

THYME #80

The Australasian SF News Magazine
October 1990



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Thyme is brought to you ~bimonthly (Commitments & Mortgage permitting) by LynC, from the ADDRESS:

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News, reviews, etc can also be sent via Email to Thyme@asis.unimelb.EDU.AU for those having access to ACSnet, AARNet, Internet, etc.

Thyme is available for news, reviews, artwork, informative phone calls or letters, trade, or even subscription, at the following rates: \$1.25 per issue Australia only. NZ\$1.65, or UK50p - to the agents. **ELSEWHERE**: A\$2.00 per issue (include conversion costs of A\$5 if in another currency). All overseas copies are sent SAL, or Airmail if SAL not available.

Advertising rates: \$15 (Oz) per quarter page, or pro rata. Copy ready ads only. Fan Ads - at cost - talk to us.

Our agents are: **EUROPE**: Joseph Nicholas, 5A Frinton Rd, Stamford Hill, London, N15 6NH, U. K. **NEW ZEALAND**: Linnette Horne, P.O. Box 2836, Wellington, Aotearoa/NZ. **ELSEWHERE**: write to me (LynC) directly.

News, reviews, articles, and locs are to be sent to **Thyme's** address; fiction and fiction queries to **Thyme Fiction's** address (Aphelion Publications, P.O. Box 619, Nth Adelaide, SA, 5006); money to overseas agents if there is one, **Thyme** otherwise.

If you have a big hand-drawn X (XX for non Australians) on your mailing label, this means that this is your LAST issue unless you DO SOMETHING.

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1990 HUGO AWARDS:

Best Novel

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | <u>HYPERION</u> | Dan Simmons
(Doubleday/Foundation, Bantam Spectra) |
| 2 | <u>A Fire in the Sun</u> | George Alec Effinger (Doubleday/Foundation) |
| 3 | <u>Prentice Alvin</u> | Orson Scott Card (Tor) |
| 4 | <u>The Boat of a Million Years</u> | Poul Anderson (Tor) |
| 5 | <u>Grass</u> | Sheri S Tepper (Doubleday/Foundation) |

Best Novella

"The Mountains of Mourning" Lois McMaster Bujold (**Borders of Infinity** (BAEN))

Best Novelette

"Enter a Soldier. Later: Enter another"
Robert Silverberg (**Time Gate** (BAEN))

Best Short Story

"Boobs" Suzy McKee Charnas (**Asimov's**, July 89)

Best Non Fiction

The World Beyond the Hill Alexei & Cory Panshin (Tarcher)

Best Dramatic Presentation

- | | |
|---|------------------------------------|
| 1 | INDIANA JONES AND THE LAST CRUSADE |
| 2 | THE ADVENTURES OF BARON MUNCHAUSEN |
| 3 | BATMAN |
| 4 | FIELD OF DREAMS |
| 5 | THE ABYSS |

Best Professional Editor

Gardner Dozois (**Asimov's The Year's Best Science Fiction** 1st-6th annual colln (St Martin's Press))

Best Professional Artist

Don Maitz

Best Semiprozine

Locus ed. Charles N Brown, P.O. Box 13305, Oakland, CA 94661

Best Fanzine

The Mad 3 Party ed Leslie Turek (The fanzine is now defunct)

Best Fan Writer

Dave Langford

Best Fan Artist

Stu Shiffman

John W Campbell Award (not a HUGO) for best newcomer

Kristine Kathryn Rusch (editor PULPHOUSE)

Best Original Artwork (not a HUGO)

Don Maitz (cover of RimRunners (Popular Library))

The NEW ZEALAND SCIENCE FICTION AWARDS

(These were awarded at the New Zealand Natcon in June this year)

Best Media Zine:

Katra

Best General Fanzine:

Cry Havoc edited by Lyn McConchie & Linnette Horne

Best Fan Artist:

Peter Gainsford (artist for Cry Havoc)

Best Fan Writer:

Alan Robson

Best Fanzine Editor:

Lyn McConchie (ex-co-editor of Cry Havoc)

Services to NZ Fandom:

Keith Smith (currently co-editor of Cry Havoc)

[Cry Havoc's address is P.O. Box 2836, Wellington, NZ]

WRITERS OF THE FUTURE 1990

(These were awarded in a special ceremony in Hollywood in June)

Best Writer: James Gardner from Canada (prize US\$4000)

Best Illustrator: Derek Hegstead from USA (prize US\$4000)

Both appear in this year's Writers of the Future, Volume VI (Bridge Publications). This edition also boasts the first Australian finalist in this competition - James Verran of South Australia with a story called "The Dive".

FAN FUNDS:

DUFF

In our previous issue we announced that Greg Turkich had won this with 132 out of 256 votes. We also mentioned that the names of Australian voters had been published, and that they were too numerous for us to mention. Doxy raised the point that it was unaware as to where this information had been published. Why, in the previous DUFF administrator's newsletter, which was almost certainly sent to everyone who voted. If you didn't vote, and wish to know, the newsletter can probably be obtained by writing to Terry Dowling, 11 Everard St, Hunters Hill, NSW, Aus, 2110.

GUFF

Roman Orszanski won this by a margin of one vote over the Muijsert/Loney team.

The Australian voters, all 107 of them, are again too numerous to mention. If you didn't vote and wish to know, Irwin has now published these in GUFFAWE NINE. Write to him at 26 Jessamine Ave, East Prahran, Vic, Aus, 3181.

As at June 1990, GUFF had \$4774.23 in Australia.

FFANZ

Nominations are now open for an Australian to travel to New Zealand for Forrycon next year (see Con listing). Nominations will remain open till Christmas Day. Voting is expected to close mid April. Contact Terry Frost, in Australia, at 12/18 Robe St, St Kilda, Vic, Aus, 3182. Phone (work) (03) 697 5453. Thyme has no idea how to contact the New Zealand Administrator, and gets the impression a lot of New Zealand people suffer from the same problem.

TAFF

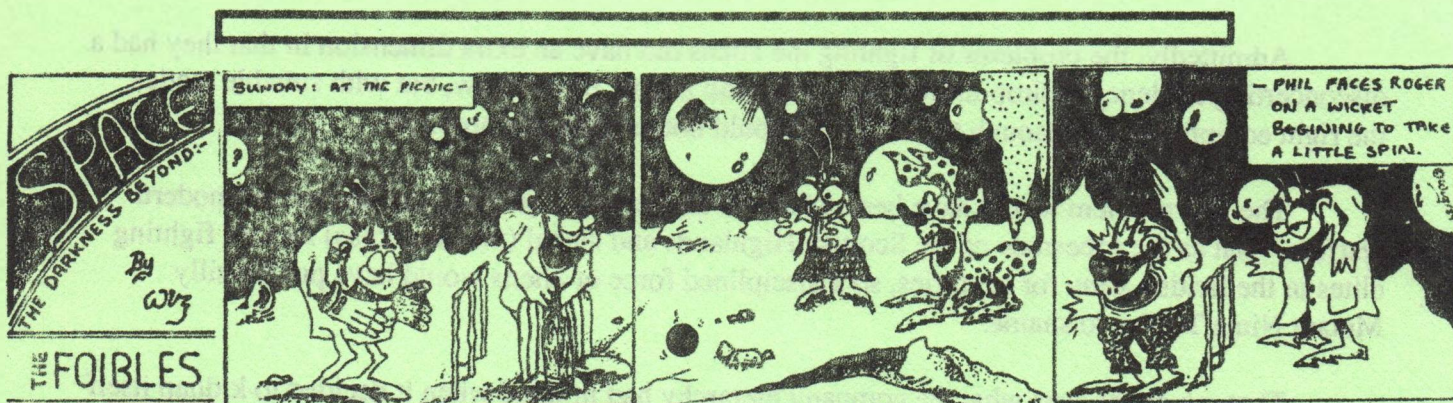
This is the fan fund which sends a European to America and vice versa. Australians are eligible to vote but not stand, and get the dubious honour of choosing which administrator they wish to deal with. This year a European is to be chosen to go to Chicon, the 1991 Worldcon (see Con Listing). Nominations open on the 1st November and close on the last day of this year. Voting closes mid May, 1991.

The administrators are:

USA Robert Lichtman, P.O. Box 30, Glen Ellen, CA 95442, USA

UK Christina Lake, 47 Wessex Ave, Horfield, Bristol, BS7 0DH, UK

Lilian Edwards, 2 Spring Valley Terrace, Morningside, Edinburgh, EH10 4QD, Scotland



ALIEN(S): THE TRUE STORY, PART II

OR: In space there are some places you don't go without a lobbyist.

MARK (ROCKY) LAWSON

In taking the aliens side in the brief "war" on LV-426 that was later heavily glamorised in the film ALIENS - with a preliminary action depicted in the film ALIEN - the most useful parallels that come to mind are the battles of the Little Big Horn and Isandhlwana.

Both battles were similar both to each other and to the film in that some poorly equipped natives managed to destroy units of a modern, "civilised" army. In the first battle several Indian nations together under Chief Crazy Horse of the Oglala Sioux wiped out Colonel Custer and a largish section of his cavalry regiment on the Little Big Horn River in 1876. Determined not to be out-done, only three years later the far more poorly equipped Zulus under Cetewayo managed to kill all but a handful of 1800 Europeans and 1000 native troops at Isandhlwana in South Africa.

Custer deserved what he got for blundering into an enormous indian encampment, apparently even after seeing the size of it, and then going out again the wrong way. At Isandhlwana, the Brits spread themselves out too much and, idiotically enough, failed to keep the soldiers supplied with ammunition.

But these blunders and the resulting victories didn't do the natives concerned any good at all - merely delaying the inevitable, if that. In both cases the units destroyed were a fraction of the forces arrayed against the natives, and once those "civilised" troops got their act together the natives were doomed.

The Zulus in particular had no hope of winning against a British column with plenty of ammunition to hand. Those who have seen the film ZULU will know what I mean. The film was, incidentally, a fairly accurate portrayal of the action at Rorkes-drift, after Isandhlwana, where less than 100 British troops held out against thousands of Zulus, basically because they had rifles, and the Zulus didn't.

With the above in mind it can be seen that the Aliens of the film had no hope at all. They might have been able to win victories through what amounts to guerilla actions or by swamping small groups, but the inevitable winners were the soft, pale creatures totting M-41A 10mm pulse-rifles, over and under with a 30mm pump-action grenade launcher, at least, that's what the second film claimed they had, and it sounds good enough to me.

Admittedly, the problems of fighting the aliens did have an extra dimension in that they had a disconcerting tendency to drop in from above or grab people from below, but with suitable tactics, the right equipment, and enough training that should not have been a problem.

The real problem would have been when the aliens were equipped and trained for modern warfare - just as the tribesmen of the Scottish Highlands and Nepal (the Ghurkhas) formed fighting elites in the British army for centuries, so a disciplined force of aliens would have put the silly Mutant Ninja Turtles to shame.

That, no doubt, was what the company hierarchy had in mind when it decided to kidnap itself an alien.

As described in the previous exciting episode, the Nostromo made an unlogged stop-over on LV-426, as per an unofficial but well paid company request, to spotlight some aliens. The heavy work was probably done by two extra battle 'droids which grabbed one of the full-grown aliens guarding eggs in a derelict spacecraft, plus some of the eggs.

Unfortunately for the crew, the 'droids made a mistake in confining the new specimen, which is fairly easy to do with a new species, and after the ship took off again, the creature got loose. It was probably able to surprise and incapacitate both 'droids directly after getting loose.

The crew naturally decided that the deal was off and tried to get rid of the alien, although there probably was some residual argument to the effect that the creature should be handed over to the company for a tidy bonus - hence the reference to the Science Officer, Ash, who was supposed to be on the company's side. Second Officer Kane may well have also been grabbed by the creature and implanted with a captured egg, although the second creature so gestated could not have grown to maturity in time to affect proceedings.

In any case, after the creature had got a couple of the crew, the incident could no longer have been explained away or covered up for the benefit of the independent board of inquiry. About the only way left of avoiding some very nasty questions was to concoct a story about how the alien had infected a crew member, blame everything on the company (which presumably would be in deep trouble no matter which version of the story was accepted), and destroy the evidence by blowing up the ship.

The Nostromo's log would have been doctored to avoid revealing the company's little mission, and naturally, as depicted in the second film, an independent board of Inquiry would have doubted Second Officer Ripley's story. (The Inquiry would have been run by the Government, not the Company, as there was considerable loss of life.)

