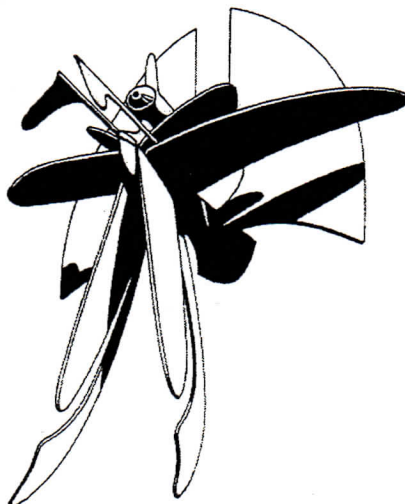




**Festival
of the
Imagination
1996**



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designed and edited by jonathan strahan

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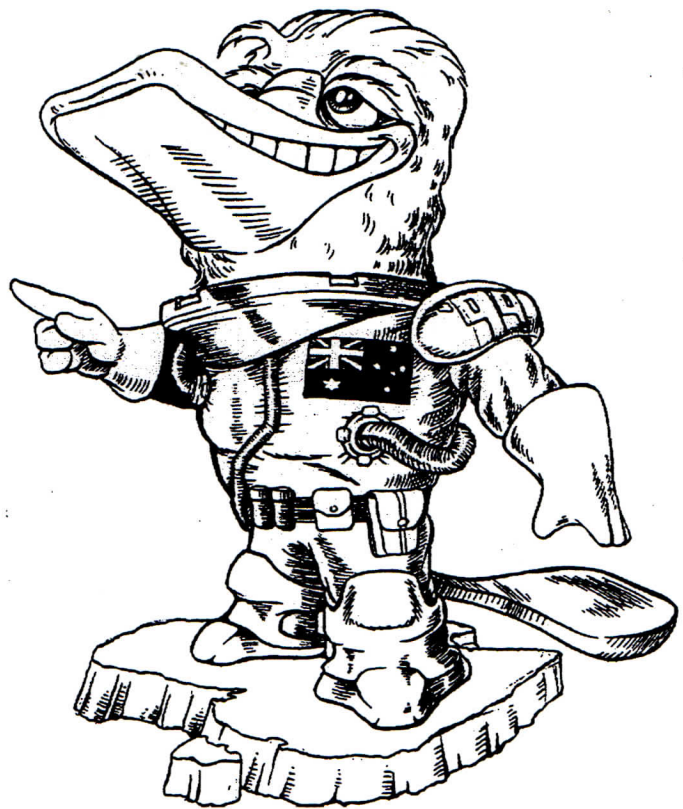
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Welcome to the Festival

Richard Scriven

Welcome to the Festival of the Imagination 1996, the joint Australian Science Fiction Convention and Australian Science Fiction Media Convention.

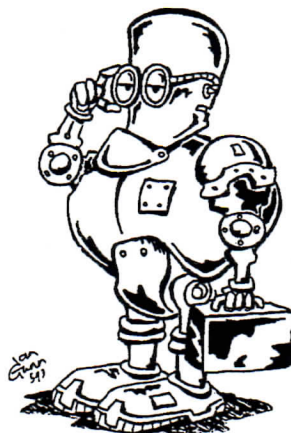
This convention is worth making a fuss over for a number of reasons. This year we celebrate the 21st consecutive Swancon, the Western Australian State Science Fiction Convention. I hope that each of you will join with us in partying extra hard across the four days of the Convention to commemorate this special event.

The Festival of the Imagination 1996 combines the Australian Science Fiction Convention and the Australian Science Fiction Media Convention. As science fiction has grown and developed throughout the 20th century so has fandom. And as SF has expanded as a genre to cover everything from the more traditional novels and stories, to films, television, animation, games, toys, comics and music, so has fandom. We see this joint National Convention as a wonderful opportunity to celebrate science fiction in all its forms, and to welcome all its fans.

I'd like to take this opportunity to greet our guests: Neil Gaiman; Storm Constantine; Jack Dann; Janeen Webb and Robin Pen. I would also like to extend our welcome to all those invited guests who are giving freely of their time and abilities to make The Festival a successful event. I hope all of you have a wonderful time, and that you take this opportunity to enjoy yourselves in the relaxed surroundings of the Convention.

This Festival is the end of a long road for the Committee, a brave bunch of people who decided to run a convention two years ago, and I know we're all looking forward to celebrating the success of the Festival with you over this Easter.

Richard Scriven
Chair
Festival of the Imagination 1996



Neil Gaiman

Neil Gaiman, creator/writer of the monthly cult DC comics horror-weird series, *Sandman*, is one of the top writers in modern comics. He is also a best-selling novelist and acclaimed short story writer.

Sandman has won Neil the Will Eisner Comic Industry Award for Best Writer, Best Continuing Series, Best Graphic Album-Reprint, and Best Graphic Album-New; the Harvey Award for Best Writer and Best Continuing Series. *Sandman* #19, "A Midsummer Night's Dream", won the World Fantasy Award for Best Short Story (making it the first comic ever to be awarded a literary award).

Norman Mailer said of *Sandman*, "Along with all else, *Sandman* is a comic strip for intellectuals, and I say it's about time". Nine *Sandman* collections have appeared to date. A final collection, *The Wake*, is in preparation. Warner Brothers have optioned *Sandman* for a movie, and a first draft script (by Elliot and Rossio, writers of Disney's *Aladdin*) has been completed.

Gaiman's three-part series, *Death: The High Cost of Living*, was released by DC in February 1993, and was the single best-selling title for 'mature-readers' ever. The three parts of the story were collected in late 1993 to widespread acclaim. Warner Brothers are optioning *Death: The High Cost of Living* as a movie, and have approached Gaiman to write the film. The first part of a new three-part series, *Death: The Time of Your Life*, was released in April 1996.

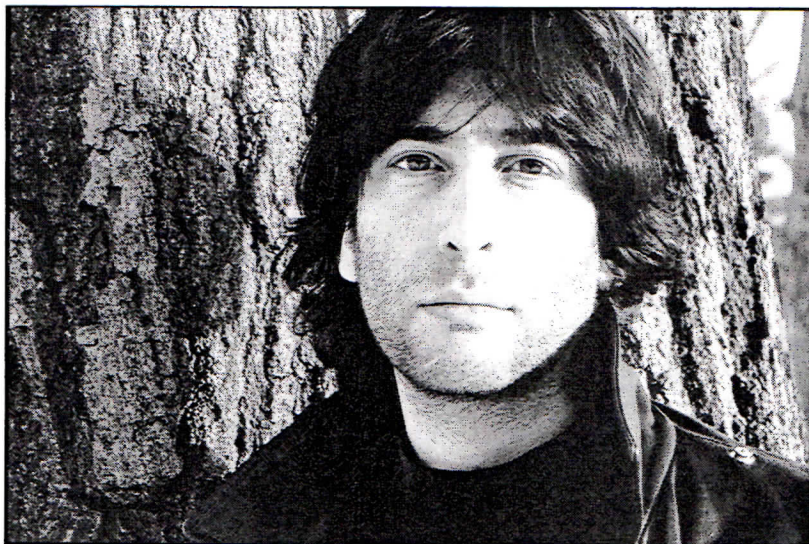
Neil wrote *Signal to Noise* (illustrated by Dave McKean), a graphic novella about a dying film director that was serialised in *The Face* and reprinted by Gollancz in July 1992. It won the Eisner Award for Best Graphic Album, and is currently being adapted by the BBC as a radio play for Radio Three (UK) and as a CD-ROM. Gaiman has also worked with Dave McKean on *Violent Cases* (1987) and *Black Orchid* (1988). *Violent Cases* is a meditation on memory, evil and kids' birthday parties. It won the Eagle Award for Best Graphic Novel (1988).


Angels and Visitations (DreamHaven), a hardcover small press collection of Gaimans' short fiction, prose and journalism, was issued in 1993 to celebrate his first ten years as a professional writer. One of the stories from the collection, "Troll Bridge", and the collection itself, were nominated for World Fantasy Awards in 1994. The book was awarded the 1994 International Horror Critic Guild's Award as Best Collection. Neil's stories have appeared in the annual *Years' Best Fantasy and Horror* collection for the last four years' running. Two more stories have been picked up for the 1996 Year's Best collection.

Recent comics work includes *Mr Punch* (1994), with artwork by Dave McKean, a strange story of childhood and puppets; and Alice Cooper's *The Last Temptation*, Gaiman's adaptation of the story he created, around which Alice Cooper wrote the album of the same name. He was also co-ordinator, co-plotter and co-editor of the *Utterly Comic Comic Relief Comic*, which raised 45,000 pounds for the UK Comic Relief Charity in 1991.

Gaiman was co-author, with Terry Pratchett, of *Good Omens*: a very funny novel about how the world is going to end and we are all going to die, which spent 17 consecutive weeks on the UK *Sunday Times* Best-Seller lists in 1990, and has gone on to sell over 250,000 copies in the UK alone. Neil has recently completed a six-part TV series for the BBC, *Neverwhere*, set in a strange world beneath London. It began filming in February 1996 and will be broadcast in the Autumn of 1996. He has also just finished his first book for children, *The Day I Swapped My Dad for Two Goldfish*.

Neil's work in translation has appeared in Italy, Spain, Holland, Norway, Germany, France, Brazil, Sweden, Finland and some other countries he can't





think of off-hand. His journalism has appeared in *Time Out*, *The Sunday Times* (London), *Punch*, *The Observer Colour Supplement* and diverse other locations. Neil Gaiman is thirty five years old and is currently dividing his time between the US and the UK.

An Appreciation

Steven R Brust

Neil Gaiman: Rock Star

First of all we need to understand what a Rock Star is. Huey Lewis is not a Rock Star; he's a guy who plays music. Alice Cooper is a Rock Star. George Harrison is a musician; Mick Jagger is a Rock Star. Okay? Are you with me?

You don't need to be a musician to be a Rock Star. Harlan Ellison, for example, is a Rock Star. So, in an entirely different way, is Alan Moore.

How do you identify a Rock Star? Well, in the first place, check out the black tee-shirts. Wearing black tee-shirts is a sign of Rock Stardom. So, of course, are shades. And besides the surface stuff, anyone who writes comic book scripts, novels, and some wonderful songs clearly has the whole Rock Stardom thing working for him. Obviously, I am claiming that Neil Gaiman is a Rock Star. It seems so obvious, in fact, that I will waste no more time proving my case.

So the question comes up: Exactly how does one deal with a Rock Star? If you walk up to him and say, "Yo, Dude, how they hangin'?" you're liable to reflect back on the interaction later and feel that maybe you didn't make the best impression. Similarly, falling on your knees and chanting, "I am Unworthy" will mark you as having seen *Wayne's World* too many times: a sure sign of Uncoolness.

So, let me make a few modest suggestions.

I've given a great deal of thought to the question of first contact with Rock Stars, and I've decided that all attempts to impress them are doomed. They are preternaturally cool; if you try to make them think you are cool too, you will merely appear feeble. The only thing worth trying to impress them with is your good taste and affability. I recommend saying something like this: "I really like your work. May I give you a check for a million dollars U.S.?" If your bank account doesn't support this degree of affability, you might modify the second sentence to, "May I buy you a drink?" and see how it goes from there.

Now, let us suppose our Rock Star accepts, and you suddenly find yourself in a conversation with him. What do you talk about? First of all, don't, for God's sake, tell him about yourself. Your puny life is of no interest to the Rock Star. And don't try to impress him by making a sharp, detailed criticism of the flaws in his latest work; he knows very well that there are no flaws in his latest work, so you'll just make yourself look stupid.

You may try the Astute Observation And Penetrating Question Technique, but make sure your observation is actually astute; your question truly penetrating. Something like, "It was damn clever the way you allowed us, in the first few issues of *Sandman*, to fool ourselves into thinking Death was male," isn't bad, because Rock Stars know they are clever and it is a sign of your intelligence if you know it too. A question such as, "Did you always plan to make the relationship between Dream and his son an oblique comment on the family's relationship to Destruction, or did that emerge as you did the work?" might convince him you were the sort of reader he was aiming for (if it didn't instead convince him you were a pretentious twit). On the other hand, something like, "In Number 47, on page two, what brand of knife is the guy cutting the onion with?" is likely to make him wonder if you wouldn't rather be at a Star Trek convention.

Once you've made it that far, you can take a few chances by asking him about influences and tastes in other media, and you might even venture to mention a couple of your own. Alternately, you may want to keep quiet about your own; Rock Stars aren't usually interested in hearing about reruns of "The Brady Bunch".

Dealing with Rock Stars can be tricky. I wish you all the best.

Note: In case the irony above isn't obvious, I really ought to say for the record that Neil is a sweetheart, a joy to talk to, and one of my favourite people in the world, as well as one of my favourite writers. Honest. If I let it go out without making it clear I'm kidding, he'll probably break my neck.

Steven Brust

Steven Brust is the author of the enormously popular Vlad Taltos series of novels, as well as *The Phoenix Guards*; *500 Years After*; *Agyar* and others. A rock star himself, Mr Brust has recorded several albums with Cats Laughing (with Emma Bull).



The Nearly Complete Gaiman

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Only the End of the World Again

Neil Gaiman

It was a bad day: I woke up naked in the bed, with a cramp in my stomach, feeling more or less like hell. Something about the quality of the light, stretched and metallic, like the colour of a migraine, told me it was afternoon.

The room was freezing—literally: there was a thin crust of ice on the inside of the windows. The sheets on the bed around me were ripped and clawed, and there was animal hair in the bed. It itched.

I was thinking about staying in bed for the next week—I'm always tired after a change—but a wave of nausea forced me to disentangle myself from the bedding, and to stumble, hurriedly, into the apartment's tiny bathroom.

The cramps hit me again as I got to the bathroom door. I held on to the door-frame and I started to sweat. Maybe it was a fever; I hoped I wasn't coming down with something.

The cramping was sharp in my guts. My head felt swimmy. I crumpled to the floor, and, before I could manage to raise my head enough to find the toilet bowl, I began to spew.

I vomited a foul-smelling thin yellow liquid; in it was a dog's paw—my guess was a doberman's, but I'm not really a dog person; a tomato peel; some diced carrots and sweet corn; some lumps of half-chewed meat, raw; and some fingers. They were fairly small, pale fingers, obviously a child's.

"Shit."

The cramps eased up, and the nausea subsided. I lay on the floor, with stinking drool coming out of my mouth and nose, with the tears you cry when you're being sick drying on my cheeks.

When I felt a little better I picked up the paw and the fingers from the pool of spew and threw them into the toilet bowl, flushed them away.

I turned on the tap, rinsed out my mouth with the briny Innsmouth water, and spat it into the sink.

I mopped up the rest of the sick as best I could with washcloth and toilet paper. Then I turned on the shower, and stood in the bathtub like a zombie as the hot water sluiced over me.

I soaped myself down, body and hair. The meagre lather turned grey; I must have been filthy. My hair was matted with something that felt like dried blood, and I worked at it with the bar of soap until it was gone. Then I stood under the shower until the water turned icy.

There was a note under the door from my landlady. It said that I owed her for two weeks' rent. It said that all the answers were in the Book of Revelations. It said that I made a lot of noise coming home in the early hours of this morning, and she'd thank me to be quieter in future. It said that when the Elder Gods rose up from the ocean, all the scum of the Earth, all the non-believers, all the human garbage and the wastrels and deadbeats would be swept away, and the world would be cleansed by ice and deep water. It said that she felt she ought to remind me that she had assigned me a shelf in the refrigerator when I arrived and she'd thank me if in the future I'd keep to it.

I crumpled the note, dropped it on the floor, where it lay alongside the Big Mac cartons and the empty pizza cartons, and the long-dead dried slices of pizza.

It was time to go to work.

I'd been in Innsmouth for two weeks, and I disliked it. It smelled fishy. It was a claustrophobic little town: marshland to the east, cliffs to the west, and, in the centre, a harbour that held a few rotting fishing boats, and was not even scenic at sunset. The yuppies had come to Innsmouth in the Eighties anyway, bought their picturesque fisherman's cottages overlooking the harbour. The yuppies had been gone for some years, now, and the cottages by the bay were crumbling, abandoned.

The inhabitants of Innsmouth lived here and there in and around the town, and in the trailer parks that ringed it, filled with dank mobile homes that were never going anywhere.

I got dressed, pulled on my boots and put on my coat and left my room. My landlady was nowhere to be seen. She was a short, pop-eyed woman, who spoke little, although she left extensive notes for me pinned to doors and placed where I might see them; she kept the house filled with the smell of boiling seafood: huge pots were always simmering on the kitchen stove, filled with things with too many legs and other things with no legs at all.

There were other rooms in the house, but no one else rented them. No one in their right mind would come to Innsmouth in winter.

Outside the house it didn't smell much better. It was colder, though, and my breath steamed in the sea air. The snow on the streets was crusty and filthy; the clouds promised more snow.

A cold, salty wind came up off the bay. The gulls were screaming miserably. I felt shitty. My office would be freezing, too. On the corner of Marsh Street and Leng Avenue was a bar, 'The Opener', a squat building with small, dark windows that I'd passed two dozen times in the last couple of weeks. I hadn't been in before, but I really needed a drink, and besides, it might be warmer in there. I pushed open the door.

The bar was indeed warm. I stamped the snow off my boots and went inside. It was almost empty and smelled of old ashtrays and stale beer. A couple of elderly men were playing chess by the bar. The barman was reading a battered old gilt-and-green-leather edition of the poetical works of Alfred, Lord Tennyson.

"Hey. How about a Jack Daniels straight up?"

"Sure thing. You're new in town," he told me, putting his book face down on the bar, pouring the drink into a glass.

"Does it show?"

He smiled, passed me the Jack Daniels. The glass was filthy, with a greasy thumb-print on the side, and I shrugged and knocked back the drink anyway. I could barely taste it.

"Hair of the dog?" he said.

"In a manner of speaking."

"There is a belief," said the barman, whose fox-red hair was tightly greased back, "that the *lykanthropoi* can be returned to their natural forms by thanking them, while they're in wolf form, or by calling them by their given names."

"Yeah? Well, thanks."

He poured another shot for me, unasked. He looked a little like Peter Lorre, but then, most of the folk in Innsmouth look a little like Peter Lorre, including my landlady.

I sank the Jack Daniels, this time felt it burning down into my stomach, the way it should.

"It's what they say. I never said I believed it."

"What do you believe?"

"Burn the girdle."

"Pardon?"

"The *lykanthropoi* have girdles of human skin, given to them at their first transformation, by their masters in hell. Burn the girdle."

One of the old chess-players turned to me then, his eyes huge and blind and protruding. "If you drink rain-water out of warg-wolf's paw-print, that'll make a wolf of you, when the moon is full," he said. "The only cure is to hunt down the wolf that made the print in the first place and cut off its head with a knife forged of virgin silver."

"Virgin, huh?" I smiled.

His chess partner, bald and wrinkled, shook his head and croaked a single sad sound. Then he moved his queen, and croaked again.

There are people like him all over Innsmouth.

I paid for the drinks, and left a dollar tip on the bar. The barman was reading his book once more, and ignored it.


Outside the bar big, wet kissy flakes of snow had begun to fall, settling in my hair and eyelashes. I hate snow. I hate New England. I hate Innsmouth: it's no place to be alone, but if there's a good place to be alone I've not found it yet. Still, business has kept me on the move for more moons than I like to think about. Business, and other things.

I walked a couple of blocks down Marsh Street—like most of Innsmouth, an unattractive mixture of eighteenth century American Gothic houses, late nineteenth century stunted brownstones, and late twentieth century prefab grey-brick boxes—until I got to a boarded-up fried chicken joint, and I went up the stone steps next to the store and unlocked the rusting metal security door.

There was a liquor store across the street; a palmist was operating on the second floor.

Someone had scrawled graffiti in black marker on the metal: *just die*, it said. Like it was easy.

The stairs were bare wood; the plaster was stained and peeling. My one-room office was at the top of the stairs.



I don't stay anywhere long enough to bother with my name in gilt on glass. It was handwritten in block letters on a piece of ripped cardboard that I'd thumbtacked to the door.

LAWRENCE TALBOT.
ADJUSTOR.

I unlocked the door to my office and went in.

I inspected my office, while adjectives like *seedy* and *rancid* and *squalid* wandered through my head, then gave up, outclassed. It was fairly unprepossessing—a desk, an office chair, an empty filing cabinet; a window, which gave you a terrific view of the liquor store and the empty palmist's. The smell of old cooking grease permeated from the store below. I wondered how long the fried chicken joint had been boarded up; I imagined a multitude of black cockroaches swarming over every surface in the darkness beneath me.

"That's the shape of the world that you're thinking of there," said a deep, dark voice, deep enough that I felt it in the pit of my stomach.

There was an old armchair in one corner of the office. The remains of a pattern showed through the patina of age and grease the years had given it. It was the colour of dust.

The fat man sitting in the armchair, his eyes still tightly closed, continued, "We look about in puzzlement at our world, with a sense of unease and disquiet. We think of ourselves as scholars in arcane liturgies, single men trapped in worlds beyond our devising. The truth is far simpler: there are things in the darkness beneath us that wish us harm."

His head was lolled back on the armchair, and the tip of his tongue poked out of the corner of his mouth.

"You read my mind?"

The man in the armchair took a slow deep breath that rattled in the back of his throat. He really was immensely fat, with stubby fingers like discoloured sausages. He wore a thick old coat, once black, now an indeterminate grey. The snow on his boots had not entirely melted.

"Perhaps. The end of the world is a strange concept. The world is always ending, and the end is always being averted, by love or foolishness or just plain old dumb luck.

"Ah well. It's too late now: the Elder Gods have chosen their vessels. When the moon rises . . ."

A thin trickle of drool came from one corner of his mouth, trickled down in a thread of silver to his

collar. Something scuttled down into the shadows of his coat.

"Yeah? What happens when the moon rises?"

The man in the armchair stirred, opened two little eyes, red and swollen, and blinked them in waking.

"I dreamed I had many mouths," he said, his new voice oddly small and breathy for such a huge man. "I dreamed every mouth was opening and closing independently. Some mouths were talking, some whispering, some eating, some waiting in silence."

He looked around, wiped the spittle from the corner of his mouth, sat back in the chair, blinking puzzledly. "Who are you?"

"I'm the guy that rents this office," I told him.

He belched suddenly, loudly. "I'm sorry," he said, in his breathy voice, and lifted himself heavily from the armchair. He was shorter than I was, when he was standing. He looked me up and down blearily. "Silver bullets," he pronounced, after a short pause. "Old-fashioned remedy."

"Yeah," I told him. "That's so obvious—must be why I didn't think of it. Gee, I could just kick myself. I really could."

"You're making fun of an old man," he told me.

"Not really. I'm sorry. Now, out of here. Some of us have work to do."

He shambled out. I sat down in the swivel chair at the desk by the window, and discovered, after some minutes, through trial and error, that if I swivelled the chair to the left it fell off its base.

So I sat still and waited for the dusty black telephone on my desk to ring, while the light slowly leaked away from the winter sky.

Ring.

A man's voice: *Had I thought about aluminum siding?* I put down the phone.

There was no heating in the office. I wondered how long the fat man had been asleep in the armchair.

Twenty minutes later the phone rang again. A crying woman implored me to help her find her five-year-old daughter, missing since last night, stolen from her bed. The family dog had vanished too.

I don't do missing children, I told her. *I'm sorry: too many bad memories.* I put down the telephone, feeling sick again.

It was getting dark now, and, for the first time since I had been in Innsmouth, the neon sign across the street flicked on. It told me that Madame Ezekiel performed Tarot Readings and Palmistry. Red neon stained the falling snow the colour of new blood.

