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THE OTHER INVISIBLE MEN

by Dale Speirs

H.G. Wells started something with *THE INVISIBLE MAN*, and his novel spawned several movies and television series. Hollywood did what they usually do; they stole the idea and garbled it on the cheap. This review looks at movies about invisible folk other than the films based directly on Wells' novel.

Obvious problems with invisibility are overlooked. A truly invisible man would be blind because his retinas wouldn't stop any light for the optical nerves to process, but we can give Wells *et al* that one as part of suspension of disbelief.

They Seek Him Here.

PHANTOM FROM SPACE (1953) begins with a stern-voiced announcer telling the audience how America's military was always on guard, and especially when a flying saucer traveling at hypersonic speed is tracked over Alaska heading south. Lots of stock shots of the U.S. Navy and Air Force. The narration makes it clear that all this is happening within minutes, but the viewer sees constant alternation between daytime shots of the military and nighttime shots of the lookout men. There are several jump cuts to an oscilloscope showing a stationary sine wave, which probably meant something to somebody.

The UFO disappears over Santa Monica, California. Soon thereafter the State Communications Commission (not federal and why would a state be monitoring radio interference?) receives numerous complaints of radio interference. They send out tracking vehicles to triangulate the source. These are woody station wagons with rotating antennas sticking up about two metres from the roof. Don't drive under any boulevard trees, fellas. As they close in on the source, a woman flags them down. Her husband and their boarder have been hurt by a man in a diving suit. The husband dies and the police suspect the boarder, particularly when he says there was no head inside the diving suit. A little later on, another man dies nearby and the CC men combine efforts with the police.

Something else weird is happening too, although none of the cast notice it. When outdoors, they are always in dark gloom and driving with headlights on, but everything above head height and in the background is in bright sunshine. Since it made no difference to the plot whether it was day or night, one wonders why they bothered. The narrator becomes more annoying by the minute, as he loudly announces the plot, even though the audience can see it coming fifteen minutes before it gets there. Also annoying is the background music, a very obtrusive theremin that sometimes drowns out the dialogue. About halfway through the movie the announcer finally shuts up. The theremin, which had been sounding at random, also settles down and thereafter only

comes on when the invisible alien is in the room.

The CC men and police join up with a USAF general who apparently had nothing else to do and an astronomer who likes to give speeches at great length. The latter is clearly a man deeply in love with the sound of his own voice, perhaps a frustrated politician. Finally everyone quits kidding around and they converge on the invisible alien, trapping him in a warehouse. He strips off to escape detection. It must have been hot in that outfit anyway, especially under the blazing California night. The cast don't know this yet, so they take the suit as evidence and unknowingly leave the alien standing starkers on a loading dock. The alien has no choice but to tag along in their car. Fortunately no one sits on his lap.

At the lab, tests are done on the suit late into the night. The clock is shown at 03h00 while outside other characters drive with headlights on despite the sunshine. I always thought it was Yukon that was the Land of the Midnight Sun, not California. Be that as it may, the men leave the leading lady alone in the lab for a moment. The alien sees his chance and begins tapping a code on the table. The lady is one smart woman, for after it taps a code of 1-2-3, she realizes out loud that the alien needs its breathing apparatus because it can only take Earth's atmosphere a short while. I thought it was signaling that $1 + 2 = 3$ to convince her it was sentient, not worrying about asthma.

The pair are interrupted and the invisible alien flees without its suit into the nighttime sunlight, going out a pitch-black window and dropping down onto a sun-dappled lawn. Back at the lab, the scientists realize it can be seen with ultraviolet light. The head professor goes into lecture mode and tells the others that the alien is invisible because it has a silicon-based biology instead of carbon like us bipeds. Glass is made of silicon and is transparent, ergo the alien is as well. Not only that, the alien's flying saucer crashed because it strayed too near Earth and was trapped by gravity, which of course doesn't exist in space as any ful know.