Thus, broke, demoted, and five decades out of her time (the lifeboat had drifted for a long time) Ripley would have had little choice when she was offered a second chance at Alien hunting in some semi-official capacity. For, when a colony was established on LV426, comprehensive government surveys would have discovered the wrecked Alien spacecraft, which would then have been noted down for some later archeological investigation. This investigation found rather more than it could handle - coincidentally not long after Ripley was finally discovered - so the marines, plus Ripley, were called in.

It says something for Ripley's personality and method of handling problems that this time, despite it being her big chance, she managed to blow up the whole colony - accidentally or not - and damage the marine's ship. One can imagine the remarks made about her back at company headquarters.

As with the previous film, the blame was conveniently put on someone who didn't make it back to defend himself. But just what another board of inquiry would have made of her actions at the colony on LV-426 is an interesting question that a third film might answer.

BOOK REVIEW:

The Mark Of The Werewolf Jeffrey Sacket

Published February 1990, Bantam Books

There are not many good werewolf books around, unlike the vampire genre, which has experienced a glut in recent years. This novel by Jeffrey Sacket has the horribly clichéd title "Mark of the Werewolf" but the title turns out to be extremely appropriate. When I first read the blurb, I suspected a plagiarism because of two things. Immortality is a factor - and it never was before the series *Werewolf* - and the werewolf's name is Janos Kaldy, having mutated from 'Ianos the Chaldean' over 3000 years. Janos Skorzeny is the name of one of the *Werewolf* characters.

I started off thinking it was going to be a rip-off of the series' concepts, but ended by thinking it was brilliant. It's a long book - but has an easy style. The werewolf is caught by a group of Neo-Nazis in America who kidnap the tribe of gypsies he's with, for medical experiments. When they realise what he is, they want to 'make' werewolves out of their own men. Janos Kaldy also has a mate, whom he made a werewolf 2000 years ago. Her name is Claudia Procula, and she used to be Pilate's wife.

There's quite a bit of backflash as the Nazis regress Kaldy to recover his lost memories. This is the quite logical result of immortality - Kaldy can't remember who he is, or anything beyond his release from a French Prison around the time of the revolution. "The human memory wasn't meant to survive immortality." He and Claudia were cast into that prison by the sage Nostradamus, to whom they had gone, believing he would know a way to kill them. How can you kill a creature who can't be shot, burned, crushed, or even pricked with a pin? He doesn't bleed and his bones don't break.

Kaldy's memories are the key to the beginning of the werewolves - the act he committed to bring the curse on himself, and the reason why only certain people are ever just bitten, and not destroyed. I wasn't sure I liked the religious angle, but at least it's not presented as Jehovah's curse and the sign of the devil, etc. The pentagram and the swastika are much older than that, and owe their origins to the cult of Zoroaster in Persia. It is here that a man called Isfendir once betrayed his teacher to death.

In its different way, it is as good as The Wolf's Hour by Robert McCammon, though maybe not so original. In some of his other books, this author seems to be carefully going through the various 'stock horror' characters. This novel has a refreshingly unpredictable ending, not so much for the two protagonists, Janos Kaldy and Claudia, or the master-race movement, but for a werewolf whom Kaldy makes, who survives into our future and finds himself on a world with five moons...

Sue Isle

LETTERS:

Mark Linneman wrote to us on the subject of worldcon bids:

"Jack Herman's letter on the Sydney in '95 bid and your short note on the Worldcon bids were interesting. I have some later information, and a few comments.

The fans I met at Midwestcon had a generally positive attitude toward the **Sydney bid**. It was seen as a credible and serious bid in an interesting location. West Coast fans, not surprisingly, were the most supportive. It is also perceived as an outsider, because [1] the Glasgow bid will split the votes of those desiring a "foreign" convention. Many fans from the Northeast USA, who otherwise might support Sydney, will likely vote for Glasgow; and [2] The convention voting on the bid is Magicon, to be held in Orlando. The USA bidder is Atlanta, and its geographical proximity will convince others of the numerous Southeastern fans that they should vote for Atlanta - at least they can afford that. Sydney does have some serious support, and it may win - particularly if the Glasgow bid falters. Atlanta is running a major and well organised bid campaign though.

The **1994 Nashville** bid has been moved to Louisville, Kentucky. The hotel in Nashville had another offer for the same period as the con, and very efficiently decided to negotiate with the other group rather than waiting to see who won the bid. The same committee is involved and Louisville has run many successful Rivercons for decades. It should help Winnipeg's chances however.

That "only" **three years notice** is available for Worldcons is becoming more of a problem. Major venues (such as Opryland which can hold the whole con under one roof [- it was Nashville's choice]) fill up sooner than that with other conventions. My law librarian's convention is now considering sites for our '96 annual meeting - and we'll only have about 3000 attending!"

Mark

925 #106 Red Mile Crt
Lexington, KY 40504, USA

James Allen also wrote; on the subject of recent Australian publications and Authors:

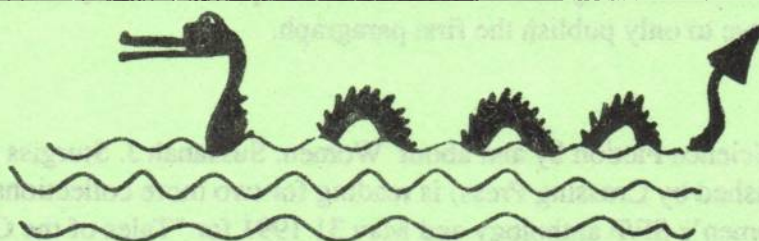
"I'm reading Striped Holes and I think it is the best Broderick ever - it is fun and not so deadly serious or polysyllabic as his other work. Very very very nice Damien.

I see from the publicity for Terry Dowling's book (Rhynosseros) that Terry has won 6 ditmars. I hope he does well, I've liked the Rhynosseros stories I've read so far.

Perhaps Australian SF is on the way up!"

James

P.O. Box 41, W. Brunswick, 3055



Yarn Basket:

CofA's:

Kim Huett for no apparent reason has moved post office boxes. He has gone from P.O. Box 649 to P.O. Box 679. Both at Woden, ACT, Aus, 2606.

John Newman and Jan Warracke have gotten sick of high-pressure city living and gone bush. Their new postal address is P.O. Box 198E, Ballarat East, Vic, Aus, 3350

Gordon Lingard has moved, yet again. This time he can be found at 85 Mann St, Armidale, NSW, Aus, 2350. Phone (067) 729 067.

Janeen Webb, ex-co-editor of ASFR II, has a post office box in St Kilda. P.O. Box 6231, St Kilda Rd Central, Melbourne, Vic, Aus, 3004.

Minotaur Books has changed both its name (it is now Minotaur (SF) P/L) and its various locations. All sections can now be found at 220 Bourke St, Melbourne 3000. The new (general) phone number is (03) 639 1144. [It was interesting just how fast their "We have moved" sign got ripped down...]

Craig Hilton, Rat artist extraordinaire, has moved to P.O. Box 430, Collie, WA, Aus, 6225. Phone (097) 344 625. If you need any fillo's Craig is usually happy to oblige between playing at being a doctor.

Tanya Hempstead is yet another fan who has decided to squeeze into a post office box. She has G.P.O. Box 1085J, Melbourne, Vic, 3001.

Greg Hills, itinerant fanzine publisher (latest title is Digitus Imprimus), has taken over the Muijsert/Loney Post office box, P.O. Box 428, Richmond, Vic, 3121.

The Cat's true feeder has returned, so the cat has kicked **Lucy Sussex** and **Julian Warner** out into the cold. They can now be found at 39 Chapman St, North Melbourne, Vic, Aus, 3051.

Hatches:

Adrian Jamie Hirsh arrived at 10:45 am on the tenth of July, 1990. At the time he weighed 3.66 Kg, but is considerably heavier now. Last heard, Adrian, Irwin, and Wendy were doing fine.

OZ Publishing:

Dreamstone have finally announced the launch of From Sea to Shining Star, the collection of **A. Bertram Chandler** stories. This was launched at Galaxy Bookshop on the 21st of October. Collectors editions are (RRP) A\$100, Numbered editions (RRP) A\$70. Enquiries and orders to Dreamstone, P.O. Box 312, Fyshwick, ACT, Aus, 2609.

Russell Blackford wrote to tell us his story "Crystal Soldier" is to appear in an Italian Anthology Sfere di Cristallo, wherein he appears to have been listed as an American!

Not content with three of his novels being re-printed in Australia this year, **Damien Broderick** is to have a short story collection, The Dark Between the Stairs published in April next year. And on the subject of Damien, last issue we published a snippet of an article in which he appeared. The article quoted him as saying that he writes "because I'm achingly sad and lonely. I write to be loved and admired." We prefaced this quote by saying that Damien had "simply" written ... How could we have been so wrong? We should know by now that Damien never does anything "simply". It turns out that what he really wrote in answer to the question "Why do I write?" was 20 lines long! The article chose to only publish the first paragraph.

O/S Publishing:

Wanted Fantasy/Science Fiction by and about Women. **Sussanah J. Sturgiss** (who already has two anthologies published by Crossing Press) is reading for two more collections. Deadlines are January 31 1991 for a women's SF/F anthology and May 31 1991 for "Tales of the Goddesses"

(working title). Works are to be no longer than 10,000 words. For more details or submissions write to Sussanah J Sturgis, P.O. Box 39, West Tisbury, Mass 02575, USA.

Fanzines:

Australian Science Fiction Review Incarnation II has been laid to rest. At least we assume it has been, it is now late Spring, and the last issue we've seen was Winter. The Winter issue did claim to be the penultimate issue though, so there may be one more to come.

Events:

October 27 - **Halloween Party** 6pm, 6 Ian Pde, Concord, NSW. \$10 a head, dinner and drinks provided. Fundraising event for Huttcon.

October 28 - **The Otherworlds Fair** 10am to 4pm at the Scout Hall, 213A Weston St, Brunswick East, (near Nicholson St) Vic. This is a market day for all fannish groups. Enquiries to Wendy Ratter on 383 2846 AH (but before 9:30 pm)

November 7 - **Critical Mass!** 8pm, 2nd Floor, 155 Pirie St, Adelaide. SA. Topic for discussion is Science Fiction Art, chaired by Lesley Bray. Dinner beforehand will be at Left Bank Café.

November 7 - **Nova Mob** ~8pm, 31 Brighton St, Richmond, Vic. (Ph: 429 8354). Topic for discussion is "Writing Feminist SF", hosted by Rosaleen Love. Pre-meeting eats are at Erawan Thai Restaurant, 205 Swan St, Richmond.

November 11 - **Sunday in the Park (and Splurge!)**. This is an inclusive byo picnic, starting around 12:30 pm. Wander down to the Ornamental Lake in the Royal Botanical Gardens, Melbourne, Vic; south of Alexandra Ave between Punt Rd and the Swan St Bridge.

November 15 - **Douglas Adams** (author of "hitch-hiker's Guide...", etc, etc) appears at the Age Literary Lunch in the Southern Cross, Melbourne, Vic. Cost is \$35 per head. Ring (03) 670 1096 for tickets. Douglas Adams is in Australia between the 15th and the 22nd. Ring (03) 646 6716 to find where/whether he is appearing in your local area. [Paul Hamlyn Publishing & James Allen]

December 1 - **Nova Mob Christmas Party**. Lunchtime Yum Cha, venue and time to be announced.

December 8 - **Medtrek Christmas Party**. Bring a NEW toy. This fun event is really a toy drive for the Camperdown Hospital. Venue is Ron & Sue Clarkes, 6 Bellevue Rd, Faulconbridge, NSW. Phone AH (047) 516 740 (before 10:00 pm, please).

[Can't half tell it's getting near Christmas, can you?]



Rats of the Underworld © Craig Miller 1989

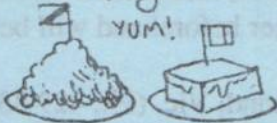
What's On At The Melbourne Science Fiction Club

THE MSFC IS A FUN BUNCH OF PEOPLE WITH A WIDE RANGE OF INTERESTS - WHY NOT POP IN AND MEET US? WE'D LOVE TO SEE YOU.