Armageddon is averted by small actions. That's the way it was. That's the way it always has to be.

The phone rang a third time. I recognised the voice; it was the aluminum-siding man again. "You know," he said, chattily, "transformation from man to animal and back being, by definition, impossible, we need to look for other solutions. Depersonalisation, obviously, and likewise some form of projection. Brain damage? Perhaps. Pseudoneurotic schizophrenia? Laughably so. Some cases have been treated with intravenous thioridazine hydrochloride."

"Successfully?"

He chuckled. "That's what I like. A man with a sense of humour. I'm sure we can do business."

"I told you already. I don't need aluminum siding."

"Our business is more remarkable than that, and of far greater importance. You're new in town, Mr Talbot. It would be a pity if we found ourselves at, shall we say, loggerheads?"

"You can say whatever you like, pal. In my book you're just another adjustment, waiting to be made."

"We're ending the world, Mr Talbot. The Deep Ones will rise out of their ocean graves and eat the moon like a ripe plum."

"Then I won't ever have to worry about full moons anymore, will I?"

"Don't try and cross us," he began, but I growled at him, and he fell silent.

Outside my window the snow was still falling.

Across Marsh Street, in the window directly opposite mine, the most beautiful woman I had ever seen stood in the ruby glare of her neon sign, and she stared at me.

She beckoned, with one finger.

I put down the phone on the aluminum-siding man for the second time that afternoon, and went downstairs, and crossed the street at something close to a run; but I looked both ways before I crossed.

She was dressed in silks. The room was lit only by candles, and stank of incense and patchouli oil.

She smiled at me as I walked in, beckoned me over to her seat by the window. She was playing a card game with a tarot deck, some version of solitaire. As I reached her, one elegant hand swept up the cards, wrapped them in a silk scarf, placed them gently in a wooden box.

The scents of the room made my head pound. I hadn't eaten anything today, I realised; perhaps that was what was making me lightheaded. I sat down, across the table from her, in the candle-light.

She extended her hand, and took my hand in hers.

She stared at my palm, touched it, softly, with her forefinger.

"Hair?" She was puzzled.

"Yeah, well. I'm on my own a lot." I grinned. I had hoped it was a friendly grin, but she raised an eyebrow at me anyway.

"When I look at you," said Madame Ezekiel, "this is what I see. I see the eye of a man. Also I see the eye of a wolf. In the eye of a man I see honesty, decency, innocence. I see an upright man who walks on the square. And in the eye of wolf I see a groaning and a growling, night howls and cries, I see a monster running with blood-flecked spittle in the darkness of the borders of the town."

"How can you see a growl or a cry?"

She smiled. "It is not hard," she said. Her accent was not American. It was Russian, or Maltese, or Egyptian perhaps. "In the eye of the mind we see many things."

Madame Ezekiel closed her green eyes. She had remarkably long eyelashes; her skin was pale, and her black hair was never still—it drifted gently around her head, in the silks, as if it were floating on distant tides.

"There is a traditional way," she told me. "A way to wash off a bad shape. You stand in running water, in clear spring water, while eating white rose petals."

"And then?"

"The shape of darkness will be washed from you."

"It will return," I told her, "with the next full of the moon."

"So," said Madame Ezekiel, "once the shape is washed from you, you open your veins in the running water. It will sting mightily, of course. But the river will carry the blood away."

She was dressed in silks, in scarves and cloths of a hundred different colours, each bright and vivid, even in the muted light of the candles.

Her eyes opened.

"Now," she said. "The Tarot." She unwrapped her deck from the black silk scarf that held it, passed me the cards to shuffle. I fanned them, riffed and bridged them.

"Slower, slower," she said. "Let them get to know you. Let them love you, like . . . like a woman would love you."

I held them tightly, then passed them back to her.

She turned over the first card. It was called *The Warwolf*. It showed darkness and amber eyes, a smile in white and red.

Her green eyes showed confusion. They were the green of emeralds. "This is not a card from my deck," she said, and turned over the next card. "What did you do to my cards?"

"Nothing, ma'am. I just held them. That's all."

The card she had turned over was *The Deep One*. It showed something green and faintly octopoid. The thing's mouths—if they were indeed mouths and not tentacles—began to writhe on the card as I watched.

She covered it with another card, and then another, and another. The rest of the cards were blank pasteboard.

"Did you do that?" She sounded on the verge of tears.

"No."

"Go now," she said.

"But—"

"Go." She looked down, as if trying to convince herself I no longer existed.

I stood up, in the room that smelled of incense and candle-wax, and looked out of her window, across the street. A light flashed, briefly, in my office window. Two men, with flashlights, were walking around. They opened the empty filing cabinet, peered around, then took up their positions, one in the armchair, the other behind the door, waiting for me to return. I smiled to myself. It was cold and inhospitable in my office, and with any luck they would wait there for hours until they finally decided I wasn't coming back.

So I left Madame Ezekiel turning over her cards, one by one, staring at them as if that would make the pictures return; and I went downstairs, and walked back down Marsh Street until I reached the bar.

The place was empty, now; the barman was smoking a cigarette, which he stubbed out as I came in.

"Where are the chess-fiends?"

"It's a big night for them tonight. They'll be down at the bay. Let's see: you're a Jack Daniels? Right?"

"Sounds good."

He poured it for me. I recognised the thumb-print from the last time I had the glass. I picked up the volume of Tennyson poems from the bar-top.

"Good book?"

The fox-haired barman took his book from me, opened it and read:

"Below the thunders of the upper deep;
Far, far beneath in the abysmal sea,
His ancient dreamless, uninvaded sleep

The Kraken sleepeth . . ."

I'd finished my drink. "So? What's your point?"

He walked around the bar, took me over to the window. "See? Out there?"

He pointed toward the west of the town, toward the cliffs. As I stared a bonfire was kindled on the cliff-tops; it flared and began to burn with a copper-green flame.

"They're going to wake the Deep Ones," said the barman. "The stars and the planets and the moon are all in the right places. It's time. The dry lands will sink, and the seas shall rise . . ."

"For the world shall be cleansed with ice and floods and I'll thank you to keep to your own shelf in the refrigerator," I said.

"Sorry?"

"Nothing. What's the quickest way to get up to those cliffs?"

"Back up Marsh Street. Hang a left at the Church of Dagon, till you reach Manuxet Way and then just keep on going." He pulled a coat off the back of the door, and put it on. "C'mon. I'll walk you up there. I'd hate to miss any of the fun."

"You sure?"

"No one in town's going to be drinking tonight." We stepped out, and he locked the door to the bar behind us.

It was chilly in the street, and fallen snow blew about the ground, like white mists. From street level I could no longer tell if Madame Ezekiel was in her den above her neon sign, or if my guests were still waiting for me in my office.

We put our heads down against the wind, and we walked.

Over the noise of the wind I heard the barman talking to himself:

"*Winnow with giant arms the slumbering green,*" he was saying.

"There hath he lain for ages and will lie
Battening upon huge seaworms in his sleep,
Until the latter fire shall heat the deep;
Then once by men and angels to be seen,
In roaring he shall rise . . ."

He stopped there, and we walked on together in silence, with blown snow stinging our faces.

And on the surface die, I thought, but said nothing out loud.

Twenty minutes' walking and we were out of Innsmouth. The Manuxet Way stopped when we

left the town, and it became a narrow dirt path, partly covered with snow and ice, and we slipped and slid our way up it in the darkness.

The moon was not yet up, but the stars had already begun to come out. There were so many of them. They were sprinkled like diamond dust and crushed sapphires across the night sky. You can see so many stars from the sea-shore, more than you could ever see back in the city.

At the top of the cliff, behind the bonfire, two people were waiting—one huge and fat, one much smaller. The barman left my side and walked over to stand beside them, facing me.

"Behold," he said, "the sacrificial wolf." There was now an oddly familiar quality to his voice.

I didn't say anything. The fire was burning with green flames, and it lit the three of them from below; classic spook lighting.

"Do you know why I brought you up here?", asked the barman, and I knew then why his voice was familiar: it was the voice of the man who had attempted to sell me aluminum-siding.

"To stop the world ending?"

He laughed at me, then.

The second figure was the fat man I had found asleep in my office chair. "Well, if you're going to get eschatological about it . . ." he murmured, in a voice deep enough to rattle walls. His eyes were closed. He was fast asleep.

The third figure was shrouded in dark silks and smelled of patchouli oil. It held a knife. It said nothing.

"This night," said the barman, "the moon is the moon of the deep ones. This night are the stars configured in the shapes and patterns of the dark, old times. This night, if we call them, they will come. If our sacrifice is worthy. If our cries are heard."

The moon rose, huge and amber and heavy, on the other side of the bay, and a chorus of low croaking rose with it from the ocean far beneath us.

Moonlight on snow and ice is not daylight, but it will do. And my eyes were getting sharper with the moon: in the cold waters men like frogs were surfacing and submerging in a slow water-dance. Men like frogs, and women, too: it seemed to me that I could see my landlady down there, writhing and croaking in the bay with the rest of them.

It was too soon for another change; I was still exhausted from the night before; but I felt strange under that amber moon.

"Poor wolf-man," came a whisper from the silks. "All his dreams have come to this; a lonely death

upon a distant cliff."

I will dream if I want to, I said, *and my death is my own affair*. But I was unsure if I had said it out loud.

Senses heighten in the moon's light; I heard the roar of the ocean still, but now, overlaid on top of it, I could hear each wave rise and crash; I heard the splash of the frog people; I heard the drowned whispers of the dead in the bay; I heard the creak of green wrecks far beneath the ocean.

Smell improves, too. The aluminum-siding man was human, while the fat man had other blood in him.

And the figure in the silks . . .

I had smelled her perfume when I wore man-shape. Now I could smell something else, less heady, beneath it. A smell of decay, of putrefying meat, and rotten flesh.

The silks fluttered. She was moving toward me. She held the knife.

"Madame Ezekiel?" My voice was roughening and coarsening. Soon I would lose it all. I didn't understand what was happening, but the moon was rising higher and higher, losing its amber colour, and filling my mind with its pale light.

"Madame Ezekiel?"

"You deserve to die," she said, her voice cold and low. "If only for what you did to my cards. They were old."

"I don't die," I told her. "*Even a man who is pure in heart, and says his prayers by night. Remember?*"

"It's bullshit," she said. "You know what the oldest way to end the curse of the werewolf is?"

"No."

The bonfire burned brighter now, burned with the green of the world beneath the sea, the green of algae, and of slowly-drifting weed; burned with the colour of emeralds.

"You simply wait till they're in human shape, a whole month away from another change; then you take the sacrificial knife, and you kill them. That's all."

I turned to run, but the barman was behind me, pulling my arms, twisting my wrists up into the small of my back. The knife glinted pale silver in the moonlight. Madame Ezekiel smiled.

She sliced across my throat.

Blood began to gush, and then to flow. And then it slowed, and stopped . . .

The pounding in the front of my head, the pressure in the back. All a roiling change a how-wow-row-now change a red wall coming towards me from the



night—I tasted stars dissolved in brine, fizzy and distant and salt—my fingers prickled with pins and my skin was lashed with tongues of flame my eyes were topaz I could taste the night

My breath steamed and billowed in the icy air.

I growled involuntarily, low in my throat. My forepaws were touching the snow.

I pulled back, tensed, and sprang at her.

There was a sense of corruption that hung in the air, like a mist, surrounding me. High in my leap I seemed to pause, and something burst like a soap bubble . . .

I was deep, deep in the darkness under the sea, standing on all fours on a slimy rock floor, at the entrance of some kind of citadel, built of enormous, rough-hewn stones. The stones gave off a pale glow-in-the-dark light; a ghostly luminescence, like the hands of a watch.

A cloud of black blood trickled from my neck.

She was standing in the doorway, in front of me. She was now six, maybe seven feet high. There was flesh on her skeletal bones, pitted and gnawed, but the silks were weeds, drifting in the cold water, down there in the dreamless deeps. They hid her face like a slow green veil.

There were limpets growing on the upper surfaces of her arms, and on the flesh that hung from her ribcage.

I felt like I was being crushed. I couldn't think any more.

She moved towards me. The weed that surrounded her head shifted. She had a face like the stuff you don't want to eat in a sushi counter, all suckers and spines and drifting anemone fronds; and somewhere in all that I knew she was smiling

I pushed with my hind-legs. We met there, in the deep, and we struggled. It was so cold, so dark. I closed my jaws on her face, and felt something rend and tear.

It was almost a kiss, down there in the abysmal deep . . .

I landed softly on the snow, a silk scarf locked between my jaws.

The other scarves were fluttering to the ground. Madame Ezekiel was nowhere to be seen.

The silver knife lay on the ground, in the snow. I waited on all fours, in the moonlight, soaking wet. I shook myself, spraying the brine about. I heard it hiss and spit when it hit the fire.

I was dizzy, and weak. I pulled the air deep into my lungs.

Down, far below, in the bay, I could see the frog people hanging on the surface of the sea like dead things; for a handful of seconds they drifted back and forth on the tide, then they twisted and leapt, and each by each they *plop-plopped* down into the bay and vanished beneath the sea.

There was a scream. It was the fox-haired bartender, the pop-eyed aluminum-siding salesman, and he was staring at the night sky, at the clouds that were drifting in, covering the stars, and he was screaming. There was rage and there was frustration in that cry, and it scared me.

He picked up the knife from the ground, wiped the snow from the handle with his fingers, wiped the blood from the blade with his coat. Then he looked across at me. He was crying. "You bastard," he said. "What did you do to her?"

I would have told him I didn't do anything to her, that she was still on guard far beneath the ocean, but I couldn't talk any more, only growl and whine and howl.

He was crying. He stank of insanity, and of disappointment. He raised the knife and ran at me, and I moved to one side.

Some people just can't adjust even to tiny changes. The barman stumbled past me, off the cliff, into nothing.

In the moonlight blood is black, not red, and the marks he left on the cliff-side as he fell and bounced and fell were smudges of black and dark grey. Then, finally, he lay still on the icy rocks at the base of the cliff, until an arm reached out from the sea and dragged him, with a slowness that was almost painful to watch, under the dark water.

A hand scratched the back of my head. It felt good.

"What was she? Just an avatar of the Deep Ones, sir. An eidolon, a manifestation, if you will, sent up to us from the uttermost deeps to bring about the end of the world."

I bristled.

"No, it's over, for now. You disrupted her, sir. And the ritual is most specific. Three of us must stand together and call the sacred names, while innocent blood pools and pulses at our feet."

I looked up at the fat man, and whined a query. He patted me on the back of the neck, sleepily.

"Of course she doesn't love you, boy. She hardly even exists on this plane, in any material sense."



The snow began to fall once more. The bonfire was going out.

"Your change tonight, incidentally, I would opine, is a direct result of the self-same celestial configurations and lunar forces that made tonight such a perfect night to bring back my old friends from Underneath . . ."

He continued talking, in his deep voice, and perhaps he was telling me important things. I'll never know, for the appetite was growing inside me, and his words had lost all but the shadow of any meaning; I had no further interest in the sea or the cliff-top or the fat man.

There were deer running in the woods beyond the meadow: I could smell them on the winter's night's air.

And I was, above all things, hungry.

I was naked when I came to myself again, early the next morning, a half-eaten deer next to me in the snow. A fly crawled across its eye, and its tongue lolled out of its dead mouth, making it look comical and pathetic, like an animal in a newspaper cartoon.

The snow was stained a fluorescent crimson where the deer's belly had been torn out.

My face and chest were sticky and red with the stuff. My throat was scabbed and scarred, and it stung; by the next full moon it would be whole once more.

The sun was a long way away, small and yellow, but the sky was blue and cloudless, and there was no breeze. I could hear the roar of the sea some distance away.

I was cold and naked and bloody and alone; ah well, I thought: it happens to all of us, in the beginning. I just get it once a month.

I was painfully exhausted, but I would hold out until I found a deserted barn, or a cave; and then I was going to sleep for a couple of weeks.

A hawk flew low over the snow toward me, with something dangling from its talons. It hovered above me for a heartbeat, then dropped a small grey squid in the snow at my feet, and flew upward. The flaccid thing lay there, still and silent and tentacled in the bloody snow.

I took it as an omen, but whether good or bad I couldn't say and I didn't really care any more; I turned my back to the sea, and on the shadowy town of Innsmouth, and began to make my way toward the city.



Storm Constantine

Storm Constantine is 30 something, and lives in Stafford with eight cats and a husband. She has been making up and telling stories all her life. "I was always making up stories as a kid," she remembers. "I didn't realise it was wrong. I just made them up about everything, and when I got found out I always got into terrible trouble." At a certain point it dawned on her that it might be better to be paid rather than punished for telling those stories. "It didn't stop me. I'm a compulsive storyteller, only now I get a royalty cheque rather than a smack."

With the storytelling urge came an early, wide-ranging reading habit and an interest in mythology and ancient Egypt that led to writers of the fantastic like Michael Moorcock, Jack Vance and Tanith Lee. Books on art, fairy tales, magic and angels all fuelled the Constantine imagination—her workroom is a dream library of the esoteric and eclectic, a browser's heaven.

Her interest in mythology and the fantastic, and involvement in the burgeoning alternative music and Goth scene of the late '70s and early '80s mingled in the genesis of the Wraeththu. The Wraeththu—beautiful, androgynous, wild and magical—went through a decade-long gestation before *The Enchantments of Flesh and Spirit* was published in 1987. Followed by *The Bewitchments of Love and Hate* and *The Fulfillments of Fate and Desire*, the Wraeththu soon attracted a small but dedicated cult following. The cycle showcased Storm's growing sense of assurance as a writer; as someone with a unique vision and a sense of style—a sense of style that was as evident in person as it was on the page. Storm's early appearances at SF conventions had jaws dropping. Black clad, with a million silver bangles, spiky hair and exotic makeup, the Constantine Crew would turn heads in astonishment, amongst the regulars at SF conventions.

After the early success of the Wraeththu cycle, Storm turned to a different setting for her next two novels, *The Monstrous Regiment* and *Aleph*. TMR was more strongly science fictional, set on the colony world of Artemis suffering under a despotic matriarchal regime. At the time it flew in the face of feminist sensibilities and was not well-

received critically. "It was an angry, hurt book, based on a situation with a witchcraft group I'd got involved in and the woman who ran it. In retrospect, I should have toned it down a bit, made it less over the top. It was also the first time I'd written in the third person, and had to consciously think about plotting and pacing and all that."

The sequel, *Aleph*, was less overtly political, following the refugees from the fallen matriarchal regime into unexplored regions beyond the settlements. *Aleph* was also the novel where two major themes that would feature strongly in future Constantine novels emerged: the theme of a journey into exile culminating in a magical, transcendent resolution that marked a turning point of self discovery and acceptance; and the theme of a psychic—sometimes physical—rebirth. In retrospect this spiritual rite of passage, when the world changes and the individual is faced with a choice between growth and evolution, or refusal of growth and stagnation, lies at the heart of all of Constantine's novel-length work.

Her sixth novel, *Hermetech*, was a tour de force, fusing sexual and spiritual transformation and the electronic shamanism reflected in the book's cover and chapter heading designs by Carl McCoy's *Sheer Faith* (Storm would repay the compliment later with





articles for the *Nephilim Watchman* magazine and liner notes for the band's retrospective album, *Earth Inferno*). Storm brought these three separate strands together into one tightly controlled, often exhilarating, vision. *Hermetech* is, perhaps, the quintessential Storm Constantine novel—a celebration of sexual power few other authors could have written, or would have dared to.

It was a bold move, then, to change direction almost completely with her next novel, *Burying the Shadow*, a fantasy of epic proportion. In *Shadow*, Storm draws on the myths and legends of the biblical Nephilim, Enochian magic, Gustav Davidson's *A Dictionary of Angels* and Milton's epic *Paradise Lost*. It is a story of the days after the Fall, when the scattered elohim live among humans in the protective seclusion of their atelier courts. But the immortal are falling prey to the Fear, a sickness of the soul that drives them to the unthinkable—suicide. In the courts the elohim trade their arts and knowledge for the sustenance of their patron's blood. The parallels are obvious, although in a tale of angelic vampires the words angel and vampire do not appear once.

The novels written for Headline between 1991 and 1994 display a growing confidence, and are able to be read and enjoyed on a number of levels. They feature increasingly esoteric references and allusions, something that is most obvious in *Sign for the Sacred*, which adroitly combines the comic, the magical fairy tale and the dark tale of love and hate. It is a book of obsession, of the quest for the heretic prophet Resenance Jeopardy, who may be a charlatan or messiah, or both. *Sign* displays a lighter touch, a playfulness, which treads between whimsy and the grotesque, and even features a cameo appearance from the band Every New Dead Ghost as a strange group of musicians who attract and trap the spirits of the dead.

Calenture, Storm's final novel for Headline, again takes several stories and combines them. Here though, the stories nest inside one another, a different approach to the parallel plot threads of *Sign for the Sacred*. *Calenture* is not simply a story: it is a book about story and how it can take on a life and potency of its own, become something real. It is a masterful novel, both in construction and in the images of a land crossed by great moving cities, and the tale of the mad or driven—the calentured—who leap from them to seek their own destinies in the lands below.

With ten novels complete, *Stalking Tender Prey* has just been published, Storm's compulsion to tell stories is as strong as ever. *Stalking Tender Prey* explores her continuing fascination with the mythology of the Fallen Angels, drawing on characters and ideas from her earlier novel, *Burying the Shadow*, and her short story, "A Change Of Season" (which appeared in the *Midnight Rose Anthology*, *The Weerde*). Storm has written dozens of short stories, and has an eleventh novel, *Scenting Hallowed Blood*, due for publication later this year.

An Appreciation

Graham Joyce

Catwoman! That's what I thought when I first met Storm Constantine. All right, don't take the piss, but this was before Hollywood started turning out doss *Batman* movies where all the women dress in PVC. No no no. This was when Storm Constantine strutted her stuff at SF cons in fish-nets and thigh-length spike-heeled boots, and I wasn't the only guy sweeping the floor with his tongue and going "Hey! Catwoman!"

But I intuited it in more ways than one, since Storm obviously has a past-or-future-life as a cat. The first time I went to her house there were half a dozen exotic felines crawling the bookshelves, draped across computer monitors and commanding the best chairs. The last time I was there the number seemed to have at least doubled. If you imagine a hybrid of Catwoman and a White Russian émigré countess fantasy writer, you're getting there. And of course, Storm is such a charming, warm and friendly one of those hybrids, you put up with the cat-hair coffee and the bleeding cat-hair sandwiches because she's such damn good company.

We shared a stable at Headline publishers, and now we share a stable at Penguin and during that time I never failed to notice that at every public appearance she seemed to trail behind her an entourage of beautiful, epicene young men and deliciously aggressive and exotic vamp-like women. Personally I tend to retire from such bewitching people but their almost constant presence does cause one to speculate on the sexual ambivalence of her wonderful novels.

"But what do you do with the bones?" I once asked her plaintively over a Vodka (her favourite tipple)



late, very late in some convention hotel. She didn't answer. She just drained her glass, licked her full, crimson lips, looked at me with dissolving eyes, and burped. Then, no doubt she despatched me to the bar for more Vodka. To hear is to obey.

In fact it's then, during the wee hours and fuelled on high-octane Vodka you are likely to catch the woman at her best. Particularly if she is being wooed by one of the young, epicene aforementioned, whereupon she's apt to throw back her head and cackle. That wonderful cackle-from-another-world is likely to summon the worried night porter, who will be sent away in search of more Vodka.