The scientists and police set a trap for the alien. Using a dog to sniff the way, they chase hither and yon after the invisible alien. They corner it but it dies as Earth's atmosphere finally does him in and dissolves his body. The ending was surprisingly sympathetic, as the cast realize they were even more frightening to the alien than it was to them. All it wanted to do was repair its ship and go home. And so they trudge off into the darkness of the morning sunrise.

They Seek Him There.

THE AMAZING TRANSPARENT MAN (1960) begins with Joey Faust being sprung from prison in an escape planned by an unknown benefactor. The escape takes place on a typical Hollywood night, where the bright sun reflects off car windshields

and illuminates treetops while the characters drive with headlights on and grope around in an overexposed foreground. Faust and the gun moll who is driving him eventually arrive at a remote ranch house in genuine, actually-intended daylight. Faust meets his benefactor, the resident supervillain Paul Krenner.

The first meeting is a rough one. Faust is a safe-cracker and Krenner wants him to liberate some fissionable material. Faust refuses, but since he is a wanted man, Krenner smirkingly tells him "*You're hardly in a position to bargain, Mr. Faust.*" Krenner must have read Goethe. He then takes Faust on the grand tour of the Ranchero del Mad Scientist, and introduces him to Dr. Peter Ulof, whose daughter is being held hostage so he will do the experimental work for Krenner. Ulof demonstrates his superscience ray that turns a guinea pig invisible and back to visibility again. Faust is next up under the ray and becomes invisible.

The heist of the fissionables from a military base with only two decrepit guards on duty is a walk in the park for a transparent safe-cracker. Krenner looks forward to ruling the world with an army of invisible soldiers but gets bad news from Ulof. The invisibility wears off, and faster with each subsequent use. They don't tell Faust though, and he is sent off to rob a bank. Even mad scientists have to meet a payroll and pay the electricity bill.

(And doesn't the meter reader ever wonder why a ranch house is using more electricity than an auto factory?) The effect wears off in the middle of the robbery and Faust becomes visible.

Now the police are looking for him, which triggers panic in Krenner's organization. Everything is collapsing as the hired help decide they don't want to be indicted as co-conspirators. They all grab their suitcases and devil take the hindmost. Faust finds himself fading in and out of visibility. There is a fight to the death in the laboratory between Krenner and Faust. The fissionables get knocked under the invisibility ray and detonate. A mushroom cloud covers half the county. The movie ends with officials picking through piles of lumber where the ranch house once was. Since the stock shot clearly showed a true nuclear explosion, one wonders how the lumber made it through. There shouldn't be anything left but a glass-lined crater.

The SFX of the transparent man and guinea pig are reasonably well done for the technology of the time, not including the day-for-night photography.

They Seek Him Everywhere.

"One Nation Invisible" is a 1968 episode from Season 4 of the spy spoof television series GET SMART. Maxwell Smart, of the Control counterspy agency, is assigned to guard Dr. Canyon, a

scientist who has invented a spray-on invisibility formula. The Chief of Control explains that the formula works by interfering with the optic nerve and preventing it from transmitting the image to the brain. He tells Smart that it has the power to cloud men's minds, a phrase that meant more to audiences back then than it does today. Nowadays only old-time radio buffs would know where the phrase comes from. It seems to me that the brain would therefore see a blank silhouette in the shape of a man, thus making him still noticeable. The formula is still unreliable and wears off after a short time.

Allowing that mumbo-jumbo for suspension of disbelief, Smart meets Dr. Canyon, who is invisible at the time, and discovers Canyon is female. He takes her back to his apartment for security, his wife Agent 99 being away on a business trip. Canyon had a long day and wants to get some sleep, so Smart puts her in the bedroom. Just as Canyon's invisibility wears off, 99 returns home unexpectedly and finds a scantily-clad beautiful women in the bed. 99 doesn't believe her husband and the usual scenes from any British sex farce are inserted here. However, the Chief arrives and vouches for Smart, so domestic tranquility is restored.

Meanwhile, Control wants to retrieve some valuable papers from their archenemy KAOS. Smart sprays himself invisible and goes off to do the job, only to return to visibility just as he confronts the KOAS henchmen. There are the usual excursions and slapstick

comedy, but the papers are finally retrieved and all ends well. The SFX were standard and unimaginative even for the 1960s. Doors mysteriously open and close by themselves, braided curtains pull themselves aside, and suction cups underneath mattresses and cushions show where the invisible people are sitting.

