

- SWANCON 2000 -

STATE SANCTIONED THOUGHT FOR THE DAY.

TODAY IS THE TOMORROW YOU
WERE PROMISED YESTERDAY.

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CONTENTS

Convenor's Welcome	Shaun Tan	cover
Introduction	Candice Schilder	4
Millennial Hype, Millennial Hope	The Editors	5
Ghost of a Day	Damien Broderick	7
Bellwether (Excerpt)	Sean Williams	10
Millennium Hype	Connie Willis	13
Cookie Boy	Robin Hobb	16
Night Voyager	Paul Kidd	18
Way Down Upon the Swanee...	Paul Collins	19
Incident on Woolfe Street	Grant Stone	22
Golden Age? Who, Us?	Janeen Webb	24
Thanking the Wizard	Dave Luckett	29
My New Really Epic Fantasy Series	Grant Watson	30
Untitled	Garth Nix	33
A Gift of Eagles	Ian Nichols	36
Mitch	Jack Dann	38
Terry Dowling & Blackwater Days	Danny Heap	40
Charles N. Brown - A Hard Life	Terry Dowling	42
Down These Mean Streets a Pig Must Go	Marianne S. Jablon	44
Accidentally In Transit	Peter Nicholls	46
Fairytale Quartet	Cathy Cupitt	50
Sojourner	Tess Williams	53
The Map Table	Stephen Dedman	55
Coelacanth Soup	Meredith Costain	57
Bios	Robin Pen	60
		65

CONVENOR'S WELCOME

CANDICE SCHILDER

Presenting SwanCon 25, the National Science Fiction and Media Convention of the year 2000!

Welcome to our members. For those of you who have been to SwanCons before, you know what to expect. Enjoy yourselves. For those of you that have not been to a SwanCon before - join in on the merriment. By all accounts SwanCons are unique conventions, and a great deal of fun. For those of you who regularly attend the NatCon, I hope you find the SwanCon/NatCon blend to be harmonious to your tastes.

Welcome to our guests. Like many of our members, some of you come year after year to join in on the festivities. Welcome back, and enjoy the ride. Welcome also to those guests for whom this is your first SwanCon. Things are done differently around these parts. I think you'll like it.

Once every year, SwanCon comes to bestow its joy upon us all like a fannish St Nicholas. Once every year the NatCon finds its home at a convention in Australia. This year the SwanCon and the NatCon are one of the same, and you are here to enjoy both.

Welcome one and all to SwanCon 25, and let the memories begin!

INTRODUCTION

ANNA HEPWORTH, JOHN PARKER, GRANT WATSON

Welcome to the souvenir book of SwanCon 25, both the 39th annual Australian science fiction and fantasy convention and the 25th annual Western Australian convention. Falling for the cultural hype as Australia's millennial SF convention, we have endeavoured to bring you one of the largest, most talented and wide-ranging collections of guests ever assembled at the one event.

This book gathers together works from many of our Guests and showcases them in a single volume. They include essays, stories, poetry and artwork and exhibit all of the wide ranging concepts you would expect from such an eclectic gathering of writers and artists.

We asked our guests for up to 1500 words, and offered the theme of "100% Millennial Hype" for them to ignore. As you will see as you read, only some of them were interested in either of these restrictions. Worse than that, some of them made us choose between two equally wonderful pieces. Much to our pleasure, many of the works included are presented for the first time in this volume.

We hope that the stories here will entertain you (what else do we read speculative fiction for, if it isn't entertainment?). We hope that the essays will intrigue and inform you (Again, what else are they there for, except possibly as entertainment?). We hope that Shaun Tan's spectacular cover will astound you to such extent that you'll all be ripping it off the front of the book and framing it for your wall.

Ultimately, we hope that you will read this book at the convention, then take it home, dig it out of your con bag, read the bits you missed at the con, and drag it out occasionally to reminisce over in future years.

MILLENNIAL HYPE, MILLENNIAL HOPE

DAMIEN BRODERICK

Everything you think you know about the future is wrong. How can that be? Back in the '70s, Alvin Toffler warned of future shock, the concussion we feel when change slaps us in the back of the head. But aren't we smarter now? We have wild, ambitious expectations of the future, we're not frightened of it. How could it surprise us, after *Star Trek* and *Star Wars* and *Terminator* movies and *The Matrix* and a hundred computer role-playing games have domesticated the 24th century, cyberspace virtual realities, and a galaxy far, far away?

Actually, I blame glitzy mass-market science fiction for misleading us. They got it so wrong. Their enjoyable futures, by and large, are as plausible as 19th century visions of tomorrow, with dirigibles filling the skies and bonneted ladies in crinolines tapping at telegraphs.

Back in the middle of the twentieth century, when the futuristic stories I read as a kid were being written, most people knew 'that Buck Rogers stuff' was laughable fantasy, suitable only for children. After all, it talked about atomic power and landing on the Moon and time travel and robots that would do your bidding even if you were rude to them. Who could take such nonsense seriously?

Twenty years later, men *had* walked on the moon, nuclear power was already obsolete in some countries, and computers could be found in any university. Another two decades on, in the '90s, probes sent us vivid images from the solar system's far reaches, immensely powerful but affordable personal computers sat on desks at home as well as work, the human genome was being sequenced, and advanced physics told us that even time travel through spacetime wormholes was not necessarily insane (although

it was surely not in the immediate offing).

So popular entertainment belatedly got the message, spurred on by prodigious advances in computerised graphics. Sadly, the script writers and directors still didn't know a quark from a kumquat, a light-year (a unit of interstellar distance) from a picosecond (a very brief time interval). With gusto and cascades of light, they blended made-up technobabble with exhilarating fairy stories, shifting adventure sagas from ancient legends and myth into outer space. It was great fun, but it twisted our sense of the future away from an almost inconceivably strange reality (which is the way it will actually happen) and back into safe childhood, that endless temptation of fantastic art.

Maybe you think I'm about to get all preachy and sanctimonious. You're waiting for the doom and gloom: rising seas and greenhouse nightmare, cloned tyrants, population bomb, monster global mega-corporations with their evil genetically engineered foods and monopoly stranglehold on the crop seeds needed by a starving Third World. Wrong. Those factors indeed threaten the security of our planet, but not for much longer (unless things go very bad indeed, very quickly). No, what's wrong with the media images of the future isn't their evasion of such threats. It's their laughable conservatism.

The future is going to be a fast, wild ride into strangeness. And most of us will still be there as it happens.

This accelerating world of drastic change won't wait until the 24th century, let alone the year 3000. We can expect extraordinary disruptions within the next half century. Many of those changes will probably start to impact well

before that. By the end of the 21st century, there might well be no humans (as we recognise ourselves) left on the planet - but nobody alive then will complain about that, any more than we now bewail the loss of Neanderthals.

That sounds like a rather tasteless paradox, but I mean it literally: many of us will still be here, but we won't be human any longer - not the current model, anyway. Our children, and perhaps we as well, will be smarter. In September, 1999, molecular biologists at Princeton reported adding a gene for the extra production of NR2B protein to a strain of mice. The improved brains of these 'Doogie mice' used NR2B to enhance brain receptors, helping the animals solve puzzles much faster. Humans use an almost identical protein.

Nor will we be the only intelligences on the planet. By the close of the 21st century, there will be vast numbers of conscious but artificial minds on earth. How we and our children get along with them as they arrive out of the labs will determine the history of life in the solar system, and maybe the universe.

These things are moving from sf to reality. Dr Hans Moravec, a robotics pioneer at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, argues in *Robot* (Oxford University Press, 1999) that we can expect machines equal to human brains within 40 years at the latest. Already, primitive robots operate at the level of spiders or lizards. Soon a robot kitten will be running about in Japan, driven by an artificial brain designed and built by Australian Dr Hugo de Garis. True, it's a vast leap from lizard to monkey and then human, but computers are *doubling* in speed and memory *every year*.

This is the hard bit to grasp: with that kind of annual doubling in power, you jump by a factor of 1000 every decade. In 20 years, the same price (adjusted for inflation) will buy you a computer a *million* times more powerful than your current model.

At the end of the 1990s, the world's best, immensely expensive supercomputers perform several trillion operations a second. To emulate a human mind, Moravec

estimates, we'll need systems 100 times better. Advanced research machines might meet that benchmark within a decade, or sooner - but it will take another 10 or 20 years for the comparable home machine at a notepad's price. Still, before 2030, expect to own a computer with the brain power of a human being. And what will *that* be like? If software develops at the same pace, we will abruptly find ourselves in a world of alien minds as good as our own.

Will they take our orders and quietly do our bidding? If they're designed right, maybe. But that's not the kicker. That's just the familiar world of (ugh, horrid term, but sometimes appropriate) sci-fi movies with clunky or sexy-voiced robots. The key to future change comes from what's called 'self-bootstrapping' - machines and programs that modify their own design, optimise their functioning, improve themselves in ways that limited human minds can't even start to understand. De Garis calls such beings 'artilects', and even though he's building their predecessors he admits he's scared stiff.

By the end of the 21st century, Ray Kurzweil expects a merging of machines and humans (*The Age of Spiritual Machines*, Allen & Unwin, 1999), allowing us to shift consciousness from place to place. He's got an equally impressive track record, as a leading software designer and specialist in voice-activated systems. His timeline for the future is even more hair-raising than Moravec's. In a decade, we'll have desktop machines with the grunt of today's best super-computers, a trillion operations a second. Forget keyboards - we'll speak to these machines, and they'll speak back in the guise of plausible personalities.

By 2020, a Pentium equivalent will equal a human brain. And now the second great innovation kicks in: molecular nanotechnology (MNT), building things by putting them together atom by atom. I call that 'minting', and the wonderful thing is that a mint will be able to replicate itself, using common, cheap chemical feedstocks. Houses and cars will be compiled seamlessly out of diamond (carbon, currently clogging the atmosphere) and

sapphire (aluminium), because they will be cheap appropriate materials readily handled by mints.

Until recently, nanotechnology was purely theoretical. The engineering theory was good, but the evidence was thin. At the end of November, 1999, researchers at Cornell University announced in the journal *Science* that they had successfully assembled molecules one at a time by chemically bonding carbon monoxide molecules to iron atoms. This is a long way from building a beef steak sandwich in a mint the size of a microwave oven powered by solar cells on your roof (also made for practically nothing by a mint), but it's proof that the concept works.

If that sounds like a magical world, consider Kurzweil's 2030. Now your desktop machine (except that you'll probably be wearing it, or it will be built into you, or you will be absorbed into it) holds the intelligence of 1000 human brains. Machines are plainly people. It might be (horrors!) that smart machines are debating whether, by comparison with their lucid and swift understanding, *humans* are people! We had better treat our mind children nicely. Minds that good will find little difficulty solving problems that we are already on the verge of unlocking. Cancers will be cured, along with most other ills of the flesh.

Aging, and even routine death itself, might be a thing

of the past. In October, 1999, Canada's Chromos Molecular Systems announced that an artificial chromosome inserted into mice embryos had been passed down, with its useful extra genes, to the next generation. And in November, 1999, the journal *Nature* reported that Pier Giuseppe Pelicci, at Milan's European Institute of Oncology, had deactivated the *p66shc* gene in mice - which then lived 30 percent longer than their unaltered kin, without making them sluggish! A drug blocking *p66shc* in humans might have a similar life-extending effect.

As well, our bodies will be suffused with swarms of medical and other nano maintenance devices. Nor will our brains remain untouched. Many of us will surely adopt the prosthetic advantage of direct links to the global net, and augmentation of our fallible memories and intellectual powers. This won't be a world of Mr Spock emotionless logic, however. It is far more likely that AIs (artificial intelligences) will develop supple, nuanced emotions of their own, for the same reason we do: to relate to people, and for the sheer joy of it.

The real future, in other words, has already started. Don't expect the simple, gaudy world of *Babylon-5* or even *eXistenZ*. The third millennium will be very much stranger than fiction.

And a bloody bonza future to youse all!

