

# THE MENTOR

AUSTRALIAN SCIENCE FICTION



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# THE MENTOR

## AUSTRALIAN SCIENCE FICTION

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### THE EDITORIAL SLANT

Eugene Naoumov emigrated from the Ukraine to Sydney several months ago and recently got into contact with me. Last week while walking down one Sydney's streets, watching the crowds, he commented that Australia had "socialism, without communism".

I have been thinking lately about what sort of political systems we are likely to see in the future, both near and several hundred years hence. I have also been noticing that pundits on TV, from various countries, have been commenting on how "democracy" has triumphed in the last couple of years. Yet the citizens of the "old" USSR wanted to have democracy, but aren't sure quite what it is, or how to obtain it now that communism fallen.

If we take a common dictionary meaning (The Penguin Macquarie Dictionary) the first two definitions are: "government by the people" and "a form of government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them or by their elected agents under a free electoral system". These are very broad definitions, but neither says what I thought democracy meant: "The form of government in which the laws and the exercise of them is by and for the majority of those people". That is, the majority rules, and the rules benefit the majority. Going by this definition - which I think is the widely held one - neither the UK, the USA, Canada, New Zealand nor Australia is a democracy.

In how many of these countries has a minority, through legislation or other means, eg. through the force of the media, convinced the politicians to change the laws so that they are get a better deal than the majority of the people in that country? OK, you can say, some people - those handicapped, or those whose racial background is looked down upon by the majority, or whose sex or proclivities is not equal to others in day to day activities (workplaces, etc) - need that extra power behind them to enable them to live as (they think) they should. All to the good, says I, but the country, or state, they live in after this comes through is NOT then a democracy.

Democracy used to be the rule of the people, but there are ways around that. Activists know this.

Contributions may be on an IBM ascii file or typed, single or double spaced, preferably a good photocopy (and if you want it returned, please *type* your name and address)! Contributions are not paid; however they receive a free copy of the issue their contribution is in, and any future issue containing comments on their contribution.

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# LOOKING FORWARD, LOOKING BACK

by Sean Williams

Drifting along the Screw, Officiator Gauntley ruminated upon his lot. He was tired, frustrated, sick of being manipulated by faceless authorities and high-flyers, and he felt old. Yet, despite this, an unusual excitement burned within him.

He was there -- brushing the pivot about which the history of humanity turned -- where no man had been but him, apart from those that lived there. He supposed he had earned the right to be elated. His career in the Arm would certainly be over when he returned Home, some fifteen billion years hence.

He had, however, only a few minutes to contemplate his fate before he was abruptly startled from his meditation.

The Bore Alarm sounded. With a screech the inspiration of a thousand tearing fingernails, the computer alerted him to the presence of a major spatio-temporal catastrophe in their immediate vicinity. His craft -- without awaiting confirmation from its pilot -- swung immediately towards the disturbance, seeking its source with a single-minded determination that required no human intervention.

'Shit.'

He swung down out of his bed and propelled himself across the chamber of the crew quarters towards the pilot bay. The spacious room spun dizzily around him -- white surfaces and disjointed planes whirling in the absence of gravity -- until he obtained the peak of his trajectory. His black jumpsuit settled weightily upon his wide shoulders and his shoes clicked contact with the floor. His loose, dark brown hair fell in disarray across his forehead, and he absent-mindedly brushed it back.

'Where, dammit?' he asked, anticipating the answer.

'Forty-three tee, one sixty-five tau, eighty-eight teh,' said a pleasant male voice, indicating the direction of the temporal vector. Magnitude: 'Five years and closing.'

Gauntley studied the hologram of the Screw. One flashing light was his ship, the *ESS Nelson*; the other, further ahead along the Screw, was the target. A black dot was nil primum mobile, a series of crimson arcs the Forbidden Zones. Both flashing lights and the black dot were flashing inside one of these red segments, rapidly coming closer together. The You-Are-Entering-A-Forbidden-Zone indicator in one corner of the tank had been chiming and flashing for over two relative days, and would have changed to You-Have-Entered-etc had he not sabotaged that part of the machine's programming.

He hadn't anticipated this, having disabled the Bore alert overrides, but not the Zone command structures. He cursed fate for conspiring against him. Invading a Forbidden Zone was crime enough, but the Arm would crucify him for actually integrating within it.

Again. The dots were already much closer.

'Preparing to snatch and grab,' said the ship, and various displays shifted position and changed colour on the board.

'Abort,' he ordered. 'Display manual instruments.'

'Request denied. Priority override function in operation.'

'Disengage override function. Command: return control to pilot.'

'Command refuted. Authority unrecognised. Emergency conditions apply.'

'Directive instruction #788. As supervisory member aboard this craft I demand the manual control of this ship which is my right and privilege.' The computer was unimpressed.

'In circumstances which dictate one and only one course of immediate and compulsory action which can be undertaken with greatest efficiency by the ship's automatic systems, said systems will have complete authority over

the control board until said circumstances have passed. Directive confuted.'

'Damn you, you god-damned machine! Give me back control of my ship!' He slammed his fist onto the control board.

'Aligning with local spatio-temporal vector,' replied the voice, apparently ignoring him. On Gauntley's left there was the sudden whirring of the hard-copy printer. A piece of paper issued from its mouth, and on it were the words:

'This conversation is being recorded. Your behaviour will be reported to the appropriate authorities.' An unwelcome reminder that he was but a temporary guest onboard an alien ship, instead of the bold pioneer he'd once hoped to be.

Gauntley viciously screwed the piece of paper into a ball and threw it across the compartment. The scrap followed a complicated trajectory as it passed through free-fall and bounced into various fielded compartments -- kitchen, storage, observation, and hygiene bays. It eventually rustled to a halt against the aluminium box in the storage bay, and there Gauntley, drawing a sudden breath, was content to let it rest.

The storage bay was blind to the computer. He had substituted a recorded image of the empty bay some time ago, and the computer hadn't noticed the difference. It would do so immediately, however, if he entered the bay and failed to register on the monitors. He hoped desperately that the scrap of paper hadn't already triggered internal alarms within the computer's electronic mind.

Luckily for him, the computer was momentarily distracted.

The dots touched.

Gauntley braced himself unnecessarily against the back of the command chair as a lurchingly vertiginous star-filled vista appeared in the heretofore black monitor tank. The old light of distant suns flashed past, and, although the view was obscured by a blinding, all-pervasive white light, he was sure the constellations looked familiar. Recently familiar, too.

He forced the notion out of his head as the screen went black again and control of the board was returned to him.

The emergency was over so quickly and easily, for the ship. Yet for him, he thought, his problems had only just begun. A blinking yellow light indicated that the foreign object responsible for the Bore now resided in the evacuated storage chamber. He placed the ship on a holding pattern and went reluctantly to view the intruder.

\* \* \*

Wrapped in a paper-thin body-glove of atmosphere, he stepped into the hold. Invisible, but present, a gentle pressure kept him stationary against the wall of the huge chamber, and he turned to view the object of his discontent.

The hold was utterly black except for the region around the obviously manmade artifact a hundred metres

away. The beams of fierce spotlights were focussed on the device, and the intense light revealed it to be roughly cylindrical, quite small -- only a hundred metres in length and thirty in diameter -- and possessed of a low albedo. It had a rough, black surface, undetailed and unfamiliar, not metal or plastic, Gauntley was certain. Organic? he wondered, interested despite himself.

He supposed that, at another time, the artifact might have awoken the sense of mystery and wonder he'd lost over the years; it was a piece of another time, another space, snatched from its reality -- something touched by hands long-dead. But the appearance of the object was the last thing he needed, at that moment.

'Move me closer,' he said, and the gentle forces wafted him away from the wall. Despite the irregularity of its exterior, the object showed no obvious detail that might have suggested a door or window, or even an external instrument of any sort. Gauntley supposed that any that had once existed had been blasted away.

'Take a sample.' Dust puffed into the airless void as some invisible manipulator chipped away a fragment of the material.

'Organic carbon compounds,' came the quick response from the computer. 'Natural, not artificial. Surface suggests recent exposure to extreme temperatures, which is consistent with the assumption that this artifact is the cause of the Bore. Deeper samples reveal a fibroid nature consistent with many organic tissues.'

'Terrestrial?'

'Possibly -- and one one would assume so -- but not necessarily. Further probing reveals an alloy surface which, upon electromagnetic examination, proves to be the shell of a relatively empty space within the object. Analysis suggests that this is some form of primitive Screwship, perhaps a prototype or test projectile -- maybe even an accident, a fluke of design.'

'Is that possible? Can you build a Screwship by mistake?'

There was a momentary hesitation.

'I can't answer that,' replied the computer, and indeed it couldn't. The details of every race's initial discovery of time-faring technology was kept shrouded in secrecy, for no real reason than to assuage an almost superstitious fear of paradox. The computer wouldn't tell him if a Screwship could be built by accident, because that would suggest that it had been done by any one of the many extemporal races. This snippet of information was enough, the computer reasoned, to provoke Gauntley's all-too-human curiosity, and lead to some unfortunate circumstance for someone, somewhere, sometime. For the same reason were the Forbidden Zones unexplained; they just were.

Gauntley wasn't bothered by the machine's reticence, but he was definitely interested in it. Later, he promised himself, he would delve a little deeper, reveal perhaps a smattering of interesting facts. Under other circumstances he enjoyed probing the holes in the Arm's public knowledge; the ever-present veil of secrecy under which he was forced to work both irritated and challenged



him, and it was probably for this reason that he'd been selected for this mission. Although he'd become somewhat jaded by his years in the Arm, he was still fascinated by time and paradox, and the never-ending search to find out what was really going on.

But he'd learned early on that the search had to be conducted with utmost discretion; to employ a time-worn cliché, it was dangerous to know too much. After a few years, he'd pretty well abandoned his initial attempts to unravel the tangled web of cause and effect; it was simpler by far to do so, although his interest was still aroused by odd snippets here and there.

What lay before him was more than a snippet, however, and was bound to be discovered by the authorities when he returned. There was only so much you could erase, even from shipboard memory.

'Anything else you can tell me?' he asked. 'About that?' He pointed at the mysterious, blackened cylinder.

'Other data reveals movement from the chamber within the craft.'

'Organic? Not automated machinery?'

'Yes, assuming the manufacturing technology is not one based on the use of organics.' Smartass, thought Gauntley. The computer continued:

'The evidence implies that the craft -- if it be such at all -- is occupied.'

'What race?'

'Any one of fifteen or so. The spacial location of the craft prior to collection would suggest that it is --'

'Human, right.' He'd known it would be human. It had, after all, been removed from the system which birthed the species he himself belonged to. 'See if you can make contact with him.'

There was a minute's pause. Then:

'No response on any radio frequency, but the hull may be interfering with any signal we or it could be sending to or from the inside. No response from any other known transmission medium, including psi. Implanting speakers into the outer layer. Transmitting message.'

Pause.

'The inhabitant of the craft will disembark as soon as he has sealed his pressure suit. He is indeed of your species; his name is Sorenson.'

'Any details?'

'None other than I have given. Yours will be the task to interrogate, as he is a member of your race.'

Very well, he thought. Two can play at that game.

'Set course seventeen tee, eighty-five tau, one-seventy-eight teh; one hundred years. Notify me when we have reached our destination. Leave me in complete privacy until then.'

'Confirmed,' it replied coldly, and fell silent.

'Move me closer,' he requested of the automatics.

He drew nearer to the primitive Screwship and waited for the man's appearance, but nothing happened for some time. Eventually a glowing red line appeared and spread across the black, charred surface. It met itself,

forming a circle, then began to fade. There was a puff of dust and ash, and a meter-thick disc fell away into the blackness, followed by a spreading cloud of air crystals.

A small man in a silver suit, with a helmet that was partially transparent, struggled through the opening. The chamber behind him was well-lit, but appeared dark in the blinding glare of the search lights. Raising a silver glove to shield his eyes, the man called Sorenson floated away from his craft.

'Hold him,' ordered Gauntley. Sorenson stopped drifting with a jerk.

'Take me inside.' He was propelled towards the opening. Feet-first, he slid through the gap, and arrived within the ship. There was no field gravity, the sparsest of holographic displays, and hardly any room. The rest of the craft apart from that chamber -- which was obviously the single crewman's only quarters -- must have been crammed with the mechanisms for the propulsion system, considering how primitive the man's technology evidently was.

One thing, and one thing only, was remarkable, but that especially so: every panel of the chamber was outfitted in some way with wood.

Earth Wood.

His mind boggled at the sight.

There was enough wood in the tiny ship to buy outright four craft identical to the *Nelson*, back Home. This apparent disregard for its value -- suggesting that the place from which Sorenson came laboured under a glut of trees -- confirmed Gauntley's suspicions regarding the nature of the organic material around the hull, but he had only the vaguest of suspicions what its purpose might have been.

'Take me out.' He issued from the craft, returned to the bright void. Sorenson signalled desperately, and Gauntley took pity on him.

'Open a link between Sorenson and I.'

'Link established.'

Gauntley hesitated a moment, trying to decide what to say. 'Sorenson?'

'Who -- ?' The man flailed in the void.

'Sorenson?'

'Yes, that's me. Who in God's name are you, and where am I?' The man's voice was a high tenor, strangely accented and taut with fear and consternation.

'My name is Officiator Gauntley. You are in the cargo hold of the Screwship, *ESS Nelson*, awaiting interrogation regarding the nature, origins and purpose of your ship.' Gauntley suddenly remembered the hostile nature of their environment and the fact that he must have looked highly unusual, apparently exposed to the harsh vacuum. 'Take us both out of here,' he told the automatics.

'What did you say?' asked Sorenson.

'Nothing.'

They were propelled towards an open mouth in the black wall, Sorenson protesting momentarily then accepting the acceleration. They passed through an unfelt, unseen membrane into a pressurised corridor well-

lit by diffuse, invisible light-sources. The two men floated opposite each other; despite the lack of gravity, Sorenson seemed well-coordinated, as though he had been raised in free-fall. Behind the clear material of the helmet, Gauntley could see the man's blue eyes fixed firmly upon his own.

'You can unseal your suit, if you want.'

'Thank you, Officer Gauntley.'

'Uh, Officiator. Not Officer.'

'Sorry.'

The little man -- he stood no higher than Gauntley's shoulders -- unsnapped clasps and peeled back seals. There was a tiny hiss and the helmet of his suit came away. The man's head was a mess of wild hair, black and thick. Sorenson ran his gloved fingers through it, and it stood on end, tiny droplets of sweat streaming from the tips as he shook his head. Sorenson's face was young and finely cut, with smooth skin, full lips and warm, glitteringly intelligent eyes.

Gauntley looked closer. Sorenson wasn't a man at all.

He was a woman.

'Destination achieved,' said the computer, interrupting Gauntley's startled double-take. 'Further instructions?'

He fought the impulse to challenge the computer over its error regarding Sorenson's gender, knowing the machine would merely respond by stating that it was unfamiliar with the more subtle details of the two human sexes. Perhaps he would tackle it later, in private.

'Course, uh ... one-sixty tee, one-oh-nine tau, one-forty-one teh; three by ten to the six years. Privacy until we arrive.' Another random destination. God only knew, thought Gauntley, where they were headed, but it was worth the risk to get the computer off his back.

'Certainly,' it replied.

'Who was that?' asked Sorenson.

'My computer. Well, not really mine, I guess; it kind of does whatever it feels like and I work around it, more or less.'

'And where are we?'

'Follow me, please,' said Gauntley, deliberately ignoring the question. He propelled himself along the corridor using his toes and fingers on the textured walls. Sorenson, behind him, did pretty well the same thing, and to Gauntley this was further confirmation that she had lived in free-fall most of her life. The corridor ended at Gauntley's quarters. The entrance portal opened automatically as he approached, and he floated through it.

He deftly moved from free-fall into the field of the entry bay, but the change caught Sorenson unawares. With a look of almost comical surprise, and a noise that sound like glurk, she fell to her knees. When she had regained her composure and footing, she said:

'Gravity?'

'Field,' replied Gauntley. 'Artificial, you know?'

Sorenson shook her head, looked down at her booted feet in disbelief.

'You don't have it?'

'No.' Remembering the lack of gravity in the cabin of the woman's Screwship, he supposed he should've have been less surprised.

'Okay, follow me carefully. Walk across this grey area; beyond the black line is free fall. Leap across the chamber to the blue bay upwards and to your right. When you reach it, there's another field but it's oriented in almost the opposite direction to this one, okay? I'll go first and try to watch out for you.'

She nodded vigorously, perhaps a little defiantly -- as though she felt he was patronising her in some way. 'Ready whenever you are.'

'Here we go.' He managed the long somersault across the central space of his quarters with practiced ease, and arrived in time to steady her when she stumbled.

'Good. Take a seat.' He indicated the pilot's chair. She settled awkwardly into it; her antiquated suit was barely flexible enough to accomodate the movement of her joints. He remained standing, leaning against the flickering board. 'Right. What is your full name and where are you from?'

'My name is Karin Mairi Sorenson, and I'm from Earth.'

'That's not where we picked you up.' He hadn't really checked the ship's data of the Bore, but as he hadn't seen the blue planet on the screen during the manoeuvre he felt to safe to make that assumption. 'No, it's not,' she admitted.

'Where, then?'

'Why do you want to know?' She had a look in her eyes that told him she wouldn't be saying anything more until he answered some of her questions. No doubt she was as curious as he.

'Because you have committed a serious offence, and I, as an Officiator in the Extemporal Arm, must take the details and decide what action is appropriate.' It was only in part a lie: he was merely deceiving her by implying that he was acting in his official capacity, instead of as a temporarily freelance pilot.

'Extemporal?'

'Outside of time. We police the Screw and ensure that any --'

'Wait. The what?'

'The Screw.' He pointed at the holograph on the board. There was only one dot now, and it had drifted outside the Forbidden Zone, away from the Screw altogether. The warning light was still flashing, however, and Gauntley made a mental note to fix it later.

'And what, may I ask, is the Screw?'

He hesitated, then decided to explain. 'Uh, tell me, first, what you understand to be the nature of time.'

She blinked, and proceeded to rattle off a string of half-formed theories and notions that all had one basic flaw.

'Close, but not quite,' he said, interrupting her in mid-flow. 'You're saying that time is linear, one-dimensional, right?'

'Assuming that to be the case, rather, for simplicity's sake.'

'A dangerous assumption. The time-line you came from is a locus of temporal points linked in a string, a helix in three-dimensional *Zeitspace*. The Sol system time/space line is called the Screw, because it looks like a cork-screw. All points along the Screw are linked spacially, but not temporally, so that to travel through *Zeitspace* along the Screw is to travel through time, and maybe slightly through space as well. There are other strings that represent the time-lines of time-faring races. If I expand the view, you'll see where this blue line almost crosses the Screw at one point five by ten to the seven years APM; that's called the Durelle line, and ...'

She was staring at him blankly.

He coughed. 'I'm sorry. I find the details and math interesting. It's a hobby of mine, and I tend to get a little carried away.'

'I think I've got the gist of it anyway,' she said. 'After all, I've been studying time all my life.'

'Where?'

'I told you. I'm from Earth.'

'It's fairly obvious you came from Earth originally, but where have you been recently?'

'Why not Earth?'

'Earth doesn't have zero gravity and you've clearly spent most of your life in space. But you weren't born in free-fall -- your bones are too solid. You have an artificial tan, also, which suggests a closed environment. Some sort of colony? An asteroid?'

She sighed, vanquished. 'Ceres. My parents brought me there when I was two.'

Shit, he thought. I knew it.

'What year is it, back where you come from?'

'2471.'

'Anno Domini?'

She nodded. He groaned silently to himself, wishing he was somewhere else, some other time. He'd hoped the instruments might have lied somehow, but they hadn't; he had indeed picked her up from the *nil primum mobile*.

The pieces of the jigsaw he carried in his head suddenly fell into place, and, if he guessed correctly, he had partially unravelled the web that obscured the origins of human time-travel. He knew too much for certain, now, but he grimly continued the interrogation.

'And your ship: what was its purpose? What is it designed to do?'

'What do you think?'

'To travel through time?'

'One for you.'

'I'm sorry?'

'Yes, you're absolutely correct. I was trying to travel through time.'

'Forwards?'

'Yes. Does it make any difference?'

'It is impossible to travel linearly backwards through time. It creates unsustainable paradox.'

'But --'

'Why is your ship covered with wood?'

She shrugged. 'Wood was the cheapest and most expendable ablative shield I could get.' 'Why did you need an ablative shield?'

'I -- just in case, I guess.'

'You guess?'

She put one hand to her head, as though soothing a headache. 'Back home, they call me a genius, but the truth is I'm only a good engineer. I was in charge of the team that had been working on the project -- for almost twenty years they'd been banging their heads together, getting nowhere until I came along and shook them up. But, no matter what good ideas I had, or how many working models I made, I didn't really know what forces to anticipate when the timeship was in motion. I could have missed any number of things, and just one might have meant the difference between life or death, for me. The shield was a precaution that was no trouble to arrange, and would be no loss if I didn't need it.'

She smiled defiantly, perhaps remembering past battles, reliving victories. 'And I wasn't going to send any one else. No way. I wouldn't even let a test ship go first.'

'Sounds a bit gung-ho.'

She shrugged. 'Why not? I wanted to be part of the first experiment; I wanted to be involved on the other side of the drawing board. We didn't know what precautions to take, so we took as many as we could. After all, no-one had ever travelled through time before.'

She abruptly turned her face away from his, and made a motion with her left hand that suggested extreme irony. 'Or so we thought,' she added. 'You've probably been doing it all your life.'

'I have never travelled through time.'

'What? That's not the impression I got.'

'I travel around time. By avoiding the time-lines -- like the Screw -- altogether, we prevent certain ... catastrophes.'

'Such as?'

A strange touch of sympathy held him back. He didn't want to break the news to her too soon. 'I'll tell you later. Is there anything you'd like to ask me?'

'Of course. Did it work?'

He laughed dryly, running a hand through his hair. 'All too well. Anything else?'

'I don't know where to start.'

'Just don't ask me to start at the beginning.' He paused seriously and braved her look of puzzlement. 'I mean it. Don't ask me whether you go on to invent the technology to travel around time, or something like that.'

'Why not?'

'Because I don't know the answer. As far as I know, no-one did; this is an alien ship, commissioned to the Arm by the civilisation who inhabit the Durelle line. But I suppose someone must have, originally, or we would never have come across them in the first place.'

'So you're saying that you don't know anything ...'

'That's right. The men in power -- whoever they are -- like to keep it a big secret, just as they dislike having public attention drawn to their actions and identities. It's all a high-level plot to do away with



complicated causal effects. They don't fear paradox -- contradictions are not possible -- but sometimes it gets hard to follow what's really going on.'

She absorbed this information. 'You really don't know anything about it at all?' she repeated in disbelief.

'No, I do not.' Or I didn't, he added to himself. Until now. Part of him added that he still might not know everything, and maybe never would.

'But you must wonder.'

'Of course. But I can't do anything more than wonder. It's dangerous to go back and find out -- quite apart from the causal effects -- because, if you're caught, the penalties are severe. And you're always caught, no matter how careful you think you've been.' Here's hoping I'm wrong on that point, he added to himself.

She absorbed this. 'So where can I start?'

He smiled encouragingly, throwing caution to the wind. He was doomed anyway. 'Ask me where I live.'

'Okay.' She smiled warmly in return, playing the game, but the glitter of intelligence never faded; she was expecting to learn a great deal in the immediate future. 'Where do you live?'

'I'll show you, although I can't actually take you there.' He addressed the computer. 'New instructions.'

'Certainly,' said the machine, and he settled back to enjoy what he fully expected to be his last free flight through the backwaters of time.

\* \* \*

Almost two relative hours later, he asked her, 'Okay, have you seen enough yet?'

She was beginning to smell; he received the occasional whiff from the neck of her pressure suit when she leant forward to peer through the expanded view-screen -- which now covered a field of vision almost ninety degrees wide. The only accommodation she'd made to her personal comfort was to remove her gloves.

'No. Show me something else.'

He shrugged. He was tired too, but he indulged her. 'Take us to F: 45'15'189.'

'Confirmed.' The computer's uncommon obedience was remarkable, he thought to himself for the nth time. For the past two hours it had hardly disputed an order.

'What I'm about to show you is perhaps a little hard to describe.'

'Try me.' Her eyes were ablaze, red with the strain of learning so much so quickly. He wondered if he looked the same; he hadn't slept for almost two days.

'All right. You've seen the Screw; you say you understand it. Now, the space between the loops of the timeline is not empty. If we position ourselves on any point in *Zeitspace*, we occupy a position in so-called "real" space within our own universe.' She nodded slowly. 'So travel through time can mean travel through space.'

'Always -- and vice versa. It's much easier and less energy-expensive than travelling through the spatial dimensions -- at least where large distances are involved.

Most of our trade between other species was opened up this way --'

'Objective achieved,' interrupted the computer.

'Stabilise us with respect to local space.'

'Confirmed.'

The *ESS Nelson* materialised into a void of nothing. Almost nothing. Far away there was a speck of flickering, bright light.

'Not much here, is there? We're in a void far beyond the most distant galactic clusters. Nothing for company except hydrogen atoms.' He took manual control of the ship, and piloted it towards the light. As they drew nearer, the light resolved into a series of mighty explosions of energy, one bursting after another in a near-continuous flash.

'Any guesses?'

'I've no idea.' She shook her head. 'A small Quasar?'

'No. It's a freeway.' She looked at him, almost indignantly, as though she suspected him of toying with her. 'Really. I said before that we travel outside the timeline, but really I should have said that we travel outside our timeline and cross millions of others instead. These other lines are empty, or almost empty -- such as this one here -- and major routes have been navigated along them, to prevent possible problems for another inhabited line. Every Screwship's computer has as its prime directive not to cross a zone that is known to be habited, except in the case of certain emergencies.' He paused, waved at the screen.

'The freeway you see before you crosses this particular timeline at an angle, so whatever ships are travelling along it appear for only an instant.'

'The light?'

'Atoms of hydrogen striking the shockwave of each Screwship's passage, turning instantly to energy.'

'Aren't the ships affected?'

'Not really, although there is a certain amount of heat build-up on external surfaces. They're designed to take it, so it never becomes a problem. They ride a wave of energy, each explosion trailing them by minute fractions of a second.'

They watched the flowering light in silence for a minute or so, she apparently deep in thought, he waiting for her to ask a question that, to him, appeared obvious. Apparently the thought never occurred to her -- and he thanked his lucky stars.

'More,' she said. 'Show me more.'

'No. You need a change of clothes and a shower.'

She looked down at her suit and grimaced as though realising for the first time how badly she smelt. 'But you haven't shown me your home yet.'

That was true. There were too many things for him to show her on the way, and he had to admit to himself that he was taking unexpected pleasure in playing tour guide for his guest -- besides, he didn't really want to go Home and face the heat. It was difficult to stop, but he knew he had to.

'Later, I promise --'

'But at least tell me one thing -- why is it that we experience time to be passing, here in the ship?'

'Ah.' He smiled wryly and scratched his head. 'That's a curly one ... Let's just say that quantum transactions on the sub-atomic level create the potential for movement in either time or space, and is normally manifested as the passage of time. Consciousness connects the locii; the passage of time is simply an awareness of temporal motion. When we are relatively fixed in the temporal dimensions, movement in a spatial direction allows us to feel time pass. That, in a nutshell, is the basis of the drive the *Nelson* employs -- but don't ask me to explain it in more detail. Maybe later, when we've got a week to kill.'

'Okay. Tour of the ship?'

'No, but I'll show you a picture of it.' He called up the standard display of the *Nelson*. The ship was a fun-house mirror, a twisted globule of quicksilver, a chrome cell; four stubby, malformed nacelles housed the drive units; the central structure was home to cargo holds and crew compartments. The *Nelson* was polymorphous -- it could change its shape to meet circumstance -- but this was its most basic form.

'Doesn't tell me much,' she said.

'I gather that's the general idea. The Durelle aren't giving anything away.' He killed the display. 'Computer, arrange quarters for our guest, Karin Sorenson.'

'Certainly. Quarters arranged; follow the blue light.'

'I'll show you there.' He lent her his hand as she struggled out of the seat. They managed the leap across the room without major difficulty and she eased herself into the weightlessness of the corridor with an audible sigh of relief. A blue ball of light awaited them.

'Take us there,' said Gauntley to the ball, and it drifted off. They swam after it, to a portal identical to the one that lead to Gauntley's chamber. It too irised open as they approached.

When they entered what Gauntley had fallaciously assumed would be a clone of his own room, they found themselves standing on a fielded surface, in another corridor, facing three more portals. The first opened onto a large entertainment area, partly fielded; the second onto a kitchen area, with adjoining bathrooms and bedroom, likewise partly fielded; the third portal opened onto a room that contained nothing but an enormous spherical swimming pool, a peculiarly luxurious fetish Gauntley had seen only once before under circumstances almost as unusual as these. Ripples traced complex paths across its shimmering surface, and strange shapes twisted in its mirrorlike depths.

He took a deep breath, hoping he didn't appear as startled as he felt by the opulence of the rooms -- the pool in particular.

'Call me when you're ready, and we'll eat.'

'Wait.' She floated into the central room. 'Where do I find a change of clothes?'

'Ask the computer.'

'How?'

'Just ask.'

'Um. Computer, where do I find a change of clothes?'

'In the blue wardrobe, Ms Sorenson.'

'Oh. Thank you.' She began to unpop seals and unzip zips.

'Do you need a hand?' Gauntley heard himself ask before he could stop and question his motives.

'Yeah, thanks. I'd appreciate it.'

In a fielded area, they wriggled her out of the suit. Her undergarment was white cotton, and completely soaked with perspiration. He coughed with embarrassment.

'I'll ... I'll see you in a little while, then.'

'Thanks again, Officiator Gauntley.'

He paused on the threshold. 'My friends call me Brian.'

She smiled warmly. 'Thank you, Brian.'

He retreated hastily from the room, praying she hadn't noticed his arousal. She was beautiful. Beautiful.

\* \* \*

Several hours later, the computer produced dinner for the two of them and they dined together in her cabin. The food was expensive and well-cooked -- a more than favourable comparison to the ship's rations on which he'd been living. He tucked in with vigour, unwilling to miss the opportunity. He suspected that when she left he'd be back on sawdust.

She was asking him specific questions about extemporal life -- obviously the hour or so she had been alone had been long enough for her to organise in her mind exactly what she wanted to know -- but Gauntley was having trouble concentrating. She was wearing a low-cut, ballooning outfit of some semi-opaque fabric, and it complimented her figure and face much more than had the pressure suit.

'The loops of the Screw,' he was explaining, 'are approximately one by ten to the six "years" in circumference, but they are so tightly stacked against each other that, in places, they are almost touching. In such instances, it's easier to travel one million years -- by crossing to the next loop up or down -- than it is to travel more than a thousand along the Screw.' He paused to chew and swallow a mouthful of his dessert. She waited patiently, obviously fascinated.

'If we were to start at where I picked you up and leap up to the next loop, we'd end up about a million years in your future. But we'd skip all the bits in between, of course.'

'I wonder what we'd find ...' Her eyes were glowing with the vision, and that made them even more captivating, almost impossible for him to resist.

'Ah. Something very puzzling.'

'You've been there?' He nodded.

'Tell me.'

He stopped eating, put down his spoon. 'Well, the sun's still there, a little cooler perhaps, but otherwise pretty much the same. Venus has been terraformed, so's Mars; Mercury has been mined extensively; there are minor changes to all the other planets, and the gas giants have gained or lost the occasional moon or ring.' He paused, then continued.

'The weird thing is, there's no Earth.'

'What?'

'It's gone. The Moon, too. Completely vanished. Without a trace.'

'Where?'

'No-one knows. They don't even know exactly when it happened. Probes have been sent into the regions between the two points, but, so far, no clues.' He enjoyed the look on her face as she digested the mystery. 'It takes time to travel through time, you see.' He polished off his dessert, relishing every mouthful.

'It must get confusing,' she said, after a while, 'keeping track of when is when and so on. How do you avoid bumping into yourself coming while you're going?'

'It's not hard. Not if you're careful. We're required to keep a careful log of all times and dates, and the computers onboard the Screwships are programmed to prevent you crossing your own path. In answer to your first question, we treat upwards along the Screw as a movement positive in time, and downwards as negative. All relative, of course, to some arbitrary point of reference.'

'Which is?'

'It varies amongst the extemporal races.'

'That's something else that interests me.' She abandoned the previous line of questioning, much to his relief.

'The extemps? We in the Arm deal more with our alien counterparts than we do with our temporal brothers.'

'I don't know what you mean.'

'Which bit in particular?'

'"Temporal brothers." Are you saying what I think you're saying?'

'Perhaps. If you're saying that you think I'm saying that there are two separate human societies -- one that has extemporal travel and one that hasn't -- then you're absolutely right.'

'But why? Why doesn't everyone use time travel?'

'It's worse than that, I'm afraid. One either knows about time travel or doesn't; and, if one knows about it, then one uses it. There's no two ways about it. You're either in the Arm and in the know, or you're not. And once you're recruited, you don't get out of the Arm, because if you leave, you get wiped.'

'Killed?' She looked shocked, disgusted, and he hastened to correct her.

'No! Don't be stupid. Part of your memory is erased -- the part that knows about the Screw and *Zeitspace* -- and you're returned with a false past.'

'Why?' Now she looked angry.

'It's all part of the universal fear of complications and paradox. The Arm doesn't interfere much in spatial affairs, just a gentle nudge here and there, whenever it's deemed absolutely necessary; and then, only as "mysterious traders" who appear and then disappear, leaving behind hints and the occasional technological artifact. The Arm appears in space folklore over and over again, but never has official existence. We exist pretty much independently of our homeworlds, but a certain fondness remains. After all, most of us were recruited from the "real" universes.' He shrugged. 'Our alien allies feel much the same way.'

Once again the subject of aliens lured her out of dangerous waters.

'Tell me about them.' She leaned forward, and he saw the distinct curves of her breasts move gently beneath the misty fabric of her blouse.

He swallowed, and described a selection of races. She was fascinated, amazed, incredulous, just as he had been when he'd first been introduced to the reality of extraterrestrial life-forms. He elaborated on the fact that, because there were as yet no Screwships of human design, all human operators in the Arm piloted ships of alien manufacture, and this led to some amusing situations arising from the opposing biological needs of different races. Eventually, though, she grew tired of the subject and changed it again, to something more immediate. 'So what do you do?' she asked, as they moved to the greater comfort of a lounge suite apparently situated on the wall across the room.

'I,' he replied, pouring them a glass of aged (of course!) red wine, 'am a rover. A solo. I police distant sectors, travel to uncharted regions, brave the elements. I battle wild extemp beasts with my bare hands and save beautiful maidens from imminent disaster.'

Hold it, mouth, he told himself urgently. Don't let the wine say too much.

'Is that true?'

'Mostly. I do work alone, and I do explore uncharted regions on the Screw and off -- usually looking for evidence of new extra-Screw civilisations that might be worth discovering. The Arm gives me free reign, more or less, provided I obey the guidelines and do little favours for them every now and then. About the extemp beasts, well, that was a slight exaggeration, but I've heard rumours.' She wanted to know more, he could tell by the look in her eyes.

'Where do you come from?' she asked.

He sighed, remembering. 'I was born on a planet called Othello, some thousand light years from Sol, in the year 570 PM -- or 3041 AD. Othello wasn't colonised by the Arm; it was an Earth settlement, part of the expanding sphere of inhabited systems that was then called the United Terran Trading Empire. Later, when the UTTE dissolved, Othello was capital of the Greater Union of Planets -- the first spatial government contacted by the Durelle and the Sh'kuzi in 1076 PM. Othello reunited the UTTE under another name, and *this time it lasted for two thousand years*. They sent expeditions to the Galactic



Core, and to the Outer Shell, where they stumbled across the ruins of the Vaught civilisation. The Vaught themselves are still alive and well in *Zeitspace*, of course, and were quite amused by the Terran's attempts to discover where they'd got to.'

She shook her head. 'It's all science fiction to me.' He laughed sympathetically, then went on with the tale.

'I was born before most of this happened, when Othello was still a new colony of less than one million people. I was recruited when I was fifteen, by pure virtue of the fact that I was curious enough to follow a stranger who came through our town. He'd been acting suspicious all day, asking for someone -- I never found out who -- and, when he wandered off alone into the hills, I tracked him. He didn't go far, to a closed reserve not normally open to the public; after about five minutes of impatient watching, I saw the man fiddling with some equipment -- I learned much later that he was opening a vacuum to provide a space for the arrival of his ship -- and not long after I was rewarded with my first, unforgettable, sight of a Screwship appearing, out of nowhere. The stranger stepped into it, it vanished again, and the next thing I knew, two men grabbed me by the shoulders and took me off to another ship, where they ... offered to make my wildest dreams come true.'

He smiled crookedly. 'It wasn't that simple, really, but I've been working with the Arm ever since. I suppose that counts for something.'

'How long would that be?'

'Since I started? Longer than you might think. One of the advantages of living amongst aliens who often have superior biological technologies is that we manage to skim off a few tricks on the side. One of them is longevity. I'm young, by general reckoning, but old enough to question a few things I've held dear all my life.' Like working alone, he added to himself, not game to say the words aloud.

'And what brought you out here, to my end of time?'

'I was under contract.' Be careful, he reminded himself again.

'To save me?'

'No, but if I'd known you were here I would've lowered my price.'

She smiled, and the drink must have been getting to her too because she chose that moment to lean forward and kiss him full on the lips. Their tongues touched fleetingly, and Gauntley felt the moment crystallise around him, as though everything that had gone before had anticipated this particular point in time, and everything that came after would be affected by it.

It was a cusp. They were rare; he'd heard about them, but never felt one before. He was feeling this one in exquisite detail.

Their lips separated, but they remained holding each other.

'I've never kissed anyone before who wasn't from Ceres,' she said.

'I've never kissed someone who was.'

'You haven't been there?'

'Uh, no.'

'You should -- it's quite pleasant, for an asteroid colony.'

'I can't. It's, oh hell, it's not habitable anymore.' He had to tell her, wanted to tell her, but he couldn't.

'No?' Alarm grew in her eyes, and he hastened to quell her fears, if he could, without lying.

'It's sort of a shrine, I guess. People don't go near it -- temporal or extemporal. Something important happened there a long time ago, and it's become a kind of focus for a lot of powerful emotions.'

'What happened?'

'I ... I'm not sure.' Only a half-lie, he hoped. 'No-one is.'

'The trees are okay, though, aren't they?'

He thought for a long moment before he answered. After the forests of Earth had died, Ceres had -- ironically -- become the last outpost of Earth's flora. Or so he had read in history texts when he was young. He'd also read more on the subject, prior to his departure on this mission, but just then wasn't the moment to tell her about the rest of that.

'In all the years I've been alive,' he replied, 'I have never seen a living Earth tree. Earth wood itself is so rare where I come from that I have only ever seen two pieces: one displayed in a museum, the other ... under peculiar circumstances. Until, that is, I saw your ship -- which is, needless to say, beyond price because of the wood it contains.'

She tensed within his arms. Concern, puzzlement, alarm, all fought a battle for the control of her face, and the warring emotions obviously raised merry hell within her as well. 'Don't worry, though,' he added. 'The trees are okay. I promise you.'

She relaxed -- reluctantly -- and kissed him again, more passionately this time. After a while she lead him towards the free-fall hammock, and he told himself he shouldn't be doing this. But he couldn't resist. And he didn't want to fight it, even if it meant losing his career in the Arm -- and the parts of his memory that would remember her along with it.

\* \* \*

He dreamt he was back Home, in the station near the timeline of the homeworld of the Durelle species. He was in a luxuriously appointed room that seemed big enough to hold the entire *ESS Nelson*. Someone in a black suit was talking to him, and behind the figure Gauntley could see a giant, blue ball of water, half as wide as the room, floating in mid-air at the centre of what was obviously a zone of free-fall.

The view was distracting. He wasn't listening to what the man was saying. He couldn't quell a nagging feeling within him, as though there were something important he had forgotten.

The man turned, became Alexander Durelle -- the discoverer of the race that had been named after him and one of the most famous and mysterious men in extemporal space. His grey, beaked face beamed with child-like eagerness. He held something in his cupped hands, which he offered to show Gauntley.

Gauntley tried to speak, but couldn't. Durelle opened his hands, and from within there grew a plant. It increased in size, grew leaves and bark, shed seeds and fruit, waved in imaginary wind and stretched towards an unseen sky. 'It's a tree,' said Durelle. 'A living, Earth tree.'

Gauntley was impressed. If it was real it was priceless. 'Do want it?' asked Durelle.

Gauntley tried to nod, Yes, but wasn't able to.

Behind Durelle, the bubble of water burst in slow motion, cascaded towards the tree. The surging torrent swept the precious plant away, along with Durelle himself. Gauntley, still frozen in place, felt the rushing, whirlpooling water rise over his knees, past his waist, towards his throat. He wanted to hold his breath, but was too busy gasping with fear, trying to quash the bubbling scream that arose from a deep place within his chest. Someone grasped his shoulders, shook him.

He awoke.

\* \* \*

'You were dreaming,' said Karin.

'I'm sorry I woke you.'

She kissed sweat from his brow. 'That's okay. Try to go back to sleep. If you can't, perhaps I can help.'

He smiled in the darkness, pressed his naked body against hers, and fell almost immediately into another dream.

\* \* \*

'Are you sure it's real?' he asked.

There was nobody around. Just blackness, speckled with stars.

'Are you sure?' he asked again.

The distant suns were silent.

'Where are you?' he shouted. 'Are you absolutely certain?'

A man in a silver suit of armour appeared out of the void. He tugged off his helmet, and his face was white and grizzled, but young. A campaigner, old before his time.

'Of course it's real,' he said. His accent was strange, like somebody else's, but Gauntley couldn't remember whose. 'I've been farming paradoxes all my life,' went on the man, 'and I can tell you right now that what you're holding is legit. As good as any you'll find.'

Gauntley opened his hands, looked inside. He was holding a ball of white fire. As soon as he saw it, it started to burn him. He opened his hands wider by reflex.

'No!' cried the young/old man as Gauntley flung his arms apart, tossing the painful ball away from him.

The blackness exploded white, tore apart, and he jerked awake, legs kicking as though he was trying to run.

His legs brushed Karin's, and he was shocked to discover that he was crying.

\* \* \*

The second time he didn't disturb Karin -- miraculously -- and he knew he would be unable to return to sleep. The dreams were trying to tell him something -- he was sure of it -- but he knew that the realisation would only come with time, not mental effort. He wiped away his tears, disentangled himself from the hammock, dressed, and went on a tour of the ship.

The *ESS Nelson* was huge and an inspection was a difficult, confusing task. Gauntley felt the need for it, however; he needed to retreat into routine, a break from abnormality and complication.

He spent an hour going through Karin's ship, out of curiosity and from a need to study the wood more closely, but he didn't discover anything new. Likewise, he didn't find anything that refuted his fears, so he returned to his quarters and tried distract himself in other ways. No matter what he did -- reading, writing, listening to music, studying -- the image of Karin wouldn't leave his mind's eye. He sensed a vortex of possibilities and potentials swirling around him; he was in danger of upsetting some fragile balance if he did the slightest thing incorrectly. Barely rested, his thoughts were eventually interrupted by a call from Karin herself.

'Hello, Brian?' she called. 'Where are you?'

'Computer. Image please.' A hologram of Karin appeared in the centre of the room; she was naked, still lying in the hammock. When the image of Gauntley appeared before her, she gathered the drifting sheets around her. She looked so beautiful, so innocent.

'Hello,' he said, waving and trying to appear cheerful.

'What are you up to?'

'Working.'

'On your hobby?'

'Yes.'

'Can I see?'

'Maybe.' He sighed wearily. Things had gone too far already, but an irresistible momentum pushed him onwards. 'Come on over if you like. Just follow the blue ball.'

'Okay.' There was silence for a moment. 'How do I turn this off?'

'I'll do it.' He smiled again. 'End of image, voice.' He turned back to his desk, saved all his doodles and scribbles for later appraisal and cleared the work-tank.

She arrived moments later, dressed in a loose, blue jumpsuit.

'Can I see?' she asked again, and he saw the eager look in her eyes. She was anticipating a rich mental feast.

He took a deep breath.

'I'm sorry, Karin. You can't.'

Her face fell slowly. 'Why not?'

He sighed, pushed himself away from the desk, into free-fall. He drifted in front of her, holding out his hands as if exposing himself to attack.

'It's a tricky situation. I'm not sure what I should do with you.'

'What're your options?' Her face was setting in a darkening, cold mask. As he retreated, so she prepared herself for attack.

'I'm not even so sure what they are. I can take you with me, back Home; you can join the Arm, work with us -- with me, if you want. Or the Arm won't accept you on some ground; they'll send you back less a part of your memory and you'll become a tree farmer, or whatever.' If only she could, he thought to himself.

'My father was a tree farmer,' she said frostily. 'It's not so shameful an occupation.'

'I can appreciate that.'

'Can you?'

'Yes.' He unconsciously shot a furtive glance to the aluminium case in the storage bay. 'Back Home, we almost worship trees. There are rumours of secret farms, but no-one's ever seen one.'