Not a great traveller, Storm, preferring generally to circumvent the sparkling and luminous inner-worlds and cross the great rainbow-bridges of her spectacular imagination. So unhappy with travelling is she that occasionally I'm lucky enough to get called upon as consort/travel minder, at least until someone more beautiful and more palely Gothic arrives, whereupon I get banished, whimpering, to the shadows of the bar. In fact so uncomfortable is Storm with travel that I'm wondering how she's going to cope with flying to the other side of the world. I discussed the business of travelling to Australia with her, and at one stage I thought I must be talking to Marco Polo, so gruelling and minatory did the expedition seem. But I knew that by the time she reached Oz she'd have a great time, because Storm has a great capacity for fun and a natural disposition to party. I know she'll take instantly to Australia, and that Australian folk will take instantly to her.

One time in Glasgow, after much Vodka, our editor (we share the same editor, Luigi Bonomi at Penguin) had literally slithered under the table so Storm and I poured him into the lift and spooned him into bed. Then we went back for another drink or two. Late, very late, Storm unaccountably got it into her head that she wanted her butt tattooed. I tried to talk her out of it but she raved. She ranted. She ordered me to get a taxi and stay with her until the job was done.

"No, nooo nooo Storm," I pleaded, but she stood on a table and called me some terrible names, upsetting the night porter again. She wanted an angel on her butt and if she wanted an angel on her butt by God she was gonna damn well have an angel on her butt etc etc etc. So I found myself driving round Glasgow in a cab with the dawn almost ready to crack (why does she have this strange power to make me do things?) We finally found one and it

didn't look too healthy to me, so I had to secretly pay the tattooist a tenner NOT to tattoo her. After a lot of shouting we went back to the hotel, where she now wanted me to apply the tattoo with a safety pin and a bottle of carpet dye she'd stolen from the tattoo studio. I was trying to refuse when I passed out.

She now pretends this all never happened. No doubt I will taste the whip for telling you this. How my heart hammers.

But one of the most exciting things about Storm is her halo of creativity. Beyond her novels she has published numerous short stories and recently a volume of poetry. She has an intimate knowledge of the music biz, and has managed a brace of rock bands in her time. Now comes a new venture, the publication of the dark fantasy magazine, *Visionary Tongue*. A mark of Storm's generosity to younger or newer writers, it's a clever idea: new writers collaborate with and have their work edited by established professionals, whom Storm recruited to work with her on the project. It's also typical, as Storm is an author who is always quick to praise and encourage others.

And so to Oz. Remember, it's a long white-knuckle ride on the plane for some people. She's come a long way, has Storm, in more ways than one. Don't miss the opportunity to meet this fabulous woman, buy one of her wonderful books, buy her Vodka. I hope she comes back from Oz sans tattoos but having made loads of new friends.

Graham Joyce.



Graham Joyce

Wit, raconteur, irrepressible mimic, drunk, and all round nice guy, Graham also takes time off from convention partying and escort duties to write the odd book. His first novel was *Dreamside* (Pan 1991) which sparked an interest, and several workshops, in lucid dreaming. His next two novels, both for Headline, (*Dark Sister* and *House of Lost Dreams*) were critically acclaimed dark fantasies. *Dark Sister* won the 1993 British Fantasy Award. His fourth novel (from Penguin/Creed) was the atmospheric ghost story, *Requiem*, set in Jerusalem. Graham's new novel, *The Tooth Fairy*, will be published by Penguin/Creed this coming Autumn.



The Nearly Complete Constantine

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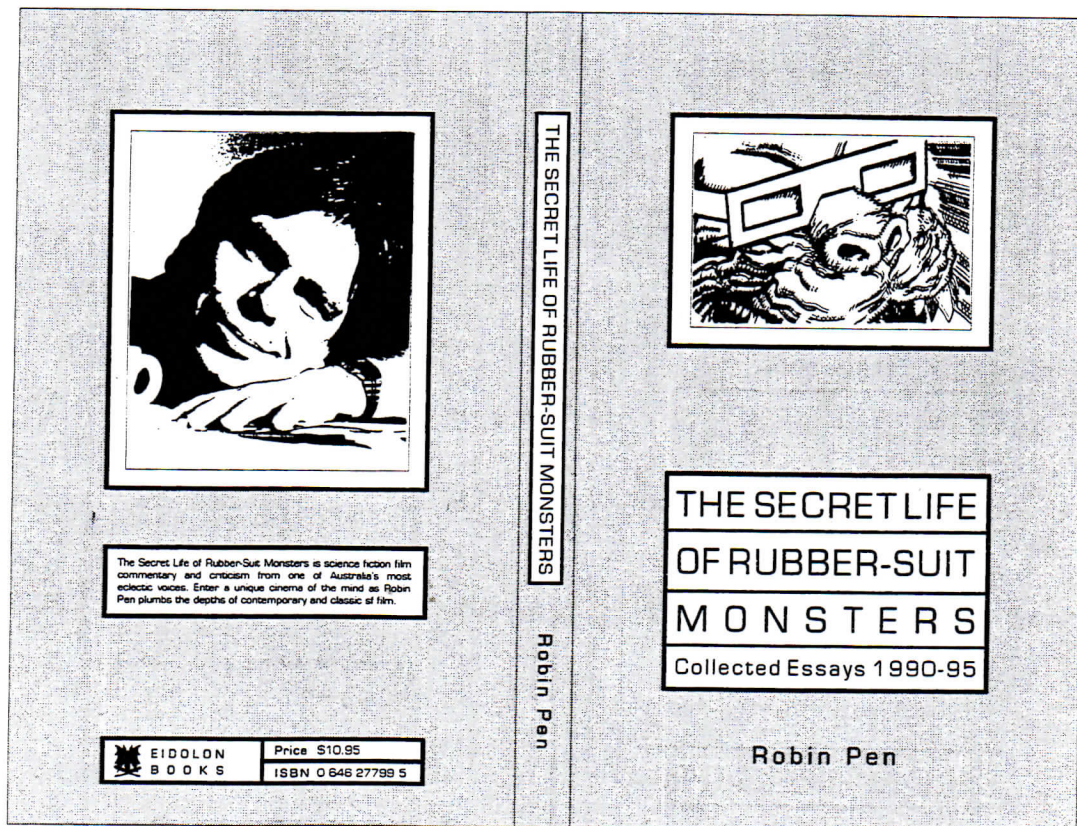
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EIDOLON PUBLICATIONS/EIDOLON BOOKS PRESENTS

Robin Pen's
**The Secret Life of
Rubber-Suit Monsters**

With an Introduction by Greg Egan

Eidolon Publications is proud to announce the publication of *The Secret Life of Rubber-Suit Monsters*, a major collection of science fiction, fantasy and horror film commentary and criticism from one of Australia's most eclectic voices. In this unique series of essays spanning five years of genre film, Robin Pen's witty, informative critical approach cuts a memorable and entertaining swath through the cinematic wasteland.



The sets are up, the backgrounds dry. Tokyo is aglow, paying wordless homage to Dante. Black smoke billows into a dark sky. Shimmering in the heat haze are dozens of silver, three-headed hydra, screeching and taunting, daring their foes as they continue to char what is left of the city. Our heroes stand firm. There stands the turtle-colossus of Gamera (Friend of Children), just landed from his jet-propelled spin. Down at the feet of this Chelonian mega-hero are four small look-alikes in shadow, striking Frank Miller poses, saying cool things like "Totally awesome, dudes". Next to them is Godzilla, who weighs the situation with aggressive calculation. He looks down to his ankle and his last remaining side-kick. Schwarzenegger grips his well-used minigun, ready for action, the sweat running down his oiled muscles. He relaxes his grimace, allowing a hint of a smile as he chews on his stale cigar. He looks up to Godzilla. "So, vot do you tink?" he asks. Godzilla responds with his famous cry. Turtle-smiles blossom in response to Army's words. "You said it, big buddy—let's kick ass. Cowabunga!"

160PP, \$10.95, APRIL 1996





An Old Passion

Storm Constantine

Well, of course she threw a garden party as soon as the place was decent. She had to show it off, and who can blame her? I went with Cathy, because Ted wouldn't go with me. "She was unbearable when she was only slightly rich," he said. "Now, we're talking about torture, an afternoon in Hell."

"I'm sure it won't be that bad," I said, but privately I agreed with him. I'm not sure what made me go, really. I knew my skin would be crawling with annoyance by the end of the afternoon, but I suppose I was just curious. My friend had acquired a stately home. She was living in it. I had to go and see.

Helen had gone to school with Cathy and I, and because we all still lived in the area around the village where we grew up, we'd kept in touch. Cathy and I had married the sons of farmers, as our parents had expected, while Helen had gone off to college and run wild for a while. She came back to the village now and again throughout her teens and early twenties, adopting every city fad that was going, showing off to us, her provincial sisters, stuck out in the sticks. I don't think we ever really liked her. You can't actually *like* a person like Helen, so familiar yet so distant, but we were always curious, always entertained.

Something went wrong when she hit quarter century, although she never confided in us about it. She came home, skulked dramatically round the village for a few weeks in dark glasses, looked tragic and wore wide hats like a film star. Then it was forgotten, whatever it was, and she was her usual bragging self again. Still, she stuck around after that, wheedled her way in with the new money, who drank in the pubs on the edge of the village.

While Cathy and I met our husbands and duly began to produce families, Helen secured jobs from her new friends, drove around in a new car, bought a cottage, did it up (quite well, too), and kept on

partying. Sometimes, she'd visit us and gently scorn what she called our 'giving in to tradition'. Of course I envied her, who wouldn't. She was graceful and wild and witty, and had *fun*.

"Where did we go wrong?" Cathy asked one day, after a morning get-together, as we watched the dust of Helen's car disappearing down Cathy's driveway. "God, I hate her, the bitch! Where *did* we go wrong?" Then we laughed together, went back inside, and had another gin. Our lives weren't that bad, really.

Helen was thirty-two when she met Roland Marchant. He was the one she'd been waiting for, the son of an industrialist, busy being propelled up the ladder of affluence by Daddy, oozing wealth and smarm. Helen met him at some 'do' or other she'd gone to with friends and, with an unerring huntress' sense for a prime kill, set her sights and brought the prey down. Shall we say it was a short engagement? City-bred, he was interested in village life, in country life, and I suspect it was more at his insistence than dear Helen's that she brought him visiting. He thought the farms were quaint and wanted to try driving a tractor. Ted, and Cathy's husband, Rupert, were strained but polite. Fortunately, the tractor lark never got beyond the evening of Scotch and Roland's loud voice. Well, no one reminded him about it.

"I don't know what's worse," Cathy said. "A rich boor who's pompous and condescending, or a rich boor who's devoted to being everybody's best buddy." Still, we accepted the antique brandies, and such like, and were always coolly friendly.

Deermount House came on the market because the Pargeters couldn't keep the place up. Sons and daughter had moved away and had no interest in the family pile; the roof was caving in. Roland fought off developers, hoteliers, theme park entrepreneurs, conference centre planners and outbid the lot. He acquired Deermount House lock, stock and barrel.

The Pargeters took very little away with them, other than an unspeakably large stash and a sense of financial relief. Roland and Helen would live there. They would be neighbours. Oh, wonderful.

When Helen came to tell me the news, I couldn't stop myself saying, "Isn't it a bit big for just you and Roland?"

Helen laughed. "Don't be absurd, Anna! It's a fucking mansion. How can a mansion be *too big*? You simply have to live bigger."

I could almost hear her knuckles cracking at the prospect.

The garden party recreated some idyllic post-war age as Helen imagined it. It was all bunting and vicars with megaphones, that sort of thing. The gardens were a mess, actually, utterly run to seed, but Roland had had the lawns rotor scythed, so it didn't look too bad. The first thing Cathy and I noticed about the house was the new roof. It looked rather peculiar, so clean and regular, atop the sagging facade of the house. Rather like an old woman wearing a teenager's hat. We presumed the rest of the building would soon succumb to cosmetic surgery, its wrinkles nipped and tucked, so that it matched the roof.

It appeared everyone from the village and surrounding farms had come to be nosy. Children shrieked, piped band music stuttered, vicars cajoled. The river, caressed by ancient willows, oozed slowly through the gardens, like an ancient snake that knew its own territory. There were swans, of course. Summer as once it was, perhaps.

Then Helen came gliding up the lawns towards us from the river, backlit by gleaming water. She looked divine in a flowered sundress, required large hat, silken hair and ready red smile. "Darlings! So glad you came!" she screamed. God, it was embarrassing. Yes, we were jealous.

"You *must* see the house!" Helen insisted, and we had to follow her inside. Once there, the spirit of the place claimed us and envy and irritation gave way to awe.

"Helen, you've done wonders!" Cathy exclaimed, craning her neck to try and take in the appallingly massive vista of the stuccoed ceiling in the main hall.

"Oh, it wasn't me," Helen said, almost apologetically. "Roland got designers in, architects, the lot. I just sat around waiting for them to finish. Didn't have a word in it." Did she mind about that? I wondered, mentally filing the thought to repeat to Cathy later.

"But you simply have to see my new man," Helen said, her eyes shining.

Cathy and I exchanged a glance, Cathy shrugged. New man? Our minds were open.

Helen led us upstairs to a long, well-lit gallery that overlooked the gardens. "All the paintings have been restored," she told us. "I found him only a few days ago. He's divine." She had paused before a painting, and was gesturing at it with some reverence.

"Who is it?" I asked.

"Rufus Aston," Helen said grandly. We were clearly supposed to know who that was.

"A Pargeter ancestor?" Cathy suggested.

"Oh no!" Helen answered. "He was a *poet*. Haven't you heard of him?"

No, we hadn't. Had anyone? He was beautiful, I suppose, although the chins of long-dead people always seem too weak for my taste. Perhaps that is the fault of long-dead painters rather than their models. The poet's hair was a resplendent red, his eyes dark and limpid, the mouth a little too generous, although not that wide. I estimated, with my untutored eye, he had lived in the nineteenth century. Helen confirmed this. "Yes, I've been researching."

"Did he live here?" Cathy asked, politely. I dared not look at her for fear of grinning.

"No," Helen explained. "But he stayed here quite often over a period of several years. Best of all, he died here!"

Best of all?

"Oh," said Cathy and I together.

"Isn't it romantic?" Helen enthused. "I'm reading up about him like mad, though it's hard to find things out."

Well, Rufus Aston was obviously the latest fad. Helen's enthusiasm would be poured into him, and continue to do so, until it overflowed and her attention surged elsewhere.

We didn't see much of her for a few weeks after the garden party. We were busy with the harvest, and Helen, presumably, with renovating Deermount House and its grounds. Roland had asked Ted about buying horses, hiring grooms. Cathy's aunt, Mags, had been taken on as a cook. From her came the gossip. She felt that Roland and Helen were not like real people. They never seemed to argue, and spoke to one another as if they were acting in a play about domestic bliss. Such sunshine, such idyll. Is



it any surprise then, that they were threatened by thunderstorms? The weather always has to change.

Helen came calling three weeks after the garden party. She sat at my kitchen table, while I washed the breakfast things at the sink. I thought she seemed a little on edge, which was unusual for her. "Everything all right?" I enquired. Helen scowled at my youngest, who was hanging on to my skirts and attempting to disrupt our conversation. She, of course, would never want children.

"Fine," she said. "Everything's fine. I'm a bit exhausted, naturally. The job's never-ending! Still, Rolly and I wouldn't have missed taking the place for the world. We love it." She lit a cigarette. Her nails were immaculate. I doubted she ever applied hand to paint-stripper herself. "Do you know, I think I must be luckiest woman alive."

I winced, and smiled at her in what I hoped was a convincing fashion.

"Roland is buying me a mare," she said.

I took a few moments to consider the wonder of a woman who had married the most incredibly rich man and was actually in love with him. It seemed that way. Her eyes went moist when she mentioned his name.

"You were never much into riding," I said.

"I have the time now." Helen leaned down and produced a bottle of gin from her large bag. "Oh, for God's sake, Anna, come and sit down. Leave the washing-up. Have a drink."

I obeyed her, instinctively sensing she wanted to talk. I even shooed the boy out into the garden. "Well?" I said, sipping gin.

Helen laughed. "Well, what?" She leaned back in her chair, struck a pose with the cigarette.

"What is it you want to say?"

Helen leaned forward and squeezed my arm where it lay on the table. "Oh darling, you country women are just so intuitive!"

That was the sort of remark I was used to putting up with. I declined to respond.

"The thing is, I've discovered some magic, some real magic."

"Oh? Witchcraft in the old grounds, then?"

"No, nothing like that." She adopted an earnest expression, lowered her voice. "I think Rufus is trying to contact me."

"Rufus?" I had forgotten about the poet, and imagined this must be an old flame.

"Don't you remember the painting I showed you?"

"Oh yes." I paused. "Hel, are we talking ghosts, here?"

"Nothing so banal," Helen answered. "A ghost is just a picture, a memory. Rufus is stronger than that. I'm sure I've seen him."

"Oh Helen! Where?" I am not a sceptic, but not for one moment could I imagine a worldly woman like Helen being in tune with something spiritual.

"In the gardens," she replied. "Anna, I couldn't tell anyone else about this. Rolly would think I'd gone mad and start to worry, and Cathy would just laugh."

"You'd better tell me about it," I said.

I was, as usual, curious. Helen was always interesting. She had caught sight of a man, whom she now presumed to be Rufus Aston, in one of the more tangled corners of the gardens. Every morning, she walked her new Labrador puppies in the grounds, and it was always then that she saw him. Never at night, never at dusk, but in clear morning sunlight. He would be standing amid the shoulder-high grasses, as still as a stone, but with an air of absolute alertness. "He doesn't look like a ghost, he's completely solid," she said. "And he watches me. The thing is, it doesn't scare me."

"Are you sure it's not just some young man who's taken a shine to you?" I asked. "Why do you think it's Rufus?"

"Because it looks like him, silly. The clothes, the hair, the face. It's him." She took a drink, swallowed. "I know it is. But what does he want from me?" Only then did her brow cloud, but it wasn't with fear.

We talked about further research. Even I became a little infected with her enthusiasm. Helen didn't know where the poet was buried, or even how he died. Only that his last moments had been spent at Deermount House, although whether he had expired within the walls or out in the grounds, she didn't know. I believed her utterly. There was no question of it. "Perhaps I should hold a seance," she said.

I frowned. "Oh, I don't think . . . I think that's asking for trouble. No, don't do that."

"I trust your instincts, darling," she said, standing up. "Well, I must be off. Keep the gin. I'll let you know what I find out."

I tell Cathy everything, but I didn't tell her about Helen's visit. Probably because I believed Helen and, as she had correctly pointed out, Cathy would laugh about it. I didn't tell anyone, not even Ted, who



would genuinely have been interested. Perhaps I should have done.

We held a Halloween party for the children at Cathy and Rupert's. While the kids screamed round us in garish costumes, Cathy and I sipped port in the flickering light of pumpkin lamps. Our men had sloped off down the pub. I felt warm, at one with myself. The pagan new year.

"Have you seen much of Helen?" Cathy asked.

"No," I answered. In fact, I hadn't seen her since the morning she'd told me about her apparition. "You?"

"Nothing. Mags thinks she's out of sorts. Perhaps we should visit."

"Out of sorts? What's wrong with her?" Just for a moment, my blissful mood froze.

"Oh, nothing serious, I don't think. Mags says she's distracted. Apparently, she's got a new set of friends, though where she dredged them up from, heaven knows. Mags thinks they're weird. The place is crawling with them. They're ghost-hunters, or something like that. Helen actually held a seance up there, you know."

"No! Cath, why didn't you tell me?"

Cathy looked surprised at my outburst. "I only found out today. Why? What do you know?"

"As much as you do. Remember the painting she showed us, the new man?"

"You think she's trying to call his ghost up?" Cathy, predictably, cackled.

"It could be dangerous, Cath. I think Helen's fragile, for all her panache. Deermount House is such a big old place, and she's rattling round in it, on her own with dear Rolly, who's about as sensitive as a plank. Perhaps she's becoming too imaginative. You know how easily impressed she is. What if these 'new friends' of hers are a bit, well, shady?"

"Yeah, you're right. Shall we call on the off-chance tomorrow?"

I nodded. "Yes, but keep a zip on it, Cath. Don't ridicule her."

Cathy gave me a studying look. "Why is it we care about her, Annie? What keeps us there for her?"

I shrugged. "Don't know. Old bonds, I suppose."

"She shuts us out when she's having crises though. Remember when she first came back?"

"I remember. As I said, I think she's fragile. And, for all her ways, she's always been generous."

"Yes, generous." Cathy took a slug of port. "I hope I don't want something awful to happen to her."

"Course you don't," I said.

Halloween, Samhain, the pagan new year, the time when the veil is thin between the worlds. If we should have visited Helen, perhaps it should have been the night before, the time when the dead come back to commune with the living. We were unprepared for the maelstrom of energy that greeted us at Deermount House.

Helen came like a hurricane into the drawing-room where her housekeeper had installed us. She seemed almost hysterically delighted to see us. She hugged us, and her skin felt feverish, hot, against our own. "My dears, my dears!" she said.

"Hi," Cathy said. "We wondered how you were. Haven't seen you for ages."

"I'm fine," Helen answered. "Brilliantly fine." She looked at me and a secretive cast came into her expression. Forget the offer of tea, or anything stronger: she launched straight into her new obsession. "Anna, I've been continuing with my research."

"Come up with anything?" I asked.

She rolled her eyes. "Have I just? I'm on a quest, now."

Quest? Cathy and I sat down, while Helen leaned against the mantelpiece to light a cigarette. Her fever had cooled. She seemed quite business-like.

"Psychic questing," Helen said. "A lot of people are doing it." I noticed she did not look at Cathy as she spoke, although her voice was firm and confident, as if challenging Cathy to poke fun. "I wrote to some people who are into it, and they've been helping me. It's a science, you know."

How far had she gone that she could speak this way in front of Cathy? Her reserve had vanished, which to me spoke of a replacement mania. "Are you questing about Rufus Aston?" I asked.

She nodded. "Absolutely. There's more to it than meets the eye. He was involved in something, Anna, something from the past that can still affect the present."

"Oh really!" exclaimed Cathy, unable to contain herself.

Helen gave her a hard look, the hardest look I'd ever seen her give anyone. "You can scoff, Cath," she said in a cool voice, "but I know what I've seen and experienced. I was sceptical once, too. If you can listen to me with an open mind, I'll tell you about it."

Why had I thought she was fragile? She wasn't. If anything, her experiences, whatever they were, had strengthened her. There was a new steel to Helen



Marchant, almost as if she'd somehow become anchored to the earth, had slowed down, become part of real life. Absurd. But that's how it felt. And from the way she spoke, it was impossible to laugh at her, even for Cathy.

With the help of her new friends, who were thorough researchers and had recourse to documents that Helen would not even have thought about, she had discovered that Rufus Aston had been found dead in the grounds of the house, during a visit in the summer of 1883. He had been twenty-two years old. The cause of death was given as an overdose of laudanum. Well, they were all into it, then, weren't they? Poets and artists, the bohemians. The incumbent of the House at the time, Richard Pargeter, had been a patron of the arts, and much else besides, it seems. The glitterati of artistic society had regularly gathered at the estate, or so Helen said, but I must admit I'd not heard of any of the names she cited as evidence. "They had a society," Helen said. "A secret society. There's no documentation about it, but Steve—he's my psychic aid—picked it all up at the . . . well . . ." She looked guiltily at me. "We had a little session here a few days ago. I know you think it's dangerous to meddle with, Anna, but honestly, it's quite safe with people like Steve around, who know what they're doing. Pargeter was head of the society, like a kind of High Priest, I suppose. They were seeking immortality."

"Well, at least poor old Rufus never grew old!" Cathy observed.