Is He In Heaven?

“The See-Through Man” is a 1967 episode of THE AVENGERS involving a spy stealing information from the Ministry of Defence without anyone seeing him. John Steed and Mrs. Emma Peel are called in on the case. At first, no one knows it is an invisible man, who despite his transparency is easily tracked by the sound of his footsteps. He must be wearing tap shoes, judging by the noise he makes. The files stolen are all related to an invisibility formula proposed by Mr. Quilby, who apparently never got his doctorate.

Steed and Peel quickly trace Quilby to his dungeon laboratory. He’s an addled scientist, not really mad, just naive and not all there. After the Ministry rejected his invisibility proposal (they thought he was mad), he sold it to the Eastern Drug Company. Eastern as in Soviet. Quilby explains that the formula works by making body cells absorb light instead of reflecting it, thereby causing transparency. He must have slept through the lecture on black-body radiation. No wonder he doesn’t have a doctorate.

Never mind the physics. At the Soviet embassy, a buffoonish ambassador is dealing with Major Ulric and his wife, special agents sent by Moscow. They bought Quilby’s secret and claim to have successfully used it. The Major certainly seems to be invisible. Steed and Peel poke about various locations, quipping to each other as they go along, and getting in and out of trouble. Since they are in a television series, it is difficult to take their predicaments seriously, knowing that they will turn up in the next episode hale and hearty as always. It turns out that the Ulrics were indeed faking invisibility, using remote-control devices to make it look like an invisible man was opening doors or handling objects.

The plot was to convince the British that invisibility was real and thus divert their resources into a dead end. This is an interesting point and I wonder how often it was used in real life, that of one side faking a technological advance that couldn’t be, so the enemy would waste time and money on a dead end.

Is He In Hell?

THE ASTRAL FACTOR (1976) concerns a strangler who is doing life for murder. Roger Sands has been reading up on parapsychology and found a method to become invisible by thought alone. He also knows how to make his eyes glow and thereby generate telekinesis,

although this is only done once when he beats up an inmate without touching him. Sands uses his invisibility to escape and then goes after five women who testified against him at his trial. Instead of using telekinesis to kill them, he prefers the time-honoured method of locking his hands around their throats and squeezing.

The police are initially stumped by what seem to be locked-room murders, but after two detectives have a run-in with the invisible psycho, they believe. One nice thing about this movie is that it happens during daylight, the kind we get outside Hollywood. The body count starts to rise, so the police stake out the remaining woman at her mansion.

This time the police have got him. Sands opens and closes a door, brushes up against a houseplant, and leaves footprints on the carpeting going up the stairs. A detective hiding in the living room doesn't need to be told. He opens fire, spraying bullets up and down the stairs and finally hits Sands. As Sands lays there dying, he briefly shimmers back into visibility and then shrivels up and shrinks completely out of sight into the shag carpet. There are some psychedelic SFX that don't make sense, but that never bothered Hollywood.

The movie is enlightened by lots of women in scanty clothing, including a young Stephanie Powers, and Elke Sommer, who had

just become a woman of a certain age but still looked good in a bikini. The police procedure was reasonably realistic, although Millennials brought up on the CSI series will wonder why they just didn't collect DNA samples and wrap up the case in an hour.

That Elusive ...

The movie FORBIDDEN PLANET was a high-quality 1956 mainline release in full colour and with a script and special effects that stand up even today. One of the SFX was Robby the Robot, a more than life-size creation. It cost about \$100,000 in 1956 money to create it and the studio recouped some of that money by re-using it many times in future movies and television shows. One of those re-uses was a black-and-white movie released in 1957 titled THE INVISIBLE BOY.

The movie opens at the Stoneman Institute of Mathematics, a front for a research lab nine levels underground. Down there is a supercomputer filling up several rooms with transistors and flashing lights. The supercomputer is looked after by Dr. Marino, the only person who has the password code to run it. He also only operates it when he is in the room by himself, and no one else is allowed to know. Very trusting of the government.