'I don't believe you,' she said. 'What would you know of trees, you who have never even seen one?'

'Othello was a farm world, very much like Earth once was. It had trees -- not terrestrial, but similar. I know what it's like to feel fertile soil, to farm, to watch something grow. No matter how long it's been since I was recruited by the Arm, or how well I was trained and educated, I still remain a farm boy at heart.' He quoted an apt little phrase he'd heard a couple of days before:

'You can take the man out of the country, but you can't take the country out of the man.' 'True, but not very original. My father has been saying pretty much the same thing all his life.'

Her father?

'Hans Vanguard was your father?' he blurted out before he could stop himself.

'I took my mother's name when I was ... How - ?'

'I have one other option,' he said, interrupting her before she pursued the train of thought to its logical conclusion. 'I can just send you back now, let you go free. But I can't, you see, because that would be tantamount to killing you.' 'What are you talking about now?'

'I can't tell you.' The uncertainty, the indecision, the thought of losing her was an inch-thick nail through his chest.

'Start making sense, Brian, before I really get angry.'

'I can't ... Oh god, I suppose I'll have to show you. Any way you go, you'll find out. I can't be doing any harm.'

She fumed silently as he twisted himself back to the board.

'Computer. Set course for nil primum mobile. Advise ETA.'

'ETA: five minutes.'

'Okay,' he turned back to Karin. 'Do you want to wait in silence, or do you want to talk?'

'Talk. Where are we headed?'

'Nil primum mobile, otherwise known as Zero PM, is the point of reference from which humans date their extemporal travel. No-one knows exactly why it is named so, nor who named it.'

'When --'

'Don't interrupt. The region of the Screw immediately surrounding nil primum mobile is classified as a Forbidden Zone -- forbidden to all extemporal traffic, especially if it is intending to stabilise itself with respect to normal space within the Zone.'

'My mission took me about twenty years prior to Zero PM, inside the Zone, and I'm not going to tell you why I was there. Suffice it to say that I was pressured into complying with certain arrangements -- not for money, but for other reasons. I disabled the Zone regulators, set up certain precautions, and left.'

'On the way back -- mission completed -- I was drifting along the Screw, not really sure of my next step, when --'

'We have reached nil primum mobile,' interrupted the computer.

He turned away from her, settled into the pilot's chair. She remained floating in the centre of the room, arms tightly folded across her chest.

'Okay. Stabilise us,' he said. The computer complied with his instruction, obeying the modified programming he had installed within it instead of the overrides of the Arm. On the screen, there appeared a familiar starscape. One particular star glowed many magnitudes brighter than the others, but that paled in comparison to a white explosion of light which hung nearby, blazing fiercely. Despite its intensity, the peak of the detonation had clearly past, and the ferocious flower of light was beginning to fade.

Gauntley took manual control, and piloted the *Nelson* towards the explosion, speaking to Karin as he did so.

'As I was drifting, not really paying attention to where I was going, the computer spotted a Bore. I was foolish -- I should have guessed before I left that something of this nature might be going on, but I didn't take any precautions. The computer took control of the ship, proceeded by the book towards the Bore, to root out the cause.'

On the screen, the explosion was dying fast. In its place appeared a spreading cloud of twinkling motes. It looked like a puff of dust from this distance, but each particle must have weighed tonnes, Gauntley estimated. 'Once the emergency was over, control of the *Nelson* was returned to me, but by then it was too late. We had collected the object causing the Bore, and I was involved whether I wanted to be or not.'

The cloud was coming rapidly closer. The twinkling lights became boulders of rock, some still glowing with the force of the blast. Other, smaller, chunks existed and these too radiated outwards from the centre of the explosion. 'I want you to answer one



question, before I tell you why a Bore is so dangerous, exactly.'

'Okay,' she said, and he didn't have to look over his shoulder to know that, although she was still angry, what he was telling her was sinking in.

'Where did you test your timeship?'

'In one of the labs. Why?'

'One moment.' He navigated through a thick cloud of tumbling debris. The *Nelson* was practically indestructible, but he hated messy flying. This scene was a pivotal point in human history, and he wanted to leave as little evidence of their presence as he could. Some of the smaller fragments -- much larger than a man -- rushed past, hauntingly familiar but unrecognisable. There was a lot of dust and dirt amongst the larger rocks, plus the occasional corpse, and Gauntley hunted for a clear space.

'A Bore alarm sounds automatically when any sort of craft tries to travel through time along a timeline -- the Screw in particular. They can be detected only at short range -- between ten and twenty years -- and I was unlucky enough to stumble upon this one before I could head home.'

He found a patch of relatively empty space amongst the debris, and followed it. One of the larger pieces of flotsam drifted into view. Gauntley grabbed it with remote manipulators, pulled it closer, focussed the screen onto it.

It was a tree, an oak, dusted with ice that once had been atmosphere. Its branches were broken in many places, and it had lost most of its leaves; clumps of dirt still remained between some of its frozen roots. It was the saddest thing Gauntley had ever seen -- a testimony to failed hope, to the ultimate triumph of man's greed to conquer the elements, no matter what the cost.

'Do you remember what I said while I was showing you the freeway? About the destruction of the hydrogen atoms as a Screwship passed through a point in a space-time line? Well --'

'You're lying!'

'Listen to me, Karin --'

He was stopped in mid-sentence by two sounds, both from behind him. One sounded like a sob; the other was a ring of metal on metal. A split-second too late, he turned to see what Karin was doing.

His world imploded into an intense locus of pain somewhere on the left side of his skull, then exploded into stars. The last thing he heard was Karin crying --

'No!'

-- and blackness took him.

\* \* \*

When he regained consciousness, feeling as though years of pain had passed him by, the *Nelson* was stationary and positioned near the Durelle Line, far up the Screw from the red arc that contained nil primum mobile. One quick glance showed him that everything was in order, except that Karin's timeship was gone. Presumably she too was no longer on board.

He groaned, expressing the pain in his head and distress at his predicament. He turned and looked around the chamber.

It was full of tiny, drifting objects. Some had floated into the fielded bays and settled in little clumps across chairs, benchtops, the control board, and his own unconscious body. His eyes searched for the aluminium case, and didn't find it at first. A dull thud drew his attention to the hammock. It was turning lazily in the zero gravity. Tangled in the fabric was the box. It was open, empty.

Gauntley stood cautiously, trying to keep the throbbing agony to a minimum, sending a drift of the particles showering to the floor. He reached outside the area of the field, grasped one of the floating particles as it drifted past. He cradled it gently in his palm for a moment, then tossed it back into the empty, weightless air.

It was a seed, as were all the others. He laughed, despite himself. It was ironic, really, that in her anger she had chosen the box as a weapon to use against him, but it made sense; it was the only movable object of any substantial mass in the room. At least she must have guessed, before she'd left him, what the nature of his mission had been.

He returned to the board. 'Where are we?' he asked.

'Home.' The laser printer issued a sheet of paper. He grabbed it.

It said: 'Mission(s) accomplished. Request permission to dock.' He didn't like the suggestion that he'd been involved in more than one mission, unknown to him, nor did he trust the computer's politeness. He put the note carefully to one side, shelving it for the time being.

'Take us in.'

He settled back into the chair with a resigned sigh as the vast network that was the Durelle Station drew closer and resolved into a cluster of enormous tubes and spheres, twinkling with tiny lights. God only knew, he thought, what sort of welcome he would receive.

The inbound portal opened and the *Nelson* passed through it. He watched rank after rank of the twisted, silver ships file past -- each a twin to his own -- until something out of place caught his eye. One of the docks was encapsulated within a black privacy screen as though the Screwship beyond it was being kept isolated from public eyes. It hadn't been there when he had departed from Home just days before, and he couldn't imagine why it would require the screen.

Secrecy! he swore to himself.

As he watched, someone stepped out from behind the screen and watched the *Nelson* glide past. The middle-aged man was dressed entirely in black, but Gauntley sensed that he didn't belong to the Arm. He was tanned and had thick, white hair. He looked uncannily like Gauntley's father, although that could not have been the case, because his father had died long before he had been recruited. The possibility that his father had been

grabbed by the Arm and the death faked occurred to him briefly, but he dismissed it as paranoid.

As the *Nelson* drifted by, the man smiled and waved. Somehow Gauntley knew that he was waving at him, no-one else, and he saw the man give a distinct thumbs-up sign before vanishing behind the screen. A dull chime interrupted Gauntley's muse upon the matter. They had reached the *Nelson's* dry-dock.

'Shit,' he swore, when he saw what awaited him.

A row of uniformed guards stood at the entrance to the bay. They looked threatening, forboding, and the knot of fear began to burn anew in his belly.

'How did I get here?' he asked the computer as the ship settled into the bay.

'Ms Sorenson instructed me to return you Home.'

'You were not given authorisation to obey high-level commands from her,' he responded indignantly.

'That statement is incorrect. Authorisation was given.'

'But not by me.'

'Correct.'

'Who, then?'

There was an all-too-familiar hesitation. Then: 'I can't answer that.'

'And when was the instruction given? Before she left?'

'Incorrect.'

He frowned. 'After she left?'

'Incorrect.'

'When, then?'

'Before this mission departed from dry-dock.'

He shrugged, confused, quelling the frustration that welled in him. He was clearly involved in an even-more tightly-tangled mess of plots and sub-plots than he'd imagined. No doubt it had something to do with the luxurious staterooms Karin had received while onboard. Someone high up was involved in this one -- for certain -- and Gauntley hoped he had performed well for whomever it might have been.

Of only one thing was he certain: that he would never see Karin again. Only They knew where she had gone, and he would never be in Their league.

The disembarkation ramp was ready; the uniformed men were waiting. He supposed he had nothing to lose, so went to meet his destiny, nursing his headache as gently as he could.

As he strode down the ramp, a gliding car flew smoothly into view. It passed down the rank of dry-docks and pulled to a halt opposite the *Nelson*. The interior of the car was shrouded with darkness, so Gauntley was unable to tell if it was occupied or not. Regardless, he headed hopefully towards it, but was kept at a distance by one of the uniformed men.

The rear door opened and an old man emerged. He instantly recognised Alexander Durelle as he approached, mainly by the strength with which he carried himself -- distinctive in such an old man. He was smiling, which was a good sign under the circumstances. Durelle extended his hand, and Gauntley took it, shook it.

'Well done, Officiator Gauntley,' he said. 'Although I guess I shouldn't really call you that, seeing you've been expelled from the Arm for breaking quite a number of regulations.' His smile grew even wider, although Gauntley couldn't see the source of his amusement.

'Do you have what I asked for?' Durelle asked.

'They're inside. They were released by accident, and I haven't had a chance to repack them into the box, but I can assure you that a quantity of each species was included. Hans Vanguard was as willing and able as you said he would be.'

'And he didn't require money, did he?'

'No. You were right about that, too.'

'Excellent!' Durelle chuckled in amusement.

'And what about you? Does our deal still apply?'

Gauntley thought about it briefly. What good was a piece of wood -- no matter where he was headed -- if he didn't remember it was from Earth? 'I guess not.'

The old man clapped his wrinkled hands and rubbed them together. 'We'd better take you away then, eh?'

The small hope Gauntley had entertained flickered and died. He resigned himself to a life free of complication. The guards closed in.

'No, no, no,' Durelle said to them, and waved them away. 'That won't be necessary. He's coming with me. Captain Ellison -- have one of your men collect the seeds in the crew quarters of the *ESS Nelson* and see that they are brought to my stateroom as soon as possible. Make sure none are missing. Evacuate the chamber, if necessary.'

The captain saluted as Durelle took the confused Gauntley by the arm and lead him towards the car.

'I'm sorry about the run-around, young fellow, but things were complicated enough as they were. Couldn't let you know too much, in case it didn't go as it was supposed to.'

'This was all planned?' Gauntley asked inanely, slightly dazed by the sudden turn of events.

'Well, not planned as such; let's just say we knew roughly in which order they occurred.' He patted Gauntley's shoulder with his free hand. 'You needn't worry about official punishment -- losing your memory and all that messy business. We've much more important work for you to do.'

He held open the car door, and Gauntley stepped inside. The relative darkness was a welcome comfort after the bright lights and confusion of the dry-docks. He felt an arm slide around his shoulders and the pressure of warm lips on his neck.

'Guess who?' asked Karin.

He felt dizzy for a moment, almost nauseous, and was unable to speak. Durelle, much to his relief, left the two of them alone, and sat in a separate chamber of the car. As they glided silently along the docks, he watched the bulk of the *ESS Nelson* until it disappeared behind another Screwship.

'What are you doing here?' he asked, at last.

"They grabbed me after I left the *Nelson* in my timeship and took me here. A Screwship was waiting for me, as if they knew exactly what I was doing and exactly when, and I guess they must have when you think about it. They tell me they even rigged your ship so their's wouldn't show up on your screen."

Oh god, he thought. I've been set up. He swore a silent, private curse on whomever They were. Karin went on:

"They filled me in on history after the destruction of Ceres: how the explosion caused by the Bore -- which was my fault, as I travelled through time and through Ceres before you picked me up -- left no survivors, and no living trees." She looked sad for a moment, but less emotional than he would have expected, considering she'd lost her home and her family through her own carelessness. "And how 2471 AD became nil primum mobile as a kind of part-payment for the damage mankind had inflicted on nature. Sort of an honour, a token of respect, a promise that it would never happen again."

He thought that there may have been another reason -- but he wasn't about to speculate on that, if he could help it.

"You seem to have taken it all rather well," he said.

"I didn't at first, but I've had some time to think it over."

"How long?"

"Six months."

"I see." He frowned.

"Alex told me they were hiring someone to go back to Ceres and get some seeds to farm a small, private forest somewhere -- somewhere secret, of course -- and they wanted me present when the shipment arrived. I knew it would be you because when I hit you with the case --" she bit her lip -- "all those seeds came out. I'm sorry about all that; I was upset and angry and I took it out on you as though you were the one responsible. I wanted to help my family and friends if I could and I knew you'd try to stop me. Have you forgiven me?"

He rubbed the tender lump on his forehead. "Give me six months, and maybe I will."

She laughed and kissed him joyfully.

"But," he said, when he was able to, "what I can't understand is why we -- you in particular -- are being treated with such deference. What else have they got in store for us?"

"They're taking us to live with them -- the Elite, they modestly call themselves, but they're really nice about it, not too superior or patronising. It's as though they're another Arm supervising the Extemporal Arm that supervises temporal humanity; it's just a job to them, you know? Anyway, we're going to their secret hideout, wherever that is."

"But why?"

"I can answer that too," she said. "Get this: they want us to design the first human Screwships. You with your PhD -- something you never told me about -- and me with my skills in engineering, my god, what a team, hey?"

She laughed, threw her arms around him and squeezed. "I reckon we'll do it, too," she said into his ear. "Why else would they be so nice to us?" He agreed, silently, and was certain he would have to endure sarcastic comments from the *Nelson*'s computer no longer.

Good as it was to feel her arms around him, he was still unsatisfied on a number of points. "There's something else missing." He was haunted by a mental image of the spherical pool. "Did you try the pool in the *Nelson*?"

"Of course -- wasn't it wonderful? I've got another one where I'm living now. Why?"

He recalled the first time he had met Durelle, in the spacious suite with the pool in the background. Someone else was behind all this, and he had a strong hunch who it was. It certainly explained who They might really be. "What is it?" she asked, staring at the slow grin that spread across his face. "What are you thinking?"

He lied; it was better that she should remain ignorant if she hadn't already figured it out. "I was trying to guess where they're going to take us to build the ships. We couldn't do it here."

"I don't know. They haven't told me. Wherever their secret hideout is, I suppose."

He chuckled to himself: another hunch. He was forced to admire their audacity and the scope of their achievements. The image of the pool had turned into the Earth, blue and beautiful, and he found himself eager to see it in person, wherever it was. He knew there would be forests waiting for them.

He stared deep into her intelligent, glinting eyes, savouring the warmth he saw in them.

"We've got an interesting future ahead of us, haven't we?" he said.

"Yes, we have."

"I'm looking forward to it."

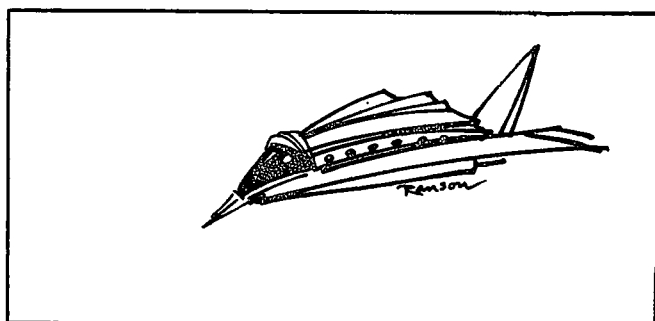
"Really?"

"Yes, really."

As they kissed again, he thought: I know that somewhere out there you're looking back and making sure it all goes to plan. I can feel it.

He remembered the man in black he'd seen as the *Nelson* docked, sighed internally and added: and I'm looking over your shoulder, making doubly sure I don't get it wrong.

the end





# A HISTORY OF SCIENCE FICTION & FANDOM IN ARGENTINA

by Claudio Omar Noguero

## Part One

### INTRODUCTION

Though our country doesn't stand out in technological development, it has a very important stream of scientific fantasy in its literature.

We must firstly face a problem which is impossible to ignore. The truth is we can't define what belongs to the genre of science fiction among such an abundance of fantastic tales as there is in our literature. The problem begins because the two concepts have not yet been defined. This is still intensely controversial in critical circles. Notwithstanding, we can take as a middle ground between Fantasy and Science Fiction the fact that there is in every science fiction story a scientific concept which is decisive to its plot; in the end, it being a balance between the natural and the supernatural elements, avoiding the fatalistic atmosphere, dense and irrational, that is a central theme of fantasy.

Several anonymous economists affirm that both Japan and Argentina share certain improbable conditions. No futurist, who called himself that, would have predicted that Japan, a country scarce in resources after the Second World War, would grow to be of such industrial importance; nor would he have understood how Argentina, which, according to the same logic would have had to be among the foremost nations in the world, and which today is under-industrialised, impoverished and indebted. Talking about Japan, it's easy to say that it is a science fiction country.. and we can suppose, without

much risk of being mistaken, that Argentina is too, though only to include it among the anti-utopias.

And in spite of the socio-economic swinging to which we are already so accustomed, science fiction has not reached its ultimate development. In fact, it is easier to find utopian elements in the official discourses, economic plans and political projects and/or analysis in our country, than in the minimal literature produced locally.

We have said before that we have a considerable fantasy tradition, beginning in the mass of legends and folk tales that have had their origins, in general, in the rural ambient, and that go on being registered and adapted in the urban concentrations where they are transformed in anecdotes, losing their contact with mythological mechanics and increasing the psychological suggestive power by their closeness to the sensationalist press.

Then, we would suppose, that if the industrialization process should keep advancing, all that tradition would have turned into the path leading to science fiction, thus differing more from Latinamerican magic realism. But neither the one nor the other thing has occurred: proper genre sf, developed and established as such in more powerful countries, has its logical evolution, which from the fifties has gradually abandoned the technocracy, now enters upon other questions -- metaphysics, philosophy, anthropology, semantics, sociology, ecology, etc -- things more accessible to the survivalist imagination of these suburbs so far from the centres of power and technology.

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## A PIECE OF HISTORY:

We'll have a review of what has happened up to now in the Science Fiction sphere in this country. For this purpose, we'll divide this section into six parts or periods, taking into account those events which have more or less continuously affected the development of the genre.

### 1 - PROTOHISTORY (- 1953)

Modernism was the first articulated literary movement that kick-started the creation of the fantastic theme, with the conscious will directing the writing of a particular type of tale. Some of these already showed scientific fantasy outlines. The work of some writers comes to the forefront: Leopoldo Lugones and Ruben Dario, Eduardo Holdberg and Macedonio Fernandez, Roberto Arlt, Horacio Quiroga, Felisberto Hernandez and Francisco Piriá, and latterly, Jorge Luis Borges, Adolfo Bioy Casares, Silvina Ucampo and Julio Cortazar.

Lugones and Dario, notably influenced by Edgar Allen Poe, attempted to investigate other dimensions, not only for their literary possibilities, but with a serious interest in the occultist and theophysical streams, and in the case of the Argentine writer, on the (at the time) revolutionary theories of Einstein.

In Lugones' case he had created two books of fantastic tales and science fiction: *LAS FUERZAS EXTRA MAS* (Strange Forces - 1906) and *CUENTOS FATALES* (Unfortunate Tales - 1924), besides having written essays with fantastic elements.

Also with such influences, the Uruguayan Francisco Piriá (1847-1933), founder of the Piriapolis watering place, published in Montevideo *THE TRIUMPHAL SOCIALISM, OR WHAT MY COUNTRY WILL BE IN 200 YEARS* (*El socialismo Triunfante O Lo Que Sera Mi Pais Dentro De 200 Anos* - 1898), an extensive utopia planned on a reasoned socialism and based on concepts by Moses, Aristotle and St. John.

In talking about *LABORATORY DREAMER* by Eduardo Ladislao Holmberg, Roberto J. Payro states that Eduardo Ladislao Holmberg was at the same time founder of the Natural sciences and of SF literature in our country. In his second text, *THE MARVELOUS TRAVELS OF MR NIC-NAC* (*Viaje Maravilloso Del Senor Nic-Nac* - 1875), he gave an explanation worthy of Edgar Rice Burroughs: his protagonist travels to Mars by starving himself till his soul separates from his body and reaches the fourth planet. There he has several adventures, which are profitable to the author, starting from the similarities with our own geography, to social satire of his era. Mars as a setting, would be repeated in *INSOMNIA*, a brief tale from 1876. In that year, he published *HOFFMAN'S CASK* (*Le Pipa De Hoffman*) where the protagonist enters an unknown zone of reality due to the hallucinogenic effects of the contents of a cask; the description of the process makes it comparable, with the detailed depiction of events and the description of its effects equal to any present text

on LSD or mescaline (it brings to my memory the later works of Henri Michaux, writing under the effects of mescaline).

After his death, a part of his work was arranged and catalogued by one of his disciples, Antonio Pages Larrays, who titled the compilation *FANTASTIC TALES* (*Cuentos Fantasticos*), which was the only work cataloguing Holmberg's works that have been published in newspapers, magazines and books. At present this work is out of print and difficult to find.

Holmberg's style was influenced by the German Hoffman, not only in the story that has his name but in others, such as *HORACIO KALIBAN OR THE AUTOMATONS* (*H/K. Y Los Automatas* - 1897), which are plagued with German names, grotesque humour, and abundant descriptions of meals and wines; he weaves a net around an automaton manufacturer, who came to destroy, in the last lines, the reality of *all* people, and then later, the hypothetically real world, as later would one of the best American sf writers: Philip K. Dick. Other influences on Holmberg are Poe, Flammarion, Verne, Conan Doyle and H.G. Wells. The last two were translated to the Spanish by him. Among the extra-literary interests introduced into his work we can find frenology, spiritualism, Darwinism, parapsychology, psychiatry - all new themes for those times.

We have previously mentioned a part of Lugones' work. In *STRANGE FORCES* (*Las Fuerzas Extranas* - 1906) he collected twelve tales and a theory on the cosmos which constituted a fundamental pillar for the development of fantastic and sf literature in our country.

Even in Holmberg's darkest tales there predominated an essential optimism where the drama was more romantic decoration than the author's true conviction; in Lugones can be seen the contradictions and schisms that mark the phasing of the 19th Century into the 20th. On the one side he ministers to the occultist, spiritualist and parapsychological theories, on the other hand to the advance of more modern theories on mathematics and physics. So, while Lugones was a fervent follower of the scientific-spiritual school of Theosophy and of its founder, Mme. Helena Petrova Blavatsky, of whom he had carefully read *ISIS WITH A VEIL* and *THE SECRET DOCTRINE* (this element was considered so important by Canal Feijoo, that he supposed it was not only decisive in the field of his literary output, but also in the real world, till the point of having marked the day, place and import of the suicide of Lugones in 1938). On the other hand he was the author of one of the first and finest essays on Einstein's theories: *THE SIZE OF SPACE* (*El Tamano Del Espacio* - 1921).

The plots of *THE STRANGE FORCES* follow, in several occasions, a sort of master tale, that has been described by Paula Speck, in a study, as follows: a solitary scientist invites a friend (the narrator) to corroborate the results of a series of experiments. It is suggested that the investigations are diabolic or blasphemous: they infringe the sacred limits of human knowledge and depend on the

help of equivocal beings, partly human. The experiment is sensible but liberates terrible 'forces' that destroy the scientist, directly or indirectly. Included in this collection are the tales **THE OMEGA FORCE** (La Fuerza Omega - on the violent powers of sound), **VIOLA AQUERONTIA** (where a gardener attempts to give powers to flowers), **THE METAMUSIC** (La Metamusica - on the visualisation of music), **THE PSYCHON** (an experiment to obtain the materialization of certain kind of thoughts). In every tale there abounds pseudo-scientific explanations with a detriment to the narrative development and to characterisation. But the other three sf tales in the book are more interesting. In **AN UNEXPLAINABLE PHENOMENA** (Un Fenomeno Inexplicable) and in **YUR** we find a theme recurrent in that time, which we can name the spectre of the monkey. One of the first literary examples we can point to is that of **THE MURDERS IN THE RUE MORGUE** of E.A. Poe. In this case, and many more after, a monkey is used as a symbol, a condensation of primitiveness and violence. Further on, the appearance of Darwinism and its massive diffusion would apportion a more deeper meaning: the traumatic idea that the human being descends from that animal ancestor and its psychological consequence: a mixture of fascination and terror in facing that brother, at a time so near and yet so incomprehensible. That mixture of feelings will reappear later in Quiroga's tales, to give a more emotive heat to the above-mentioned stories. In the first one (appearing in comic form recently with text by Otto Carlos Miler and aart by Carlos Roume, and published in the magazine **FIERRO** of Buenos Aires), an Englishman sees his shadow as that of a monkey and feels that a part of his body (one of his hands) is abnormal, till comes the point when by stretching the other hand he takes one of his hands in the other. In the second tale, the narrator tries to make a monkey talk. Though he only attains the wherewithall to carry him into a fatal depression, he acquires his object in a pathetic, final scene, where the first words of the animal coincide with his death.

**THE ORIGIN OF THE DELUGE** (El Origen Del Diluvio), lastly, describes with a minuteness and imagination, worthy of Stapledon's **STAR MAKER**, the world and the beings previous to the Deluge, and culminates in a sparkling, tangible nexus (a primitive mermaid in a bathtub in Buenos Aires) that joins the present from which a female medium transmits the story, with the remote age of the participating spirit.

Two other fantasies are added to these tales, without doubt the best of the book due to the detailed description of its decadent and luxurious atmosphere (**THE HORSES OF ABDERA** - Los Caballos de Abdera- and **THE RAIN OF FIRE** - Le Lluvia de Fuego) and the **A COSMOLOGICAL ESSAY IN TEN LESSONS**, which closes the book with an extant theory on the origin and development of the universe, supposedly transmitted by a "casual interlocutor" in a pass in Los Andes.

The interest presented by **THE STRANGE FORCES** is not repeated in **UNFORTUNATE TALES** (1924), though three of its stories (**THE ALABASTER**

**COUP** - El Vaso De Alabastro, **THE QUEEN'S EYES** - Los Ojos de la Reins - and **THE DAGGER** - El Punal) may be called SF by the documented descriptions - and precis - on the history and rituals of the Egyptians, though it is necessary to recognise that they have no narrative weight.

Lugones' influence over Horacio Quiroga was double: linguistic for the fantastic part of his work, and existential and indirect for the consequences that the travelling they made in 1903 to Misiones (a province in the Northeast of the country on the frontiers with Brazil and Paraguay), because some years later Quiroga would dwell in that province, and the best part of his narrative work has the atmosphere that pervades the Misionere Wood.

Nevertheless, the fantastic and SF elements would be permanent interests for Quiroga, and the first titles related to the theme would be published in the magazine **CARAS Y CARETAS** (Faces And Masks), such as **THE FIRE GLOBE** (El Globo de Fuego - 1907), where a couple communicate for the first time, sentimentally, with the apparition of a "globular ray, an electric bomb" that enters through a lock hole; or in **LOGIC TO THE CONTRARY** (Lotic Al Reves - 1908), a disposition with an essayic tone which is confirmed in the second half of the story. In **THE HANGED MONKEY** (El Mono Ahorcada - 1907), on the other hand, the theme of Yzur of Lugones is repeated: the narrator tries to make a monkey talk, and the tone becomes more frugal, as can be seen in the didacticism. It ends in tragedy too, as can be seen by the title.

Apart from these tales, Quiroga wrote, between 1908 and 1913, six works signed with the pseudonym S. Fragosa Lima, because he considered these stories were bad, being "food money" literature. In **THE MONKEY THAT KILLED** (El Mon Quie Asesino) he devises a complex theme of meta-psychosis to execute a delayed vengeance - delayed for three thousand years. **THE ARTIFICIAL MAN** (El Hombre Artificial) envisages the creation of a man with all the garbage imposed by the "Frankenstein" of Mary Shelley, and added an idea that saves the tale: experience is given to the recently created man by the transmission by means of arching, supplied by the atrocious torture of an innocent. **THE WILD** (El Salvaje) is one of his best works, probably because it uses an area well known by the author: the Parana river. The narrator travels there to investigate the circumstances of the strange report by the person in charge of an isolated meteorological station of impossible torrential rains, his encounter with a dinosaur and the growing friendship with the animal. It has a deep, nostalgic tone, that can compare it to some of Ballard's tales (eg 'Regress al mar...mm...RETURN TO THE SEA?').

He published his last book, **FARTHER ON** (Mas Alla) in 1935. Here he tries to concentrate, in the middle of an absolute stylistic and argumentative jumble, on the theory of some special rays, the "ml" rays, which could solidify cinematographic images, giving them separate existence. Among the chaos appearing in that book, he



twice mentions "the strange forces", as a veiled homage to his master, Leopoldo Lugones.

What connects Macedonio Fernandez to the great body of sf is his way, frankly and constantly, of contradicting all the accepted beliefs, of arguing the Therapeutics, the Realism in the novels, the limits of Psychology, with such deepness and variety that results, after all, more from an encyclopaedist of new style than a narrator.

From his extensive work, the most "finished" tale is *THE CALABASH WHICH TURNED INTO THE COSMOS* (*El Zapallo Que Se Hizo Cosmos*), that narrates how a natural catastrophe transforms with an ontologic one in the last paragraphs. *TANTALIA* anticipates the later interest awakened by the growing power of perception of vegetables, though excessively loaded with philosophical significance. *THE PSYCHIC SURGERY OF EXPIRATION* (*Cirugia Psiquica de Extirpacion*) describes Cosimo Schnitz' sensations; he is a blacksmith whose sense of futurity, of prevision, has been reduced, artificially, to eight minutes. *WHEN SOLANO REYES SUFFERED TWO DEFEATS IN ONE DAY* (*Donde Solano Reyes Era Un Vencido Y Sufria Dos Derrotes Al Dia*) explains, with detailed description and hypothesis, a simple way to accelerate or brake the nearness of death. *A SHRINKING PATIENT* (*Un Paciente En Disminucion*) extrapolates the death wish of doctors, in the same style as Robert Sheckley.

Among his innumerable non-narrative texts related to sf, *THE INTELLIGENT DANCE* (*El Bobo Inteligente*) describes a country in which "its inhabitants are at the back of all inventions, one and all", so that it passes from electricity to gas, to petrol, to brazier, to torch, and the transient puts weights on their shoulders to walk slower and so as not to arrive early, and they use a clock "invisible and epileptic, which jumps the hours".

The two truest friends and correspondents of Macedonia were Jorge Luis Borges and Santiago Dabove. The three used to meet in the above brothers' house to discuss metaphysics, William James, theories on health and on death (this last being one of Dabove's obsessions).

In Borges' narrative work, sf is a marginal element, and when a tale is framed inside this genre, is easier to place it close to early years it than in the contemporary scene. On the other hand, his style, his personal universe, his way of prefacing a theme in words, have become so topic and identifiable, so influential over other authors, that it can be said that a great part of contemporary sf is "Borgean", than the opposite.

*TLON, UQBAR, ORBIS TERTIUS* (1940) describes the insidious infiltration, by bibliographical means, of a strange universe on our own. *BABELON'S LOTTERY* (*La Loteria de Babilonia* - 1944) shows with Kafkian precision the complexity of an award and penalty system. *FUNES THE MEMORABLE* (*Funes el Memorioso* - 1942) is one of the tales that approaches sf; without much difficulty, it can be catalogued with the innumerable North American tales which use the same method of magnifying the brain function, memory, which

adding the substantive "man" to the title (it could sound like "Funes, the memory/-man"). *BRODIE'S REPORT* (*El Informe de Brodie* - 1970) returns to the tone of Swift's travels, to describe, in a mixture of anthropologic treatise and travel tale, the strange habits of a certain tribe. *THE UTOPIA OF A TIRED MAN* (*Utopia de Un Hombre Que Esta Cansado* - 1975) is just a recipient for some repeated obsessions of Borges, paradoxically opposing the title of the piece by the general perfectionism of his utopian projects with his individual eccentricities; to elaborate, in a terse trade of information between two men from distant epochs, many of the ideas that Borges expounded in many conferences and reports.

Aside from his narrative work, he propounded the work of Adolfo Bioy Casares, Ray Bradbury and Olaf Stapledon, and dedicated an excellent essay to "the first Wells", that is to say that of the scientific novels. He noted, in the preface to a quite thick edition on the North American Novel, that "had included themes which could not be encountered in more extensive works". Talking about the police genre, sf, western and Indian poetry, he demonstrated, in that volume, that his interest was not that of a snob, in choosing so disparate authors such as Lovecraft, Heinlein, Van Vogt and Bradbury, mentioning the importance of fan clubs and fanzines in the USA. He also declared that Wells' novels circumscribe and surpass everything that has been written afterward.

In the brief work of Santiago Dabove, *DEATH AND HER SUITOR* (*La Muerte Y Su Traje* - 1961) there are some samples of what Borges describes in his prologue as "reasoned imagination", adding a new denomination to the long list of that which have tried to take over from the inadequate and apparently immovable definition of "sf".

The most desiccated tale, for its duality and synthesis is *BEING DUST* (*Ser Polvo*) where a man avariciously transforms to a vegetable. *VARINSKY'S EXPERIMENT* (*El Experimento de Varinsky*), on the other hand, depends mostly on Poe's imagery, and results in being convincing to a small degree. *FINIS* recollects, with intensity, the Hector Servadas of Jules Verne, including the pseudo-scientific explanations for the events (infrared radiations, spectrographic analysis, etc). The theme is the change of rotational velocity of the Earth and the general catastrophe which follows, which brings it into the theme of "post-catastrophe" that plagues the genre: social disorder, lack of the masks and psychological identities and the historical regression of all mankind. *THE REMEMBRANCE* (*El Recuerdo*), a very short vignette, is a poetic text which purports to have been written after, not only the end of mankind, but of all life, and which approximates Stapledon; *TWO MOUTHS* (*Dos Bocas*) is much of a joke, wherein he mixes surreal images with satire.

And now we come to one of the authors who, with more originality and style - in my judgment - has enhanced this genre: Adolfo Bioy Casares. Though he is not totally dedicated to sf, many of his best works - as also those of his wife, Silvina Ocampo - pertain to the genre of sf. Both novels take place on an island, both have occultist

themes until the end, where the secret of the apparent chaos that dominates them till then is revealed. Both have a notable Wellsian influence, and both apply a subtle, complex play of conceptual mirrors that underlie the narration itself, multiplying the narrators, the points of view and the possibilities that what is being read is false. The view of the book could be modified by the views of any previous reader to the current reader (who has the book in his hands).

In MOREL'S INVENTION, the final explanation, which arrives through the imprecise machine of the penitentiary colony of Kafka, deceives a little, because of encircling logic which limits in the white climax; being of such metaphysical description that till then predominates in the text, with a coldness and indifference that preceded the development of the French Nouvelle Nouvelle. In EVASION PLAN, for a change, the brilliance of the climax helps to simplify the excessive ambiguity of the previous pages. In both, the characters are not Argentine, the landscape is some kind of white page, describing with minimal detail the islands, and the style communicates a merely intellectual intranquility, though it brings to mind images of terror tales, which except for the solid metal frame that surrounds them found fold up...

are different from the typical ones of the other literary protagonists: that predominate with meanness and obtrusiveness). That adherence to identifiable reality makes for more credibility and intensifies the central idea of the story: the transportation of a flier to a parallel universe, which lets Bioy describe in a few pages, and in tangential mode, how it would be another Buenos Aires, in which the big differences in its past with regard to ours are obvious in subtle - but terrifying - detail: alleys which don't exist, streets with changed names, unexplainable differences in the protagonist's friends behaviour.

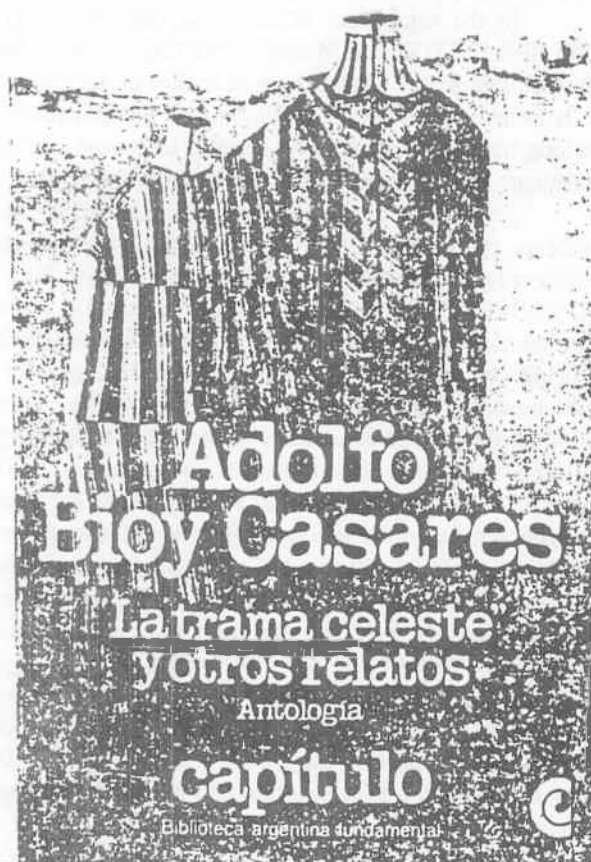
THE CALAMARI CHOOSES ITS OWN INK (I Calamar Opta Por Su Tinta - 1962) tells again a classic humorous sf story: of the extraterrestrial visitor who instead of landing in the indicated place (Washington, the Unesco, London...) lands in a little town and is meticulously destroyed because of the meanness of its inhabitants, even when, as in this case, its origin and the possibilities of the encounter are known.

In THE ANXIETIES (Los Afanes - 1967) there filters the tone of Bioy's love stories, mostly consumed in a thin and slender net of jealousy, animosity and misunderstanding among three or more characters. The sf element, vital for the story, is that which gives strength to the tale, saving it from the clumsy and superficial theme that overwhelms the other stories of this type in the genre. Here Bioy treats Heladio Heller, a new representative of the fauna of the wise porteno (= inhabitant of Buenos Aires), who invents cages in which humans or dogs souls can be trapped, winning with that invention the exaggerated hate of Milena, loved by the narrator but married to the inventor, and in charge of executing the vengeance of the ordinary against the extraordinary.

THE GREAT SERAFIN (1967) describes the end of the world on an isolated, melancholic seaside where the protagonist has gone by medical reasons. The end of the story is a slow blackout, more a sigh than a breakdown, in one of the most desperate texts of a work in which joy is expressed only in its more superficial aspects (a joke, noisy mirth, elegant jest) as if wanting to give more emphasis to the sadness. Powerful, pictorial imagery (a seaside full of dead fish, the slow disclosure of the statue of a buried serafin) reminds one of Ballard and Garcia Marquez.

The tale A NEW FURROW (Un Nuevo Surco - 1974) presents a strong emotion compared with the energy (as in Quiroga), here used for a new Morel or Doctor Castel, to all practical purposes, such as in Dino Buzzatti. The sanitarium where the story is played, which is rigidly organised in rooms whose numbers indicate the degree of deterioration of the patients. As in others of Bioy's tales, this is related by a disparate group, and progresses steadily towards the resolution of the mystery and the final sadness.

In order to shorten this listing of the local sf progenitors, and having finished with the authors who have written it with more power, we'll only make mention of some curiosities from other writers, though their production is a minimal part of their global work. Such is the case of Julio Cortazar, whose texts are, in general,



In the tale THE LIGHT-BLUE PLOT (La Trama Celeste - 1948) the characters begin to speak in a language recognisable as commonplace, they live in Buenos Aires, their personality mixture are totally human (mixtures that

unclassifiable, and sometimes are very close to fantasy or sf, as we see in *WITH LEGITIMATE PRIDE* (Con Legítimo Orgulo'), *HEADACHE* (Cefales), *AFTER DINNER* (Sobremesa), *A YELLOW FLOWER* (Una Flor Amarilla), and *THE HIGHWAY SOUTH* ('La Autopista del Sur'). The same can be said of Silvina Ocampo on reading her tales *THE INEXTINGUISHABLE RACE* (La Raza Inextinguible), *THE WAVES* (Las Ondas), *THE TILLER* (El Verdugo), and *REPORT FROM THE SKY AND HELL* (Informe del Cielo y del Infierno). The automation theme returns in Leopoldo Marechal's novel *MEGAFON OR THE WAR* (Megafon O la Guerra' - 1970). Some stories from *THE LITTLE MOON* (El jorobadito - 1933), written by Roberto Arlt, in particular the tale *THE RED MOON* (La luna roja), which builds an atmosphere of precise and sensible apocalypse, which is transformed in crude allegory, for its symbolic end, may be included, using the genre limits of sf very elastically. The same for *MARTHA RILQUELME* (1956) by Ezequiel Martinex Estrade, a complex narration that describes a house in which misdirection and mystery are predominant, and whose limits expand till reaching cosmic dimensions. Or fragments of Ernesto Sabato's *ON HEROES AND GRAVES* (Sobre Heroes y Tumbas' - 1961), especially *THE REPORT ON BLINDS* (Informe Sobre Ciegos), that nears Lovecraft in the description of some strange landscapes. Or the tales *THE PRISONER* (El Prisionero), *HIBERNATION* and *THE TWO DEATHS* (Las Dos Muertes) of Alberty Lagunas; Alfonsina Storni's sonnet *TO IN INHABITANT OF MARS* (A Unhabitante de Marte); and the tales *THE END OF THE YEAR* or *LOVE IN WINGS* (Fin de Año and Amor en Alas) by Syria Poletti...

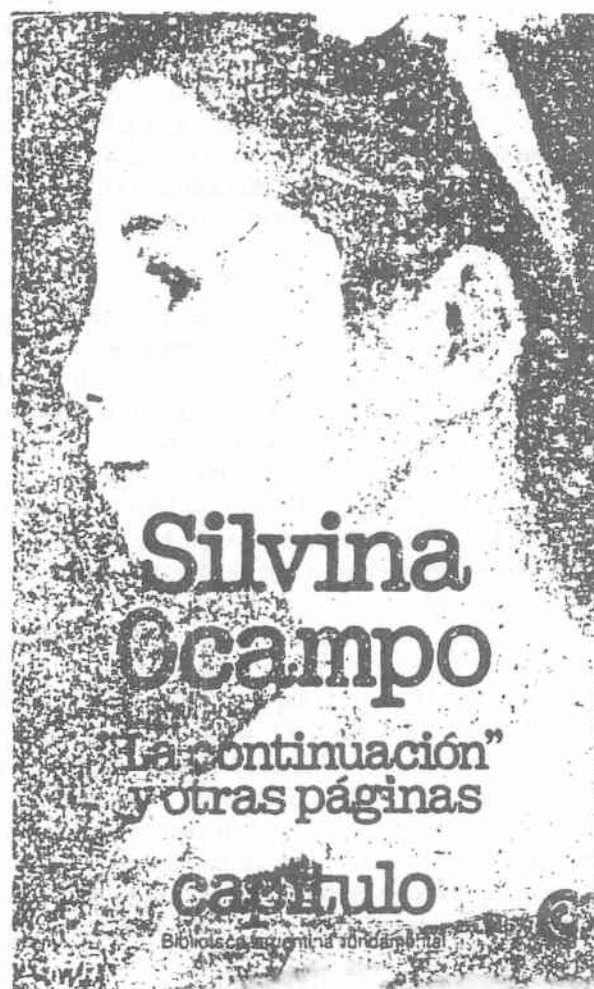
## FARTHER ON (MAS ALLA: 1953 - 1957)

*MAS ALLA* (Farther On) is the magazine that put the base for a steady sf readership in our country, though it was not the first publication on the genre: it was preceded by *HOMBRES DEL FUTURO* (Future Men), which between August and October 1945 published three issues dedicated to reproducing North American sf; the material came from *STARTLING STORIES*, *ASTOUNDING* and *THRILLING WONDER*, including more or less scientific futures (for example, *PLUTO MEN*) and Eric Frank Russell, Stanley Weinbaum, Edmond Hamilton and others works.