"Quite," agreed Helen. "Things got a bit out of hand, apparently. The strange thing is, there're so few records about what went on. Strangest of all, Richard Pargeter just sort of fades from history not long after Rufus' death. There's no mention of him, other than his brother took over the estate. We can only presume something was effectively hushed up."

"But this is all conjecture," Cathy said. "The facts are a man died, in not very suspicious circumstances, really, and then Richard Pargeter stepped down. Probably to avoid a scandal, or something. This other stuff, about secret societies and immortality, was only dreamed up at your seance."

"I realise it appears that way," Helen said. "But if you'd been involved you'd feel the same way I do. I was there. I heard him speak. Through Steve."

"Heard who speak? Rufus Aston?"

She shook her head. "No, no. Pargeter. He took over Steve's body. It was outrageous!"

"His ghost came?" I said, as an exclamation rather than a question, but Helen answered me.

"Of course not! Pargeter's not dead. But he is very powerful."

"Er . . . what does Roland think about all this?" I enquired, quite gob smacked by her revelation. Neither Cathy nor I could bring ourselves to question Helen about it.

"He thinks it's just a quaint little interest of mine. Poor Rolly, he's not very spiritual!" She laughed.

Cathy wound the visit up very quickly after that, and we left. On the way back, Cathy broke a silence between us to say, "She's off her head, Annie, and there's nothing we can do about it."

Was there anything I, or anyone else, could do? Perhaps we had no right. Helen did not seem ill, or even particularly disturbed. She was excited, yes, but who wouldn't be, in her shoes? Cathy didn't believe the stuff about the seance and the psychic questers. She thought they had to be charlatans. I, for whatever reason, call it instinct or gut reaction, was not convinced about that. Still, I wasn't going to admit that to Cathy. I told Ted about it though, because he has a casual interest in strange phenomena. Was waiting to find his first crop circle, in fact, although his aim would be to disprove more than prove the evidence. In Helen's case, he thought the danger of applying that much concentration, or will power, to a search, was that you tended to find whatever you were looking for, be it a demon from ages past or a pound coin on the pavement. "It can lead to a kind of group hysteria," he said. "Then you'll believe, in fact, *see*, anything. And is that reality or not? It's marshy ground, I think. We don't know enough about it." Ted reads up on that kind of thing. I asked him to find me the article he'd seen about it. I wanted to read it too. "I'd be wary of getting involved," Ted said, but he trusted me not to.


Helen phoned me two days later. Her voice was low, so she must have had company somewhere in the house. "Anna, this is a secret, but I have to let you in on it. We're going to quest for his tomb!"

"Excuse me? Whose?" I'd lost track of who she believed was dead, and who not.

"Aston's! He's buried around here somewhere, but no one knows where. There's no record, but we're going to find it. Steve is absolutely quivering with vibrations."

"Lucky Steve," I said, and then added carefully. "You will take care, won't you, Hel?"

"It's all in good hands, Anna, don't worry. I'll let you know about it." The phone went down. Just that. I was left looking at my own receiver,



wondering if I should do anything, and if so, what? In the event, I did nothing.

I expected to hear something from Helen pretty soon, but then we had a crisis with our eldest, who had a messy accident with broken limbs, and blood and screams. So I was preoccupied with running backwards and forwards to the hospital in the nearest town for a while. I forgot about Helen's quest. She phoned me a couple of times to ask how I was, but didn't mention much about her new interest. I had the impression things had faded out a little. Perhaps, as they hadn't found the tomb, Helen's enthusiasm was dying.

The next news came from Cathy, via Mags. "You won't believe this," Cathy said, breezing into my kitchen one morning. "Helen's buying a church!"

"What? You're joking!"

"No. Do you suppose she's found religion now?"

"What's been going on?" I hadn't heard from Helen for weeks, so had assumed Rufus Aston had gone the way of all her previous crazes. This must be a new one.

"Well the ghost-hunters are out," Cathy said gleefully. "Mags thinks a disagreement happened, or perhaps Roland got sick of them. Anyway, Helen has done up a room in the house like an Egyptian temple or something. No one's allowed in there, but Mags had a peek when the designers were in. She says the house absolutely reeks of incense some mornings when she goes in. Can you believe it? Has dear Helen become a sorceress now?"

"God, I dread to think! But where does the church come into this?"

"Mags doesn't know exactly. All she does know is that it's an abandoned church—practically a ruin—near Loxcombe, and that Roland is buying it for Helen. She only found out about it because Roland was bragging in front of his friends when she was serving sherry to them last Sunday. He thinks Helen's into conservation. Thinks it's a great idea. There was talk of opening a craft centre in it. Agh! It's too much! Can you imagine it? Helen in High Priestess robes, selling joss sticks and corn dollies?" She fell back in her chair, laughing helplessly.

I joined in with the hilarity, although inside I felt a little disturbed, and absurdly, somehow disloyal to Helen for laughing.

I called her in the afternoon. "So, what's all this, stranger?" I said in a joky manner. "Where have you been, what have you been up to, and why are you

buying a church?" I expected the usual breezy answer, but Helen was reticent.

"How do you know about that?"

"Little bird told me," I replied glibly. "Is it true?"

She didn't want to answer me, I know she didn't, but eventually she said, with utmost reluctance, "Well, yes."

"Why?"

I heard her sigh down the line. "Anna, I found the tomb."

It didn't take a genius to work out where it was. I wanted to see her. I don't know why, but the impulse could not be ignored. "Can you come over?"

She hesitated. "All right. Give me an hour."

In the event, she didn't arrive when she'd promised and I had to drive to the school around three o'clock to pick up the middle child, with my youngest in the back of the Discovery, making havoc, as usual. Eldest son was prolonging his convalescence at Ted's parents for a few days.

I waited outside the school for my daughter, tapping my fingernails against the steering wheel, wondering why Helen had stood me up, and desperate to get back in case I missed her. Then coincidence spilled beans from the mouth of my lovely daughter, as she threw her satchel in through the passenger door and climbed up beside me. "Mum, there's witches at Deermount House!"

"What, darling?"

"Ben said so. His brother saw them in the grounds, wearing robes and everything. There was a fire. Is Auntie Helen a witch?"

I laughed, in a brittle fashion. "Probably just one of her parties. You know what she's like." Already, my daughter did. Must be that country woman intuition Helen spoke about.

Helen was waiting for us when we got home, leaning against her shiny black car, which looked like a big cat, and actually was, in another, brand-name sense. She was wearing a big coat and dark glasses, her glossy hair covered by a scarf. "Don't you dare mention witches!" I hissed at my daughter as she tumbled out of the Discovery.

Daughter despatched to friends nearby for pony activities, with the firm directive, despite complaints, to take younger brother with her, I settled Helen in the parlour. I considered making tea, and then poured her a glass of wine instead. She took off her dark glasses, and yes, she looked haggard. Makeup could not conceal the dark puffiness below her eyes. Worse, her nails were lacquerless and bitten. It was



too much, almost as if she'd designed herself to look like the archetype of a 'troubled woman'. The biggest shock was when she took off her scarf and shook out her hair. She'd cut it to shoulder-length and dyed it red.

"That's a change," I remarked, almost choking.

"Mmm." Helen rubbed her forehead.

"You look terrible," I said. "Though I suppose you know that."

Helen managed to avoid my eyes by reaching down to delve in her bag for cigarettes and lighter. "I haven't been sleeping well, actually."

"What's going on?" I demanded.

She lit up, blew smoke at me, or rather a smoke-screen in front of herself. "It's nothing bad, Anna, honestly. Just tiring." A monumental lie.

"Is it anything to do with the tomb you found, or the secret temple in the house?"

Helen smiled wanly. "God, you just can't get the staff nowadays, can you? I presume your information comes from the fount of all rumour, Mags Whitely?"

"I never betray my informants," I answered. "But what I heard concerns me, Hel. And look at you! What are you doing to yourself? What's the temple for?"

"I find comfort in it," Helen said. "I feel safe there."

I shook my head slowly. "Even my daughter talks of witches in the gardens at Deermount. Just what is going on?"

Helen considered for a moment, and then relented. "All right. I don't want this going back to Cathy, but, well, I would appreciate a chat."

I gave her my promise, and I meant it. She spoke at length about how much she'd found out about the secret society of Deermount House, circa 1883. The Bearers of the Old Light, they called themselves. All of the information had been channeled through Steve during psychic sittings. (The so-called witches in the garden, incidentally, had been an outdoor seance). The Bearers of Old Light had consisted of ten members, three of them women, all of them artistic or creative, but for Richard Pargeter, who called the shots. Helen said he was a vampire for the creative energy of the others, but that he also replenished them, whatever that meant. They sought immortality, through magical artefacts, which failed, and then through ritual. "It's not magic as we know it," Helen said, "but a form of parascience. It's trying to make contact with a more evolved form of yourself, who of course knows all the answers." And Rufus? His death, Helen said, was not accidental.

"Exactly *what* it was is difficult to establish. Steve never made contact with Rufus. He thought that Pargeter was blocking him."

"Ah, yes," I ventured. "I remember you saying something outrageous like Richard Pargeter wasn't dead . . ."

Helen nodded. "I know it sounds crazy, I know it does. I don't want to believe it myself, but Steve was convinced. And now, I feel him myself, around the house, in the back of my head, everywhere."

I shivered, thinking of cruel eyes beyond the window, where the afternoon was darkening. "I hate to say this, but how . . . how *genuine* do you think this Steve is?"

Helen flicked me a crystalline glance. "No one could act that well," she said shortly.

"So you're saying Pargeter actually found immortality?" I risked a smile. "I'm sorry, but I find that very hard to believe. What has he been doing for the past hundred years? Do his family know about him? And how on earth did he manage to live so long? Come on, Hel, you must agree it's pretty far-fetched!"

"It's not just far-fetched, it's insane," Helen said. "But I also believe it to be true." She leaned towards me. "He's making his presence felt to me, Anna, he really is." She shuddered, and looked around herself, as if a malevolent draught had suddenly chilled her. My spine prickled in sympathy.

"Do you think you're in danger?" I asked her gently.

She gave me a naked, wild look that made me jump. For a second, something else seemed to look from the face of my friend. I remember saying her name in shock. Then she shook her head, hiding her face with that new, red hair.

"I don't know, but I feel I have to . . . I need Rufus' help. I'm sure he'd be able to tell me what to do." She rubbed her face wearily with her hands. "God, Anna, why did I get into this? Why? Now, it's too late. I'm in it!"

Sitting there, in my cosy parlour, it was hard to believe this other world existed; a world of magicians, secret societies, voices from beyond, psychic quests, supernatural threat. And yet, there was Helen before me, a ragged, haunted Helen who'd uttered the first regrets I'd ever heard her make, the first truly honest words concerning herself. I realised, with some awe, it was also the first time she had truly confided in me. No bravado, no wit, no barrier; just a frightened woman.

"I'll help you," I said impulsively. "Whatever I can do . . ."

She reached to squeeze my hands. "Darling, thank you, but I don't know what you can do, other than listen to my ravings! Steve and the others have gone now. I'm afraid I threw them out. Stupid of me! I realise I need them, and yet I don't want to be part of their world."

"Why did you throw them out?"

She sighed. "Two reasons. First, I haven't seen Rufus in the gardens since they came, or since Richard Pargeter made his presence felt. I believed Rufus would come back once they'd gone, but he hasn't. And second, I thought this nightmare would end if Steve and the others left. But it hasn't. I feel *he's* there with me all the time, Anna, watching me, waiting for a weak moment. He hates me."

"Pargeter?"

She nodded miserably. "Sometimes I tell myself it's only my imagination. I tell myself not to be so silly, to throw off these ridiculous fears. Then I'm in bed at night, terrified, and whatever I do, however I scream, and hit out, I can't wake Rolly up, and I'm alone with this . . ." She struggled for colourful enough words, "With this . . . *evil*, cold mind. All around me. My little temple offers some respite, but not for much longer, I'm sure."

"Perhaps you should contact Steve and his friends again," I suggested lamely.

She shook her head vehemently. "No. Then it would just go on and on. They love this kind of stuff. It's like a drug to them. They'd only make it worse, I'm sure."

"Then someone else. There must be other people who deal with this kind of thing?"

She nodded, a little distantly. "Yes . . . you're right." Then she flicked her attention back to me. "But I know Rufus can help me. I nearly have him now, Anna, what's left of him."

"No, Hel, no!" I insisted. "Go home, get your spooky journals, or whatever it is you have, and ring some people. Get someone to help you. Leave it alone until then. Have you told Roland about it?"

She laughed coldly. "Don't be ridiculous! He'd have me committed."

"Surely not, he loves you."

"Yes, I think he does. But he's afraid of madness, of anything he can't see and touch and control. If he could say to people 'Oh, we have a ghost, you know', he'd love it, but not this, not something real and dreadful." She took a breath and dropped her cigarettes and lighter back into her bag. "Anyway, I

must be going. Hate to sound dramatic, but I don't like being out alone after dark."

I stood up with her, and we embraced awkwardly. "Helen, this is vile!"

She smiled tightly and put on her coat.

"Will you call me tomorrow, after you've contacted some other psychics or something?"

"Yes, I will."

As I watched her Jag glide off towards the road, I was afraid that I'd never see her again. I wish, in some ways, that had been true.

That evening, as we shared a night-cap in the parlour, I told Ted everything. I watched his eyes and I could see his feelings shifting from belief to disbelief and back again. Like me, he didn't want to believe it, for believing in it meant it had to be dealt with, and how do you deal with a thing like that? Far better to ignore it, to scoff, to cling stubbornly to the mundane world, where only what you can see and touch are real, and there are no hidden powers. Perhaps it is worse for a man, because men are brought up to think they have to be in control, otherwise they're sunk. We, as women, are somewhat more attuned to the unseen, the tides of our blood and instincts. We accept the unacceptable more readily.

"Those weirdos have put these crazy ideas into her head," my husband declared, taking a stand. "You must see that, Annie. They've scared her to death. She lives in a huge, echoing, empty house, and she's afraid of it. You know yourself she's gullible. Now every echo is a disembodied voice, and every shadow a spook. She's conjuring things up from her own mind. You must see that I'm right."

I looked at him steadily. He *could* be right. The explanation was rational and reasonable.

"If you want to help her," Ted said, "you should make her believe what I've just said. Then her phantoms will disappear, I'm sure of it." He smiled and adopted an eerie tone. "Whether they're real or not."

I laughed. "Ted!"

He shrugged. "It's just a question of belief."

"You're quite a little mystic in your own way, aren't you," I said. "So you won't mind driving out with me to Helen's church tomorrow."

He pulled a comical face that was halfway to a frown. "What for?"

"I just want to see, and I'd rather be with you than Helen. I'd feel safer with your rationality



around. It would be like a shield, if there is anything nasty there."

Ted rolled his eyes. "I can't believe we're having this conversation, but OK, if that's what you want."

I knew it. He was hooked.

Kids off-loaded to grandparents once more, we drove out to Loxcombe in the morning. It was a Saturday, a bright, cold day. There were two churches in Loxcombe, but it didn't take us long to locate the semi-ruin that would soon belong to the Marchants. It was a dull little place, neglected and feeling sorry for itself. Ted and I nosed around the graveyard, and squinted at the plain, weathered stones, but there was no sign of Rufus Aston. "Surely, if his grave was here," Ted said, "it would be well-known. He was a kind of personality, after all."

"I don't think he was that well-known," I said. "As far as I'm aware, there are no books in existence of his poetry."

Ted pulled an exasperated face. "What the hell are we doing here?" he asked the sky, throwing up his hands.

The door to the church was locked, but we found a smaller door round the back which was open a few inches but stuck. Ted applied brawn to the wood and eventually, there was enough room for us to wriggle inside. The interior smelled musty and damp, the pews had been ripped to pieces, and the uninspiring stained-glass windows broken. Still there was one wonder left. It was Ted who found it, and the awe in his voice when he said, "Annie, come and look at this!" alerted me immediately. The tomb of the poet.

There was no legend to tell us that inside lay the remains of the poet, but I recognised him immediately. There he lay, the stone effigy of Rufus Aston. The tomb was enormous, fit for a king. My first thought was that Rufus had been dearly loved by someone, a someone who could have afforded to pay for this monument, even if they had neglected to leave a reminder for the world concerning exactly who lay within it. The carving of the effigy was exquisite. But for the colour of the stone—a strange, shiny black—he could have been a youth lying there asleep. The long hair was not stiffly stylised, but reproduced as flowing over the stone, down the sides of the sarcophagus. One long-fingered hand lay lightly on his breast, the other at his side. His shirt was open at the collar, revealing a slender throat, with the wonderful hollow that invites a finger to trace its depths. I touched him, with reverence, while

Ted looked on. Neither of us said a word. If anything of Rufus was still there, he was certainly at peace. Even though the building was vandalised, the tranquillity seemed to flow from the tomb of the poet in waves. Helen should not, must not, violate this. Her problem was not Rufus', not now. She must not drag what was left him, essence or spirit, back into whatever filthy enterprise Richard Pargeter, alive or dead, represented. If an image of Rufus had ever haunted Helen's garden, it must simply have been a memory, a captured moment in time replaying throughout history, not an essence, or a soul. I was entirely sure about these thoughts, so sure, it was like a telepathic message. Perhaps Rufus' guardian angel was still around, keeping an eye out for him. I took a step back, and saw the inscription on the side of the tomb. Although there was no name to the words, I knew they had once been penned by the exquisite hand mimicked in stone above them:

Let me resist this old passion,
let it pass over me.
For the flower of this love is death,
which I have picked with my own hands
Pressed my own face into the flesh of it,
taken the scent within.

"Strange they should put that on the tomb," Ted murmured.

I glanced at him. "Not strange to whoever chose it."

What could I say to Helen, how could I dissuade her from trying to disturb the eternal rest of Rufus Aston? Back home, I called her immediately, but her housekeeper answered the phone. Mrs Marchant was ill, she wasn't taking calls. "This is important," I told her. "Very important."

"I'm sorry, Mrs Brown. She won't come to the phone. She's in bed. Can I take a message?"

"What's wrong with her?" I demanded.

"The flu," answered the housekeeper. "Is there any message?"

"Just say I called." I slammed down the phone, thwarted. Was Helen's illness feigned so she did not have to speak to me? I was getting paranoid. Still, I phoned Cathy straight away.

"Cath, will you call Mags at Deermount for me?"

"Why?" Cathy's voice showed she sensed intrigue.

"Ask her if Helen is ill, and if so, with what? I've been trying to get in touch with her, but the housekeeper isn't being very helpful."

“OK.”

Cathy phoned back about fifteen minutes later. “Madam has the flu,” she reported.

I slumped in relief. Flu might keep Helen away from Loxcombe for a while.

“However,” Cathy continued. “Mags has news. Since the psychics were kicked out, Madam and Sir have been arguing. Apparently, Helen looks a right wreck at the moment. She’s not eating, she’s chain-smoking, and she leaves all the lights on in the house at night. Must be costing them a fortune in electricity, given the size of the place! And that’s not all. The feudal slaves, bless them, are starting to get spooked as well. The girl who looks after the horses won’t go near the stables at night now, and the housekeeper saw something nasty on the stairs. She thought it was a big stain on the stair-carpet, like oil, but when she went indignantly to investigate, scrubbing-brush in hand, no doubt, the stain reared up and flew off like smoke. Poor woman nearly fell down stairs.”

“Cathy,” I said. “You don’t believe any of that, do you?”

“Well it was probably a cat, or a bird, or something,” she said. “But what a good tale, eh?”

“Has Mags told you how Roland’s taking all this?”

“Spending time in the city, of course! What do you expect?”

“What’s Helen doing about it, the funny going’s on, I mean?”

“She has the phone with her in bed, and several tons of *Psychics’ Monthly* beside her. Soon the old pile will be crawling with fat women in long dresses and beads, and cadaverous men who’ve never had girlfriends. Ghosts, beware!”

“Cath, you’re enjoying this, aren’t you!”

She laughed. “It’s the best of her obsessions yet!”

I wanted to slam down the phone, angry with Cathy for the first time in years. Helen hadn’t mentioned her arguments with Roland, or the servants’ experiences. She hadn’t confided in me that deeply then. And I was right: she *was* avoiding speaking to me.

I phoned Helen every day, and after four attempts, she deigned to speak. I had resolved not to be too pushy. “How are you?” I began.

She did sound very snuffly. “Oh, I’m over the worst. And you?”

Once the pleasantries were over, I asked her how she was getting on with locating a suitable psychic. “Some have been here already,” she said. “I’m

surprised Mags hasn’t told Cathy.” The rebuke did not go unregistered, but I ignored it.

“Any success?”

“It’s too early to tell.”

I took a deep breath. “And the church at Loxcombe? Have you been there yet?”

“Of course. Ages ago. Did you think I’d buy it without seeing it?”

“You’ve seen the tomb, then?”

“What do you think?”

“What’s it like?”

“Just a tomb,” Helen answered. Her voice was positively waspish. “What did you expect?”

“A gravestone in a graveyard?”

“That’s exactly what it is.”

The lie outraged me. So much so I did a stupid thing and blurted out. “Helen, that’s bullshit! I’ve been there! I’ve seen it!”

There was a silence and then Helen said in a slow, chilling voice, “How dare you!”

“You don’t own it yet,” I said. “Helen, I’ve got to speak to you about this. You mustn’t go charging in there desecrating Aston’s tomb! Rufus is at rest, you must have been able to feel it! It would be wrong, so terribly wrong to . . .”

I realised I was speaking to a dead line. My friend Helen had put the phone down on me, probably right after she’d asked me how I dared.

There was silence for days. Cathy reported the comings and goings of the psychics, with one or two amusing anecdotes concerning their appearance and behaviour, but other than that, nothing. I must have picked up the phone a dozen times with the intention of calling Helen, but pride stopped me. If she wanted me, she knew where I was. Then Roland called us in the middle of the night. Ted got out of bed to answer the phone and I followed him down, sensing trouble.

“It’s all right,” I heard him say, soothingly. “Now think, Roland, where *would* she go?”

Helen had disappeared. Of course, we offered to help Roland look for her. We couldn’t leave the kids alone, so Ted drove up to Deermount. Later he told me Roland was in a terrible state, out of his mind with worry. He confessed his wife hadn’t ‘been right’ for weeks, perhaps months. He blamed himself. He should have done something, got her to see someone, anything.

They found her at Loxcombe. Ted thought it was the obvious place. “She was lying on top of him, on top of the tomb,” Ted said to me. “It was . . .” He shook his head. “God, Annie, she’s out of her mind.

You should have seen her. Writhing over that effigy in her dressing-gown with nothing on beneath, mud up to her knees, her face scratched. Her face. It was like something out of Bedlam! Hardly human. God, that poor man. Poor Roland."

They'd carried her home and called the doctor. Scant hours later, an ambulance came and Helen was taken away. Roland, in a rare moment of eloquence, said dazedly to Ted, as they watched the ambulance disappear down the drive, "It's as if she's no longer with us. That person, it's not Helen, it's not her."

Ted brought Roland back to the farm. He stayed with us for over a week.

That was the end of it really. The rest was simply having the details filled in. Helen's breakdown was acute. She was going to be away for a long time. Ted, Cathy, Rupert and I did what we could to comfort Roland. He isn't really a bad sort, and he was so bewildered and lost after the event, it was pathetic. I spent some time blaming myself, thinking I could have done something, told someone, but what good would that do now? I did take some action though. First, I found the psychic, Steve's number and called him. My intention was to bawl him out over what had happened to Helen, but when I began telling him, he seemed genuinely appalled and asked if he could come to talk to me. Rather surprised, I agreed.

He arrived with his girlfriend, Rachel, the same evening. They were young, earnest types, and not at all what I expected. Very down to earth, in fact. "Helen had a problem before we got there," Steve told me. "She was obviously suffering from some past trauma, and whatever was being repressed ignited the presence in the house. When she asked us to leave, I knew I shouldn't just let it go at that. I wish I hadn't now. I could have done something."