GHOST OF A DAY

SEAN WILLIAMS

The flap over the door flipped back without warning, and a Soldier of the Peace stepped into the room. The seer leaned back from her simple altar to study him. His bone armour was polished with the zeal of one new to service; he held a crested helmet under one arm. Tall, young, strong, and nervous, he was like so many she had seen before.

'I hear tell of your powers,' he said. 'I seek your sight.'

She put aside the dice game she had been playing. 'I am indisposed,' she said. 'The Eye is —'

'I leave tomorrow,' he interrupted. 'I need your advice now. Please.'

She had been about to say that the Eye was clouded, that it was unlikely to respond to her call. But her mind was as sharp as ever. He was just another soldier afraid of service, battle, death. She could, perhaps, soothe his fears. If he insisted upon relying on any details she gave him, well...she had tried to warn him.

'There's a stool,' she said, waving. He picked it up and brought it closer.

'I can pay you —'

'Say nothing more,' she snapped, 'until I speak to you again.'

He nodded, eyes averted, and sat opposite her.

The altar between them still held the ivory dice in a wooden cup: many-sided prisms and near-spheres that glittered in their gloomy home. She put them aside and closed her eyes, focusing on the soldier before her. Her aching limbs, the smoke of the fire, the feel of the altar cloth, even the rumble and boom of the spaceport outside

— all faded. In the darkness behind her eyes she sought him: the creak of his armour as he shifted on the seat; the hint of spice on his breath; the memory of his face, so naïve and untouched by time...

Some seers dressed their power in cards and glass trinkets. She preferred to keep it simple, undiluted. All things resonated; all things contributed to the ever-changing wave-front that was the future. The fewer there were between him and her, the clearer the Eye could see.

And this time, in defiance of her expectation, it *did* see. The mist that had previously fogged her mind parted, as though a storm was passing, and she looked gratefully into the distance. Not as one would look across a room, but staring *into* it: seeing the weave of the rug from underneath, the mortar between bricks despite the paint, and the contents of every cupboard without opening them...seeing *through* time...past cause and effect, to...

'A battle.' She was careful not to speak too much, lest she lose her grip on what the Eye revealed. 'I see a great battle. There are many ships, many worlds, many...'

She stopped.

People, she'd been about to say.

'Where do you go?' she asked the soldier.

'Zoltran,' he answered. 'It's an outer territory. There is insurrection against the Emperor —'

'You do not fight aliens?'

'No.' His voice was puzzled. 'There are none.'

This she too had been taught, that nowhere else in the galaxy did intelligent life exist. Yet the snippet cast up on her time-seeking shores had been relatively clear on that score: the people fighting the battle weren't people

at all, but strange creatures with smooth skin and patches of hair, odd-shaped limbs and strange lumps of flesh where their eyes should be.

Her sight faltered for a second. If there were no aliens, then *what* was she seeing?

The soldier's breathing was shallow and quick. She didn't need to read his mind to know what he was thinking. He wanted to ask her if she saw him in the vision, if it was his battle she saw.

'What is it?' he asked, his desire to know finally exceeding his willingness to obey her request for silence. 'Do you see death before me?'

'You go into battle,' she snapped. 'You are a fool if you expect otherwise.'

'My death, I mean.'

'You'll die one day, that I promise you.'

His legs shifted beneath the table. Almost, she expected him to get up and leave. She would have been relieved if he had. But he relaxed suddenly, as though the truth of her words had aged him prematurely, softened his muscles and bent his spine, bowed his head.

'Is that what you see, then? Don't soften the blow, madam. I am a Soldier of the Peace. I am prepared to die.'

'I see...' Her brows knitted, concentrating furiously to dispel the images that clouded her sight. She wanted to tell him something — anything — with certainty. Something more than the feeling that nagged at her. It was a feeling she recognised, for all that she had felt it only a couple of times before. The flavour was unique, lending credence to the thought that it wasn't a dream, a passing fancy, a mind-game thrown up by her subconscious.

Sometimes the currents of time were stirred by forces she could not imagine. This, she was beginning to think, wasn't a vision of the future, but of the *past*.

She saw spaceships sundered and left empty to the vacuum, cities burnt to blackened rubble, habitats crashing from the sky, whole planets wreathed in smoke. Blood

and fire and the stench of decay filled her senses until she could hardly breathe. She glimpsed faces, heard fragments of names, caught brief flashes of history. The strength of the vision was not one she could deny, now that she had allowed it in. This was *real*. This had *happened*.

She saw the odd-shaped aliens fighting, killing, retreating, dying — but it wasn't a war she was seeing. Her fingers clenched the altar cloth as the truth sank in. Not a war. A massacre.

Perhaps it was *this* that had clouded the Eye these past days. A secret history that yearned to be discovered, too powerful to be forgotten. The aliens must have been utterly routed, exterminated, for none at all were left, now. The empty galaxy her forebears had found was testimony to that.

Maybe those same forebears had killed the aliens. She wasn't sure; the enemy was hidden behind machines and distance, as those who fight in space always were. That there was no mention of such an occurrence in the history she knew was not necessarily surprising, either; the genocide might have taken place so many years ago that such an atrocity could even have been naturally forgotten. Or the victors — assuming they *weren't* her ancestors — might have died out, or gone elsewhere, or been themselves beaten by another emergent race. Maybe that was the way of things — civilisations ebbing and flowing like the tide, crashing on the rocks of time.

The thought had a certain ring to it...

'Madam?'

The soldier's voice brought her out of a very deep trance.

'I...I'm sorry.' The tremor in her voice surprised her. 'What is it? Are you unwell?'

She sighed heavily. 'It's nothing. I am just old.'

That was the truth of it — of the vision she had been granted. The old made way for the young; if they didn't, they were *pushed*...

But this soldier wouldn't be interested in hearing that. Or maybe he would, in his own way. It would be

better than lying, telling him he would be victorious and promoted in glory. She had told such lies in the past, when the Eye failed her. They left a sour taste in her memory.

'My sight is dim today,' she said, opening her real eyes to meet his expression — first eager, then disappointed. 'All I can offer you is the advice of an old woman who has seen the lives of many pass under her gaze. There may be value in that, if you will accept it.'

He bowed his head, almost humbly. It was a nice act, she thought.

'I will,' he said.

'I cannot tell you whether you head toward wrack or ruin this day, but my advice is this: be gracious in victory, for you might not win next time, and valiant in defeat, if that is your fate. Be true to your compassionate nature — everyone has one, although your Sergeant might deny it — and remember that *all* life is precious. Not just yours. Do you understand?'

He raised his gaze from his bony knees. 'I am a soldier, madam.'

'Of the Peace.'

'A soldier nonetheless. I am trained to fight.'

'I didn't tell you not to fight.' She shook her head in sudden annoyance. 'Is that what you heard me say? Maybe that's what you *want* to hear.'

He clicked with annoyance and stood — finally out

of patience, or out of understanding. 'How much do you ask for this advice?' he rumbled.

'Nothing,' she said, dismissing him with a wave. 'Your youth exhausts me. Go!'

She told herself that, if he paid no heed to any other words than the last she uttered, then she would count herself satisfied.

And she was.

When the flap slapped shut behind him, she settled back on her stool and retrieved her dice. She played idly for a while, savouring the ghost of the long-forgotten day that had so briefly entered her mind. Some of the extinguished race's history still lingered with her, although she had barely touched the surface and had no intention of digging any deeper. The distant past was full of such places: dusty and dangerous traps for the curious, like attics with rotten floors. She had known other seers who had wasted their lives, seeking arcane knowledge from the minds of the dead, and she wasn't one to fall to such perils. Stories were only ever finished when they were forgotten, and all stories deserved an end.

Two mandibles clicked together in a smile, and the grey hairs around her compound eyes shivered.

Even a Soldier of the Peace would understand that, she was sure.

BELLWETHER (EXCERPT)

CONNIE WILLIS

The following is a section from my novel Bellwether, about a researcher named Sandra Foster, who works for a company named Hi-Tek, trying to discover what caused past fads and fashions, like hair-bobbing and the Hula Hoop, so that Hi-Tek can create new ones.

Sandra is afflicted with an incompetent, insolent, eye-rolling, hair-tossing assistant named Flip who helps by delivering packages to the wrong people, losing the letters she was supposed to copy, and refusing to do anything else Sandra asks her.

In the first chapter of Bellwether, Sandra spent the entire day organizing her articles and clippings on hair-bobbing into meticulous piles all over the floor of her office and then attempting to deliver a large, heavy package marked 'Perishable' that Flip had delivered to her to the right person. She returned to her office to discover that Flip, in a fit of helpfulness, had cleaned up the office and thrown everything away. Sandra, despairing, leaves work and goes to the Earth Mother for dinner:

The Earth Mother has okay food and iced tea so good I order it all year round. Plus, it's a great place to study fads. Not only is its menu trendy (currently free-range vegetarian), but so are its waiters. Also, there's a stand outside with all the alternative newspapers.

I gathered them up and went inside. The door and entry-way were jammed with people waiting to get in. Their iced tea must be becoming a trend. I presented myself to the waitress, who had a prison-style haircut, jogging shorts, and Texas.

That's another trend, waitresses dressed to look as little as possible like waitresses, probably so you can't find them when you want your check. Name and number in

your party?' The waitress said. She was holding a tablet with at least twenty names.

'One, Foster,' I said. 'I'll take smoking or nonsmoking, whichever's quicker.'

She looked outraged. 'We don't *have* a smoking section,' she said. 'Don't you know what smoking can do to you?'

Usually you get seated quicker, I thought, but since she looked ready to cross out my name, I said, 'I don't smoke. I was just willing to sit with people who do.'

'Secondhand smoke is just as deadly,' she said, and put an X next to my name that probably meant I would be seated right after hell froze over. 'I'll call you,' she said, rolling her eyes, and I certainly hoped *that* wasn't a trend.

I sat down on the bench next to the door and started through the papers. They were full of animal rights articles and tattoo removal ads. I turned to the personals. The personals aren't a fad. They were, in the late eighties, and then, like a lot of fads, instead of dying out, they settled into a small but permanent niche in society.

That happens to lots of fads: CBs were so popular for a few months that 'Breaker, breaker' became a catchphrase and everyone had handles like 'Red Hot Mama,' and then went back to being used by truckers and speeding motorists. Bicycles, Monopoly, crossword puzzles, all were crazes that have settled into the mainstream. The personals took up residence in the alternative newspapers.

There can be trends within trends, though, and the personals go through fads of their own. Unusual varieties of sex was big for a while. Now it's outdoor activities.

The waitress, looking vastly disapproving, said, 'Foster party of one,' and led me to a table right in front of the kitchen. 'We banned smoking two *years* ago,' she said, and slapped down a menu.

I picked it up, glanced at it to see if they still had the sprouts and sun-dried tomatoes croissant, and settled down to the personals again. Jogging was out, and mountain biking and kayaking were in. And angels. One of the ads was headed HEAVENLY MESSENGER and another one said 'Are your angels telling you to call me? Mine told me to write this ad,' which I found unlikely.

Soul work was also in, and spirituality, and slashes. 'S/DWF wanted,' and 'Into Eastern/Native American/personal growth,' and 'Seeking fun/possible life partner.' Well, aren't we all?

A waiter appeared, also in jogging shorts, Texas, and snit. He had apparently seen the X. I said, before he could lecture me on the dangers of nicotine, 'I'll have the sprouts croissant and iced tea.'

'We don't have that anymore.'

'Sprouts?'

'Tea.' He flipped the menu open and pointed to the right-hand page. 'Our beverages are right here.'

They certainly were. The entire page was devoted to them: espresso, cappuccino, caffè latte, caffè mocha, caffè cacao. But no tea. 'I liked your iced tea,' I said.

'No one drinks tea anymore,' he said.

Because you took it off the menu, I thought, wondering if they'd used the same principle as the library, and I should have come here more often, or ordered more than one when I did come, and saved it from the ax. Also feeling guilty because I'd apparently missed the start of a trend, or at least a new stage in one.