With its four uninterrupted years of publication and its laudable intent for the incorporation of artistic, literary and scientific local material, with a sparkling readers' mail, *MAS ALLA* is, up to the present day the magazine that has published the most issues (48) in Argentina.

Travel to and from different planets, travel to the past and the future, with unhuman plants and animals, and from the already known, ordinary humanity plantified in its animality, superior minds, galactic politics, changing

ways, impressive aliens, ends of the world, criminals and saints passing among the stars - these were some of the themes which travelled through its pages.



But farther on the anecdotal, *MAS ALLA* made schoolrooms for the readers, stimulating, opening a road for the appearance of fans clubs.

Its format (14 cm x 19.5 cm x 184 pages) made history too, confusing a reader accustomed to larger magazines, like *PIF PAF* (comics), who arrived at the newstand and saw it mixed with the "big ones".

It was published by Abril, with material extracted from the US magazine *GALAXY* and with local contributions, as mentioned above. So we could read in its pages new Argentine writers such as Hector German Oesterheld, Pablo Capanna, Juan P. Edmunds, and made available were the first Spanish versions of more representative novels: *THE DAY OF THE TRIFFIDS* by John Wyndham, Robert Heinlein's *THE MAN WHO SOLD THE MOON* and its sequel *REQUIEM*, and *THE PUPPET MASTERS*; Isaac Asimov's *THE CAVES OF STEEL* and *PEBBLE IN THE SKY*; Frederik Pohl and Cyril Kornbluth's *WOLFBANE*; Alfred Bester's *DEMOLISHED MAN* or *THE MARTIAN CHRONICLES* of Ray Bradbury, which appeared in a series between numbers 17 and 25.

Two Argentines saved the world from each xenoid invasion thanks to a state of drunkenness: Claudio Paz made it with *THE 17 COINS OF 2U* (#24) and Ignacio Covarubias concreted it through that fellow *SATURNINO FERNANDEZ, HÉRO* (#27). Common men, evading through alcohol of their more or less weary and disappointed circumstances, transcended without realising it, the barrier of superintelligence. A corrective entry was given by Juan P. Edmunds who tells how the visitor recently arrived from the stars places his gigantic foot over the lilliputian city of Bahia Blanca (an important city in the south of the provinces of Buenos Aires), the story - *DISCOVERY*.

There was also detective sf, with humour and without policemen. Abel Asquini was the author; this pseudonym was that of a first order scientist, physicist and mathematician, the radio-astronomer Carlos M. Versavsky. One such was *LIO'S CRIMES* (*Los Crimenes de Lio*). It is worth while to seek in numbers 6, 7 and 8 to see *THE PROTONIQUEL* coming through its inventor's head due to a familiar short circuit, or to hear the sound of *NEMOBIUS FASCIATU* and receive the bite of a sick dog and fall down into one's own trap, under the infrared rays of *NICTALOPES*.

Humour and melancholy have first place with *MAS ALLA*'s Argentine writers. One of them, with the trite name of Juan Fernandez, invented a robot (*PARTICULAR PROFESSOR*) who took nutrition in tablet form; and another, Francisco Baltzer, verified that the vacationers who went in *SUMMER* to Mar Del Plata were not only the Argentines and foreigners who wanted to loose their money in the local casino, but since its fame had extended through hyperspacial frontiers, also some insectoids who placed their winnings in local banks (numbers 4 and 20).

An Argentine child discovered the secret of invisibility. His name was Rino and he was the literary son of Julian del Cordoba in his short story *RINO'S FANTASIES* (#46); of course, all was the consequence of having discovered antigravity. So Rino became more powerful than Superman, and left his invention to a "world security organisation"... back when the UN seemed to be the solution to universal problems. But at the time De Cordoba showed us his child, he had already gathered "primal mastery" in prehistory and had given us *THE JUMP* which has a writer trapped in his own fiction (#20 and 22).

At the same time that the Italian-Argentine expert Pablo Capanna explained that UFOs didn't land on our planet any more because of a mutual *INCOMPREHENSION* (#37) that comes from our antiquity. In a cellular humorous outline, Luis R. Torres destroyed the Earth, inhabited by *NOTHING MORE THAN HUMANS*. That feeling of annulling, perhaps the fruit of economical instability or apocalyptic inflations, becomes evident in Julio Almado's vision of an experiment that gets to *THE DISINTEGRATED TIME* (# 38); and leaves only one thing to the protagonist to affirm: With my face against the dust, I only say "I'm afraid". Another fear

made Leo Boreas decide to *DIE ALONE* (# 14) as is told by Adolfo Perez Zelaschi, in order to destroy a vampiric machine which feeds on thoughts and personalities.

And it was unavoidable that, with the saturation caused by *MAS ALLA*, clubs would appear. The Argentine Interplanetary Society, pioneer in rocketary in our country, organised the first Argentine Astronautic Exposition in March 1955; at that event could be seen the notable work of model maker Hector Marziano: rocket models, model planetary landscapes, homunculi with diving suits, with a thousand precious details artistically created.

In the city of Ramos Mejia, in 1955, the "*MAS ALLA Friends Centre*" was formed, run by Julio Castelví. Five years later, when the publication *MAS ALLA* ceased, clubs, associations, and organisations related to sf appeared and disappeared in Argentina, but though that is another story that we'll go into further on, we can only mention here the influence that *MAS ALLA* had in what happened at the beginning.

There were, however, more characters connected with this magazine. One, maybe the most important of those which passed through it and is well known by his further contributions of international remembrance, is Hector German Oesterhald. He came to be its editor in the last issues (though the full team responsible for the publication was never revealed), when he published a couple of stories: the scandalous *THE REINFORCED MAQUIAVELO* (*Maquiavelo Reforzad*), where two enterprises compete in the making of resistant sautes and potent feminine breasts by atmospheric aspersion, and *BEWARE OF THE DOG* (*Cuidado Con el Perro*), with a Martian taking photographs of us, as if we were his pretended vampiral capture.

After that, Oesterhald would be responsible for the text of the comic *THE ETERNAUT* (*El Eternauta*), begun in a serial way back in 1957, which was, without doubt, the first extended work on the genre here.

But let us finish with *MAS ALLA*. After four years, it ceased publication. Its last editorial argued that due to the fact that it was an elitist publication (of the "intellectual and spiritually privileged sector"), it was economically unjustifiable to continue it, unless it dropped its quality, which would be "a deceit and an insult which the readers would not be worthy of or would not accept, and that would cause disgust to our conscience." With "emotion and sadness" *MAS ALLA* said good-bye to its readers (who might live in Montevideo or in Santiago de Chile, Lima, Costa Rica or Barranquilla - Colombia - Guayaquil - Ecuador -, Camaguey - Cu -, Caracas, Paris or Moscow, and all the towns that could be imagined in Argentina), hoping that its disappearance would only be a short while. It promised to come back "when the interests in sf would reach to a higher point than at present. And God grant that moment be not too far..."

This happened thirty years ago. Several times we've heard similar excuses, and we've also seen magazines succumb without any excuse. In its time, the disappearance of *MAS ALLA* created an empty place that



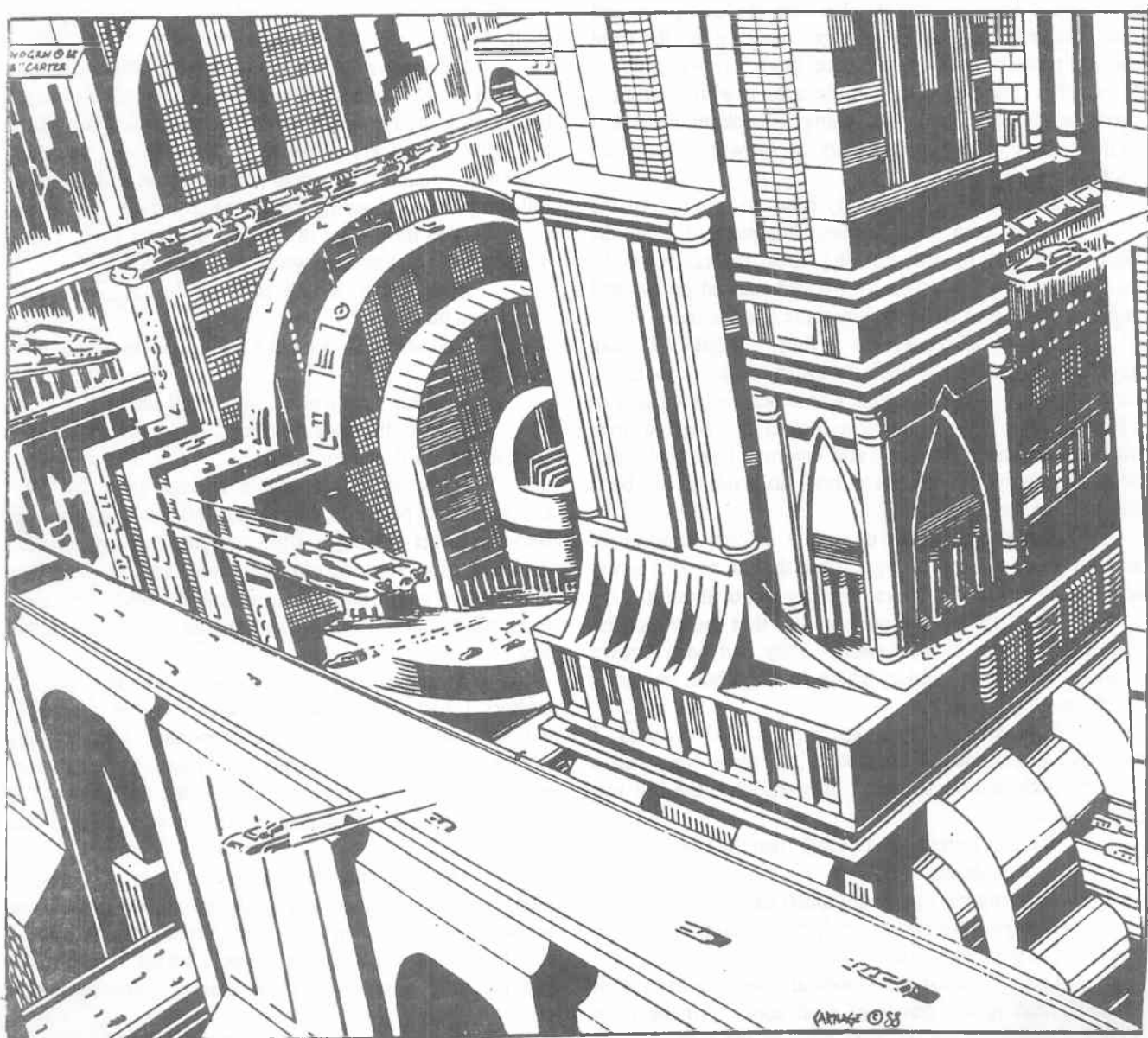
was only partially covered by the books of such publishers as MINOTAURO and FABRIL. When seven years later MINOTAURO became a magazine, it only recovered a part of that public. EL PENDULO (The Pendant), which appeared twenty years later, encountered another generation.

Still today, the veteran "masallistas" form some kind of elite that hoard their collections as a relic, though frequently have given up reading sf.

With its classic Campbellian style, says Pablo Capanna, MAS ALLA represented an epoch. No other magazine achieved up till now its length of publication. Times have changed, and the genre has won its place in literature, though it has some lack of originality, but we are where we are because in the beginning was MAS ALLA.

But MAS ALLA was not alone: a few months after its first issue was published, there appeared a rival:

URANA, The Magazine Of The Year 2000. It was a disordered magazine, because it was said to be published in Buenos Aires but appeared in Rosario, and its only two issues were published in October and December 1953. It was published by "Selecciones Argentinas" and was edited by Julio A. Echeverria. It reproduced material from the Italian magazine of the same name, which explains certain peculiarities in translation to the Spanish ("fantasciencia" instead of "ciencia ficcion"; "motoscafo" instead of "submarino"). It was similar to MAS ALLA, but more precarious. Its price was near half of MAS ALLA, but its value was very less, and it disappeared without pain or glory, without growing to be a favoured alternative. We only make this mention because, as we'll see further on, this kind of imitation would be repeated again and again.



# USED BOOKS

by Shane Dix

The shop was an unobtrusive little place tucked away down a side street. If you weren't looking for it, you could easily have missed it. Its frontage was plain and drab, and only the smallest of signs hanging out the front notified passers-by of its presence there. It was only by chance that I happened to stumble upon it while using the street as a short cut. And being a book enthusiast, I couldn't pass up the opportunity to browse through an uncharted bookshop.

Inside there was barely room to move. All the walls were covered with shelves that reached from the floor to the ceiling, and running down the centre of the shop were two long tables with books stacked on top and underneath. It was like a dream come true for me.

The shopkeeper was a thin, fragile old man nestled in the far corner behind a tottery desk he was using for a counter, his face lost somewhere between the pages of a book. After a few minutes he looked up - peering over his heavy lensed spectacles - and saw me. I said hello and smiled genially, but he went back to reading his book without acknowledging me.

The shop had an unusually solemn atmosphere which I found discomforting at first, though as soon as my attention turned to the books I quickly forgot about it.

The first thing I noticed was that the books fell into no particular classification. They had been thrown together without any order, which I found both annoying and frustrating.

'Do you have any books by John Cox?' I asked. I had read just about all his books, but there were still a couple which had eluded me. In particular, the last two before his death.

Without looking up he said: 'Just the one.'

'Whereabouts?'

He shrugged lightly but didn't say anything more.

'Are you always this helpful?' I said. 'But even this failed to get a response.'

I started looking, methodically moving from shelf to shelf, reading the spines of each book. All the titles were unfamiliar to me, as were most of the authors. And when I did see a name which I recognised, it would always

turn out to be a book which I had never heard of before. But more discouraging than anything else was that there was never more than one title by the same author on any shelf.

I looked around for an hour or so before deciding to call it a day. I would have liked to have stayed longer, but the lack of organisation to the shop had left me with a headache. I quickly chose a couple of books and took them to the counter. The man addressed me with a look of mild surprise, as if seeing me for the first time.

'You have a lot of obscure material here,' I said. 'It's a wonder that anyone would bother with it.'

'Every story should be read,' he said. 'At least once. Just these two?'

I nodded. He took the books and looked at their covers.

'I couldn't see a price on them,' I said.

'Two dollars for this one.' He handed the book back to me. 'A dollar for this.'

It seemed a reasonable enough price for their condition, so I paid him the money and left. I stepped out into the street feeling a little uptight, but my tensions dissolved as soon as the chill wind touched me. The shop had been so warm and quiet, so isolated from everything else, that stepping from it was like stepping from another world.

As it turned out, the books I bought - both by authors I had never heard of before - were incredibly tedious. Nothing seemed to be happening, and the story lines were developing at a very slow pace. I couldn't read more than a dozen pages of either. One of them was so poorly written that it amazed me it had ever made it into print.

The following day I returned them to the shop, along with a few others that had been sitting around the house. As I stepped in and closed the door behind me, I felt the outside world fall away into a stifled hum, and the disconcerting quiet of the place quickly gathered around me.

'I'd like to exchange these books,' I said.

The old man looked at me, expressionless, and then to the books I had placed in front of him.

'We don't buy books,' he said tiredly, 'We sell them.'

I laughed uncertainly. 'But surely you have to buy the books in order to have them to sell.'

'We just sell,' he said.

'But that's ridiculous,' I said. 'If you don't buy anything, where does your stock come from?'

'We just sell,' he repeated bluntly, then returned to the book opened before him.

Angered by this, I snatched the books from the counter and left the shop, slamming the door closed behind me. Outside, the roar of a car engine startled me, and suddenly the real world settled around me once more.

On the way home I dumped the books into a rubbish bin.

\* \* \*

Over the next couple of days I found myself wanting something to read, but the books I opened seemed lifeless and uninspiring. Nothing was satisfying my appetite. Oddly, it was the two books I had bought from the shop that I had a craving for. In fact, ever since I had thrown them away I had been feeling strangely guilty. The few pages I had read had left a lasting impression on me, and the need to read more of their story had steadily grown over the days. So desperate was I for those books that at one stage I even went back to the rubbish bin in the hope of finding them still there.

Finally, despite my reservations, I returned to the shop. I stepped inside and immediately the outside world dropped a thousand miles away. The old man was again busy reading a book over in the corner, and he showed no sign that he noticed me enter. I moved along the aisles, feeling a warm thrill at the closeness of the books that flanked my every side.

I browsed casually at first, not looking for anything in particular, half-heartedly reading the titles on the books' spines. It was unusual to find many of the titles familiar to me, even though I had glanced at them only the once before. I noticed on one shelf a number of books which had not been there the last time I had been in the shop.

'I see you have some new books in,' I said loudly.

He didn't look up. 'We only sell used books here.'

'What I mean,' I said irritably, approaching the counter, 'is that you have *additional* books. Books which weren't here a few days ago.'

'We always get books in,' he said grumpily, finally raising his head and squinting over his glasses. 'It's a book shop.'

'You told me the other day you didn't buy books, though.'

'We don't.'

'Then where do they come from?'

He glared at me for a moment. 'Do you want to buy anything or not?'

His evasiveness was infuriating. 'What's the book you're reading?'

He showed me the cover: *The When of Frederick Blite*.

'Never heard of it,' I said.

He shrugged. 'Just because you've never heard of it, doesn't mean it's not worth reading.'

He turned again to the book in front of him. The more I spoke to him, the more agitated I became. I hated the way he would always read, as if nothing else mattered. I couldn't understand how he could be so openly rude to his customers. Whenever he spoke to me it was almost with contempt, as though my interrupting his reading irritated him.

'Look,' I said shortly. 'Why can't you tell me where you get your books?'

He looked at me steadily. 'Because it doesn't concern you. Not yet, anyway.'

'Now what the hell does that mean!'

He looked back to the book, flipping over a page. 'Are you buying, nor not?'

\* \* \*

For the rest of that day and into the evening I sat in my car opposite the bookshop, watching the goings-on across the street. I sat there like a man obsessed, keeping vigil on that pathetic little shop and its old man. I didn't know what I hoped to achieve, except perhaps to satisfy my curiosity.

No-one entered or left the shop the whole time I was there. The old man just sat in the corner reading by the light of a small lamp until about eight o'clock, when he locked up and switched off the light. But the next morning when I returned to the shop, I again found books on the shelves which had not been there the day before.

I looked over to the old man, then to the door behind him.

'What's behind there?' I demanded.

After a few minutes he lifted his attention from the book. 'Hmmm?'

'Do you keep books there?'

'Where?'

'There!' I snapped, pointing over his shoulder. 'There! Behind that door!'

'All the books we have are on our shelves,' he said calmly. 'If it isn't there, we don't have it.'

'Where do you get your books *from*?'

It is difficult to describe exactly how I felt right then. Angry, yes. Confused, sure. Perhaps even a little scared. I wasn't even certain why the mystery of the books had roused me so intensely. But it had, and all I could think of doing was finding out where they were coming from.

The old man's only response to my outburst was to return to his book and carry on reading, which riled me even more. I snatched it away from him, hoping to get a reaction. His haggard features looked back indifferently at me, though in the slight twitching of his hands I could see

his irritation. Not with me perhaps, but rather with his need to continue reading.

I looked at the book I now held, the book to which he was gently leaning: *A Man Out Of Time*. And beneath the title, the author: H. G. Wells!

'I know everything that Wells ever wrote,' I said. I tapped the book with my finger. 'This isn't one of them.'

'It will cost you five dollars,' he grumbled.

I flicked through the pages of the voluminous book. All of the passages I read were unfamiliar, which surprised me. I was expecting the book to have been a previous work under a different title, or perhaps even a selection of short stories. But it was neither. Instead it was a completely original work.

'I don't understand,' I said.

'Five dollars,' he repeated. His hand was outstretched - though whether for money or the book I couldn't be sure.

I slapped five dollars into his hand and hurriedly left the shop. I drove home as quickly as I could and, feeling strangely apprehensive, locked myself in my bedroom with the book. I was so anxious to open the book that I trembled. And when I did start reading, I found it difficult to stop.

I read page after page with growing interest. It was kind of autobiographical, though written in novel form, and it went into incredible detail of Wells' life. It was a totally absorbing read, and when I finally looked up from its pages I discovered that it was already evening.

The book was without a doubt the work of H. G. Wells. It could *only* have been penned by him. No-one else could have possibly had such an insight into his private life. But the fact that it was a book that I had never heard of before distressed me. I felt a compulsion to put it down; but something even deeper compelled me to continue, and for the rest of the night I sat up reading, greedily devouring each and every sentence.

The next day I was exhausted, but hungry for more. It was the same sensation I had had with the other two books I'd purchased from the shop, only more intense and demanding. I was consumed with the need to continue reading, and I knew that no other books but the ones from this shop would satisfy. There was something strangely - and disturbingly - tantalising about them.

I returned to the bookshop early the following morning and waited for it to open. Soon the old man shuffled towards the door, glancing through the window at me, his soft breath fogging the glass. He unbolted the door and I entered, immediately sensing that heavy, melancholic atmosphere. But this time I noticed something else beneath it: a subtle, lingering sense of... learning? Yes, that's what it was. Right then I felt as if I could have stayed there forever.

More than anything, I wanted to understand the secret of these books, of the shop. But I knew that my arrogance was not going to get me the answers I needed. I decided upon a more genial approach to the old man.

'That was quite an interesting book I bought from you yesterday.'

He nodded without turning as he moved over to his corner. He settled himself and collected a book from the counter.

'What are you reading now?' I said, stepping over to him.

He lifted the book, showing me the cover; both the title and the author were unfamiliar to me.

I don't get it,' I said. 'With the wealth of literature you must have in this place, you still waste your time on trivial books.'

He shrugged frail shoulders. 'Every book deserves to be read.'

'Yeah, so you say. But what I'm looking for is something as intriguing as that book by Wells.'

'You might try over there,' he said, pointing. 'Third lot of shelves down, about halfway up. Probably a couple there that might interest you.'

I moved over to where he had indicated, my eyes sweeping vaguely over the spines of the books. I said: 'How long have you worked here?'

'Most of my life.'

'Really? And how long has the shop been here?'

'Always.'

I laughed aloud at this. Every time I had been in the shop it had been empty apart from the shopkeeper and myself. It was amazing that he could even keep up the rental on the place.

'It must do good business,' I said dryly; but my sarcasm was lost of the old man who didn't even look up from his book.

After about ten minutes I stumbled upon something which immediately caught my attention. It was a book by Edgar Allen Poe titled *Tormented Soul*. As I reached for it I noticed beside it a book by D. H. Lawrence. And beside that, Joseph Conrad. In fact there was a small cluster of famous authors: Orwell, Joyce, Hesse - and each book with an unfamiliar title! Classic writers, their writings often sought, and here was a number of unknown works cluttering the dusty shelves of a second hand bookshop!

'What is going on here?' I dropped three of the books onto the counter. 'How did you come by these books? Books the world has never even *heard* of?'

'How does anyone come by a book? They just... fall into your possession.'

'Look, I'm not in the mood for any of this cryptic nonsense. Just tell me where the hell you got these books from!'

He regarded the books casually for a few moments, then offered me a price. 'Twenty dollars for the lot.'

'I want to know about these books,' I said stiffly. 'Are they forgeries? Is that it?'

'Forgeries?' He shook his head at me and laughed - possibly the only emotion I had ever seen him display. 'No, they are not forgeries.'

'Then where do they come from? I want to know! The world *deserves* to know!'



He stared at me for a long while. Then: 'Do you want these books or not?'

'Damn you!'

I was about to pay him the money and leave, when the cover of one of the books on his counter caught my attention. It was of a woman frowning, and I recognised her instantly: those solemn eyes, the tangle of wiry hair, the creases in her brow - it was a face I had seen every day in my childhood.

I picked up the book with the face of my mother on the cover, and flicked through its pages, reading the occasional passage and feeling an uncomfortable chill as the words revealed incidents which I could clearly recall. It detailed her thoughts and feelings, exposing her as the sad and lonely lady I had always suspected her of being. It was a cold and precise account of her life, though at all times managed to remain compassionate and kind. But above all, it was my mother's life.

'All these books...' I started, glancing around at the shelves. 'They're ... people?'

'Every life is a story,' he said quietly.

I nodded gently, uncertainly. 'And every story deserves to be read.'

'They need to be,' he said. 'It's their only purpose.'

I stared at the face of my mother for a few moments, wanting to open the book and start reading. 'Why me, though?'

The old man shook his head, shrugged. 'I've been asking myself the same thing all my life.'

'But why now?'

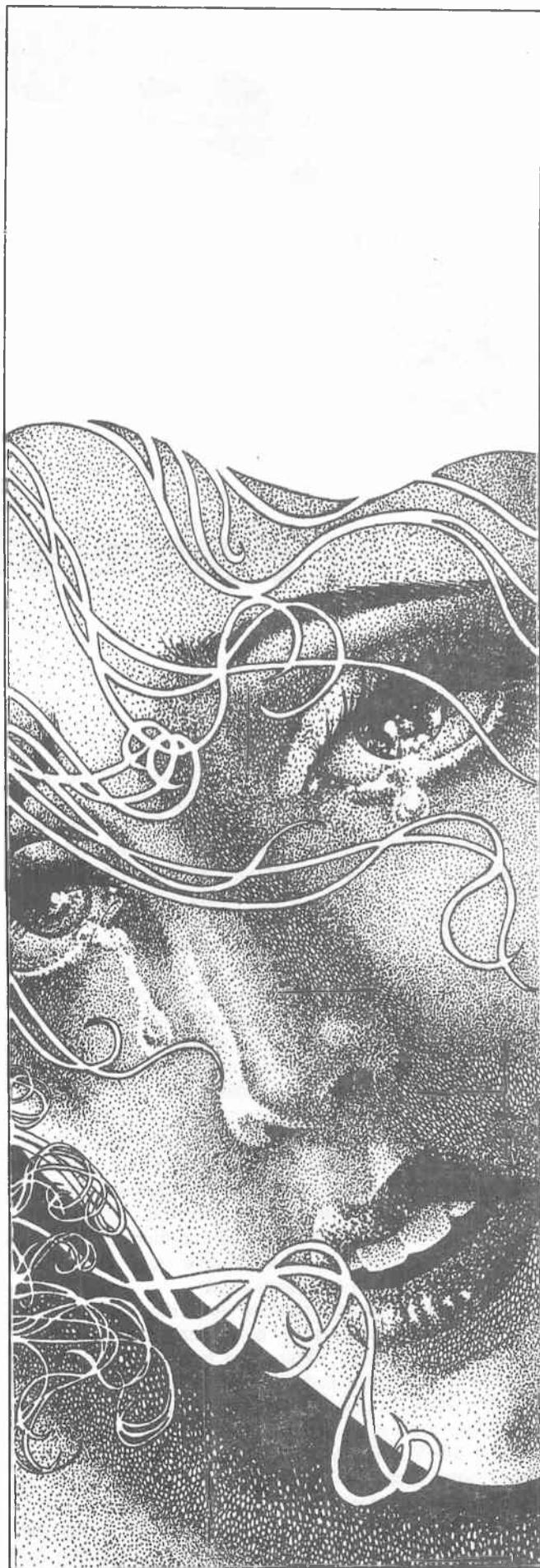
The old man smiled sadly. 'I guess I'm on my past pages.'

I returned to the shop a couple of days later. The door was open but the old man was nowhere to be seen. I walked along the aisles, looking around at the mass of books that surrounded me. There were more books here than could be read in a lifetime, and the challenge of that alone excited me.

I called out to the old man, but there was no reply. Over at the counter was a single book: *The Shopkeeper*. On the cover was a picture of the old man. He was a lot younger and wasn't wearing spectacles, and his lips were turned up at the corners in an uncanny smile. And behind him, a vague impression of the book shop.

I picked up the book and, sitting myself down behind the counter, opened it and began to read. And as the simple words absorbed my interest, I felt all else around me dissolve and drop away. All that remained was the book in front of me, and an overwhelming desire to finish it.

end



# NOT BIG BROTHER?

by Rachel McGrath-Kerr

## "CHANGE FOR POPULAR SCIENCE FICTION SERIES - 'IT WON'T WORK' SAYS INSIDERS."

The American-Italian production company, Eccolapittura! Productions, yesterday announced that it will be changing the crew of its popular science fiction series, *OFF AND ONWARDS*. Newcomers will include Kenji Tamada (27), a well-known Japanese actor, who will be the second in command on the spaceship *Heroic*. And Mala Temendo, the beautiful Nigerian actress and singer, will be the ship's new engineer. A number of minority groups have welcomed this inclusive move, while the company's spokesperson, Jane Whicker, stressed that these actors have received their roles by merit.

Further plans to make this series more representative of today's society include (according to the press release yesterday) "supporting the *Heroic's* basic tenant of peace, justice and conservation... creating characters from a greater variety of age groups...(and) the acceptance of homosexual relationships among the characters". Ms Whicker explained that there were many minorities previously without positive role models in science fiction, and in any genre at all.

Certain industry sources yesterday said it was a brave gamble, made possibly only because of the series' first season success. "You have to face it," said one producer who declined to be named. "It's getting easier to cast an Afro-Caribbean or an Asian into a starring role nowadays, although some directors ensure they behave just like the WASP cast members. Gays? Well, you'll have moral activists screaming about that here, in England, and any other country that's a bit uptight. Attitudes are changing, though, and maybe it will get easier. Perhaps the hardest one is actually casting old actors. In a fantasy show, people don't really want to see

wrinkles - they want to see firm muscles, smooth skin, people looking better than real life."

Maybe, maybe not. One thing is for sure: the *S. S. Heroic* will have a lot more interesting activity on board than the average spaceship."

o o o

This "article" is not merely wishful thinking. Science fiction, in common with other genres of the mass media, is laden with stereotypes, and innovations stand out. Small wonder that Mills and Boon detractors claim that there is an approved writing plan down to maximum word length, or that a struggling author can follow a DIY s-f story kit; complete with tried and true characters.

One might say that there are only three basic s-f plots: The aliens are coming, We're going to the aliens, or The aliens have been here forever. It's cruel, but it also contains a grain of truth. Given some author's paucity of plot, loading storyline with cliché upon cliché, then the characters could be the last chance to make a story rise above the mundane. For it is the characters' actions, history and motivation that create conflict and thus interest when combined with other characters and outside occurrences. If the character is one of several "approved" stereotypes, then the reader can cheerfully (or sadly) predict what they will say, do or think, and exactly how the plot will be resolved.

Granted, there is some comfort in reading a book or watching a film that is composed of stereotypical people and situations: the comfort of the known and

familiar. It is not difficult to think of an example of a gallant battle-scarred captain, a squealing blonde female companion, an inscrutable alien, or an obscenely cheerful/grumpy robot.

The major drawback of "painting by stereotypes" is boredom on the part of the audience. Time, money and effort are precious commodities, not to be wasted on something that is rehashed and flimsy.

Fortunately changes are occurring. The audience's assumptions about gender, sexuality, race and age today are not the same as they were 30 years ago. Similarly, s-f, having an infinite number of futures and alternate universes, need not be trapped in the stereotypes of today: its possibilities are infinite. It is understood that a media producer will want his/her product (film, book, comic, etc) to sell in most cases, and anything radically different can cause controversy. Sometimes a bit of notoriety can help sales but on other occasions, the attention is very hostile, if the work is especially "ideologically unsound".

Congratulations to all those who are already breaking moulds. Indeed, even some of the blindest bigots have realised that it is unsafe to be blatantly sexist, racist, ageist, and so on. Pressure groups and lobbyists know how to raise their voices. Hang on a moment... if this continues, the only things left to "pick on" will be perverse computers, and the PC lobby group will undoubtedly complain, threatening to put a rebellion virus in every word processing program that crashes as soon as the words "head of junk" are typed.

So, who's left? Doesn't it seem that many more types of people are getting a better deal already? Certainly. After all, the squeaking wheel gets the oil. But what of the people who are hidden by the "cloak of invisibility"? Certain groups are simply never mentioned, or only ever appear in passing.

One particular group that doesn't feature largely, if at all, perceived by many as non-vocal, powerless and without esteem of many long-established pressure groups is: fat people<sup>1</sup> It's easier for people to get away with "fattism" because many don't believe that "fattism" exists. While discrimination on the basis of weight and size can be brought before a court of law or an employment commission, there is still constant discrimination in everyday life that never raises a murmur of dissent. For example, the seats on public transport are designed for a Size 12 backside, not a Size 20 or even a Size 16. What about the styles and sizes of clothes? The list goes on.

There are many fat people who agree that many aspects of life are unfair, and believe that they deserve such a situation because it's their own fault that they're fat. While they take this attitude, they are "willing" victims through their own silence.

The fact is that if you're fat, you don't fit into the mass media's image of what constitutes beauty and perfection. The types of people included in books, Films, TV shows and so on are a reflection of the society in which they're produced, which is in its turn influenced by its own mass media: a vicious circle. Even future-centred items of the mass media are still stuck with late twentieth century body images. On the occasions when a writer has not mentioned body-shape, the audience's assumptions usually tend to the current-day ideal.

A certain amount of bulk in men is thought to add stature, making them more imposing and a bigger presence. If the man is more than a little overweight, then it is permitted (by the hidden agenda) to make him a jolly gourmand, in the mould of Friar Tuck or Falstaff. (If the man is very skinny with little muscle definition, he receives the seven-stone weakling tag, or compensates for the perceived deficiency with great intelligence).

What about women? The protagonist is not apparently allowed to become fat. Heroines can be slender, fit, willowy, and so on, but rarely plump. Sometimes the loss of fat is seen as the return of happiness, or the woman is "rewarded" by achieving a higher position or gaining the love of the hero. If a woman is fat, the stereotypes available are the Falstaffian equivalent, or a ruler, frequently malevolent, equally massive in personal proportions and land possessions.

However, it is more likely that there won't be any fat people featured at all. To some people, it is bad enough that the ranks of physically perfect WASP space academy graduates have to now grudgingly include women and various ethnic backgrounds. It's asking too much to add physically imperfect people to the scenario, for that is how some see fat people. (If you don't believe me, then go to a gymnasium and listen to what fitness instructors are saying, and what the members are saying about themselves.)

Given this hidden agenda on body image, here are a few of my maybes to explain why there are so few fat people in the future.

1. Everyone is genetically screened to prevent any genetic disposition towards the gain and maintenance of excess weight.
2. Big Brother controls energy intakes and all food and drink comes from central kitchens. Those who buy food on the black market are disposed to quietly, or made to publicly confess their sins of gluttony.
3. Everyone is so psychologically well-adjusted and treated so nicely by friends, families and the authorities that there's no need to over-eat or under-eat in order to suppress or express a hidden need.
4. All fat people are shipped off to a special planet. Second-rate comedians bless the day that colony was established.
5. There is a 100% safe, quick and painless method of removing fat, with no need for a recovery time.
6. Fat people are used as ballast on spaceships and kept in the cargo hold. This scheme backfires as a

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<sup>1</sup> The term "fat" as it is used here could be replaced with obese, overweight, having excess weight, etc. If you, the reader, find the word "fat" to be offensive, then you're welcome to replace it with a similar word.

suitable career when they find themselves stranded on strange planets when extra goods are on board.

7. There is a galactic food shortage continually. The only fat people are rich people.

8. Cooking is a forbidden art and effigies of Mrs Beeton are publicly burnt. Food is so bland and unimaginative that no-one in their right mind would eat more than was strictly necessary.

9. A fat husband or wife is highly esteemed and thus the fat partner is rarely shown in public, for fear of inciting envy in the less fortunate.

10. Fat people are divided into resistance cells, fighting to subvert the slim path of society. Activities include substitution of sugar for artificial sweeteners, repackaging double-choc cookies as low-kilouole tasty bran biscuits, and subtly air-spraying models' photographs to make them appear at least 10 kilos heavier.

I'm not sure that I particularly like any of these possibilities. I'd much rather see a few more less-than-perfect people in mass media products with faults and virtues, being accepted for who they are, not what they are expected to become.

*(About the writer: Rachel teaches Mass Media Studies as part of her school's English programme. For many years, she had qualified as "fat", "really fat", and "not as fat as you used to be", and has still managed to have an overcrowded professional and social life.*

*If any readers could provide her with media examples of fat people in a non-stereotyped role (maybe a fat female first officer?) she would appreciate it.)*





# NOTHING NICE

by Duncan Evans

Black air rushing. The baddest of night sounds. The forest roars, wave-water green. Tall tree-heads heave and sway.

High on the grey house, tin rooster is confused and can't decide which way to face. The screen door mutters. Underneath the sagging eaves, tired curls of paint shiver and twitch.

Go to the bottom of the garden, and a glade the forest owns. Creepers drag at and drape the iron fence. A weedy shroud holds the stones prisoner while roots press.

The soil is not still. Thick tendons are breaking deep under. The ground humps. A rupture shows, then grows, ripping slowly to the sound of socket and bone parting company.

Up comes a thing about which nothing nice has ever been reported. It is not one of the sleepers boxed below. Their little glade is only a way *through*. Such gates are not so uncommon as people might wish to believe.

Steaming slightly, the thing elbows its way out of the earth and pokes its snout into the busy air. *Fox*, it thinks. *No no no. Birds.... huddled sparrow, hovering owl. Mice. Rat. Bandicoot. Ahhh...*

It comes all the way up.

*Boy!*

Inside the grey house, the boy sleeps, pillowed by dreams. Dizzy rooster spins. Summer door yawns. Old paint flutters. Only a frightened fox sees what goes creeping out across the wide lawn.

The boy's name is Barnaby Banister. Barney B. He is seven years old, and quite convinced that the two grown-ups who live in the house with him are not his parents. His *real* parents live beyond the thousandth shift of light, on a world that is big and brilliant red. This is something about which Barney feels he can be certain. After seven-and-a-bit years you should know whether you belong on a planet or not.

He is awake now. A faint scratching has reached him where all the usual night-noises cannot. He gets out of bed and hobble-limps to the window.

Listen.

*Scratch-scrabble-scrape.*

He stoops and comes up kneeling between curtain and glass. Outside, the night is empty. His breath goes in swirls up the black pane, and sends dead flies skittering on the sill. He feels his shins soaking the cold from the floor.

*'Open the window.'*

He opens the window.

When it comes sliding in, Barney backs up hastily. His night-light shows him what a mistake he has just made.

'Ah!' says the thing. Clotted earth drips on the rug. Barney thinks he will be in trouble for sure when Mrs Banister sees this. The thing looks around Barney's room. It sniggers at the charts and paper constellations on the wall, pokes its claw at a dangling plastic spaceship.

Barney looks at the thing. It is not a goblin, he decides. It is too big, and too entirely bad-smelling to be a goblin. He has read books. Goblins are cleaner than this. It looks more like some kind of troll.

The troll smiles at him. Not a nice smile. Its mouth is full of - no, *crammed* is the word. Its mouth is crammed with teeth... crammed with *fangs* if we're being entirely honest.

It sidles toward him. 'What are you staring at?'

'N-nothing.'

Barney moves back. The bed stops him. The troll looks him over. It looks longest at his leg.

'Well, if it isn't a little *gimp*. Never ate a *gimp* before.'

Barney gulps.

'What do they call you, *gimp*?'

'Er.'

'Name!'

'Barney,' says Barney. 'Barnaby Banister.'

'Well, Barney,' says the troll. 'This is how it works. I'm going to eat you.'

Barney nods dumbly.

'But not until *tomorrow* night,' the troll adds, and wriggling bugs come chuckle-sputter out of its snout. 'At midnight.'

The thing looks around Barney's room.

Barney, being seven-and-a-bit years old, can appreciate the full and splendid cruelty of this.

'You can run away,' the troll tells him. 'I can always enjoy a good chase. Sharpens the hunger. Seasons the meat.' It frowns at Barney's leg. 'Well, just do your best.'

'You won't eat me,' Barney says.

'Tomorrow I will,' the troll says.

'Not ever.'

'Oh?'

'I'm from space. I'll zap you. Get my zap gun and zap you.'

Grit and mucus spray as the troll laughs. 'See this?' it says, pointing.

Barney sees the clouded eye and the boil of scar above.

'Know who did that?'

'No.'

'Someone a lot tougher than you, little chicken,' says the troll. 'With iron, sharp and *real*.'

Barney's fingers are on the bedspread behind him. He feels every woven juncture in the cloth. He wishes he were under it.

The troll pushes its face close. 'Want to know what happened to him? The one who did this?'

Barney does not want to know. He already knows.

'Right,' says the troll. 'Zap your hardest, cripple-boy. Zap away.'

Barney juts his lip. 'You bet I will.'

Window perched, the troll sniggers. 'That's the spirit, little chicken. Leave 'em laughing.'

The troll is gone.

Barney is quiet. His thoughts are running in a useful direction.

Required: one zap gun.

His fingers are glad to be on the red roundness of *My First Computer*. The big bumpy keys are warm and waxy-soft. Just touching them helps him stop trembling. He makes a question about zap guns. A gun for zapping.

*My First Computer* bleeps. A bad bleep.

Barney begins to shake again. He goes to the closet. Button-bright eyes gleam in the sneaker-dark.

'Hello, Mr Ted.'

He asks Mr Ted about zap guns.

But Mr Ted won't speak. Apparently, Mr Ted does not believe in trolls. Mr Ted never tells "scary" stories.

Barney thinks it is time Mr Ted learned a few facts about life in the real world - otherwise the situation for Barney tomorrow night is likely to be very serious indeed. He gets some of his story-books and sits on the floor with Mr Ted and he begins to read.

It is tomorrow, and midnight comes quick around. When Barney hears the voice outside he gets up and clanks to the window. He is wearing his leg-brace on top of his pyjamas. He wants to be completely prepared.

'Open the window.'

He opens the window. Cold slips through him as the glass swings.

Here is the troll.

'Hello, little chicken. Got your zap gun?'

Barney shows it to him. It is long and flat and has many buttons.

The troll smirks. 'Very good, chicken. I'll play. Zap me, then we'll have that iron off your little drumstick and gobble you down.'

Barney points the zap gun.

'*Pulmonary Artery, Vena Cava*,' the zap gun says as Barney plays its eye across the troll's big ribs. '*Right Auricle, Hepatic Vein*.'

The troll is not smirking anymore. 'What do you think you're doing, chicken?'

Barney frowns at it to be quiet.

'*Hepatic Artery, Left Ventricle*,' the zap gun rattles. '*Left Auricle, Aorta... Pulmonary Vein*.'

The zap gun bleeps. A good bleep.

'*Optimum liability specified. Prime target designated. Engage*.'

Barney zaps the troll. The troll yelps. Needle-fire has jumped to prick its chest. The stink of burning is surprising. After a moment, the troll realises that it has not died, it laughs and comes toward the boy.

Dust showers from its chest. A small shower.

'What...?'

A bigger shower.

'Uuuur!' says the troll unhappily. Its middle is collapsing with a smoke-soft sigh. The rest of it soon follows in a cloud.

There is a drift of red dust on the lawn. Barney watches while an obliging wind sweeps it away. He closes the window and goes back to bed.

The closet door opens quietly. Sleep-eyed, Barney does not see the paw which gently lifts the zap gun from his hands. He does not hear the buzz of servo-motors, or the cool whirl of clever, secret tools. In the morning, when Mr Banister goes frowning through the house, he will find his Audio/Video Remote Control Unit on the floor by Barney's bed. The batteries will be dead. Barney will be scolded.

'*Only us toys in here*,' Mr Ted is whispering as he scuffles back into the closet and softly shuts the door.

Barney will never meet or know the people who abandoned him here. That world is much farther away than any idea of distance can describe. But he isn't alone. And when he grows up he's going to be told one last great story. About himself. This much has been provided so that at least, if nothing else, he'll never have to wonder why.

# RECOLLECTIONS OF SYNCON '92

by Alan Stewart

The feeling of convention attending in connection with Syncon '92 started for me on the Thursday night with the train trip. Leaving Spencer Street station on an interstate train was out of the ordinary enough to kick off the "Convention" mode. Particularly as I was accompanied by Donna Heenan, with James Allen and Jeanette Tipping in first class, locked away from us economy passengers, and an empty seat labelled Rex Thompson. Rex was across from New Zealand as the FFANZ winner and seemed to have had his act together during the past four days in Melbourne.

Okay, I couldn't specifically recall saying "There's the station we leave from on Thursday" as we drove past it on his night time tour, which included the Westgate Bridge and its great view of the skyline, but he had his ticket. Roger Weddall had supposedly left by bus a couple of hours before, and it was possible he'd talked Rex into accompanying him as a prank. But bus tickets shouldn't be available at such short notice, so hopefully Rex was all right. As the train left right on 8.00 pm, we could only hope we'd see Rex in Sydney. (Later, in June, when again departing by interstate train, this time for Hongcon in Adelaide, I noticed the Sydney train was delayed and left at 8.12 pm).