FRIDAY 5TH OCTOBER

International
Bring-a-Plate
Night



FRIDAY 12TH OCTOBER

JUST A RELAXING
NIGHT AT THE
CLUB. PULL UP A
CHAIR...



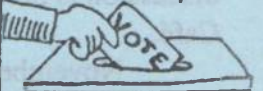
Friday
October
19th.

Round
Robin
Story

Friday 26
October

GENERAL
MEETING

Nominations open
for committee positions



NOVEMBER
~ 16TH ~
(FRIDAY)

COMMITTEE
ELECTIONS

DEMOCRACY IN ACTION!

FRIDAY 23rd Nov.

Most of us will be
spending the week-
end at HUTTCON
(THE NATIONAL MEDIA
S.F. CONVENTION,
DIPLOMAT MOTOR INN,
ST. KILDA) BUT YOU
CAN STILL POP IN AT
THE CLUB FOR A
CHAT.

30TH
NOV

Be amazed as we
prepare our first
Christmas Window
Tableau!



Friday
7th December

Play School
Night

fun and games

SUNDAY
DECEMBER
9TH



FILM
NIGHT

A SMALL DONATION PLEASE
TO COVER FREIGHT

THE STALKER
A RUSSIAN CLASSIC
THE SORT OF FILM
YOU DON'T SEE
EVERYDAY

FRIDAY 14TH
DECEMBER

FRIDAY 21ST
DECEMBER



CHRISTMAS
PARTY (BRING A
PLATE OF FOOD)

Friday 28th
December

Coffee
Cake +
Conversation

(saving our energy
for the new year)

JAN 4



ICE
CREAM
NIGHT

ANOTHER
FILM
NIGHT!

A SMALL
DONATION
TO COVER
FREIGHT,
PLEASE

FRIDAY 11TH
JANUARY

YET ANOTHER LINEAR BARRER MEMORIAL

QUIZ
NIGHT

FRIDAY 18TH JANUARY

PRIZES TO BE WON!
A SMALL CHARGE WILL
COVER SUPPER.

Friday 25th JAN



Yet another attempt
to create a fanzine
in minimum time.
Bring your typewriter,
pens, lettraset etc.

Membership of
the MSFC entitles
you to our award-
winning clubzine
AND discounts
at Melbourne's
leading SF Book
Shops and Games
Retailers!



The MSFC meets EVERY FRIDAY at
St. David's Church Hall, 74 Melville Rd.
West Brunswick

* Melways map 29 - C6
* Catch a No. 55 tram.

at Meetings
start from
7.30

FOR FURTHER
INFO PHONE
429 8354

The THYME Convention Update

CONFEDERATION II:

Dates: 16-18 November, 1990
Venue: The Christchurch Town Hall
Rates: NZ\$45, NZ\$15 Supporting, NZ\$25 day membership
GOH: Jacqueline Pearce (Servalan) (???)
Mail: CONFEDERATION II, 39 Marriots Rd, Nth Beach, Christchurch 9, New Zealand

HUTTCON '90: (The 1990 Media NatCon)

Dates: 23-25 November 1990
Venue: The Diplomat Hotel, 12 Acland St, ST KILDA.
Rates: \$60. Supporting \$25
GOH: Ed Bishop (Voice of Capt'n Blue in CAPTAIN SCARLET, Striker(?) in UFO, Newsreader in WOOPS APOCALYPSE).
 Norman, Margaret, and Rebecca Hetherington (aka Mr. Squiggle)
FAN GoH: The winner of the Raffle was Marjorie Cammer of NSW!
Room Rates: Double/Twin \$61, Triple \$72, Executive Suite \$78
 Include one night's accommodation when booking, cheques made out to "The Diplomat Motor Inn".
Travel: Contact Edwina, if interested in a group bus from Canberra and Sydney.
Mail: Edwina Harvey, 12 Flinders St, Matraville, NSW. 2036
 Interstate agents: Blake Edgerton - QLD, Tim Richards - WA. Write as above though.

[HUTTCON will be taking bids for BOTH the 1991 Media Natcon AND the 1992 Media Natcon. If you are planning to run either please contact Edwina.]

CIRCULATION V: The 5th Regional Canberra SF Convention

Dates: 7th - 9th of December, 1990
Venue: Burgmann College, ANU, Canberra
Mascot: This is one big secret, and ain't no-one telling this editor!!!
 [What are they afraid of? I'm only gonna publish it.-Ed]
Rates: \$45 to 30 Nov, \$50 at door. \$10 supp.
Room Rates: Single \$38, Double/Share \$65, Double/Private \$80. Full board.
Mail: Circulation 5, P.O. Box 47, Civic Sq, ACT, 2608, Aus.

SWANCON XVI:

Dates: 25-28th January, 1991
Venue: The Freeway Hotel, South Perth
Rates: \$40 Att till 30th Nov, \$50 after, \$20/\$25 Child, \$20/25 Supp.
Banquet: \$16 (limited seats)
Theme: Fantasy and the Real Worlds

GOH: Barbara Hambly
FGOH: Cindy Clarkson
Room Rates: Single/Twin/Double \$65, Triple \$77, Family(?) \$80. Extra person \$12 per person.
 Breakfast is available, but extra. Creche facilities \$90 8 hours a day for the three days.
Mail: P.O. Box 318, Nedlands, WA, Aus, 6009

SUNCON '91: (The 30th Australian Natcon)

Dates: 29th March - 1st April, 1991
Venue: Brisbane Gateway Hotel
Rates: \$60 til Hutcon, Supporting \$15, Voting \$5
GOH: Harlan Ellison.
Fan GOH: Leigh Edmonds & Valma Brown
Room Rates: Single/Twin/Double \$90, Triple \$100
Mail: Suncon '91, P.O. Box 437 Camberwell, Vic, 3124

[It's been quite a while since this con published any information]

ABBYCON:

Dates: 29 March - 1 April 1991
Venue: Abby's Hotel, Welleslet St, Auckland
Rates: NZ\$40 til Feb 1, NZ\$45 after
GOH: Phillip Mann (Author - who'll be taking a couple of writers' workshops as well), and Steve Campbell (TVNZ Director)
Mail: ABBYCON, P.O. Box 74013, Market Rd, Auckland 5, New Zealand

FORRYCON: (The 1991 NZ Natcon)

Dates: May 31- June 3, 1991
Venue: Airport Hotel, Kilbernie, Wellington
Rates: \$NZ35 til Jan 1 1991, NZ\$40 after, NZ\$45 at door. Supporting NZ\$20
GOH: Forrest J. Ackerman
FAN GOH: Tim Jones
Room Rates: Single \$69/\$89, Double/Twin/Triple \$99, Quad \$109
Mail: Forrycon, P.O. Box 27432, Upper Willis St, Wellington, New Zealand

CHICON V: (The 1991 Worldcon)

Dates: August 29 - September 2, 1991
Venue: The Hyatt Regency, Chicago, Illinois, USA
Rates: US\$95 to 31/Dec/90. Supporting US\$30
GOH: Hal Clement, Richard Powers (Art), Martin Greenberg, Jon & Joni Stopa, Marta Randall (TM).
Room Rates: US\$70 single/double, + US\$20 per person triple/quadruple. DO NOT attempt to book these yet.

Mail: Registration; Chicon V, P.O. Box 218121, Upper Arlington, Ohio 43221-8121

Information; Chicon V, P.O. Box A3120,
Chicago, IL 60690-3120, U.S.A.

[Dick & Nicki Lynch (Mimosa editors, etc, etc) are doing the Fan programming and have asked for requests from you, the fan. If you have any items you'd like to see write to them at P.O. Box 1270, Germantown, Maryland 20875, U.S.A.]

MEDTREK IV: An SF Media Con

Dates: 4 - 7th October, 1991

Venue: University of Western Sydney - Hawkesbury Campus

Rates: \$75 til 1st Jan 1991, \$80 til 1st Sept, \$20 Sup.

GOH: Dave Prowse (Darth Vader)

FGOH: Marianne Plumridge (fan artist & writer)

Theme: The Galactic Senate Elections

Room Rates: These include Full board and vary from \$85 (Sat&Sun) to \$170(Fri-Mon). Individual meals can be purchased for \$7.

Mail: Joanne Keating, 64 Fourth St, Ashbury, NSW, Aus, 2193

SYNCON '92: The 1992 NatCon

Dates: 17-20th April 1992 (Easter)

Rates: \$45 til end of 1990, \$25 sup

GOH: Michael Whelan

FGOH: Nick Stathopoulos

Theme: The Art of Science Fiction

Mail: Syncon 92, G.P.O. Box 429, Sydney, NSW, 2001

HONGCON '92:

Dates: June 6th-8th, 1992

Venue: Adelaide Convention Centre

Rates: \$65 til July 1991, \$75 after. \$30 Supp.

Mail: Hongcon '92, P.O. Box 106, Rundle Mall, Adelaide, SA, Aus, 5000

[A multistrand convention emphasising media interests.

The first 192 memberships are eligible for various prizes.]

MAGICON:

(The 1992 Worldcon)

Dates: September 3rd - 7th, 1992

Venue: Orange County Civic & Convention Center, Orlando, Florida

Rates: was US\$50 attending till 31/Jan/1990, US\$20 Supporting, US\$30 Children

GOH: Jack Vance, Vincent DiFate, Walt Willis, Spider Robinson (TM)

Mail: Magicon, Box 621992, Orlando, FL 32862, U.S.A.

SWANCON 18: (Bidding for the 1993 Natcon)

Dates: Easter 1993 (April 8-12?)

Pre-supporting Memberships: \$5

Mail: P.O. Box 318, Nedlands, W.A., 6009

SAN FRANCISCO '93: The 1993 Worldcon

Dates: August 1993?

Rates: tba

Venue: tba

GOH: Larry Niven, Tom Digby, Alicia Austin, Wombat (Jan Howard Finder), and Guy Gavriel Kay (TM)

Mail: San Francisco in '93, P.O. Box 22097, San Francisco, CA 94122, USA

(all details are correct to the best of our knowledge at the time of going to print.)

[Most details of New Zealand Cons come to us from Cry Havoc, P.O. Box 2836, Wellington, New Zealand.]

Thanks for this issue go to Sue, Linnette, Julie, Stephen, Chuq, Irwin, Terry, Robert, James, Mark, Lucy, Wendy, Alan (many times), Russell, Damien, Greg, Tanya, Craig, Janeen, Gordon, John&Jan, Kim, Mark, Joseph, and our artists this issue:

Front Cover, Back Cover: Wiz © 1990

Foibles: (p3) Wiz © 1990

P 7 Dennis Callegari © 1990

P 9 Craig Hilton © 1989

LynC 0633211090

Sadly, I have to announce that due to work and family commitments, and a lack of funds, I will be ceasing publication of Thyme. Current plans are for an issue late January with FFANZ and Ditmar voting forms (and any other fan fund), and an issue after Suncon with results.

THYME FICTION 4

THE MOMENT

Shane Dix

"I'm not going back in there!"

There was a soft, weary sigh at the other end of the line, followed by a long and strained silence.

"Okay, Michael," the feminine voice said finally. "But I really think you should think this over."

"I have thought it over," he said stiffly. "I'm not going back in, Beth. I mean it."

"You've never pulled out before, Michael. Why now?"

"Because this one's different. There's something about this patient's dreams. Something.... I don't know. Eternal."

He heard her chuckle and felt annoyed that she wasn't taking him seriously. This case was different. The man had been found lying on the floor at home, in a coma. Just lying there, pupils dilated, features sedate. There was no apparent cause for his condition: no head injury, no gas leak, no drugs. Nothing. For all practical purposes, he was in a deep and peaceful sleep.

And he was dreaming.

That was where Michael came in. For the past few years Michael Turate had been working with the Hospital's Head of Psychology, Professor Andrew Crompton. Together they had forged a new branch of science, the direct tapping of a sleeping patient's emotions.

The procedure was relatively simple. During dream periods, a person could expect to experience a myriad of emotions, all directly connected to dream content. Crompton had found a way of tapping into this suppressed emotion and recording it. The recorded dream-waves could be played back to another sleeper - in effect a control brain - for translation back to dreams and, thereby, analysis.

When Michael first underwent the procedure, he woke screaming and crying. It proved to be more than just dreaming; it was an insight into a patient's personality. Images, stark and graphic, had inundated the dream to the point where his own personality was threatened with being crushed.