The espresso trend's actually been around for several years, mostly on the West Coast and in Seattle, where it started. A lot of fads have come out of Seattle recently—garage bands, the grunge look, caffè latte. Before that, fads usually started in L.A., and before that, New York. Lately, Boulder's shown signs of becoming the next trend

center, but the spread of espresso to Boulder probably has more to do with bottom lines than the scientific laws of fads, but I still wished I'd been around to watch it happen and see if I could spot the trigger.

'I'll have a caffè latte,' I said.

'Single or double?'

'Double.'

'Tall or short?'

'Tall.'

'Chocolate or cinnamon on top?'

'Chocolate.'

'Semisweet or dark?'

I'd been wrong when I told Dr. O'Reilly all fads had to have a low ability threshold.

After several more exchanges, concerning whether I wanted cubed sugar versus brown and nonfat versus two percent, he left, and I went back to the personals.

Honesty was out, as usual. The men were all 'tall, handsome, and financially secure,' and the women were all 'gorgeous, slender, and sensitive.' The G/Bs were all 'attractive, sophisticated, and caring.' Everyone had a 'terrific sense of humor,' which I also found unlikely. All of them were seeking sensitive, intelligent, ecological, romantic, articulate NSs.

NS. What was NS? Nordic skiing? Native American Shamanism? Natural sex? No sex? And here was NSO. No sexual orgasms? I flipped back to the translation guide. Of course. Nonsmoker only.

The buxom, handsome, caring people who place these things seem frequently to have confused the personals with the L. L. Bean catalog. I'd like Item D2481 in passion red. Size, small. And they frequently specify colour, shape, and no pets. But the number of nonsmokers seemed to have radically increased since the last time I'd done a count. I got a red pen out of my purse and started to circle them.

By the time my sandwich and complex latte had arrived, the page was covered in red. I ate my sandwich and sipped my latte and circled.

The nonsmoking trend started way back in the late seventies, and so far it had followed the typical pattern for aversion trends, but I wondered if it was starting to reach another, more volatile level. 'Any race, religion, political party, sexual preference okay,' one of the ads read. 'NO SMOKERS.' In caps.

And 'Must be adventurous, daring, nonsmoking risktaker' and 'Me: Successful but tired of being alone. You: Compassionate, caring, nonsmoking, childless.' And my favourite: 'Desperately seeking someone who marches to the beat of a different drummer, flouts convention, doesn't care what's in or out. Smokers need not apply.'

Someone was standing over me. The waiter, probably, wanting to give me a nicotine patch. I looked up.

'I didn't know *you* came here,' Flip said, rolling her eyes.

'I didn't know you came here either,' I said. And now that I do I never will again, I thought. Especially since they don't serve iced tea anymore.

'The personals, huh?' she said, craning around to look at what I'd marked. 'They're okay, I guess, if you're

desperate.'

I am, I thought, wondering wildly if she'd stopped on the way in to empty the trash and had I locked the car?

'I don't need artificial aids. I have Brine,' she said, pointing at a guy with a shaved head, bover boots, and studs in his nose, eyebrows, and lower lip, but I wasn't looking at him. I was looking at her extended arm, which had three wide grey armlets around it at wrist, mid-forearm, and just below the elbow. Duct tape.

Which explained her remark about it being a personal errand this afternoon. If this is the latest fad, I thought, I quit. 'I have to go,' I said, scooping up my newspapers and purse, and looking frantically around for my waiter, who I couldn't find since he was dressed like everybody else. I put down a twenty and practically ran for the exit.

'She doesn't appreciate me at all,' I heard Flip telling Brine as I fled. 'She could at least have thanked me for cleaning up her office.'

I *had* locked my car, and, driving home, I began to feel almost cheerful about the duct tape armbands. Flip would, after all, have to take them off.

MILLENNIUM HYPE

ROBIN HOBB

So, when do you find the time to write?

A great many people who enjoy reading science fiction or fantasy harbor the ambition to write it. I don't think this phenomenon extends so strongly into any other genre. The question 'When do you find the time to write?' is a staple of almost any interview and many casual conversations between writers and enthusiasts. So, before we run out of millenium and have to pop the top on another one, I'll tell you the secret of how to find the time to write.

You do it now.

I know you already have a plan. When the new millenium begins, you are going to sit down and write that book you've been carrying around in your head. Or when you finish college, you'll begin work on those short stories, right? Or when the kids start school. Or when you can afford a computer. Or when the kids are old enough to look after themselves. Or when you retire from your job.

Or when you're dead.

I first became completely cognizant of the significance of time versus task while working as a rural route driver for the U.S. Postal Service. In the larger U.S. cities, mail is delivered door to door by uniformed carriers on foot. In the rural areas, where houses may be miles or acres apart, the mailboxes are mounted on posts by the roadside, and the mail is delivered out the windows of privately owned vehicles. My route was 50 miles long, with between 500 and 600 mail boxes. I began the day by sorting the mail for the route. Whether there was 17 stacked feet of mail to sort, or 27 feet, it all had to be

sorted into its cubicles by eleven. Time did not yield to the task.

Once that was done, I strapped the mail into consecutive bundles secured with leather belts (even trickier than it sounds), filled the back seat of my car with the stuff, and headed out. I had five hours in which to deliver all my mail and get back to the post office, so that the mail I picked up could leave on the outbound truck.

So, do the math. Say 550 mailboxes to open, fill, and shut in 5 hours. That averages out to 110 boxes an hour, or not quite 2 boxes a minute, spread out over a fifty mile route. That's not allowing for the driving between boxes, nor the times when I had certified mail that must be signed or other special 'to the door' deliveries. It was clearly an impossible task. But the women I worked alongside had been doing it for years, and in a couple of months, I was up to speed as well. For close to two years, I delivered the rural mail, which included everything from saplings to earthworms to bees to pheasant chicks. Stacks of phone books left my Chevy sagging on its shocks. All through December, the trunk of the car would be stuffed with packages. Whatever they gave us, we delivered, even the perfumed soap samples that left all the carriers sneezing one day. No matter how much they gave us, we knew the old adage: The Mail Must Go Through.

And it did. The whole trick to it was to think of the individual seconds that were passing, and not worry about where the hour hand was. If you looked up from the endless road and boxes at 3:30 and thought of all you still had to do, it was obviously an impossible task. But if you forgot all that and simply did it, one rusty, dusty

mailbox after another, it got done. Even on the days when I discovered that a swarm of bees had taken up residence in a box, or that a straying flock of sheep were blocking the road, it still got done.

I don't deliver the mail anymore. Now I write books. But they get written in much the same way that the mail was delivered. A keystroke at a time, the words climb onto the screen, wedged into sentences that are then bundled into chapters. The trick, I have discovered, is not to look at how far I must go before I reach the end, or even at what date I must mail it off to an editor. The task is to choose the correct words one at a time, and put each of them in the right place. Eventually, when I look up, the final paragraph of the last chapter is finished.

We're all familiar with the phenomenon of work expanding to fill the time allotted to it. The inverse of that might be that if you wedge one more task into that time slot, the first task will compress to make room for the second. You don't have to give up anything you're doing now to start writing. In fact, it is a great error to give up having a life in order to become a writer. Do that, and you'll run out of things to write about.

There is a catch, of course. (You knew that, didn't

you? In fact, even before you read that, you were thinking, 'Oh, sure, that's easy to say, but you haven't seen my schedule, have you?') The catch is, you have to commit to it. It can't be, 'Sometime next weekend I am going to try to write something.' It has to be, 'I will get out of bed early on Sunday and I will write 250 words before I give up.' If you think that is impossible, ask yourself, how did you find the time to attend this convention this weekend? Couldn't you have done the same thing to find a day to write? Or, if you want to start smaller, how did you find the time to read these words? In the space of time that it has consumed, how many words of your own could you have set down on paper?

I'll make you a deal. Keep up your end of it, and I'll prove you have time to write. Swancon gave me 1500 words worth of space to express this in. I've only used up 1106. You know that if I had written 1500, you would have found time to read them all. So I'm giving you that much time right now. Take out a piece of paper or find the back of an envelope and start writing. One word at a time, committed to paper. See how far you get.

Start your own new millenium right now.

COOKIE BOY

PAUL KIDD!

Once upon a time, there was a lad called 'cookie boy'. Cookie boy sometimes felt that he was different from all the other children at school. It wasn't that he had skin of a different colour, or came from a colourfully diverse ethnic background. It came from the fact that he sensed he had more rich chocolatey goodness than most other girls and boys.

He could *sense* this chocolatey goodness. He could feel it in his every pore. But when he stared at himself in the mirror, he saw nothing out of the ordinary. His skin contained no chocolate chips - he was apparently made up from a rubbery, squoodgy flesh that covered a collection of bones.

No peanut nodules.

No creamy filling.

No marzipan...

He dunked himself experimentally in tea and coffee in his bath. Apart from stirring weird sexual awakenings, it failed to soften him or make him in any way more palatable.

Cookie boy was not disheartened. The world of physical senses was clearly a lie. Cookie boy suddenly

realised that all information undergoes a filtering process in the brain. The world could actually be different to his perceptions. Perhaps he truly was a delicious cookie, but had senses that were incapable of acknowledging the truth!

Cookie boy sought out the *wise-dragon-with-big-tits* who lived on the sacred mountain. While her breasts were actually rather small - quaint little 'fried-egg-like' objects she enhanced with a padded bra, they were certainly the only tits known to be present on a dragon. Cookie boy admired them while he presented the dragon with a ritual offering: An origami flapping crane he had fashioned from the clear, crinkly plastic that comes wrapped around video cassettes.

He explained his problem. Thoughtfully, the dragon ate him, and discovered that Cookie boy was in fact pleasantly brittle on the outside, yet yielding and doughy on the inside. Rather than chocolate chips, he had a thin layer of chocolate fudge right in the middle, making him pleasingly sweet and cool on the palette.

Moral: Turn the damned page.

NIGHT VOYAGER

PAUL COLLINS

a brightly burning sun that threatened all life within my world.

As the aperture widened I became aware of movement immediately above me.

My imagination dissected me tissue by tissue. I felt the blinding morass that was my prison, could *smell* the heavy odour of tangy blood, and now knew fear, *real* fear as rumblings echoed from beyond the cavern.

From tiny points within the wall's structure, there appeared multi-clawed abominations such as only Poe or Lovecraft could conceive. They wormed their ways through the wall, and with their tentacles leading their hideous shapes they clawed forwards.

A subliminal thought offered knowledge: Demodices. Somehow I knew what these creatures were; yet I had never encountered them.

Lacking even rudimentary understanding of this paradox, I crouched down and hugged the floor to avoid their weaving, insidious heads that moved restlessly, unerringly, toward me.

They were obviously agitated by my innocent presence, yet they initiated no immediate assault. Could they smell me? Like inquiring minds they sought that which they didn't understand.

Fear and panic made me scramble madly about. I was compelled to run blindly, rather *slide* from position to position, and splash across the surface of my prison.

But my movement attracted their unwanted attention. Feelers tried to jag me. I danced from side to side as their stingers sought to spear me.

Suddenly a roar, very much like pounding surf, made

I knew sentience in the blink of an eye. Nightmares became pain and with pain I was born into a moist, clinging twilight.

I was totally unaware of any history. Who I was, or the circumstances under which I now found myself was simply non-existent.

I found myself naked and unadorned, spreadeagled. Beneath me there fluctuated a gently pulsing floor much as say Dali would have envisaged. I floated helplessly, suspended above an expanding horizon of darkness.

The world as I knew it was tinged by multi-coloured mosaics, a wonderful, shifting kaleidoscope of predominantly greenish hues.

My sky was a brilliant red yet translucent cavern. To the West I could see a diffused sunset with traceries of frozen blue lightning.

Where was I? How long would this nightmare last? Dim memories of a lost past clicked by frame by frame. From deep within I knew I had to break out and find some clue to my incarceration.

Sudden pain racked my body. My neck felt as though it were being hacked at. I screamed my anguish and the pain subsided to a dull throb.

I struggled upright, anxious for protection. The floor sucked at my feet. Manoeuvrability proved difficult at best. I persevered, fell, regained my balance, toppled once more. Then I lay quite still and allowed the lapping floor to caress me.