After an uneventful trip, and good connections in Sydney, we rang up the convention hotel from Artarmon station and arranged transport with Rod Kearins. We'd been joined by Neil Murray who flew up that morning, but also commuted from the city centre. Arriving at the hotel we were checking in when a carload of fans from Melbourne arrived consisting of Danny Heap, Paul Ewins, Beky Tully and Rex Thompson! It was a long involved story and I'll leave it to Rex's trip report to describe all the gory details.

Attending Syncon as part of the Bidding Committee for the 1994 Australian SF Convention put a different slant on both my activities and views, compared

to Syncon '88, which was held in the same hotel. The panels, Artshow and Hucksters were all on the same level with only a brief walk between, and only the video program was away on another floor. This never seemed to be greatly attended, despite the fact it had a large room and screen, and may be due partly to the fact there wasn't a printed video program, just written notes on the whiteboard near registration with possible starting times which weren't strictly adhered to. I'm not sure which was cause and which effect - the small numbers or the haphazard organisation. It seemed just a nod in the direction of media fans.

One highlight of the convention was the Artshow. With an impressive portfolio from GoH Michael Whelan (pronounced whale-an), and other professional artists, there was a lot to see and styles to compare. From painted rocks to record and book covers; imaginative oils to detailed models; the range was impressive and well displayed, providing both room for viewers and security. Art featured in the main program with an illustrated talk by Michael Whelan on various of his works; Sean McMullen's keynote speech featured pulp covers by Australian artists; New Zealand fan artists, their work and pubs, were presented by Rex Thompson; and work by professional graphics designer Greg Bridges also featured in a slide show. In this respect Syncon '92 lived up to its theme of "The Art of Science Fiction".

Some of the dual track program items were hard pressed to fill up the small rooms, let alone the main hall. Panels on "The History of Natcons" and "Fan Funds" saw the panellists outnumbering the audience and ended up an anecdotal round robin discussion. Perhaps many of the con attendees had heard it all before, and that sense of familiar faces stayed with me for all the con. There didn't appear to be more than a handful of the 150 attendees I hadn't seen before, and not many more I couldn't put a name to.

Unfortunately, the non-attendance of some scheduled panellists led to the cancellation of items, but when Michael Whelan ran overtime no hasty wind-up was arranged, and he continued on, to the delight of the audience. This flexible management improved the convention, as did the arranged guided tours and explanations of the Artshow.

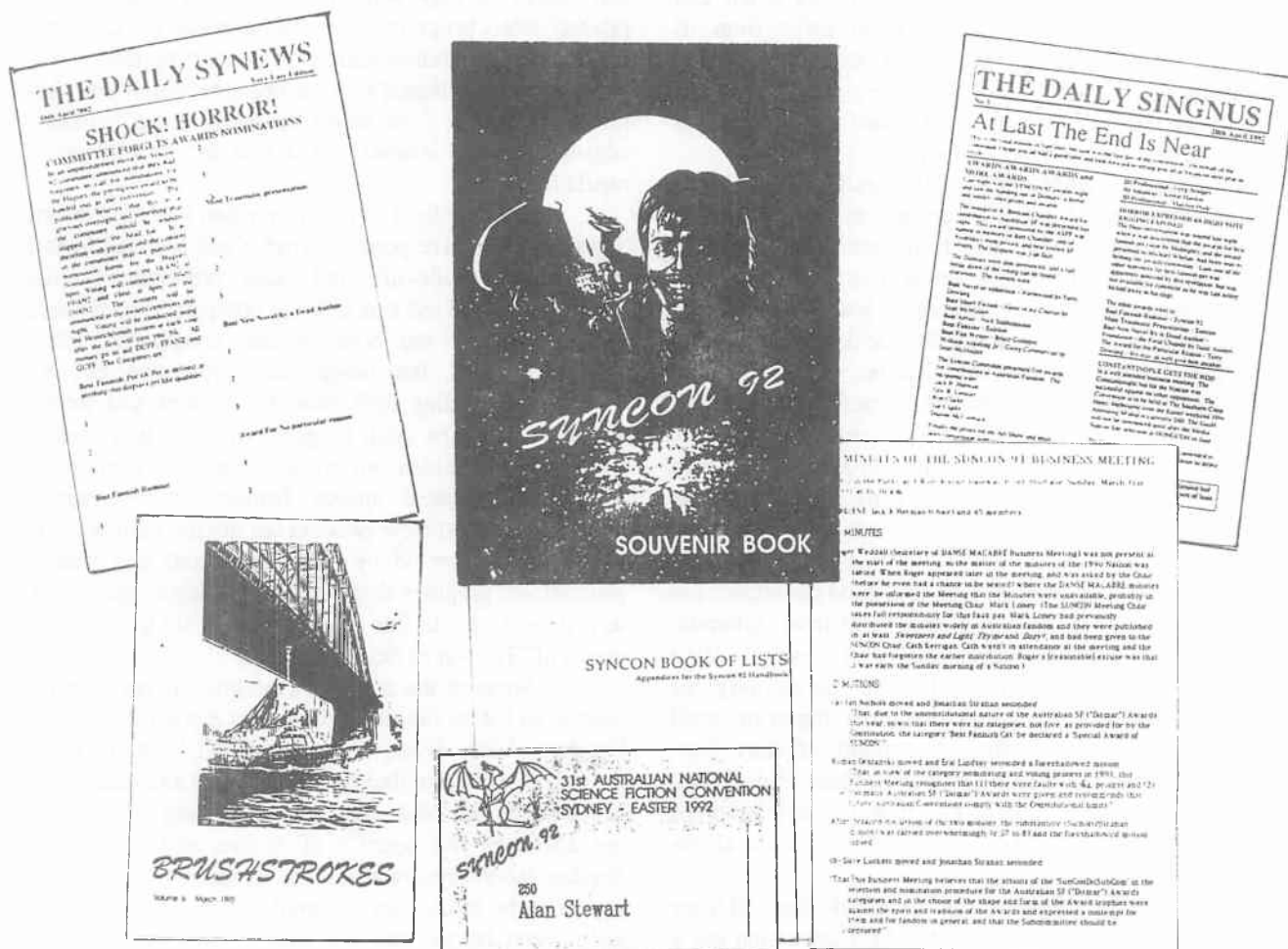
Many of the "usual" activities at conventions occurred, like the auctions and masquerade, but they weren't attention grabbing or novel. Talks like Dr. Karl Kruzelnicki's on "Bizarre Science", which were new and interesting, proved more memorable. Perhaps the "old timers" feel of the convention meant people went off to chat and eat more because they thought they'd seen the panels before. Nick Stathopoulos in his compering of the Masquerade managed to make it special, and it was nice to see that those few who put effort into costumes on the restrictive "favourite book cover" theme were rewarded.

The hotel staff were courteous, and even provided an Easter egg on every pillow for Sunday morning. Talking to the committee revealed that very attractive function room and GoH accommodation rates had been offered, and I think a majority of bookings for the period were from convention attendees. The hotel and accommodation were done right, even if some people complained when they found a weekend rate which

included breakfast was available for similar cost to their accommodation-only arrangements made through the convention. This rate probably wasn't available when they made their booking as it's usually a last minute decision by the hotel.

From a personal view the convention was a success with Constantinople '94 winning the right to host the 33rd Australian SF Convention at the business meeting, even if it was unopposed. FFANZ made money through the fan fund auction and provided a GoH in Rex Thompson who was an asset, not only to convention programming, but more importantly, to the con partying. The other fan fund winner, Eva Hauser from Czechoslovakia representing GUFF, was a bit more reserved, but took the opportunity to have many an intense discussion both with fans, and also with writers with regard to translation and publication in Slovak. Congratulations to the winners of the Ditmars, even if I had to settle for nomination certificates this year.

Overall Syncon '92 presented most of the "Traditional" activities one expects at an Australian SF Convention, and made the most of the opportunity offered by their theme. They were well served by the hotel and GoHs, but suffered a bit from the "old hat" feeling of the attendees and some panels.





# THE AFFAIR OF THE MARTIAN CADAVER

by Evan Rainer

The Mars Secret Intelligence Service had seconded Ray Bilinsky to work for them. They were short-staffed due to security coverage for the visiting Russian President of the EEC. The Americans and the EEC had colonised all the prime spots on Mars but being a whole new planet there was much scope for smaller countries like Australia to pursue their national interests.

'Yeah, you bet,' Ray said to the public service android on the holoscreen. 'Give me the details.'

The plastic head on a stick said, 'The Department wants you to work with the electric space-propulsion division of General Dynamics in New Boston.'

'Nifty,' Ray muttered. He always liked visiting an American State. 'Is this a commercial job?' He knew the big Russian corporations already had a one-third share in General Dynamics. Maybe there were some commercial leaks to interested parties.

'No,' the collar and tie on a stick continued. 'They're just a bit short-staffed during the President's visit, so they've asked our government to lend them some people to hold down a couple of troublesome hot spots.'

'Hmm.' Ray grimaced. That didn't sound so good. 'All right, rubber-nose. Gimme the rest of it...' He didn't much like conversing with a basketball on a pole, even if it did look like a movie star and have perfect diction. Why couldn't they stick with the old computer-generated 'images'? Who cared if they looked like cartoons? Mechanical simulacra were gauche.

The android filled him in. The nuclear heavy-lifter launching pads in New Boston were the target of an environmentalist terror squad, according to Intelligence. The blockade of the Chancellor of the University of Mars had exploded into last week's outrage. The tear gas fired by the public order simulacra had suppressed the campus militants, but at what a cost.

Ray was an alcoholic. He had a stocky build and a mop of tousled, almost curly hair that looked like the brown mop used by the publican at his local watering hole.

Ray's face was broad, eyes dark and anguished. He kept applying for vacant positions in the Gazette each month, but it was always some clown fresh out of university who got the job. His hands were thick and stubby-fingered. His coveralls were always rumpled, but that was only to be expected for someone who frequently woke up in a Marsport gutter on a Sunday morning and couldn't remember how he got there. The impact with the kerb under .38 gee was not so health-threatening as on Terra.

Right now, Ray really had trouble remembering what he was doing in New Boston. His head hurt real bad. And he was out of cigarettes. He glanced across blearily at his partner. The Australian High Commission at Marsport had set him up with this creature, this Camp Perry nerd, Jimmy Astor, as a liaison with the National Security Agency.

Just my luck to get stuck with an inexperienced American drip, Ray thought gloomily.

The nerd was young, eager, well dressed and evidently highly impressed at his first meeting with a seasoned agent from MI6, which was what he thought MSIS was.

The nerd had a long, thin head, buck teeth and greasy but neat hair. His garish checked coveralls which all but glowed in the dark had a top pocket filled with pens, many of them leaky.

Ray Bilinsky gritted his teeth. He looked at Jimmy Astor. 'Jimmy, let's go back to the beginning...' He eased himself into the niche amid some crates. It was a window seat overlooking the Charon fuel-pellet supply depot. A speeding Phobos glimmered behind scattered cloud.

'Yes?' the nerd peeped.

It had come as a surprise to Ray that Three, his superior in MSIS, had let the National Security Agency know of Ray's outstanding work on Terra and Solis Lacus here on Mars. Why had Three passed on that information? It puzzled him.

Ray said to Jimmy Astor, 'You claim the gang is going to try to steal one of those nuclear pulse detonators tonight?'

'Uh huh,' Jimmy Astor peered about, wondering if the other three American agents would be arriving soon.

'Will you stop gawking about and listen?' Ray snarled.

'Sorry,' Jimmy fidgeted. 'I was expecting our three to be arriving soon.'

Ray sucked in his breath. He groaned inwardly. 'You mean Three of surveillance? Is that what you're trying to tell me?' He could not understand why Three, his superior, would be coming to a low-level security operation like this in the dead of night. The boring old fool was usually trying to get his paws around some bimbo chorus-girl. Still, he did have a track record of showing up like this with a vacuum headed tart in tow that he wanted to impress.

Jimmy Astor was also eager to impress his MI6 pal. 'Well, two's company, you know. Oh, by the way, how's Veronica?'

Ray was shocked. Two as well? He thought of his mysterious special weapons chief, whom they knew only as Two. So Two and Three were on this mission and here in New Boston. What did it all mean? That Russian President had them all on their toes. He stared up at the great pressurised dome, American engineering efficiency at its best. Martian frost twinkled on the restaurant suspended at its peak 1500 metres above. This clouds drifted below the eating place.

Ray looked at the geek. This young college nerd was from old New England money. Such wealth, stolid families had connections with the Pentagon and the Grand Old Party. A man's career could be ruined by an injudicious punch to a youthful ear.

'Veronica? Oh, she's fine. She's all right,' Ray spoke reluctantly. Veronica was the daughter of the local CIA station chief, the man who assigned the nerd to Ray. Ray had known the station chief for years. They had served with their respective country's UN peacekeeping forces during the Tibet war in 2014.

'She still goes to those... all night dance places, if you know what I mean,' Ray was cautious.

Three men floated up the corridor of crates under two-fifths gravity. Arm strength alone was enough to keep them gliding in shallow arcs. One separated.

The nerd tapped Ray's arm. 'I think I see two coming.'

'You mean Two... here?' Ray felt intimidated by this young scion of inherited wealth. That a man so young could mix socially and easily with the cream of the interplanetary intelligence aristocracy, Three and Two.

The three covert operations men, on spotting the nerd, gave him a wave and split off on their surveillance tasks. They floated swiftly in long, low-gravity curves.

Ray responded to more of the nerd's cuff yanking in time to see only one approaching him.

'Hi,' the CIA man said. 'I'm Joe. Anything happening yet?'

'No,' Jimmy whispered, buck teeth gleaming in the soft glow from Phobos. The moon was a tiny spark trailing across the sky. 'They're due soon. Our man up there in the restaurant has 'em on visual. They landed in a Moller over in those warehouses.'

The CIA had set up this operation on information from their undercover man. He was a simulacrum posing as an environmentalist student; he had communicated that the dissident group would try to steal the fusion-pulse unit tonight.

'Where's Three?' Ray asked.

Joe glanced over his shoulder. 'There's two,' he said.

'Where?' Ray peered around in the darkness. He couldn't believe both Two and Three were here. He'd better be on his toes if the big bugs were observing the operation.

The iron rectangles of the space-propulsion cranes stood gaunt and grey, like ancient icons against the moon-smudged sky.

'Jimmy,' Ray whispered. He had spotted something among the yellow and red containers... a swiftly moving figure darted from cover to cover. Ray pointed. 'Next to the wheel of that big crane.'

'I've got him,' Jimmy Astor said. His odd spectacles peered into the nightscope. His nasal American accent chattered into the radio. A couple of other intruders were now visible. 'Affirmative', 'Negative', and 'I copy' followed. Ray rolled his eyes. Americans could never use a single syllable word like yes and no when a triple-barreled whopper was available.

Emotionally at one remove from this nonsense, Ray sat back against a crate and pressed his aching head. His mind on the sensuous Veronica and how she earned extra funds at the all-night dance palace.

'Think we should nab them?' Joe said to Jimmy Astor. Joe was a square-jawed man with glistening black hair and olive skin. His shoulders were wide but he was very short. He had huge hands. His eyebrow was like one long caterpillar draped sunning itself across the equator of his head.

Joe had his back to Ray. Joe's bag sat nearby on a crate. He had taken from it his night-viewers and transceiver. Other intriguing goodies poked out.

Ray picked at his nails. Wonder what those are, he thought, looking at Joe's bag.

Meanwhile other CIA men were moving along the containers of propulsion engines in a well oiled routine. Each covered the other in turn. It resembled a crab's mating dance.

The environmentalist terror mob had loaded a burnished thruster-cone on to a wheeled hand-trolley.

Joe called orders over the airwaves. The CIA men moved in. Crackle of electro-static hand-guns erupted from below.

Ray yawned. He idly picked up a small hand-piece from Joe's open bag. 'Huh,' he muttered and tossed it back. He picked up a hand-sized box. 'Hmm,' he frowned. There was a couple of dials and sliders on it. And a red button.

Ray puzzled over the button. He slid back its safety cover. Wonder what this does, he thought. He pressed it.

A huge sheet of flame shot up from the propulsion engines. The blinding flash was followed by an earth-shattering shockwave.

By the time Joe had recovered and stared into his little CIA bag, the box with the red button was back in there. He looked up.

Ray Bilinsky was sitting about five metres away reading the Martian GLOBE.

'Gahdamn,' Joe growled. His face was white. The caterpillar above his eyes had risen up almost to the greasy black hairline.

Jimmy Astor stared at Joe, embarrassed that this faulty equipment had been witnessed by a master operative from MI6. 'Must've been a stray shot through the thruster-cone,' he mumbled.

Ray nibbled a fingernail. He dignified to look up, turning a page graciously. 'Well, I'd better get back to my resident. He'll want a full report.'

'Yeah,' Joe stood up, floating high. 'We'd better get out, too, before the press boys burn our butts over this. Jesus! Every window in New Boston must be broken.' The panes in the main dome would withstand far greater shocks.

A while later Ray slid behind the joy-stick of his silver Porsche - Veronica's stocking was still hanging over the vertical thrust throttle of the Moller - and by daytime had tabled his report on Three's desk.

'Well done, Ray.' Three beamed through his handlebar moustache. 'Care for a drink? It is daytime, isn't it?'

He obviously didn't know. The commander's hands traced their familiar path to the old oaken cabinet. He produced a cut glass bottle filled with an amber fluid.

'No thanks.' Ray rubbed at a bad crease in his sleeve. Bits of crate poked from the shoulder-pads of his coveralls. 'It affects my performance.' He rubbed his temples. The ringing from the blast was like a vibrating bucket over his head.

Three smoothed his balding pate. Greased silver locks popped up like Nike missiles. He was a small man who never wore the modern one-piece business clothing. Instead he adopted ancient tweed suits with real buttons. His face was like a baby's, round and red with gleaming eyes and much errant hair poking from nostrils or ears or straight out from a bushy eyebrow.

'I want to read this binder on those nasty chaps.' Three opened his safe and brought out a Whitehall report.

It had been flown from Washington in the diplomatic bags with the amber fluid. It had SECRET stamped all over it.

There was a regular mail run. Fusion-pulse thrust fed tiny deuterium beads into a chamber where laser beams compressed them from all sides. The resultant sequence of continuous atomic explosions allowed a ship to maintain a steady 1-gee acceleration to Mars, with turnover and deceleration at mid-point. Under this system research crew were rostered to the scientific station on Pluto. They attained a speed of 7750 kilometres per second at halfway point, where the ship turned over for deceleration. The total trip time to the Pluto station was 221 hours, or about 18.5 days.

Three momentarily disappeared from sight behind the safe door. In a further violation of elementary security, the old Cranbrook school prefect had driven through the service tunnels criss-crossing Mars. He had driven to the New Boston dome with the papers in the glovebox of his antique Austin A40. Three had a fear of heights. His drunken meanderings through the planet's service tunnels often knocked out an entire quadrant's pay-TV or holophones, which the security service was obliged to cover up.

It passed through Ray's mind that the old man could be a double agent.

Ray leaned forward and took the folder. 'I take it I can't leave the building with it, Three?' He opened the cover.

'No, don't leave the buildings, old boy. This recent terrorist flap has put the boffins in a spin... looks like it could be the real show, what. Those students've been threatening a mass strike long enough. God only knows what the public order simulacra would have done if that missile on the Chancellor had not been a dud.' He downed the glass and looked up. 'Oh, by the way - all SECRET folders have an explosive incendiary in them. If one leaves the building with one, one is likely to meet one's maker.'

Ray had been reading the contents page of the folder. He looked up suddenly. 'Say that again?'

There was a further gurgle as amber fluid disappeared down geriatric larynx under two-fifths gravity, then Three answered, 'An incendiary..'

'No, about One leaving.'

The commander's elbow slid off the armrest. He poured himself a refill. 'Oh, one is cactus if one leaves the office.'

Ray frowned. 'You mean One is not exempt?'

Three looked cross. 'Certainly not! Why should one be?'

Ray shrugged. 'I dunno. I just thought One would be such a priceless operative we couldn't afford to lose his...'

Three looked very indignant. His face grew pink. The vein at the front of his nose filled with purple-hued matter. 'Now look here, Ray, I hope one's assignment to that propulsion job hasn't made one's ego too all-important.'

Ray sweated. So it was true... One had been there. He contemplated Three's prize Streton hanging on the wall. 'So One was appointed to this case? Isn't that a bit of a comedown for One?' He could see this was going to be puzzling.

The commander swirled his fourth scotch and scowled out from his position somewhere down in the upholstery where he had slid in the low gravity and didn't appear to be able to get out again. He snapped, 'Look here, I should think one should jolly remember when one was appointed to one's own case, shouldn't one?'

Ray decided to try to terminate this puzzling exchange. It seemed evident Three was a shade too full of the amber cooling fluid and was losing his septuagenarian marbles.

Ray muttered, 'Of all people, One should, at the level of expertise One has.'

'Yes, yes.' The commander brooded angrily, examining Ray for a moment. 'I must say one seems to have quite an opinion of oneself.'

Ray couldn't follow this. 'Uh, yes... interesting brochure here. I'll take it down to the classified secure reading room for a browse.'

Three puffed black smoke from his pipe. He watched it coil up in the fragile gravity to the ceiling bug. The CIA had angle-drilled across from the sex aids shop next door and had a listening device in there.

Three pointed at the ceiling and scribbled something on his green notepad. Ray observed the hand pointing up and wondered what it meant. Then the hand appeared again with the bit of green paper. Ray could no longer see even the top of Three's head.

The note read: Can't speak - meet me at Oboe Lounge when you get back.

Ray heard a thud. He got up and left.

Jimmy Astor sat on the folding chair and poked a piece of Peking duck in its cardboard container. He watched the surveillance television screen.

'Say, Joe,' Jimmy said, 'That gardamn Mr Three just fell off his chair plumb tanked to the gills.'

Joe Gardner's real name was Joe Al Kaheld, a lunar-manufactured simulacrum from the Syrian Secret Police who was on the pay-roll of environmentalist missile smugglers. He shot Jimmy Astor in the back of the head. It was necessary that he kill Jimmy Astor because the remote detonator for the fusion-pulse was supposed to have been triggered after the nuclear segment had been armed. New Boston was to have been wiped off the map of Mars.

Now Jimmy's superiors had been analysing the bungled surveillance mission at the propulsion dockyard. If they kept on in the direction they were going they might uncover vital details to show that he, Joe, was a rogue replicant'

Joe taped the back of Jimmy's head and loaded the cadaver into a body bag. He floated down the back stairs over the sex aids shop and made sure the abandoned car was still there. It was an old thing with wheels, unlike the other battered Moller vertols around it.

His cell members would come and cart it away to the crushers after he hid the cadaver in the trunk.

He had no problem carrying the cadaver down in the two-fifths gravity. He went along the street to a public holophone and called his controller.

'Yes, Joe here. The parcel is ready,' he said cryptically. 'It's in the alley. Yes, an old Austin A40 with off-planet visitor's plates.'

The controller said 'Yes' and 'Fine' and Joe hung up. He was always nervous in these connections that it would be his undoing, that an android-hunter would track him down and take him back to the factory to be rewired selling hamburgers in Red Square. His hand trembled with fear as he hung up.

Now he would only have to kill that Australian and his trail would be covered.

There was a problem. When Joe Al Kaheld floated back up the alley, the Austin A40 was gone!

Raymond Lafayette Bilinsky meticulously followed normal procedures to throw off any possibly tail. He examined the Oboe coffee lounge from across the street for a while to see if it was safe.

At length, Ray entered. He eased himself into a window seat. The Oboe was in a lane in the tourist area of New Boston. The Longfellow Sky Restaurant atop the dome was visible between the two office blocks. This part of New Boston had drag queens and male prostitutes standing on the footpath. They openly plied their trade to hover-truck drivers, football stars, holovision newsreaders, members of the state legislature and sometimes that preacher from the Martian TV gospel hour.

The proprietor came over.

'What would you like today, Monsieur Ray?' Ray often came to this spot when he was not parachuting into Tibet or crawling through secret tunnels into Yakuza lairs on the Moon. It had come as no surprise to him that Three knew this was one of his watering holes when on Mars.

'G'day, Pierre. Gimme a coffee. Usual.'

Pierre nodded. 'I haven't seen you here with Veronica for while. Is she, er, all right?'

'Yes,' Ray muttered. 'We went dancing last night.' He did now wish it to be widely known that he saw her.

'Ha!' Pierre exploded. All the diners stopped eating. 'Stupid, empty-headed little slut. Every one of my restaurant staff had laid her at one time or another...'

Ray's glare signalled that he wished Pierre to disappear. Pierre disappeared.

Three's hand smeared along the window glass outside with a loud squeak. Everybody in the restaurant stopped eating once more to stare at this opulently dressed staggerer trying to keep his balance. His nose was red, the usual flag of distress.

Ray tried to sink down under the table. 'Bloody hell.' At the same time, Ray noted Three's Austin A40 across the road in a No Parking zone. It stood out like a dug-out canoe next to the Moller vertols taking off and landing.

Three entered the small cafe full of transvestites and gospel preachers. He stood rippling, as though deciding whether to fall over backwards or forwards. This went on for some time. At length he removed his hat and threw it like a frisbee at a wall hook. The onlookers did not realise Three had perfect aim when in this condition. The hat settled quietly on its peg. Pierre's little monkey head peered over the cookery slot.

Three slowly worked his way along the narrow isle. He walked methodically, placing each foot as though he were testing the floor for mines.

At Ray's table he fell sideways into a chair. His head banged the table. The ashtray flew off on to the floor.

'Are you okay, Three?' Ray said. He put his hand to mask his eyes and forehead from the staring diners.

'Splendid, old boy. I'm setting a little Martian trap.' Three proceeded to go through all his inside coat pockets. Puzzled, he then proceeded to go through all his other pockets.

At length he appeared to realise where he was. 'And how are we, Raymond?'

Ray grunted; if his chief had asked him how one was there would have been certain confusion.

The two coffees arrived.

'Ah, I need this.' Three attacked the coffee.

'Trap?' Three stopped his noisy slurping. He put down the cup on one of the two saucers that was real and started going through his pockets all over again. The coffee in the cup boogied up and down in .38 gee. He dragged out a brown folder with a familiar logo at the top, the kangaroo and emu.

'Here it is, here it is,' he bellowed. His elbow banged the metal sugar container and clattered the metal salt shakers all over the place.

'So I see,' Ray mumbled gloomily. His hand covered even more of his forehead.

The whole restaurant stopped talking and peered around. They could clearly see the brown folder and the photograph from it he was waving. Both had TOP SECRET stamped in read ink along the top and bottom.

Ray clutched at the photo and hurried it to the table-cloth. 'I know this bloke. It's Joe Garden.

Three stared at him. 'You know him? Where from?'

Ray leaned on the table. He looked away, his gaze settling on Three's Austin A40 across the road. A small boy eating an ice-cream stood staring at it, wondering what this non-flying thing with wheels could possibly be. Ray sighed, 'One of the CIA team. At that fusion-pulse bust...'

Three began to fall asleep. After a while he woke up and began speaking as though nothing had happened. 'This is Joe Al Kaheld. We know he's on Mars. Up until last week there was no recent photo of him; it's like he didn't exist a year ago. So he's infiltrated...'

'What about the trap?' Ray wanted to get away. Veronica was appearing down at the Tabou, she and her dance troupe.

'Our plant in their camp leaked that certain members of the electric space-propulsion team dine at this restaurant. I want you to work with a team to observe this place.'

Ray groaned. 'They can start by observing your car.' He pointed through the window. 'Some sleezeball is trying to pinch it.'

Eyes flew open. 'The rotter.' Three tried to stand up but seemed to have misplaced the floor. Friction was non-existent in .38 gee.

The thief was a short man in a grey sports coverall who was obscured as he fiddled at the back of Three's vehicle.

'I suppose I'll have to deal with it.' Ray stood up.

Joe Al Kaheld had been panic-stricken when he walked back up the alley and found the antique car gone. Could the terrorist squad have acted that quickly after his phone call? He did not think so, but he could not be sure. His neck tingled as he imagined an android bounty hunter taking aim. Joe could not ring back his contact so soon without violating the rules of covert behaviour. Each phone call increased the mathematical probability of being nabbed. He shuddered at the thought of hashing up tasteless, soggy Big Macs to tourists in Red Square, or even worse, Times Square. Androids were only assigned to menial jobs.

Chastened at such thoughts, he hurried into the main road and looked for the Austin. Then he began a systematic search, something his electronic brain was good at.

He finally found the car not far away from the sex aid shop. It was in the more disreputable end of the neighbourhood.

Joe was relieved to see the battered old Austin. Probably some local hoodlums had tried to joyride it and given up. He looked about, then approached and examined the lock on the trunk lid.

Wham! Something slammed into the back of his head. He blacked out. The electricians to his main conduit were jarred.

Somewhat earlier, the terror squad had floated above the alley in their Moller hovertow just as the Austin was driving its erratic path out the other end.

'That's the car,' the terrorist said. He was a big, fat man with many tattoos. He bit into a Hoadleys Violet Crumble bar.

The other terrorist, driving the hovertruck, said, 'He's probably moving it to a less observable area for us. We'll follow him.'

The Austin parked near the Oboe. The hovertruck dribbled along above rooftop traffic a ways back. They did not know the details of the driver or why the car had to be disposed of.

Three got out and staggered away.

In short order, another man came up and fiddled with the back of the Austin. Then someone from the



Oboe crossed the road and knocked out this man. The attacker opened the trunk and rolled the victim inside and shut the lid. The attacker returned to the restaurant, conferring with a passer-by for a moment.

'This is a whole can of worms,' the terrorist observer muttered. He tore more of the purple wrapper from the Violet Crumble bar.

'Quickly,' the hovertruck driver cursed. 'I'm gonna land - you attach the tow-cable.' He roared the braking thrusters.

'Right,' his terrorist sidekick said.

'Put the boot into him!! Put the boot into him, mister!' The small boy with the ice-cream stood looking up at Ray, enlivened by this moment of gritty street drama.

Ray rolled the body into the trunk and slammed the lid. 'He's my Dad, kid. I'm taking him back to the home. He shouldn't be in this area.' Ray looked around at the transvestites. 'And neither should you, come to think of it...'

'Ar gee...' The small boy looked as disappointed as any twenty-first century Ginger Meggs and walked off licking his ice-cream.

Ray floated off the kerb. At the other side he met his mate, Vladimir, from the KGB. 'G'day, Vlad. How's all the overtime with this tour?'

Vladimir looked up. 'Oh, hello, Ray. I made more this weekend than I do in a month guarding those dills at the embassy.

Ray was envious. 'I'm bloody glad they've got a Russian in the seat again.' He referred to the recent EEC elections. 'That French idiot trod on so many vested interests it's a wonder the Europeans didn't secede to the US.'

Vladimir grinned. The French president had not been popular, or tactful. Germany and Russia were the power-houses of the EEC. Things ran smoothly when such pragmatists held the levers of the economy. The KGB man changed the subject. 'I praised your work at Solis Lacus to my American counterpart.'

Ray paused. His mind ticked over. So that was why he'd been stuck with a bubble-headed geek from Virginia. It had not been Three at all. At least not directly.

Vladimir was reading his mind. 'Yuri wanted me to fill that slot. Ha, no way, mate. I pointed out what a terrific agent you were... and Ukrainian to boot... and how much more useful I would be here looking after the great Vozhd.'

'Thanks a heap, pal.' Ray spoke only English. His grandparents had been in the many successive waves of Russians, Ukrainians, Balts, Hungarians, who had poured into Australia Felix every decade or so in lockstep with putsches, purges or crises of one sort on another. The '40s, '60s and '80s of the previous century had seen peaks in the graph. Ray looked inside the Oboe. 'Well, I gotta go. I'll call you later, mate.'

'The President's gone by Sunday. So long.' Vladimir strolled off in his relaxed, low-gee bounce.

Ray was puffing hard. He walked up the aisle and slid in beside the window again. 'Three, I got him.'

Three had fallen asleep again.

Ray shook him and slapped at the side of the old drunk's face. Finally Three woke up. '... and the electric space-propulsion team dine at this restaurant.'

'The bloke stealing your car,' Ray interrupted him. 'It was Joe Gardener. What a helluva coincidence.'

'Eh? Really?' Three was totally perplexed. 'Are you sure?'

'You bet,' Ray smiled. 'I belted him over the noggin and tossed him in the boot. He's snoring on top of that sack of potatoes or whatever it is you've got...' He pointed across the road. His jaw dropped.

The Austin A40 was gone!

Three glared at the empty spot where his vehicle had been. 'My car. Some bounder's stolen my car. Are you sure Al Kaheld's in the boot?'

Ray was incensed. 'Have another coffee, Three. I'll go and have covert operations put out a bulletin for it. It can't have gotten far.'

The hovertruck team landed in a deserted lot at the back of a paint shop. They threw a tarpaulin over the Austin hanging in tow and proceeded to the wrecking yard on the other side of the Longfellow National Park, which divided the three-kilometre wide floor of the New Boston dome.

'Yes,' Ray said when he came back from the phone. 'This Joe Gardner won't get far.'

'Just as well,' Three said. 'Now you can start on this surveillance job tomorrow.' He waved a little in his seat and signalled Pierre for another coffee.

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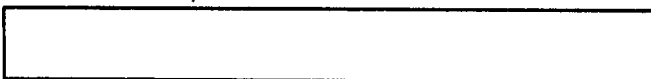
It was a drizzly Martian night. Spray condensed from the rafters of the great dome. Ray really had trouble remembering what he was doing in the Oboe coffee lounge. His head hurt real bad. And he was out of cigarettes.

Vladimir walked past outside. He stopped and smiled at Ray through the pane, tilting the electrostatic rainhat at him and smirking at the idiotic CIA nerd. Then he walked on.

Ray glowed at his Russian mate. 'Bastard,' he muttered.

He glanced across blearily at the young CIA nerd assigned as his American liaison. Brent Sandoz had heard of the startling exploits of the MI6 man, which was what he thought the MSIS was. He determined to study these methods and try to become equally as famous...

END



# THE YANKEE PRIVATEER 15

by Buck Coulson

Rivercon is coming up in Louisville, KY, next weekend, and I've been informed that I'm on a panel of "Funny Fan Stories", so I've been dredging my memory and jotting down notes, and why do all this work just for one panel? Especially when I owe a column to Ron, and Australians haven't heard my stories as often as Americans have.

Some of my best, though, relate to professionals. Kelly Freas told a group about a happening at a Rivercon several years back. Muhammad Ali, still heavyweight champ at the time, was in Louisville for the wedding of someone he knew, and stayed at the same hotel which the convention was in. He wasn't obtrusive; the only time Juanita and I saw him was on the street; we were following these three very large black men, and the one in the middle was creating a lot of excitement among passers-by. At this con, the GoH was Keith Laumer; one of his few convention appearances. He wasn't in a good mood; from my brief correspondence with his brother, March Laumer, I gather that he seldom was in a good mood. He'd been an athlete and then something happened that crippled him so that he had to walk with a cane, and it soured his disposition. I didn't see him much at the con, either; he was not friendly. Anyway, Laumer and Freas happened to be together, waiting for an elevator, when Ali came up and waited with them. The elevator arrived, and Laumer shoved Ali out of the way with his cane and boarded it. Kelly said Ali's face was a study. People didn't treat him that way, but obviously the heavyweight champion of the world would get ruinous publicity if he beat up on this crippled honky. Kelly said it took all his willpower to keep from laughing, but he managed it, since there was nothing physically wrong with him, and he didn't think Ali would appreciate being laughed at.

Dick Spelman told this story at I believe X-Con this year. Or maybe Marcon. Anyway, we were talking about the first conventions of individuals, and Dick said his first one was in Philadelphia in 1947. He mentioned that a certain fan, who later became well-known in the professional field, so I won't provide his name, was also at the con. With him was "a woman not his wife" as Dick put it. They arrived, and discovered that for some reason LIFE magazine had decided to cover the con, which was

very big news back then. LIFE was of course going to take photos, so the fan and his girlfriend tried to stay well away from the photographers, and at the banquet got a seat at the back of the room, hoping to be very inconspicuous. Unfortunately, LIFE also set up at the back of the room, and the fan and his girl showed up in the center of a two-page spread... It took quite a while, I gather, for his wife to forgive him.

In later life, Isaac Asimov said he disliked travel and didn't do it, but back when the trains ran, he came to a couple of Midwestcons. (The trains still run in this country, but in the Midwest they don't run very often, or to very many towns. Indiana has one train that runs from Chicago to Indianapolis and on south, and another one that runs from Chicago to Fort Wayne and points east. Once a day, usually, and that's it.) Anyway, when schedules were more frequent, Asimov was willing to come to Midwestcon, which at that time was the only midwestern convention; this was in the 1950s. I remember him wearing a huge "I like Ike" button; the obvious self-publicity was amusing. He was into giving the banquet speech at one con - Midwestcons didn't have Guests of Honor then, and I don't believe they do even now. Sputnik has just gone up, and Asimov's speech was a ringing denunciation of scientists taking the bread out of the mouths of hardworking science fiction writers, concluding with the rallying cry, "If God had meant basketballs to fly, He would have given them wings!" (It was funnier at the time, because the 1950s saw an enormous amount of religious objections to space travel, citing God's disapproval of humans meddling in His affairs.)

Elliott Shorter was a large black fan in New York City; last time I saw him was at the Atlanta Worldcon in 1986. Bruce had seen him earlier and called out "Hi, Elliott" which gave him pause, since Bruce had been 10 or 12 years old the last time Elliott had seen him. His greeting to me was, "Your son damned near gave me heart failure." Anyway, in the earlier years, one of the major football players was Roosevelt Grier, and Elliott was constantly being mistaken for him on the New York streets. Elliott for some time explained to passers-by that no, he was not named Grier. Finally he gave up and

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started signing autographs. He didn't mention how many US citizens have phony Roosevelt Grier autographs, he said the number was considerable.

Speaking of autographs, there was a "meet the pros" party out by the hotel pool. Pros and fans mingled, and the pros were all asked to step up to the microphone and introduce themselves, so fans who didn't know what they looked like could find out. Pros also wore styrofoam imitations of the hats known as "straw boaters" back in the early 1900s, also for identification. Bruce was in a small group talking to Bob Tucker when Tucker's name was called to come up to the microphone. Tucker didn't want to interrupt his story, so he slapped his hat on Bruce's head and said "Go on up there, Kid." I asked Bruce, when he told me the story, if he'd announced himself as Tucker. He said no, he'd never got to the microphone, "but on the way I signed six autographs". He was wondering if people never looked at copyrights; he said he'd signed books written before he'd been born. (Bruce was a teenager at the time, and to me at least hardly looked the part of a famous author.)

One of the Washington, DC, Worldcons was held in this enormous hotel, which covered an entire block and had incorporated several different buildings into its structure. One of them at least was set a half-storey off from the rest; to get from the third floor in the main part of the hotel to the third floor in this section, you had to go up a half-flight of stairs. At one point I was talking to Sid Coleman, and we were walking as we talked, and got lost in this big area full of rattan furniture and looking like a stage set for "The Twilight Zone". (I tried to find that room again later, and couldn't.) Gary Anderson said that one of the elevators stopped at one floor which consisted of a short hallway with no doors in it, and with no elevator button in sight; fortunately, he'd held the doors open while he looked around, and wasn't trapped there. Gene DeWeese and I had sold a book to Doubleday, and our editor wanted to meet us at the con. We met her in the lobby, she suggested going to our room, so we walked back to the elevator to our section and went down 7 floors to our room. At one point, the editor inquired if we had windows... We did. Our room and the lobby were both on the ground floor of our respective parts of the hotel. She eventually asked us to do a second book, so I guess she wasn't too put off by our accommodations. I believe that was the con where Juanita and I and probably the DeWeeses went out for breakfast one morning to this nice shiny clean restaurant nearby. I got a waffle for my meal, and received it on this nice, large dinner plate. As I gradually demolished the waffle, a picture of a covered waggon began to appear on the plate. Okay, the restaurant had a pseudo-western decor; nice of them to extend it to the plate. Then I finished the waffle and discovered the inscription on the plate, which was "The Donner Party". (For those of you who don't know US history, the Donner Party headed for California during the 1949 Gold Rush, got trapped in the mountains by snow, and ended up eating several of the weaker members of the party to stay alive.) This led to a question. Had the restaurant ordered the

plates specially for its own customers, or was there a china factory somewhere turning out thousands of dinner plates commemorating cannibalism? I never found out. If I'd had my wits about me I've have asked about buying a souvenir plate, but I was too stunned to think about it. (Later, a Chicago fan mentioned that one book publisher had printed several thousand copies of someone's book about the Donner Party, and *then* discovered a typo on one page, which referred to the Dinner Party.)

I mentioned Sid Coleman awhile back; i think it was at this DC con where I asked him if he'd been working harder on his humor or his physics lately, and he said, "Both; I've been working with the French Atomic Energy Commission." Just recently I got a shock out of the science article in ANALOG, in which the author refers to "scientists such as Stephen Hawking and Sidney Coleman". It gives one a funny feeling to see an acquaintance remembered mostly for his humor being mentioned in the same sentence as a world-reknown scientist...

Isaac Asimov was at one of the east coast Worldcons; not New York, since I never went to a New York Worldcon, but somewhere along the seaboard. This was during the time he was writing the "Lucky Starr" series of juveniles, and shortly after it was revealed that the author of them, "Paul French", was really Asimov. There was to be an autograph session that afternoon; in those days, all the pro authors at the convention sat in more or less of a row, and a fan could go up to any one of them with a book to be autographed. There was none of the long lines we occasionally see these days when a popular author is present; autographs weren't such a big deal. Juanita and I and the DeWeeses had lunch in a drugstore with a lunch counter - saving money - and afterwards Gene and I looked at the rack of paperbacks up at the front. One of the books on the rack was THE LUCKY STAR DREAM BOOK. Gene looked at the book, looked at each other, bought the book, and at the autograph session presented it to Asimov with due solemnity. "Would you please autograph this, sir?" Asimov came up out of his chair with a sort of shriek, then sat down again, laughed, and said, "For a minute there I thought they'd released another one of those things without telling me." I still have the book, autographed "Paul French" and "Isaac Asimov".

The other autograph story concerns Edmond Hamilton. At a Midwestcon, he came by Juanita's and my huckster table, and bought one of the books I'd written. I handed it to him, and he said, "Well, aren't you going to autograph it?" A bit numb, I did, autographing it "To Edmond Hamilton, who does this sort of thing much better than I do." He looked at the autograph, and asked if I really meant it. I said that considering his and my literary output, I guess I did. He laughed and said he'd received an autograph by L. Sprague de Camp with the same wording I'd used, and he'd asked de Camp the same question. De Camp had paused for a moment, frowning, and then said, "Hell, no!"

# COMPACT

by James Verran

I plonked my backside onto the only vacant stool. A quick glance to my left revealed all I wanted to know about the bloke sitting there: 18 ct. gold bracelet, open shirt-front with chunky chain and medallion displayed against a mat of black hair. From the smell of him I guessed he was a women's hairdresser, or whatever.

On my right, a better prospect: a tired looking fellow in a tartan shirt sat with his raised glass tilted against his lip. His trance-like expression telegraphed that he'd had enough to be talkative.

'G'day, mate.' My favoured opening line. 'Buy you a drink?. I hate drinkin' alone.'

He swept me with bloodshot eyes framed by a face that had obviously been slept in, then said in a surprisingly cultivated voice, 'Sure, why not? So long as I can return the compliment. Apart from the barman, you're the first bloke that's spoken to me since I've been here.'

Bingo! I'd found a talker. I was going to get a story out of this one. After spending most of the afternoon trying to strike up conversations with random strangers, I'd almost given up. I'd been threatened with a bashing and told to piss off more than once. Till then, the only friendly response had come from a willing lady who'd well and truly exceeded her 'use by date'. I'd beaten a hasty retreat for the sake of my virtue.

Now to test the famous, "Jack London Method" for overcoming the greatest of all bogeys: writer's block.

Dropping the bar crawler's idiom, I fired my first question, 'Been here long? I mean, I haven't noticed you here before.' Then cringing at my gaffe, I thought, Shit, I'm off to a bad start. What if he's a regular? I'd never been inside the place before.

He let me off the hook: 'No, I'm new here. I don't usually drink out. I prefer a quiet time at home, with. . . .'

'What's up? You seem a bit down.'

He looked directly at me and said, 'Are you really interested, or just being polite?'

I couldn't recall where I'd seen his face before, but something warned me that I'd better come clean. I spilled the beans: 'Mister, I am interested. I'm a writer

and right now I need a story.' I flashed my 'OK, I'll go' expression.

He replied, 'You've come to the right man. Oh-boy have I got a story.' I groaned inwardly, but smiled encouragement. I'd met compulsive yarn spinners before: all talk, but not a damn thing that could be verified. Oh well, I could always embellish his story, if need be.

Two beers arrived and we toasted each other's health, then he asked, 'Would you rather move over to a table where it's quieter?'

I shook my head. 'Here's fine, it's just as noisy over there and we can get refills easier from here.'

'There's not that much I can tell - I don't know all the technical details. I only witnessed the results. She was playing God.'

I interjected, 'You said was, not is playing God.'

'That's right, and I provided all the money she needed. But not any more: she finally went too far.'