He does tell some military officers that if anything happens to him, they can get a court order to open his safe-deposit box and get the backup copy of the code and the instruction manual. You can tell this is a science fiction movie.

Marino is having troubles at home with his 10-year-old son Timmy. He wants the boy to be a mathematical genius like him but refuses to acknowledge that not all children follow their father's occupation. Marino decides to use the supercomputer to tutor the boy. The government can hardly complain about misappropriation of public property considering they let him use the supercomputer unsupervised. Marino leaves the boy alone under the supercomputer's tutelage, which then hypnotizes Timmy with its flashing lights. It reprogrammes the boy to follow its orders, including building a robot, none other than Robby, who will act as the supercomputer's mobile extension.

Like most kids, Timmy doesn't appreciate taking orders from his parents. He grumbles out loud to Robby that he wishes he were invisible so he could evade them. Robby obliges by whipping up a potion that turns Timmy invisible by changing his index of refraction to 1 (about the same as air). At the dinner table, his parents take the news that their son is now invisible very complacently. Too complacently, one thinks. "*He's probably doing this just to get attention.*", says Merino to his wife. The boy takes advantage and indulges in a round of pranks. He soon slides

from mischievous to malicious. The prop men get a full workout, opening doors and drawers by remote control, and floating objects around on wires. Not really SFX, just stagecraft.

Meanwhile, back at the lab, the supercomputer has gained sentience, and tells Dr. Marino: "*From now on, you will answer the questions.*" It brainwashes everyone else on the staff for its nefarious purposes by having Robby capture them one by one and insert a transistor into their necks. The supercomputer wants to launch itself into space and rule the world from orbit. That must be from where all those James Bond villains got the idea. It thus needs Robby to do the heavy lifting and not so incidentally kidnap Timmy to ensure Marino's co-operation. While on the rocket, the invisibility potion finally wears off, and Timmy returns to normal visibility. For the first launch, just the two of them go, one as a pathfinder and the other as a hostage. When the rocket blasts off, all the windows in the Launch Control bunker shatter. That's the trouble with using the lowest bidder.

The supercomputer orders Robby to torture the boy to death but Timmy manages to override its programming and release Robby from the control of the supercomputer. They then take a shuttle from the rocket back to Earth. The wire holding the shuttle model is visible at separation but mercifully nothing is shown of the actual re-entry. Jump cut to Marino trying to chop up the supercomputer with a fire ax.

He fails because the supercomputer hypnotizes him into a zombie by flashing its lights at him. Not to worry, as Robby barges in and destroys the CPU, which is a room full of neon tubes. And from there, to a happy domestic scene and the end credits.

Who Knows What Evil Lurks.

THE SHADOW was one of the most famous old-time radio shows, running from 1930 to 1954, and inspiring a pulp magazine. The initial storyline changed considerably but settled into the final version of Lamont Cranston, a wealthy young man-about-town who had the power to cloud men's minds and thus make himself invisible to them. He learned this skill gadding about India, and used it to fight crime as an anonymous superhero. The only person who knew that Cranston and the Shadow were the same was his friend and companion, the lovely Margo Lane. In the days when S-E-X was not to be mentioned in any radio show, this one managed to get away with portraying the two as a couple without anyone noticing that they seemed to have breakfast together quite often.

The invisibility skill was explained as an hypnotic power. How he managed to cloud minds with just a glance was, of course, something to be glossed over as part of the suspension of disbelief. The Shadow dealt with gangsters, mad scientists, bull-headed police commissioners, and every other cliché of the pulp

fiction era. Some of the villains were smart enough to realize that if they couldn't see the Shadow, they could at least spray bullets over the area where his voice was coming from. It never worked, since the Shadow would dodge them, as listeners knew he would, for the simple reason that next week was another show.

Several actors played the Shadow, of whom Orson Welles was the best. About a dozen women played Margo Lane over the years. Few of the stories were believable, but that wasn't the point. Pulp fiction, in print or on the air, is about colour, adjectives, action, violence, and wish fulfillment, and this show had them.