Unexpectedly, a great tear in the ceiling expanded vertically and slowly folded back like a great maroon velvet curtain.

The chamber flooded with blinding light; its source

me scream in earsplitting agony. At the last moment I opened my eyes.

A wave of warm, glutinous fluid swept across the cavern floor; a monstrous torrent that bore me past my adversaries and expelled me outwards.

I tumbled downwards into another alien landscape. The crimson tide left me thrown up on jagged rocks, pummelled and bruised, gasping for breath.

The residue was nothing more than a trickle. Slowly these last remnants of fluid began to solidify, forcing me to move quickly before I became embedded in the cooling, hardening embrace.

My new surroundings were in vast contrast to those I had previously encountered. This outer world was pitted in a uniform manner which suggested to me that, at one time, this land had been subjected to agriculture.

Further afield I could see a mountainous range. Judging by the warmth they exuded I gathered they might be volcanic.

A strong counter-gravitational pull in this lesser atmosphere enabled me more freedom and I 'air' swam amongst particles that wafted like motes.

I gradually gained knowledge through comparison. Some subliminal instinct told me this world had an unfamiliar gravity.

Cautiously at first, then with greater confidence, I progressed with giant steps; setting a pace that had me leaping about with great fluidity.

During my newfound freedom I glimpsed other lifeforms that I gathered were far different than I had known in my previous existence.

The terrain began to change – rough fields ran into a gnarled and petrified forest: one immense surrealist woodland devoid of foliage, with death represented upon each quivering branch.

It was here that I discovered a partly disembowelled, decapitated body.

Despite my initial repugnance, I forced myself to examine the cadaver. Perhaps the body held a clue as to

my own identity. Surely I might glean some piece of information.

On closer inspection I suddenly became aware that I might have once known the dead person. A friend? Had we arrived together and been separated by a wave?

Someone not long dead I realised. Judging by the contusions and cuts, the head had apparently been severed by a pincer motion that had sliced inwards and torn out the man's larynx.

I cast an anxious glance to ensure my safety. It must have been a formidable creature to inflict such damage.

Then I was moving backwards on automatic. A flurry of movement on the periphery of my vision threatened my existence.

I sought safety behind a pulsating opaque mound and peered from behind.

It was another man, flailing his arms as though in sheer terror, his face stamped with fear.

Some of his panic swept me and I almost followed him in his mad exodus. But caution reined me in and I let the stranger pass without attracting attention.

The man's passing obviously presaged an unknown danger so I remained hidden, cowering I suspect; almost content to learn that there were others of my ilk. It seemed we were an endangered species, and one not too capable of protecting ourselves.

A nagging thought persisted. I knew these people. Their build and facial features were so familiar that it hurt.

I waited patiently, secure in the knowledge that if I had remained hidden from one person, then my anonymity was secure.

The temperature remained constant; with a start I realised the sun had not moved one bit since I had been here.

There was movement to my left and I remained stock still, only to discover it was the same tortured man who had recently fled past me.

Had he blundered, thereby losing his way and retracing his earlier path? Perhaps without noticeable

landmarks he had erred? With some fright I realised he might have brought back whatever it was that had been hunting him! I wished him far away. How dare he jeopardise me!

No sooner had he disappeared from sight, he appeared again. Impossible! He hadn't the time to backtrack and approach from the same path again! I watched him pass with some trepidation. Seconds passed and this, this *doppelganger* passed again.

And again and again and again.

Soon I became claustrophobic. I was captured in a single sequence, forced to watch a repetitive re-enactment of the same event.

I became almost blasé and hardly bothered to hide when I heard someone's approach. But something in the way it moved, the way it moved with *intent*, made me scurry for cover.

There were two of them, running side by side. Running from whom? What?

A chill dire warning gripped me. They were me. I was them. We were all of the same mould.

I had not been transported to another world, rather I had been absorbed into an inner world; one familiar yet fantastically foreign. I had been absorbed into *myself*.

I knew then who these creatures were. Folliculus Daemoniacus: those minute organisms that live in one's eyelashes.

I had wakened in the pupil of my own eyeball.

Memory slowly returned and with it came excruciating pain. Mental anguish, vastly removed from physical suffering.

I knew my identity. I was, *had* been, a writer. One who wrote prolific absurdities. A literary man damned, one with feet of clay, creating hurdles to leap, trying desperately to bottle the sun and refusing to rest in the shade – perpetual motion going nowhere – one hand clapping, the other juggling, trying to view the moon through a milk bottle, a scorpion stinging itself.

I'd been creative, yet believed in nothing, thereby never finding lover or even companionship. A lifestyle as barren as the plain through which I now trekked, as stark as the forest I now dwelled. A journey down the contours of my own face into the stubble of my beard.

My last conscious thought had been looking into the barrel of a gun, knowing my finger was drawing tight on the trigger, unable to resist the temptation to end my miserable life.

And feeling euphoric now that I was about to exit from a world to which I had never contributed.

Now I knew my destiny: to be alone after all, prey to organisms that live within man's mortal body.

The overhead sun was an electric globe.

SOMEBODY PLEASE TURN OUT THE LIGHT...

WAY DOWN UPON THE SWANEE...

GRANT STONE

People need a symbol to identify themselves as separate from others, something to act as a shorthand (an icon even) for who they are, something to be placed on t-shirts, posters, tea towels and name tags. Swancon 1, a gathering of people with an interest in science fiction and fantasy - the first such congregation in Western Australia, also needed a symbol and found it in the 'tin duck'. This is the story of that 'duck'.

Where to begin?

Aussiecon 1 must be the starting place. This first World Con to be held in the southern hemisphere in Melbourne in August 1975 brought together four wise men from the west, who returned home by another way (oops sorry wrong story); who on returning home reunited to form a committee (I use the term loosely) to plan for Swancon 1.

But why? I hear you chorus...

As one of the four, and something of a ringleader in the endeavour, I would posit that we were enthused by the Melbourne experience and wanted to repeat something of the same in the West.

So who were the gang of four?

- Anthony Peacey (English teacher, owner of the infamous house in bayswater that became site of Swancon 1, filthy Pro - he had had a story published in *Science Fiction Monthly* (UK)),

- Wally Blackburn (silent partner, E R Burroughs collector extraordinaire),

- Gary Hoff (Trufan with international connections having worked on the European worldcon in the late 60's and has had a continuing fannish interest ever since) and

- myself (young - I was once, enthusiastic, Murdoch 'almost' Librarian with the key to the riches of University support).

I should add that I was married and living as a tutor at St. Columba College (UWA), an important minor detail in the unfolding story of the 'tin duck'. The small tutors' flat that Sheryl and I were living in at the time was the location of most of the planning meetings for Swancon 1.

However the true catalyst for harnessing the energy of the gang of four was an American fan who came to WA in the summer of 1975/76 to teach science in our high schools (At the time WA was offering two years employment to Americans who wanted to teach - particularly SHS science). Cliff (my dad always called him Chris) Wind was the glue that made the idea of a Con stick i.e. after it had crystalised (was that a mixed metaphor?). Cliff found me at St Columba thanx to the fannish mafia that had me (with an institutional address) firmly placed on its map. The fact that I had written to every Australian fanzine editor in the preceeding 2 years to build Murdoch's SF collection also helped cement my address as a contact in WA within Australia and overseas.

Cliff had an abiding interest in the films of Esther Williams, the film music of Lalo Shiffirin and a fannish SF interest cultivated in the hotbed of Seattle Fandom. Cliff could not believe a place the size of Perth didn't have a

regular SF community or at the very least, a Con. Cliff also knew a little about local Cons and what was needed to get one started. Part of that process was 'identification', a logo, a...

I had foolishly dreamt of a local Con at Aussiecon 1 to the point that I firmly believed I had written on my Aussiecon 1 name tag (with it's marvelous Gerald Carr graphic), Swancon 1 Chairman. I got out my Aussiecon 1 name tag to check this fantasy and the writing must have faded...however I do remember that the name of our WA con was never in doubt. Swancon it was to be from the very beginning; Swan river, Swan lager, SWANCON.

After some initial meetings I was sitting around a St.Columba College meal table (I think an evening meal) talking to one of the other Columbans who was at that time the only College resident going to WAIT (later to become Curtin University). The reason she was going to WAIT was that she was enrolled in fine arts and design. Her name was Jill Yates (she now runs her own design consultancy in Perth) and she it was who willingly (read... at no cost) agreed to produce a design for the Con name tags. I gave Jill the name of the Con and she delivered, a few nights later, the design before you.

Jill reasoned at the time that she wanted her 'Swan' to be in the same typographic family as the angular-dash

typography of early computer displays - she reasoned that it was, after all, a science fiction convention.

Jill's original design was redrawn for Swancon 4 by an original attendee at Swancon 1, Robert McGough. (Robert was also one of the co-creators of *The Faster Than Light Radio Show* that same year). Robert argued that Jill's angular design reminded him more of metal than computer display and so he drew a Swan of plates of metal...tin perhaps; and so the 'tin duck' was born.

Robert's three dimensional 'metal' swan was redrawn about the time of Swancon 9 by a neofan with far to many talents for one person. Cartoonist, writer, filk singer, *Goon Show* aficionado and all round clever dick - Craig Hilton. Between Robert's Swan and Craig's redrawing (with a selection of 'tin duck' poses) the WA Fannish Achievement Awards had absorbed the title of the iconic representation of the convention - they had become, affectionately, the 'Tin Duck's'.

As for the Silver Swan Award...? Is that the 'Tin Duck' in full plumage eh, majesty. Certainly it's an honour for those who receive it because it comes from the 'heart' of the community of (and on) the Swan.

Grant Stone April 2000

Swancon 1 - gang member

Silver Swan Recipient

Chandler Award Recipient... Coffee?

INCIDENT ON WOOLFE STREET

JANEEN WEBB

Witold glared at the moon.

A midwinter evening: dark and clear. Barely six o'clock, and the full moon was already turning Fawkner Park to monochrome: the paths etching black lines under dim white lamps, the rising damp beneath the trees hanging in silent patches of tarnished-silver mist beneath stark black branches. All quiet, all still.

Witold turned up his collar, gripped his briefcase tight with one gloved hand, stuffed the other into his coat pocket, and strode onto the long diagonal that would take him across the park and home to Woolfe Street. He bulked large in the landscape, a great bear of a man muffled in a heavy black felted-wool overcoat. Muttering to himself, he stomped along, kicking at tree roots that fractured the dark ribbon of asphalt. He smelled mown grass and leaf mold and the sweet rot of fallen figs and, underneath it all, the animal musk of predators.

The rattle and hum of traffic reasserted itself as Witold neared the Woolfe Street edge of the park. He heard a leathery rush of wings, looked up in time to see a flock of bats wheeling overhead, sketching their black-leather silhouettes across the face of the frosty moon.

Woolfe Street went on for miles. Witold's route along it would take him past the local market, beyond which the street became a trendy shopping strip of specialty bookshops and restaurants and bars, until it came to a crossroads where, as if by common consent, fashion abruptly yielded to necessity. A block of grimy buildings housing drycleaners, boot repairers and garages formed the barrier that shielded chic society from the blank reality

of the less-than-fashionable high rise public housing apartments where Melbourne stored its immigrants. Witold did not intend to live there for long.

He was still rehearsing his grievances when he reached the fashionable shopfronts of Woolfe Street's middle section. It did nothing for his mood. He hated this part of the long walk home - it reminded him of all the things he couldn't afford, reminded him of why he took a sandwich to eat at his desk, reminded him of why he was walking home from the St Kilda Road office-block to save the fare.

It was way too early for the clubs and discos. The brass-studded coffin doors of *The Children of the Night Club* were still firmly shut, the sign on *Vampyra's* read 'First drinks 9pm'; even *Hyde's* wasn't open yet.