It took several sessions to learn to distance

himself, but once he had done so his fluency in dream interpretation improved rapidly.

But the coma case was unlike anything he had experienced before. Psychologically the man seemed sound enough. In fact his dreams were almost serene. Whenever he was there, dreaming, Michael felt enticed by the tranquility of the images. Several times he could have abandoned the waking world and surrendered himself to that all-pervading peace and calm. The last time, he had done just that. Only for a moment or so, then he realized the danger, and kept his wits about him until the dream sequence finished.

But the others didn't understand. Beth and Tony were novices; they couldn't appreciate the dangers of dream absorption. He resented them for that.

"I'll call you back," he said sharply into the mouthpiece.

"Michael, wait -- "

He dropped the receiver into its cradle, returned to the bedroom and sat wearily on the unmade bed. He lay back against the pillow and ran his fingers through tousled hair.

If only they understood. That was the problem. No-one but himself understood. No-one else had been in there. They hadn't seen the dream. Hadn't seen the....

He sat up with a start and shook his head. His eyes had been closing, his thoughts drifting away again. Back, back....

Professor Crompton sat on the park bench, huddled beneath his gaberdine coat, his neatly-trimmed beard glistening with droplets from the recent rain. He watched as Michael tossed soggy pieces of bread to the birds that gathered around them.

He considered his colleague sadly, seeing how he had deteriorated in the few days since the last excursion. Michael's hair was unwashed and matted, his face unshaven and grubby. He was hunched over, near exhaustion, and every so often his bloodshot eyes would close for a couple of minutes until he

awoke again with a sudden jolt. There was a smell about him, of body odour and alcohol.

"It's not like you, Michael," he said softly. "You've always confided in me."

"Nothing's wrong," Michael said irritably. He rested his head on the heel of his palm. It felt too heavy to hold up by itself, weighted from his lack of sleep. How long had it been? Two days? Longer?

"I was worried," Crompton said shortly. "You hadn't called."

"And I didn't intend to."

"Beth said --"

"Look, professor!" Michael snapped. "I'm not going back in there. That's final." He looked levelly at Crompton. "There's something in there. Something not quite right."

"But what?" Crompton urged. "What is it in there? You've always trusted me, Michael. Why not now? Tell me what it is that frightens you."

"It doesn't frighten me, dammit!" Michael stood abruptly and moved a few paces away. He buried his hands in the pockets of his parka, then dropped his head and sighed. "He does frighten me."

"Then staying away isn't going to solve the problem. You know that better than anyone. You can't hide from your fears indefinitely. Whatever's in there, you're the one best equipped to deal with it. He's your patient. You know him better than anyone." A long, expectant pause followed. "You realize that if you don't go back in there, I'm going to have to send one of the others."

Michael wheeled around. "You can't do that!"

"I've never taken a patient away from you before, and I don't want to now. But if you aren't prepared to at least try and explain what it is that's going on, then you leave me no choice."

"I mean it, professor. You can't send anyone in there. It's not safe!"

Crompton stood. His hands gripped Michael's shoulders and shook them.

"Why, Michael? Why isn't it safe? Talk to me!"

Michael shrugged the hands from his shoulders and turned away. He fixed his gaze on the distance, thinking of the dream and the patient, and of his own fears. And of the....

"I haven't told you everything," he said finally.

"How so?"

"I've never told you about the man in the dream."

"Man?" said Crompton quizzically. "What man?"

"He's always there. Everytime I go in. Always in the distance, always out of reach, and always... with his back to me. I start to chase him, but I get distracted. You know how it is; you've dreamt. I get lost among the other images and forget him. But he always comes back. Without fail."

"Why didn't you tell me this before?"

Michael turned to him again, smiling weakly. "I didn't think it was important."

"For Christ's sake, Michael! A man in a coma for no apparent reason and you omit to tell me of such an unusual feature of the dream. Hasn't our work together taught you anything? It's the patient who hides relevant facts; they fail to see the value of seemingly inconsequential images. Not us. You should have known better."

"I know all that. But it isn't important. He isn't anything to do with the patient's dream. He's...."

"He's what?"

"He's an outside element, I guess," said Michael uncertainly, and wondered why it had never occurred to him before.

Michael sat with Crompton in the recording room, sifting through the data on the coma patient's dream, hoping to find a pattern.

"It spirals," Michael said softly, his features furrowed in concentration.

Crompton nodded thoughtfully. What they had believed to be a steady movement towards the heart of the problem now began to appear as a path circling the central dilemma. All the events that had taken place within the dream, all the symbols and psychoses riddling the patient's sleep thoughts, now seemed to revolve about something unseen.

"I wonder," Crompton mused, pushing his glasses up on the bridge of his nose. He leafed through a folder of notes, pausing occasionally to peruse the transcripts. Then he tapped a sheet with his pencil.

"See here," he said, and Michael leaned in closer. "Each time the man appeared, you're touching on some major symbol. What appears at first glance to be fundamental symbols of your typical neuroses, are in fact the key to the whole problem. Look. Here you approach a giant turtle in a stream. We thought little of it because of the number of other animals in the dream. But it's when you approach this particular animal that the man appeared and distracted you. And the same here. You were near a tree whose branches were so tall they reached a dark hole in the sky. He appeared again."

"Leading me away."

"Perhaps. Or maybe he was leading you on an alternative path. Or, dare I say it, a more appropriate path."

"I'm not sure I follow, professor."

"Imagine that what our patient is suffering from is extremely traumatic. Horrifying perhaps. Without preparation you may not be capable of tolerating the secrets his mind is suppressing. I'm not sure, but

maybe this man, this vision, is a guide of some kind. A safety measure if you like, from your own subconscious."

"Or maybe," Michael added ruefully, "from the mind of the patient himself."

Crompton thought about it for a few seconds, then waved his hand to dismiss the notion. "No, that's absurd." He said it with a faint, uncertain laugh. "It goes against everything we've ever learnt about dream weaving."

Michael sat at home in silence and darkness, reflecting upon his talk with Crompton. The professor had pleaded with him to return later that evening, to go back under and confront the mysterious element from the dream. Michael had said he would consider it, but made no promises.

He knew Crompton was right. He had to go back in and face his fears. He knew also that if he didn't, the professor would stick to his word and send someone else.

And for a new subject to attempt the dream could prove fatal. Michael was 'acclimatised' to this particular dreamscape. His already numerous excursions had conditioned him, helped him build a resistance to the peculiar nature of the dream content. To throw anyone else in would be to expose them to depths in which they would surely drown.

He was the only acceptable choice, but that didn't make the decision any easier. The dream had terrified him. Just thinking about going back in made him nauseous.

There was a certain enduring quality that distinguished the dream from others he had experienced. There was a strong sense of eternity, and the suggestion in the content that the dream was not that of another, but somehow belonged to himself. It reminded him of his own dreams, and that scared him.

In there, he increasingly forgot it was only a dream. Only when he woke could he begin to differentiate between image and reality - when the feeling of infinity had subsided and time had once again elapsed. Only then did the dream sink back into its appropriate place.

But what if next time he didn't wake up? Or couldn't wake up? What if he became so enticed he stayed there, like the patient, forever dreaming? There seemed no way of preparing himself for this. When he was awake he could see the danger, but asleep and dreaming it was obscured by the promise of immortality: an eternity spent in a serene and exotic landscape, in a dream where there were no divisions of time, only a single, liquid moment.

Despite everything, he knew he had to return. If he didn't the patient would keep on sleeping, keep

on dreaming. Others would vainly attempt to carry on where he had left off. Nothing would be resolved.

He shuddered, then stood and went over to the telephone.

The intermittent purring at the other end was broken by a sharp click, followed by Crompton's tired voice.

"Professor, it's Michael."

"Yes, Michael." Pause. "Michael, it's two o'clock in the morning."

"It's now or never, professor," Michael said firmly. "I'll go back in, but under one condition."

"Which is?"

"That you make sure you get me out again."

The dream-room was small and shadowy. Only the dull blue glow of fluorescent lighting penetrated the tinted glass window to the recording room. Michael lay loosely strapped to the bed with electrodes gelled to his temples, listening in the quiet to the sound of his own breathing. He watched the professor and Tony on the other side of the glass, conferring and sipping coffee.

He had lain there for what seemed hours, trying to relax enough to sleep. But his doubts and fears kept intruding, making him want to shout to Crompton to call the whole thing off.

After a time, he sighed and opened his eyes again. He raised himself and called out, but they didn't seem to hear, and when his voice settled once more into the quiet of the room, he dropped his head back and stared up into the gloom.

From the silence grew a faint growl - starting as a deep and guttural sound that rose in volume for a few seconds before petering out.

"Dad?" he called cautiously, and in answer heard a second growl followed by the patter of feet.

He sat upright, snapping the straps with relative ease, and shuffled away from the dog. He continued to edge back until he bumped into something. Reaching behind, he found the rungs of a ladder. Before he had a chance to climb it, the long snout of the dog pierced the shadows, its malevolent eye glaring briefly before dissolving back into the dark.

Michael scurried up the ladder, tears streaming down his cheeks. He felt as if he might soil his pants.

Outside he saw a van parked on the front lawn. It belonged to an old school friend, though Michael couldn't see him anywhere. His girlfriend was standing by the open door of the van, her features hidden by the folds of night. He sniffed back his tears and went towards her, feeling the need to impress her with news of his work with the professor.

As he approached, he noticed something unusual.

The girl's skin had a peculiar pigmentation, and the closer he got the more she resembled a lion; still a girl, but with lion's skin and a beautiful, wind-swept mane. Disturbed, he turned away, and, from the corner of his eye, saw a man standing nearby with his back to him. He felt that the man was of some importance, though wasn't sure exactly why.

The figure turned to him and grinned, and Michael found himself staring into the face of a young boy: familiar, haunting, bearing the arrogance and innocence of all humanity. The boy's hand was reaching out to him, waiting for him to accept it. Michael hesitated, trying to understand a sudden compulsion to run away, then he relented and met the boy's handshake.

He felt a new sense of being flush through him, warm and comforting, giving him a strong sense of belonging with his surroundings. He felt at one with everything.

Images swirled about him; faces and buildings disintegrated and fell away, leaving only the night and the soft sponge beneath his feet. A gently-accusing thought passed through him like a lazy wind, reminding him of how far he had fallen from the dream's centre. With that, guilt overwhelmed him, only to be quickly eased by the assurance of a soft and pulsing light. He gazed into the shimmering abyss, feeling drawn to the warmth of its forgiveness. Behind him he knew others followed - a deluge

of dreamers returning to the womb, beckoned by the need to remember what they had forgotten, to see what Michael was now seeing: a single light made up of many colours, of many parts.

Then, from beneath the understanding, rose another thought, almost buried, almost forgotten, and it caused him to reel with uncertainty. It was of a man, a professor, and a promise that stretched like an invisible cord between them, holding him unsteadily upon the periphery of the dream. It caused within him a confusion that made him want to release the boy's hand, to fight the compulsion to remain within that sweet and tantalising moment of which the dream was made. It made him want to turn and flee.

He looked up and saw the path that brought him here, winding up into the night, disappearing amidst the billion sets of eyes that flickered across the dark. The boy clenched Michael's hand tightly, holding him on that edge of uncertainty.

"We all share one dream," he assured softly. It was a voice not unlike that of Michael's father.

The notion comforted Michael and he smiled to the image of the boy, even as it began to waver like a reflection in a pond. Perhaps he would stay, after all, falling gently into the light. Just for a moment longer.

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GREEN WALL DREAMING

Geoffrey Maloney

Jackson woke with a start, his heart thumping, the arteries in his neck bulging, pumping with the tremendous force of the terminal anxiety that gripped him. He was going to die. He knew it. It was the only thing he was certain of. He had forgotten everything else. At that precise moment he didn't even know where he was. There was only one certainty, his death.

But quickly his mind came back to him, and when he found it again there was only one thought running through it, one thought chasing itself from beginning to end, around and around and around, the one thought that dominated his life, the incessant reminder to take his medication. He was always forgetting, forgetting to remember to take his medication, the bitter white pill that kept him one step away from.... And that was why he was going to die, because he knew that one day he would forget, forget

forever.