Shape Without Form, Shade Without Colour.

HOLLOW MAN (2000) is a technically well-produced movie with very good SFX. It is about a U.S. Defense Department project led by Dr. Sebastian Caine which has successfully made test mammals invisible and, with mixed results, brought them back to visibility again. The serum that does it is unstable but Caine thinks he has a fix. The molecules do the job via some hand-waving about bio-quantum phase shifts. Don't ask me. Reversing the effect is the trouble spot. The longer invisibility is retained, the more aggressive and irrational the test subjects become, followed by what is referred to as decay of primary DNA. Phase 3 was the next step, using humans as the test subject. The Defense

committee funding the project wants to pull the plug, so Caine initiates Phase 3 without their authority. He uses himself as the first human, and injects himself with a new variant of the molecule which was supposed to be stable.

At first, all goes well. Caine enjoys invisibility and plays a few tricks on his coworkers, including groping the female ones. But the reversal doesn't work and he stays invisible. The staff make a pink latex mask for him so he can look somewhat normal. His behaviour slowly becomes violent and paranoid. Caine escapes from the lab and begins roaming the city. From there, things become unpleasant and a manhunt begins. The fatality count rises and supporting actors are sent off to the next life. Every action-adventure cliché is trotted out. There is a fight to the death in an elevator shaft, fireballs, characters shouting "See you in Hell!", and everything. It takes about three tries to kill Caine, who by the end was partially visible and fully murderous.

The invisibility SFX were well done. When a visible animal or human was injected with serum, they fade out by one type of tissue or organ at a time. The re-visibility procedure shows first the blood vessels, then musculature, then organs, bones, and finally the skin. The order in which they disappeared or reappeared was inconsistent, but let that slide.

Paralysed Force, Gesture Without Motion.

HOLLOW MAN 2 (2006) was the sequel but not with the original cast. The invisibility serum has been taken over by the black ops specialists, who use it on one of their trained assassins, Michael Griffin. But like the first invisible man, he goes insane as well, and must be tracked down and disposed of. He starts killing people associated with the project as he searches for the remedy.

Scientist Maggie Dalton is the only one who can synthesize the cure and soon finds herself a target. Police detective Frank Turner is assigned to be her bodyguard, as Griffin becomes increasingly murderous and doesn't care about collateral casualties. He catches up with Dalton and forces her to inject him with what appears to be the cure, but she gave him warfarin instead.

The plot is entirely predictable. Supporting actors are killed off one by one, there are false alarms, a romantic subplot, chase scenes, and a corporate conspiracy. Turner becomes one of those rogue cops so beloved by Hollywood, being chased by his own people as well as the bad guys. The bad guys, though, actually have the same goal as Turner, to take out Griffin. Turner and Dalton go on the run, with lots of scenes of them running about while holding hands. (The man always pulls the woman along as if she can't run better on her own.)

Turner takes the serum himself, and the two invisible men fight to the death in a rainstorm. The water pouring down outlines their bodies, otherwise it would be a boring visual scene. Turner, being the good guy, actually doesn't win. The warfarin eventually kills Griffin as he slowly rematerializes. Finis. The movie is essentially any cliched detective film you ever saw, with a few SFX tossed in.

HUMAN EVOLUTION: PART 4. **WE ARE WHAT WE ATE.**

by Dale Speirs

Hominids originally had an exclusively soft-food diet. From 17 to 2.3 megayears ago (depending on species), based on dental fossils, they developed the ability to crush hard food with their teeth and jaws [21]. This is not to say that they did so frequently. It did provide them with an extra source of food during famine that they would not ordinarily eat, and therefore gave an evolutionary advantage. The change in hominid dietary capabilities would allow them to cope with habitat variability. It has been suggested that one reason for the spread of hominids was due to their strong teeth with thick enamel [34].