But the lights were all on in *Wolfe's Bar and Grill*. Always popular, it would be packed tonight, at full moon, so close to the solstice. He'd eaten there once, before *Wolfe's* had become too fashionable, too expensive for the likes of him. The place was a carnivore's delight. Dark timber panelling, red velvet booths, heavy-scented red candles whose fat yellow flames reflected the flesh of dark-framed nudes that hung against plush red wallpaper - and over it all the juicy blood-smell of meat. The menu made no apologies: steak tartare, sausages, livers or sweetbreads for starters, followed by a main course of steak, served lightly seared. The warm, red flesh came garnished with limp salad. The dessert menu consisted of one red word - 'strawberries'.

As he passed *Wolfe's* window, Witold slowed to read the chalked menu of 'Solstice Specials': carpaccio, black

pudding, mealy pudding (deep fried blood-and-oatmeal), blood sausage, rare roast beef with bone-marrow jelly. Witold peered, and a pair of early diners smiled back at him from their red-curtained window booth. They were holding long glasses filled with sticky bright red liquid. Witold hoped they were drinking Bloody Marys, but suspected they weren't. Fruit and vegetables were not welcome at *Wolfe's*. As he turned away he saw the waiter pause, and snicker. The couple grinned. Witold knew they were all laughing at him. He didn't care. He knew what they were.

There were more people in this part of the shopping strip, commuters on their way home crossing paths with locals on their way out for the evening. Witold could tell the wolf people at a glance. They were too neat. They tried too hard to fit in, to look respectable. Witold saw them in the coffee shops, fastidiously wiping the wolf drool from the corners of their neat red mouths, dabbing at their meticulously combed wolf beards with starched white napkins. As if they weren't about to spend the rest of the evening howling at the moon and snacking on their neighbours' pets. Or worse.

The crowds thinned as Witold crossed Chapel Street and walked the last couple of blocks to his high rise home. He was unsurprised to see the flashing blue strobes and badly-parked police car that announced trouble in his building. There was always trouble in his building.

What did surprise him, when he had slogged his way up his five flights of unlit, piss-smelling stairs, was the small, determined crowd around his own doorway. Witold didn't trust his neighbours an inch. He elbowed and shoved his way through them, jabbed his key into the lock. But the door swung open before he could turn the handle. A very young, fresh-faced police officer stood inside.

'Mr Jevik?'

'Yes. What's wrong?'

Witold pushed past to where Nada sat, small and

pale and tearstained, her hands anxiously twisting her soggy handkerchief.

'What have you done to my wife?'

The bulge of Nada's pregnancy strained against her woollen dress as she stood to meet her husband. Witold put a protective arm around her shoulders. 'She's pregnant. You can see that. Why have you come here upsetting her? What have you done?'

'Nothing. Your wife called us, Mr Jevik. I've only been here a couple of minutes. My partner is checking the buildings. Now if you'll just calm down...'

Nada put a hand on his arm. 'It's Katarina, Witold. She is missing.'

Witold gasped for breath, managed to say 'When? How long?'

'A couple of hours.'

'My God. Tonight of all nights.'

Witold strained to focus his attention. The officer consulted his notebook. 'Let's check the details, Mrs Jevik. Your daughter is five years old, shoulder length blonde hair, grey eyes. Right?'

'Yes.'

'She is wearing...?'

'A blue tracksuit and sneakers. A red overcoat and a red knitted cap.'

'Did she have anything with her?'

'A small basket.'

'And you last saw her...?'

'About a quarter to five. It was still light. She was doing a little errand for me. Just across the way. I told her not to leave the path.'

The police officer paused, smiling. 'Don't tell me: she was taking a basket of goodies to her poor sick grandmother.'

Nada winced, turned away. Witold stood his ground, muscles trembling, hands clenching into fists. 'Her grandmother,' he grated, 'was murdered. Along with her grandfather and her aunts and her uncles and her cousins. Along with her brother. In the ethnic *cleansing*.' He spat the

words. 'You wouldn't understand.'

The officer had paled. Witold relented a little: 'My daughter was ill and we had taken her to the hospital in the city. Otherwise, we also would not be here to trouble you. She's all we have. You must find her.'

Nada patted his quivering hand, turned back to the officer: 'She was taking some soup to Mrs Wolan. Across the way. She sometimes babysits for me when I have to go out. She says Katie never arrived.'

'Why did you send the child?'

Nada glanced down at her bulging belly, said only 'I am having trouble with the stairs at present.'

'Oh. Of course. Sorry. Do you have any idea where she might have gone? Is there anyone she usually plays with here? Anyone she might have stopped to visit?'

'No-one special. She's a good girl, always does as she's told. She wouldn't just wander off on her own. I asked all the neighbours before I called the police station.'

Witold's agitation was palpable. Nada spoke quickly, forestalling her husband: 'We do not want to cause any trouble. We just want to find Katie.'

But Witold would not be checked. 'Trouble?' His voice rose. 'For God's sake, woman, it's a solstice moon, this neighbourhood is full of wolf people, our daughter is missing, and you don't want to cause trouble?' He was shouting now.

Red faced and shaking, he turned to the officer. 'Start with the wolf people.'

'We can't just target one ethnic group with no evidence, Mr Jevik. There are laws about...'

Witold cut him off. 'You don't understand. You don't live next door to them. The wolf people. They emigrate from the old country. They bring their abominations with them, and your government is stupid enough to let them!'

'You emigrated, Mr Jevik. Why shouldn't they?'

'You don't listen. The civil war, the *ethnic cleansing*, it is flushing out more than unfriendly neighbours. More than religious enemies. There are things they don't want

to keep there. The old races are coming here as refugees. Wolf people. And worse. They bring the old ways with them. They don't want to be part of this new country. They form ghettos. They do not assimilate.'

'How do you know? They look just like everyone else to me.'

Witold dropped his voice, spoke wearily: 'In the old country, we have ways to know them. Wolf people are hairy on the inside. They change at full moon. Turn their skins. They have no choice. At full moon they must go hunting. They must have living meat. They prey on the unwary, the homeless, the defenceless - they attack small animals, old women, children.' He gulped air, went on. 'They smell out births - if they cannot take the newborn they eat the placenta, the afterbirth. It is a delicacy. No matter how much the rich ones try to hide it, with their special restaurants and their fancy clothes, we know the truth. And down here in the public housing they keep us awake with their howling. At full moon always some child's puppy is going missing, always someone is putting disgusting messes in the rubbish bins next morning.'

The young officer flushed, embarrassed. 'Too many late night horror movies, if you ask me. I suppose you want me to go back to the station for a box of silver bullets and some sharpened stakes.'

He paused. 'Sorry. I shouldn't have said that. Look, Mr Jevik, this isn't helping. I know you are upset. The sooner we can conclude this interview the sooner we can start searching for Katarina.'

'Horror movies?' Witold was shouting again. 'Do you think you'll catch them at the crossroads? I am telling you the wolf people are lethal. Tonight is full moon. They have to feed.'

His voice cracked. 'And they have my daughter.'

The search dragged on into the night. Descriptions were issued and broadcast, Katarina's kindergarten photo was shown on television, news journalists with tape recorders and videocams clamoured for comment. Police public

liaison officers appealed for information. Nada and Witold, tearstained and bone weary, faced the TV cameras and pleaded on the late night news with persons unknown for the safe return of their daughter. Nothing helped. Talk-show commentators reminded their audiences of other disappearances, speculated on possible links to other ethnic kidnappings, wondered darkly about organized crime in the immigrant community, assumed the worst. Their ratings climbed as hope dwindled.

Witold insisted on scouring the neighbourhood with the official searchers. Woolfe Street had moved into its night phase. It was no place for a child. Witold cursed the moonlit solstice night that had lured so many sleazy darksiders into the district. Everywhere he looked they were there, grotesque shapes outlined by moonlight and lurid neon - creatures of the night, cruising, lurking, lying in wait for unwary innocents. He could feel their hunger.

Witold stayed determinedly at the side of the officer assigned to search with him. He'd stopped shouting, could now only nod numbly as the ritual was repeated in endless cafes and clubs and bars: Katarina's photo in a stranger's hands; the crucial question 'Have you seen this little girl?'; the shrug, the headshake, the total indifference.

The ordeal went on. The alley beside *Vampyra's* smelled of cheap booze and recent vomit. Witold's stomach heaved as something squelched underfoot, something that reeked of blood. His scream brought his partner running. Police flashlights revealed the remains of a recently disembowelled possum. Witold fought for control, said tightly 'Wolf people. I told you.'

The officer scowled. 'Looks more like a dog did this.'

'Same thing.'

The officer ignored him, resumed his patient search routine.

The moon had sunk low in a frosty sky by the time the long shift was over. Witold was exhausted. The constable escorted him back to the flat. They were drinking tea in

the kitchen when the call came.

A cultured, European voice spoke calmly: 'Mr Jevik? I have your daughter.'

'What?'

'I believe I have your daughter.'

'Who is this?'

'Wolfgang Sachs. The owner of *Wolffie's*. You came in earlier this evening with a police officer.'

'And you said you'd never seen her.'

'Yes. I know.'

'How did you get my number?'

The voice was patient: 'You insisted on leaving it with me. You wrote it on my seating plan. You disrupted my all customers and insisted on checking my kitchen.'

'What have you done with her?'

'I? I have done nothing.'

'Then why is she with you?'

'That, Mr Jevik, is a matter for some conjecture.' He paused. 'But I assume you will want her back as quickly as possible. Can you come to the restaurant?'

'Yes.' Witold slammed the phone down, shouted for Nada. The officer was already radioing information to headquarters. The two men raced for the stairs, heard sirens split the night as patrol cars headed for *Wolffie's* on Woolfe Street. It wasn't far.

It took forever.

The squad car from the station had arrived ahead of Witold. A second car carrying Nada and Mrs Wolan pulled up behind them. Police converged on the scene from half a dozen directions. The press would not be far behind. Wolfgang Sachs stood in the entrance to his restaurant: a tall, elegant man wearing a fur-lined black leather coat over his dark evening suit. Witold stared anxiously, for the second time that night, at Wolfgang's long face. Everything about him - the high, domed forehead, the lupine eyes, the pointed beard, the sharp, gleaming teeth identified him as one of the wolf people. Everything from his carefully barbered mane of silver-tipped dark-brown hair down to the soft gleam of his

Italian leather shoes spoke money and influence. He exuded charm and confidence. And he smelled of meat. Witold was afraid.

Wolfgang spoke. 'Really, there is no need for all this.' The sweep of his manicured hand indicated the spotlights, the weaponry, the growing number of police cars. 'The child is not a hostage.' He shrugged. 'More like an inconvenient guest.' As he turned to where Witold and Nada waited, his smile revealed overlong canines: 'Come in, Mr Jevik, Mrs Jevik. I won't bite.'

The Jeviks stepped across *Wolffe's* red threshold. The empty restaurant seemed cavernous, lit mostly by dying embers in the huge hearth. And there, tucked up safe and warm in a scarlet blanket, sat Katarina.

Official procedures swung smoothly into place. The child was whisked aside to be checked by a police doctor. Tearful reunion interviews were broadcast. The press went home. The social worker arrived. The officers got down to the business of writing up the incident for their reports.

Wolfgang Sachs obligingly recounted his story one more time: 'When the restaurant closed I went out to check on Vlad' - he scratched his German shepherd affectionately behind its ears. 'I found her curled up asleep under my dog's blanket in the back of my Range Rover. I have no idea how she came to be there.' He hesitated: 'She was terrified. She called me 'Wolf Man'. It took me half an hour to convince her I wasn't going to eat her.' He looked straight at Witold. 'Children get hold of some strange ideas.' He paused, then said mildly: 'I finally coaxed her out, moved her inside by the fire, telephoned you. I gave her some hot chocolate to drink. She seems unharmed.'

Katarina kept her big grey eyes fixed on her father as she answered the social worker's questions. 'I saw the big dog in the back of the car outside the flats. I only

climbed up to pat him. He looked lonely.'

Wolfgang confirmed that he had parked the Range Rover there, briefly, while he collected his dry cleaning. He'd left the back door ajar for Vlad's comfort.

'Then the Wolf Man came, and I was scared. So I hid behind the seat. I thought he'd go away again. He didn't see me. He slammed the door and drove away.'

'Why didn't you say something?'

'I couldn't. Daddy made me promise never to speak to the wolf people.'