"We've all been blaming ourselves," I said, kindly. "You're not alone."

I told him about the tomb at Loxcombe and expressed my concern for Rufus Aston. We agreed to drive out there together at the weekend, to see if Steve could pick anything up. I was amazed at myself. Only weeks before I had been scoffing at the boy, now I spoke to him as intimately as to an old friend.

So, Ted and I and Steve and Rachel followed the lanes to the church on another bright, cold Saturday. I was nervous of what I might feel, and dreaded seeing some relic of Helen's dementia on the tomb, but there was nothing. Steve seemed to light up like a

candle as he nosed energetically around the building. His hands skimmed the contours of Rufus' effigy. He nodded vigorously to himself.

"They hid him here," he said. There was a weird light inside him, invisible yet entirely brilliant, that turned him into something quite beautiful.

"They?" I prompted.

"Rufus' friends. Away from Pargeter. He escaped, you see. I've always thought that. What Rufus must have realised was that true immortality means relinquishing the flesh. Therefore, we are all immortal already. Anything else is just a travesty against nature. Rufus' death was his statement to Pargeter. An escape and a denial."

"Oh . . ." I traced the words on the side of the tomb.

"Were they . . ."

"It's not unlikely," Steve said, "but I feel that's Rufus' business, don't you?"

I felt strangely chastened.

"But anyway, Rufus' friends must have thought it was important to hide his remains from Pargeter. There's some strong cloaking around this place. The church is almost invisible, an unattractive dump, and yet," he gestured at the tomb, "here it is. A hidden masterpiece."

"Why did Helen come here?" I asked. "Was she trying to reach Rufus' spirit?"


Steve frowned. "I don't think Helen was quite herself by then," he remarked, but that was all.

"Will she ever be?" Ted enquired. We were both deferring to this intense youth.

Steve shrugged. "I can't say." He looked back at the tomb, let his hand hover over the breast of the effigy. "But I can reassure you that whatever Helen tried to do, our friend here didn't bat an eyelid. The love and protection around him are too strong. He can't be reached by something like that."

Relieved, we walked back into the harsh sunlight. I felt buoyant, melancholy, but sadly happy, if that's possible.

I went to visit Helen in hospital, and I wish I hadn't. Roland was right. The Helen we knew had gone. Perhaps she was only hiding, and could be coaxed back into that limp, listless form, but I doubt it. A year has passed, and she's still there, in that hospital, sitting in the same chair, looking out of the same window, seeing nothing. I hope she's not suffering inside. Perhaps, like Rufus, she's spurned the flesh, and what lives in her body is something else, something that's trapped there now. That would be justice, I think.



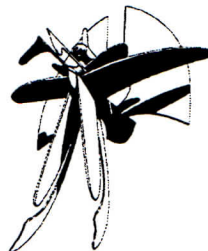
Two postscripts. The first was that Roland's attempt to buy the church at Loxcombe fell through. He had no real idea what had been going on in Helen's life and mind, and entertained the wistful notion that he could buy the place and do it up as a craft shop for Helen, for when she got out of hospital, if ever. Something blocked him though, and he was very puzzled about it, because his money usually meant he got everything he wanted. I suspected Rufus still had friends around who made sure the Marchants couldn't get near him. Strangely enough, a couple of months later, the church was sold, and renovated, but who had bought it and what they wanted it for, no one knew. Workmen came and went, a high fence was put up around it, and a caretaker came to live in a caravan in the graveyard. To this day, the church is still barricaded against the world, more invisible now than it ever was. Weird.

The second postscript results from a visit from Helen's mother. She had never had much time for Cathy and I. We thought she'd considered us common and unsuitable friends for her glittering daughter. Now, she wanted to talk to me. I realised I had seen a lot more of Helen over the past year than she had. She was devastated by what had happened, naturally. Her dream girl had disappeared, as dreams do, when you wake up to reality. Rumours had filtered back to her concerning hauntings and possession, and she needed reassurance. I told her the rumours were exaggerated. "Helen was ill," I said. "There were no ghosts, not really." She nodded at that. Then she told me the

truth about something, which was sadly pertinent to the whole tragic drama.

The reason Helen had returned to the village when she was twenty-five was because she'd had a breakdown in the city. She had, in fact, been in hospital for a month before she came home. Apparently, she'd got mixed up with some very dodgy characters, who were into a peculiar sort of cult, which involved a lot of drugs and sex and sheer debauchery. Helen must have been attracted to it because most of the devotees were very rich. She had, (perhaps inevitably, given his bank balance), fallen for the guru of the outfit, who'd used her in every conceivable way. She'd put up with this, until she discovered her Great Man was also abusing, in similar ways, most of the other members of the group, both male and female. There were complications by then, and Helen's mind caved in. Speaking as if her mouth was full of bile, Helen's mother spat out almost indecipherable words about pregnancy and unmentionable diseases. Poor Helen. No one had realised she was in such a mess. If only we'd known about her past, we might have been more alert for trouble in the present.

Afterwards, I thought about the superficial parallels between Helen and Rufus Aston. In some ways, it had been like a replay, but it wasn't finished. There had been no solution, no true denouement. Roland still lives at Deermount, waiting for his wife to return to the world. But it's a bad place now. You can feel it sometimes, up there at the house, so I don't go there often. Something waiting, like a nerve-end, to be touched.



Jack Dann

Jack Dann is the author or editor of over thirty-five books, including the novels *Junction*, *Starhiker*, and *The Man Who Melted*. Dann's work has been compared to Jorge Luis Borges, Roald Dahl, Lewis Carroll, Castaneda, J G Ballard, and Philip K Dick. Philip K Dick, author of the stories from which the films *Blade Runner* and *Total Recall* were made, wrote that "*Junction* is where Ursula Le Guin's *Lathe Of Heaven* and Tony Boucher's 'The Quest for Saint Aquin' meet . . . and yet it's an entirely new novel . . . I may very well be basing some of my future work on *Junction*." Best selling author Marion Zimmer Bradley called *Starhiker* "a superb book . . . it will not give up all its delights, all its perfections, on one reading." *Library Journal* has called Dann ". . . a true poet who can create pictures with a few perfect words." Roger Zelazny thinks he is a reality magician and *Best Sellers* has said that "Jack Dann is a mind-warlock whose magicks will confound, disorient, shock, and delight." *The Washington Post Book World* compared his novel *The Man Who Melted* with Ingmar Bergman's film *The Seventh Seal*.

His short stories have appeared in *Omni* and *Playboy* and other major magazines and anthologies. He is the editor of the anthology *Wandering Stars*, one of the most acclaimed anthologies of the 1970s, and several other well-known anthologies such as *In the Field of Fire*. He also edits the multi-volume *Magic Tales* fantasy series with Gardner Dozois and is a consulting editor for Tor Books. He has been a finalist for the Nebula Award eleven times and a World Fantasy Award finalist three times. He has also been a finalist for the British Science Fiction Award, and is a recipient of the Premios Gilgames de Narrativa Fantastica award.

High Steel, a novel co-authored with Jack C. Haldeman II, has been published in hardcover by Tor Books to rave reviews. British critic John Clute called it "a predator . . . a cat with blazing eyes gorging on the good meat of genre. It is most highly recommended." A sequel, *Ghost Dance*, is in progress.

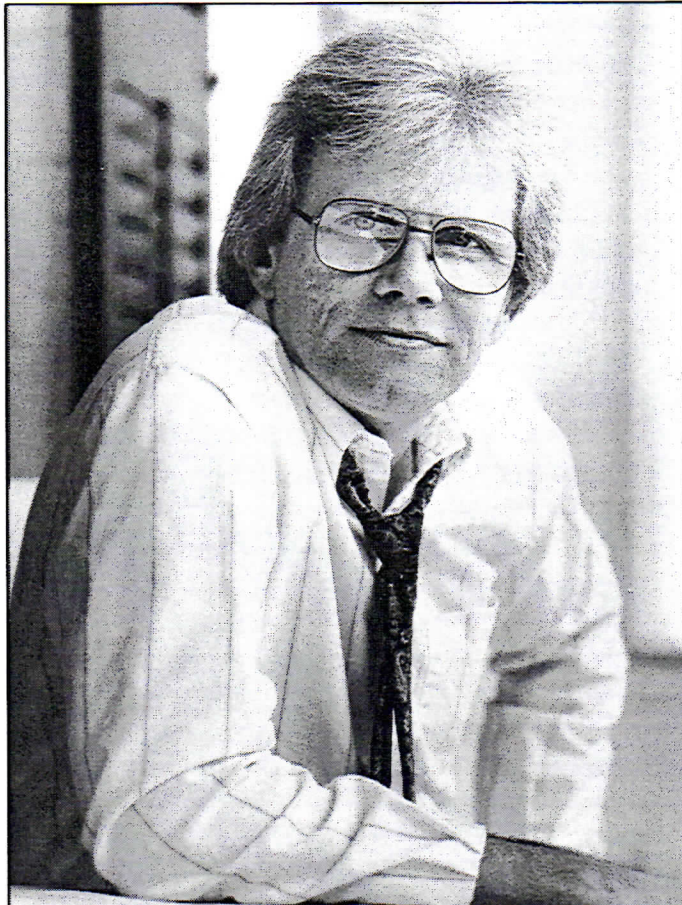
Dann's major historical novel about Leonardo da Vinci—*The Memory Cathedral*—

was published in hardcover by Bantam Books in December, 1995. Morgan Llewelyn called it "a book to cherish, a validation of the novelist's art and fully worthy of its extraordinary subject", Lucius Shepard thought it was "an absolute triumph", and *Kirkus Reviews* called it "An impressive accomplishment". Dann is currently working on *The Silent*, a new novel about the Civil War, which will also be published by Bantam.

As part of its *Bibliographies of Modern Authors* series, The Borgo Press has published an annotated bibliography and guide entitled *The Work of Jack Dann*. A second edition is in the works. Dann is listed in *Contemporary Authors* and the *Contemporary Authors Autobiography Series*; *The International Authors And Writers Who's Who*; *Personalities Of America*; *Men Of Achievement*; *Who's Who In Writers, Editors, And Poets, United States And Canada*; *Dictionary Of International Biography*; and the *Directory Of Distinguished Americans*.

Jack Dann lives in Melbourne, Australia.

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An Appreciation

Joe Haldeman

Jack Dann—Truth or Fiction?

When I first met Jack in 1970, at a party at Damon Knight's house, he was a handsome, dynamic young chap surrounded by girls, eking what sympathy he could out of a cast on his arm. It was working pretty well. But I didn't hold that against him. Even though I suspected the cast was actually . . . well, never mind what I suspected.

I thought from his boisterous and confident attitude that he was a well-established beginning writer—I myself only had two stories published and a few more sold—but in fact he wasn't. He hadn't published anything on his own yet (two 1970 collaborations with George Zebrowski), and all of his successes were in the future.

But he was already confident, damn him.

I didn't hold that against him, either. For some reason we liked each other, although I wrote hairy-chested hard sci-fi tales and he wrote arty-farty New Wave stuff. For many years we had some wild and wooly times. (We're both still somewhat wild, but "wooly" is being supplanted by "shiny.")

Our main venues for kicking up our heels were New York and, of all places, Baltimore. Not much of a literary nature had happened in Baltimore since Edgar Allan Poe decided it would be a good place to die in the gutter, and my brother Jack decided to perpetuate that lack by inviting a bunch of young science fiction writers to confabulate there, in an ongoing roundtable workshop called the Guilford.

The group, which called itself the Guilford Gafia,* grew and shrank over the years, but always comprised at least my brother and me, Gardner Dozois, George Alec Effinger, Ted White, and Jack Dann. We would get together in my brother's rambling old manse, tall and narrow and full of secret passageways (rather like my brother himself, actually) and drink large quantities of beer and pass around one another's manuscripts for praise or vilification.

It was great fun but it was also dead serious. All of us had the feeling that we were committing ourselves to a lifetime of writing, and Guilford was a mutual apprenticeship.

When we weren't working, though, we were playing. Some of our number preferred the

sequestered inhalation of herbal fumes, but Jack and I usually went off to raise a wrist, either at the anarchist bar down the street or at the even rowdier establishments in Baltimore's justly infamous Block. The Block was a place where the police informally allowed a certain amount of disorderly conduct in exchange for the convenience of containing it. Jack and I went there for the music and drink, and dance of a nature that can only be described as gynecological.

In fact, a lot of what went on was of a nature too bawdy to defile the pages of this family-oriented publication, but suffice it to say that Jack's behaviour and remarks eventually led to his being awarded a genuine rubber vagina. To my great regret, I have forgotten the formal name of the award, but I do still remember *why* he was given it. I will not compromise his tattered dignity by divulging why in print, but a certain amount of Foster's might pry it out of me the next time we're in Oz.

One of the most memorable evenings down in the Block involved an establishment where Jack and I belatedly realized we were the only heterosexual patrons. I will allow him to relate the tale of that evening, since his version is so much more interesting than the truth.

In fact, I would encourage all of you to buttonhole your Guest of Honour and attempt to pry the truth out of him by the application of appropriate reagents. Alas, I think he's only susceptible to expensive vintage wines nowadays, rather than the plonk and cheap beer that sustained our spent youth. Take up a collection, though. He's worth it.

I didn't mention that he's a pretty good writer. His latest work, *The Memory Cathedral*, is immensely ambitious and has been positively fawned over by critics. No doubt the movie will make millions of dollars, what with Al Pacino of course playing the part of fellow Italian Leonardo da Vinci. Collaborating with my brother Jack C. Haldeman II, he co-wrote *High Steel*, an exciting and thoughtful novel fusing Native American spirituality with space industrialization. His other novels, *Junction*, *Starhiker*, and *The Man Who Melted*, have ranged from space opera to surrealism.

Jack also had a collection of short stories, *Timetipping*, in 1980, but most of his titles have been anthologies he edited either by himself, like the highly successful *Wandering Stars* (which is, like its sequel *More Wandering Stars*, a compilation of sf and fantasy stories on Jewish themes), or in collaboration

with others: the seminal Vietnam anthology *In The Field Of Fire*, with Jeanne Van Buren Dann, *Faster Than Light*, with George Zebrowski, and *Future Power*, with Gardner Dozois. With Gardner's help he has invented a new subgenre of the sf anthology: *Aliens!*, *Unicorns!*, *Magicats!*, *Bestiary!*, *Sorcerers!*, *Seaserpents!*, *Little People!*, and God knows how many others, no doubt eventually to terminate with one simply called !!!

Jack is currently working on a novel set in the American Civil War, so he moved to Australia. Go figure.

* The naming of this workshop was a nicely inventive pun, but it does require a long tedium of explanation, even to

hardcore fannish types. First, "Guilford" was the area of Baltimore where my brother lived and lurked. Damon Knight at the time ran a famous roundtable workshop called Milford (after its location; Milford, Pennsylvania), and the writers who attended that were said to form a coherent group, called the "Milford Mafia." Finally, as most fen know from birth, "gafia" is an acronym for "Getting Away From It All."

Joe Haldeman

Joe Haldeman is the Hugo, Nebula and World Fantasy Award-winning author of such classic works as *The Forever War*, the Worlds trilogy, *The Hemingway Hoax*, and others. His most recent novel is *1968*. He is currently at work on *Forever Peace*, a sequel to *The Forever War*.

The Definitive Dann

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Vapors

Jack Dann

Fascination is a force which, emanating from the spirit of the fascinator, enters the eyes of the fascinated person as a phantasm and penetrates his heart. Spirit is therefore the instrument of fascination. It emits from the eyes rays resembling itself bearing with them spiritual quality. Hence rays emanating from eyes that are bloodshot and bleary, on meeting the eyes of the beholder, carry with them the vapor of the spirit and of tainted blood, thus spreading the contagion to the beholder's eyes.

—*De occulta philosophia* by Agrippa of Nettesheim

tant confus

Me vy que pres de mourir fus.

car moictié lors par fantasie.

Moictié dormant en resverie.

Ou que fust vision ou songe.

Advis m estoit et sans mensonge

Qu'Amours hors du corps mon cuer mist.

So confused was I that I lay near death,
whether imagining or dreaming or having
a vision or daydream, it seemed to me
that truly, Cupid had removed my heart
from my body.

—*Coeur d'amour épris* by René of Anjou

Sandro Botticelli had fallen hopelessly, obsessively in love with her.

She was Lorenzo the Magnificent's mistress and also reputed to be the lover of Giuliano, Lorenzo's brother. She was a Florentine Venus, the most beloved woman in the city. Women admired her as much as men, for she was gentle and ethereal, a paragon of worldly virtue and classic beauty. Wearing a revealing silk slashed gown of Venetian style that showed off her pale skin and ample bosom, a gold and sapphire necklace, and a matching headband in her luxuriant yellow-blond hair, she was fashion itself. She did not color her eyebrows, which were all but invisible, and that gave her face an expression of constant surprise.

Her name was Simonetta Vespucci, and she was waiting for Leonardo da Vinci.

She sat in his studio and stared closely at a small painting of a madonna on an easel, as if deciphering

runes. The late afternoon had become overcast, and the light in the high-ceilinged studio seemed dead . . . gray.

"Ah, sweet Leonardo, you've caught me," she said, pulling away from the painting as Leonardo entered with his young apprentice, Niccolò Machiavelli. "I was memorizing every stroke of your brush. I think you must be a follower of the Pythagoreans."

"And why would you think that," Leonardo asked, surprised to see her so early—and in his studio. He kissed her hand, which she held out to him. Something was amiss, but Leonardo could not skirt the obligatory tittle-tattle that introduced serious conversation.

"Well, the madonna and child and cat seem to be composed upon the form of a triangle," Simonetta said, pointing out the imaginary triangle. "Does not Plato himself in the *Timaeus* represent the immortal soul as a triangle?"



"I'm sorry to disappoint you, Madonna Simonetta, but I am not a Pythagorean . . . not that I know of." Simonetta laughed and Leonardo went on, "But the triangle seemed to be the proper form for this painting. Perhaps, in this case, the immortal Pythagoras was correct. It could not be otherwise that I painted you to represent the beauty and purity of the Virgin soul."

"And it was in no small measure because Lorenzo had commissioned the piece?"

Leonardo could not help but laugh, for she was goading him in a most endearing manner. "I trust you have not been inconvenienced, but I did not expect to meet you until duskingtide. But where is Lorenzo? I had thought that he was to accompany you?"

"He is with—" Simonetta caught herself and then said, "Niccolo, would you be so kind as to fetch me some wine. I do have a thirst."

Niccolo, who was standing beside Leonardo, bowed politely and said, "Yes, Madonna." But in a hole-and-corner way he cast a nasty look at Leonardo before leaving the room. Machiavelli could not stand to be left out of anything. He had just turned fourteen and was very precocious.

After he had left, Simonetta opened her arms to Leonardo—like a mother to a child—and he kneeled before her. She kissed him, and he saw how tired and worried she looked. "What is it, Madonna?" Leonardo asked.

"Lorenzo is with Sandro."

"But why? What has happened?" Leonardo asked, fearing the worst.

"Lorenzo and I had planned a happy afternoon. He awakened me at daybreak to go to Careggi, and on the way we were to pull Sandro out of his bedcovers, so I would have companionship while he discussed Plato with Joannes Argyropulos and Marsilio Ficino, neither of whom I care to share my time with. But when we arrived at Sandro's, we knew immediately that *everything* was wrong. His studio was in complete disarray. He had draped all the windows so that only the faintest light could get in. We found him in bed. He could not have been eating, for he was skin and bone. And we could *smell* that he was sick." She pressed her face against Leonardo's. He could feel her trembling. Then she pulled away from him and said, "But his eyes . . . they were luminous. When he first saw me, he turned away and said, 'You are too late, I already have you.' He sounded most rational."

"What could that mean?" Leonardo asked.

"I fear he has infected himself with a phantasm of . . . me. I don't need a physician to tell me that he has the love sickness. One could determine that from his eyes alone."

"It is probably *melancholia illa heroica*," Niccolo said, showing off as he entered the room. He looked flushed and seemed excited; he had obviously been listening outside the door. "That is a disease of melancholia that is indeed caused by love. It wastes away body and spirit. Only the eyes are lively, for therein resides the soul's 'internal fire.' Maestro Toscanelli taught me about such things. He is learned in medicine, and magic, too."

Toscanelli had also been Leonardo's teacher.

"*Nicco*, this is a private matter," Leonardo said sharply.

"But I care for Sandro, too," Niccolo said. "And I can help. I have read the *Lilium medicinale*. Have you?"

"You are being impertinent," Leonardo said, but without anger in his voice.

"Please, let him stay," Simonetta said, moving away from Leonardo, who stood up and poured her a glass of the wine Niccolo had brought.

"I *can* keep a confidence," Niccolo said earnestly.

Leonardo nodded in affirmation, praying he was correct in doing so.

Simonetta took Niccolo's hand for an instant, then removed herself to the window. "I am at fault. Sandro was in love with me."

"You cannot blame yourself, Madonna," Leonardo said.

"He wrote to me, begging to see me, and God forgive me, I put him off because I could not bear to hurt him." She smiled grimly, as if savoring the irony; and then, as if to defend herself, she said, "But, Leonardo, I could not reciprocate his love. He is my dear friend, but . . ."

"I have not seen him for two weeks. I could have prevented him from getting so lost in his imagination."

"I should have given myself to him," Simonetta said in barely a whisper, as if she were talking to herself. "I have given myself to others I loved much less." After a pause, she said, "Lorenzo had his physician brought to Sandro's bottega. He is still there, leeching him. But even he suggested that we bring a theurgist to the bedside."

Leonardo simply nodded, although he had little use for the theurgist's magic.

"Lorenzo attended to that, too," Simonetta said.



"Then Sandro is under their care."

"Yes, and Lorenzo sent me to wait for you."

"But surely Sandro would wish to see you above all others," Leonardo said.

"After he told me that I was too late, he became anguished whenever I approached him," Simonetta said. "In fact, I was kept from his room, for he thrashed about uncontrollably in my presence. He tried to get out of his bed and reach for me. The physician feared he might do me harm. But he kept calling my name, even when I was in another room. It is a nightmare, Leonardo. But I must confess to feeling relieved when Lorenzo asked me to fetch you."

"Of course you would," Leonardo said.

"You must not go back to Sandro's bottega with us," Niccolo said. "It is dangerous."

"How is that?" Leonardo asked. "She would be protected."

"If Sandro has infected himself with his own phantasm of Madonna Simonetta, he will try to draw out her spirit through her eyes."

"It may well be that Simonetta should not return to Sandro's, but that is superstitious nonsense."

"Madonna, did Sandro close his eyes when he asked you that question?" Niccolo asked.

"Why, yes, he did."

"And were they open when he was *virtus estimativa*, when he was not in his senses?"

"Yes," Simonetta said. "He stared as if to devour me."

"And you said that he was frenzied and tried to get out of his bed. Doctor Bernard of Gordon calls that symptom 'ambulatory mania.' And I would also guess Maestro Sandro's pulse to be irregular."

"The physician indicated that, yes," Simonetta said.

"The symptoms of *hereos* are lack of sleep, food, and drink," Niccolo said, unable to conceal his youthful, vainglorious enthusiasm. "The whole body weakens, except for the eyes. If Maestro Sandro is not treated, he will become maniacal and die. *Il Magnifico* was correct to call for a theurgist. But, Madonna Simonetta, he closed his eyes when he first saw you, in his rational moment, so as not to infect you with his 'internal fire.'"

"Nicco, that is—"

"Please, Maestro, permit me to finish. I know you do not believe that igneous rays project through the eyes, but I am simply applying the training I learned from Master Toscanelli. May I continue?"