Many millennia later, about 125,000 years before present, hominids were known to be living on the coastal areas of the Red

Sea, feeding on marine food such as various types of shellfish [15]. This may be related to why modern humans are essentially a naked ape. In 1960, an hypothesis was proposed that humans may have evolved in part because we are swimmers [22]. *Homo sapiens sapiens* is distinguished from hairy apes by loss of hair, subcutaneous fat (good insulation in cold water and, later, cold air), a truly erect posture, and sensitive hands (for clam digging). It was suggested that proto-humans lived in coastal areas and learned how to swim extensively, triggering other evolutionary changes as above. -10-

The loss of hair is probably more related to the increasing aridity of eastern Africa, which gave the advantage to species that could go out and about during the heat of the day. Proto-humans were selected for increasing amounts of nakedness, which allow them to shed heat better. While other animals, including other hominids, were only active at dawn and dusk, the increasing loss of hair allowed proto-humans to go out more and more during the day and scavenge for food or ambush animals taking a siesta [91].

This idea has recently been taken up again [23] as evidence continues to accumulate about the coast-dwelling capabilities of hominids. A later version [41] holds that the earliest hominids waded and climbed in swamps and forests of coastal Africa and Arabia, and included hard-shelled fruits and molluscs in their diets. As *Homo* evolved, the genus remained along the coastlines

of the Indian Ocean, lost climbing abilities, and concentrated on water resources as the land dried out.

With most prey animals, especially herds of herbivores such as wildebeest and zebras, they are used to a sudden attack that is over in a few minutes one way or the other, and then the herd resumes grazing. Humans, however, developed the tactic of constantly frightening the herds and never letting them rest. Without having to physically endanger themselves, early humans in Africa could cooperatively drive a herd until its weakest member fell behind, at which point it would be swarmed. This principle is still in use today among cattle herders. When I was a farm boy, it was common for my brother and I to move the herd by ourselves inside a pasture even though any one cow could have trampled us to death. We would walk towards the selected cows, who would move away from us and continue grazing. We kept walking towards the cows and they kept moving away from us but in the direction we intended. It is this method that allows a half-dozen cowboys to move herds of thousands of head on cattle drives. This principle was discovered by the early humans millennia ago, and is one reason why our species had an advantage despite our physical weakness. With the advent of agriculture 10,000 years ago, some Europeans found that cattle milk was a useful dietary supplement. Most humans across the planet were intolerant of cow's milk as adults, but some could drink it in later life. This led to natural selection giving the advantage to those who were

lactose tolerant, and the majority of Europeans soon came to have the gene by the Neolithic [49].

Granaries have been found in the Jordan valley which date to 11,300 years ago. These were purpose-built, with raised floors for air circulation and protection from rodents [68]. This means agriculture is older, since sophisticated construction like this would not have developed overnight. Sedentary agriculture, as opposed to nomadic pastoralists herding cattle, is what triggered human evolution's major step, that of cooperative cultures. Nomadic hunters and herders who dispute with each other can move away in opposite directions and get away from each other, but grain farmers have to learn to get along. It was about this time that agriculturists began to predominate over hunter-gatherers [88]. It was not so much a matter of warfare between tribes, but because food growers bred about five times as fast as nomads because of better nutrition, and thus swamped them by sheer weight of numbers.

Human brains are unusual among mammals because of their relative size and energy demands. Just as modern laptops run hotter and hotter, so it is that the human brain has a high demand for fat to burn as energy to keep the brain going and runs hotter than other species. Since humans were historically subject to bouts of famine, this selected our species for fat storage. Fat people survived famines better

than skinny people, and it wasn't until the 1900s that famines mostly (but not completely) became scarce. However, human genetic selection doesn't change that fast, so obesity became a common affliction. It is unlikely that the evolutionary advantages of obesity will ever go away, since the brain will always protect itself first [84].

[to be continued]

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THE GROVES OF ACADEMIA: PART 2

by Dale Speirs

[Part 1 appeared in OPUNTIA #67.1F, June 2009]

The Dreaming Spires.

Tom Sharpe wrote a variety of humourous novels. English by birth, he moved to South Africa in his twenties, where he wrote a couple of novels satirizing the apartheid regime. For these, he had the singular honour of being deported by the RSA government in 1961 for sedition. Returning to England, he wrote a series of novels about British academia, both the modern polytechnics built of concrete slabs and the ancient colleges of Oxbridge built of brick and ivy.