Several pairs of eyes turned to Witold. He sat rigid, silent.

'What did you do next?'

'I didn't want to get eaten. I hid under the blanket. The Wolf Man let the dog out, but he still didn't see me. I stayed very quiet. I thought someone would come.'

'And...?'

'It was smelly in the back of the car. It got dark. I was trying to stay very still. I guess I went to sleep. Then the Wolf Man came back and found me. But he didn't try to hurt me. He was nice.' She smiled shyly. 'He gave me chocolate.'

Finally, the questions were over. Sunlight was touching the cold buildings as Witold carried his daughter to the waiting police car. She snuggled into his shoulder, and confided her secret:

'They didn't change, Daddy.'

'Who?'

'The wolf men. I watched and watched. I wanted to see them turn their skins like you said they would. But they didn't do it.'

Witold considered this for a moment. 'Some of them,' he said darkly, 'the rich ones, they can afford special drugs, hormones, to stop the change.'

He kissed her lightly.

'But we know what they are.'

GOLDEN AGE? WHO, US?

DAVE LUCKETT

Elizabethan Londoners who flocked to the theatre, saw as much. The trees do obscure the forest, to some degree, certainly. But look around you.

SF in Australia is booming.

Now, I know that Greg Egan, possibly our best living hard-SF writer, would not like the characterisation as Australian. That was the reason for the somewhat clumsy construction of the last para. He would, perhaps, allow that he is very successful, (in all senses) and that he does write in Australia, which is all I mean to say. The point is that Egan is one of many, now.

One day, I hope a long, long time from now (a couple of centuries would be favourite) they'll wonder what they should engrave on my urn.

'He had fun', maybe? Nah, they'll say, he was a natural depressive.

'He called 'em as he saw 'em'? Nah, he was as blind as Polyphemus, and even more one-eyed.

'He was part of the Golden Age'? Perhaps. Well, it gets my vote.

There's a story that a Royal visitor to the site where they were rebuilding Coventry Cathedral (a building well-known to our pro Guest of Honour) went around asking various workers what they were doing. One, a mason, said that he was cutting stone. Another, a carpenter, said that he was knocking up scaffolding. The last, a labourer pushing a barrow, said, 'Me, ma'am? I'm building a cathedral.'

Me, ma'am? I'm part of a Golden Age.

This is a big year, 2000.

I'm going to the USA in August. Why? Well, I keep telling myself that it's to sell books to publishers, but that's really just a cover story to impress the taxman, who cometh. Or to read a paper (actually, to appear on a panel) at the WorldCon, but that's just a way of prising some money loose from the Uni. I'm actually going to three conventions in four weeks. It's really for the purpose of having fun. Expect me to resurface around half-past November.

One of the Cons will be Conchord, which is a Filk Convention. (Yes, Cecilia, they have Cons in the USA just for the filkers.) I am asked to bring Australianiana so they can auction it, and sing Australian filk. (I will be regaling them with our national hymn to regurgitation, *Manly Pier*.) Another is Bubonicon in Albuquerque, which is asking me to bring Australianiana so they can auction it, and talk about Australian writers. Another thing I'm doing is to talk to the Lunarian Society in New York, who want to know about Australian SF. The panel at the WorldCon will also be about Australian SF, I'm pretty sure, and there will be others.

Do you discern a common thread in all this?

Nearly every US fan I have spoken to has heard that something extraordinary is happening Down Under, if they know anything about Australia at all.

Distance lends perspective. I think these people see something that we do not: namely, that a Golden Age is happening, and we're in it. To stretch the bow (a lot) I wonder if the average Athenian of 430 BC, or the

THANKING THE WIZARD

GRANT WATSON

Swancon 25, in continuing a tradition set down by Swancon Twenty3, has chosen to celebrate a noted figure in speculative fiction during the convention. This year, we have selected American writer, director and performer Jim Henson as our Posthumous Guest of Honour.

There are two reasons to celebrate Jim Henson. The first reason is simple. In his thirty-year career in film and television, Jim made an awful lot of really cool stuff.

Everyone knows about the Muppets, Jim's own combination brand of rod and glove puppetry. He started developing them with his first television series, *Sam And Friends* (which starred a lizard named Kermit). They made appearances in coffee commercials, corporate training videos and *The Ed Sullivan Show*. Jim created a piano-playing dog named Rowlf for *The Jimmy Dean Show*. He made some children's specials in Canada, one of which – *The Frog Prince* – recast Kermit the lizard as Kermit the frog.

In 1969 New York's Children's Television Workshop teamed up with Jim to create *Sesame Street*, which continues to run today. The impact of *Sesame Street* on children's television can not be understated. It introduced previously unseen techniques such as satire and parody, a refusal to talk down to its audience and rapid, commercial-style segments that were tailored to a young, attention-span deficit audience. During the past 31 years, *Sesame Street* has won a record number of Emmy Awards, spun off into two successful feature films and launched the highest-selling toy of all time.

Seeking a more adult audience, the Muppets became foundation cast members of *Saturday Night Live*. After failing to gel with the live actors, they found themselves

dumped and in search of a new series. When no one in the USA wanted to fund a weekly Muppet series, Jim turned to English television producer Lord Lew Grade. Formatted as an old-style variety show, *The Muppet Show* united characters from Jim's entire career: Kermit from *Sam And Friends* and Rowlf from *The Jimmy Dean Show*, to name two. He also created a range of entirely new characters, each of whom became household names: Fozzie Bear, the least funny comedian in the world; Gonzo, a hairy blue daredevil with a chicken fetish; Miss Piggy, a vain starlet with a crush on Kermit. *The Muppet Show* was the first series to be sold directly into syndication – a process that is commonplace today. After five successful seasons *The Muppet Show* exploded into a series of feature films – six to date – as well as an animated series (*Muppet Babies*) and a number of short-lived spin-offs (*Little Muppet Monsters*, *The Jim Henson Hour*, *Muppets Tonight*).

In 1981 Jim directed *The Dark Crystal*, an intricate fantasy quest based on design drawings by artist Brian Froud. Despite being a box office failure of immense proportions, *The Dark Crystal* gathered unanimous critical acclaim and found a second wind on video and television broadcasts. Jim later teamed with *Star Wars* producer George Lucas to create *Labyrinth*, loosely inspired by *Alice In Wonderland*. Learning from mistakes made on *The Dark Crystal*, Jim made it lighter and funnier, and infused it with a number of songs by pop musician David Bowie. More successful than *The Dark Crystal*, yet not successful enough to turn a profit, *Labyrinth* has also become a regular video renter and favourite film of countless people worldwide.

To help create the advanced and experimental puppet techniques required by *The Dark Crystal* and *Labyrinth*, Jim formed his own London-based visual effects firm: the Jim Henson Creature Workshop. The Workshop has worked continuously in film and television production for almost twenty years, not only establishing itself as the world's premium animatronic effects firm, but also expanding into computer graphics and the experimental field of digital puppetry. Naming every production that the Workshop has been involved with would be near to impossible. Try watching *The Empire Strikes Back*, *Babe*, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, *The English Patient*, *The Phantom*, *Mission To Mars*, *The Flintstones*, *Loch Ness*, *The New Statesman*, *Lost In Space*, *Merlin*, *Doctor Who* and *The Talented Mr Ripley*.

Jim's love of fantasy continued when he created and produced the television anthology *The Storyteller*, narrated by John Hurt. Sadly the production team's perfectionist nature and attention to detail did not match the required pace of a television series, and only nine 30 minute episodes were produced in the time set to film twenty six. *Greek Tales*, a second season starring Michael Gambon, only lasted four episodes.

Considerably more successful was Jim's adaptation of Roald Dahl's *The Witches*, directed by Nicholas Roeg. It was the final feature film that he produced before his untimely death in 1990.

Jim unexpectedly died of pneumonia in 1990, and control of the Jim Henson Company fell to his son Brian. In the past ten years, the company has launched a whole new range of productions to varying success: the satirical comedy *Dinosaurs*; the cartoon series *Dog City*; the award-winning miniseries *Gulliver's Travels*; and the science fiction adventure series *Farscape*.

Earlier this year the Jim Henson Company, including all Muppet characters, was purchased by the German media company EM.tv for one billion dollars. Hot on the heels of this sale came the announcement of an all-new version of *The Muppet Show*, to air worldwide in 2002.

Combined with continuing production on *Farscape*, the new children's series *The Bear In The Big Blue House* and at least two more Muppet movies, the future for Henson is looking more optimistic than ever.

Jim left behind a legacy of entertainment that has thrilled and amused generations of people worldwide. He entertained us, he educated us and he let us all – even for just half an hour a day – be incredibly, incredibly silly. We thank him for it from the bottom of our hearts.

The second reason to celebrate Jim Henson is something that not too many people know, but we'll let you in on the secret.

Jim Henson was a wizard.

Not a visual effects "gosh, how did those guys at Skywalker Ranch do *that*?" kind of a wizard, you understand. A real genuine bona fide wizard. The kind Tolkien warned you about.

Firstly, he possessed a long, grey beard. All wizards have beards, and those beards are always long and should always be grey. Anyone claiming to be a wizard who doesn't have a beard isn't a real wizard at all.

Secondly, Jim created living creatures out of pieces of cloth. This is true, and we can prove to you that it is true.

For example: we know that Kermit the Frog is not real. We know that he is a glove puppet, that he is made of green felt and white plastic and that for him to move and speak, somebody has to put their hand inside him, manipulate his body and mime his mouth to the voice that they give him. He's a puppet. He doesn't move or speak on his own, he doesn't have an independent life and he most certainly does not really exist. He is a fictional character.

He is also, however, the only fictional character in history to deliver a lecture at Cambridge University.

Despite what we *know*, Kermit the Frog remains real to us. Maybe it's because we see so much of his personal life each time he's on TV. Perhaps we identify

with his so-human emotions and frustrations. It may just be that he is (as are all his Muppet companions) unbelievably well performed. Whatever the reason, on that deep, central little core of childhood inside all of us, we know for a fact that Kermit is a real person.

And we're all in on the conspiracy. He has been a guest host on *The Tonight Show*. He has attended film premieres, written a book and led the Rose Bowl parade. He was even a guest at Bill Clinton's 1993 presidential inauguration. Give him a few years and we may all elect him to the United Nations.

Even though we are absolutely certain that Kermit is not real, we can not help but believe that he is a genuine person, and that if we were ever visiting New York, we might have a chance to meet him walking down the street.

And that, my friends, is genuine magic.

So for these reasons, we celebrate Jim Henson. We want you to celebrate with us. We want you to sit around in corridors, stroll through the convention facilities, hang out at parties, and remind each other just how cool Jim was. We want conversations about Supergrover, and painting elephants pink, and Skeksis, and Philo and Gunge, and David Bowie's wig, and Pepe the Prawn, and whether or not you can remember a *Sesame Street* monster named Frazzle.

And if any of you ever visit New York, we want you to keep your eyes out for a two and a half foot tall green frog riding the subway, or a wide-eyed blue nosed thing hanging in coffee shops with a harem of chickens, or a pointy-headed yellow anal retentive feeding pigeons in Central Park.

Because you know that they're out there. All of them.

MY NEW REALLY EPIC FANTASY SERIES

GARTH NIX

This is a variation on a talk I gave at Aussiecon Three and probably will again at Swancon. While I'm better known for writing quite dark fantasy, I do like to let the lighter side of my writing brain take over once in a while...

I'm going to read the prologue from my new 47 book epic fantasy which is currently titled *The Garbeliad*. The titles of the individual books include:

- Book One A Time of Wheels
- Book Two A Throne of Games
- Book Three The Dragon Who Died Young
- Book Four Sorcerer's Thirty-Seven Apprentices
- Book Five The Witch Wardrobe of Lyon
- Book Six The Dark is Falling
- Book Seven The Seventh Book
- Book Eight The Return of the Mistakenly Purchased King

To tell the truth I'm not entirely sure about the other 40 books yet, though I'm toying with *The Book Whose Title Must Not Be Spoken* for Book 26. You know, to keep the series sort of atmospheric and spooky.

