 1988:** Griffith, Langford, Preuss, Watson, etc.

#26, **Nov/Dec 1988:** Brown, Pratchett, Shaw, Sladek, etc.

#27, **Jan/Feb 1989:** Bayley, Brosnan, Robinson, Shaw, etc.

#28, **Mar/Apr 1989:** Baxter, Campbell, Newman, Rucker/Laidlaw

#29, **May/June 1989:** Egan, Fowler, Kilworth, Mann, etc.

#30, **Jul/Aug 1989:** Ballard, Brooke, Goldstein, MacLeod, etc.

#31, **Sep/Oct 1989:** Brown, Gribbin, Jones, Stross, etc.

#32, **Nov/Dec 1989:** Bayley, Calder, McDonald, Royle, etc.

#33, **Jan/Feb 1990:** Brin, Carroll, Newman, Watson, etc.

#34, **Mar/Apr 1990:** Calder, Brooke, Griffith, MacLeod, etc.

#35, **May 1990:** Baxter, Bayley, Disch, Stableford, etc.

#36, **Jun 1990:** Egan, Ings, Newman, Reynolds, etc.

#37, **Jul 1990:** Bear, Brooke, Egan, Lee, Stross, etc.

#38, **Aug 1990:** special Aldiss issue, Bear, Stableford, etc.

#39, **Sep 1990:** Brooke, Garnett, MacLeod, Tuttle, etc.

#40, **Oct 1990:** Calder, Gibson/Sterling, Gribbin, etc.

#41, **Nov 1990:** Brown, Egan, McAuley, Royle, Webb, etc.

#42, **Dec 1990:** all-female issue, Fowler, Murphy, Tuttle

#43, **Jan 1991:** Jeapes, Langford, Newman/Byrne, Shaw, etc.

#44, **Feb 1991:** Brown, Christopher, Egan, Siddall, etc.

#45, **Mar 1991:** Baxter, Holdstock, Landis, Stableford, etc.

#46, **Apr 1991:** Beckett, McAuley, Mapes, Moorcock, etc.

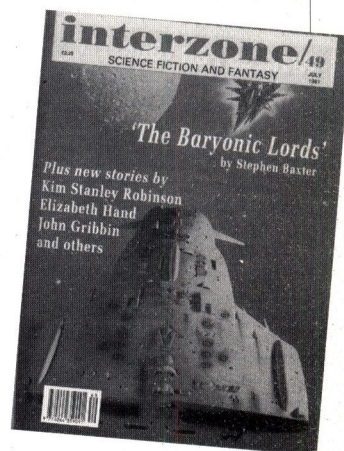
#47, **May 1991:** special *Aboriginal* issue, Ellison, Pohl, etc.

#48, **Jun 1991:** Egan, Griffith, Kilworth, Newman/Byrne, etc.

#49, **Jul 1991:** Baxter, Gribbin, Hand, Robinson, Webb, etc.

#50, **Aug 1991:** Egan, Griffith, index to first 50 issues, etc.

Please note that issues 1, 4-7, 16-17 and 20-23 inclusive are now unavailable. Later back-issues (number 51 onwards) are all available for £2.50 inland. Please make your cheques or postal orders payable to *Interzone* and send them to 217 Preston Drive, Brighton BN1 6FL, UK.



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