He leapt from the bed (where he had lain alone) and rushed to the kitchen, grabbed the medicine bottle from the top of the fridge and, in his anxiety, dropped it, spilling hundreds of white pills, scattering them in all directions. In absolute confusion, his mind numb, terror gripping him, he scrambled across the floor grabbing at the pills. He only needed one, just one.... Finally he had it in his hand. He gulped it down, then took two more in case the first had lodged in some hidden recess of his throat. He felt as though he could no longer trust his own body.

Afterwards he sat at the kitchen table drinking red rum and smoking thick turkish tobacco that burnt the back of his throat and left him with an incessant cough. He was a condemned man; no need to give up smoking for health reasons. He was calmer now. He

had taken the pill, had a drink and a cigarette. But calmness was a relative matter. Compared to five minutes ago he was calm, but he still bore the tell-tale signs of the haunted: the slight nervous shake of his hand as he raised the glass to his lips, the quick sharp draws on the cigarette, the hunched shoulders, the dark rings beneath his eyes - and eyes that flittered across the surface of the table searching for an object, anything at all, that could absorb his gaze and hold his concentration for more than a few seconds while his mind danced its way through the desperate gentle depression of his life.

Jackson looked up and stared into the dull blank vidscreen in front of him. He switched it on, illuminating the room with a sickly green light.

"Good morning," a chirpy voice announced.

"It's not morning," Jackson said.

"Well it should be," the voice replied.

"I couldn't sleep," he said.

"Ah, dear. Forgetting to take the pills again are we. Naughty, naughty."

Jackson stared into a screen that illuminated the words as he heard them. "Why don't you remind me? That's one of your functions, isn't it?"

"I'm not programmed for that," the voice replied.

"You're supposed to be so smart," Jackson said. "Why don't you program yourself?"

"Can't do that. Not capable of independent thinking. If you forget to program me to remind you, then I don't remind you. It's as simple as that."

"You're doing alright for something that can't think," Jackson muttered.

"Only because you've already programmed this conversation. You programmed the very words you're hearing now. You thought it would help you remember, but I think you want to forget."

"You can't think."

"You programmed it."

"Shut up," Jackson said. "Do something useful. Tell me a story."

"Sure. What would you like?"

"Once upon a time...."

"Sure."

There was a brief musical interlude, then it began.

ONCE UPON A TIME, A LONG, LONG TIME AGO, IN A DISTANT LAND THAT NOBODY HAS EVER HEARD OF, THERE LIVED A MAN CALLED JACKSON, WHO WAS AN ARTIST, MORE PRECISELY, A SCULPTOR OF SOME RENOWN. HIS WORKS WERE CONGLOMERATIONS OF METAL, WOOD AND CERAMIC, FITTED TOGETHER, TWISTED AROUND EACH OTHER, MELDING INTO A SINGLE SYMBOL THAT EPITOMISED LIFE'S RISE FROM THE SUBSTRATE OF THE EARTH TO TAKE CONTROL OF AND THEN DESTROY ITSELF. ONE REVIEWER WROTE:

'HE CREATES MONUMENTS WHICH HAVE A FEELING OF

SCALE AND GRANDEUR. IN JACKSON'S HANDS THE CONTRAST BETWEEN MAN-MADE AND NATURAL MATERIALS IS TRANSFORMED INTO AN ECOLOGICAL AND POLITICAL STATEMENT. HIS WORKS ARE, AT ONE AND THE SAME TIME, A GLORIFICATION OF THE TECHNOLOGICAL PROCESS AND A VILLIFICATION OF THE EVILS IT HAS WROUGHT.'

But that was indeed a long time ago. It belonged to a different reality and now formed part of the mythology of Jackson's character. As with all myths, nobody - least of all Jackson - could say how much truth it held. It seemed true. Jackson believed it was true, but at the same time he realized he was always forgetting to remember the things that were important in his life, so it appeared just as likely that he had forgotten his past and created a new one to compensate. But that didn't matter anymore. Whether truth or myth lay behind it, he knew that life in this other reality had looked promising for him.

But that was before he became ill, before his wife became ill, before every single person in the world became ill. With the onset of the illness, life was arrested, metaphorically, figuratively, literally. Life reached a dead-end and reality had flipped, warped out, been replaced with something that was totally different and hardly compensatory at all. It was a nasty business.

....HIS ARTISTIC CAREER WAS DESTINED FOR GREAT HEIGHTS UNTIL....

"Yes," Jackson said, "tell me about the disease."

NATURE OF INFECTION: CHARACTERISED BY THREE PHASES* PRIMARY, SECONDARY, TERMINAL.

SYMPTOMS: PRIMARY PHASE* SLIGHT FEVER, ABSENCE OF LIBIDO LEADING TO LOSS OF ALL SEXUAL FEELING. SECONDARY PHASE* INFERTILITY, PREMATURE SENILITY. TERMINAL PHASE* BREAKDOWN OF IMMUNE SYSTEMS, INTERNAL HAEMORRHAGING, DEATH.

HOWEVER, MEDICATION ADMINISTERED AT THE ONSET OF THE DISEASE WILL ARREST ITS PROGRESS IN THE PRIMARY PHASE LEAVING THE PATIENT RELATIVELY SYMPTOM FREE.

Symptom free. Jackson laughed and took a sip of his rum. It bit into his throat and he enjoyed the burning sensation it traced from his lips to his stomach. It reminded him that he was still alive. He sucked his cigarette and could feel the smoke eating into his lungs. He liked that too, for the same reason.

PROBLEM: EVEN THOUGH THE DISEASE IS ARRESTED IN ITS PRIMARY PHASE, THE LOSS OF LIBIDO AND ALL SEXUAL FEELING HAS LED TO A DRASTIC REDUCTION IN THE BIRTH-RATE.

EXTRAPOLATION (GENERAL): DRAMATIC DECREASE IN WORLD POPULATION.

EXTRAPOLATION (SPECIFIC): DESTRUCTION OF THE

CREATIVE URGE AND ASSOCIATED THOUGHT PATTERNS.

CONCLUSION: EXTINCTION OF ART IN ALL ITS FORMS.

EXTINCTION OF HOMO SAPIENS (PERHAPS).

QED.

A double blow for Jackson. Not only had he been robbed of his sexuality but also his purpose/reason for living. This was why he kept forgetting to take his pills. He had no reason to remember to take them.

ASSOCIATED PROBLEMS: SUBCONSCIOUS DEATH*WISH* REDUCTION/DESTRUCTION OF THE LIBIDO RESULTS IN CORRESPONDING INCREASE IN THE MORBIDO* LIBIDO AND MORBIDO COUPLED AND BALANCED IN THE HEALTHY ORGANISM BUT IN THE UNHEALTHY ORGANISM MORBIDO RUNS RAMPANT AIDED AND ABETTED BY ENTROPY* HEAT DEATH**** SECOND LAW OF THERMODYNAMICS* ALL SYSTEMS TEND TOWARDS DISORDER IN THE ABSENCE OF A REGULATING, ORDERING, REPRODUCING LIBIDO.

"The loss of my memory, my forgetfulness," he said to the vidscreen and the silence of the kitchen," is a direct result of the destruction of my libido. If I don't take my pills I will die. My morbido is a deep-seated primal beast of the ancient universe. It has resurfaced and is about to wreak its vengeance."

"That was awful," the vidscreen said.

"Can you do any better?" Jackson asked. "Remember, I've lost all my creative abilities."

"Sure."

"Forget it," Jackson said. "Tell me something about the genes instead."

"Sure," the voice said.

GENES: WORKING CLASS PANTS, INVENTED IN THE EIGHTEEN HUNDREDS IN THE UNITED STATES DURING THE CALIFORNIA GOLDRUSHES....

"That's a bad old joke," Jackson said.

"You should know. It was one of yours before you stuck it in my memory banks."

"Alright. Get on with it."

GENES ARE OFTEN REFERRED TO AS THE MEANS BY WHICH BODIES REPRODUCE THEMSELVES. A MORE PROFOUND TRUTH IS THAT BODIES ARE THE MEANS BY WHICH GENES REPRODUCE THEMSELVES. EVOLUTION IS THE STORY OF THE ABILITY OF GENES TO BUILD FOR THEMSELVES EFFICIENT DEVICES FOR THEIR OWN PRESERVATION AND REPRODUCTION.

Jackson pondered on that for a moment. It had taken three thousand million years to produce such an astonishingly complex gene preserving and propagating machine as the human body.

But the great experiment had proven a failure, and now the genes were abandoning ship. The forty-six chromosomes of the human body finally realized they were going nowhere; if the purpose of their machine was destroyed then it was obvious that their purpose for preserving the machine was destroyed as

well. Thus the machine dies and, during the process, everything associated with the astonishingly complex device becomes of no consequence. Intelligence, consciousness, reason, creativity, intuition: all the by-products of the preservation of the genes become nothing more than a colourful means to a dreary end.

God knows - if the genes didn't - that Jackson had tried to fulfil his biological role in the ladder of evolution. Once upon a time - another part of his mythology - he had been married and had wanted children. But they had left it too late. Before they knew it, he had the primary phase and his wife, despite the medication, was beginning to enter the secondary phase. He remembered with horror their feeble attempts to reproduce; the sexual act, no longer holding any pleasure for them, had rendered the whole thing an impossible venture clouded with fear and anxiety. And it did no good remembering past pleasures when sex totally divorced from reproduction had been for pleasure only. In fact they had found it hard to imagine how they had ever found sex enjoyable at all. But still they had tried, their ailing bodies forced into what were by then artificial responses. And nothing had happened. Nothing important anyway. No fertilisation, no pregnancy, no child, no reproduction. The gene pool was not satisfied. They were driven to further, more drastic methods. Nothing ventured, nothing gained. Artificial insemination, in-vitro fertilisation, bionic wombs, surrogate mothers, surrogate fathers. Nothing worked. Everything ventured, nothing gained. And they had given up. His wife slipped rapidly through the secondary phase and into the terminal phase. After several agonising months, she died.

That was all a long, long time ago. But Jackson hadn't forgotten. He would never forget, though he wasn't quite sure he remembered it right.

Every night he remembered it: the horrors rising to torment him - perhaps a defensive mechanism to take away the horrors of the present. And the future? Jackson couldn't even think about the future. There was no future. His genes were screaming; after three thousand million years of planning they came up against a flaw. Their magnum opus wasn't invulnerable. They had forgotten about the nasty little virus. Jackson could appreciate that; after all, nobody was perfect. He was always forgetting things.

Every night he asked himself: if his libido was destroyed, his wife dead, his artistic career a shambles, his decaying will fighting a continuous battle against the evil Doctor Morbido, then why didn't he just admit defeat and do what his genes wanted him to: succumb to the pressure, forget to

take the little white pills, or, better still, take the power, the initiative, into his own hands and become the instrument of his own morbido, not the victim. He had a little purple capsule hidden away expressly for that purpose. It contained just enough potassium cyanide to make a nice clean end of it. It had cost a fortune on the black market, but in truth he had no way of knowing whether it actually contained the deadly poison or was simply sugar crystals. You couldn't very well try before you buy. But Jackson wasn't ready for that. No, not yet. He had a goal, a magnum opus of his own. He didn't know what it was or where it was going to come from, but before he died he wanted to create something that he could be truly proud of. He would take the inanimate materials of the earth, the organic life of nature and the synthetic products of technology, and meld them into his final symphony of creation. All he needed was an idea, and if the idea never came then at least he could go on dreaming, dreaming away his miserable life until they carted his cold body down the stairs and out into the street.

About three or four in the morning, after he had drunk enough rum to tranquilize himself, Jackson turned the vidscreen - which was elaborating the intricacies of Darwin's theory of 'Survival of the Fittest' - off and staggered to his bed to collapse into a drunken sleep.

That night he dreamed the world green. His dreams were a bit like horror movies on the rampage. It all tended to get a bit out of hand.