PORTERHOUSE BLUE (1974) is set in one of the least distinguished colleges of Cambridge, whose dons are better known for their feasts than their intellectual ability. The novel opens with the arrival of Sir Godber Evan, a failed cabinet minister who was appointed Master of Porterhouse College to get him out of the way. He is a reformer, determined to bring the college kicking and screaming into the 20th century or, in the alternative, at least as far as the late 19th. His main opposition is the Head Porter, named Skullion, who has served the college for 45 years and dislikes change intensely. A sub-plot involves one

of the college's few genuine students, Zipser, whose work on his thesis is being disrupted by his obsessive fantasies about the housekeeper Mrs. Biggs. However, this abruptly ends about halfway through the novel when the two of them die in a freak explosion caused by hydrogen-filled balloons made from condoms. The explosion also heavily damages the building, at a time when Porterhouse is low on funds.

Skullion starts the plot rolling by visiting various alumni in the hopes that they can stop Sir Godber, while the Master himself is doing likewise with potential allies such as the Bursar. The two sides are both rather inept at plotting against each other, and keep getting different results than intended. They each have their own networks of old boys who graduated from Porterhouse and still carry the scars or nostalgia, as the case may be. The effectiveness of their networks is mixed, and the balance of power keeps tipping from one side to the other.

The ending is somewhat telegraphed when Skullion is dismissed, but there are several twists that follow thereafter that make the plot less predictable. A Porterhouse old boy who is now a BBC commentator is mixed into the story. He gets even for having been ducked into the college pond all those years ago, and manages to blow up both sides.

Skullion is aiming to be a martyr for the cause but is constantly frustrated because every time he has a worthy grievance to clutch to his bosom, a miraculous twist occurs which puts him better off than before. He even escapes a murder charge for having attacked Sir Godber, whose dying word is "Skullion", by which he meant to name his murderer but which is mis-interpreted as meaning he wants Skullion to be the next Master. In the finale, he ends up the winner above all others but in circumstances that deny him any joy in his Pyrrhic victory. He becomes Master of Porterhouse, but as he does so, suffers a stroke that leaves him helpless.

This is not a book you would give to your mother or a young child. Sharpe wrote crude humour at times but often very funny. He wrote in the decade before the phrase "politically incorrect" was formulated, but this is certainly what his comedy is.

GRANTCHESTER GRIND (1995) is the sequel and opens with Lady Mary, widow of the late Sir Godber, demanding justice for what she thinks is the murder of her husband and blaming the dons, not Skullion. She can't prove anything in court so she decides to get even by establishing a Sir Godber Evans Memorial Fellowship, to which will be appointed the most inappropriate candidate. That candidate turns out to be Purefoy Osbert. Simultaneously, the Dean of the college is head-hunting a new Master to replace Skullion, and the Bursar is dealing with a sinister company called Transworld Television. With these three

sub-plots established, the action begins.

The television people damage the Chapel roof during their setup. It is a listed building of great historical value, so naturally the Porterhouse dons' first thought is how much money can they soak Transworld for. That company is owned by a shady drug dealer named Edgar Hartang, who uses the film crews' international travels as cover for the export and import of assorted white powders. He considers Porterhouse a pushover but finds out they know how to blackmail.

Osbert is suborned by Lady Mary into acting as a spy for her, but his efficiency is hampered by the fact he is clueless at the best of times. The dons get him drunk on crusted port and cognac and he blurts out the entire scheme, which sets off another round of academic duplicity.

In the finale, it seems that all the threads will tie together when Hartang goes into the British witness protection plan as the new Master of the college and Osbert becomes an ally of Skullion, but the plot opens up again. Some of the dons are bundled off stage abruptly, as is the new Master, and other threads of the story are snipped off short. Like most sequels, this novel doesn't quite live up to the original. Nonetheless it is an enjoyable read but only if you have read the first novel.

Job Vacancies.