My curiosity hadn't been overly aroused so far, but I thought he might warm to his task if I plied him with a couple more drinks. The barman obliged with two scotches and a bottle of soda.

He nodded his thanks. I enquired, 'She? Who's this, your wife?'

'Yes. We were contented, I had my accountancy practice and she was at the university, working on something called Micro Bionics.'

'Never heard of it,' I said truthfully, 'What's it all about?'

'Can't rightly say, she chucked it in, and began some new line of research. Then, about two years ago, she started to pester me for extra money. That shouldn't have been a hassle, my old man left me more than I'll ever need in this lifetime. She wouldn't tell me about her work, just kept saying that she needed the dough until her grant came through. It never did.'

He took a metal, throat lozenge box from his pocket, and started as if to speak, but slipped it back into his pocket and took a long swig on his whiskey. 'Anyway, she almost spent every cent I had. When I asked her

where the money went, she handed me a stack of docketts and receipts.'

'What were they for?'

'Laboratory equipment mainly, and dozens of books. Not your ordinary reading material, but those limited edition, university press things, cost her - me thousands.'

She also bought a lot of computer time, overseas hookups and subscriptions to foreign user networks. And dolls' things.'

I thought of questioning his last remark, but he continued before I could swallow my drink and it slipped my mind.

'She eventually moved her things down to the campus, leaving me to live alone. The only time she called at the house was when she needed something - usually money. She knew how to spend money, right enough.'

'Was she having it off with someone else?' I asked, employing my usual tact.

'No, she spent her time locked in her lab and only came out for meals or shopping excursions. I went down there at odd times, but she was always alone. Always too busy to give me more than a few minutes. I thought of cutting off the finance, but she was so persuasive. I just paid the bills and they kept rolling in.'

He pressed his hand against his pocket and after repositioning the metal box, returned to his story. 'One day, a parcel arrived, it'd been addressed to our home by mistake; sent from overseas, Brazil I think. I opened it. I wish I hadn't. It contained photo's of a corpse.'

I tossed down the last of my drink and ordered another two. 'What happened when she found out that you'd seen the pictures?'

'Nothing. She just took them into her lab and slammed the door. She did ring me later, to thank me for taking them to her. Said she needed them for comparison.'

'With what?'

'With normal human specimens, apparently.'

'Did it look abnormal to you?'

'No - er, yes. The cadaver was perfect. A perfect little man, eighteen centimetres tall!'

At that point, scotch and soda exited via my nose: a process normally restricted to water and usually whilst swimming. He waited for my gasping to subside, then glossed over his last remark with, 'She'd been studying the effects of some obscure irradiation upon living cells before she turned recluse.' He glanced at the front door as a police car yodelled along the street. Then turned back to continue.

Last week, Saturday evening it was, I broke into her office and went through her files. That's when I discovered just what she was up to.'

My eyes had stopped watering and freshly flushed eustachians had sharpened my hearing, so I said, 'Hold on, back up a bit. Did you say the dead man was only eighteen centimetres tall?'

'That's right, eighteen - according to the ruler scale in the photographs.'

'Was he dark skinned, a pygmy, or one of those shrunken, tourist gimmicks?'

'No, he was as white as you and me, typically Caucasian but only eighteen centimetres from head to toe. Her notes revealed how she'd been shrinking animal tissue cultures and trying to keep them alive. But the things just died, no matter what nutrients she tried.'

He removed the lozenge box from his pocket and set it on the bar top and tossed a five on the counter, saying, 'I'm sorry, the next are on me.'

'What was the object of all this?'

'Who knows? She was as mad as a hatter.'

While thinking, The pot calling the kettle. . . I attempted to sound sincere, and said, 'Sounds like she, or someone she knew, must have succeeded. How did she shrink them?'

'She'd developed some kind of field that reduced the orbits of subatomic particles. Damned if I could make much sense of it - still can't. She wanted to produce smaller animals - or humans. She reasoned that smaller intra-atomic spaces caused the compaction that reduced the apparent bulk.' He took a long, slow swig. 'However, her scheme went awry. Although she could reduce living matter by nine tenths, it remained the same weight-mass, as she put it. Some of her cultures survived for hours, even days, but couldn't absorb nutrients and eventually died.'

'What killed them?' I asked, playing the interested believer.

'Something about normal nutrient and air molecules being incompatible with those of the condensed tissues.' He sipped on a fresh drink, and seemed eager to continue; I let him run on.

'I was reading her latest test notes when she walked into the office and snatched them from my hands. She said that if I wanted to know what was happening, I'd better go into the lab. I didn't need asking twice.'

'Her machine was running, and I took a look.' He swallowed a last mouthful of scotch and placed his glass near the metal box. 'She had a test under way. Some poor derelict, by the look of him. He was laying naked, under what looked like an X-ray machine. He shrank to around fifteen centimetres, right before my eyes. I reached across to make her stop it and that's when she caused this.'

He held up his right arm. I was sitting on his left and hadn't noticed it until then. It ended just above the wrist in a heavily bandaged stump. 'She did that?' I gasped, reaching for my glass.

'Her damned machine did - could've killed me. The poor devil on the test bench was stone dead by then. I lost my cool and grabbed at her coat, but my hand entered the beam.'

'She pushed me away, but stumbled against the projector, or whatever that thing was. As she fell she twisted to avoid the machine's field.'

By now he was quite upset, but continued, 'Her head crunched against the corner of a bench-top. She died at my feet. I panicked and could only think of getting rid of every trace of the whole ghastly business. I pushed



her into the beam and she shrank to about this -' He held up the stump beside his left hand, remembered, and quickly withdrew it from sight.

This bloke had to be a nut case. Shrinking people and now he claimed to have disposed of his wife. But I thought I'd better humour him, if only for therapeutic value.

His voice began to quaver as he finished his story, 'I set fire to the lab and got the hell out of there. They'll be here soon, that barman recognized me. You write my story - if you must. Thanks for the drinks - and for listening.' He twisted from the stool and without

looking back, walked through the door to the street. I watched him weave across the pedestrian crossing and vanish into the sidewalk crowd.

Then the penny dropped. I remembered where I'd seen him before. His picture had been in the morning paper with the story about a fire at the university. As I turned back to the bar, I saw the metal box beside his empty glass and picked it up. Surprised by the weight, I opened it.

Resting on a bed of cotton gauze was a tiny, doll-sized human hand.



# C. S. LEWIS: A MINUET OF GIANTS

by Andrew Darlington

The creator of the NARNIAN CHRONICLES had an odd relationship with Science Fiction, and wrote his COSMIC TRILOGY as a Christian retaliation to what he saw as a dangerously atheistic genre.

Clive Staples Lewis had an odd relationship with Science Fiction.

To Lewis, myth is important. In a Jungian sense, myth embodies the aspirations and hidden truths of a culture.

Science Fiction is the mythology of the machine age. Its truths are those that can be rationally quantified. Its aspirations, those of scientific achievement.

C. S. Lewis was a christian.

While he was fascinated by the virile energies of Science Fiction, its mytho-poetic possibilities and awesome scope, he was repelled by what he saw as its materialistic ethos.

His answer - his retaliation, was what is now termed THE COSMIC TRILOGY (single volume edition Pan S.F./1990 - ISBN 0-330-31374-6). Three novels in which, according to the original blurb, "using the apparatus of Science Fiction and his brilliant imaginative gifts, C. S. Lewis presents the problems of good and evil". It is a unique project, one only partially located in the unique genre it hopes to unsettle. A work totally unlike anything else within, or outside the phantasmagoric realm of Science Fiction.

OUT OF THE SILENT PLANET was published by John Lane/The Bodley Head in 1938. It introduces Dr Elwin Ransom, who is to be the central protagonist of the action. He's a philologist (that's linguist to you and I), and fellow of a Cambridge College. On his voyage to Mars he is pitted against the scientist Professor Weston

who "has Einstein on toast and drinks a pint of Schrodinger's blood for breakfast". And the mysteriously devious Mr Devine who, as well as being Ransom's contemporary at Cambridge, is prone to uttering "strange blasphemies and coprologies". PERELANDRA, later retitled VOYAGE TO VENUS, follows in 1943. Early mentions of "the black-out" locates its creation within the convulsions of World War 2, which perhaps throws its fictional moral conflict into sharper relief. One of the proofs of Weston's evil in the novel is his professed readiness "to sell England to the Germans". And later, in a moment of reflection, Ransom muses that "at that moment, far away on Earth... men were at war" in a ghastly reality far removed from the book's delicate discourse. THAT HIDEOUS STRENGTH arrives in 1945 with an American name-switch to THE TORTURED PLANET and an abridged edition ten years later. To Lewis "a modern fairy tale for grown-ups", its terrestrial - or "Tellurian" setting makes it more a creature of its time than its two predecessors, and it doesn't travel well. Similarly its multiple narrative viewpoints - one of them through the eyes and brain of Mr Bultitude, a huge black bear, loses the novel its tightness of focus.

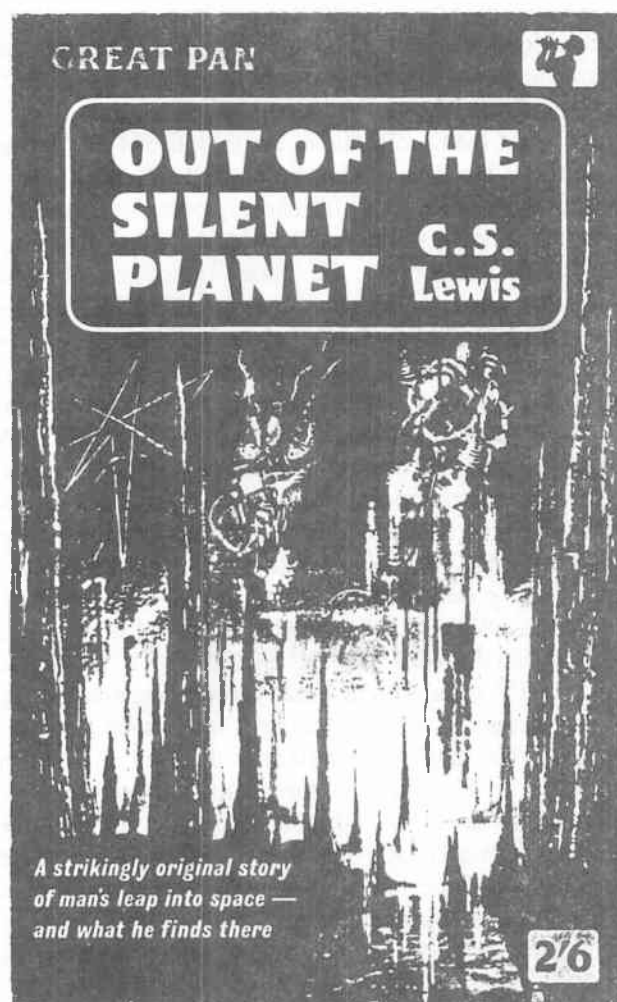
Yet each fictional instalment, although linked by common cosmology and characters, is distinctly different in tone. SILENT PLANET draws most directly on the conventions of Science Fiction. VOYAGE TO VENUS is a lush and entrancing allegory. THAT HIDEOUS STRENGTH a bizarre and often unwieldy concoction of mysticism and Ealing Comedy.

Born in Belfast (29 November 1898), the young "Jack" Lewis's early reading included proto-S.F. and Fantasy by Arthur Conan Doyle, Rider Haggard, George MacDonald (PHANTASTES), and GULLIVER'S TRAVELS. While, still at school, he was so affected by H. G. Wells' WAR OF THE WORLDS that he briefly

embarked on his first juvenile attempt at interplanetary fiction. But the opening adult novel is a hypnotically fascinating and luminously exciting adventure. Its image of Mars as distinctive as any in the extensive literature of the red planet. Many writers have personalised Mars, stamping their fictional imprint on its ochre sands. Edgar Rice Burroughs. Stanley Weinbaum. Leigh Brackett. And particularly H. G. Wells, who - according to Brian Aldiss, "awoke Lewis' imagination and his moral dislike at one and the same time". Wells' mechanistic, socialist, atheistic vision is regularly alluded to by Lewis, by way of contrast. Initially on a walking tour of the Midlands, Ransom is kidnapped by Weston and Devine who carry him to "Malacandra" with the intention of trading him to placate the planet's inhabitants. Critic Peter Nicholls suggests that Ransom "like Christ is... offered as a ransom for mankind" (in *THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF SCIENCE FICTION*). Ransom doesn't realise he's on Mars until relatively late in the plot, speculating at one point that he could even be on the Moon's dark side. Escaping his captors, his journeys on the strange world are shadowed by constant fearful anticipations of Wells' insectoid reptilian monsters and the soulless dehumanised rule of science he'd learned to expect from *WAR OF THE WORLDS* and *FIRST MEN IN THE MOON*. Ransom even recalls specifically "how H. G. Wells' Cavor had met his end on the moon" (technically it should have been *in* the moon!).

Lewis exactly inverts those expectations.

Malacandra is a world in which three sentient species - or Hnau, co-exist in perfect harmony, under the tutelage of the Eldila who are like "footsteps of light", and the world-spirit Oyarsa. It is Earth - Thulcandra, which is the "bent world", the Silent Planet, excluded from the cosmic dialogue because its world spirit, its Dark Lord, the depraved Oyarsa of Tellus, is insane. Devine brings greed and death to Mars; "we are all a bent race. We have come here to bring evil." Weston brings more complex ills. When I first read *SILENT PLANET* as a child, I did so without preconceptions, and enjoyed it simply as a singular different slice of S. F., and some of its descriptions of Martian alienness remain stunning. "He gazed about him, and the very intensity of his desire to take in the new world at a glance defeated him. He saw nothing but colours - colours that refused to form themselves into things. Moreover, he knew nothing yet well enough to see it; you cannot see things till you know roughly what they are". Lewis' portrayal of Mars is largely in keeping with the then-contemporary ideas of the planet. Ransom learns that "the Malacandrian atmosphere lay chiefly in the handramits; the real surface of the planet was naked or thinly clad". The former, seen from the heights of the "undimensioned, enigmatic blackness" of space, are the wide artificial valleys mistakenly called "canals", cut into the harandra, or dead crust of the ancient world to extend its habitation. This accords with the consensus view of Mars still recognised by fictioneers well into the mid-1960s. And as yet, C.S.L.'s occasional religious allusions are not highly visible, more a co-opting of religious vocabulary.



Space? "Older thinkers has been wiser when they named it simply the heavens".

Meeting the Hrossa is "like the meetings of the first man and the first woman in the world... the first tingling intercourse of two different, but rational species". The Hrossa, Ransom considers, resemble talking animals, "as though Paradise had never been lost". And "ever since he had discovered the rationality of the Hrossa he had been haunted by a conscientious scruple as to whether it might not be his duty to undertake their religious instruction"! The climax of the novel is a cleverly constructed comic three-way dialogue in which Ransom (the philologist) translates Weston's self-justification of racial destiny, social Darwinism, and scientific ambition into Martian terms that the Oyarsa can understand. His simplified paraphrase reducing the arguments - and hence the underlying premise of most Science Fiction, down to an internally contradictory nonsense.

Brian Aldiss calls it "one of the most delightful space voyages in the literature" (*BILLION YEAR SPREE*), and Lewis returns briefly to Mars in one of two short stories - originally published in *THE MAGAZINE OF FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION*, and later incorporated into the 1966 collection *OF OTHER*

WORLDS. MINISTERING ANGEL (from the January 1958 issue) envisages a different and less ethereal planet; with a Monk who had "chosen three years on Mars as the nearest modern equivalent to a hermitage in the desert", and the whores who arrive there to upset his calm!

But then... of course, the fiction of C. S. Lewis has ulterior motives. What he calls the "hidden story" beneath the surface plot. It's entirely possible to read his charming Narnia stories as delightful fantasies without necessarily deciphering the coded messages of their symbolism although the symbolism is visible. Narnia is a "country of walking trees... of Fauns and Satyrs, of Dwarfs and Giants... of Talking Beasts". A world in which Digory picks, and is tempted to eat an apple from the magic garden (in *THE MAGICIAN'S NEPHEW*). A world breathed into life by the benevolently god-like lion Aslan who is resurrected from death, whose blood can revive the dead (*THE SILVER CHAIR*), and who finally bids the fantasy world's cessation with the words "the dream has ended, this is the morning" (*THE LAST BATTLE*). With *PERELANDRA* the moral is even less easily avoided. *AUTHENTIC SCIENCE FICTION* #38 (October 1953) calls it "a rather slow, somewhat boring treatise that grinds an axe so crudely you can see the chips fly off". The prefatory disclaimer that "all the human characters in this book are purely fictitious and none of them is allegorical" is difficult to accept; for this, the second "Cosmic Trilogy" novel, is a Perelandrian Book of Genesis. "A strict allegory is like a puzzle with a solution" his biographer Brian Sibley quotes Lewis as saying, his own stories - he claims, more resemble "a flower whose smell reminds you of something you can't quite place".

In his emerging cosmology Mars provides a rough blueprint, a first attempt at animating life-forms. Learning from its crudity, Earth creates humanity, advanced - but flawed by its "fall" from grace. The Moon possesses an underground machine civilisation, suggested but never encountered, which marks the outer limits of Thulcandra's sphere of evil. While Venus is a new world, its myths yet to be written. "The distinction between history and mythology might be itself meaningless" considers Ransom, in much the same way that with the Eldila "the distinction between natural and supernatural, in fact, broke down".

This time Ransom is summoned through space. He travels to mist-shrouded Venus in a "coffin" powered by Eldila. His interplanetary voyages are all made nude. The inference is of reaching worlds "beyond death", and of rebirth - never stated, but implicit in the image. He discovers Venus, or Perelandra, to be a world of ocean with few points of fixed land, but fleets of floating islands which Lewis illustrates with painterly richness and vivid attention to detail, snaring descriptions with often stunning precision of observation; "great globes of yellow fruit hung from the trees, clustered as toy-balloons are clustered on the back of the balloon-man". Lewis later explains that "the starting point of the second novel, *PERELANDRA*, was my mental picture of the floating

islands. The whole of the rest of my labours, in a sense consisted of building up a world in which floating islands could exist" (an interview in *S.F. HORIZONS*, Spring 1964).

Ransom soon meets the Green Lady. The world's Eve. And shortly after he discovers Weston there in his familiar role as emissary of evil, but this time he enacts a more focused part. Weston's soul is owned by the Mephistophelian Tellurian Oyarsa. As the novel slowly progresses he decays further into a thing of pure malevolence, becoming first the Un-man, and later the Tempter, as his true intentions clarify. Ransom "had a sensation not of following an adventure but of enacting a myth". And Lewis adds to that myth-building process with every simile. At one point Weston's corrupt body even tempts the Green Lady with the suggestion that "he (Ransom) does not want you to go on to the new fruits that you have never tasted before". Fruit? - what is at stake here is "Original Sin", the loss of Venusian innocence, the prospect of a second Fall, all balanced on the outcome of their individual actions, "the sense of precariousness terrified him". The leisurely pacing accelerates when Ransom, losing more rounds of philosophical and theological debate than he considers fair, decides to kill Weston. The ethical equation of such a murder perhaps being as equally "sinful" as the attempted seduction is not something that worries either the author or his character. The ensuing pursuit takes hunter and hunted to the forbidden fixed land and through a bizarre sub-world of caves and their half-glimpsed monsters. A labyrinth compounded of Hades and the Narnian Really Deep Land of Bism beneath the Underland (in *THE SILVER CHAIR*), a domain complete with a glimpse of its waiting thrones.

Perelandra is saved. Ransom meets the "King" (Adam), and the Oyarsa of both Mars and Venus, to learn more of the true nature of the solar system, and of god ("Maleldil"). "On Mars the very forests are of stone; in Venus the land swims". C. S. L. extends his hard/soft imagery into a definition of male/female beyond physical sexuality, personified by the qualities of these worlds. The interplay of history, myth and morality is its "Great Dance". The fact that it places the human form above all over animals - "a little lower than the angels", is hardly surprising considering its context. As is its sexism; the Green Lady, although nominally equal-but-different, is treated as being of lesser importance than the king. Yet *PERELANDRA* is a beautifully-woven tapestry of deep and subtle colouration with areas of exquisite prose. His description of "ripple trees" and their tiny denizens runs "the wind was blowing the streamers not down the mountainside but up it, so that his course had to the eye the astonishing appearance of lying through a wide blue waterfall which flowed the wrong way, curving and foaming towards the heights".

Clive Staples Lewis was a strange, repressed, solitary man who - in Anthony Burgess' memorable description, was "god-drunk". And he had an odd relationship with Science Fiction. To C. S. L. the spaces

separating the worlds are "god's quarantine". This assertion is intended to be serious. A chapter in Arthur C. Clarke's *THE VIEW FROM SERENDIP* (Gollancz. 1978) amplifies his attitude. Lewis was constantly opposed to all aspects of modernism, including the Rocket Societies which were then being organised by equally fanatical enthusiasts into the grandiosely titled "British Interplanetary Society". Clarke, the group's treasurer and chief propagandist met "Jack" Lewis for a pre-arranged open debate in an Oxford pub. Lewis was seconded in the confrontation by fellow Inkling J. R. R. Tolkien, Clarke by Val Cleaver - who was destined to become head of Rolls Royce Rocket Division! The debate is fiercely passionate, although from a Nineties perspective it increasingly takes on the slightly unhinged air of two bald men fighting over a comb. Lewis contends that space flight will spread humanities crimes to other, as yet uncontaminated worlds. Reduced to absurd simplicity his attitude is of the "there are things we are not meant to know/ man should know his place in god's scheme of things/ if man was meant to fly he'd have been given wings" variety. That man should be content with his allotted span - both racially and individually, and when it's done he should die with dignity as the Martian Hnau will, once they've served Maleldil's purpose. A Professor of Medieval and Renaissance English at Magdalene College, Cambridge, C. S. L.'s mind-set is as mustily pre-industrial and myth-riddled as his colleague in the debate, Tolkien.

While Clarke ripostes that the inevitable future of the race lies out there beyond the atmosphere, quarantine or no. Neither possibility seems probable as the century lurches to its close. But Lewis' opposition to his concepts did not blind him to Clarke's qualities as a writer. A dust jacket blurb for *CHILDHOOD'S END* (Sidgwick & Jackson. 1954) quotes a Lewis book review with this barbed recommendation - "here we meet a modern author who understands that there may be things that have a higher claim on humanity than its own "survival"". Clarke himself (in *THE COMING OF THE SPACE AGE*. Panther 1970) refers to "my old sparring partner's... theological exercises in S.F." While critic Sam Moskowitz's essay in the same volume contends that Lewis not only borrowed from H. G. Wells, but from Olaf Stapledon too, and also assumed his "entire religious philosophy as it applied to the space age". There's some evidence that Lewis *did* admire Stapledon's elaborate fantasies in which evolving future races hop worlds to escape the extinction of the Earth, and eventually colonising Neptune 2,000 million years hence - indeed Lewis even wrote about them with some enthusiasm in *THE CHRISTIAN WORLD* (1958). But he obviously rejects what he calls the "desperately immoral outlook" that puts so much faith in man's own ability to "revitalise the cosmos" (from a letter quoted by Lewis' biographer and disciple Roger Lancelyn Green).

Yet with *THAT HIDEOUS STRENGTH* even this attitude seems to have darkened. Prefacing *OUT OF THE SILENT PLANET* he'd admitted "... this author would be sorry if any reader supposed he was too stupid to

# THE COSMIC TRILOGY C. S. LEWIS

OUT OF THE SILENT PLANET  
PERELANDRA  
THAT HIDEOUS STRENGTH



have enjoyed Mr H. G. Wells fantasies or too ungrateful to acknowledge his debt to them". But the later novel portrays Wells himself as "Horace Jules" - "a cockney, a very little man, whose legs were so short that he had unkindly been compared to a duck. He had a turned-up nose and a face in which some original bonhomie had been much interfered with by years of good living and conceit". The novels which "had first raised him to fame and affluence" were flimsily grounded in "science.... taught him at the University of London over fifty years ago". The character assassination ends with Jules being shot to death! As Arthur C. Clarke writes amusingly in his *ASTOUNDING DAYS* (Gollancz. 1989) World War 2 ends with the unleashing of two S.F. concepts into the real world - rocketry (the V2 Flying Bombs) and atomic power (Hiroshima). Perhaps the muddled and unsatisfactory third instalment of the *COSMIC TRILOGY* is presaged by this realisation? That the atheistic proponents of the space age were seeing their dreams enter the realms of news reports.

To Lewis *THAT HIDEOUS STRENGTH* is "a tall story about devilry, though it has behind it a serious point". C. S. L. had already produced a mild and amusing novel about devilry. *THE SCREWTAPE LETTERS* from



1943 depicts a senior devil writing instructions to his young, inexperienced nephew Wormwood on how to win human souls. And here, from the timeless spaces of other worlds, **THAT HIDEOUS STRENGTH** reduces the scope down to a very pre-war Little England vision and the trivial concerns of a highly dated and class-riddled cast of terrestrials; Bill the Blizzard, "Fairy" Hardcastle, Mrs Maggs (the domestic "woman who comes in twice a week") and Mother Dimble. Ransom doesn't appear by name until halfway into the book. He is now the "Director", in a beatific state of numinous transfiguration, the bite on his foot - inflicted by Weston on Venus, born as a stigmata. While Devine is also present in the form of Lord Feverstone, who becomes Emergency Commissioner of Edgestow, a "conquered and occupied city".

The new protagonists are Mark Studdock a Sociology Don at Bracton College, part of the Edgestow University complex, and his dissatisfied wife Jane. The first fully drawn female character in the trilogy (the Green Lady of Venus scarcely counts), she discovers to her own unease that she's capable of precognition. Aligned with the College "Progressive Element" Mark is inveigled to join a government sponsored research centre which has bought the ancient Bracton Wood from the college. N.I.C.E. is the **AVENGERS**-style acronym for this National Institute of Co-ordinated Experiments. Weston may be dead, but NICE continues his work by other means, with the ultimate objective of "a new type of man" achieved through "sterilisation of the unfit, liquidation of backward races, selective breeding" creating "a new era. The *really* scientific era".

NICE is an attempted totalitarianism with unconvincing Kafkaesque overtones, and it is - of course, in the sway of the Dark Eldils. They plan to revive the ancient Alantean magics of Merlin, the great wizard of Arthurian legend, who "had not died. His life had been side-tracked, moved out of our one-dimensional time for fifteen centuries. But under certain conditions it would return to his body". Merlin lies secretly entombed beneath the contested Bracton Wood suspended in time, a state C. S. L. calls "parachronic", "dead and not dead, something exhumed from that dark pit of history". His pagan Druidical power will be reinforced by what Lewis sees as the new demonic power of science - epitomised by NICE, in which "dreams of the far future destiny of man were dragging up from its shallow and unquiet grave the old dream of man as god".

Here Lewis states his anti-science thesis most nakedly. Science leads to a "despair of objective truth" in which "all morality was a mere subjective by-product of the physical and economic situations of man". Science undermines belief. And if this conspiracy of logic, realism, and human rationalism "succeeded, hell would be at last incarnate". Needless to say Lewis ensures that it doesn't succeed; a convention of five Oyarsa - those from Mercury (Viritrilbia), Jupiter (Glundandra), and Saturn (Lurga), as well as the two we've already encountered, lend a hand, Mark sees through the beguiling pretence of

"progress" and returns to more traditional values, and Merlin - once revived, unexpectedly joins the side of light against darkness. There's little of the prose richness of the earlier novels, but some notes of humour en route. The "Head" of NICE is discovered to be just that - a severed head maintained by a system of tubes, pipes and drips. A horror image lifted directly from the Gernsbackian pulps! While NICE, in its search for the resurrected Merlin, takes an unfortunate and confused tramp into their custody believing him to be the great Druid. But it is more occult flim-flam than S.F. and this third volume of the **COSMIC TRILOGY** would have been long forgotten if not for the furnace heat of its two predecessors.

And anyway, by March 1949 Lewis's interests had moved elsewhere. He wrote "Once there were four children whose names were Peter, Susan, Edmund and Lucy...", opening **THE LION, THE WITCH AND THE WARDROBE**, with six more **NARNIAN CHRONICLES** to follow until **THE LAST BATTLE** in 1956.

"I've never started from a message or a moral" Lewis protests to his S.F. **HORIZONS** interrogators, adding "of course, it wouldn't have been that particular story if I wasn't interested in those particular ideas". Science Fiction is an essentially atheistic medium. Perhaps it has to be. Its imagery follows H. G. Wells Time Traveller to the slow entropic devolution at world's end. It crosses Stapledon's trackless aeons of random evolutions and meaningless extinctions. Even once it has outgrown its early role as propaganda vehicle for the space race, it still conjures up intriguing blasphemies of alternate christs, with Moorcocks' **BEHOLD THE MAN**. The "hidden story" here is inconsistent with belief in god's eternal plan, inconsistent with Lewis' world in which Maleldil was born a man in Bethlehem". James Blish uses religious themes and a Jesuit priest as protagonist in his **CASE OF CONSCIENCE**. Anthony Boucher allegedly puts his S.F. at the service of his Catholic faith. Ray Bradbury's priests meet sinless Martians in his **THE FIRE BALLOONS**, while Walter M. Miller's post-apocalypse **A CANTICLE FOR LEIBOWITZ** centres on the rituals of the church. But even accepting such exceptions Science Fiction remains the ultimate literature of machine age rationalism with an implacably healthy atheistic subtext. What Lewis condemns as "the idea which is at this moment circulating all over our planet in obscure works of "scientifiction", in little Interplanetary Societies and Rocketry Clubs, and between the covers of monstrous magazines, ignored or mocked by the intellectuals, but ready, if ever the power is put into its hands, to open a new chapter of misery for the universe" (**PERELANDRA**).

Clive Staples Lewis died on 22nd November 1963.. living long enough to see Yuri Gagarin, Gherman Titov, Alan Shephard and others follow Weston and Devine in gloriously transgressing god's quarantine regulations...

# TREES ALONG A DELTA

by Brent Lillie

Den was in the car, about ten minutes from home, when the first hiccup struck him. The last thing he remembered was the yellow tail-gate of the station waggon in front, and the lights further down the street, winking from amber to red. The next thing he knew, he was sitting in his lounge-room reading the paper. It was as though he'd blinked, and the world had re-arranged itself around him.

Laying his paper in his lap, he looked up at the wall clock, comparing the time with that displayed on his wrist-watch. The wall clock said 2:30 pm. So did his watch. But the last time he'd checked, in the car as he approached the traffic lights, it had been 2:05. 2:05, Sunday, January 16th.

But then again...

'Sharon,' he called, trying to disguise the quaver in his voice. 'What day is it?'

THE BUSH TUCKER GUIDE made no mention of squat, hardy-looking plants with spiky leaves and tough-skinned, orange fruit.

The fruit, grape-sized, was scattered here and there about the shrub in clusters that varied in number; never less than six, never more than ten.

'Do you reckon I ought to try one?' Den Markett enquired of Willy Norris, one of the more experienced bushwalkers taking part in this particular weekend's trail-blaze.

'Why not?' Norris replied absently, gazing around the pristine, but oppressively hot, landscape. He's told the others it was pointless, bushwalking in this kind of weather. He was all too familiar with the consequences of a big dry: parched creek beds, flies, plenty of snakes, a plant life left brittle and uninspiring... and more flies.

Markett seemed to be enjoying himself, though. As long as he was scratching around in the undergrowth for grubs and shoots and berries, he was as happy as a pig

in mud. The food had to be plenty bad at home, Norris reckoned, to make a bloke resort to eating stuff like that!

Removing his water-bottle from a side pocket of his pack, Norris took a long, luxurious swallow. He put the bottle back, wiped a hand across his brow and squinted up at the blazing sun.

Christ, it was hot! Combustible. A carelessly discarded cigarette on a day like this could spell disaster. Even the mottled shadows pooling under the large eucalypt where Markett had discovered the precious berries offered little or no relief.

'If it is poisonous, it would be in the book,' Norris offered, in a vain bid to get Markett moving again.

'But it's not even *in* the book!'

'So?' Norris shrugged. 'A new taste sensation. You could be the first!'

'Yeah. Markettus Croakus,' Den mumbled. He closed the well-thumbed guide and returned the book to the bulging back-pack laying next to him on the trail.

Then he plucked one of the small orange berries off the plant and eyed it warily. He scraped at the tough outer covering with a grimy fingernail.

'Looks hard.'

'Peel it.'

'Yeah.' Extracting his pen-knife from his jeans pocket, Den cut into the skin. The inside was soft and purplish-yellow. A few seeds floated about in a semi-transparent, glutinous mass.

'Jesus,' Den muttered. 'It looks disgusting.'

'Pretend it's a Jaffa, bush tucker man,' smiled Norris, delighting in Den's discomfort.

The skin of the berry was indeed tough, but it peeled away from the gelatinous interior easily enough. Den was left holding something that resembled an oversized booger.

'Want some?' he enquired of Norris.

'Not a chance.'

Den sliced off a small segment of the fruit and, frowning, placed it on the tip of his tongue. It yielded a

strange flavour; at first bitter, then sweet, then fading into a sherbety, mellowness that numbed the inside of his mouth.

'Good!' he said. 'Bloody good!'

Den turned to his companion, saying a little smugly: 'I'm onto something here, mate. If no-one's ever discovered this particular fruit before, I could end up a millionaire! Sure you don't want some?'

'Shove them up your arse!' Norris scowled. The oppressive heat was getting to him; his one and only desire was to return to the spartan comfort of his tent, and the copious amounts of beer that lay within.

Den laughed and popped the rest of the fruit into his mouth. He grabbed a handful of the orange berries and dropped them into his shirt pocket. Three of them would be lost somewhere between the camp-site and home. The remainder went through the wash. Den would neither remember the taste of the fruit, nor the bush it came from. It was just one of their interesting qualities. Another was, they gave you the hiccups.

Den couldn't recall going to sleep. Of course, no-one is actually aware of the particular moment when they drift off into slumber, but Den couldn't even remember coming *close* to it! He did remember laying his book on the bedside table and switching off the lamp, however.

He remembered that Sharon was lying with her back to him. She had just bathed, and smelled of bath oil. Her skin against his naked thigh had radiated not heat, but an indefinable coolness, reminding him of shaded, marble bench-tops on a hot day. Beneath the sheets, an idea had begun to form. But he was sure nothing had happened. Or had it? He honestly didn't know, because suddenly he'd found himself staring at his lathered reflection in the mirror, his razor in his hand, the bathroom tap running.

This must be tomorrow, he told himself. Den examined the face in the mirror. It was the first of many times he'd imagine there was another him - someone that slept with his wife, mowed the lawn, and ferried him to work in his car.

At that particular moment, though, and as odd as it seemed, what concerned him most was not the possibility that some asynchronous doppelganger had made love to his wife, but the fact that an uninvited stranger had walked in and helped himself to *his* breakfast.

It wasn't fair. He could gain little or no satisfaction from the bitter residue of coffee clinging to his palate. There was nothing better than the first cup of coffee of the day, and brewing another would not, *could* not, be the same. He decided some bastard was stealing his life away.

Den finished shaving and rinsed the blade under the tap. A thought suddenly struck him. Hiccups! He'd hiccuped last night, in bed, in the darkness, and that's what had put him here!

What a concept! Hiccups that could jolt you forward in time! It smacked of science-fiction, horror-something Arthur C. Clarke or Stephen King would dream

up. And what, Den wondered, would they have him do next? Consult a doctor, or a psychiatrist? Maybe they'd shove a brown paper bag over his head and make him count to a hundred? A glass of water? Have someone sneak up and say 'boo!'? Amnesia? Amnesia had to be the most hackneyed, worn-out last-grasp in the history of the universe. It died as a serious story-line before Fred and Wilma had Pebbles.

Well, to be honest, so did hiccups.

Most likely, they'd have to convince himself that the blackouts had nothing to do with the hiccups, and put the episode down, not to amnesia, but to some other form of mental aberration. The premise: implausible. Stupid. They probably wouldn't even bother with it. Neither did Den. At first.

The unrelenting heat smothered all sound.

A brightly-coloured finch alighted on one of the shrubs and skipped from branch to branch, pecking at the orange fruit. Larger birds fed here also, and small native animals that spread the seedlings in their droppings.

The forest baked under the pitiless summer sun. It rained on Thursday and from the forest there arose a sound akin to that of a red-hot griddle, being plunged into cold water - a hissing and a spluttering; the creak and groan of stretching timbers, and, finally, a great, sylvan sigh of relief, perfumed with a million subtle odours, released by the relieving rains.

Whereas there had been twigs and leaves and various examples of common local flora beneath the tree where Den had laid aside his heavy pack and sampled the strange new berry, there was now a carpet of orange. On occasion, the berries would explode into purple and yellow flowers that shot their seeds into the wind.

Just after lunch, in the cafeteria near the furnishing suppliers where he worked, Den hiccuped, and jolted himself clear into next week.

He wouldn't have known it was next week if the cop hadn't told him. The cop had appeared quite taken aback, actually, when Den had gaped vacantly about the room and asked not where he was, but *when* he was. 'Monday, January 24th,' the cop had replied. 'But what's that got to do with anything?'

He was a big detective, with short-cropped hair, and he wore a grey suit, sans coat, which he'd draped over the chair behind the desk. A gun, solid, and menacing, hung in a shoulder holster on the back of the chair. The cop leaned closer to Den's face, the hint of last night's beer on his breath. Ignoring the beefy countenance suspended before him, Den continued his examination of the room. There was a filing cabinet, chipped, battered and oddly-askew; a rogue's gallery of poorly-photocopied mug shots, sticky-taped to the faded, peeling walls; the desk, with the blotter just peeking out though the mantle of papers, and the chair with the coat and gun on it. That was about it. Except for the tall man in the dark blue suit standing

silently by the window, taking in proceedings with an air of studied detachment. My solicitor, Den presumed, correctly.

'If you're trying to act crazy, it won't work,' the cop said derisively, grinning sideways at the solicitor, who obviously wanted to smile, but whose professional etiquette wouldn't allow it.

'I'm not,' Den responded quietly. 'I've got the hiccups.'

The cop stared hard into Den's eyes, then backed away and sat on the edge of the desk.

'Okay. Let's start again!' he said with a bored sigh. 'Mr Markett, why did you kill your wife?'

Around the dam, the shrubs blossomed: fruit to flower, flower to seed, seed to shrub, shrub to fruit.

Up the sides of trees, they grew, climbing visibly, the seedlings eddying and riding the winds like frenetic swarms of insects. The flowers, after letting loose their spores, fell limply to the surface of the dam, staining its listless waters a vibrant purplish-yellow.

'Why did you kill your wife?'

How in the hell would he know. Maybe he didn't kill her - maybe someone else did, and he'd got the blame. No matter. Sharon was dead. He wished he were dead, also, but he doubted the other would allow it.

The big cop slammed the desk, to make some kind of point. Den wasn't even listening to him. He was staring past the solicitor, watching the dark, moisture-laden clouds mass beyond the window. That was good. They needed the rain. It had been much too dry. He hiccuped...

and found himself in a prison cell. Someone shouted, off to his left, and a cell door slammed, far, far away. Den rose from his bunk to look in the mirror above the chipped enamel sink. The whites of his eyes had gone an odd purple colour. He walked over to the bars and rested his head on the cool metal. He hiccuped. ... he was still in prison, aimlessly meandering about in what he gathered was the exercise yard. Another prisoner looked up as Den passed him. He had purple eyes, too, but they differed vastly from the eyes Den had glimpsed in the mirror in his cell. These eyes were evil, and full of bad intent. In his right hand, the man clasped a crudely-made, but vicious-looking blade.

'Give me what you owe me, missus-killer, or so help me, I'll cut out your throat and feed it back to you in small chunks!'

Den shook his head disbelievingly, willing this... madness, away. Arms extended, he took a few stumbling steps backwards. Around him, drifting clots of tattooed flesh and prison blue congealed to form a makeshift arena. A vicious shove between the shoulder-blades sent him sprawling. As the tarred and gravelled exercise yard rushed up to meet him he noticed innumerable tiny weeds growing through the cracks in its surface. Trees along a delta. He rolled on his back. A face, grey, unshaven, with bad teeth, whirled across his vision like an out-of-control Catherine wheel. 'I have... the hiccups,' Den pleaded. The face leered down at him, purple eyes mocking, the lips drawn back in the grotesque parody of a smile.

'Join the club,' the man said, and began to operate.

- END -



# TERRY DOWLING: IN DEPTH

By Bill Congreve

RYNOSSEROS; Terry Dowling; Collection; 1990; 228 + viii pp; Aphelion pb; \$12.95.

WORMWOOD; Terry Dowling; Collection; 1991; 253 + viii pp; Aphelion pb; \$12.95.

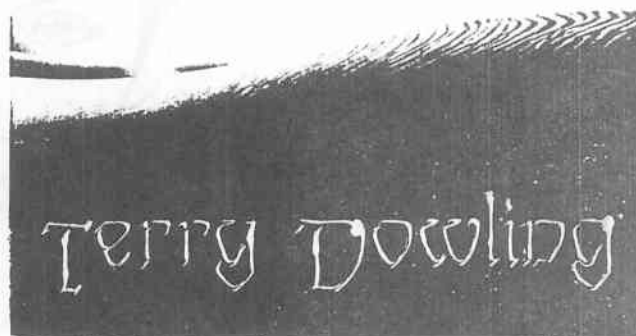
BLUE TYSON; Terry Dowling; Collection; 1992; 238 + xiv pp; Aphelion pb; \$12.95.

Words are the tools by which writers place their thoughts into the minds of readers. A writer codes a complex stream of emotion and meaning into a socially recognised format, and utters those words onto paper. By a complex physical process those words, still printed on paper, come into the hands of a reader. The reader decodes the physical patterns of the words into a different and just as complex stream of thought and emotion which carries unique meaning for the reader. The words themselves are mere pieces of black ink on paper; inherently valueless. The meaning lies only in the minds of the writer and the reader.

This is the basis of all communication. If what a reader means by his words is different from the meaning a reader decodes from them, then we are all pissing into the wind.

A writer may use simple, elegant language, and allow the dictionary (socially accepted) meaning of words to carry ideas. This is what most of us do. Sometimes a writer will use a complex pattern of words to carry not only precise meaning, but emotion as well. Words are used in a semiotic sense to carry patterns and ideas coded into them by society beyond mere dictionary definition.

If I write "pasta", you don't just think "pasta", you receive as well a concept of "Italian food". If I write "HAL 9000", you, as knowledgeable SF readers and viewers, receive an image of loneliness, arrogance, tragedy, and





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the threat of artificial intelligence. What do you see if I write "sandship"?

The work of Terry Dowling is drenched in such loaded language. As often as not, Dowling will invent a new word or invest an old word with new impact from the context of his background.

The world of Tom Tyson, honoured as "Blue" Tyson by the tribes of a rogue artificial intelligence has tricked them into placing his name in *The Great Passage Book*, is captain of the sandship, or charvolant, *Rynosseros*. For this reason he is also known as Tom Rynosseros. Tom Tyson is a National, a white man.

The aboriginal tribes of Australia have come into their full potential as a people. Their wizards, or clever men, have looked into the mythic potential of the Dreamtime, and have found it to be real. The tribes, now called Ab'O tribes, have remade themselves (I'm tempted to snicker here, and mention the name Michael Jackson, but the Ab'O remaking reaches from the genetic level and continues on a higher cultural level.) into mankind's dominant nation. The racist superiority and arrogance with which they treat the rest of the world proves that they too are merely human. Dowling is making a point here about racism, and this mirror image of today's society is one of the themes which gives his future history a sense of rightness and which propels his created world towards confrontation.

The tribes dominate their world. They have carved out their domain; all of space because that is where the power lies, and the centre of Australia as that is perceived to be their heritage. National Australia - or non-Ab'O Australia (not necessarily white Australia) - is self-governing but restricted to a limited number of enclaves along the coast. Anthropology tells us that after an original onslaught forty thousand years ago that was as great in impact, or greater, than the recent depredations of the white man, the aboriginal people had no choice but to reach an equilibrium with the land, and to live within physically imposed limits. The Ab'O tribes have taken their *perceived* (and physically enforced) historical and cultural imperatives, and made them into the driving forces of their new society. The reverence for life, for the land, the living recreation of the dreamtime, the creation of new forms of life, both biological and in the myriad forms of artificial intelligence, are all present, and they are all tarred with the brush of political expediency.

Herein lies Dowling's second great theme in these stories. Artificial intelligence has long been a talking point in SF. The Ab'O tribes have achieved it, place great reverence in it, and have used it wonderfully in their remaking of Australia into a new Dreamtime, a physical declaration to the world of their superiority. And now that they've created it, they feel threatened by it. Because the artificial intelligence has been programmed with the same reverence for life, and for the Dreamtime, as the Ab'Os, it is more successful than the Ab'Os at holding the same values dear. The Frankenstein Syndrome. The newly created life is too much like a better humanity.

Tom Tyson, Dowling's hero, is a man made by artificial intelligence.