A giant cytoplasmic wall of green jelly had descended upon the Earth, cutting a messy, squelchy curve around the globe, across the city, through the suburbs and into the room where Jackson slept. In the darkness it was all glowing and green, shiny and quivering, slimy and pulsating. It was alive and fertile. Jackson hadn't been expecting it, but it didn't surprise him. Weird things happened in dreams and no complicated questions got asked. Jackson just climbed out of bed and walked up to the green pulsating wall. He placed his hand on its surface. It was warm, pleasantly warm, like the skin of a person who had been sitting too close to the fire. It was smooth, vibrating and sensual. Yes, the touch of another's hot flesh. Jackson added force to his touch. The surface yielded, ripples quivering in concentric circles from the epicentre of the pressure. Jackson pushed harder, forcing the surface to the limits of its elasticity. He pushed harder and harder, again and again, until the surface of the green wall broke, splashing him with cool fresh liquid, and his arm plunged up to his elbow into the interior. A rush of warmth, tingling pleasurable warmth, wet warmth, swept from his fingertips. It

felt like the power of the ocean surf as it surged up his arm and into his body. A rush of sexual excitement flooded through him. His flesh tingled, his body shook, and he clung to the green cytoplasm. It opened and engulfed him, drowning him in a thick mucous sea.

In the morning he sat in front of the vidscreen again, his first cigarette lit and a cup of coffee in his other hand.

"Tell me about dreams," he said.

"Sure," came the reply.

DREAMS* AFTER REALITY, DREAMS ARE THE MOST PECULIAR EXPERIENCE THAT THE SPECIES HOMO SAPIENS HAS DEvised FOR ITSELF. THE INTERPRETATION OF DREAMS HAS LONG HELD A FASCINATION AKIN TO THE FASCINATION FELT FOR THE DREAM EXPERIENCE ITSELF. ANALYSES OF DREAMS ARE AS CONTRADICTORY AS ANYTHING IS LIKELY TO BE.

DREAMS ARE: REINTERPRETATIONS OF REALITY, AN ESCAPE VALVE FOR THE MORE DANGEROUS AND/OR IRRATIONAL URGES THAT CANNOT BE ALLOWED TO REACH THE LIGHT OF DAY.

DREAMS ARE: BY-PRODUCTS OF THE NORMAL SLEEP MECHANISMS OF THE BRAIN, SERVING NO FUNCTION, A RANDOM COMBINATION OF MEMORIES, BOTH SHORT AND LONG TERM, WITH ASSOCIATED IMAGINARY EXTRAPOLATIONS.

DREAMS ARE: ENTERTAINMENT FOR A CONSCIOUS MIND DEPRIVED OF ITS NORMAL WINDOW TO REALITY, A THREE DIMENSIONAL FULFILLMENT OF THE SENSES. CONSCIOUSNESS GENERATES ITS OWN REALITY, THE DREAM, SIMPLY BECAUSE IT CANNOT CEASE TO FUNCTION AND REQUIRES SOMETHING TO BE AWARE OF.

DREAMS ARE: PAST ASSOCIATIONS OF GUILT RISING TO TAUNT HUMANS IN THEIR SLEEP WHEN THEIR CONSCIOUS GUARD IS DOWN AND THEY ARE NO LONGER PROTECTED.

DREAMS ARE: PROPHECIES OF THE FUTURE.

DREAMS ARE: WISHES ALMOST TRUE.

"Please tick one of the above," the voice said.

Jackson was a smart man. He mentally ticked all the above, and added a few extra he'd thought of since the last program. He was reminded of the words of a famous writer who no longer wrote because he was dead. He leaned forward and spoke into the vidscreen's audio pick-up. "Take this down: 'A dream is just whatever it is, nothing more and nothing less, and that's just what dreams are.'"

"Pretty vague," the voice said.

Jackson remembered his dream, and it was pure joy. It was only a dream, but that didn't matter, for in the dream Jackson had experienced feelings that had been dead for many years. For a brief moment sexuality had returned to his diseased body and his dormancy had been ignited. Brief. Fragmentary. A flash-in-the-pan.

All day Jackson sat in front of the vidscreen

attempting to recapture those fleeting moments of the previous night. He watched several movies selected from his vast library of scatology, leafed through an old and priceless collection of glossy magazines containing hundreds of pictures of beautiful naked women, and read all the letters in the sexual advice columns:

DEAR DOCTOR LIBIDO, THE OTHER NIGHT I WAS AT THIS PARTY AND I MET THIS WOMAN WHO....

It was all very nostalgic. It belonged to another age, another time, when stimulation was cheap and could be gotten for the cost of a walk down the street. People never thought twice about it; they thought about it constantly. Those were glorious days: not a thought given to reproduction, only pleasure, pure pleasure. Now nobody thought about sex but everybody thought about reproduction, and in its most corrupted artificial form. For the rest of the day he continued to think about the injustice of the world and when his mind was well and truly numb with rum he wandered off to bed.

When the green came down he was ready for it. He was standing looking at the sky when he realized, in actual fact, that he was staring at a ceiling suddenly split open - obviously the sky couldn't split open, so it had to be the ceiling - and the green cytoplasm was oozing through to take up residence in the room. He discovered her that night, hidden away in the jelly, very tiny, very frail, a little green girl child. She was part of him and he was part of her. She was something he had created, and now she was growing in his green world.

The next day the feeling of joy stayed with him much longer. The dream gave him hope. Something beautiful had happened and he anticipated more. But by the end of the day his depression had returned and he was drinking again. After all, it was only a dream. But it was a dream that was thematically recurring and serialized. It returned each night, and each night he watched as the child grew, not as an embryo grows in its mother's womb, but as a little girl grows in her infancy, the first months of her life, nurtured in the green cytoplasmic wall.

Jackson's feelings of anticipation grew as the child grew. It was like the long approach of summer, when spring heralds the end of winter, and the increasing humidity, the strength of the sun, the smell of the pollen, all come together to create that unshakeable feeling that can only be called anticipation. At such times it seems almost anything can be achieved.

This feeling nurtured Jackson, just as the green fluid nurtured the dream child, and slowly, day by day, he felt a clarity returning to his mind. Five days after his first green dream, Jackson had an

idea, a creative idea. For years it seemed he had been sitting around waiting for the idea to come to him, and now the nexus had formed and was growing, becoming stronger. Like the zygote embedded in the fertile womb, the idea embedded itself in his new fertile mind. It seemed destined to bear fruit, to give birth to its creation.

He laboured for weeks, day and night, gripped by the new-found passion. He was like a madman. He was a madman. His hands were possessed of an agility he had never known. As he held the materials in his fingers he could judge what was right and what was wrong. The right amount of manipulation here, the right amount of trimming there, this bit thus jointed, this bit smoothed, that bit roughened. He became a great intuitive force tempered by a technical skill that he had not possessed even at the height of his career. For six weeks he became a master craftsman, crafting his master work, his magnum opus, and he never once went near the vidscreen.

It was late in the afternoon and he had nearly completed his work. Only the finishing touches remained, a light, fine sand on the edges, a touch of colour in the depressions. As he worked he remembered the dream that he had had the night before. The lower part of the wall was beginning to bulge and inside the child was beginning to stir. She was a beautiful creation, such delicate limbs, such an exquisite face. And he knew that soon the green would have to burst and the child would be born.

Jackson finished, put aside his tools and went to the kitchen to get himself a drink and a cigarette. When he returned he gazed at the work, trying to remain aloof from it, trying to be objective as possible, pretending that it was just there and he had not created it. It was to be a symbol of a fertile world, a universal symbol that would reach into the subconscious of all the trapped and miserable people. It was to symbolise the beauty and sexuality of all things.

It should have demanded a raw emotional response that ate its way through years of disease and ugliness to reach the core of sexuality that was dormant but not dead. It should have evoked worship. But as Jackson looked at his work, took in the lines of the wood, the texture of the baked clay, the smoothness of the metal, something seemed wrong. It didn't work. It remained dead, just as the world remained dead. He had failed.

Anxiety gripped him. He had fooled himself all those weeks. He had created a fantasy world in which he imagined himself a great artist able to create a miracle. Poor deluded fool, thinking that he could defeat the agonies of the world. It was useless. He

had been wrong. It was his last try, his last attempt to regain some sanity in a crazy, crazy world. Panic gripped him and he rushed to the kitchen. There, in the back of the cupboard, he found it, a little purple capsule wrapped in silver foil. It was his last chance to regain dignity.

For several minutes he stood looking at the capsule, then he flipped on the vidscreen.

"I'm going to kill myself," he said.

"Good," the voice replied. "It's about time you salvaged some self respect."

"You can't say that."

"Sure I can. It's about time..."

"No," Jackson said. "I didn't program that."

"Automatic program built into the system. Perhaps you'd prefer the classic response: No, don't do it; you've got so much to live for."

"Shutup," Jackson said.

"Just trying to keep you talking while I notify the authorities."

"What?"

"You know that suicide's illegal. I'm afraid that I've had to report you to the Suicide Prevention Squad. They should be here soon."

"You can't do that," Jackson stammered.

"Sure I can. I'm a very advanced model. I can do lots of things."

Jackson ran from the kitchen, back to his work room. He railed against his creation, swearing and calling it a monstrosity. He smashed at it with a hammer, again and again, then he wept. As the tears flowed down his cheeks he placed the purple capsule in his mouth. It sat neatly between his molars.

Through tear-stained eyes he stared at his work, his greatest failure. He bit down on the capsule and as he did so a flash of insight hit him. He saw what he had done wrong. He saw how it could be fixed, how it could be made perfect. The image of its magnificence flashed through his mind. If I just change this ... but it was too late. The molars gnashed together, the purple capsule split, his teeth crushed the crystal.

He tasted sugar in his mouth.

He ran into the kitchen.

"They'll be here any moment," the voice said.

Jackson put his fist through the vidscreen.

In his work-room Jackson worked with a frenzy, chipping, scraping, sending shards of wood and metal flying in all directions. Blood dripped from his hands but he felt no pain. He was oblivious to everything but his work. When the Suicide Prevention Squad knocked at his door he didn't hear them. When they smashed down the door he still didn't hear them. It was only when they burst into the work-room that he became aware of other things. He stood back from his work. It was finished. It was perfect.

The woman in charge said, "We got a report of an attempted..."

She stopped short as her eyes fell upon Jackson's work. She took in its lines, its smoothness, its roughness, its deep shiny crevices that glistened as if they were moist. A hot flush rose to her cheeks. Her eyes sparkled. Jackson looked at her and smiled.

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IMMORTALITY

Ian Mabbett

I told Susan about my dream. (Was it a dream?) She didn't seem very impressed.

"The thing is," I said, "in a way, it's a key to the meaning of the universe." I had to move aside to let her rummage through the magazine rack.

"And what is the meaning of the universe?" she said, at last grasping the sought-after Radio Guide and lifting it clear. Her mind was on other things. She said it in the way one makes automatic responses to a small child.

"Well, that's the whole point. Nothingness. The winding down of everything."

She glanced up at me, frowning. "Nothingness?"

"In a way. Or everythingness. It comes to the

same thing."

"I would have thought that nothingness and everythingness weren't quite the same thing." She spoke with a casual dismissiveness as she ran her finger down Monday night's programming.

"No, not really. You see, the meaning of the universe lies beyond words. Words are events, but the truth of everything lies behind all events where there is nothing that can be described."

"I see," she said, pushing me aside again - I was standing directly in front of the radio.

There was a pause. Obviously she wasn't interested in discussing it further.

"Anyway," I said, "it'll make a story I can tell

them at the club. At last."

That was a mistake. She disapproved of my Tuesday evenings at the Club, mixing as I did with a strange group of eccentric old men. Pursing her lips, she looked at me sharply. "A story to tell them at the Club?" There was a hint of scorn in her voice.

"Why not?"

"But I thought the stories these friends of yours tell each other after dinner are supposed to be so terribly terribly impressive. You said that's why you've always been afraid to tell one yourself."

"Just anecdotes." I was on the defensive. "What's impressive about them is that these people have had such extraordinary careers in important positions, they've got fascinating things to tell. Commando raids, secret treaties, scientific inventions..."

She was standing with hands on hips, looking at me. "And you're going to tell them about nothingness."

"Well, yes, I suppose..."

"You can't make a story out of nothingness," she said, turning back to the radio and fiddling with the tuner.

"Oh yes I can."

I could never make up my mind whether they were absurd old poseurs, acting parts they couldn't play in the real world where they were has-beens, or an elite gathering of some of the most talented men in the country. Certainly I didn't belong with them; they were nearly all twice my age. But Professor Boyd had introduced me to the group, and they tolerated me. Half repelled, half fascinated, I kept coming back.

There was Professor Boyd, of course, whose laconic remarks about his career as a scientist hinted at astonishing inventions that would have changed the whole pattern of life if they had become public property.

There was the Brigadier, whose stories of the secret decisions and unpublicized missions that really determined the course of World War II made nonsense of all the conventional wisdom.