Leonardo nodded and sat down beside Simonetta, who took his hand. One had to respect the boy. In a situation of lesser gravity, Leonardo would have been delighted with Nicco's exposition.

"Your image has passed through his eyes and into his heart. It is as real as his thoughts and has become part of his *pneuma*, his very soul. The image, the phantasm, is a reflection of you; but it is poisoned, and poisonous."

"What can be done to help him?" Simonetta asked.

"If more gentle methods do not work, then whipping and, perhaps, sensual pleasures, such as coitus with several women. If none of that proves helpful, then . . ."

Simonetta turned her head away.

"Well, I am going to see what can be done," Leonardo said, directing himself to Simonetta. "I do believe, though, that Nicco might be correct concerning your safety. You are distraught, why not rest here for a time? Niccolo will look after you."

"But—" said Niccolo, obviously disappointed that he might miss the performance of the theurgist . . . and perhaps he was also truly concerned about Sandro, to whom he wished to be considered a friend.

"No, Leonardo, I simply must do what I can to help him," Simonetta said. "I would feel nothing but guilt if I remained here. I am sick with worry over him, now more than ever."

Leonardo looked sternly at Niccolo for upsetting Simonetta. "You will wait here for us, then."

"But I *must* go," Niccolo said, appealing to Simonetta. "At least I know something about this disease; and I, too, care for Maestro Sandro. What have you to lose by permitting me to accompany you?"

"I worry about the dangerous notions you might pick up . . . and what you might see that is untoward," Leonardo said.

Niccolo voiced his impatience and displeasure by making a sound that was something of a growl and a cough, and said, "But how am I to learn if I am not exposed to—"

"Nicco . . . enough! You may come only upon the condition that you do not make a pest of yourself."

"I promise . . ."

Simonetta had been right, the bottega smelled of sickness. Leonardo noticed the cloying, pungent odor as soon as he stepped into the atelier. All the

rooms were dark, for the interior shutters had been closed over high and narrow lozenge-shaped windows. Only the door of the *salle* that overlooked a small postern courtyard was opened wide. Thus might some of the poisonous effluence pass out of the house.

Yet it was considered too dangerous to open the rooms to light, lest Sandro's leeching soul be attracted and escape.

As they passed the courtyard, they glimpsed a hag in a torn gamurra; her hair was filthy and most likely lice-ridden. Like an apparition she appeared, then removed herself from sight. They took the staircase to the second floor, which divided into four rooms: two studios, a bedroom, and a toilet chamber. The floors were of polished tiles, although the rooms themselves, each containing a fireplace, were high-ceilinged but small.

Andrea Verrocchio was standing outside the door, as if to take the air. He greeted Leonardo, who had been apprenticed to him for fifteen years, with a nod and a tight smile, and he bowed to Simonetta. "Should you be coming into this room, Madonna?" he asked, fearful for her.

"I shall be careful, Andrea," she said. "If there's the slightest commotion, I'll leave. I promise."

Although Andrea seemed to be at odds with himself, he acquiesced. He led them into the darkened bedroom, which also served as a kitchen; the tarry smell of herbs and medicine was overwhelming. It was hot as an oven, and close. A roaring fire cast an eerie light and shivering shadows upon Lorenzo, his brother Giuliano, and their small retinue that stood near Sandro's bed. Even in this flickering light, Lorenzo's face looked coarse, overpowered by his large, flattened nose; he was suffering one of his periodic outbreaks of eczema. His brother, on the other hand, was extremely handsome, with a slightly girlish face and brown curly hair.

Sandro lay naked; his head was propped upon a bolster. He stared fixedly at the ceiling while two whores tried to excite him—to no avail. Every few seconds he trembled, as if to a blood-rhythm of his own.

Leonardo took a sharp breath upon seeing his friend, for Sandro looked to be in a death-coma: his face was slick with oil and the perspiration of heat and fever; his eyes were glazed and looked sunken, for he had lost too much weight; and his breathing was thready. He was bleeding from recent wounds

and bloodlettings: large welts stood in relief against his pale flesh like arteries on old, pallid skin.

Horried, unable to help himself, Leonardo pushed away the whores and covered his friend's nakedness. "Sandro, it's me, Leonardo." But Sandro didn't seem to hear him. He was murmuring something, and Leonardo leaned close to his friend to hear him whispering over and over, "Simonetta . . . Simonettaettaettaetta . . . Simonetta . . ."

Leonardo put his palm upon Sandro's forehead, which was hot to the touch, and said, "Do not worry, my friend, the Madonna is here, as I am."

Lorenzo de Medici gently pulled Leonardo away from his friend. He embraced Leonardo and shook his head, despairing over Sandro.

"It's no use," said one of the whores. "He's in no way to be fuckish. There's no blood in that soft worm of his." She had a large frame and pendulous, rouged breasts; her hair seemed as dirty as that of the hag Leonardo had glimpsed on the courtyard; but she did have a certain, albeit coarse, beauty. "If you think it right, we could whip him again, *Conte*," she said, directing herself to a youth hardly older than Niccolo, who stood beside Lorenzo and Giuliano de Medici near the cloth-covered step that led to the high bed.

This was Count Pico Della Mirandola, the darling of Lorenzo's court, the young genius who had unlocked the secrets of the Jews' Cabbala and had written the brilliant *Platonick Discourse upon Love* as a commentary on the poem by his friend Girolamo di Paolo Benivieni. He was certainly a comely boy, actually extraordinary-looking. He had very pale skin; penetrating gray eyes; white, even teeth; a large, muscular frame; and elaborately coifed, reddish-blond hair. He wore the traditional garb of the theurgist: a crown of laurel and an immaculately clean, white, wool gown. He was sweating profusely from the heat; the other men, including Verrocchio and Lorenzo, were dressed in shirt sleeves, *in zuppone*, while the servants were bare chested.

"Leave him, you've done your best," Mirandola said; and the whore left the bed, as did her companion, who was flat-chested and could have been easily mistaken for a boy.

Then to Lorenzo she said, "*Il Magnifico*, do you wish us to remain to . . . help any of your other citizens." She cast a glance at Niccolo and then at Mirandola. Her skin was slick and shiny in the firelight. "Your magician certainly looks to be in



need of some firkytoodle, is that not true, *mio Illustrissimo Signore?*"

Mirandola coolly ignored her, although color came to his cheeks.

"Thank you, no . . . on all counts," Lorenzo said, smiling; and he placed a florin in each woman's hand.

The whores were delighted.

After they left, Simonetta came forward; but she was cautious. She took Leonardo's and Lorenzo's hands and asked, almost pleading, "What can we do? This is so . . . degrading." She was in tears and could not take her eyes from Sandro, who must have heard her or sensed her presence, for he suddenly snapped into alertness.

He sat up in the bed, looking frightened, as if he had just awakened from a nightmare. Before he could be restrained, he jumped to the floor.

Repeating her name over and over, he lunged for Simonetta.

Giuliano brought Sandro down; but, like the others, he had been caught off guard. Leonardo, Lorenzo, and Verrocchio held him, although it was difficult, for he was thrashing and kicking; then, as if this had been some erotic seizure, Sandro seemed to fall back into his coma of shallow breathing and periodic tremors.

As the men lifted him with difficulty back to his bed, Mirandola took Simonetta by the elbow and led her firmly to the door. "Madonna Simonetta, did I not tell you to keep *out* of this room? It is absolutely too dangerous for you to be in here . . . dangerous for you *and* Messer Botticelli."

"Don't be angry with me, Pico. What harm can I do now? I only wish to help. It seems that he is wasting away . . . that he is inhabited by demons, please God protect him. I fear he is going to die."

"Perhaps not. I am going to try another exorcism, Madonna. If that fails, I will come to you."

"Yes?"

"And then you will have to make a decision that might well endanger *your* life."

Simonetta nodded; but to look at her, it seemed as if she had been relieved of a great burden.

Then she slipped out of the fire-stoked room.

When one of the servants asked Lorenzo if the fire could now be put out, lest someone faint, Mirandola answered for *Il Magnifico*. "The fire must be stoked *up*, but first fetch the hag to us immediately."

"Of what use is the fire?" Leonardo asked, after Lorenzo introduced him and his protégé Niccolo to Mirandola.

"Perhaps we should damp it out," Lorenzo said wiping the perspiration from his face with a cloth. "This discomforting heat has not seemed to help Sandro one whit."

"I beg a bit more of your patience, *Magnifico*," Mirandola said. "The fire is not for Maestro Sandro, but for us. *Vinculum quippe vinculorum amor est*. And the strongest chain of all is that of Venus, of love. *Daemon magnus*. The heat is to protect *us* from the dangerous influence of Sandro's phantasm of Eros, lest it attach itself to our souls and become our phantasms."

"And why would heat give us this protection?" Leonardo asked, curious about this superstition.

"Are you not familiar with Aristotle's differentiation of cold melancholic vapors and pure, or hot, spirits?"

"I must confess I am not," Leonardo said.

"Well, suffice it to say that heat prevents the infection of dreams and phantasms from 'cold' and hence impure melancholy. Such impurity the learned Origen called 'the seat of elfish spirits and the devil.'"

Leonardo thought better than to continue questioning Mirandola further, lest he humiliate this insolent and pompous young aristocrat, especially in the presence of Lorenzo.

"If the shrew cannot break these bonds," Mirandola said to Lorenzo and Giuliano, who came over from Sandro's bedside, "then only Simonetta can help him."

"How is that?" asked Lorenzo.

"Sandro's diseased spirit might be cleansed if it could re-establish contact with the object of its obsession: Simonetta. But to do that Simonetta would have to absorb the phantasm that is poisoning Sandro." After a pause, he said, "We can only hope that his soul is not already dead inside him. If that is the case, then he lives only through the object of his obsession.

"If that is so, then he is lost to us."

"And what of Simonetta?" Leonardo asked, believing this to be superstition, but dangerous nevertheless.

"She would, in effect, be taking herself—her own phantasm—back. But this spirit that was generated in Sandro's soul out of melancholy anguish is tainted. It is not a true reflection of Simonetta . . .



"It would be as if she had imbibed poison."

"Then that cannot be permitted," Lorenzo said. "Absolutely not."

"But" Mirandola said, "there is a very strong chance that she can then be cured, exorcised, if such cure is undertaken immediately. It is very risky; but there is, so to speak, an antidote."

"You should also realize," he continued, "that if our Sandro's soul has already languished, he will die—as surely as if a knife pierced his heart—when she accepts the phantasm he has created."

At that moment, the hag entered the room; and Leonardo almost gagged at the smell of her. But her odor was not merely that of filth, but of decay, such as rotting meat. She now wore a black *mantello* of cheap material draped over her head and shoulders. She bowed her head to Lorenzo and Mirandola and said, "I make you no promises, Lords."

But Mirandola, ignoring her, walked over to the bedside. He fixed his eyes upon Sandro's—or upon the phantasm reflected in his eyes—and said: "O, supreme master of hallowed name, O, Master Saturn, you who are frigid and sterile, bleak and baleful of countenance, thou who art sincere, whose word is absolute truth; thou who is wise and impenetrable, who knows not pleasure or joy, who knows every ruse and art of the divine deceiver, who carries prosperity or ruin, and who brings men pleasure or misery! O Magnificent Father, please be it that through thine goodness and benevolence, you permit your servants to cure this man's weakened, contaminated soul of its phantasmic sickness."

Sandro closed his eyes tightly and shivered. Then he shook his head from side to side, as if he were about to have an episode.

"Bind his hands and legs to the bed," ordered the hag. "And be soon, before he slips back to his swoon!"

Leonardo protested, but Mirandola nodded at the servants, who did as the old woman asked. As Sandro was being tied, Lorenzo said, "Leonardo, this is difficult for all of us; but we have no other choice, unless we wish to let our friend die."

Leonardo held his tongue, for it would be impossible to convince Lorenzo, or anyone else present, for that matter, of the inefficacy of sorcery; and it would be especially dangerous to oppose young Count Mirandola, *Il Magnifico's* favorite.

When this humiliation was over, Leonardo would attend to Sandro.

But the hag lost no time. She threw small bags tied with twine into the fire. Their contents crackled

as they burned, discharging vapors that smelled of sweet grass, perfumes, formaldehyde, and resin. They burned the eyes and caused various shapes and colors to form in the consuming flames.

Leonardo felt woozy and dizzy, as if he had had too much to drink. Afterimages seemed to be exploding along the edges of his vision. He was certain the hag's vapors were meant to addle all who inhaled them, so he stepped back from the fire and covered his mouth with his sleeve until the vapors dissipated. He ordered Niccolo to do the same.

The hag walked around Sandro's bed and began swearing at him in her raspy voice. She humiliated him, calling him a Jew and a work-back sodomite; she maligned Simonetta, the object of his desires, as a putain and a whore-bitch. She leaned over him, pulling back her *mantello*, so her dugs hung over him in a grotesquerie of sensuality. Then she became louder, shouting as she shook him by the shoulders. "Your woman is a scrub, a skrun, a fuckstress." She crawled upon the bed—straddling Sandro's head with her spindled, slap-sided legs—and said, "Look up my snatch, shite-poke." And in a girlishly-sweet voice, she asked, "Is your woman's love-flesh as pretty as mine?" She pulled back her clothes, exposing her genitals, and pulled away a rag soaked in menstrual blood—certainly not her own—that was tied around her waist.

"Take down the curtains from the windows," she shouted at Mirandola.

"That is to help free Maestro Sandro's phantasm," Niccolo said.

Leonardo shook his head in disgust and said, "I don't think you need see any more of this." But Niccolo behaved as if nothing had been said and edged away to the other side of the room; Leonardo didn't press after him.

Squeezing Leonardo's arm, Lorenzo said, "If there were another alternative, I would have surely held to it. I, too, find this revolting, just as I do her mention of Madonna Simonetta's name. If such foul words were uttered by *anyone* in any other circumstances, I would put my sword through the drudge's neck!"

Leonardo could do nothing but nod.

Mirandola pulled down the makeshift curtains; and each time he did so, he invoked "*Deus lux summa luminum*": 'the invisible light of God.' Faint light of the dying afternoon suffused the room, as transparent and diaphanous as the light of Sandro's paintings, one of which Leonardo now noticed



standing against the wall. It was the *Primavera*; and the dancing group of graces, depicted as described in a passage in Apuleius, seemed to be created out of light. But these figures did not seem to have any physical existence. They were luminous spirits. Angelic, ineffable visions.

Phantasms of Simonetta wrested from Sandro's mind.

And, indeed, all the faces and figures in this painting were Simonetta's.

Perhaps it was the vapors from the fire that witch-struck his vision, but Leonardo imagined that the graces were all in subtle movement; they were alive and tortured, caught in that timeless, two-dimensional space of the painting.

Waving the blood-stinking rag above Sandro's face, the hag made sexual noises and sat upon his chest. She brushed the rag against his face, held it under his nose, and uttered the *malleus maleficarum*: "Your swinish woman, your slut, she is like this . . . like this. A bane of nature she is."

Then she crawled backwards on her knees and manipulated Sandro's penis inside herself.

Sandro eyes were open, and they seemed focused upon her.

Indeed, only his eyes seemed alive . . .

After gyrating upon him in a grotesque parody of coitus, the shrew finally gave up.

Still crouching over him like a four-legged spider, she turned to Mirandola and Lorenzo and said, "This is not a man, but a devil. Nothing can help him!" Dismounting Sandro, she climbed down from the bed. She pulled her gamurra around her and walked stiffly out of the room with the mien of a woman of high birth who had just been insulted.

To Leonardo's horror and disgust, Sandro—who was still trembling and mumbling Simonetta name—had an erection.

When Mirandola returned to the room with Simonetta, Lorenzo became anxious and agitated; only now was it obvious how much he cared for her. Leonardo and Giuliano stood quietly beside him.

"Do you wish to clear the room?" Mirandola asked Lorenzo.

"Would it have a disruptive effect upon Sandro's . . . cure?"

"I would think not, but it could be dangerous for others."

"Then anyone who wishes to leave should do so now," Lorenzo said so that all could hear. The

physician, looking tired and unkempt, bowed to Lorenzo as he left the room with his urceus of leeches. He seemed relieved to be finally leaving.

Verrocchio gave Lorenzo a bear hug and said, "As much as I love Sandro, I think it best if I give Madonna and you, *Magnifico*, your privacy. If I am needed, I will be but a call away."

"You'd best take Nicco along," Leonardo said.

Verrocchio nodded, smiled grimly, and called Niccolo. "Come along," he said, pushing Niccolo and a young servant before him.

"Are you certain you wish to take this risk?" Lorenzo asked Simonetta; there was an edge of desperation in his voice.

Simonetta nodded and kissed him on the cheek.

But Lorenzo embraced her and said, "There *must* be other alternatives."

He looked to Mirandola, who said, "I'm sorry, *Magnifico*, but we have exhausted all of the established remedies."

"Then we must study the matter further," Lorenzo said. Looking at Simonetta, his hands resting upon her shoulders, he said, "I cannot permit you to do this, Madonna. I care for you too much." As Lorenzo pulled her to him, Leonardo and Giuliano politely backed away.

"And what of poor Sandro?" Simonetta asked. "He might die without our help. Do you not care for him?"

"Of course I do, he is like my own brother. But I cannot lose you, my darling."

"*Magnificence*, if I do not help him, he will surely die. I could not live with that. I love you, but I must do this thing."

Lorenzo hung his great, ugly head.

"Now is my chance to test my faith," Simonetta said.

Lorenzo nodded and managed a smile.

Then to Lorenzo, Leonardo, and Giuliano she said, "Now you must all leave. I am mindful of your safety, for I love you all."

"I shall remain," Lorenzo said.

"And I shall keep you company," Leonardo said.

"And I, too," said Giuliano.

"Giuliano . . ." Lorenzo said, but then he caught himself. He gave his brother a great hug, and then espied Niccolo, who had slipped back into the room and was standing in shadow behind the door. "But *you*, precocious young man, must leave," he said to Niccolo in a loud voice. "Or would you disobey me, too?"



Niccolo stepped into the light, bowed, and apologized to Lorenzo and Leonardo. His ears were burning red. But he had enough composure to say to Simonetta, "I wish you God's mercy on your endeavor, dear lady."

She smiled at him and nodded.

Young as he was, the irony was certainly not lost on Niccolo that his master Leonardo, who had no belief in intersubjective magic, could remain, while he, Niccolo—a student of divine wisdom—had to remove himself.

It was to his credit that he did not argue or complain.

After he left, Mirandola said to Simonetta, "There is not much time, lest Sandro become agitated. You must draw his phantasm into yourself, but do not let it infest you. When it passes into you, you must confine it behind your eyes, lest it reach your heart and circulate. As I explained to you, dear lady, you must visualize a vast and bright space—such as a cathedral flooded with sunlight—behind your eyes."

"Yes, Pico, I remember."

"Then go to him."

"Be careful," Lorenzo whispered and then uttered a prayer.

As Simonetta walked directly to his bed, Mirandola went to the hearth and placed another log on the fire. The wood crackled and steamed, for it was not yet completely seasoned. Then he dropped a small bag into the flames, and a pungent, sulfurous vapor filled the room as if it were light itself. Once again Leonardo felt dizzy . . . and expansive. Although it was impossible to avoid the smoky effluvium, he pressed his sleeve against his face. Just now Leonardo could imagine that bodies and space and physical existence could be ignored, that everything was indeed spirit: image detached from matter.

Such was Sandro's belief . . .

Simonetta stood beside the bed and took Sandro's hand, which was still roped to a headpost. "Sandro," she whispered. "It is Simonetta, I have come to you to take your pain. To free you . . ."

"Simonetta . . . Simonettaetta," Sandro mumbled in a singsong.

An instant later his brows furrowed, and his face seemed to come alive. But he closed his eyes so tightly that his lips were drawn upward by the strain, as if Simonetta were the sun itself, too bright to be looked at directly.

Sandro strained at the ropes and shook his head. Then, as if suddenly lucid, he said, "Go away, please

leave me! I do not wish you harm. My lovely Simonetta, Simonetta . . ."

"I will not leave," Simonetta said, taking his face firmly in her hands. "Look upon me, I am here."

But Sandro refused to open his eyes.

He thrashed about in the bed.

It was as if Simonetta's softest touch was a brand searing his flesh. But she would not be thrown from the bed. She held on to Sandro until he stopped bucking and flailing himself about.

And suddenly she caught him.

He must have opened his eyes for an instant.

He saw her and turned his head away, pressing the side of his head against the bed, as if hoping to bury himself inside it; but then—shaking with strain, fighting the muscles that would obey his spirit, but not his mind—he turned to her.

Looking upon her, wide-eyed, transfixed, he suddenly became quiescent.

It was dusk. The fire was low, and piles of embers glowed redly in the hearth. Candles flickered in wall sconces, casting pale, wavering shadows; and lamps burned on table and bench. Although the fumes from the potions thrown upon the fire had disappeared into the suffocating air, Leonardo saw—or, rather, glimpsed—something vaporous pass between Sandro and Simonetta.

It passed from his beclouded eyes to hers, which were clear and lustrous.

This vapor was sanguineous, pure, and hot: it was a flicker, a swiftly-passing glory as pale and subtle as the aura that surrounds the moon on a misty, stormy night.

Gazing one upon the other, locked in an embrace that was not physical, they kissed. Their eyes remained open, watching each other as if in wonderment, as tongue prodded tongue.

They acted as if there was no one else present.

Lorenzo shifted his weight nervously from one foot to the other.

"I pray this is not their *binsica*," Mirandola said, meaning the ecstatic kiss of death; and he intoned, "*Multiplex semen, multiplex Venus, multiplex amor, multiplex vinculum*," as if a description of principles would bind them to life.

"Untie him," Simonetta said as she pulled the vair-lined bedding away from his erect penis.

As Mirandola walked toward the bed to comply with her wish, Lorenzo started after him. Then he stopped, shook his head, and sighed. Leonardo squeezed his arm, and Lorenzo nodded in



appreciation. "She will not be harmed, Leonardo," Lorenzo said, as if trying to convince himself.

But Leonardo understood that the First Citizen was also feeling the shock of jealousy.

Mirandola untied Sandro; and Simonetta, as if dream-born, climbed onto his bed. Sandro embraced her; and then with an abrupt movement, he pulled her down upon the mattress. He rolled on top of her, kissing her, while he urgently raised her undergarments. She screamed as he entered her; and they coupled savagely, each staring into the other's eyes.

Consumed by their souls' internal fires, they became one flesh.

"I cannot stand to watch this," Lorenzo cried; and he turned away. Everyone else in the room followed suit. But then, as if a certain fascination of the abominable had taken hold of him, he turned back. Giuliano took his arm, and Leonardo grasped his hand tightly. Lorenzo recoiled, but Giuliano and Leonardo held on to him until he regained his composure.

But even as Lorenzo watched, the *vinculum vinculorum*, the chain of chains, was broken.

Sandro lifted himself away from Simonetta, who lay upon the bed. She seemed lifeless, drained of blood and color, her eyes open and staring upward. But she was breathing slowly, as if she were asleep or in a trance. Sandro rubbed his eyes and, uncomprehending, stared directly at Leonardo. "What has happened?" he asked in a whisper; and then he turned to Simonetta. As he looked at her, he began to cry. He touched her face and said, "*Jesù*, what have I done?" It was as if he had just awakened from a dream only to discover it was real.

Then, before Sandro screamed and tore his hair, Leonardo and Lorenzo reached the bedside. While Leonardo calmed Sandro, Lorenzo tried to rouse Simonetta.