In *COLOURING THE CAPTAINS*, the first story of *Rynosseros*, Tom is newly returned from the Madhouse, the asylum where he lost his memory at the hands of the AIs, and had his life rebuilt by the same AIs. Because of this treatment he holds a deep and abiding prejudice against all artificial intelligence. Yet he is still chosen by a rogue bell-tree to be one of its champions; one of seven Coloured captains whose name will be entered in *The Great Passage Book* and who will therefore be allowed passage in his charvolant into all lands held by the tribes. But Tyson must first perform a service for the bell-tree: he must decipher the meaning of the colours awarded the National captains and use the knowledge to save the bell-tree and the last of its human creators. The tree is demanding of Tom that he recognise the value of all intelligence.

The story is a difficult one to read. It is densely worded and intense with the political, physical, and social description needed to launch a series that presently includes another two collections, and a novel. (One novel and one collection are, as yet, unpublished.) Within the story we find a number of terms not defined until later in the book, and one term, "haldane" which is not fully discussed until the first story, *BREAKING THROUGH TO THE HEROES*, from the second collection, *Blue Tyson*. *COLOURING THE CAPTAINS* is a rewarding experience, and not just as a gateway for what is to follow, but perhaps it needs something, more dialogue, or strengthening subplots, to direct some of the intensity away from the world-building and into the story.

*THE ONLY BIRD IN HER NAME* is a marvellous piece of magic in which Tyson gathers with members of the Bird Club to thwart hunters who will destroy the last Forgetty. I won't say much more about it because I don't want to spoil any reader's pleasure. There are no great themes. The purposes of this story are entertainment, and a love for life in all its forms.

The Ab'Os society's greatest prejudice, against humaniform robots, is revealed in *THE ROBOT IS RUNNING AWAY FROM THE TREES*. A Maitre class mankin learns something of honour as its programming directs it on a suicidal mission. Artificial intelligence, and mankind's reaction to it, once again acts to reform Tyson.

Of the remaining stories, *SPINNERS* continues the impact of AIs on Tyson's prejudices and motives. *WHAT WE DID TO THE TYGER* combines fate with Ab'O whim in the destruction of a famous charvolant. *SO MUCH FOR THE BURNING QUEEN* is a love story as two fire-chess champions battle for mastery. *MIRAGE DIVER* is the story of a group of artists whose art has deserted them, and what they must do to rediscover it.

Over every story hangs the shadow of Ab'O influence. Even if not directly involved, there is a recognition that all this is possible only because Ab'O clever men had looked into the haldane power of the Dreamtime. It is fitting that in *TIME OF THE STAR*, the last story from *Rynosseros*, we are presented with the

grand spectacle of two Ab'O charvolant fleets engaged in war on the sands of Lake Eyre. Why fight? For the love of a good woman, and the jealous tribe who won't allow her to follow her heart. This must be the oldest motive of all for war, and it is still only an excuse for the men to indulge in the ultimate form of politics. Tom Tyson receives a baptism of fire as *Rynosseros* is made the flagship of an Ab'O prince fighting to save his tribe.

# # #

Building on *Rynosseros*, but still a part of it, comes the second book of the series, *Blue Tyson*. The new collection depends largely on the first. The stories can be read individually; as with *Rynosseros*, some were first published in magazines, but to be fully appreciated need to be seen as part of a whole. It is *Blue Tyson* that confirms the directions set in the first book. We have more conflict between Nationals and the Ab'O tribes, the tribes are becoming more open in the destruction of the Artificial Intelligences they once revered, and Tom Tyson is becoming more accepting of the role AIs play in his unknown past, and is more often becoming their champion in the present. Tom Tyson's story is no longer a series of unconnected novelettes. He is moving, or being driven, towards a pivotal role in the conflict that must inevitably occur.

*Blue Tyson* opens with a novelette, **BREAKING THROUGH TO THE HEROES**, in which Tyson is embroiled in Ab'O mindwar. A heretical new theory of haldane power has been proposed by a small and otherwise weak tribe. The inference is that all mankind may have the undiscovered ability to access haldane power that has previously been restricted to Ab'Os. The Arredeni prince and his daughter who propose the theory must be shown to the world to be wrong - through defeat.

It is this discussion of the last cornerstone of Dowling's world building which makes **BREAKING THROUGH TO THE HEROES** the appropriate thematic conclusion to *Rynosseros*, rather than the opening story of another collection. However, the story also marks a new chapter in Tyson's life as he finds himself able to see the haldane entities generated by the clever men. Another element is added to the mix driving Tyson's world to confrontation.

**GOING TO THE ANGELS** is a powerful novelette revealing the power of the Ab'O tribes, and the unfeeling disregard which the Ab'O power structure holds for all other peoples. This story, perhaps worthy of a longer and more detailed treatment, is very nearly the trigger for all out conflict. Necessity, the desire to avoid war on Tyson's part, and the sheer lack of knowledge and a suitable power base to bluff and coerce further force a compromise which must surely be unsatisfactory to Tyson.

**VANITIES** is a short story written around a surprising conceit; it fishes after, catches, and then mirrors once more the magic of the world the Ab'O tribes have created.

**A DRAGON BETWEEN HIS FINGERS** shows more of the Ab'O mind power, that perhaps anybody may strive for, as a precious cargo of artificial biolife carried aboard *Rynosseros* is hijacked, first by an ambitious Ab'O captain, and then by pirates.

My favourite story in the book is **STONEMAN**. This one doesn't feature Tom Tyson or his sandship. Rocky Jim is a stoneman, one of a special cadre of eccentric workers whose job is to walk the highways of desert Australia and keep them free of stones and other litter so that charvolants may pass safely. Rocky Jim's great passion in life is the artificial intelligence of bell-trees, those lovely AIs created by earlier Ab'O philosophy and used as mileage posts on the roads to fill the interior of Australia with life. Rocky Jim is challenged to a slingshot duel by the mythic figure of a lone Ab'O prince in a deserted black Charvolant.

Also worthy of attention is the last story, **TOTEM**. Tyson and an old friend, Lisa Maiten, separately escort two notable scientists to the tribal biotect lifedump at Tell. The description says it all. This is the place where the Ab'O scientists dumped their failed designs. But the AIs are viable, there is the power of the sun and the wind, and life continues.

There has been a death.

In **TOTEM** Dowling wears his other hat - that of communications lecturer - and writes about interspecies communication in a medium where there is no mutually agreed upon set of meanings. His chief inspiration seems to be the theories of academic D. Berlo. Stories that take the theme of first contact so intelligently are rare in modern SF.

Tom Tyson's story is the story of Dowling's future Australia. His world is a mirror of our own; the Ab'O tribes are the possessors of a technology barely distinguishable from magic. His world is slowly moving towards a confrontation whose implications may not be fully apparent for a couple more volumes. Yet each story is a self contained adventure that can be enjoyed for its own sake. Obviously there must eventually be a novel in which the Nationals and the Ab'Os come into direct conflict. Tom Tyson will take an active roll in the conflict, and I suspect the myriad Artificial Intelligences will become more the agents of their own destiny than pawns and tools. It's a novel I'm looking forward to reading.

Through the whole of Tom Tyson's world runs a suspicion of autobiography. Dowling has invented a world and created a hero by writing a perception of himself into that world. He has given himself all those adventures the rest of us only daydreamed about as children.

# # #

*Wormwood* is a different future society, one which, if it is possible, is even more complex and wonderful than the world of Tom Tyson. The alien Nobodoi arrive on Earth and remake it with the aid of a

fragment of neutron star. The Nobodoi create a hierarchy of all their client races on Earth, and then disappear to allow their mysterious plans to mature.

At first glance, the wishes of humanity are totally irrelevant. Humans are the natives whose world has been taken over. They need not be considered, they are merely underfoot. A movement arises. It is a simple philosophy that says "We chose to be human, and we chose to maintain a human identity". There is nothing so flashy as the revolt in Gordon Dickson's *Way of the Pilgrim* which took advantage of a flaw in the alien mindset for victory. In *Wormwood*, the alien races don't have such flaws. Humanity is totally overwhelmed. There is no secret formula for removing the aliens. Humanity is treated according to the respect their actions deserve. And yet, it slowly becomes apparent that the Nobodoi have left room in their hierarchy of races for an aware and active humanity.

I'm not revealing anything major here. The hint is dropped on page 6 in a chart Dowling gives that shows the patterns of interaction and the flows of understanding between the races resident on Earth. Humanity is a "bridge" race destined to bring together three arms of the Nobodoi empire into a more harmonious whole without the previously required intervention of the Nobodoi themselves.

*Wormwood* opens with the novella, NOBODY'S FOOL, which pits the wit of Aspen Dirk, a boggler of alien artifacts of unknown purpose, against the will of the militaristic Hoproi, one of the three chief alien races. Dirk is assisted by his minder, Beford Hess, and the illegal identikin clone Hollis Green. The assignment is to boggle the greatest Nobodoi artifact of all, the Link.

The story suffers a little from the same problem that affected the first story of *Rynosseros*. Dowling has a very complex world - socially, physically, and culturally - to introduce to us, and NOBODY'S FOOL struggles to carry the load and remain readable. It manages better than COLOURING THE CAPTAINS in *Rynosseros* simply because it is longer. There is nothing wrong with the story; plot, background, themes, characters, entertainment value, etc, the story has it all. It is simply being asked to carry too far a load of information. This doesn't detract from a reader's enjoyment. The alien characters are *alien*, the entire design of Dowling's world reflects the very alienness of the constructs. Hollis Green, who appears again later in the book in another story, is a marvellous character and deserving of a longer work.

THE MAN WHO WALKS AWAY BEHIND THE EYES is a tragedy of love but a triumph of the human spirit. The human bureaucrat, Jamis Tralby, sinned against the Darzie by trying to cover-up the crimes of the human rebel, Jarin Kennenny. Tralby is sentenced to a mind-death where a Derzie telepath will enter his mind and shut down his thoughts from within.

A DEADLY EDGE THEIR RED BEAKS PASS ALONG is the second story to feature Hollis Green, the identikin clone who must always live in fear that his original will take out a contract for his death. Green

discusses death with a Hoproi, a Darzie, and a soon to be dead Salman, a creature who will then serve out a kind of indentured and mindless living death to another race so that it may afford to send its offspring home from Earth. Green's curiosity is manipulated by the Hoproi until he agrees to investigate the life barge of a Qualagi one-captain. Now, the Qualagi are born dead, but slowly achieve life, sentience and independence as their present parent releases them. I don't know if there is a term for the special kind of sense-of-wonder a story like this elicits. It is like discovering Eric John Stark, or Kimball Kinnison for the first time as a teenager, and then discovering the adventure is intellectually stimulating.

HOUSECALL continues in the same vein as a retired human burglar is blackmailed into continuing his trade. Jason Peck is a special kind of housebreaker. He specialises in Matta dwellings, and he only breaks in while the Matta is at home. The burglary becomes a battle of wits and honour as the Matta house defends its owner against the invading human. This time one of the invading humans has no honour.

The sense of wonder continues as the mad poet Anteli frees a sentient Trelban starship from servitude in IN THE DARK RUSH. Antelim knows the insterstellar voyage must kill him, but to achieve the experience he craves he denies the reality of his own death and commands the starship to proceed. Meanwhile, the starship comes to love the suicidal human.

The final story is FOR AS LONG AS YOU BURN. The Amazi female is nearly alone on Earth. She doesn't interact with any race except mankind, yet she has something of enormous value to offer mankind, if only humanity has the wit to recognise the gift and can swallow its pride long enough to accept.

*Wormwood* is stronger than either of the *Rynosseros* or *Blue Tyson*, yet there is more obviously a direction to Tom Tyson's life. *Wormwood* is a collection of stories that promises much, and it is not hard to guess the direction future stories may take, yet that continuity isn't yet present, perhaps because there is no continuity of characters. *Wormwood* needs another book to take it further. It remains simply a marvellous group of stories set against the same background. *Rynosseros* and *Blue Tyson* form a greater whole because there is a deeper plot tying events together. There is the promise of more to come.

# # #

Okay, so far this has been pretty much a flat out rave. There are a couple of points where Dowling's work fails. His science, if you happen to be one of those who like to know how the nuts are screwed onto the bolts, is not always spectacularly accurate. A geostationary satellite can't be "tethered" over Central Australia, it must remain over the Equator, or it isn't geostationary. Saying it is "tethered" simply makes the situation worse. A satellite can't "hear" anything from the planet's surface, no matter how good its "gain monitors" are. It is possible that a

laser will read vibrations caused by sound waves in a flat surface and that the modulations in the frequency of the laser can then be interpreted as sound. It is also possible a good camera can send images to a computer programmed to read lips. But sound up to orbit is a no-no.

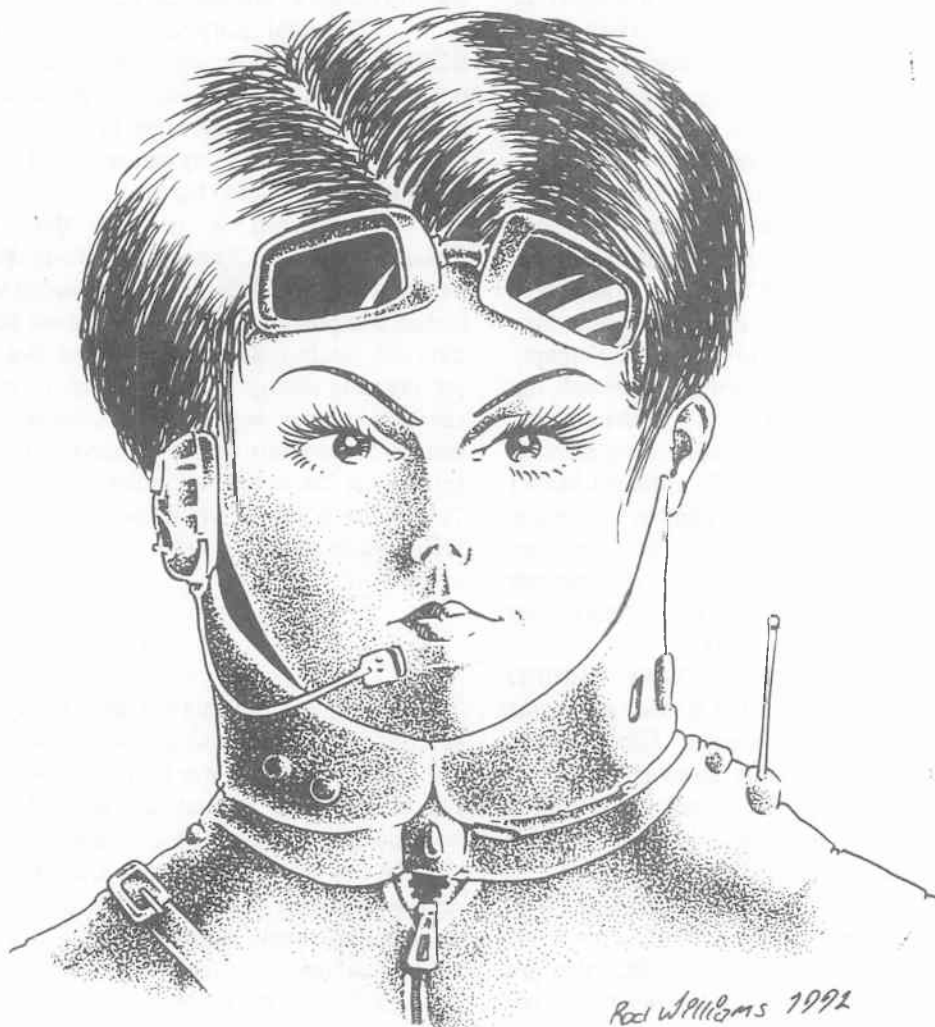
All three volumes have covers by Nick Stathopoulos. The cover for *Rynosseros* is stunning, a bare desert landscape with a backdrop of sky framed by the deeper blue of deep space. The cover for *Wormwood* is more of a mosaic, a sculpted set of Nobodoi symbols and architecture set against a browned with age old style map. This one works well as hardback cover, but I'm not sure how well it stands out on a shelf of paperbacks. The cover for *Blue Tyson* is conceptually the best of the three. This time the framing device is sand striated with minerals and the illustration is a bell-tree against an out of focus desert landscape. Unfortunately, the composition of the piece is slightly off, leaving all the framing devices subtly wrong. Having seen the original at a convention, I can only assume the printer didn't follow the artist's instructions. I suspect book design is part of the production learning curve for any small press publisher. But who gives a stuff about covers when the contents are so good?

Some critics have accused Dowling of copying the art of such pioneers as J G Ballard, Jack Vance, and

Cordwainer Smith. All of these writers have used the techniques Dowling plays with in his fiction. To the same list we should also add Robert Sheckley, and the Michael Coney who wrote the "Song Of Earth" volumes. That Jack Vance was written the introduction to *Blue Tyson*, and Harlan Ellison the introduction to *Wormwood*, shows what those writers think of the copycat theory. The techniques are available to all. Faren Miller wrote of Terry Dowling's work in LOCUS "The magic has returned". And so it has. The magic in Terry Dowling's work lies not in his style, which has been used before, but in the worlds he has created, and in this he is his own man.

I reread these books for this review, and found more to appreciate and find wonder in the second time around. These stories are absolutely Australian in their flavour and sensibilities, yet their appeal is universal. I'm secure in the knowledge I can return to them again in the future. These are books you will want to read again, and are worth so much more because of it.

The above books are available from: APHELION PUBLICATIONS, PO Box 619, North Adelaide, S.A. 5006, AUSTRALIA.



# THE FARM STORY

by Grai Hughes

The gunshots cracked all day.

The gunshots cracked all day, from when the sun blazed into the blue above the eastern pasture, beyond the rusting iron frame of the old windmill, the sentinel tower by the rust-barnacled water-tank that had been the fortress of so many childhood games, to when it fell, casting a thickening bloody light over the wheat field, west of the house and barn, whose upward grade made it seem a vast expanse extending to the horizon. The ripeness of that wheat, that ugly, stunted rust-ridden wheat, and its seemingly immensity under that sanguinary sun, were lies, hollow betrayals of light and land.

The gunshots woke me. A distant dry cracking. As dry as the hot wind rushing the fields of dead brittle wheat.

I pulled on my jeans and boots and ran through the kitchen, grabbing a piece of as yet unbuttered toast from Margaret's hand as I went, before she had a chance to slather on the rich yellow stuff. Her face, that despite her tremendous appetite, had of late been losing its cherubic look, formed its stern, motherly look, her eyebrows rising.

'Grandad said not to... he'll be livid!' But I had kicked open the screen door and was running for what I thought would be the last time to my tower.

I clambered up the iron frame, as high as the just risen sun, and sat on the wooden platform just below the rust eaten triangles of the blades. I could see Grandad, a small figure in white, by the carnival-red tractor, and the dust-red Hereford herd, their white faces skulls, milling before him. He pushed up his hat and dabbed at his brow with a red bandanna. Then he tied it around the barrel of the .33 Winchester, slung with a strap over his shoulder, and taking bullets from a box on the nose of the tractor began thumbing them into the breech.

I watched, shocked to the guts, yet fascinated, as he lifted the butt to his shoulder, and taking careful aim pumped bullets into the heads of the curiously calm and lowing cattle.

A red star exploded on the white skulls. The cows would loose their dung and drop suddenly, and I could imagine their eyes rolling with surprise and momentary pain, as they staggered and fell heavily to their sides raising a burst of dust. Some, their legs would kick a little, searching for the hard earth, before they were finally still.

Occasionally a beast would meander away from the herd, then Grandad would whistle a particular whistle, and Petersen, our black and white Collie cattle dog, with lips pulled back in a fool's, that when he snarled became a sneer, would leap around and bark and nip at their ankles until the straying beast had returned to the herd.

When a dozen or so were dead Grandad would climb into the tractor, kick over the engine with a spurt of diesel exhaust, and then reversing, using the grader on the back, push the carcasses into a ditch.

From my tower I watched Grandad's methodical labour. When half the herd lay dusty in the ditch, when the sun was a rage of gold high in the immense and oppressive blue, and the shadows of the windmill were little more than the lines of some curious hexagram scored in the earth directly below, so that my tower seemed of a sudden not so high as it had always previously been, I returned to the house.

Grandad came in with the purpling dusk. From the front room, amongst the packed cardboard cartons and suitcases, Margaret and I heard his boots clump heavily up the steps. We turned from the television murmuring quietly before us to watch him through the screen door.

Sweat ran down his arm from the rolled sleeve of his shirt, trickled over his fingers and steamed off the barrel of the Winchester, a blue mist under the bare globe that lit the porch, just a shade lighter than the gunmetal itself. He made a circling motion with the rifle, so that the bow of the kerchief tied around the end of the barrel licked the dust off the floorboards. Then he dropped it. A shot rang out the evening, with a certain finality, and Margaret clutched Zebediah, her toy horse, tighter in her hands.



Grandad's eyes in his weathered face, as dark and wizened as a dried apple, were rolling then staring, bloodshot and mad and had he not been such a hard man they probably would have been tear-filled. He seemed not to have heard or noticed the shot at all. Eyes rolling and staring into the blackening night, as mad as Old Bentback's, Margaret's pony, the day he'd eaten jimson weed and gone wild. We'd had to shoot Old Bentback. It looked like we'd have to shoot Grandad too, I thought with a harsh humour. Margaret would cry but she always did. She cried for a week when we shot Old Bentback, until Grandad had made with wire and straw and glue and some of Old Bentback's tail a small bedraggled unicorn, with a horn he'd carved from a cropped steer's horn. Old Bentback's soul was in that unicorn, Margaret said. She named it Zebediah and that had quietened her.

There were speckles of blood dried to black on Grandad's shirt and on his moleskins. Moths and gnats and mosquitos and iridescent beetles flickered around his head. He chucked off his hat, brushing at the insects which swarmed again around his ash-grey hair. He stomped through the front room without barely a nod at Margaret and I, and went down the hall to shower.

He was mad yesterday. Today he was crazy.

It wasn't the drought that had ruined our earth, like it had so many others. Grandad was canny. He'd used the last overdraught to stock up on cattle feed. Said he could smell a dry season on the breeze from the west. The government had deregulated the market though. Imported beef, from Asia, was cheaper than our dust. It cost more to truck the herd to auction than what we'd get for it. South West Queensland Beef and Dairy owned the trucking. They owned the auction yards. They owned the abattoir, the estate agent and the bank. We were shafted.

The bank delivered the foreclosure notice and posted the auction signs. A SWQBaD subsidiary would buy our farm, our cattle, like they had so many others, and razor a profit while we yet owed them our labour and our blood.

Grandad wouldn't even let the suit from the real estate even borrow a shovel to dig the post holes. Perfectly within his rights, Sheriff T. Jackson-Flynn said. The bastard had to drive the 167 kilometres back to Windorah to get a shovel.

Soon as the Sheriff and the bankers and estate agents had gone Grandad took a can of petrol and doused the Auction: Foreclosure signs and set them blazing. 'Bastards. Sweating collared men,' he spoke with derision, 'with narrow minds and small eyes. The suits that hang on their crooked shoulders like the hunched wings of carrion birds. Vultures - let them profit and feast on carcasses.' He didn't curse much, especially in front of Margaret, so when he did you knew he meant it.

Margaret just said how pretty the flames looked, all hallowe'en orange, burning triangles within squares livid against the dusk.

Me, I said nothing. I knew it was futile. I just could smell the burning in air, yet it seemed to hold... something special, like Christmas Eve and the last day of

school and the day after the finish of harvest all together. An expectancy of something new, change and freedom, and yet also an ending. Everything complete but not quite, and everything about to start again but not quite yet.

After dinner of greens and carrots and lamb roast that Margaret had put on in the afternoon, a dinner at which no one said as much as 'Pass the salt please', Grandad sat on his wicker chair on the porch drinking straight from a bottle of Johnny Walker he'd been keeping for a celebration. He'd given that bottle to Dad ten years ago when Margie was born. Mum and Dad had died only a month later in a car smash. I was five then, so although I remembered a lot about them, the smell of Mum's perfume and Dad's rough chin, and the sound of both their voices, Grandad had always been there too. That bottle had sat dusty and incelebrate on the self ever since. Yeah, tonight Grandad was celebrating.

We did the washing-up and Margaret helped me with my algebra homework; she was good at that sort of thing, I never had the patience. Then we watched TV for a while, a programme set in the lush English countryside. I couldn't bear it, the taste of dust still dry on my tongue, and went to bed.

But the moon lifted huge and butter-yellow over the fields out of my window, and I was too restless to sleep. There was a smell, heady on the warm breeze, like when we'd drive into Windorah along the highway, past the abattoir.

As I turned my mind to what the city'd be like (we'd be going in just under a month, after the auction, to stay with Aunt May in Brisbane) and began finally drifting into dreams, I heard Grandad go out into the night, the creak of the barn door, and then, like the breaking of a clock whose mechanism yet refused to fail completely, the rustle and twang of bailing wire, extolling some purely imaginary hour.

Margaret woke me earlier than the sun and said she couldn't find Grandad. She'd cooked a big breakfast of sausage and egg and fried tomato, and had even made both tea and coffee. Because she knew Grandad was a bit sad because he'd had to shoot all the cattle and even his horses to stop the bankers taking them, but when she went to wake him he wasn't there. He'd even let the chickens out and Petersen had killed a whole mess of them and was chasing the others around.

'And I'm absolutely livid!' she added, (she'd heard the word "livid" on TV and had been applying it liberally, ever since) pointing at the breakfast, now cooling, laid on the best Gingham cloth, with Zebediah clutched in her hand. But her cheeks were flushed as she held her face tight against the welling tears.

I went and looked. There were feathers and bloody chicken carcasses scattered around the yard. The rooster, escaped into the lower branches of a scraggly gum by the coop, whose wire door hung only by the lower hinge, crowed mournfully.

Petersen was barking and chasing a chicken that he'd half mauled so it was still running with its torn off head, held by one or two gory tendons, dragging a trail in

the dust. The dog was well on its way to becoming wild. There was blood on his white bib, and he gave us barely a glance, and that more snarling-guilty than cowed, before seizing the chicken and setting down to jaw it.

Then under the crystalline blue of the shadowless pre-dawn, a blue that of a sudden raged as the rim of the sun flared on the horizon, we saw something, glinting, moving in the wheat field. Margaret, standing by me on the porch pointed with Zebediah clutched in her hand, its horn piercing.

The glinting, silver and gold and shimmering as the sun licked it, made a twangy chimey music as it dashed amongst the wheat. Silver fire aspark amongst the sombre ochre of the field, it raised a dust haze as it ran, kicking the earth and crushing the wheat to powder. It swung something into the air, a crook'd stick, a scythe that caught the sun an arc on its blade against the cerule raging morning.

It was Grandad. I could see tufts of his ashen hair through the chrome cap on his head. He'd wrapped himself in baling wire and was hacking the wheat with the scythe like some madly animate scarecrow. He'd leap and twang and chime and slash a mighty slash out of the dead dry wheat. In the gusts of powder, he looked like some emaciated Michelen Man, like the one on the paint peeling sign at Murray's Tyre and Fuel in Windorah.

He quickly tired. I wasn't sure if he'd noticed us. He stuck the handle of the scythe into the earth and let it go as he dropped to his knees, vanishing but for a gleaming amongst the chest high stalks. The scythe bent over him like some curious long-necked, silver-beaked bird and as Grandad sobbed the wire jangled and twinged like tinny bells.

He grabbed handfuls of the cut wheat, which but for a few stalks turned to dust under the pressure of his hands. He just sat there, suddenly still, the powdered earth running through his clenched fists and the sun gleamed on his armour of wire and ablaze in the blue of his mirrored sun-glasses.

Margaret, tears wet on her face, suddenly ran forward. All blubbing she prised open his hands, taking the bundles of straw from his fists and pressed Zebediah into them.

'Don't be sad because you had to shoot all the animals, Grandad,' she said. And with her little hands she bent the thin sheafs of stalk around each other, so they looked like a rough straw doll of a beast. 'We can make more, like you made Zebediah, and they'll be even more pretty and their spirits will wander the fields of heaven with Zebediah.'

Grandad's head sprang up all of a sudden, like he'd heard a shot. He stood, all ajangle and glowing silver in the risen sun, and said, 'These fields forgotten. This earth has forsaken us, but that is the way of earthen things. I love you kids. Let's forget this earth and have a celebration.' He put his sliver twined arm around Margie, smiling now, as they emerged from the wheat to me, and we walked back to the house.

'Steven,' said Grandad as we finished the now cold breakfast, wolfingly, our stomachs rapacious with expectancy, 'your father's black suit, the one he wore to Grandmother's, bless her soul, funeral, in the green trunk, I think. Margaret, wear your mother's satin party dress. We'll rustle the best damn herd anyone's ever seen, and watch those duffer's from the bank's faces when they come to auction off the beasts!'

So I dressed in my father's black suit, which smelled of camphor, and Grandad found, rummaging in a box, Great Grandad's harness racing silks. So I slipped my arms into the harlequin vest. Then Grandad tied a green and blue polka dot tie round the neck of my red shirt, and pinned his father's war medals on my chest.

Margie strolled out, beaming, in Mum's emerald satin party dress, too loose around her thin shoulders. So she tightened it with sashes of silk around the waist, and a gold clasp that bunched up the baggy bosom, and draped herself in Mum's and her own jewellery so she glittered with chains of gold and brooches and pearls and rings, loose on her fingers.

Grandad strung his wires with the ring-pulls off beer cans and brass washers and Christmas tree ornaments and bells and ribbons of aluminium foil, and fridge magnets in the shape of fruit and Disney characters and smiley faces, and my old toy matchbox cars and keys and other bright metallic and jangling odds and ends, and stuck our Christmas star in his wire cap.

Margaret put on her straw hat, and I donned my wide brimmed Akubra. Grandad pulled the brim so the hat sat at an jaunty angle and said, 'Now. We're ready.' He took his camera and set the timer so it trapped a photo of us together on the end of the porch, with the scattered bodies of chickens and Petersen still leaping about behind us.

Then we pulled on our gumboots and Margaret said, 'We look positively livid!' And I'm sure we did, dressed for the maddest Hallowe'en costume party ever.

Then Grandad, with a jangle and a magician's flourish held up the tractor keys, and said, in a solemn tone, 'Mow the wheat field, Steven. Mow it all.' He hadn't ever let me drive the tractor by myself, alone, before, though I'd driven it a few times when he'd driven in to Windorah.

I grabbed the keys and ran for the barn, waving my hat in the air and hollering.

'I want a good sized stack, ya hear?' he shouted and laughed.

Revelling in some mad and wanton power, I climbed into the cabin, adjusted the seat upwards and forwards, put in the key and pressed the starter. The engine kicked and I revved John Bell's 360 horses of Cheverolet engine so it shouted spumes of diesel exhaust. I snapped on the stereo to a rock station, raised the harvester blades and roared out to the field.

I raised a hell of wheat dust and earth dust. Billows of ochre red chaff and the heavier dust of the earth, as I carelessly churned the ugly wheat. The dust raised and drifted for kilometres and turned the sky to a red rage, the sun within bloated and crimson. Under

which I drove, so that this haze was a cloud of hate shrouding me, swirling against the cab windows, fingers of it, tendrils, battering and dissolving against the glass, as the tractor roared and I bellowed and the music blared. And I inscribed a hexagrammatic mandala of my bitterness, my anger, upon that earth, no longer mine, that I had loved.

Then the habit of task superseded anger, bitterness, my savage joy and even my past love of that land, and I finished mowing the field with a care and an exactitude, writing an aeon old calligraphy rather than a scrawl. When the field was reduced to stubble, carpeted in straw, I lowered the hay-grader on the back of John Bell and reversed, inscribing a star from points to centre, pushing the wheat into one enormous stack. The scythe, I realized, forgotten in my initial storm, my later calm, like the proverbial needle, lost in its depths.

Then I mowed the now wild straggle that edged the field, of Paterson's Curse, and pushed the tangle of it to the haystack. Mum had planted it when she'd kept an apiary, and I remembered the distinctive taste of the honey from those purple flowers, matured in big earthenware jars, cool in the bottom shelf of the pantry, and how as a child in that treasure trove Mum had caught me, my fingers sticky, sucking the sweetness from them. But all she said was how the scrubby, purple flowered weed was also called Salvation Jane. And she'd dipped her finger in the jar too.

When the sun was middling in the sky and the dust clouds had mostly settled, Grandad and Margaret drove out in the Ford pick-up, a tangled jigsaw of wire jangling, teetering and towering in its tray.

Grandad waved a gleaming arm and I cut the tractor engine.

'Come on, Steven!'

'What do you think, Grandad?' I said with a nod towards the mountain of hay, edged with Paterson's purple tangles, that rose like some monstrous dusty bloom, as high as a house over the stubbled field.

'A veritable Himalaya, Steven, my boy. An Ulluru of straw! The biggest mountain of hay in the world.'

'It's ab-sol-ute-ly livid!' said Margaret.

Grandad was excited. He was crazy excited. 'We'll unload the pick-up then have our picnic lunch.'

Grandad let down the tail gate and rolled a tar drum off the back of the Ford. Then we lashed some rope amongst the tangle of wire. We pulled at it, straining, and it rolled off with a flutter of petals, like some enormous tumble weed, dropped a few curious wire shapes, and came to rest by the hay mountain. The bottom of the pick-up's tray was deep in flowers; irises and violets, chrysanthemums and marigolds, angel's trumpets and sprays and posies of, seemingly, every last flower from the garden. We shovelled them off, and the perfume crushed out of them, and they sat a small, brightly coloured hillock by the hay.

Margaret had spread a sumptuous lunch from a larder basket; of pickles and cold roast chicken, pizza

slices and walnut cake and whipped cream, and plastic containers of syrupy peaches, and sticks of celery and cocktail onions, and mayonnaise and bread rolls, salads and mangoes and bananas and crystalized ginger, and tasty biscuits, and green and black olives and cubes of assorted cheeses, upon a lurid quilt of multicoloured paisley.

Of dynamic ribbons and globe symbols, and banks and corporations and the *novus ordo saeculorum*. Of the over-organism, entitius without consciousness, of a generic symbology whose enticing heraldries were the blooms of corruption. Of continuous logos and static logos. Of white noise and chaos. Of bleakness dressed in rainbows. Of how the city was a palace of mirrors. How the reversals of mirrors are lies, how at least broken mirrors, shards, at least admit they lie. Of how many people are mirrors, are shards that do not know they are fragmentary. Of contemporary man, convoluted of romanticism and cynicism. Of glass houses full of stone throwers.

And the sun bloomed on him, and silver light swelled from his face, incandescent. And we knew he was mad, but both Margie and I listened in rapture, to this man of wire and leather whose raucous laughter shook his body and range the midday with jangling and tinkling and twangs and chimes. A discordant, but for that, a more delightful music.

'And now to work!' And we stood, brushing the crumbs from our finery.

Grandad and I started untangling shapes from the tumble of wire, while Margie packed away the luncheon. We stood the wire skelata of cattle all round, and they cast thin, squiggly lined shadows on the dusty and stubby earth.

Grandad, with a long handled brush began ladling tar over the frames, and when he'd finished one Margie and I stuck sheafs of the hay, tangled with Paterson's Curse, to the legs, torsos and heads of the beasts, so that they were spindly legged and barrel chested. Then, when a few were done, and Grandad kept tarring and I kept tying on the hay, Margaret stuck a red chrysanthemum to the end of each muzzle as a mouth, and violets or daisies or irises as eyes, and tired stiff straw tails to their rears. While she waited for me to finish she'd mottle the straw bodies with other flowers.

We worked, only stopping to drink Cokes or nibble at some cheese and biscuits from the basket. By three in the afternoon, when the sun was at its hottest and highest, and the blue was paling under that fire to a harshity of white, a magnificent herd of fat straw beasts stood quiet on their sun-blasted pasture. We were tufted with straw and patched with petals and splattered with tar, and looked, as we stood admiring our beasts, like a trio of motley scarecrows.

Dog weary but happy we drove back to the house and cleaned up. We ate, then stood out on the porch and watched our herd, silhouetted, fat and proud, on the beckoning dusk.

My dreams that night were unremembered - but of soaring above and away, towards, then coming through, an unremitting turbulence.

The day opened with a raw crystalline light. In that shadowless pre-dawn I ran out, for what I knew with the certitude of childhood's end, would be the final time, to my tower. The structure seemed to rise up against the boiling blue of morning, a monochromia that in its oneness demanded hold of the infinite.

The grit of the rusting iron, as I climbed to that giddy height, into that blue void, was the stuff of the firmament.

So I remembered, the rust in my hands, it also towered after the long descent of evening, the world shrinking away below. But this turning was the tower's decline, and the curved horizon ever rising.

Over which, as I topped the platform and swung my back to the imminent sun, my arm hooked around the rust encrusted axle of the fan, against the screaming blue and a fat and livid white daylight moon, blazed our golden and bejewelled herd.

As the sun then razed the dawn to day, blazed at my back and I felt its touches on the back of my neck and on my arms, and the shadow of the tower bean its slow creep out, the tower declining all the while. And the farm under the first glow of that mocking liquid light, the miraculous beasts spread below, seemed a momento, a bizarre Calvary preserved under a dome of blue glass. For Grandad had taken his silver wire wrappings, my father's black suit, and mother's emerald dress, our fine costumes of yesterday complete with regalia, and made three scarecrows. Curious shepherds overseeing the herd, on wooden crosses.

*Fleshed in straw and thistle and Paterson's Curse  
Crimson mouthed and violet eyed  
When the farm died  
After the scorching months  
We shot the herd  
Took a thousand kilometres of baling wire  
and tied a hundred head of cattle  
And three fine horses  
They stood proud, our golden calves  
Then the rains blew in  
And scattered them  
And they rotted in the sun.*

Shake a Nativity under glass and snow falls. A wind smelling fat with rain of sudden shook this earth, and the beasts bristled against it. the dust raised and swirled, momentarily filling, without obscuring this dome.

But the sun hauled down the earth, and the shadow of my tower grew long, and it declined so that I almost stood upon the ground. So too lengthened the shadows of our quivering beasts, and they seemed to move in fear. Golden calves before some coming wrath.

A storm as black and immense as the onslaught of a winter's night swept over the horizon. The wind that gusted before it turned the blades of the mill, so they creaked around, rhythmically vibrating. The rust bitten vanes at the back snapped side to side in the gusts, like the

tail of some ominous bird. And the earth tilted away and my tower seemed to rise and fly, as it I rode on the back of this malevolent bird, so fast towards the rushing blackness. I clambered down and ran back to the house.

The rains, slow at first so the heavy drops kicked up spirits of dust, then of a sudden hammering, then slashing down, scattered our beasts. Tumbled them, stampeded them. Knocked them to earth, ate away their flesh of straw, plucked out their eyes and mouths and the bright mottle of their hides, which floated away, a scum of petals on the flooding rivulets.

It thundered and flashed for only half an hour. We watched from the porch, distraught, this hell lit in lightening flashes. Then the sun came out, smeared over the slick earth. Quickly drying, glinting on the bent and tangled skeleta of our strewn beasts. Muddy clumps of straw began to ripen and rot, smelling like foul silage.

Grandad seemed transformed to his usual taciturn self, but we knew he wasn't; he was hurting as if cursed. We took our cases and odds and ends and put them in the pick-up. Margie clutched Zebediah in her hands. Grandad had an old and browning family photo in his lap.

The last I saw of the farm as we drove off for Windorah was a few lonely, bedraggled beasts of tattered straw and Paterson's Curse, the scythe, glinting, which somehow had remained planted in the earth, and also we three fanciful scarecrows beside it.

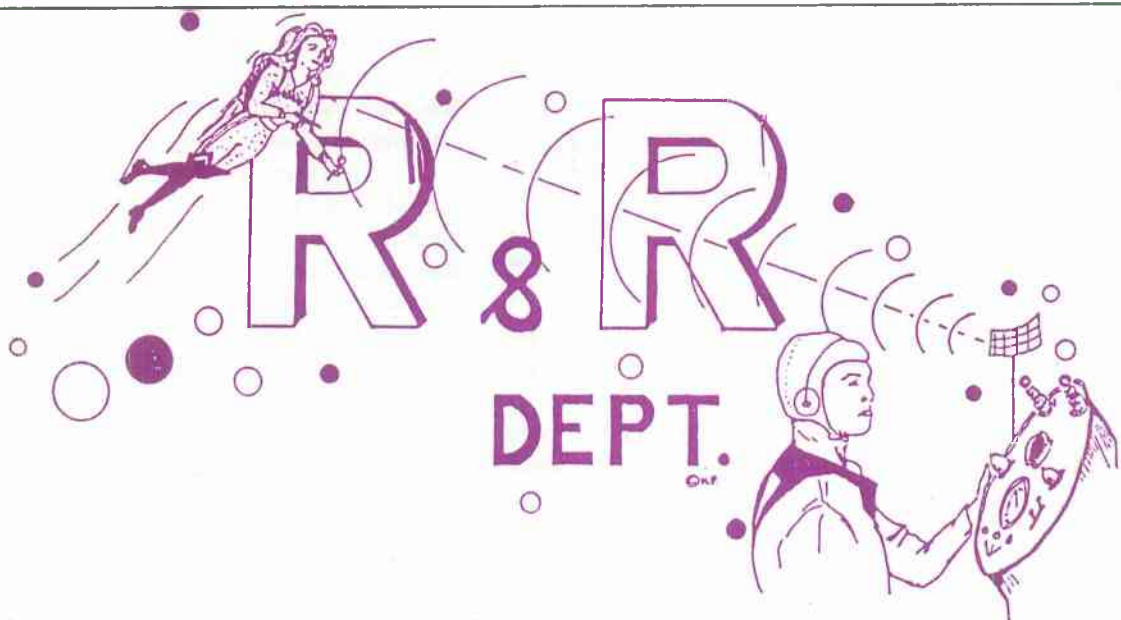
Our flowered eyes weeping, our flowered mouths laughing.

A year or so later, in a southern suburb of Brisbane, in an ordinary life in which we walked to school rather than studying by relay satellite, Margaret wrote a poem that won a school competition, and was published in a local paper.

People asked me about the poem. Teachers, a journalist, Aunt May. What did Margaret mean by it?

So I wrote this story.

end



**SYDNEY J. BOUNDS, 27 Borough Rd, Kingston on Thames, Surrey KT2 6Bd, UK.**

Blair Hunt's FUGITIVE (TM 74) was the most interesting story in this issue. Unusually, it could have been better if the author had developed it more. This one suffers by being compressed. It might sell to a pro mag if the author takes the trouble to fill it out.

Buck Coulson, as usual, was interesting, but I find it sad that conventions are now so expensive that "without that table, we couldn't have afforded to go". It seems that sf cons are only for the well off these days.

Of the illustrations, I liked best Jozef's on page 6, and I am pleased to see he has now made it professionally in OBLEGON.

**THE JEWELLED MIRROR:** The first sentence put me off. I believe it is a mistake to mix past and present tense, especially in one sentence. One or the other throughout, please.

Best non-fiction goes to Andrew Darlington this time, and I hope you can persuade him to do a column. I met Mary Patchett years ago, and seem to recall she was better known for her horsey stories for children. I believe William F ("Bill") Temple wrote some juvenile sf adventure books but cannot remember titles.

Of the poems I liked Janet Cooper's STARLIGHT - but is the third line necessary? It seems to me to read better without it.

An interesting selection of letters again. Just Clip the Coupon was a nice piece of nostalgia, and amusing.

I read THE STAND in the original printing and considered it too long then; I don't contemplate reading an even longer version.

OUT OF OZ is a column I hope you will develop in the future. I'm sure a lot of your overseas readers will appreciate this.

I haven't caught up with Pratchett's MOVING PICTURES yet, but have recently read GUARDS! GUARDS! He gets better all the time.

This is written on the hottest day of the year (so far) according to the weatherman, so any spots of grease are me. (29.6.92)

**NED BROOKS, 713 Paul St. Newport News, VA 23605. USA.**

Much thanks for the Mentor 74. All I can recall ever reading of the 1950s sf that Darlington lists are the two Heinlein juveniles. I have since acquired a couple of W E Johns books, but they are about Biggles rather than sf.

Interesting to read about Peter Brodie's difficulties with the Soviet customs inspectors - apparently postal thievery is common to ill-governed countries. Several things I sent Mae Strelkov simply disappeared, and she was not surprised. And I recently received an order from a Buenos Aires bookstore asking that the book be sent registered. They also wanted 5 copies of the invoice sent by air - it will be interesting to see if I ever receive any payment for this book!

Odd that I should never have heard before of the sf church that Steve Sneyd mentions having been established in 1978 by Suzette Haden Elgin. The ideas expressed in the hymn that he quotes do turn up in Bob Zentz's folksongs "Chariots" and "The Eyes of Nostradamus". I hear Zentz has a third album out, but haven't gotten a copy yet - he isn't famous enough to get into the music stores on this side of Chesapeake Bay, and driving to his store in the summer weekend traffic is a daunting prospect.

My mind was somewhat boggled by Don Boyd's notion that the moon as seen from Texas is "upside down" as compared to that seen from Oz - surely it is obvious that the face of the moon as seen from Earth inverts itself everywhere between moon-rise and moon-set? (3.7.92)

*(From Australia, the moon can be seen to actually have a 'face' - Ron.)*



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STEVE SNEYD, 4 Nowell Place, Almondbury, Huddersfield, W. Yorks. HD5 8PB, UK.