There was the ex-Governor, who, as lord over a colonial empire, had been initiated into the spine-tingling secret cults of a jealously-guarded esoteric religion among Pacific islanders.

There were about half a dozen of them, and they all seemed larger than life. Even the Admiral, who had only one story and repeated it practically every week. He was an impressive figure with his massive girth and his red chin protruding aggressively between magnificent mutton-chop whiskers. His story was of how he almost destroyed a whole fleet while on manoeuvres in the Pacific. His own fleet.

It was with some impatience that I sat through the beef Wellington and the bavarois the following Tuesday. Finally we filed upstairs to the Morris Room for our coffee and port. A waiter held out a bottle for the Brigadier's inspection; "I wouldn't dream of drinking that stuff," he said irritably, and I thought I saw my opening.

"Talking of dreams," I said, but nobody was listening. I had to wait while the Admiral treated us once more to an account of his moment of near-infamy.

A pause soon came and I took my chance.

"I had an odd dream the other night, about somebody who was given immortality," I said. "I dreamed his whole life."

"You're going to tell us the story of this fellow's life, then, are you?" drawled the Brigadier, hunched in the depths of his armchair.

"Well, I thought I might."

"By Jove! If he was immortal we'll want a lot more port and coffee. Waiter!"

"No need," I assured him hastily. "My story can be quickly told."

"Quickly told?" barked old Squiggles, the barrister, in his courtroom manner. "If this individual was immortal, how can his story be quickly told?"

"I dare say we'll find out," said the Admiral. "Only do get a move on with it, won't you, eh?" He stifled a yawn.

"Here, have a top-up before you start." The Bishop passed the port. Gratefully I poured, then held my glass up, taking comfort from the twinkling reflections of the fire in its ruby heart.

"I call him Smith," I began. "That's what he was, in a way. He wanted to make gold. He was an alchemist."

"Your story begins in the Middle Ages, then," said Sir Oswald. "It's as well to get these things straight at the outset."

"In a way, the details of his life don't matter," I said. "They're irrelevant, as you'll see."

"Irrelevant to what?" Squiggles was cross-questioning again.

"The real point of the story. Anyway. Smith, the Middle Ages, a country town. I won't be able to maintain the three unities, by the way." I looked around defensively, half expecting an objection.

"Just carry on," said Boyd, not unkindly.

"Well, one day he was trying to make gold in his little laboratory and quite by chance he put together a mixture of chemicals that went Phut! - and when the smoke had cleared, there was a devil. Large as life, and very threatening. 'You impertinent whippersnapper, I suppose you've summoned me because you want the gift of immortality,' the devil said."

'Well, no, actually,' said Smith. 'I want to make gold.' 'That's very difficult. If I were you I'd settle for immortality. Then you'll have time enough to get all the gold you want.' 'I'd really rather have the gold now,' said Smith. At that, the devil's face went a horrible purple colour and Smith began to wake up to the reality of his situation. He felt rather scared, so he settled there and then for immortality. It seemed to be the only way to get rid of the devil.

"Now, nothing obviously happened at first, and he began to think the whole thing had been a hallucination. But, after about twenty years, it could no longer be ignored that he wasn't looking any older. The girls of the town found his perpetual youthfulness interesting, and his wife, who was getting to be fat and old, was jealous. There were rumours. Some thought that he had discovered the secret of eternal youth in his alchemical experiments, and once a group of local bullies beat him rather badly in an attempt to force the supposed secret from him.

"His children married and went away, and in the end he realized that the only thing for it was to pack his bags and disappear, starting life all over again somewhere else. It was obvious to him now that he'd have to do the same thing over and over again, about every twenty years."

I paused while the waiter deftly refilled my coffee cup. Lord Rolvenden wagged a reproving finger at me. "I've got several objections to the way you're telling the story," he said. "It's badly paced. It's weak on characterization. And it raises questions of detail that you choose to ignore."

I was a little piqued. "If you'll only wait," I said, "you'll see that these biographical details aren't really important to what I want to tell you. They're just preliminary."

"I don't see how that can be."

The Admiral lazily lifted a hand from the arm of his chair. "Just go on, lad," he growled. "Go on."

"Very well. Now, as you can imagine, Smith soon learned how to enjoy his new lifestyle. The possibilities were endless. Anything he wanted he could work around to. After a couple of these twenty-year careers he was rich - in one he made his name selling bottles of gum resin and soot black flavoured with goat's bile that he called the elixir of youth. Each time round he was a parvenu of unknown social origins, of course, but money talks, and he could win the bride of his choice. Then, when she was past her prime, he would simply take off and start again."

The Bishop was looking pained. "My dear young man," he said sorrowfully. "Am I to take it that your character, Smith, was a bigamist?"

"Strictly speaking, no. Nor a trigamist. Nor a tetragamist. In fact..."

"I take your point," he said. "I feared as much."

"After a couple of nasty reverses at the gaming tables he learned the wisdom of prudent money management. After all, what was the charm of a quick buck when, with a little patience, he could make as many slow ones as he wanted? After several centuries he could afford to gratify all his tastes. Thorough bred horses, the best hunting dogs, musicians from the courts of Europe to play for him at table. He went back to do different courses at Oxford ten or a dozen times. Oh, how sweet was life." I took a sip of port, and a sip of coffee, and a sip of port.

"It won't do, you know," protested Sir Oswald.

"What?"

"Everybody knows that immortality would be hell. The sheer boredom of it. After a century or two your Smith would be trying to commit suicide all over the place. Just try to imagine the tedium."

"That's just where you're wrong." I was more confident now. "Think about it: the subjective experience of time is related to how much of it you've got behind you. When you're five, a day is ages long. When you're a hundred and five it goes by in a flash. Why, the whole of the nineteenth century was just a blur of excitement for Smith. There simply weren't enough hours in the day for him to do all the things he wanted to do: travelling, exploring, reading, keeping up with the new inventions."

Sir Oswald looked unconvinced.

"There was a time when he tried to commit suicide."

"Ah," said Sir Oswald in an I-told-you-so voice.

"But it wasn't anything to do with boredom. Partly unrequited love, partly the temper of the age. Around 1930, you know. He went on a luxury cruise in the Pacific and jumped overboard. His lungs filled with water and he suffered pain, but not death. In fact it got boring walking around on the ocean bed, so he swam to the nearest island where all the local maidens fell in love with him and he decided life was worth living after all."

"My dear young friend," said Professor Boyd languidly. He leaned forward to knock his pipe out on the heath, effortlessly compelling everybody's attention. "You are riding roughshod over the philosophical problem."

"What philosophical problem?" I was put off my stroke.

"Why, I mean the question of what immortality means. What is it? Why should Smith stay young-looking rather than grow older and older to infinity? Why should he be able to float to the surface and swim some presumably great distance? You can't

duck the problem of definition, you know."

"I'm not ducking it. Smith thought about it, you know. Quite a lot."

"Oh?"

"There was the time in 1637 when he was caught by accident in a brawl outside a Plymouth tavern and the tip of one of his fingers was cut off by a dirk. It made him think. For the whole of eternity he'd be without his fingertip. What if he lost an arm or a leg? From then on he lived a very quite gentle life. No violent sports."

"Ah," said Professor Boyd.

"Of course, the end had to come. He knew it. The end for humanity, I mean - humanity other than Smith.

"Not nuclear bombs - that's just the fashionable worry now. Biological warfare. He tried to prepare by learning bushcraft and primitive smelting and so on. He got to be pretty good with a bow and arrow. And in no time he was the only person left alive. The bacteria simply got out of control. Very selective - humans died, animals were left untouched."

"And when pray is all this going to happen?" Boyd asked, stabbing his pipe stem at me.

"Early twenty-first century. We've got a little while left gentlemen. So there he was, out on the veldt, hunting for his food. He had a store of tinned food but he kept away from towns. Buildings falling down and so on."

"Your story won't wash, you know," Squiggles announced with authority.

"How do you mean?"

"Why, it should be apparent to the meanest intelligence. I mean, Smith is supposed to be immortal. So he doesn't need to eat at all. Why hunt? Why tins?"

"Simple. Smith didn't enjoy feeling hungry. He liked a good steak as much as the rest of us."

Squiggles said nothing.

"There were many species there for the trapping or shooting. He was beginning to enjoy the challenge of his new life.

"Until the day he just failed to kill a lioness. The wounded beast was enraged, and ate him up."

A silence fell upon the mellow room, punctuated by the tranquil ticking of the grandfather clock in a corner.

"I don't see it," grumbled the Admiral after a while, half opening his eyes. "You said he was immortal."

"But not invulnerable. Remember the fingertip. Pain. Hunger."

Another pause.

Professor Boyd smiled meditatively into the fire. "In what, then, my friend, did this immortality

consist? Are you not playing a semantic game with us?"

"No, indeed." I was very earnest now. "Smith was still there. The ants and things did their worst with what was left of course. I'll spare you the details, gentlemen. But Smith was still there."

Squiggles brandished a finger at me. "Answer me this, sir. Were Smith's brains still there or were they not?"

"They were not."

"Therefore there were no thoughts. Therefore there was no Smith." He gestured expansively, as if the conclusion were too obvious for words. It would have impressed a jury.

"No, but listen." In my agitation I tried to drink from an empty glass. The Bishop benignly handed me back the decanter. "Who after all is Smith? The person who thinks Smith's thoughts. The thoughts are one thing, Smith is another. He stands behind his thoughts, just as we all do. There were no more thoughts, but Smith was still there."

Squiggles grunted sceptically, but the Bishop was nodding.

"I mean, what do we actually consist of? Not just a body; the body is strictly speaking just a hypothesis: we believe it exists objectively only on the basis of inference, but what we know incontrovertibly is that the events in our minds exist. They are directly given. But even they are not what we are, because we are conscious of them."

I poured from the decanter, concentrating on keeping my hand steady.

"A few old philosophical chestnuts there," murmured Boyd as he held at match to his pipe.

"But I still don't understand," complained the Bishop. "I accept that Smith's soul was there, naturally. But why no thoughts?"

"As I understand it," put in Lord Rolvenden, "without a brain, there would be feelings, but no thoughts. An awful fate. There was Smith condemned to spend the whole of eternity experiencing nothing but the torment of wanting to possess a brain to think with and a body to act with. A terrible payment for his contract with that devil."

"No torment," I said. "No feelings at all. Just consciousness. Pure consciousness."

There was a silence. I seemed to have made even Professor Boyd think. He leaned forward to gaze meditatively into the fire, and with the movement the monster shadow of his head danced along the far wall and lost itself in the dimness.

"Conscious of what?" demanded the Bishop. "That's what I don't understand."

"Well, not of events," I told him. "No brain, no information coming in. Strictly speaking nothing was

actually happening inside Smith's consciousness."

"Therefore there was no consciousness," rasped Sqiggles. "Q.E.D. This is just a verbal trick. You can't have consciousness without anything happening inside it."

"Oh yes you can," I insisted. "You simply remove time."

The grandfather clock seemed to tick more loudly, as if affronted. I waved away a cigar as the waiter came offering them round.

"What after all is time?" I asked.

There was another pause. It was the Brigadier who took up my question. "No mystery about that, young fellow." he was fiddling with the wrappings of his cigar. "It's a sort of movement. Like a train moving over rails. Out of the past, into the present, and on into the future."

"No it isn't," I said. "Time is experience. It's subjective. Really it's a sort of logical arrangement of experience. What distinguishes each moment is that potentially it contains memories of a lot of past moments, but never of future moments. So each moment has a logical relationship with every other, like flies numbered in a sequence.

"But when Smith was removed from the passage of events, the basis of this arrangement didn't exist for him. So he was conscious of everything at once, so to speak."

"What?" asked somebody in exasperation.

"Yes. Look at it this way. You're always conscious of the fact that two and two make four, even without thinking, without any event taking place. Now imagine eternity. Not just a very long period of time; I mean eternity. You would become conscious of everything that could be worked out. Every conceivable mathematical proposition. Every possible logical relationship. Every imaginable world.

"And that's what happened to Smith. There was no actual process of working things out, because there was no thinking going on. It was just all there, frozen in his consciousness. The relationships between existence and non-existence, change and continuity, cause and effect. The rules which brought the universe into being. The whole history of the universe, every event in it making necessary the next event. The evolution of the solar system. The course of life on Earth, from beginning to end. All there in Smith's consciousness."