Anyway, I decided that before I write this series I'd analyse the components of successful epic fantasy. Like when to have the ultimate evil first be mentioned and so on — should it be page 42 or page 67? And one thing I discovered pretty early on is that you need to have a prologue and preferably a prophecy as well. A birds-eye view of something is a bonus and you can add that in if you like, but it's not essential.

So this is the prologue and prophecy from the first

book of my new 58 book series —I just decided I'd need another eleven books to do it properly, 42 isn't enough.

Prologue From the Secret Ledger of the Accountant

High above the dusty plains, an eagle whose wings stretched from side to side, soared and soared and...soared. Its eagle-eyes focused on the ground below, seeking out tasty vihar-vihar-rabbits.

Then a glitter caught its eye. Not the glitter of dull vihar-vihar-rabbits. No, this was metal, not fur.

The eagle folded the wings that went from side to side and dropped like an eagle that has stopped flying. Down and down and down it plummeted, until two hundred and three feet and seven inches above the ground its wings snapped out.

The eagle stopped in mid-air.

When it recovered from the shock of stopping so suddenly, the great bird of prey, the raptor of the skies, the lord of the birds, saw that the glitter came from a metal badge. A metal badge that was fastened to a brim. The brim of a hat. A hat that was on a head. A head that was connected to a body. The body of a man, who was a traveller.

This was not a vihar-vihar-rabbit. This was not food. Still, the eagle circled in a soaring sort of way, watching and listening. For this eagle had not always been an eagle. It had once been an egg. But even so, it had the gift of tongues and could understand human speech. It could

speak it too, though badly. It had a stutter because its beak was bent.

This is what the eagle heard, when the man with the metal badge on the brim of his hat began to speak to the other men who didn't have metal badges and thus didn't glitter in a way that attracted the attention of eagles that soar.

WHAT THE MAN WITH THE METAL BADGE ON THE BRIM OF HIS HAT SAID

Gather round, unpleasant acquaintances, and partly listen to a tale of our knuckle-dragging forebears and the battles they ran away from. Our recorded history goes back some three weeks to the time that Sogren the Extremely Drunk burnt down the Museum. But I remember tales older still...going back almost ten years, to the time when Amoss the Stupidly Generous gave the Midwinter Party with the ice-skating accident.

Know that this is a story before even that — back to the almost legendary but still quite believable times of twenty years ago. The time when rumour reached the Lower Kingdoms of a new, dark power growing without aid of fertiliser in the north. The name of the Overlord was spoken softly for the first time in secret and troubled councils. In many dark corners, lips whispered it, and then trembled with the effort of not laughing.

For the Overlord's name was 'Cecil' and he was known to have a lisp. Naturally enough, he preferred to be referred to as 'Overlord', and whenever his agents heard his true name spoken, dire retribution would swiftly follow. No one was safe. The merest innocent mention of the word 'Cecil' would result in hideous and usually magical destruction of everyone within hearing distance.

Within days of the first outbreak, the town of Cecil was completely vaporised, and poor unfortunates who had been baptised Cecil were forced to change their names to 'Ardraven' or 'Belochnazar' or other wimpish monikers lacking the macho virility of their own true names.

How is it that I dare to mention the word 'Cecil' to you now? I have this amulet, which magically erases the word 'Cecil' from the minds of listeners after ten minutes have passed. Instead, you will remember a conversation littered with small chiming sounds where the word 'Cecil' has been erased.

But I digress. Where was I? Yes. Frantic messages from the Dwarves went unanswered as their messenger service took so long to walk over the mountains that they weren't actually received until three years after the dire warnings they contained were sent. In any case, Falanor and Eminholme were unprepared to send men to war. Instead, they offered a troop of armoured monkeys and the entire population of a reform school for small children.

This elite force went into the mountains and never returned alive. However, they did come back dead, even more horrible than before and in the service of Cecil...I mean the Overlord.

Shocked, the kingdoms ordered a massive mobilisation and the kings had extra horses harnessed to their personal escape chariots. Yet, even as they extracted the most valuable items from their treasuries, many feared it would be too late.

The forces of Cecil were on the march. Slowly, it is true, for dead Dwarves march even slower than live ones. Yet it became clear to the minds of the Wise that within the next seventeen years, something must be done.

But it seemed that there was no power in the South that could resist the Overlord. For he was the mightiest sorcerer in his age bracket, the winner of all the gold medals in the Games of the Seventeenth Magiad. He was also a champion shotputter, who practiced with the skulls of his enemies filled with lead. And his teams of goblin synchronised swimmers could cross any moat, could emerge at any time in private swimming pools or even infiltrate via the drains, dressed in clown suits. No one was safe.

It was then that the Wise remembered the words written on the silver salad bowl they had been using for

official luncheons the last hundred years. It was brought from the kitchens, and despite the scratches and dents from serving utensils, the Wise could still make out the runes that said, 'Sibyl Prophecy Plate. Made in Swychborg-en-orgen-sorgen-lorgen exclusively for aeki.'

The other side appeared completely blank. But when olive oil was drizzled upon it, strange runes appeared around the rim. Slowly, letter by letter, the Wise began to spell it out.

'A s-a-i-l-o-r w-e-n-t t-o s-e-a s-e-a s-e-a t-o s-e-e w-h-a-t h-e c-o-u-l-d s-e-e s-e-e s-e-e.'

Days went by, then weeks, then months, as you would expect. If it was the other way around it would be a sign that the Overlord had already triumphed. Finally the Wise puzzled out the entire prophecy.

A sailor went to sea sea sea to see what he could see see see
But all that he could see see see
Was the bottom of the deep blue sea sea sea

The meaning of this prophecy was immediately clear to the Wise. They knew that somewhere in the Lower

Kingdoms, a boy would be born, a sailor who would use the power of the sea to defeat the Overlord. A boy with eyes as black as the bottom of the deep blue sea. A boy who might even have vestigial gills and some scales or maybe a sort of fin along his back.

But the Wise also knew that the Overlord would know the prophecy too, for his spies were everywhere, particularly amongst the waiters at the Wise Club. They knew that he knew that they knew that he knew.

They all knew that the Wise must find the boy with the power of the sea at his command first, and take him somewhere where he could grow up with no knowledge of his powers or his destiny. They must find him before the Overlord did, for he would try and turn the boy to the powers of darkness.

But who was the boy? Where was the boy? Was there a second salad bowl, a second verse to the prophecy, long lost to the Wise but known to an aged crone in the forest of Haz-chyllen-boken-woken, close by the sea, where a small boy with eyes the colour of dark mud swam with the dolphins?

Yes, there was.

UNTITLED

IAN NICHOLS

The first house I can remember living in had gaslight. I can still recall the image of my father, tall and lean, standing on my bed to fix the mantle to the gas jet. It had to be fitted just right, so that there were no wrinkles or edges, or the light would be uneven, and the mantle would burn away quickly. Then he'd have to light the mantle with a match, and it would turn from a piece of silky fabric to a rigid, porous shell, so delicate that the merest brush from a finger would shatter it. The light was soft and white, utterly unlike the electric light that we had put on a few years later.

It really wasn't all that far back in history: 1950, to be precise. In Manly, a holiday suburb of Sydney. The house still had gas lighting because it was condemned, and had been for many years. It was actually an old mess hall for the army barracks which had been on the foreshore of Sydney Harbour, back in the nineteenth century. We'd broken in to the house, because we had nowhere else to live after we arrived in Sydney, flat broke. Some people who'd been on the ship with us, coming from England, were already there, and they'd heard about it from others who had been in the same situation. It was a housing estate for the poor. It was also a wonderful place to grow up.

Milk was still delivered by horse and cart, the FJ Holden was the latest thing on the roads, rabbits still came calling down the street, strings of wild rabbits hung from poles over their shoulders. Sydney Harbour was fifty metres from my front door, and the Pacific Ocean only a short walk away. I learned to swim, badly, before I went to school and was bodysurfing, badly, when I was eight. There were gardens that lined the Harbour,

and my friends and I peopled them with characters from comics and books, from the serials we saw at the Saturday matinees. We stole passionfruit from the vines in every backyard, even though there were plenty in ours, for the thrill, for the adventure. I read my first books there, in that house, or dreaming on the beach, or listening to the radio that stood as high as my head and glowed like a fire. Sometimes I'd run along the whole yellow curve of sand, under the looming pines, just for the sheer joy of running and feeling the sand crunch under my feet, the breath rush in and out of me.

My dad died when I was nine, and we moved from the house in Manly to one in Brookvale. It was on a huge block, with immense trees. Gum trees, jacarandas, mulberry, pine. Trees to climb and cull the fruit from, and the scent of jacaranda to drown in, in the heat of summer. A vegetable garden rambled over the back of the block, mostly chokos and potatoes, a few beans and peas climbing up the chicken wire fence, and feral cats to keep the mice down. Twenty minutes walk up the hill was a patch of bush, with streams full of tadpoles and yabbies, and you could rattle back down the hill in a boxcart. I watched television for the first time in the house next door, the Mickey Mouse Club, and maybe another show or two. We got our own television, and I watched *Captain Zero* and *Science Fiction Theatre*, long before *Doctor Who* or *Star Trek*. There was a derelict car abandoned down the back, and I'd imitate the cops on TV, driving it on endless chases after bank robbers, until mum called me back into the house for tea.

My sister married her childhood sweetheart, my mum remarried, and I moved to Cooma, in the Snowy

Mountains. I saw my first snow there, flurried over the red clay that baked as hard as brick in the summer. When the drifts were deeper, I made snowmen, with my friend Michaelangelo. It was the first time I realised that people had real names that belonged to artists. We bounced backwards and forwards between Cooma and Sydney, according to the state of my mum's marriage, which was as stable as the San Andreas Fault. I went to five primary schools that year.

We came back to Sydney, without my stepfather, moved to North Manly, then to Fairlight. A huge, rambling house where the funnelwebs lurked beneath rocks, and one chased me down the steps to the bus. There was a bay window, with a window box beneath it. I would sit in it and read, gazing out over Bantry Bay. I went into high school, and discovered erections and my brother-in-law's collection of *Playboy* and *Man* magazines almost simultaneously. He and my sister shared the house with us, and my stepfather came around every now and then to take my mother out. He was trying to win her back. After a year, he succeeded, and moved in with us. He was an alcoholic, and my mother and brother-in-law followed in his footsteps. I loved that house, with its big, airy verandas, jungle garden and huge back lawn. We moved out pretty soon.

Into a flat in Manly, just off the oval where they played rugby league on the weekend. I read more books in that flat than I ever had before or have since. I was alone a great deal, because both mum and my stepfather were working at a sailing club, which was an ideal place for two alcoholics, one of whom was a gambling addict, as well. Mostly, I had to look after myself. I'd already learned to cook for myself while mum was working nights, and I refined those skills as much as I could. I was a mean hand with curry and rice. I also learned how to break into the cartons of spirits that were stored at our flat, waiting to go to the club. Some bottles were easier to open and re-seal than others, and substituting 50 ml of water left me with 600 ml of scotch or bourbon or rum or whatever per case. I stored these in bottles in the

bathroom, which was also my photographic darkroom. Dark spirits were developer or toner, and white spirits were fixer or stop bath.

Pretty soon, we moved out of there and into a flat opposite the club. My stepfather now managed the club, and mum managed the restaurant. He'd drink a bottle of rum on Sunday, before noon, then go across to the club to drink more. I was in my final years of high school, driving my teachers to distraction by truanting and failing a test, then getting a perfect score in the next one. It was a golden era for magazines, the mid-sixties, and I had every issue of every one. My room was packed with them. I remember reading the first version of *Dune* in Analog. I think every cover for five issues was devoted to it. We were there for a little over a year, then my stepbrother, who didn't live with us, crashed our company car after getting pissed in the club. He was under-age, and my stepfather had let him drink because he'd just entered the police academy. At one stroke, we lost the car, the flat, his career and two jobs. We moved again.