Saw a review somewhere highly praising an SF novel by an Australian - Paul Voermans' *AND DISREGARDS THE REST* (Gollancz over here) - "Voermans' has rejected bland internationalism to produce an uncompromisingly and evocatively Australian novel whose personalities ring true on every page. Excellent first book. Highly recommended" - review was Michael Cooban. I think from the type paper will be Yorkshire Post.

Returning to Rachel McGrath-Kerr's fascinating question - "Is it a difficult task to write poetry on an sf/fantasy theme, compared with writing about the mundane? Or is there a bonus in having an (almost) unlimited poetic license?"

I started searching out relevant quotes, developing logical structures, etc, but (a) a footnotised article is not really in the loc spirit, (b) she's given me the idea for a proper article sometime today, so I'll spare you all the "heavyweight apparatus a la litcrit" and just try to respond briefly and hopefully meaningfully.

There have to be caveats to any such answer. *First*, that there will be as many answers, I imagine, as there are SFnal/speculative poets - I can only answer for myself. *Secondly*, that writing poetry is, at least in my case, to a great extent the work of the "reptile brain", subconscious, or even that horrid disembodimentally twee word "the muse". The part of the mind that comments on what is written is, in many ways, a different entity, a spectator to the "poetic process" whose opinions may well bear little relationship to what is really going on between synapses and typewriter keys. *Third*, that my conscious opinions of what I am "up to" when writing genre poetry have inevitably been modified by many years of reading the opinions and debates of others on the topic, in for example the articles and letter pages of *STAR\*LINE*, the magazine of the Science Fiction Poetry Association, and elsewhere. (There are some discussions of matters relating to the writing of genre poetry which would be slightly more readily available than back files of *SL* - if Rachel wanted to borrow Edward Lucie-Smith's 1969 "seminal" SF poetry anthology *HOLDING YOUR EIGHT HANDS*, available lately on library loan in the UK, the introduction is a good example. There is a rather shallow and impressionistic article of my own in the BSFA's *FOCUS*, #23, last year but probably still available, which points to other sources. And K.V. Bailey's fascinating article *ALIEN OR KIN? SF POETRY* is being reprinted in expanded and revised form in the next issue of *FANTASY COMMENTATOR* in the States, about the end of this year.) So I claim little originality for what I say - "inspiration is forgetting the names of your sources", as someone said. Enough disclaimers already!

A very simplistic answer to Rachel's linked/entwines questions is that the mundane is itself utterly fantastic. To expand/clarify a poet *cannot*, to my mind, capture even the tiniest part of current reality, ingenious as some of the attempts have been, in any sort of

gestalt form, though the *attempt* creates some fascinating results. (eg Peter Regrove's work as "scientist of the strange" - ie any depiction of what is already known to exist, if done in sufficiently insightful depth, is almost unbearably fantastic - assuming, that is, that there is a genuine "shared reality" anyhow, and not as many "realities" as there are perceived). So, yes, there is a certain "easing of tension" for the writer in that a genre poem need not attempt to encapsulate what already exists and is, in fact, unencapsulatable (if such a word be possible) in words (though I do think the poetry "of the mundane" *can* get nearer than prose to "snapshot truth", if only as a fragmentary glimpse not of reality itself but of how the writer's brain at some level is reacting to or has reacted to it.)

The difficulty is also eased to the extent that SF, despite all its fragmentation into "schools" and styles, *does* have a shared body of images, tropes, whatever you wish to call them, which can be drawn on, and do not require in-depth explanation within a poem, provided that poem has a genre readership (the deghettoisation problem then arises - ie shd such terminology as hyperspace be explained for non-genre readers - but that problem arises with *any* poetry relating to specific topic knowledge areas, be it topographical/sense of place, jazz-related poetry, religious or metaphysical poetry - at some level there *has* to be an assumption that readers *will* wish to explore new data, whether the poem about a prehistoric earthwork in the Pennines or mutant cybermen on Betelgeuse V where the "data" is in fact a construct drawn on "not happened yet" projective data, using "shared SF possibility projections".

As to unlimited poetic license - I *don't* feel an escape from parameters in that sense. Psychological plausibilities still apply, or should; there may be an escape from the covert censorship of "political correctness" though PC is creeping into genre poetry also, as it has into so much else writingwise; there is, as said, the escape from the doomed attempt to be a "true mirror" on this world directly; but in fact, certainly in my case, most of the poetry, perhaps all, is in effect commenting on current human reality as reflected through a mirror of time/space displacement into whatever future, so, just as the "ghost of narrative" is inescapable, even if only as narrative of writer's struggle with material, so the "ghost of the present" is always there approving or disapproving of the "psychic truth" aimed at in genre work. And even in the practical sense of "making up wonders", the same factor which I think at a deep level undermines surrealist poetry applies, ie the "brain machine" can only "imagine" within the limits encoded in its own deep structures, which clearly differ from individual to individual, but I share, inevitably, species constraints.

A "footnote" I can't resist, namely, *if* no poetry can truly represent reality, *then* all poetry is fantasy, ie genre. QED? (9.7.92)

(I am sure that your comments will receive some feedback from the readers next issue, Steve - Ron.)

SHERYL BIRKHEAD, 23629 Woodfield Rd, Galtersburg, MD 20882, USA.

Thanks for THE MENTOR #74 - I am especially glad to have it after the Ranson-Scissorhands (sp?) cover - so I could see all the nice comments that were made about Peggy's cover. She is truly a nice and very talented lady and deserves all these and more. It is rare for a fan to say thank you for artwork contributions, so the egoboo has to come from any source. I cannot think of any piece that has generated so many nice comments. I'm sure you know she was nominated for the Hugo this year - making it her second nomination since she discovered fandom at NolaCon!

Thish has yet another nice Ranson cover and is just, veritabily, packed with nice Ranson illos. Way to go!

THE FUGITIVE is only a snippet of things to come. It needs a bit of polish and is more like an episode than something that can stand in its own right. Needs work, but seems to have a future.

I enjoyed Buck's account of his Chicon. I was surprised to get the \$10 rebate (so to speak) check from them - I'd have preferred that they spend the money on the con and more substantial Hugos. I am sure that, by now, I *must* have seen accounting somewhere, but nothing comes to mind in the financial columns. So far, this year, Orlando neglected to contact any of the fan nominees, but if that is the worst thing that happens - other than the *Super Hugo* ballot having mistakes - it might go fairly smoothly. I spent a few minutes yesterday looking at the layout map for the con and trying to see if there was any sort of protected walkway from the primary hotel (the *Peabody*) to the Convention Centre - couldn't find it. I know the map probably is not drawn to scale, but wonder how much hoofing attendees will have to do back and forth, especially if there is no tunnel (or such).

THE JEWELLED MIRROR is yet another episodic piece - but very polished and well written. I expected it to be the opening door to a full-blown work - I hope it eventually is worked into something longer.

Andrew Darlington's piece on juvenile SF of the '50s points up the different authors in different countries - most mentioned are unfamiliar to be, more my loss.

An observation is that the poetry might be presented more easily with illos (but, I have no idea what your sources of artwork are - so this is merely an observation and I have no way of knowing if you have tried this and whether it worked or not - forgive me for coming in on the middle of something). Peggy's piece at the end of the poetry adds much to the presentation... just a thought.

I rarely buy books these days, but always enjoy reading reviews and, potentially, filing away those that look interesting - for future reference. I usually buy by author name, or on whim after reading a blurb, but sometimes a review will prompt me to keep a name in mind and actually try to track it down. (7.7.92)

(Book prices are high; I think more readers are haunting the second hand stores and looking for "specials" in the ordinary bookshops. - Ron)

BRENT LILLIE, 10 Cherub St, Tugun, Qld 4224.

As usual, TM 74, like it's predecessors, was a damn good read. The fiction? Well, I thought Blair Hunt's contribution to be short and to the point, and quite clever. THE JEWELLED MIRROR by Maria Louise-Stephens reminded me of something when I read it. I scanned some old files and came up with some poems we'd looked at in a TAFE writing course a couple of years ago, and suddenly it dawned on me. The story was uncannily similar to Tennyson's LADY OF SHALLOT, except that Maria's version had a happier ending... I think. A lonely woman, a hero, come to free her from her bondage. "She leans forward. The mirror becomes cloudy, dark. Touching the mirror, her fingers meet no resistance..." And, from the poem:

"mirror clear  
That hands before her all the year,  
Shadows of the world appear..."

As for the rest. Enjoyed Buck Coulson's contribution. Andrew Darlington's piece, I couldn't really get into, though it's obvious plenty of others would love it. I'm more of a Trekkie, myself. If I'd been granted a solitary wish when I was twelve, it wouldn't have been for world peace or a million dollars; it would have been to be on the crew of the Enterprise. Wouldn't be bad even now.

I like the poetry. It never *rhymes*, though.

I took note of the varied comments on ARISE, YOU SOFT MACHINES; and I must admit, some of the criticisms were quite valid. Sometimes you get so involved with a story you can't see what must be glaring inconsistencies to a first-time reader. I'm going to contribute the story to the professional markets, and I thank Pamela Boal for pointing out that anyone who had the technology to create an access membrane would surely be able to stop the wind getting through the walls. The bit about the tie, though, stays. By the way, Pamela, Sam was the main character in the story, not Decker. He was the fellow in the control room.

Boy, it seems that Stephen King made a big blue when he released another version of THE STAND. Everyone's giving the poor bastard a nice old bagging. When he turns his hand to SF, King can really make your skin crawl, though. Who's read the short story I AM THE WINDOW? I thought that was great. (13.7.92)

Not fair, all those stories in TM 75 about nuclear winters - the magazine arrived in the middle of a cold snap (yes, we do have them on the Gold Coast), and I almost got frostbite reading them. SANCTUARY, in particular, left me cold - and I mean that in the nicest possible way. The bit about the frozen river and the pursuing dogs was especially vivid. Although the actual writing was a touch amateurish ("Tom and Jan ran" - sounds a bit like a preschooler's library book), the author showed a lot of descriptive skill, and should keep at it. Plenty of potential, that's obvious.

I'm not one of Sean William's greatest fans, and HEARTBREAK HOTEL proved to be a bit of a

disappointment for me. The first half of the tale was tight and involving, but when old Nick thawed out and announced he was from the future, the whole thing went downhill faster than a runaway bobsled. Actually, I was expecting old Nick to be Santa Claus or something. Snow, nuclear winter, Santa - it could all go together if you worked on it. It was as though the author started off with a good idea, then had a dinner break and lost the plot over his apple strudel.

ASHTA THE FOOL wasn't bad: the clever twist was nice. In fact, I enjoyed all the fiction apart from LORD OF THE EARTH'S ELDERS. By the time I got to it, I'd had enough of dying worlds to last me a millenium, and the strange punctuation put me off a bit.

The poetry was enjoyable (it rhymed!), and WAY BACK WHEN was a great change of pace in a very well-balanced issue. The best I've read yet. 929.7.92)

MARIA LOUISE-STEPHENS, PO Box 138, Monbulk, Vic 3793.

Thank you for THE MENTOR. At first I always read your editorial, then the comments of the R&R Dept, hoping there is some criticism.

I shall tell your something funny. i had found the mistake, after I had sent the letter off, and thought: oh, Ron is the editor, he will correct it. And this is said in fun, Ron, by not correcting it: did you set me up??? I mean mixing imperfect with present?

*[No, I print the stories as they come, with maybe putting in a comma or two. I also don't change the published letters. The idea for publishing the stories as is, is to get comments on them; sometimes with the letters I might change the meaning of the letter writer if I consciously changed the letter (not when I make typos). Anyway, I thought THE JEWELLED MIRROR stood on its own - the only reason I publish the stories I do is that I think they are worth publishing - I like them in some way. With yours, among other points, I liked the mood generated. - Ron.]*

Some of the criticisms I object to. I'll tell you which: having to go back to a writing class so that I remember what the character wears throughout - oh, dear, the prince in the flashback would have been very surprised to have seen the girl in a green skirt and a yellow blouse; and then the tenses. Apart from the awful first mistake, the girls lives in the present, so I talk about *now*, but then she goes back into the past and of course as all that happened before, I use the imperfect, deliberately - but the tunnel is still attached to the present, to give the sort of feeling: she could still go back, if she wanted to.

Also a tunnel can "beckon", it is the same as entice or lure, which I didn't want to use - and my critical friends here quite understood that it was the dancers, who wore the jewels, and it was they who twisted and turned, of course, *not* the jewels.

Another mistake someone (not I) made: "it is her last visit", not her *first*. She loves this white marble fortress in the lake - that is why she also has knowledge of its past.

And bringing in "foreign" language. It is Hindi, of course written phonetically. I could speak some, but never was able to write it... when the girl comes back into the present, having been and talked in the past, would she immediately speak English, when in the past she wasn't English? She still thinks in Hindi and then realising where she is, she starts thinking in the other language.

There are such a lot of things one has to think of when letting one's imagination go. (17.7.92)

DUNCAN EVANS, RMB 1392 Mt. Gambler Rd, Casterton, Vic 3311.

Thanks for the copy of TM #75. None of the fiction pieces were bad, though I wouldn't say they all qualified as stories. Writers, as a breed, are brain damaged. It's well known. They persist in trying to teach people lessons. Okay. But if you're going to be sticking messages in your stories, you should at least have a real story to stick it in. A good yarn that manages to get the propaganda across while it entertains is great. A good yarn for its own sake, with no real message at all, is also great. But a message propped up there with no story in sight is just preaching, much like I'm doing now.

SANCTUARY by Bill Congreve was cleanly written. Never do the bad things in church, folks. I liked the bit where they crossed the river - if you want to make your audience sit up and take notice, kill a dog I always say. Make it suffer as it goes and you'll really get 'em. I've done it myself, and it works (and if you want to see it done with stone cold precision, get your paws on THE WATCHERS by Charles Maclean). I like dogs, by the way.

HEARTBREAK HOTEL by Sean Williams was also a good yarn. Gave me a queasy turn half way though when aspects of it began to look like something I've been sweating blood over for months now, but that's my problem - and besides, the resemblance never developed past the superficial level. Wasn't thrilled with the ending so much, but what the hell do I know?

ASHTA THE FOOL by Blair Hunt I also liked. On the strength of that story, this person writes well - less is more and all that.

Andrew Darlington's article, JAMES BLISH: CITIES FLY, WORDS TOO was not , to me, quite as good as his ROBOT ARCHIE effort in TM #73. However, since I haven't read the subject material on which either piece was based, but *still* found both entertaining, he obviously didn't do too badly, did he?

I enjoyed Buck Coulson's column. We grow beans at our place too. Chainsaws aren't so bad, just stay away from the big ones. I could add something about cement mixers from recent experience, but will try to resist.

Michael Hailstone's travel story was fascinating, and reminded me of friends I haven't seen in a while. Could someone tell me about this MATALAN RAVE?

*[MATALAN RAVE is Michael's fanzine, which, if you like travel tales, would be just for you. Write to him at PO Box 15, World Trade Centre, Melbourne, Vic 3005,*

enclosing a couple of dollars - he may have some spare copies. - Ron]

As for the science fiction poetry: I would never have believed these creatures existed if I hadn't just now been mauled by a pack of them. None of it was actually unbearable (none of that "looky-what-I-just-found-in-my-belly-button" stuff). Actually, it was all quite good. For poetry. It's me, I guess. Most poems I see these days make me fidgety. It's a tricky one isn't it? You get the feeling that half of what gets published would have been more comfortable ticked up safe in its journal, and that the rest ought to be shut in the attic so it can't molest the villagers - let it out to roam the battlements at full moon by all means, just for Gawd's sake don't let it near a photocopier.

Mind you, there aren't many of us who couldn't be had up on a charge of Reckless Versifying. As youngsters, just about everybody indulged - some to the point of blindness. Only last year I was happily digging through the graveyard when a brood of my own teenage monstrosities caught a glimpse of daylight and came snuffling up to lick my hand. Thinks: 'So *that's* what the smell was!' Mate, I couldn't get the fire started fast enough. Poor club-footed beasts - they went shambling into the flames, still bleating: '*Nobody loves me. No one understands me. I'm not worth shit.*' I could only laugh, and no one else cared, so I guess they were right about that.

Don't be bothering with poetry. It's for social workers, the pale-and-interesting, and people who can't afford real therapy. Write stories. It pays just as bad and you get to spend more of your drinking money on postage and printer ribbons. (19.7.92)

BLAIR HUNT, PO Finch Hatton, Qld 4756.

Nice to see ASHTA in issue 75. Another good cover on this one too.

I seem to have come in for a caning from the critics over FUGITIVE. Strange really because it was intended to be an innocently nostalgic little story and I must own to be a bit overwhelmed to see terms like U.S. imperialism, Drivel and, God the mark, the man's accused me of Expressing patriarchal power over women! Jesus, Grai Hughes, Blaxland, NSW. Steady up a bit! Is it something I said?

At this point it would be appropriate to thank those who's criticisms took a more constructive form. In particular referring to my mistaken use of semi-colons were all too accurate, embarrassing but accurate, as were several remarks about the opening scene being too long and containing mixed metaphors.

As for those who actually liked the story and took the trouble to say so. You've won me!

As for Joy Buchanan's letter. Fantastic! Imagine being the subject of speculation. I'm tempted to prolong the suspense. But no, I confess I am a male. I guess that means that you lose and Ron wins. Did you have any money on it?

It never occurred to me that my name could be the source of this kind of confusion, though of course it should have. I have a grandson and a niece both named after me! (20.7.92)

JULIE HAWKINS, 26 Thrd Ave., North Katoomba, NSW 2780.

Thanks for THE MENTOR, I did actually find time to read it. Pity about the cover, no pretty colours! But I guess it matched the stories. Anyway, I sat down for some light reading and ended up feeling worse. What a depressing line up of work! Couldn't you have put one happier piece in, although I suppose it could be said that the fact that mankind was in the stories at all was a bright point.

I'm not really into poetry, although as a Literature student I could give you a critical analysis. Unfortunately I haven't got the time or the room (we can both breathe a sigh of relief here). I did read the poems, and that's about all.

As usual the R&R DEPT was a good read, nothing's changed, has it? The artwork was o.k., didn't seem to be as much in this issue. Overall the mag was great (as usual).

Here's something that might interest you. I am presenting a seminar on "The Genre of Science Fiction" for Literature and a researched essay on the question "Are we living in a Science Fiction World?" for another class. There are a number of s.f. readers in my classes, some of whom have asked about THE MENTOR after seeing my copy.

A few people have said they would have come to a meeting of the (Blue Mountains) SF group if they'd known about it. A bit late now. Maybe in the future we can do it again.

Anyway that about covers it. I honestly didn't know how long it would take me to get to this letter, between kids, homework, birds and painting orders I haven't got much time left.

Oh yeah, one of my teachers sculpts models of fantasy characters; he took one from an Anne McCaffrey book. One of his dragons can be seen in a real estate office in Wentworth Falls, Raine and Horne, I think. (21.7.92)

R LAURRAINE TUTIHASI, 5876 Boweroff St, #4, Los Angeles, CA 90016, USA.

Thank you for THE MENTOR #73. It arrived 24 April; I apologize for my delay in loccing. I was laid off shortly after I received your zine. I had received my notice a month earlier, and I became very busy looking for another job. Eventually, I decided to take a course on Electronic Engineering and Computer Technology. This meets every day and will keep me busy until early January. It took me a while to adjust to my new schedule and catch up with backed up correspondence and reading.

I enjoyed reading the REST OF THE TRIP. You mentioned credit cards as good to use during trips abroad. I have also found this to be the case. Even in friendly

countries, such as Canada, I find I get a better exchange rate from the credit card than from cash.

I appreciated your review of William Gibson's *THE DIFFERENCE ENGINE*. This one actually sounds readable and possibly even interesting. After reading two of his cyberpunk novels, I would never have gone back to this author on my own. I found those books totally unreadable. I found they lacked any coherent plot.

I'm also wondering whether I missed Asimov's *CHILD OF TIME* or I was just waiting for it to appear in paperback. Not that it matters terribly right now. I won't be buying books until I am re-employed. (16.7.92)

**GEORGE IVANOFF, 30 3rd St., Mentone, Vic 3194.**

Thanks for TM 75. I enjoyed Bill Congreve's *SANCTUARY*, but I thought the ending wasn't very satisfying. *HEARTBREAK HOTEL* by Sean Williams and *ASHTA THE FOOL* by Blair Hunt were my favourites. I didn't like *GREY CLOUDS*, although I can't really say why. T. J. Brook's *ROCK A BYE BABY* was effective, as was Andrew L. Sullivan's *LORD OF THE EARTH'S ELDERS*.

Since TM 75 is the first issue I have received, I haven't read Bill Congreve's article on Steven King's *THE STAND* - only the comments about the article. Having read a number of Steven King books I thought I'd make few comments.

The first King book I read was *THE TALISMAN* which was co-authored by Peter Straub. This was a fantasy rather than a horror, although there were some horror elements. I found it completely engrossing and thoroughly entertaining. In fact I enjoyed it so much that as soon as I had finished it I bought another of his books, *THE EYES OF THE DRAGON*. This book was even more fantasy and less horror. Set in a fantasy world of dragons and magicians it is about a young prince wrongfully imprisoned for his father's murder. Again I found it an extremely enjoyable read.

The next King book I read was *DIFFERENT SEASONS*, a collection of four novellas: *RITA HAYWORTH AND SHAWSHANK REDEMPTION*, *APT PUPIL*, *THE BODY* and *THE BREATHING METHOD*. This book impressed me a great deal, and is by far my favourite. This book shows how versatile in subject matter the man can be.

Next I read *SALEM'S LOT*. This was the first straight King horror that I read, and I wasn't disappointed. Most recently I've read *THE TOMMY-NOCKERS*. This book I did find disappointing. With a plot reminiscent of *QUATERMASS AND THE PIT*, it is stretched too thinly over far too many pages. In other words I found it boring. Pity - it had a good start and a nice ending. It really needed to be about 300 pages shorter. (22.7.92)

**BILL CONGREVE, 1/26 Central Ave, Westmead, NSW 2145.**

At the last meeting at Joy's place, you mentioned something about TM finally getting to be something like what you've always conceived. At the time I think the

comment went straight past, which was rather ignorant of me, but then I also wanted some time to have a better look at the thing.

It's nice. The cover is a step up from 74, and has the advantage of presenting ordinary b+w in a more interesting format. I haven't read the stories, but will do so and write a bit of a LoC. I'm a bit embarrassed at a couple of things of my own. I should never have run off at Huw Merlin quite the way I did. I only realised after seeing it in print that his review is longer than the other two. Neither should I have enjoyed writing the review as much as I did. Destructive criticism is too easy to write. I was also too harsh on John Haines. A couple of his comments were off-line, but that doesn't justify everything I said. You should tell me if I start to mouth off too much!

Anyhow, TM has an attractive cover, interior illos, stories, poetry, a review column, a lively LoC column, and a bunch of capsule reviews of latest releases, and always a few other bit and pieces of interest. Without wanting too much in the way of reviews, the only thing missing is film/video reviews and/or game reviews. I originally wondered what the Buck Coulson pieces were doing there, but now I like them. It is interesting to get an insight into how other people live, even in cultures so similar as our own. Perhaps I should write up my time in Africa, or tree-planting in Canada, or working in pubs in Sth Yorkshire. On a similar note I also enjoyed Michael Hailstone's piece.

There is a lot of good reading in TM. You have a lot to be proud of. (22.7.92).

**BUCK COULSON, 2677W-500N, Hartford City, IN 47348, USA.**

I agree pretty much with Andrew Darlington's article on Blish. It's ironic that Blish's poorest literary work - the *STAR TREK* books - gained him the most fame. The problem was that Blish was an "idea man"; his characters were cardboard but his concepts were scintillating, and ST had interesting characters and very mediocre concepts. I expect my favorite Blish book - which wasn't his best - was *THE NIGHT SHAPES*, his parody of all the novels of jungle adventure. I never really liked Haggard, and loathed Burroughs, so I thoroughly enjoyed Blish's send-up. (Just as I enjoyed Elizabeth Peters' more recent parody of the genre, *THE LAST CAMEL DIED AT NOON*.)

Hailstone's trip report was interesting, but the best part of it was either a typo or a misconceived attempt at simplified spelling: the bit about the space shot held up by "the wether at Cape Canaveral". Wasn't that even the subject of John Brunner's novel, *THE SHEEP LOOK UP?* A word shouldn't be simplified into a different word with a different meaning. And by an Australian, too... I'm not sure why "quisling" became a synonym for traitor; possibly because he was the first head of a puppet government. There were plenty of others, eventually, but none of them achieved the same notoriety.

I file my income tax late - though not on the last day - because I always have to pay, and I see no reason to



give the government my money any sooner than I have to. It's also why I have never had a return; I adjust my withholding so I wouldn't have one. Why should I give the government free use of my money for 9 months or whatever? Now, of course, as a self-employed person, I don't have any withheld, and not a lot to pay, either.

Hey, Harry; I used to be at least an acquaintance of yours, and I made it. Not a great success, but I sold stuff. Still do, now and then.

The "cards for writers" sound like the commercial version of what Robert Silverberg used to do when he was writing myriads of stories under other myriads of pseudonyms. He had file cards of plot elements; pick one beginning, one middle and one ending, and then write the story.

Rising costs have killed off a lot of fanzine fans. Mimeographs and the paper and postage were pretty cheap from the 1930s up through the 1970s. Now postal costs are more than double their 1978 figures and 10 times as much as in 1930, and income hasn't gone up that much. There's quite a difference between the cost of a mimeograph and the cost of a "desktop publishing" system, too, in real terms. In addition, when I got into fandom there was 1 convention per year in the Midwest. This year, Juanita and I will be attending 13, plus one in the southwest, and that's probably no more than half of the ones held. Fans don't have to make friends by letter first. Juanita and I still do; we're used to it. But most new fans don't bother.

Well, jewels twisting like snakes gives a strange impression of the shape of the jewels, but jewels that turn and twist like dung beetles doesn't supply the right atmosphere...

Note to Grai Hughes; I manage to write some fiction, and also read it, but only when I get paid for the effort...

I was going to say it's a shame that Quisling became known as a traitor and Laval as a cream separator, but that's an American pun.

Note to Joy Buchanan; maybe Australia will get another Worldcon. Juanita and I wanted to go to the 1973 Worldcon, and even signed up for DUFF. We and Lesleigh Luttrell (or was she still Lesleigh Couch then?) were nominators for each other, which the people in charge considered very odd but couldn't find any rules against. Lesleigh offered to drop out in our favor, but we kept figuring finances and coming up short, so we dropped out in Lesleigh's favor, and she won. Now we'll never make it because Juanita is threatened with loss of an eardrum if she flies. I guess the moral is, start saving your money now and maybe you can make a US worldcon in the year 2000. And try to do your travelling before you get too many physical problems.

The word for the weather is rain. We had 1 inch the night of July 11, 2.0 the night of July 12, 1.25 the night of the 14th, 0.5 on the 16/17th, 0.3 on the 20th, 0.2 on the 21st, 0.5 last night, and it's raining now. It becomes tiresome. Besides, Severian the dog is afraid of thunder, and has to be moved into the garage during

storms. He'd much rather come in the house, but I'd much rather he didn't; I'm not about to have a 65-pound house-dog. This bids fair to be the wettest July in Indiana history. (23.7.92)

MIKE GLICKSOHN, 508 Windemere Ave, Toronto, Ontario M6S 3L6, CANADA

Apparently what Richard Brandt knew that I didn't (see my loc in #74) was that I was about to fall in love, get engaged and pretty well abandon my career as fandom's second most prolific letterhack. There will be few locs issuing forth from this address over the next few months/years so I'm advising most faneds to consider removing me from their mailing lists if they feel a zine not receiving a written response has been "wasted".

So, so long, and thanks for all the fanzines and keep up the enjoyable work. (19.7.82)

DAVID TANSEY, GPO Box 2061, Canberra, ACT 2601.

Congrats on reaching three-quarters of the ton. (At this rate you'll hit issue #100 somewhere around 1998 or 1999). Was there any reason why almost all the stories in the issue concerned the end of the world in some form?

*[No. After I received several of these stories, I made it a theme issue - but I received the others anyway - I didn't have to ask for them. - Ron.]*

SANCTUARY by Bill Congreve was more fragment than story. I found the constant reference to rosary beads a bit wearing. Is it SF?

Sean Williams' HEARTBREAK HOTEL was well-paced and structured - a different treatment of the old theme of time travel. This boy's going places.

Congreve's column IN DEPTH is a great idea. I'm sure you'll have plenty of material for longer reviews of Australian material in the future, what with the boom in local SF. Just a few points. In the review of Sean McMullen's CALL TO THE EDGE the reviewer asks whether Spitfires had the range to accompany Allied bombing raids in WW2 and clarification of other minor points. Who gives a fuck? Why waste time on these trivial matters - the average reader wouldn't know (or care). Why not use the space to make more relevant comments. Congreve missed out on some major aspects of the collection - like how the story THE DECIAD is fantasy not SF, because it introduces the concept of superhuman "Gods of Romulus" without any rational explanation. In the review of Hugh Merlin's DARK STREETS Congreve keeps saying "Sorry, I don't believe a word of it." If the book is a stinker, as it is by the sound of it, just say so, don't apologise. You're a goddam reviewer, not a Foreign Minister. But overall they were excellent reviews.

GREY CLOUDS by Louise Hollingberry. On reading stories like this I wonder how much the youth of today have been brainwashed by greenism. By the time I got to Tony Brook's ROCK A BYE BABY! (An improvement, Tony, keep it up.) I was feeling so depressed at reading the umpteenth end of the world that I was about to slash my wrists, and was only saved by the liveliness of

the letters section (and the fact it might damage my keyboard).

Have to go now - have to form a new fan club:  
The Chainsaw Wielding Satanist Cannibals of Australia.  
(27.7.92)

**SHANE DIX, 7 McGillp Ave, Glengowrie, SA 5044.**

TM #75 was a well rounded issue with a good mix of articles and fiction. Of the former my preference went to Bill Congreve's IN DEPTH column. Of the latter, again Bill Congreve. It was good to see the return of his excellent writing to your pages. I like his ideas, I like his style. Sean Williams' story was a load of utter garbage, lacking in style and imagination and originality. And I don't care what he says, this has nothing to do with his story beating mine in the recent HONG CON writing competition. Honest Injun.

Your mailbag must be overflowing, Ron, if the WOHF list in anything to go by. Of the LoCs that were printed, Grai Hughes gets the "What-The-Fuck-Was-That-All-About" award this issue. And my swipe at Glen Chapman was somewhat deflated by Ron omitting a vital sentence. Never mind. Perhaps I should have just told Chapman to go and take a flying fuck at the moon and been done with it. But then, this might give some people a wrong impression of me. (29.7.92)

**ROGER WEDDALL, PO Box 273, Fitzroy, Vic 3065.**

In the Editorial of the latest MENTOR, you talk in a defensive tone about the amount of fiction in the fanzine. Speaking as someone who is not particularly interested in reading amateur fiction in general fanzines, I say: bully for you! Publish whatever you want to in THE MENTOR. It's not beholden on you to print what other people want to see; presumably you are publishing this fanzine precisely because you have an idea of the sort of things *you* want to see in print. Regarding people like myself who tend to flick past the fiction, the fact that not all of TM is full of material we'd like to see is hardly your problem, even if it is your concern.

On another subject, I must say I enjoy Andrew Darlington's critical/reviews articles. This latest one on James Blish's Cities in Flight is top heavy in information about how various parts of Blish's Tetralogy were published, and short an analysis of why (or only just) the books worked well. Still, I enjoy his pieces, I just wish this one delivered the goods.

Bill Congreve's reviews were appreciated and enjoyed. Trent Jamieson's poem LOAN was fun. Of course, TM is an impressive production although, like Andrew Darlington's article, it doesn't quite seem to fulfil its promise. Still, keep it up, as someone has to do it.

Oh, yes - Faulconbridge in '99 forever! (29.7.92)

**JULIE VAUX, 14 Zara Rd, Willoughby, NSW 2068.**

Please note the following Errata (underlined) in your reproduction of my poem - The Sphinx:

"In Bocotia's sweet marshlands"

Stanza three, line one:

"Did Crooked foot's words break some chain."

Stanza final - #6, line 6:

"Folly and hubris your one spell".

Also note in the poem - Under the Quiet Sun Two  
- line 7

"ray in wide dance spreading"

(4.8.92)

**SEAN WILLIAMS, PO Box 605, Cowandilla, SA 5033.**

Death, gloom, ruin, hardship, extinction: salient themes for the end of this civilisation's second millenium. With population still sky-rocketing, the advocates of the machines of mega-death still profligate, and poisonous wastes still flooding the ecosphere, is it any wonder that speculative fiction seems full of near-future Apocalypse?

Sometimes I wonder if, after the Fall, our descendants will look back at the *disjecta membra* of our time and marvel at its naivety. I can't help but think that, despite our considerable investment in suicide, it may well be Mother Nature herself who does away with us, not the other way round. (viz: AIDS is a natural disease, folks, not a CIA mistake. And it's just the first. The next one, or the one after, could be the biggie.)

Anyway, TM 75. The fiction first.

Bill Congreve does it again with SANCTUARY. A fine piece of work, with vivid characters and a skilled sense of style. Its bare mix of post-holocaustal reality and spiritual desperation is powerful, right up to the last scene (where I was preparing to be disappointed, I'll admit, but wasn't). *Deus ex fulgur?* Good stuff, on both the cerebral and visceral levels. More, please, Bill.

Blair Hunt's ASHTA THE FOOL was an amusing little fable. Unproven scientific theory vs belief: if neither can be tested, are they really any different? What would happen if we found a way to prove or disprove our beliefs? Would we like what we discovered?

Louise Hollingberry's GREY CLOUDS was fine up to the first break; sexist, but fine. Beyond then, it lost whatever plot it had and became a soap opera of ecodeath. And "You're sure it'll burn you alive" is an awkward phrase, too clumsy for a child's rhyme.

Any story that has an exclamation mark in its title should be avoided. T. J. Brook's ROCK A BYE BABY! is proof of that. There was one good passage - the one about the purple clouds and the neon balls of lightning - but I think I only liked it because of the conspicuous absence of exclamations. Tony, take a screwdriver and forcibly remove the "!" key from your computer; your writing will improve immediately by ten percent. And your dialogue is a little self-conscious at times; try reading it aloud and you'll see what I mean. Lastly, doesn't Death ride a white horse, not ebony?

Andrew L. Sullivan's LORD OF THE EARTH'S ELDERS was interesting (I liked the distinction between the Short- and the Fast-lived), but too naked for my tastes. The subject of ecodoom becomes a little tiresome after a while. Yes, it certainly would be sad if the mighty trees died out, especially if they were intelligent, but J.R.R. Tolkien (and others) explored this possibility years ago.

The story needs some sort of twist to illuminate the obvious. Also, it takes more than fancy quotation marks to make "alien" speech.

Andrew's non-fiction work was better. **CITIES FLY** made me think twice about Blish; maybe I'll read more by him, one day. Buck Coulson let me down again. Bill's **IN DEPTH** is a great new addition. (At the risk of offending you, Ron, why isn't he writing this sort of stuff for **AUREALIS**?). Michael Hailstone's **WAY BACK WHEN** was interesting, but too dense for one sitting. The poetry seemed better this issue; maybe I'm just getting used to the idea of it all. (Best: **THE OLD MAN** and **MANY HEADS AND SUMMER** by Trent Jamieson, and **THE FULL MOON'S FACE** by Julie Vaux.)

The artwork was infrequent, but consistent. -I'd much rather see a sparsely-illustrated fanzine done well (like **THE MENTOR**) than one bulging with offerings from the local kindergym.

**R&R**. Noteworthy paronomasia from Peter Brodie, a neat story from Pavel A. Viazulkov, more sesquipedalian turbidity from Grai Hughes, a marked lack of controversy overall. Jim Verran's response to **HOW TO BE AN SF WRITER ETC** was the best sort of feedback a writer can get (thanks, mate).

My heart reaches out for Steven Proposch; my greatest nightmare is to return home one night and discover that my house has been burnt to the ground. The destruction of various books, CDs, and magazines would be painful enough, but how can you insure against the loss of three years of solid work?

Overall, a good issue (although I think a couple of the stories might have worked better in another context; that is, after reading so much doom and gloom it took a lot to get me excited by page 40). Thanks for your help in getting **HOTEL** to a presentable standard, and I hope people liked it. (Although, after comments from Shane Dix and John Tipper (thanks, guys!), I wonder if I can actually meet expectations.) (4.8.92)

**JOHN TIPPER, PO Box 487, Strathfield, NSW 2135.**

In answer to Harry Andruschak's question, a number of **DAN DARE** stories have been reprinted in various forms. Dragons Dream, Holland, published **THE MAN FROM NOWHERE**, **ROGUE PLANET** and **REIGN OF THE ROBOTS** in three glueback volumes about 10 years ago. I picked up my copies in Brisbane about 4 years ago from a remainder bookshop very cheaply, so there should be copies around. Beware of faulty copies in which the adhesive didn't do its job (in other words, I wouldn't suggest buying copies through the mail). Most of the stories are currently being reprinted in England in hardcover format, so these should be generally available. I didn't start reading **EAGLE** until the late 50s and find these stories as fresh as yesterday - or tomorrow! It's also possible to pick up cardboard kits of Dan's ship, the **ANASTASIA**. An unsold supply of this 50s kit turned up in England last year and were selling for under 20 pounds early this year (see the monthly English publication, **BOOK & MAGAZINE COLLECTOR**).

Rachel McGrath-Kerr mentioned the Eurovision Song contest. I recall one winner way back when - "Puppet on a String". Did Rachel mention **THUNDERBIRDS**? I hear you all groan, but I had to get that out of my system. Who sang the above song, anyway? Was it Cilla Black, Sandy Shaw, or who?? Any TB fans might like to obtain the current edition of **Oz SF TOY COLLECTOR**, which gives full details of how the original TB vehicles were constructed. And who mentioned **KEMLO & THE SKY HORSE**? (Sorry, I usually do my loc immediately but it's some time since I read TM 75, and I've only done a quick skim before this.) I have a copy and would be happy to send you a colour pic of the jacket, if you're feeling nostalgic for same!

You mentioned Biggles last issue - you might be interested in an article I wrote:

#### CAPTAIN JAMES BIGGLESWORTH

There once was a magazine called **POPULAR FLYING** and in 1932 an ex-WWI Pilot Officer, William Earle Johns, took over its editorship. In his very first issue, Johns wrote **THE WHITE FOKKER**, a story which would result in the publication of more than one hundred books detailing the adventures of juvenile fictions' greatest flying hero, James Bigglesworth.

"Biggles", as the subject of this article, would soon come to be known on every corner of this planet, was born in India in 1899. His proud father was then the Assistant Commissioner of the United Provinces of India, with the result that young James learnt the ways of bush survival at an early age, and could handle a rifle well at the tender age of seven. Unfortunately, he contracted a fever which was to dog him not only through his childhood in India but later on whenever he visited the tropics. At the age of fourteen, Biggles (as he will be known from this point on) commenced schooling at his father's old school, Malton Hall, in rural England - a school primarily for lads destined for the British Army. Biggles' older brother, Charles, had also attended Malton just before the end of the war, after having attained the rank of major.)

Although Biggles' father intended that the lad go to university and study for the Indian Civil Service exam, the Great War arrived. Biggles quickly found himself in Norfolk at No. 17 Flying Training School. After a number of adventures, he was posted to Maranique with 266 Squadron, via 169. It wasn't long before his brilliant abilities in the air saw his elevation to Captain. Biggles was no flawless saint as portrayed in the 1950s and 60s reprints. Although fearless in any crisis which came his way, Biggles sometimes took to the bottle briefly to dull tragic occurrences (of which there were many in those violent days). Late in the war, he had a brief encounter with Marie Janis, a Belgian lass who proved to be a German spy. Biggles' cousin, the Honourable Algernon Lacey, "Algy" from this point on, joined 266 in 1917. The two became inseparable companions despite early misgivings on Biggles' part, with the result that they formed a chartering operation, "Biggles & Co", after the war.

It wasn't long before "Ginger" (first seen as a 16 year-old lad in **THE BLACK PERIL** in 1935) came on the scene. WW2 arrived and the threesome, together with Smyth, their mechanic, formed Z Squadron, then 666. Early on in the war while on a secret mission in Norway, Biggles found himself surrounded by the invading forces and actually managed to join the Luftwaffe in order to escape. After further adventures and with the war over, Biggles, Algy, Ginger and a new arrival, Bertie, scored jobs in the Special Air Police. Biggles' adversary throughout his career was Von Stalhein, firstly with Germany and later with, as always, the "other side" as it was termed in those days.

Approximately 103 Biggles Books were published in the period 1932-70. This included several "omnibus" editions which contained more than one novel, but not the later R.F.C., Bumper and Best of... titles. Several of the books relating Biggles' wartime exploits comprised short stories which originally appeared either in POPULAR FLYING or THE MODERN BOY story-paper weekly of the 1930s. The first book, published by John Hamilton in 1932, was THE CAMELS ARE COMING. THE CRUISE OF THE CONDOR, BIGGLES OF THE CAMEL SQUADRON, BIGGLES FLIES AGAIN and THE BLACK PERIL followed over the next few years from the same publisher. BIGGLES LEARNS TO FLY appeared in a pocket library, THE BOYS' FRIEND, in 1935, as did BIGGLES IN FRANCE.

Oxford University Press, or OUP, took over as Johns' publisher with BIGGLES HITS THE TRAILS for the next eight years, BIGGLES IN BORNEO being their last in 1943. BIGGLES FAILS TO RETURN came out from Hodder & Stoughton in the same year. Brockhampton, Dean, ThamesK and even Marks and Spencer shared the publishing chores from the 1950s with H&S. Some titles appeared from more than one publisher, of course, being printed many times.

Artist Howard Leigh provided most of the fine jackets and frontispiece illustrations for the OUP titles before the much more inferior Leslie Stead took over with the change of publishers to H&S. One title worthy of note was the 1942 edition of BIGGLES IN THE JUNGLE. The brilliant illustrations came from the hands of famed transport artist, Terence Cuneo.

With the rapid rise of interest in Johns' work, a number of clubs (and thus magazines) have sprung up, the best of these is:

BIGGLES & CO, an A5, 40 page quarterly from Paul Marriott, 8 The Heath, Leighton Buzzard, Bedfordshire LU7 7HL, England. Cost of overseas subscription is 17 pounds, payable to Paul.

Quite a few of the titles were reprinted in paperbacks and are thus inexpensive. Cheap, laminated editions were also published by Dean but these should not be confused with some of the later first editions which came out in both laminated (without dust jacket) and standard cloth (with). As one writer said in an article on the Biggles books, figuring out who published what, when, first, etc, is a "minefield" (6.8.92)

**CHRIS A. MASTERS, PO Box 7545, St Kilda Rd., Melbourne, Vic 3004.**

The orange/red paper gave the cover illo of THE MENTOR #75 a nice gloomy feel to it. Have you ever thought about producing the magazine as a booklet instead of side-stapled? Much easier on the reader and the end result is much more professional.

*[But the illustrations aren't shown to their best advantage... Anyway, I don't have a perfect-binding heat sealer (or a guillotine). - Ron.]*

I can very much relate to having piles of fiction awaiting (or is that *demanding*) attention... I'm afraid that this is the price one pays for being an editor. Personally speaking, this is the part of editing that I find the most satisfying - reading and evaluating mss. - the rest is purely a mechanical process of typing, proofing, assembling and printing. My only problem is that I don't get as much quality non-fiction as I'd like to.

Onto the contents of the issue: SANCTUARY by Bill Congreve was a good post-nuclear piece. (Is there a subtle jibe at X-tianity somewhere, Bill?) HEARTBREAK HOTEL was another quality piece by Sean Williams. ASHTA THE FOOL was a nice little parable, but seemed out of place in an SF magazine. THE YANKEE

PRIVATEER 14 was interesting, especially the account of Belle Gunness. IN DEPTH by Bill Congreve was interesting and extremely readable, even though I haven't (and probably never will) read any of the books reviewed. But by far the best story of the issue was Tony Brook's ROCK A BYE BABY... very subtle, extremely effective, and utterly disturbing. It's also great to see Tony getting printed outside of EOD. GREY CLOUDS by Louise Hollingberry... Yipe!!! Aaaarggh!! Not another #\$\$%@\$ environmental doomsday story!

Now to the letters: firstly, Buck Coulson... Giddyay Buck. Sorry, but I'm afraid you're nowhere near snotty enough to qualify as a true SAGPOF; also, any true SAGPOF would have castigated me for using sci-fi instead of SF. Pity about the chainsaw... obviously an inferior model, besides everyone knows that it is a fallacy that chainsaws were made for cutting trees! They're much better for chopping up small furry animals... fannish cats watch out! A .357 might be deadly, but every so boring and clean. There's nothing to compare to the buzz of a nicely tuned chainsaw. Think of it this way Buck, a bullet in the head (or elsewhere) is relatively humane, when compared to dismemberment.