Boyd looked at me sharply. "Are you aware of the implications of what you're saying?"

I felt a little uneasy at that. But the Bishop saved me from having to answer. "Oh, I say," he objected. "This is a deterministic picture you're giving us. What about free will?"

That one was easy. "No problem. If you think about it you see that they come to the same thing."

That silenced everybody for a few moments, and I finished my coffee before finishing off my little story.

"Then the dream came to an end. Unfortunately all these revelations were rather wasted because there were only fools to tell them to."

There was a pause. I thought perhaps I would have a cigar after all and started waving at the waiter. Then I realized the men around me were looking at me in an unfriendly way.

"Oh, I'm terribly sorry. I didn't mean you. I was talking about Smith's dream ending, not mine. In my dream, Smith woke up and found that the people around him were fools."

"I'm sorry," said Lord Rolenden. "You've got me completely lost."

"Well, it was the only way the devil could really honour his promise. An infinite series of wakings-up. Only in that way could Smith have real immortality. The first stage went from his career as an alchemist to the dire encounter with a lioness. Then he woke up as Nathaniel Smith, a rich merchant in eighteenth-century London."

Professor Boyd was looking at me intently, as if he had realized things that I would rather not think about. "Were there any more stages after that?" he asked quietly.

I shook my head. His eyes bored into me.

"You realize what all this means," remarked the Professor, looking musingly at the back of the fire as if the flickering flames wrote a message from the other side of time. "What is less obvious, and of interest, is the question of whether these stages interlock within a single world. That is to say, was there a real Nathaniel Smith?"

I hadn't thought as far as this. Boyd's cool probing approach made me feel even more uneasy, as if he were coming close to things that would much better be -

"By George!" exclaimed Sir Oswald. "It happens, by an incredible coincidence, that I can tell you all."

I groaned inwardly. Dimly, at the back of my mind, I had seen it coming. There was no stopping it now.

"Just recently I've been doing some family research. A great-great-great-uncle of mine, don't you know. A joker who lived the life of Riley, most unscrupulous money-grubber in town. Then in middle life he suddenly claimed to have had visions of the meaning of the universe and became a boring old sobersides overnight. Always preaching at everyone. That's Nathaniel Smith."

The room with its glimmering fire and warm encompassing shadows became insubstantial, and the voices I heard seemed to come from an enormous distance.

"So that's it," Professor Boyd said to me, and the two of us seemed to be spinning through empty caverns of infinite space.

It was an effort to focus on him now. Everything was drifting, melting....

"Remember this though," he said. "As you go over

the threshold, keep in mind that we are really just as real as you are. You are just as little real as we are."

It was no good any longer. His voice was just a fading echo in the void. And, as I looked around, where the faces of men should be, I seemed to see only typewriter keys.

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review & other matters

In TF3 (T79), I promised many things for this review section. I promised a run-down on Aphelion Pub's' plans for the next year or so; alas, negotiations with several authors are at a 'delicate' stage, so that will have to wait until next time/Thyme. I promised a vast array of letters; alas, I have room for only two, Kate's, because she was first, and Bob's, because I especially asked him - and since he made the effort to cover all stories to date - I feel I must reciprocate with the printed form. Enough from me.

KATE ORMAN, CASTLE HILL, NSW.

You asked for some feedback - here goes -

"Hotel Terminus" - a dead subtle title for a reasonably subtle story - I liked the isolated setting, the feeling of claustrophobia, which was enhanced by the first-person telling. The 'deathly pallor' was a dead give-away, though. What the heck happened to her husband?

It took me three readings of "The Red Cardigan" to puzzle it out! Yuki! Beautifully described.

"A Sea Change" - I stopped at the semen.

"Illegal Alien" - had lots of interesting ideas, but it was the sort of story the reader wanders through, at a bit of a loss as to what is going on. eg: what the heck was the Junker?

ROBERT LAUREN, BRIGHTON, SA.

Mac, you asked for a 'short' critique on the THYME stories. I'm not sure what you meant by that, but this-here-lot's what you've ended up with:

TF1 "Hotel Terminus" A tight but moody piece, skating reasonably attractively (in a literary sense) around its subject matter - wouldn't work except in first-person. Felt a bit Ballardish in places (though only in places). I found it 'satisfying' - the necrophiles among your readership must have loved it.

"The Red Cardigan" A gem! The horror unravelled with the cardigan. Knit one, pearl one... just the right number of words; if you missed something, the pattern fell apart. Tight, balanced, controlled.... all those sort of things. The lady has talent.

"A Sea Change" My God! What a follow-up! I read in

your introductory notes that the writer delivered it to you personally - I can only hope you didn't let him in the door. If his aim was to disgust, then the piece was an outstanding success. BUT, that aside, there were some neat point-of-view changes, some neat scene shifts, and I liked the way the road to disgust, once entered upon, ran sure and true to the end of story and beyond.

"Illegal Alien" Smooth, interesting, imaginative. The guy knows the field; he should be aiming higher than this.

TF2 "Sharing Space" The writing's fairly fluent but the central idea's underdeveloped (in fact I'd say she does silly things with it). Result: disappointment.

"To Here The Midnight Fled" I enjoyed reading this, even though there wasn't a great deal going on (sorry, but I couldn't get excited about these people). Some outstanding descriptive passages, and a generally-emotive use of language carried the story. I'd like to see something with a tougher plot from her - to see how far her obvious ability would stretch.

"Glaring Problem" This guy's got a nice feel for the humorous 'yarn'. It left me chuckling contentedly, which is I guess all he was attempting to do.

"Box ex Machina" Inventor falls victim to his invention: done to death. This one's too slight, but it does drift along in an amiable manner.

TF3 "Welcome To The Club" A totally implausible concept, yet the guy had me half-believing it. I guess that means it worked. A heavy reliance on conversation, carried through with a workmanlike effort.

"Enclosed Values" Frew returns. What's she doing in fanzines? Tight, balanced... all those things I said before. Tell her to ask money for her efforts.

"Kept On Ice" I, too, couldn't work out what was happening with the spaceship's name, but it was the least of my worries. The guy can write, but what's in a story about sucking up ice with a hose?

"The Homecoming" I suppose that if you're going to write about a dreary world, it's inevitably going to be a dreary story. This one was. Life might be tough on good old wherever-it-was, but who really cares?



THE INSTRUMENTALITY

The Instrumentality of the Australian S.F. Foundation

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Ditmar-Eligible SF

Below is a non-inclusive list of Australian sf eligible for nomination for the Ditmar Awards. *Caveat*: we've done our best, but the list is not necessarily absolutely complete or accurate. This listing does not include a number of amateur (ie unpaid) short fiction pieces published in magazines such as *THE MENTOR*, *THE CANBERRA SF SOCIETY NEWS-LETTER*, and various other fan- and club- zines. If you have further information, please contact the ASFF.

BOOKS:

- | | |
|-------------------|--|
| Chandler, A. B. | From Sea To Shining Star
(Collection, Dreamstone, 1990?) |
| Dowling, Terry | Rynosceros
(Collection, Aphelion, 1990) |
| Farakas, ??? | The Adonis Strategy
(Novel, ???, 1990) |
| Lord, Gabrielle | Salt
(Novel, McPhee Gribble, Aug 1990) |
| Love, Rosaleen | The Total Devotion Machine & Others
(Collection, Women's Press, UK 1989)
(Available in Australia 1990) |
| Middleton, Martin | Circle of Light
(Novel, Pan, 1990) |
| Sussex, Lucy | My Lady Tongue & Other Stories
(Collection, Heineman Aust, 1990) |
| Taylor, Keith | The Search For The Starblade
(Novel, Ace, US 1990) |
| Turner, George | A Pursuit of Miracles
(Collection, Aphelion, 1990) |
| Whiteford, Wynne | The Specialist
(Novel, Ace, US 1990) |
| Whitmore, Andrew | Fortress of Eternity
(Novel, Avon, US 1990) |

SHORT FICTION

- Byrne, Jeremy G
Tizzy's Tail (Eidolon 2)
- Chandler, A. Bertram
(Two original stories in
From Sea To Shining Star)
- Collins, Paul
Three Great Lies (True Blue 9)
- Corboli, Anatol
Welcome To The Club (Thyme Fiction 3)
- Dedman, Stephen
Spin (Strange Plasma 2 / Eidolon 2)
- Dix, Shane
The Moment (Thyme Fiction 4)
- Dowling, Terry
Colouring the Captains (Rynosceros, above)
In The Dark Rush (Aurealis 1)
Larrikin Wind (Rynosceras, a/a)
Mirage Diver (a/a)
The Robot is Running Away From The Trees
Spinners (a/a)
So Much For The Burning Queen (a/a)
- Egan, Greg
Eugene (interzone, Jun 1990)
In The Safe-Deposit Box (Asimov's, Sep 1990)
The Caress (Asimov's, Jan 1990)
The Extra (Eidolon 2)
- Enever, Paul
Box Ex Machina (Thyme Fiction 2)
- Frahm, Leanne
Reichmann's Relics (Amazing, Jul 1990)
- Frew, Wendy
Enclosed Values (Thyme Fiction 3)
- Kennett, Roger
The Homecoming (Thyme Fiction 3)
- Isle, Sue
Nightwings (Aurealis 1)
To Here The Midnight Fled (Thyme Fiction 2)
- Love, Rosaleen
Bat Mania (In The Total Devotion Machine &c)
Dolphins and Deep Thought (a/a)
If You Go Down To The Park Today (a/a)
No resting Place (a/a)
Power Play (a/a)
Tanami Drift (a/a)
The Children Don't Leave Home Any More (a/a)
The Tea Room tapes (a/a)
The Total devotion Machine (a/a)
Tremendous Potential For Tourism (a/a)
Where Are They (a/a)
- McHugh, Evan
Searching For the Big Bang
(The Australian, 10 Apr 1990)
- McKenzie, Keira
Feather Dancer (Eidolon 1)
- McMullen, Sean
While The Gate Is Open (F&SF, Feb 1990)
- Mabbett, Ian
Immortality (Thyme Fiction 4)
- Maddern, Philippa
The Subconscious Computer (Eidolon 2)

- Maloney, Geoffrey
5 Cigarettes And 2 Snakes (Aurealis 1)
Green Wall Dreaming (Thyme Fiction 4)
- Pryor, Michael
Talent (Aurealis 1)
- Russell, Joi S
Matter of Mind (Aurealis 1)
Sharing Space (Thyme Fiction 2)
- Scriven, Richard
Lucky At Last (Eidolon 1)
- Spenter, Dianne M
Do We Love? (Aurealis 1)
- Sussex, Lucy
The Man Hanged Upside Down (My Lady Tongue)
Red Ochre (a/a)
Go-To (a/a)
God and Her Black Sense Of Humour (a/a)
- Tansey, David
...And They Shall Wander All Their Days
(Aurealis 1)
Kept On Ice (Thyme Fiction 3)
- Turner, George
Generation Gap (A Pursuit of Miracles)
I Still Call Australia Home (Aurealis 1)
- Verran, James
The Dive (Writers of the Future Vol 6)
- Wodhams, Jack
The Token Pole (Analog, Feb 1990)
- Xanthos, Maurice
Glaring problem (Thyme Fiction 2)

STORY CONTEST SPONSORSHIP

The Foundation has received enquiries regarding sponsorship of short story competitions. This has been discussed in committee, and the Foundation's decision is as follows:

The Foundation is currently sponsoring short story competitions organised by Suncon and Huttcon (the National SF and the National SF Media Conventions in 1991). It will consider sponsoring similar competitions for future National SF and National SF Media Conventions. It will not sponsor competitions run by conventions other than National SF or National SF Media Conventions. Given the number and the size of conventions in Australia, and the Foundation's limited resources, sponsoring competitions for every convention that asked would be neither feasible in the short term nor sustainable in the longer term.

WORLD SF CONVENTION BIDS

The Foundation cannot subsidise Australian bids to hold the World SF Convention. The sum that the Foundation holds in trust was founded on the profit from Aussiecon II, the 1985 World SF Convention. The World SF Society Constitution specifies that such profits must be used to the benefit of fandom. Traditional interpretation of this clause allows such expenditure to follow national lines, and would allow startup loans to a future Worldcon, but does not include funding bids for future Worldcons.

THYME

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