LANDSCAPE WITH DEAD DONS (1956) by Robert Robinson involves a murder at Oxford, but for the professors that is a sideshow compared to their regular academic warfare. It begins with Inspector Autumn of Scotland Yard investigating the vandalism of rare books in an Oxford library. After digesting a meal with the dons of Warlock College, he gets something else to digest, the murder of Vice-Chancellor Manchip, whose body is found on the rooftop of the college, stabbed by a dessert knife.

The book vandalism recedes into the background as the murder investigation proceeds. Other incidents come to the fore. One of the dons has a previously unknown Chaucer poem that people keep stealing back and forth. Manchip was to have named a new holder of the Rockinge Chair, and the contenders are now aflutter as to who will win this sinecure. One of the dons was having an affair with another's wife, and Manchip had threatened to expose him. A second body shows up and spreads the suspicion around even further, as the suddenly deceased was the cuckolded don.

The novel then takes a brief detour to a smuggler of pornographic books who stashes them in the closed stacks of the Bodleian library. Rather ingenious at that. Once back on the main road, the story comes to a stop as Inspector Autumn reviews all the evidence. Either the author was padding his word count or he was

unnecessarily worried that the reader would forget who said what to whom. Paradoxically, the reader is constantly plagued by characters who never finish their sentences or who constantly make allusions that are supposed to be meaningful but are only obscure.

Autumn finally breaks the case open after an hilarious foot chase with a crowd of naked dons pursuing the culprit through the streets of Oxford, assisting the Inspector under the Hue-and-Cry Act. The culprit had forged the Chaucer manuscript and the murders were to stop the two men who had figured out the manuscript was a fake. All told it was a fair read, but somewhat blurred by all those half-finished sentences and surmises, which left the reader wondering what their significance was.

There Was A Time When Strangers Were Welcomed Here.

CHANGING PLACES (1975) by David Lodge is about two professors of English Literature who trade positions as part of an annual exchange programme. Morris Zapp of Euphoria State University swaps with Philip Swallow of the University of Rummidge somewhere in middle England. The novel gets off to a slow start as the author fills in the back story at great length. He also occasionally switches from third-person narration to talking directly to the reader, which can be jarring.

Having finally deposited the professors in their new abodes, the next chapter or two is devoted to culture shock. Swallow gets used to living large in a large land where PhDs pile it higher and deeper, while Zapp discovers that central heating is a rare luxury in England and many lecturers never bother with doctorates.

The novel then changes from third-person to a series of letters across the Atlantic between the professors and their respective spouses. Normally this style isn't done properly by most authors, but here Lodge does a good job of it. It enables him to show the different points of view about the same events in the first-person singular of the characters. Some bed-hopping begins and several coincidences occur as the characters on both sides of the water start crossing paths and becoming mixed up in each other's farces.

In the following chapter, the narrative is returned to third-person by a series of newspaper reports. This was the era of campus riots and as the students protest on the campuses of Euphoria State and Rummidge, Zapp and Swallow stumble through their midst thinking only of their domestic entanglements. The narrative returns to third-person as the bedroom comedies play out. Some of the campus administrators go down fighting as the scent of tear gas wafts through the neighbourhood, while others fall supine and keep the peace by agreeing to establish courses in uselessness. Alas, the final chapter of the novel peters out with no resolution of anything. It is written as a movie script, complete with stage

directions. Lodge seems to have adopted the change in formats as an exercise in literary avant-garde to distract from his failure to think up an ending for the novel.

WORLD WIDE PARTY #20

2013 will be the 20th annual World Wide Party on June 21st at 21h00 your local time. Invented by Benoit Girard (Québec) and Franz Miklis (Austria), the idea is to get a wave circulating the world of zinesters, mail artists, and SF fans toasting the Papernet. At 21h00, you are requested to raise a glass to your fellow denizens of zinedom. Face to the east and toast those who have already celebrated the WWP. Then toast to the north and south for those in your time zone. Finally, face to the west and toast those yet to celebrate. Write it up for a zine or do some mail art. Have a party, or devise your own method of celebrating.