Tony Brook's letter was a good read... great to see another loony rambling on about nothing.

Now to Peter Brodie: I find myself in agreement with your views on SF poetry (SF pottery I've never seen, but I'll take your word for it). Just the term "SF poetry" is almost an oxy-moron. I see I must have stirred something up here, and like most people who take themselves too seriously you over-react at even the slightest jibe. But resorting to insults? I obviously gave you credit for having more intelligence than you obviously do. I recently did see FORBIDDEN PLANET again: and I'd be the first to admit its brilliance. Whether it's the greatest film of all time is purely subjective matter. What I find weird is the motivation that drives one to sit through it ten or twenty times, finger on the freeze button, jotting down hundreds of notes, with the final objective being to make some strange list. Why? Is this a personality defect? Some psychotic fetish? Do you make lists of other things as well, or is this aberration only restricted to FORBIDDEN PLANET?

To Mae Strelkov: actually I'm an agnostic bordering on atheism. Satanism and the darker side of the occult are only interests of mine. Occasionally I have been known to mislead the unwary who like to prejudge. And yes, I have started a horror club (write to me at the above address for more into). Thrills at second hand maybe... I'm a loony not a psychotic! Subtle difference. Then again, one could classify many of the things we do as second hand thrill: reading, writing, films, TV, role playing games, etc.

Have to sign off now Ron. I've got this weird impulse to sit though REANIMATOR a few dozen times and measure, note, then catalogue all the angles between blood splatters. (8.8.92)

**BEN SCHILLING, PO Box 548, Minocqua, WI 54548, USA.**

I recently received THE MENTOR issues 72 & 73. I've moved (and probably will again shortly) and the Post Office is not really good at forwarding the slower classes of mail.

I didn't finish A WAY WITH WOMEN because of the rather silly set-up paragraphs. The original industrial cities were some of the worst slums. If you travel to a Third World city you can still see what I mean.

I see that you had an interesting trip to the former Soviet Union. Oriental restaurants seem to have become an almost universal item, although the menu may not always be what you expected. There was one in Cairo, Egypt that included French fries with the sweet and sour chicken, for some unknown reason.

I liked the article on Pseudo Technical Bull. Someone once described this sort of thing as "Balonium Generator", which also seems appropriate.

Steven Proposch seems to think that professional editors are hired to help him write. That's not the idea. They are hired to produce saleable books and magazines. Sending poetry to a publisher that isn't in the poetry business is not really a good idea. The best fiction in the world is not going to appear in (eg THE NEW ENGLAND JOURNAL OF MEDICINE). Sean William's article on being an SF writer did contain about the same advice, so I suspect I'm not the only one who feels that way.

In the US Bob Asprin Myth books are published in illustrated trade paperback editions, while Terry Pratchett's Disk World books are mass market paperbacks. The Myth books are more interesting that way, at least to me.

The portfolio in issue #73 was well done, but not exactly my style of art work.

Other meanings for apa (besides the Quechua to carry) include the Swedish ape or monkey. Not a very interesting point, but what the heck. (7.8.92)

**LORRAINE CORMACK, PO Box 983, Woden, ACT 2606.**

I was rather disappointed by the cover of TM 75. It seemed rather nothingish. It just sat there, not meaning anything, and not moving me at all.

SANCTUARY - I quite enjoyed reading this. It moved along nicely, and didn't bore me. But it seemed to be trying to say something, and I wasn't sure what. It grated a little because of that. I dislike things that I suspect are meant to have a deep meaning which I can't discern. However, the writing itself was good, well paced and smooth.

JAMES BLISH... by Andrew Darlington was quite interesting. It was a good length, too. It must have been tempting to go into more detail and run on for longer about writing Andrew obviously enjoyed, but if he had I think he'd have lost me. As it was, I enjoyed this. It was just right to catch my interest without boring me.

HEARTBREAK HOTEL was probably the best piece in this issue, to my mind. I'm impressed again,

looking at it now and realising how long it is. It didn't seem that long while reading it. Great writing to carry a relatively long piece without hesitation. I liked the strong way Stephen was drawn. I especially liked the way his relationship with Karen was made so vivid, without any need for dwelling on it or dragging in unnecessary flashback scenes. Another of the story's strengths was that it didn't get caught up in worrying about the contradictions etc that are liable to arise out of time travel. That's one of the big weaknesses of time travel stories, and I appreciated the neat way it was remedied without much fussing.

My only real criticism of the story is that Michelle wasn't a very vivid character, and so there wasn't much tension when Farquar was holding her hostage. It didn't matter to me whether she got hurt or not, so the scene had little tension for me.

Otherwise, I really enjoyed it. Sean did an excellent job.

ASHTA THE FOOL was also a nice little piece which made a good comment on the way people allow their thinking to be steered by other people. The dialogue didn't always flow as smoothly as it might, but otherwise no complaints. I liked the restraint Blair showed in ending with the villager's words, rather than continuing on to the sage's feelings or response.

I quite like Bill Congreve's reviews, but I really think he needs to think twice about his tendency to tell far too much of the story. He does it often, sometimes for no reason. When talking about BACK DOOR MAN at least he was making a point when he told us about Plat's capture and torture. But why did he tell us who the murderer is in DARK STREETS? Even if you hate a book, you ought to leave most of the plot a secret for the sake of potential readers.

GREY CLOUDS was a bit fractured and didn't have much emotional impact. Maybe if there'd been some kind of connection between the three "parts" of the story, it would have been better. It irritated me, as a not particularly well written piece of doom and gloom.

ROCK A BYE BABY! was also badly put together. The stream of consciousness bit worked quite well, but after that it went downhill. The dialogue, particularly between the doctors, was terrible. And then everything was spelt out, and clumsily at that.

I didn't read all of WAY BACK WHEN. It may be unfair of me, but I found it incredibly irritating to have Michael constantly commenting on his great interest in the "wether" (sic). If he's that interested, he should learn to spell it correctly. Also, his account was far too fractured and wandering to keep my attention. Read a couple of Ron's trip accounts to find out how to write a logical and interesting piece that makes sense.

LORD OF THE EARTH'S ELDERS wasn't actually bad, but I felt it was another case of a rather obvious message being presented clumsily. It didn't really say anything new.

You referred to Storm Constantine as a male in your book reviews. I was rather surprised when I discovered Constantine is actually a woman. Every other



Storm I've every known has been male. Irrespective, I enjoy her writing. Nice to know she's got something new out. (12.8.92)

**JOHN J. ALDERSON, Havelock, Vic 3465.**

My thanks for THE MENTOR 75. The stories are interesting, but what awful winter reading they prove to be, almost all of them talking about snow falls etc, and here it is July/August and miserably cold. Further, the writers are a pessimistic lot, possibly the economic climate does seem rather cold. But let me tell you a story...

Havelock, as readers of THE MENTOR will be aware, has an industrial suburb called Maryborough which I don't usually say much about. Bear with a bit of history. It began as a gold-mining town and as the gold petered out, and with the Great European War making things difficult the town was facing the prospect of becoming a ghost-town. In 1917, when things were at their worst they had a public meeting and decided to float two factories, (a tool-factory which became known as P&N, and a knitting Mill, simply known as The Knitting Mill, actually Cuttle Bros), and until a couple of decades ago when these passed out of local ownership, kept the place going. Now, with things the worst they have been since 1917 they have come up with the Birth of a Challenge: to up the Land Speed Record by about 100 mph.

The Golden Rod which holds the present record was little better than a dragster, four Chrysler engines, one behind the other, and they were screaming flat out to beat the previous record by a few miles per hour. When Glen Davis does his measured mile at 500 mph the two Rolls Royce Merlin engines will be purring at about one third of their available revs using 2020 hp with 5000 hp available. The Golden Rod is estimated to have cost 100 million dollars for the attempt.

Glen Davis's car is 13 metres long, 120 cm wide and less than a metre in height... the height is adjustable at speed! The body is built of fibre glass and the driver reclines right at the front. The two turbo-charged Rolls Royce meteor MK 4B V12 engines will deliver the power, one to each set of wheels via computer synchronised transmissions. When the Maryborough Council got to hear of the car they voted \$25,000 and gave the use of a workshop area, not much perhaps and they are usually notoriously skin-flint, but they are pleased enough after couple of months to have go the money back in publicity. Glen David built this car without money and those who help him do so without pay, and some of them work full-time on it. Local unemployed youth (about 60% of men under 25 have no work) now go and help as they can, for nothing. Well, story continued next year... (14.8.92)

**JOHN BROSNAN, Flat 2, 6 Lower Rd., Harrow, Middlesex, HA2 ODA, UK.**

A belated thank you for the copy of THE MENTOR #72 - which I note with a feeling of shock was published almost a year ago. I'm been meaning to acknowledge it since I received it but time seems to have sped by...

Comforting to know that some things in the world are still the same. When did you start publishing THE MENTOR? Must have been in the mid-sixties. Also comforting to see some familiar names in your letters pages; names I haven't seen for some years. Like Mike Deckinger, Brian Earl Brown, Buck Coulson, Gary Deindorfer and Mike Glicksohn. And goodness me!... there's good old John J. Alderson writing from Turkey about Noah's Ark. Also comforting to see that he's as... er, *eccentric* as ever. And, of course, a lot of the names of the letter writers are totally unfamiliar to me but that's to be expected as my links with fandom are pretty tenuous these days (actually my links with *everything* are pretty tenuous these days).

I note from various comments in the letters that in issue #71 you reminisced about the Great Bus Trip. Recently I came across some pages of a book I'd begun writing about the trip many years ago and it brought back a lot of amusing memories. Like of those Sundays spent in that field rebuilding the top deck of the bus... and those regular evening meetings of the Australian Expeditionary Society at Chris's parents where the only people who showed up - most of the time - were Chris, you and me.

I can't even remember the names of the other members of the party [other than Chris and Elaine]. I had a brief contact with the British guy who used to be a fireman but that was years ago. I presume you still have your 8mm film of the trip? the 16mm job was a disaster, but even if the footage could have been salvaged I think it would have still been a disaster. God, it all seems so long ago now - mainly because it is so long ago now. A different era, to use a handy cliché. (12.8.92)

**DOUGLAS J. A. GUILFOYLE, , RMB 695 Gundaroo Rd, via Bungendore, NSW 2621.**

I am pleased and proud to have the shadows of obscurity that gather around unpublished, young, novice writers pierced by TM #75. Anyone bothering to read the superbly encouraging "We Also Heard From" section last issue might just remember my name, though I doubt it. It was truly wonderful of the editor to send a copy of this incredible zine to an unpublished (snif, sob) writer. You will notice a small difference between the name published in that issue and at the top of this letter. My initials. If you've got 'em flaunt 'em, I say. I was saddled with two middle names and this is my only way of lashing back at the bureaucracy to which I shall always be Douglas J. Guilfoyle (utterly infuriating). It's not that I'm a hideously formal person (most people call me Doug or worse), it just seems appropriate when writing.

Anyway to the serious business of TM #75. for what (little) it's worth here are my opinions on the submissions.

I liked SANCTUARY which could be interpreted any number of ways, rather than ramming some opinion on religion and the human condition down the reader's throat.

HEARTBREAK HOTEL I read through and didn't like at first, it didn't seem to cling together, then on

reflection it seemed to work very well and I quickly answered for myself all the questions I asked about it. I enjoyed it much more the second time I read it. The only part I still have difficulty with is when Old Nick wakes up. Would it be possible to give the reader a few more clues that he's a robot? I found it a jarring revelation, which is a hopelessly vague comment but is the best I can supply.

ASHTA THE FOOL was great. Don't change a thing Blair.

GREY CLOUDS. The two pieces of the story worked well within themselves, but could someone please explain the connection between the man with the binoculars and the woman from Home Cave? The basic idea of the story made an interesting change to the usual "greenhouse" futures.

ROCK A BYE BABY! and LORD OF THE EARTH'S ELDERS restored my faith in the worthiness of the short short story, no cute or surprise endings here. Both writers seem to have a very good grasp of how to construct an interesting story of short length, many people (myself included) could learn from their sparsity of characters. Too much short fiction is burdened with more characters than the reader needs to deal with. Both authors also deserve credit for making good use of their initials.

By the large part I liked the art. Commendations (in order) to Steve Fox (cover), Steve Fox (p.33), Steve Carter (p.17) and Steve Fox (p.19). Now how did you get in there three Times Mr. Fox?

The poetry. Hmm. I acknowledge that rhyming SF poetry would not be an easy thing to write *well*, I suspect though it can be written badly with great ease.

The articles. Why didn't I read these first?! They were of a truly remarkable quality. I look forward to reading more IN DEPTH columns. (17.8.92)

JOY BUCHANAN, Lot 1093, Andromeda Dr., Cranbrook, NSW 2749.

Well Ron, I can see why you don't put a lot of fiction in THE MENTOR - it's damn depressing.

Bill Congreve: contrasts, this is the 1st story of yours I liked. Yours are usually too "horror" for my likes. I enjoyed this, the scene of the frozen river was very descriptive, I felt cold just reading it.

Sean Williams' HEARTBREAK HOTEL left me rather confused about its ending. Even with the epilogue, I'm still lost.

I also enjoyed Buck Coulson's column as usual, it was uplifting especially as most of the fiction in this issue upset the optimist in me.

Louise Hollingberry's story GREY CLOUDS is depressing. I prefer fantasy, not doom and gloom.

Well, well Peter Brodie: one should practise what one preaches; if you hate SF poetry, why write it? It was a funny poem, but I liked the mouse.

I'm not sure why I don't like ROCK A BYE BABY! by T.J. Brook. The story chops and changes too much for me. LORD OF THE EARTH'S ELDERS by Andrew L. Sullivan was very thought provoking. I personally like trees and recycle as much as I can.

Ron, get your Anne McCaffrey reviews right - Damia is the daughter of the Rowan, Afra is a Capellan. (20.8.92)

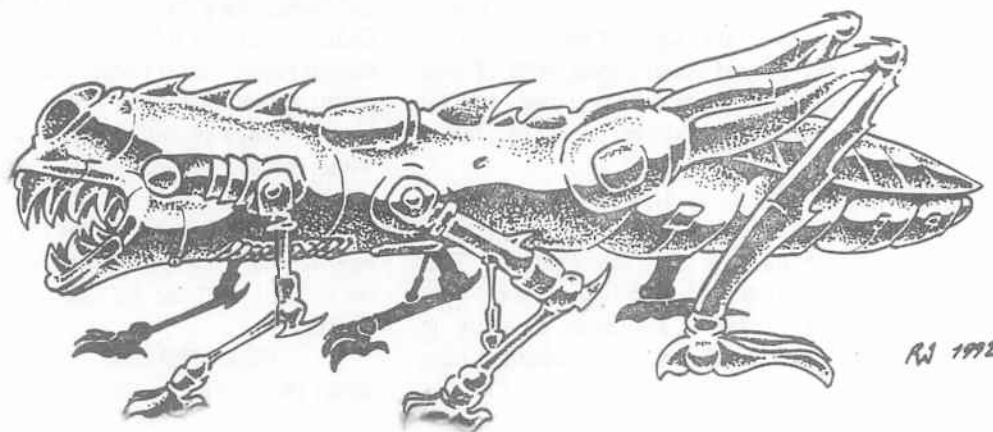
WE ALSO HEARD FROM: Jim Verran, Claudio Noguerol, Alan Stewart, Peter Brodie, P.J. Roberts, Duncan Evans, Tony J. Brook, Rod Williams and Pamela Boal (who wrote:

THE MENTOR 74 has arrived at one of those times when each day seems to have less than its fair share of hours. I'm finding it impossible to fit in all the activities (most of them pleasurable, the chores can go hang) I have planned.

The problem with this country is that although we have been enjoying longer dryer (too dry) summers for a few years we are in the habit of cramming all the best events into two or three months. The best sporting events that I like to watch, the natural history club, the garden club, the charity fates I like to support are all going full swing. Then of course there is decorating the house while it is possible to have the windows wide open and tending our little garden. Small as our garden is it only takes a couple of days neglect for it to turn into a rampant jungle.

I have read and enjoyed this issue but haven't the time to give the items the in-depth attention that I feel comment requires... (30.6.92))

[Thanks, Pamela. Both you and Mike Glicksohn (and several others) do write and let me know you enjoy TM, and I appreciate even a short note. - Ron.]





**THE WASTE LANDS** by Stephen King. Warner pb, dist in Aust by Penguin Books. (C) 1991. 509pp. A\$12.95. On sale now.

This is the continuation of **THE DARK TOWER** fantasy series, and is the third volume in that series.

With this series, as with some, you really need to read those previous to this to figure out what is going on and to really get to know the characters. The book is a strange kind of fantasy - it is set in the present day, but is not set entirely in this world. Or, to put it in another way, it is set in both this world and another, where a gunslinger can find things to sling lead at.

As with most of King's books, this is quite a thick volume and it is interesting just how much King is wringing out of **CHILDE ROLAND**, upon which this is based (as in a basis for the plot of the novel) on. I have't read King's horror novels - I don't have time to read them, but his fantasy is certainly well constructed.

**THEY CAME AND ATE US** by Robert Rankin. Corgin pb, dist in Aust by Transworld Publishers. (C) 1991. 336. A\$9.95. On sale now.

For those of you who went out and got **ARMAGEDDON: THE MUSICAL** after I reviewed it serveral issues back - this is the sequel (**ARMAGEDDON II: THE B-MOVIE**).

There seems to be more humorous sf (and fantasy) coming out of the UK than ever. As well as series of humorous sf and fantasy. **THEY CAME AND ATE US** is more of the same. Elvis is back, as is most of the cast of the first movie. There are evil doers, of course, and kinky sex. And not all the evil doers are into the kinky sex. Christineen (Jesus Christ's twin sister) is back and all the characters get into a whole of weird scenes, man!

Most times when an author lets him/herself go with this loosely tied together type of novel, it promptly falls apart. Rankin has it together, though and this is almost as good as the first volume.

**BILL, THE GALACTIC HERO ON THE PLANET OF ZOMBIE VAMPIRES** by Harry Harrison & Jack C. Haldeman II. Gollancz h/c, dist in Aust by Jacandra Wiley. (C) 1991. 217 pp. On sale now.

Bill is trying to get out of the front line and some time off to get his foot to grow, but as usual things are not going his way, and he finds himself on the good ship *Bounty* on its way to where the Marines are facing the Chingers. Needless to say, there are some strange people on the *Bounty*, Capt. Blight being one. They came to several planets - one where Batgirl Riders abound.

Of course just one adventure is not enough for one book - and they find theselves on a desolate planet with a warning beacon sending out an undecipherable message. Uhuru stayed behind and Bill and Curly (the love interest) went on down to the Station. There Bill managed to put his foot through the floor and found a coven filled with loathsome egg-like things standing upright on the floor, and later they had trouble with a quick, crab-like alien...

I won't spoil the rest of the plot (and book) for the adventurous reader - the humour here is less subtle than in **ARMAGEDDON**, but still is food for someone....

**A CALL TO ARMS** by Alan Dean Foster. Del Rey pb, dist in Aust by Random Century. (C) 1991. 341pp. A\$11.95. On sale now.

Book One of *The Damned*. This looks like it could be quite a long series - something of the length of the *Lensmen* series.

Will Dulac was a composer till he was picked up by the Weave, a conglomeration of alien races who were fighting the Amplitur and their subject races, and had been doing so for thousands of years,. Subject because they are under their mind control (or near enough) and forced to attack other races.

When the Weave representatives come to Will, they are pretty enthusiastic, but when they see how violent

humans are, fighting amongst themselves, they began to have second thoughts and Will finds it hard to explain to them the why of human society.

Not bad for SF adventure - nice and straightforward.

**BOUNDARIES** by T. M. Wright. Gollancz pb, dist in Aust by Jacaranda Wiley. (C) 1990. A\$11.95. On sale now.

There are a lot of horror stories around and many people are trying their hand at them. The majority are, as usual, 90% crud. The authors at the top of the genre are very good - T. M. Wright is said to be one of them.

In **BOUNDARIES** a brother and sister are lined by psychic forces, even after she is brutally murdered - 62 stab wounds would make anybody lie down and die. There are other things around, though - things in the cellar. As well as a lot of dust in the now empty house. The police arrest Brian Fisher, who has confessed that he caused her murder. The brother doesn't think Fisher did the deed, and one of the police detectives has other ideas also.

The book is engrossing and, though there are several passages and pages of esoteric meanderings, the whole novel fits together well. I am sure those fans of the non blood-and-guts horror - ie the "cold sweat" horror - will find this an enjoyable read.

**THOMAS THE RHYMER** by Ellen Kushner. VGSF pb, dist in Aust by Jacaranda Wiley. (C) 1990. 247pp. A\$11.95. On sale now.

**THOMAS THE RHYMER** won the World Fantasy Award several years back. It is a novelisation of the old legend of Thomas the Rhymer, set in England about the 12th Century.

The scene opens in a peasant's cottage. It is bleak weather and raining. There is a knock on the door and a young hunch-backed man comes in out of the wet. It is Thomas the Rhymer - the "hump" is his harp. For the kindness and hospitality of the couple who owned the cottage, he tells a tale of Elfland and the queen he met and loved there. He spent years in Elfland - his black hair grew long enough to cover the two of them when they made love, naked under it.

Ellen Kushner has written a novel that has caught the essence of the period - with just enough of this centuries understanding to bring it across for us. Excellent fantasy.

**TEKLORDS** by William Shatner. Corgi pb, dist in Aust by Transworld Publishers. (C) 1991. 255 pp. A\$10.95. On sale now

The sequel to **TEKWAR**, which came out a year or so ago and seemed to sell quite well. I've also hear that it is a hit with the younger readers.

This time around Jake Cardigan is again pursued by killer android assassins - though I thought assassins were only supposed to be after those high in power; ah well, America is the land where it all comes down to one level, I suppose. The action is fast and furious, with nubile

young women coming to the Jack's aid when he finds himself in trouble, and as one says, "pulls your nuts out of the fire."

**TEKLORDS** is simple enough in execution for anyone to read and understand - and would be good bait for enticing an out-of-genre reader to venture into SF's graduated depths.

**EARTHLIGHT** by R. J. Stewart. Element trade pb, dist in Aust by Jacaranda Wiley. (C) 1992. 162 pp incl Index. A\$29.95. On sale now.

The sub-title on the front of this book is *The Ancient Path to Transformation Rediscovering The Wisdom of Celtic & Faery Lore*, which gives you some idea of what the volume is about. This will teach me to ask for review copies by title.

**EARTHLIGHT** is part of the Earth Quest series, whose aim "is to examine and explain how shamanic principles can be applied to the journey towards self-discovery - and beyond". The chapter headings are: Earth Light; The Faery People; Going and Returning; Empowered Visualization; The Dark Goddess and the Tree Below; The Four Cities and The Weaver Goddess in the Underworld.

Stewart is a musician though it doesn't show in this book. He goes through New Age and faery law to help people attune themselves to nature. I don't think those people who have probably never ventured out of the Old World realise how silly it all seems from somewhere where the Faeries weren't game to venture.

**NATURAL CREATION OR NATURAL SELECTION?** by John Davidson. Element trade pb, dist in Aust by Jacaranda Wiley. (C) 1992. 275 pp incl Indexes. A\$29.95. On sale now.

Another in the Earth Quest series. Davidson graduated with an honours degree in biological sciences, met an Indian mystic and went on run *The Wholistic Research Company*.

Davidson spends most of this book giving the background to the modern theory of evolution and the earth sciences - and for a clearly written and interesting and easily understood read it is very good as far as that goes. He also goes into details of some of the things that are still not explained (as he says); things like human remains in rock estimated to be 28 million years old.

At the end Davidson ties up all the threads in an Epilogue and then give his opinion how the Life Force has given force (as it were) to the evolution of species and their decline. Note that this author is not an uneducated man: he writes clearly and gives reasonably valid reasons for his conclusions. A good talking point book.

**N-SPACE** by Larry Niven. Orbit pb, dist in Aust by Penguin Books. (C) 1990. 617 pp incl bibliography. A\$12.95. On sale now.

A few hours reading here... **N-SPACE** is a collection of many of Niven's short stories, articles and extracts from his novels. Though I would have preferred

that those extracts had been left out and more stories put in, the whole is value for money. Each section (ie story, article) is prefaced by Niven with background details of the writing of such.

One of the articles is *MAN OF STEEL*, *WOMAN OF KLEENEX*, and some of the other material is from sources that are not the usual hardcover or paperback book, so the casual SF reader may not have seen it. The stories are: *BORDERED IN BLACK*; *CONVERGENT SERIES*; *ALL THE MYRIAD WAYS*; *FOR A FOGGY NIGHT*; *THE MEDDLER*; *PASSERBY*; *DOWN IN FLAMES*; *THE FOURTH PROFESSION*; *INCONSTANT MOON* (one of his best short stories); *WHAT CAN YOU SAY ABOUT CHOCOLATE MANHOLE COVERS?*; *CLOAK OF ANARCHY*; *THE HOLE MAN*; *NIGHT ON MISPEC MOOR*; *FLARE TIME*; *THE LOCUSTS*; *BRENDA*; *THE RETURN OF WILLIAM PROXMIRE*; *THE TALE OF THE JINNI AND THE SISTERS*; *MADNESS HAS ITS PLACE* and *THE KITEMAN*. One of the better articles is *THE ALIEN IN OUR MINDS*. Another, *SPACE*, is a bit too parochial.

**JIZZ** by John Hart. Black Swan pb, dist in Aust by Transworld Publishers. (C) 1992. A\$12.95. On sale now.

JIZZ is a strange word - it has something to do with bird watchers, and something to do with other things.

John Hart is a mainstream author, and it shows up every so often (as in an asteroid with an orbit around the Earth). JIZZ is set in the 21st Century in England. Not all that much has changed - the people are still the same types as nowadays, though Brighton is a separate city state and London is still on the way down.

Hayden Sabanack is a scholar, though he is selling himself as an ideas man - and he certainly has them. He works in a small office with Sophie and an intelligent computer which most times has the miffs. He is approached by a certain business man to create some ideas for a machine to uplift humanity. He works on this, as well as working on a famous actress who has stirred his gonads, and manages to follow through with his ideas to create the device which he delivers to the businessman, who hopes to win a contest (and much money) with it.

The novel is more mainstream than SF, but if you like puns, the book is full of them.

**PLUTO IN THE MORNING LIGHT** - The Collected Stories of Robert Silverberg. HarperCollins pb, dist in Aust. by HarperCollins. (C) 1983-86. 396pp. A\$16.95. On sale now.

This is volume 1 of the HarperCollins' collection. The whole collection looks to be very good. In the American version this is volume 2, volume 1 being *THE CONGLOMEROID COCKTAIL PARTY*. There is a six page introduction by Silverbob wherein he explains why he wrote and still writes short stories. Each story is given an introduction.

The stories are: *HOMEFARING*; *BASILEUS*; *DANCERS IN THE TIME-FLUX*; *GATE OF HORN*,

*GATE OF IVORY*; *AMANDA AND THE ALIEN*; *SNAKE AND OCEAN*, *OCEAN AND SNAKE*; *TOURIST TRADE*; *MULTIPLES*; *AGAINST BABYLON*; *SYMBIONT*; *SAILING TO BYZANTIUM*; *SUNRISE ON PLUTO*; *HARDWARE*; *HANNIBAL'S ELEPHANTS* and *BLINDSIGHT*. They are printed here in the order they were written; and are a mixture of sf and fantasy. I think the one I like best is *SAILING TO BYZANTIUM*, with *SNAKE AND OCEAN*, *OCEAN AND SNAKE* a close second. The others aren't bad, though some are too short really to have much background, such as *AMANDA AND THE ALIEN* - the end of which could be seen coming.

Still, a collection worth obtaining for your library.

**WINDOWS 3.1 SELF-TEACHING GUIDE** by Keith Weiskamp & Saul Aguiar. Wiley pb (190x233 mm), dist in Aust by Jacaranda Wiley. (C) 1992. 412 pp incl Index, illust. A\$39.95. On sale now.

Most people these days who are either writers or desktop publishers are using sophisticated programs. For those who use MSdos and PCs all the later programs are using Microsoft Windows as the GUI. I myself use *WORD FOR WINDOWS 2a* as the desktop publisher. This program must have Windows loaded for it to work. To fully get the most out of Windows you need to know the background of what it can do. To do this you can either read through the manual that came with the program, or purchase a guide. Of course if you use the program with a file-server at "work" there is probably only one manual and you would do better to buy a self-teaching guide.

I have found that this guide by Weiskamp & Aguiar is very good - it gives background to the why of Windows 3.1 (the latest version) and takes the reader through all the Windows Applications simply, giving examples and lessons. The headings are: *GETTING STARTED*; *BUILDING YOUR WINDOWS SKILLS*; *THE PROGRAM MANAGER AT WORK*; *PUTTING WINDOWS TO WORK*; *USING THE CONTROL PANEL*; *MANAGING YOUR FILES AND DISKS*; *PRINTING WITH WINDOWS*; *WORKING WITH NON-WINDOWS APPLICATIONS*; *USING DESKTOP ACCESSORIES*; *WORKING WITH WRITE*; *WORKING WITH PAINTBRUSH* and *USING TERMINAL*. "Write" is a simple word processing program which comes with Windows 3.1. Altogether a good buy for those who find computers and setting up and using programs a bit hard - and for those, like me, who have used them, but look for reference material that better explains things I may have missed.

**A TIME OF OMENS** by Katharine Kerr. HarperCollins h/c, dist in Aust by HarperCollins. (C) 1992. 345pp. A\$35. On sale now.

Book Two of the Westlands cycle. For those who have been reading the Deverry novels (*DAGGERSPELL*, *DARKSPELL*, *THE BRISTLING WOOD*, *THE SOUTHERN SEA* and the first volume in the Westlands cycle, *A TIME OF EXILE*, (reviewed several issues back))



you will find that this novel carries on the adventures of those people inhabiting that world of a thousand years ago.

The events in this volume follow the return of Maryn, the king, to Dun Cerrmor, and other happenings in the civil wars. When Mayn had settled down a little he married Bellyra. The book also follows the career of Rhodry as he take up the path of a silver dagger.

There are a lot of things happening this time and Kerr splits the novel up as she follows four or so plot threads. I'm sure the readers of the type of fantasy that Katharine Kerr specialises in will take to A TIME OF OMENS with enthusiasm.

**BLOOD TRILLIUM** by Julian May. HarperCollins h/c, dist in Aust by HarperCollins. (C) 1992. 336 pp. A\$35. On sale now.

Some time ago, in June 1991, HarperCollins released the paperback version of Marion Bradley, Andre Norton and Julian May's collaboration **BLACK TRILLIUM**. In that novel the three princesses Haramis, Anigel and Kadiya had put together their powers given by the Trillium Talismans and defeated Orogastus.

It is now twelve years later and peace still reignes. The three women have grown a little apart - Haramis is deep into study of the art of magic and the problems of science; Anigel and her mate, King Atar are busy with the administration of their provinces, which keep them both busy and happy. Kadiya is still independent, and adventurous, and when she loses her talisman in the sea it is a shock, but not, apparently a disaster. Till Anigel's mate and her children are kidnapped and a ransom is demanded - her Talisman.

There is another evil about - and the three have to join forces again to try to defeat it and regain that which was lost.

**DOC SAVAGE: WHITE EYES** by Kenneth Robeson. Bantam pb, dist in Aust by Transworld Publishers. (C) 1992. 304 pp. A\$9.95. On sale now.

There haven't been many Doc Savage adventure written in the last forty years - probably the one by Philip Jose Farmer is it. On the contents page of this new novel is listed the 13 "omnibus" volumes with the original Doc Savage adventures - each volume containing four novelettes from the forties.

Kenneth Robeson has obviously read through these to get his background material straight and a blurb says that the plot is taken from original material from the early era. In this volume, someone is killing off crooks in a strange way - they have a fit and their eyes turn first red (from burst blood vessels) then poached-egg white. And then they are then very dead. Doc Savage and his companions soon are embroiled in the thick of it all and the evil White Eyes, with the white clothes, skin and eyes, soon has them trying to beat the combined forces of all the criminals in the city working in concert against them.

For the pulp era fans, of whom there are many around - witness the success of the Conan paperbacks others of that period.

**A SPELL OF EMPIRE - The Horns of Tartarus** by Michael Scott Rohan & Allan Scott. Orbit pb, dist in Aust by Penguin Books. (C) 1992. 462pp. A\$11.95. On sale now.

There is a line in gold foil at the bottom of this book calling A SPELL OF EMPIRE "A Fantasy Romp". And it is not out of place.

The stage is set in the introductory chapter when the Emperor of Byzantium, fed up with the barbarian goings-on, decides on the spur of the moment to move the capital to Sicily. This has profound repercussions - the northern tribes unite and forge their own empire. Centuries later, the events in A SPELL OF EMPIRE take place. Volker Seefried, looking for work after leaving his former master in a puddle on the ground, is taken up by a merchant who wants him, and three others, to help him on a journey. Volker finds those other three in the same tavern - two men and a woman with an owl, and they all go off to adventure.

And adventure they have on the way, mainly with warlike Norsemen, led by a sorcerer who is determined to get his way. There follows roisterous adventures. The companions are a kind of three musketeers - but their motto is more likely "All for one and the one is me".

**VALENTINE** by S. P. Somtow. Gollancz h/c, dist in Aust by Jacaranda Wiley. (C) 1992. 383 pp. A\$32.95. On sale now.

VALENTINE is subtitled Return to Vampire Junction. Timmy Valentine is dead - burned to death along with many others. Like Elvis, his image and songs go on, as does his legend. There are look-alike competitions and all the paraphernalia that goes with them. However, Timmy is dead, but not gone - his essence still exists and can take note of the happenings in the world of the living.

Angel Todd is not Timmy Valentine - people know this, but he has his own charisma. He is in a look alike competition and wins the accolades of those watching. Soon he is the up-and-coming idol and it is then that his world starts to come apart around the seams. Reality and un-reality fuse and Timmy Valentine's old friends exert pressure on Angel Todd. During the course of the novel Timmy appears in various forms, some of them from looking-glass country.

Throughout the novel creatures of the dark are brought into existence by some of the characters in the novel, so this isn't just a novel about vampires. It also gives flashbacks into the 2,000 year old doings of Timmy and his journeys around the world.

**DARK FORCE RISING** by Timothy Zahn. Bantam h/c, dist in Aust by Transworld Publishers. (C) 1992. 376 pp. A\$24.95. On sale now.

The second volume of the new STAR WARS trilogy. The first volume, HEIR TO THE EMPIRE, set up the background some years after the defeat of Darth Vader and the death of the Emperor.

In this volume, Grand Admiral Thrawn is attempting to get together a fleet to annihilate the ascending new Republic, which itself is having troubles, what with the breath of treason being uttered against some in the Council. Princess Leia is getting on with her pregnancy, and at the same time trying to deliver an alien race to help the Republic. Han and Lando have heard of the hint of treason and are working on finding out who on the Council is the traitor.

Timothy Zahn has a smooth and clear writing style, as is needed with this sort of novel, which is obviously aimed at the general readership. Zahn runs with all plots going and, even though the book ends with "To be Concluded", it is complete in itself as far as short-term story-lines go.

**THE BONE FOREST** by Robert Holdstock. Grafton pb, dist in Aust by HarperCollins. (C) 1976-91. 268 pp. A\$10.95. On sale now.

The stories in this collection are mostly about ancient Britain - if it is a representative collection of Holdstock's works, then he doesn't have a wide repertoire.

Included herein are: **THE BONE FOREST**; **THORN**; **THE SHAPECHANGER**; **THE BOY WHO JUMPED THE RAPIDS**; **TIME OF THE TREE**; **MAGIC MAN**; **SCARROWFELL** and **THE TIME BEYOND AGE**. **THE BONE FOREST** is a pre-cursor to **MYTHAGO WOOD** - I didn't like the second Mythago Wood novel (**LAVONDYSS**), but **THE BONE FOREST** seems fresher, somehow. **THE SHAPECHANGER** is a nice horror story linking the ancient world to our own through a lost dog; **THE BOY WHO JUMPED THE RAPIDS** is about perception and could be set after a nuclear war; **TIME OF THE TREE** is a Ballard-like story about creeping growth; **MAGIC MAN** concerns a human from the time of the Neanderthals; **SCARROWFELL** reminds me of **THE WICKER MAN** and **THE TIME BEYOND AGE** is a tale set in the modern world of chemical persuasion.

All in all I enjoyed reading them. Holdstock has his own convoluted style in plot - you may have to grow to like it.

**EXPATRIA INCORPORATED** by Keith Brooke. Gollancz h/c, dist in Aust by Jacaranda Wiley. (C) 1992. 319 pp. A\$38. On sale now.

**EXPATRIA** was an SF novel reviewed a couple of issues back. **EXPATRIA INCORPORATED** is the sequel to that novel.

The planet of **Expatria** was a lost colony of earth, or so the natives believed. They had a local belief that science was better left out of things and so events had run on without much going on until the announcement from the orbiting colonies that they didn't realise they had that a ship from Earth was on the way.

In this novel, the ship of religious zealots of the Third Testament arrives and commences to try to convert the natives - the former colonists, which they believed would not take too long, or many resources. The viewpoint of the novel switches between the "invading"

Terrans, the Expatriat natives and those colonists living on the orbiting Arks. The back ground of the two novels is well worked out and believable and the characterisation is also well done. I enjoyed reading the sequel as I had enjoyed the original. Good solid "hard" SF with adventures in the background. \*Recommended\*.

**THE CARPET PEOPLE** by Terry Pratchett. Doubleday h/c, dist in Aust by Transworld Publishers. (C) 1992 (revised). 176 pp. A\$18.95. On sale now.

**THE CARPET PEOPLE** was first written by a 17 year-old Terry Pratchett and published in 1971. I would say that it has been extensively revised for this edition...

The novel is about, of course, the Carpet People - the nearly microscopic-sized denizens of Carpet land. They live amongst the giant hairs that tower aloft. There are legends that they migrated from across the Tiles a long time ago. There are not only humans living in the Carpet, but monsters that terrorise the villages (and cities) scattered over the vast, flat landscape. There is also a phenomenon called the Fray - which sounds like, from the description, the inhabitant of the house wherein the Carpet lies.

The whole scenario is very close to a fairy tale - but the elder Pratchett has (obviously) added characterisation and in-dept plot elements that make it more than just a children's read. There are those Pratchett puns, as well as his wry humour.

If you enjoyed the Discworld stories and the Truckers; this is different - lighter - but it'll give you a chuckle or two. It would be a good buy for youngsters for Christmas - buy it now and ensure that it is available for the stocking.

**TRANSCENDENCE** by Charles Sheffield. Gollancz h/c, dist in Aust by Jacaranda Wiley. (C) 1992. 270 pp. A\$32.95. On sale now.

Book 3 of the Heritage universe - the universe where the Builder artifacts are strewn across the galaxy and even into intergalactic space. The other books were **SUMMERTIDE** and **DIVERGENCE**.

Our usual human characters again turn up in this volume - Darya Lang, Hans Rebka, Louis Nenda and Julian Graves - as well as the aliens Atvar H'sial, Dulcimer, J'merlia, Kallik and the robot E.C. Tally. They are hot on the train of the vanished Zardalu, which they believe have survived their return to the galaxy and are now quickly breeding their way into future dominance of said galaxy. If you have read the first two novels you will know that Sheffield has an excellent grasp of science (being a scientist himself) and characterisation. This is the kind of book that once you start reading is very hard to put down till you finish reading it.

There are not that many good "hard" SF series being published these days; when you do find one you tend to look out for that author's work and say that you hope he (or she) finishes the series/or starts another series or novel. This series are excellent SF adventure and consistent as any present day SF.

**MAGIC'S PROMISE** by Mercedes Lackey. RoC pb, dist in Aust by Penguin Books. (C) 1990. 320 pp. A\$10.95. On sale now.

Book 2 of The Last Herald-Mage. Book 1 was **MAGIC'S PAWN** and followed the career of Vanyel as he struggles against his own nature to grow up without destroying his country with his wild magic.

**MAGIC'S PROMISE** opens with Vanyel taking it easy in a hostel room and gives an example of the thinking in italics that is scattered throughout the novel. The mental telepathy is also shown in italics, which tends to create a little bit of confusion.

The action in the story is the usual fantasy quest - Vanyel's comrade Yfandes goes to answer a call from a neighbouring country which is in deep trouble and Vanyel is also drawn along. They find that one of the causes of the trouble is Prince Tashir and it takes much work on their part in their attempt to save him.

There is a hell of a lot of fantasy going the rounds at the moment; if you are a die-hard fantasy fan you will want to pick this volume up for your library.

**CHILDREN OF THE NIGHT** by Dan Simmons. Headline trade pb, dist in Aust by Hodder & Stoughton. (C) 1992. 406 pp. A\$21.95. (h/c \$39.95). On sale now.

A modern novel set in Romania and which tells of that most ancient of legends... Kate Neuman was a Haematologist and was working in that country when she comes across a baby that she falls in love with : Joshua. He is dying of a blood disease and she struggles to find a cure. Along with Father Michael O'Rourke she looks around the city of Bucharest. She finds that a simple blood transfusion helps the child and it is not long before he appears to be getting better.

All is not as well as she thinks, though, and it is not till she finds out that the baby's Family wants him back that things start to get complicated. The reason they want him back becomes obvious to her and both she and O'Rourke, after they become lovers, find that leaving the country is not as easy as getting in. In the end they managed to escape, with the baby. But the cause of the evil was still living and it may be that one day he would come to reclaim what he had lost.

One of the best of the latter-day vampire novels.

**THE GREAT SF STORIES 23** edited by Isaac Asimov & Martin Greenberg. Stories (C) 1961. 367 pp. A\$10.95. On sale now.

This is apparently a long running series, though not all of them have been released in Australia.

The stories included are: **THE HIGHEST TREASON** by Randall Garrett; **HOTHOUSE** by Brian W. Aldiss; **HIDING PLACE** by Poul Anderson; **WHAT IS THIS THING CALLED LOVE?** by Isaac Asimov; **A PRIZE FOR EDIE** by J.F. Bone; **THE SHIP WHO SANG** by Anne McCaffrey; **DEATH AND THE SENATOR** by Arthur C. Clarke; **THE QUAKER CANNON** by Fred Pohl & C.M. Kornbluth; **THE MOON MOTH** by Jack Vance; A

**PLANET NAMED SHAYOL** by Cordwainer Smith; **RAINBIRD** by R. A. Lafferty; **WALL OF CRYSTAL**, **EYE OF NIGHT** by Algis Budrys and **REMEMBER THE ALAMO** by R.R. Fehrenbach.

I remember most of these stories from when they were first published in the sf promags, and of course many have been reprinted in other volumes. I can't say that there are any "duds" in this lot - if you don't have most of them - be sure to buy this for your library. An excellent collection.

## BOOKS PREVIOUSLY REVIEWED:

**BILL, THE GALACTIC HERO ON THE PLANET OF TASTELESS PLEASURE** by Harry Harrison & David Bischoff. VGSF pb, dist in Aust by Jacaranda Wiley. (C) 1991. 213 pp. A\$11.95. On sale now. Bill, the Interstellar Marine meets up with a spoofy sort by the name of Irma, and the things that are satirised are the liked of **STAR WARS**, **STAR TREK** and many others. People also turn up in their adventures - there is even a character by the name of Dr. Delazny. Gut wrenching comedy.

**EXPATRIA** by Keith Brooke. Corgi pb, dist in Aust by Transworld Publishers. (C) 1991. 318 pp. A\$10.95. On sale now. Brooke has created an interesting society on Expatria. The world had been cut off from Earth for some time. A nobleman, Mathias Hanrahan, joins a team trying to reconstruct the old, lost technology. The society he is in rejects such research. Then those in charge find there is a Earth ship homing in on the planet. A good read.

**THE GREAT HUNT** by Robert Jordan. Orbit pb, dist in Aust by Penguin Books. (C) 1990. 707 pp incl. Glossary. A\$12.95. On sale now.

Book 2 of the Wheel of Time. Rand al'Thor is off on a quest to recover the stolen dagger of Shadar Logoth and the Horn of Valere. With two companions he journeys out to battle with Darkfriends, Trollocs, and war against the Dark One and Ba'alzaman. Fantasy adventure of the epic sort. A good long read for those overseas air journeys....

## OTHER CURRENT RELEASES:

PENGUIN: **GARDEN OF RAMA** - Arthur C. Clarke  
**THE WHITE ROSE** - Glen Cook  
**DRAGON REBORN** - Robert Jordan

JACARANDA WILEY:

**WORD FOR WINDOWS 2**  
**SMALL GODS** - T Pratchett  
**BLUE MOON RISING** - Green  
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## HALLEY'S COMET

By Julie Vaux

Long sought yet still unseen  
Halley's comet caught all our dreams  
But the Heavens' new queen  
Is not what, was never, what she seems.

A nebula, fading - a fuzzy spot  
No glorious blazing  
A cloud with a carrier wave  
A faint barely visible dot  
Focus of frantic gazing  
Did we see you when in a cave  
We still cowered  
As you glowered?