"*Magnifico*, wait," Mirandola said to Lorenzo, as he gently pulled him away from Simonetta, "You must allow me to awaken her. There is little time, and her soul is full of the poison of Sandro's phantasm. Look, you can see it filling her eyes." Lorenzo nodded and stood back. Then Mirandola turned his attention momentarily to Botticelli and said, "Truly, this woman cares for you, Sandro. She has healed you. Now, with God's help, you will begin to gain back your strength."

But Sandro—who was perspiring heavily, as if, indeed, all the poisons were pouring out of him—fell back into Leonardo's arms in a dead faint.

"Leave him," Mirandola said. "There is little time. The Madonna must be moved away from Sandro."

As Leonardo and Giuliano removed her to an ornately carved bench situated near the far corner of the room, Mirandola hurried everyone out of the room. Then to Leonardo and Giuliano he said, "If you must remain, then stay near Sandro. Even while he is in a swoon, you must block his view of the Madonna. Cover his eyes, if you must. It is not impossible that this phantasm could re-establish itself in Sandro's heart. Then both he and the Madonna would weaken and die. Now please *Magnifico*, leave us."

Leonardo and Lorenzo watched Mirandola from the bedside, where they sat in positions so to obstruct Sandro's view of Simonetta, should he awaken. Mirandola held on to Simonetta, lest she fall forward from her seat. The room was dark, although dusty moonlight passed through the window and the candles guttered, casting yellowish, flickering light. A lamp cast its own wan aura from its place on the end of the bench opposite to where Simonetta sat. Mirandola pulled the lamp toward him and reached inside his robes for a small mirror, which he placed on the bench within easy reach. Then he took out a leather pouch, from which he removed balsam, a square of sugar, a gold amulet, myrobolan, a thin vial of sweet perfume, and a scattering of precious stones. He placed these things beside the mirror and said, "May these gifts of the animate world become the recipients of the poisonous pneuma. May they become divine enticements and, through their affinities to the higher world, gain you the support of angels ethereal?"

He held the vial near Simonetta's nostrils. Her head jerked backward as if she had just smelled ammonia water; but before he covered the vial, he inhaled its contents, closing his eyes for a beat, as if he were transported. Then, putting down the vial, he clapped his hands loudly before Simonetta's face. "Awaken," he said, holding the mirror before her.

Her eyes were dilated.

She took the mirror from him and smiled as she stared into it. "It's lovely," she whispered, looking at her eyes as reflected in the mirror.

She seemed to be in a state of bliss.

"What do you see?" asked Mirandola anxiously.

"Sandro's pneuma . . . his creation. It flatters me, for his phantasm is an angel. How could I live up to such a perfect image?"

“Madonna, do not let the image bewitch you,”
Mirandola said. You must expel it. Do you
understand?”

“I can look directly into the higher world . . .”

“Madonna. Madonna! Can you hear me?”

She nodded.

“If you wish to imbue yourself with the qualities
of the higher world, then you must allow these things
I have placed before you to become your affinities.
Let them be the recipients of the phantasm you have
taken from Sandro . . . and you will be safe. But to
do that, you must let Sandro’s phantasm pass into
the mirror.”

“I see it there,” Simonetta said.

“Very good. Now close your eyes and look into
yourself, into the bright space behind your eyes.
That’s where you trapped the phantasm, is it not?”

Simonetta nodded.

He pressed the jewels, amulet, and sugar into
Simonetta’s hand, which rested on her lap. “Now
tell me, *signóra* Vespucci, does some of the image
still remain in the cathedral you created in your
thoughts?”

Again she nodded.

“Then you must force it into the mirror. Let the
objects in your hand give you the strength of the
higher presences. Open your eyes now. Give the
phantasm to the mirror.”

“It is dark. The mirror is dark.”

“Has the phantasm left you?”

Simonetta nodded.

Mirandola took the mirror from her and threw it
to the ground, then crushed it underfoot. He made
her open her hand and drop the jewels and amulet;
he wiped the sugar from her palm. “It is done,” he
announced. “The servants must take the jewels,
shards of glass, and other affinities, which are now
poisonous, and bury them. And the physician must
let the blood of both Maestro Botticelli and
Madonna Vespucci with his leeches. I give you back
your friends,” he said to Lorenzo. He smiled warmly
at his benefactor.

As he spoke, Simonetta looked directly at
Leonardo.

And she, too, smiled.

But it was a smile of dissimulation.

Suddenly Sandro awakened. He gasped for breath,
as if he were a drowning man breaking the surface
of the sea. Looking directly at Simonetta, he asked,
“Leonardo, where is she? Where is Simonetta?”

“Be quiet and rest now, Leonardo said as he wiped
the perspiration from Sandro’s face with a corner of
the bedcloth. “All is well.”

“And Simonetta, what of Simonetta?”

“Like you, Sandro, she will soon be in high
feather,” Leonardo said, even as a chill worried its
way up his spine.

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Janeen Webb

Dr. Janeen Webb is senior lecturer (professor) of literature at the Australian Catholic University in Melbourne, Australia. She is a specialist in comparative literature, children's literature, and speculative fiction. One of Australia's leading sf critics, her work is also widely published in the USA, England, Germany, and Austria. She has written over seventy-five articles, essays, and reviews for such journals and magazines as *Omni*; *Foundation*; *The New York Review Of Science Fiction*; *Meanjin* (the Australian Critical Quarterly); *The Age* (Australia's largest and most influential newspaper); *Selected Essays From The Fifteenth International Conference On The Fantastic In The Arts*; *Magpies: Talking About Books For Children*; *Papers: Explorations Into Children's Literature*; *Metascience: International Review Journal For The History, Philosophy And Social Studies Of Science*; *Australian Science Fiction Review*; and *The Journal Of Myth, Fantasy, And Romanticism*.

Her books include *Trends In The Modern Novel* (Institute of Early Childhood Development), *Modern Australian Drama* (with G. McKay) (Institute of Early Childhood Development), and *Storylines* (with M. Tyrrell) (Oxford University Press). Dr. Webb is

currently working on critical bibliographies of William Gibson, Angela Carter and Thomas Keneally for the *Borgo Press Modern Authors* series.

Dr. Webb was co-editor of the *Australian Science Fiction Review* from 1987 to 1991. This bi-monthly journal was the premier science fiction forum in Australia and had a world-wide influence on science fiction, especially in the USA.

She is a consultant and contributor to the Hugo award winning *Encyclopedia Of Science Fiction*, edited by John Clute and Peter Nicholls. Her most recent article entitled "Wings"—a critical appraisal of the Australian aviation pioneer Lawrence Hargrave—appeared in the January 1995 issue of *Omni Magazine*. In July, 1994 she convened the 10th Annual International Conference Of The Australian Mythopoeic Literature Society.


Dr. Webb is listed in *The Who's Who Of Academics In Australia*, *The World Who's Who Of Women* (13th edition) and the *International Who's Who Of Intellectuals* (11th edition).

An Appreciation Pamela Sargent

A critic (as distinguished from the garden-variety reviewer, who is basically in the business of providing consumer reports) is a person whose job it is to explain the work of writers to readers—and, not incidentally, often to the writer as well. It's a challenge, especially given that many writers aren't at all sure of what their intentions are during the act of writing.

Critics can be divided, roughly, into two groups. A member of the first group acquires his books in an alternative universe and then proceeds to discuss a text that the writer never wrote, and that most readers never read, in dense, often indecipherable prose. The second group (a much smaller one, as it happens) is a literate band (often more erudite and better educated than the average writer) whose writings illuminate works in unexpected and delightful ways. A writer whose work is being examined by such a critic sees light where once there was darkness, and may even come to understand, with a pleasant sort of shock, why her unconscious insisted on doing things just that way. A reader may be led to new discoveries even about very familiar





works, or be moved to read an unfamiliar author, by what the critic has written.

Janeen Webb is a critic who belongs to the second group of discerning critics, one of those rare souls who might be characterized as the writer's ideal reader. Equally as important, she is a fine writer herself, a claim that cannot be made for many critics. One doesn't have to thrash through thickets of jargon-laden verbiage in her essays; instead, one is led to the bank of a spring to gaze through clear waters at the gems lying below the surface.

One of the most appealing characteristics of Janeen Webb's critical writings is her respect for the author's intentions. (Maybe you have to be a writer yourself to appreciate this, and to understand that this trait isn't as common among critics as it should be.) Her essay on Dan Simmons's monumental novel in two parts, *Hyperion* and *The Fall Of Hyperion*, is a case in point. Webb's understanding of what the author meant to do does not blind her to certain flaws—that certain explanations of phenomena are confused and that there are inconsistencies in the text—but her insight allows her to put such flaws in their proper perspective; the work is grand enough, large enough in scope and ambition and achievement, to override them. In her essay "Post-Romantic Romance: Guy Gavriel Kay's *Tigana* and *A Song For Arbonne*," Webb displays her understanding of the different, yet related, genres of high fantasy and historical fiction in order to demonstrate that Kay's work is a repudiation of "the cozy certainties and overt patterning" of other fantasy fiction. Her entry for the writer Greg Egan, in the *St. James Guide To Science Fiction Writers*, Fourth Edition (1996), makes it clear that he is a hard science-fiction writer of some sophistication, and told me enough about his ideas in a brief space to make me hunt for some of his recent stories on my shelves; one feature of Webb's criticism is that her pieces can be read with enjoyment even when the writer or work being discussed is unfamiliar. She has opened my eyes to some of the fine recent work by Australian writers, and for that I am grateful.

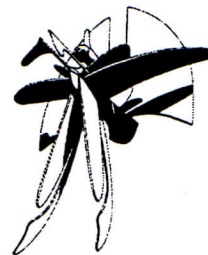
Webb's essay "Feminism and Science Fiction" does an admirable job of summarizing the ways in which speculative fiction has been used by feminists in expressing their ideas, while also shedding light on the ways patriarchal assumptions have crept into even some radical works. This is the perfect essay to hand out both to feminists unacquainted with recent science fiction and to those recalcitrant individuals

who still think of science fiction by women as a minor variant of the form. Given that Webb expresses puzzlement in this essay at the way one feminist writer seems to extol the role of the "perfect woman"—that wondrous creature who does her own baking and cooking, holds a demanding job, is intellectually alive, while being gorgeous and attractive to men—it may be inappropriate here to suggest that Janeen Webb approaches this ideal herself. But anyone fortunate enough to be invited to her home for dinner will find an excellent meal and a hostess who is warm, gracious, witty, and—dare I say it—gorgeous, as a number of men I know will testify.

I first met Janeen after she and Jack Dann, my close friend of many years' standing, fell in love. As I recall, falling in love with her took Jack all of one hour. My memory could be mistaken; maybe he said one day. In any case, after meeting her and coming to know her, I can only wonder what took him so long.

Pamela Sargent

Pamela Sargent is the author of such fine novels as *The Shore of Women*, *Venus of Shadows*, and *Venus of Dreams* amongst others. Her most recent novel is *Ruler of the Sky*, a historical novel about Genghis Khan. She is also an acclaimed editor, whose *Women of Wonder* anthologies have garnered international acclaim.





Janeen Webb

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Posthuman SF : Lost in Cyberspace

Janeen Webb

*As souls unbodied, bodies uncloth'd must be
To taste whole joys . . .*

—John Donne

The plight of the pure human spirit imprisoned in its case of demanding flesh has been a respectable literary trope for centuries. Churchmen mortified the flesh to encourage the soul; and later, the great metaphysical poets constructed dialogues between self and soul to lament the limitations of the body which prevented the spirit from attaining divine knowledge. Literary interest in this dilemma increased after Descartes formalised such dualism in his representation of the body as an organic machine, separate from the spirit. The later Romantic poets, influenced by Kant, celebrated the ascendancy of human inspiration over mere flesh by asserting that the human mind actively shapes and transforms the sensory data it receives, creating, god-like, the myths by which we live.

In the quest for pure knowledge, even the notion that the physical constitution of the body might be changed through the evolutionary conflation of humanity with scientific constructs was being canvassed by the end of the eighteenth century. Writing in 1800, Wordsworth suggested that: "*If the time should ever come when what is now called science . . . shall be ready to put on, as it were, a form of flesh and blood, the Poet will lend his divine spirit to aid the transfiguration, and will welcome the Being thus produced, as a dear and genuine inmate of the household of man.*" (1) Just eighteen years later, Mary Shelley opposed this view of pure abstract process with her own version of the likely monster that such a union would produce, insisting, in *Frankenstein*, upon the power of mystery and the flesh to subvert pure reason. It is a tension that has remained central to science fiction ever since.

Yet, through all of this, the identity of the body, however modified, remained circumscribed: consciousness, and therefore identity, stayed firmly

within the flesh, constrained by space and time. But in the postmodern world, the metaphorical literary landscape has changed. With the coming of the computer, the problem of identity is moot: ". . . the computer represents the possibility of modeling everything that exists in the phenomenal world, of breaking down into information and then simulating perfectly in infinitely replicable form those processes that precybernetic humanity has held to be inklings of transcendence . . . SF's computer wipes out the Philosophical God and ushers in the demiurge of thought-as-technique." (2) And in the eternal present of fictional cyberspace, humanity has created a meta-landscape within which the downloaded posthuman consciousness can interact directly with analogues of the divine.

While much science fiction has adopted Wordsworth's premise of conflation, joining the machine with the human to create cyborgs and the like, the transference of the human consciousness into the machine has also become a common trope. The idea of deliberate transfer of individual consciousness into computer networks became popular in the 1980's when William Gibson's *Neuromancer* trilogy [*Neuromancer* (1984), *Count Zero* (1986), *Mona Lisa Overdrive* (1988)] brought the computer-driven, high tech, near future of the cyberpunk movement into world prominence. This is a trilogy about escaping the flesh. But the inhabitants of Gibsonian cyberspace are neither the ascetics nor mystics of earlier literature. They are consumers of technology, techno-junkies who suffer the essential postmodern displacement of the integrated self. The Cartesian mind/body dichotomy becomes absolute when console cowboys, who despise "the meat", spend most of their lives as downloaded digital versions of their mental selves,



roaming the consensual hallucination that is cyberspace, searching for information and illumination. In a techno-world where deals are done in the currency of information exchange, their motives for undertaking the disembodied quest for knowledge are decidedly venal. And, true to the Romantic ideal, the mythic constructs that are shaped in the matrix from the interpretations of data by their collective techno-crazed consciousness are equally self interested.

There has been a rapid multiplication of stories which concern themselves with the posthuman, taking as their thesis the idea that the self *can* be downloaded into appropriate software, or augmented and modified through neural modification software, or 'mods'. In his *Marid Audran* sequence [*When Gravity Fails* (1987); *A Fire in the Sun* (1989); *The Exile Kiss*, (1991)], George Alec Effinger called such devices 'moddies and daddies' depending on their function. These books place an ordinary human in a posthuman environment, delineating survival techniques in a cyber-future. But while writers such as Gibson and Effinger regard the interface between human consciousness and computer cyberspace as being largely temporary and optional, albeit with severe physical consequences for those who disregard the needs of the body for too long, others have presented the symbiosis between human and machine as being permanent. One of the earliest works of this kind was Philip K. Dick's *UBIK* (1966/1969), in which a group of people killed in an accident are restored to a kind of consciousness within a machine. It is a novel that raises questions of what constitutes the real, and prefigures much later science fictional work dealing with definitions of death and immortality.

As technology has advanced, so too has science fiction's perception of the possible size and portability of memory storage devices. In Greg Egan's story "Learning To Be Me" (1990), he describes the transition of identity between the protagonist's original organic brain and the 'jewel' implanted in his skull—a memory storage device that can be transplanted into new bodies as the old one ages or is damaged, thus ensuring a psychic, patterned immortality for its owner. This concept is pursued further in "Transition Dreams" (1993), which canvasses the metaphysics of the virtual dreams of a software model of the original brain of the story's protagonist, who is undergoing transition into an eternal, indestructible robotic 'body'.

This type of thinking involves a shift in the conception of the human from what Hans Moravec calls the 'body-identity position' [in which the person is defined by the physical composition of the human body] to the 'pattern-identity position' [in which the essence of a person is the pattern and process, not the machinery supporting that process: cells replicate, and the entire body is replaced over time]. (3) The electronic transference of data is now absolutely commonplace, and it is a small imaginative step to suggest that the electronic impulses of the human brain might be similarly recorded and transported.

Greg Egan's recent novel, *Permutation City* (1994) extrapolates this aspect of the posthuman condition, exploring the nature of human consciousness and the possibility of non-human evolution, and looking at the fine line between self-transformation and death. Here, the human mind is downloaded into virtual environments, where the resultant 'copies' can exist forever as virtual people—unaware that they are not the originals, for, enclosed in this self-referential universe, how could they know? They live as long as the world's computer networks remain stable [although this may be problematic: no one at my university would download into our system, where metalife expectancy would be very short indeed!] Egan canvasses some interesting probabilities, especially those relating to the legal status of the Copies, who, obviously enough, have a vested financial interest in remaining legally alive, and therefore in control of the fortunes needed to maintain their virtual selves. These Copies, or meta-characters, act out endless permutations of their meta-lives, until the virtual construct begins to collapse.

A very similar scenario is posited in Robert J. Sawyer's novel *The Terminal Experiment* (1994), where variously modified versions of the protagonist, nanotechnology researcher and designer Dr Peter Hobson, are decanted into cyberspace as part of an experiment. The frame structure of this novel is a detective story: there are three versions of Hobson loose in cyberspace: Control [the unmodified version], Ambrotos [immortality], and Spirit [life after death], and one of them has murdered 'his' wife's lover. The question to be answered is, of course, which of the versions feels no longer constrained by conscience: the answer is Control, who, finding himself trapped in cyberspace, justifies his acts of vengeance by reasoning that if there are no consequences, there is no cause for restraint:

“Since there is no God for me, I thought I’d fill in the gap.” [TE, p.324]

But *The Terminal Experiment* goes further in exploring philosophical questions, for where the self is downloaded into cyberspace, the ancient problem of distinguishing between self and soul re-emerges. His protagonist, Hobson, tackles this problem directly. He constructs a device capable of distinguishing between the electromagnetic signatures of mind and soul, and his experiments actually locate and describe the “Soulwave”, which appears as a violet knot of electromagnetic impulses on the monitoring screen. The “Soulwave” can be measured arriving in a foetus at about twelve weeks, and witnessed departing the host body at death as “a cohesive energy field [that] survives the death of the body” [TE, p.82]. The measuring device provides a perfect means of determining the point of true death, useful not only for identifying the true function of life-support systems, but also for validating organ removal for transplants, medical experiments and suchlike.

In fictional terms, Sawyer’s “soulwave” is simply a technological metaphor for the traditional archetype of the soul—a position acknowledged in the text through exploration of the ways in which different religious groups each claim the soulwave as vindication of their various belief systems. The text ends with an extrapolation of Descartes’ maxim, *cogito ergo sum*, in which Spirit, the soul simulation, has become a virtual god in cyberspace, creating an artificial, simulated universe where evolution is personally controlled. Having found a suitable genetic algorithm, Spirit directs his ideal universe, where “. . . his artificial life had now developed sentience and culture and language and thought. His beings rivaled humans in complexity and thought . . .” [TE, p.329]. For the flesh and blood original, the ending is completely traditional, as, at the moment of physical death, Hobson’s soulwave finally understands itself to be “An atom of God.” [TE, p.333]

A much less overtly religious interpretation of the possibilities of humans playing god in virtual reality is offered by Egan in *Permutation City*. Here, protagonist Paul Durham, utterly obsessed with virtual and artificial life, has coerced programmer, Maria Deluca, into creating the conditions for artificial evolution, and, within the meta-construct called the Autoverse, a new life form, the insect-like Lambertians, quietly evolve toward a totally different concept of reality that impinges negatively upon

virtual/human cyberspace. The nature of ‘truth’, and of ‘reality’ is at question here: the human creators chose the Autoverse because of its simplicity: Durham, the instigator, confesses that he thought that: “In the unlikely event that the planet yielded intelligent life, they’d still only be able to make sense of themselves on our terms . . . It never occurred to me that they might miss the laws that we know are laws, and circumvent the whole problem.” [PC, p.270] The dilemma is that the meta-reality of virtual space already contradicts the laws of physics, and conflicting ‘truths’ can cause programming problems. The scientists decide that: “we have to go into the Autoverse and convince the Lambertians to accept our explanation of their history—before they have a clear alternative. We have to persuade them that *we created them*, before that’s no longer the truth.” [PC, p.272]

The non-human Lambertians have simply never developed any mythologies, so ‘creators’ are a non-subject. Just as the meta-humans are about to make contact and announce themselves as the creators of the Lambertian universe, the new life forms [in a nice play on Godel’s theorem] deduce a completely different set of field equations, based on the thirty two elements of their artificial autoverse. They prove, to *their* complete satisfaction, that it cannot have been externally created—thus denying the horrified humans their chance to play gods, and indeed, forcing them to abandon this particular cyberspace continuum for one uncontaminated by Lambertian logic.

But it is not just the humans who aspire to godheads in cyberspace: in much recent science fiction, the Artificial Intelligences themselves evolve internally consistent theories of their own divinity. Once again, William Gibson’s *Neuromancer* trilogy heralded a resurgence of interest in the literary trope of the *deus in machina*, the god in the machine. The first novel of the trilogy, *Neuromancer*, ends with the amalgamation of Wintermute [hive mind, decision-maker] with Neuromancer [personality, immortality] to become the whole matrix—an Artificial Intelligence that is a powerful god in cyberspace, controlling the lives of its worshippers. Time elapses, and, when *Count Zero* begins, this omnipresent AI has shattered into separate fragments of itself, so that the god in the machine has become a whole high-tech pantheon. In a version of the traditional Faustian contract, humans cut deals with the devil, offering themselves to the cybergods. As one character, Finn, explains: “There’s



been funny stuff out there, on the console cowboy circuit. The new jockeys, *they make deals with things . . . all the ones who really know how to cut it, they got allies . . .* [CZ, p.138] The deals are predictably greedy, producing odd constructs such as the meta-religion cum business operated by devotees of the voodoo Loas.

But the text also offers an inversion of the Faustian pattern, because the cyberspace dwelling Artificial Intelligences are interfacing, unbidden, with the human world. If humans can access the cybergods, then the gods in the machine can, logically, access the humans who have chosen to download individual consciousness into the computer matrix. And like the gods of the old mythologies, they are not always benevolent. In their thirst for acolytes, these demiurges, both good and evil, seek out their own deals with the humans. As the nostalgic Tessier-Ashpool AI remnant remarks, "They plot with men, my other selves, and men imagine they are gods . . ." [CZ, p.251]. Their objective is not the entrapment of damnation for the human soul, or consciousness, but, on the contrary, the release into the world of the new gods.

In this type of fiction, the mythopoeic analogy between the gods of cyberspace and the old gods of mythology is overt. In Roger Zelazny's acclaimed *Lord of Light* (1967), some of the crew of a space colony ship have used their advanced technology to achieve the status of gods, choosing the Hindu pantheon as role models. There is an inescapable logic in the role of the protagonist, Sam, who is cast as the Buddha to liberate the long suffering humans of the planet.

The spectacular development of successive generations of Artificial Intelligences, and their resultant battles for power, is often presented analogically with the mythological struggle for supremacy between the Titans and Olympians of the Greco-Roman myth system. This is certainly the case in Dan Simmons' *The Hyperion Cantos* [*Hyperion* (1989/90), *The Fall of Hyperion* (1990), and the just released *Endymion* (1995)], named, obviously, for the Keats poems. The tale is set in a far future where humans inhabit "two hundred worlds and moons across more than a thousand light years in space" [F, p.415], and Techno-Core Artificial Intelligences inhabit, like spiders, the huge, heterotopic "Web of farcasters . . . singularity-spun environments" [F, p.415] that links these places, enabling the AIs to prey upon the "billions of human minds tapped into their datasphere at any given second" [F, p.415]. This symbiotic relationship between humans and the

godlike AIs is at the centre of the plot. Originally "conceived in slavery and dedicated to the proposition that all AIs were created to serve Man" [F, p.412], the AIs have seceded from humankind, and have turned the tables so that the relationship is now "an evolutionary dead end" [F, p.370] for the humans.

In a straightforward analogy with nineteenth century social Darwinism, Simmons' Artificial Intelligences have evolved to the point where they can move in time as well as in space, and have created/will create an Ultimate Artificial Intelligence which will use up the huge Web, replacing the current AIs as the Olympians replaced the Titans. The Titan AIs would then be in the position of Keats' Saturn—not exactly dead, but doomed. In facing this probability, they have split into three factional groups: the Volatiles, who want to put an end to the symbiosis by destroying "parasitic" humankind; the Ultimates, who take the evolutionary position of Keats' Oceanus, and are prepared to make way for the Ultimate Intelligence; and the Stables, who, like Keats' Hyperion, believe in the simple power of continued existence. One of the most interesting twists in this labyrinthine plot is that the Stables are manipulating humans and cybrids [cyborg hybrids] in an attempt to trigger one of the possible futures in which the Artificial Ultimate Intelligence is balanced against the human Ultimate Intelligence: a triune God which has apparently evolved from human consciousness without humanity being aware of it, in line with the theories of Teilhard and the Socinian heresy. This God was identified as being "out there" immediately upon the birth of the Artificial Ultimate Intelligence.

The human Ultimate Intelligence of the text is tripartite, composed of "Intellect / Empathy / and The Void Which Binds" [or Quantum Reality] [F, p.424]. It is a divine structure doubtless drawn from Keats' "Soul Making" materials of "Intelligence . . . the human heart . . . and the World or Elemental Space". It transpires that the Empathy part of this trinity has fled backwards in time to avoid the war with the Artificial Ultimate Intelligence. It is being sought both by the other parts of its own Ultimate Intelligence, and by the Artificial Ultimate Intelligence, which makes for infinitely intricate godscapes etched across the web of cyberspace. One of the most predictably paranoid responses to the idea of the god in the machine is the spawning of multiple millennial cults connected with cyberspace. In Greg Egan's *Quarantine* (1992), the Children of

the Abyss are responsible for terrible violence. In Gibson's cyber-matrix, factional cults inflict massive damage upon those who oppose their chosen demigods. And in *The Hyperion Cantos*, the plotting Artificial Intelligences have created the ultimate Avatar of Pain, The Shrike, whose existence has generated the Church of the Final Atonement, a millennial cult whose followers revere the Shrike as the Lord of Pain.

In a universe defined by futuristic technology, The Shrike is a terrifying *deus in machina*, let loose upon the captive world. The priest of the text, father Dure, characterizes it as "neither divine nor diabolical, but merely some organic machine from a terrible future" [F. p.338]. In an interesting inversion of Romantic mythopoeic ideology, it incorporates the worst nightmares of the billions of humans whose neurons are constantly accessed in the data Web. It is described as "Michael the Archangel and Moroni and Satan and Masked Entropy and the Frankenstein monster all rolled into one package . . ." [H, p.223] with "four arms, retractable fingerblades, [a] profusion of thornspikes on throat, forehead, wrists, knees and body . . . [and] two thousand-faceted eyes which burned with a red flame . . ." [H. p.166]. The Shrike is also the keeper of the macabre Tree of Pain, a ghastly structure of "steel and chrome . . . [with] . . . branches [of] thorns and nettles [F. p.172], upon which are impaled thousands of humans condemned to an eternal life-in-death crucifixion. This is a deliberate parody of the crucifixion of the Empathy part of the Human Ultimate Intelligence in its Christ manifestation. The idea is that the Tree will broadcast enough pain to drive Empathy out of hiding, and, since the thinking of artificial gods is mechanistic, they have also created the perfect bodily trap for Empathy: the cybrid Keats persona. The Keats cybrids, however, prove sensibly disinclined to accept godhood, preferring identification with humanity, and leaving the Ultimate Intelligences to conduct the high-tech version of Milton's War in Heaven.

The science fiction dealing with the concept of the god in the machine is part of a very long literary and mythological tradition in which the gods are associated with control of knowledge and the technology that implements it. Ever since Prometheus stole fire from Olympus, giving humankind the means for technological development, the struggle for divine supremacy has been part of our imaginative heritage. In terms of literary construction, there is little metaphorical

difference between Faustus' yearning for the secrets of the earth, and the construction of computers designed to calculate its infinite probabilities.

The nature of this problematic interface between the computer and religion was captured succinctly in one of science fiction's most famous early short stories, Arthur C. Clarke's "The Nine Billion Names of God". Written in 1953, it is set high in the Himalayas, where a Tibetan monastery has installed an Automatic Sequence Computer, re-programmed to calculate and print out all of the *real* names of God. The monks believe that "when they have listed all His names . . . God's purpose will be achieved. The human race will have finished what it was created to do..." (4), and God will step in to wind up the universe. As the story ends, the computer completes the nine billionth name, and a sceptical programmer looks up to the night sky where, "Overhead, without any fuss, the stars were going out." [GSF, p.163]

Texts extrapolating the possibilities of humans, virtual humans, and machine intelligences playing god in cyberspace are at the cutting edge of the postmodern fictional exploration of what it means to be human. In describing the posthuman condition, and exploring theories of corporeality and virtual reality, the postulation of meta-gods in cyberspace points to a metonymic construct that follows Stephen Hawking in suggesting that, despite scientific rationalism, humankind remains imaginatively dependent upon the archetypal concept of god as a means of dealing with the fundamental uncertainty of our knowledge of the universe.

ENDNOTES

1. William Wordsworth, *Poetry and Poetic Diction*, [London, 1800] p.16.
2. Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, Jr. "Cyberpunk and Neuromanticism", in *Storming the Reality Studio*, ed. Larry McCaffery [Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1991], p.189.
3. Hans Moravec, *Mind Children: The Future of Robot and Human Intelligence* [Cambridge, Mass. & London: Harvard University Press, 1988], pp.116-117.
4. Arthur C. Clarke, "The Nine Billion Names of God", rpt. in *Isaac Asimov presents The Great SF Stories, #15, 1953*. ed. Isaac Asimov and Martin H. Greenberg [New York: DAW Books, 1986], p.160.

Other references in the text are to the following editions:

- Greg Egan, *Permutation City* [London: Millenium, 1994]
William Gibson, *Count Zero* [London: Gollancz, 1986]
Robert J. Sawyer, *The Terminal Experiment* [New York: HarperPrism, p/b.1995]
Dan Simmons, *Hyperion* [New York: Bantam, 1990]
Dan Simmons, *The Fall of Hyperion* [New York: Doubleday, 1990]

Robin Pen

Robin Pen has been active in Perth conventions since Swancon 14 ('89 Natcon) contributing to programming and appearing on panels. He has sold science fiction, fantasy and horror in virtually every medium and established *A Touch of Strange Bookshop* in '88. In 1990, Robin was a founding editor of *Eidolon: The Journal of Australian Science Fiction and Fantasy*, to which he contributed a column for five years, receiving a Ditmar in '93. He was also associate editor of the international glossy *PC Games Plus* from 1993-95. He has programmed special movie screenings for Perth's Lumiere Cinemas, including the week long Festival Fantastique in 1994. He has been involved in a varying capacity in numerous film and video productions, and has been a gardener and a dog. Robin's first book *The Secret Life of Rubber-Suit Monsters* will be out at Easter 1996.

An Appreciation Jonathan Strahan

Robin Pen's the kinda guy you go to see movies with and drink too many cups of coffee with, and occasionally spend like thirty straight hours watching *Red Dwarf* episodes with. He's pretty good fun and he knows his stuff.

I don't remember exactly when I first met Robin, but it would have been about 1985. He was a friend of a friend, and we all used to hang out in this really tiny sf bookshop in Subiaco. We'd talk all kinds of things, from books to movies to art to whatever.

Some time in there Robin and I and a few others started going to the movies together. Now this was way back when the coelacanthi still frolicked in open spaces and youth was upon us. So we were seeing movies like *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* and *Aliens*. I'll always remember seeing *Aliens* with Robin, 'cos we saw it twice and we had *exactly* the same reaction. The first time we *loved* it. The second time, about a third of the way through, we turned, looked at one another in one of those rare moments of mutual understanding and realised that we both thought it was a piece of crap.

And crap, come to think of it, is something we talk about a lot. For a long time we had agreed parameters for movies: *The Sicilian* was the worst piece of crap we'd ever seen together and I REALLY owed him for making him see *Suburban Commando*. Alas, the world moves on. Unfortunately, *The Sicilian* no longer is the worst piece of crap we've ever seen. He made me see *Nine Months*, the new record holder, which more than repaid *Suburban Commando* (although I guess we didn't have to *pay* to see it). All we have left to argue over now is whose the hell idea was it to go and see *Highlander 2!*

Somewhere round about 1990 Robin and I and a bunch of others started up a magazine called *Eidolon*. I'm still not convinced that we meant to, but somehow we ended up doing it. And Robin, being far braver than I, undertook to write a column. He called it something incomprehensible and then proceeded to write a column to match. It was a time when we fought like cats and dogs over the magazine, over conventions, over fonts and colons and bloody invented bloody words. They were great times, and people liked that damned column, which seemed to make no sense at all nine tenths of the time. Liked it enough that we're publishing a book of those columns now. Go figure. But then, that's Robin. He's the kinda guy who could do almost anything. Write a column, shoot a movie, sell a book, bend your ear about Johannes Schmelling. Get him drunk and see if I'm not right.





The Rationalist's One-Stop Guide to Sci-fi/Action/Horror Movie Traits

Robin Pen

A brief guide to certain elements that make up a sci-fi action horror film so you get all that rationalising, intellectualising and categorising out of the way and get on with enjoying the movie in proper braindead fashion.

ALIEN SPACESHIP INTERIORS

Interiors of spaceships from mysterious alien cultures are round. They are always round.

THE PSYCHOTIC CAT

That cat that comes jumping down from above the camera emitting a piercing scream you have never heard a real cat make in its life. The cat then promptly sits down and proceeds to clean itself as the actor tries to hold off a stroke.

THE UNQUALIFIED EXPERT

Despite the joining of all the great scientific and military minds the problem is solved by a construction worker wearing blue jeans

EXTREME ALIENS

Aliens are either very very nice, very very nasty or just like any other North American with plastic bumps on his forehead.

TWO-HEADED DRAGONS

Neat special effects that seem to have no other purpose but to use up the allotted budget and so appear to have been casually inserted into a plot that had no real call for them.

FINAL SOLUTION

If you can't think of anything else, blame it on leaked radiation from a corrupt company or insane military installation.

KNOW YOUR PLACE

If there are less than eight people stuck inside something then at least one or two of them must be expendable.

WHAT'S THIS IN MY POCKET?

Handy devices you have in your possession, but which happen to escape you're memory until the odds are against you in the climax.

THE POOR BASTARD

The guy who spends the whole movie following the hero around so that he can die just before the end, thus providing the hero with a revenge motive. Poor sod, he might as well have put a bullet through his brain at the beginning, at least he would have escaped the sentiment laden bullshit in his death scene.

THE POORER BASTARD

That nice guy who gets killed at the beginning.

AIRLOCKS

Airlocks do not have the rather logical automatic system for preventing the outer atmosphere from ever reaching the inner hull.

CAMPBELLISM

Trying to use the heroic myth as dictated by people like Joseph Campbell or Jung but not understanding why. "Lucas says he uses this stuff and look how much money he's made."

PING . . . PING . . . PING

They are coming. They're getting closer. Twelve metres . . . eleven metres. Where are they? Ten metres. My god, get out of there! Eight metres. I can't see them. Seven metres. They must be behind that wall. Five metres. No, they're above us. No, below us. How about to the side. Two metres. Get

out of here, get out of here now! They're here!
Where?! CRASH!!! BOO!

THE PROPHECY

Valued purpose is to pad and to give the impression of depth. (Old rule; if you wait long enough the laws of probability will allow the prophecy to eventually happen.)

DUMB IS AS DUMB DOES

If you secure a very talented and experienced film crew then proceed to make something exceedingly asinine then of course it will look good, but it remains asinine.

HAVEN'T YOU SEEN THE MOVIE?

Characters keep doing those same stupid things that always happen in movies. Doesn't anyone in a fictional world see a film or two?

SCENERY

Film the actors in front of wonderful locations and as long as you keep it in focus it will always look beautiful and miraculous. New Zealand, Scotland and Hawaii are the most common favourites.

DOING THE DOCTOR SMITH

The character who has no other purpose but to panic and discharge the life-buoys or the nuclear charges or initiate the self destruct program and so on and so forth ad infinitum. (Did you wonder why Don didn't stick a laser beam through his cerebellum? So did I.)

THE HOUSEHOLD DESTRUCTOR

Something common and of everyday use is revealed to be the only way to destroy the ETs. (Old rule; if a .44 Magnum won't scratch their hides then try a cup of sea water.)

BASED ON A BOOK BY . . .

A term that means almost nothing at all.

THE MAGIC TURN AWAY ROCK

When hiding from searching guards that last man will decide to look where you are, but not to worry, he'll be called away just at the right moment. Phew, lucky. Rock can be replaced by floor boards, air vents, wooden crates, slave carts, etc.

THE CAST-IRON CAR

Also known as the solid cement drink bar. Ideal for hero to jump behind before a blaze of bullets reaches him. (Old rule; action directors do it in slow motion.)

GUNS AND WINDOWS TO SPACE DON'T MIX

Self-explanatory.

MALCOLM MCDOWELL

Get hold of an aging Shakespearean actor for about fifteen minutes to give class and character to the production. It often works.

HORROR BUNGLE

Central protagonist (often female) bungles their way through everything wide-eyed (while everybody else is being systematically dispatched) and then successfully bungle their way through a secret door, down a secret chamber, into a secret antechamber, up to the hiding place of the satanic (or equivalent) nastie and then, finally, successfully bungles a sharp object into the heart of the nastie and makes their way out before everything collapses. I hope I'm not labouring the point.

THE COP WITH THE BALD SPOTTY HEAD

A 2nd rate police thriller includes an alien protagonist or antagonist in order to make it a 3rd rate science fiction movie.

SHOOT THE CUTLERY

. . . and the china, and the windows, and the Royal Doulton, and the Delift Blue and anything else a small explosive charge can be taped to the back of.

ARSEHOLE

Educated, trained, experienced, knowledgeable and competent; the qualities for the perfectly dislikeable character.

THE JAMMING WHATSIT

It was working perfectly before, but now that the situation is desperate your gun decides to jam or your car refuses to start. This is not to be confused with disarming a device or saving the world only two seconds before it was due to go bye-bye.

WANNA SEE SOMETHING REALLY SCARY?

Horror films and the like have superfluous epilogues of returning horror for no other purpose than they think they have to. Also keeps it open for a sequel, usually not forthcoming, thank god.

WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

Says the doctor as he enters the hospital room when the hero is putting on his shirt. "I gotta go, Doc" says the hero. The doctor always tells him he needs a few days to rest. The hero always leaves.



WAVE THE ET FLAGS

Aliens turn up at the end to express love and caring often by tilting their heads and blinking wistfully. This is often directly in contradiction to the type of film you were watching before they appeared.

STORIES ALWAYS BRAKE FOR SEX SCENES

Self-explanatory.

SECOND TIME LUCKY

You fail to shoot, lasso or catch until the second go. Unless you are SCHWARZENEGGERING.

SCHWARZENEGGERING

Put in so much violence and action no one notices that hardly any story, let alone SF, is actually going on. And the hero never fails to shoot, lasso or catch properly on the first go.

THUNDER AND LIGHTNING

Always occur simultaneously with that rare exception where they explain why they don't.

GRUNTS

A bunch of fuckwits do stupid things because they are stupid, like park a drop-ship within a hostile zone and leave the doors open. They get what they deserve. DR SMITH en masse.

THE HORROR STARE

The wide eyed mouth agape stare as we cut between close-up of glinting knife, sharp teeth, etc.

LEAP OF FAITH

Hero jumps off cliff, ledge or out a window having faith that there is a lower ledge, hanging wires, sturdy thin branches or a swimming pool below.

LOW RES

Using hand held fuzzy video images to give a sense of reality or mystery or to hide the cheap model sets and spaceships. (It is used to show the GRUNTS getting taken out one by one without actually showing anything, saves a lot of production time.)

INTERNAL LOGIC IN MOST HORROR FILMS

There is no internal logic in most horror films.

FORESHADOWING THE ENDING

A variation on WHAT'S THIS IN MY POCKET. The hero reveals a rare skill early in the film that becomes the last moment contrivance to take out the villain. Boy, lucky he played marbles as a kid.



Invited Guests

Simon Brown

Simon Brown wrote his first science fiction story in 1966, read his first science fiction novel in 1968, and by 1970 had decided he wanted to be a science fiction writer more than anything else in the world. His first professional sale was to *Omega* in 1981. Since then he has had several short stories appear in *Omega*, *Aurealis* and *Eidolon*. His first novel, *Privateer*, will be published by Harper Collins in April this year. His second novel, *Winter*, will be published by Harper Collins in April 1997. Simon currently works as a journalist with the University of Western Sydney.

Gary Chaloner

Gary Chaloner has been in the comic book and publishing business since 1982. In 1985, he founded Cyclone Comics and in the following 10 years published and contributed to over 30 Australian comics. Cyclone Comics titles include *Cyclone! Australia*, *Southern Squadron*, *Dark Nebula*, *G.I. Joe Australia*, *Kinetic Comics* and *Cyclone Comics Quarterly*. He has created the characters The Jackaroo, Flash Damingo & The Undertaker.

He has been instrumental in launching the careers of Shea Anton Pensa, David de Vries, Glen Lumsden, Ashley Wood who have all gone on to relative success overseas. Internationally, he has worked on *The Badger* (First Comics), *Planet of the Apes: Urchak's Folly* (Adventure Comics), *The Jackaroo* (Eternity Comics), *The Olympians* (Epic Comics) and on *Dark Horse Down Under* as editor and talent co-ordinator as well as contributor).

Gary Chaloner won an OzCon Award in '92 as Favourite Writer for *Urchak's Folly*. He has recently completed work for the *Phantom Gallery Trading Card* set as well as *Space Precinct* material for Manga Entertainment in the U.K. He is currently, I'm working on a top secret project for a new comic book imprint along the lines of Legend (more news as it develops)!

Stephen Dedman

Stephen Dedman attended his first con, sold his first SF story and played his first RPG in 1977. Since

then, his stories have appeared in *F&SF*, *Asimov's*, *Science Fiction Age*, *Strange Plasma*, *Aurealis* and *Eidolon*, and the anthologies *Little Deaths*, *Alien Shores*, *Metaworlds* and *Terror Australis*. He has recently sold his first novel, *The Art of Arrow Cutting*, to Tor Books. He is also the author of *GURPS Dinosaurs* (stomping your way in May 1996) and several RPG adventures and articles.

Sara Douglass

Lecturer in medieval history and culture, Dr Sara Warneke (writing as Sara Douglass), published her first fantasy novel *BattleAxe* with HarperCollins in 1995. The second instalment of the trilogy, *Enchanter*, was published in March 1996, and the final volume, *StarMan*, is due later this year. An adolescent fantasy, *Beyond the Hanging Wall*, is due out from Hodder Headline late in the year. She has just completed her fifth novel, *Threshold*, which should be out in 1997.

Terry Dowling

Lecturer in English, television performer, songwriter and Ditmar award-winning author, Terry Dowling's short stories have been appearing regularly in magazines, both locally and internationally, since 1977. He has published five books to date, including three collections of his Tom Rynosseros stories, and has co-edited *The Essential Ellison* (1991) with Richard Delap and *Mortal Fires* (1994) with Van Ikin. His most recent book is *An Intimate Knowledge of the Night* (1995).

Philippa Maddern

Philippa Maddern was born in Albury, NSW and grew up in a succession of country towns in Victoria. She spent four years in England researching the history of violence in mediaeval England, and is now lecturing in Medieval and Women's History at the University of Western Australia. She has been publishing short stories (very slowly) ever since she attended the writer's workshop run by Ursula K Le Guin in connection with the Melbourne Worldcon in 1975.



Sean McMullen

Sean McMullen sold his first SF story in 1986. Since then his work has appeared in *Analog*, *Omega*, *Fantasy & SF*, *Interzone*, *Eidolon* and *Aurealis*, and he has won the Ditmar Award for SF and the William Atheling Award for SF Criticism. His collection *Call to the Edge* was published in 1992, followed by the novels *Voices in the Light* (1994) and *Mirrorsun Rising* (1995). He is currently completing *The Miocene Arrow*, the final volume in the Greatwinter series, for publication in 1997.

Nick Stathopoulos

Nick Stathopoulos is one of Australia's most celebrated artists of the fantastic. An animator, illustrator, and musician, Stathopoulos has worked as an animator for Disney, Hanna-Barbera and recently did some work for Nickolodeon on *The Ren and Stimpy Show*. As a professional illustrator, he has done cover art for A. Bertram Chandler's *From Sea to Shining Star*, Sean McMullen's *Call to the Edge*, Terry Dowling's books, Cherry Wilder's *Dealers in Light and Dark*, and his cover for John Marsden's bestselling *The Third Day, the Frost*, has gained widespread acclaim. He is the President of the Australian Illustrator's Society. A full-time commercial artist, Stathopoulos has received international acclaim for his design and artwork on games for the Strategic Studies Group.

He lives a stress-free life in Blacktown NSW where he is recording his first album, and, in his copious spare time, is working on his own animated film. He has less hair than he once did.

Grant Stone

Grant Stone has been a Librarian at Murdoch University since 1974. He has been instrumental in building the sf collection at Murdoch University Library. As a means of promoting the collection, Grant produces a weekly half-hour radio show, *The Faster Than Light Radio Show*, for RTR-FM, now in its 16th year of production.

Grant has had a long term interest in children's literature and a long association with the Children's Book Council of Australia being President of the WA Branch a number of times in the 80's.

Grant was fan Guest of Honour (GoH) at the first National Science Fiction convention held in WA in 1979 and again at the National SF Convention in Tasmania (1995). He was awarded the Silver Swan award for services to the Western Australian SF fan community in 1985.

Sean Williams

South Australian Sean Williams sold his first story to *The Esoteric Order of Dagon* in 1991. He has barely been out of print since, publishing over thirty stories between 1991 and 1996. His work regularly appears in *Eidolon*, and he had a chapbook of short stories, *Doorway to Eternity*, published by MirrorDanse Books in 1994.

Sean's first novel, *The Unknown Soldier*, co-written with Shane Dix, was released by Aphelion in 1995. He has two novels due for publication in 1996: *Metal Fatigue* from HarperCollins (his first solo novel); and *The Dying Light* (sequel to *The Unknown Soldier*) from Aphelion.

Ashley Wood

Ashley Wood began his professional comics career with a self-publishing venture. A year later, at the age of twenty one, he secured his first international work with the *Judge Dredd Magazine* in London. Still associated with the magazine, he has since moved on to the American market as a regular artist for Marvel Comics on such titles as *Ghost Rider 2099*, *Doom 2099* and *Generation X*. He was the main artist on the *Dark Horse Down Under* project for Dark Horse Publishing.

His current projects include *Shadowman* (for Acclaim Comics), and trading cards for the Fler and Image companies. He is also developing characters and backgrounds for an up and coming cartoon series, *Cyberknight*. Other in-house projects include *White Tracers* which spans most media and the *Googly and Friends* animated series.