This time it was to a house further up the road, and we stayed there while I sat my Leaving, my mum developed cancer, and I got my first job. I discovered Tyrrel's bookshop, and its racks and racks of second-hand SF books and magazines. I spent half my pay there, every fortnight. Mum got worse, and I took a job closer to home. She died just after my birthday, and was buried on my sister's. The day after, I moved out into a flat of my own. I haven't seen my stepfather since. About a year later, when I was at Sydney University, my sister went back to England. I didn't see her or hear from her again for twenty-five years.

All this isn't what I am, or who I am now, but it's a big part of where I come from. There's been a great deal since then, but, ever since *The Boy's Own Book of Space Stories*, when I was six, Science Fiction and Fantasy has been part of it. I think it helped me with a world that was a little too real, at times.

I thought you might like to know.

A GIFT OF EAGLES

JACK DANN

Some twenty years ago I was in a sweat-lodge being led by a medicine man who, it was claimed, had the gift of eagles. It was explained to me that that was his medicine, his power. In that sweat lodge where it was so hot that your skin could suddenly crack, I remember the steam coming up so hot that it actually felt cold; I remember trying to hunker down into my blanket, and in that moment of sensory deprivation, in the intense heat and darkness, in that small space with eight other men...a space that seemed like miles of darkness...I heard a giant bellows working, felt something flapping inside the lodge, felt the touch of feathers, as something very large frantically flew about, trying to get out of that dark.

The bellows was probably my own blood pounding. The medicine man had an eagle's wing, and was slapping it against my thigh, probably waving the wing in the steam-black air. I know that now, knew it then; but I remember that on one level, it *was* an eagle loose in the sweat-lodge. I knew it was a trick, but a trick played by the Trickster, one that had resonance on a level beyond the rational. For in that instant I had felt the eagle, not the medicine man's feathers, but the eagle.

It was a shared hallucination. I remember shyly asking someone who had sat next to me in the sweat-lodge if he felt anything strange in that session. He laughed and said, 'Yeah, you mean the eagle in the sweat-lodge.'

Why was I in that Indian sweat lodge twenty years ago?

I was researching a novel, of course.

However, traditional Indian religion is not often accessible to non-Indians, and I've been told that most

accounts of Indian religion are not entirely accurate. Traditional Indians are wary of 'Wannabees,' i.e., groupies who see Indian life as glamorous and want to be close to it. How did I get in? I got lucky, I wasn't a 'Wannabee,' and...it's personal.

But those experiences subtly changed the way I experience the world. I recall being at a friend's vision-quest where everyone was 'giving flesh,' a ceremony in which the medicine man cuts the supplicant's skin with a razor and drops the tiny pieces of flesh into a colored square of cloth, which the participant later ties to the branch of a nearby tree as a totem. I asked the medicine man why people were doing this, and he looked at me as if I had just asked the most stupid question imaginable. He laughed and answered, 'Because that's the only thing you've got to give. Your skin is the only thing you really own. So you give a little of it to your friend, to help him. You give a little of yourself. You take a little pain for him.'

And so I gave flesh.

For my son Jody. For my friend Albert. For all of us. And for a little while I lost hold of my ego. There and in the sweat lodge where I burned for a few minutes, or a few hours, I had the revelation—or aberration depending on your point of view—that perhaps down deep in the quick of our unconscious our basic impulses are not selfish and self-seeking.

Of course, back then I also felt the wings of eagles beating in the sweat-lodge.

But it's in my fiction and poetry that I come closest to

remembering the sight and smell and 'feel' of those experiences. In my road novel *Bad Medicine* (HarperCollins Australia, August 2000), you can hear the spirit voices and feel the steam that's so hot it's cold.

And some of the spirits that caught me in the sweat-lodge way back in 1978 are also in poems like "Ceremony", which is probably a fitting end to this piece:

I burn in the darkness
with the others. I
fold into my sweat-stinking
blanket

My body hot wax my hair
on fire. I look down
at the rock people glowing
before me.

Steam chokes me, spirits
flicker in the round
blackness and I tell myself
I'm not afraid.

Oh, Wakan Tanka, what is
this Jew-boy doing here
burning for a vision
in the sweat lodge?

Some of the above material appeared in different form in *The Twilight Zone Magazine*, August 1987 and in *Dancing With the Dark: True Encounters with the Paranormal by Masters of the Macabre*, edited by Stephen Jones, 1999.

MITCH

DANNY HEAP

Being Gratuitous Interstate Fan Guest, Mitch was asked to write a piece for the conbook. In typical Mitch style, rather than do this himself, he decided to get someone else to do it. And who better to write about Mitch than the guy who introduced him to Perth fandom in the first place.

In his full and exceptionally long life, this seemingly young man has achieved many things. Sure a lot of them happen to be humorous and involve bodily functions too distasteful to see print here, but there are others. Other achievements that have helped better life for every living thing on the planet.

It was thousands of years ago now, on a Wednesday, that I first met Mitch. I was out, crawling through the undergrowth, looking for a medium pizza. I crawled to the edge of the jungle and looked out at a pod of pizzas, moving across the vast plains of Gondwanaland like a herd of amoeba. A smallish garlic pizza strayed far enough from its parents for me to make my move. But just as I pulled myself from the undergrowth and headed for the unsuspecting pizza as fast as my hands could drag me, who should come galumphing along but Mitch.

Well, the pizzas scattered but I didn't care. I was struck by the strange creature in front of me. It looked human but it had these weird things on the end of its legs and it moved about vertically. Mitch grinned at me (showing many teeth, far too big for a human cranium) and headed over. I couldn't take my eyes off the ends of his legs.

'Do you like them?' he asked. I nodded. 'I call them...feet.'

40

Well, he helped me make a pair and it was a miracle. I could chase down a large or even a family size with no difficulty thanks to Mitch's invention. At my suggestion that we start selling them, Mitch shook his head. He wanted the world to benefit from his invention and didn't care about making money from it. And Mitch's altruistic attitude hasn't changed after all these years. He's still a big dope.

Well, we grew apart as friends sometimes do and met up again quite a while later, in the America's. Mitch had been seriously screwed over on the foot. He hadn't copyrighted the design and someone had got in and made a fortune. So Mitch had decided to invent something else - an extra nipple. Now this is where I have to make a public apology. I sabotaged Mitch's efforts to get DNA rewritten to include an extra nipple. I had been pushing for my extra penis design for some time and fearing that Mitch would get the funding, started the rumours that a third nipple was a sign of being in league with Satan.

I'm sorry Mitch.

And the sad thing is my idea lost out to a guy who needed a new gimmick for his jewellery.

Like earlobes are actually good for anything.

The next time we met, I was being chased out of a small town in Germany by an angry mob with torches. Mitch appeared out on nowhere and pulled me into a darkened doorway and

THIS SECTION HAS BEEN CENSORED AT MITCH'S REQUEST.

whispered into my ear.

'The tulips will always grow.'

Then he was gone. Even to this day I can remember the butterfly light touch as his lips brushed against my ear. The tulips will always grow.

The tulips will always grow.

I still don't know what the hell that means.

Mitch has always been there during the difficult times of my life. He stepped in and got me out of the freakshow where I was employed as a geek.

'Danny,' he said, 'sure it might be fun, but there ain't no future in bitin' the heads off lizards.' Words to live by indeed. I had the habit of getting in with a bad crowd and Mitch was always there. He managed to convince me that I was up to better things than being a crash-test dummy, a telephone sanitiser, Adolf Hitler or an executive at Microsoft.

All these meetings with Mitch never really let me see the man behind the myth. Like Superman, he would turn up out of the blue, make everything right again, and be gone. It wasn't until my work at Alternate Worlds as manager that I truly got to know him.

Now it may be hard for you to believe, but Mitch wasn't always the good-looking, debonair ladies man we know him as today. No, back in those days he was a dead ringer for actor Clint Howard. Clint is in many films directed by his more famous sibling, Ron. If you check out Apollo 13 you'll be able to see Clint in mission control. Mitch had more hair.

After all Mitch had done for me, I finally had the chance to repay the debt. He would come into the shop at least a couple of times a week, sit in my office and relate to me his girl problems. Mitch would sit there and talk while I worked. Sometimes for an hour, sometimes for the entire working day. Feeling disenchanted, upset, and unwanted, Mitch would tell me of the heartache he felt and I, as Dr. Love (I have a Ph.D. thanks to, you guessed it, Mitch) would give him the best advice I could.

'Look, get over it!'

Well, what can I say, he did. Not only has his face

grown into his head, Mitch's confidence has grown and now he's just one huge throbbing dynamo of sexual tension. Many folks of both genders go weak at the knees at even the thought him. His actual presence gives many people, myself included, the screaming thigh-sweats. Now that he's been lucky enough to find a good-looking woman who is not only intelligent but can sell wrestling moves, we're all left without a chance. You're a lucky girl Sally. You're also a selfish one for not sharing, but this is not the time or place to go into it.

Bitch.

Many people honestly thought that I may be a little bitter that Mitch was a guest this year and that the cretinous, micro-cephalic morons on the committee chose to ignore me all together. How silly. This is a man who was always destined to walk in greatness and I in his shadow. He's been good to me over the years, pretending that the ideas are mine and letting me get the limelight 'cause I'm not as beautiful or good in bed as he. I count myself as lucky that I get to play the Watson to his Holmes, the Martin to his Lewis, the Bert to his Ernie.

Is it any wonder that Mitch was Best-Man at my wedding?

In finishing, I know that when Harlan Ellison patted Mitch on the tummy, it was 'cause he wanted to be Mitch. When Mitch and I dropped our trousers for a photo with Neil Gaiman, Neil's joy at being in a photo with Mitch was evident. Ipongi Bang blushed and hid the first time she met Mitch. There are outtakes from a sequence filmed especially for Aussiecon, where Jack Dann can't help but comment on Mitch's unfeasibly large genitalia. And when Mitch and I appeared as Janeen Webb and Jack Dann respectively I know that Janeen, herself quite stunning, was thrilled that someone with such exquisite beauty should be asked to represent her.

And I got to kiss him¹.

I bet you're all jealous.

¹ Why did no one ever question or even comment on that?

41

TERRY DOWLING & BLACKWATER DAYS

TERRY DOWLING

It's been ten years since I first visited Perth for the unforgettable Swancon 15 in 1990, just a few months before my first book, *Rynosseros*, was published. Now, with my eighth book, *Blackwater Days*, being launched at this Swancon in 2000, I'd like to say a few words about how it came to be.

First of all, it's all Shaun Tan's fault. As some of you will know, I've always been fascinated with exploring the nature and role of horror, tracking its appeal and allure and, if I can, tapping what I consider to be its true potential. I can usually enjoy the familiar cliché thrills, the blood and gore etc. of what rightly or wrongly passes as horror in popular consciousness these days, but am myself drawn to that far more powerful, disquieting, more elusive, atavistic 'horror' that I'm convinced probably has more to do with the classic Greek celebration of Dionysos than most people realise.

Prior to the equally momentous Swancon/Festival of the Imagination in 1996, I already had the central ideas for "Downloading" and "Beckoning Nightframe", and was eager to continue the exploration begun with stories like "The Bullet That Grows in the Gun", "The Daemon Street Ghost-Trap" and "Scaring the Train". I knew I wanted to do a story about utter and considered evil to be called "Basic Black", and one set around the vast World Square site in the heart of Sydney that had been – can you believe it? – abandoned for near on five years due to industrial problems. It seemed a perfect location for something chilling and primal. So, too, the title of Yves Tanguy's painting "The Saltimbanques" had always delivered a marvellously eerie charge. A student I knew

had done a report on diamond valuation. For years, I'd had an idea for a story called "The Magickers" about an Outback carnival following lines of force across the country. All these notions were sitting there at the start of 1996.

Then at Swancon in Perth that Easter, Shaun Tan displayed "Blackwater", and I found myself standing in front of it, staring into its distances, wanting to enter the landscape and resolve it somehow (I'm sure others have felt the desire to do this; the earliest instance I can recall is with Dali's "The Burning Giraffe" back in the 60s).

It's during those long looks at Shaun's painting that things started coming together. I wish I could describe how it felt. I was fortunate enough to buy the painting, and Shaun graciously included the preliminary sketches for it, so I had an equivalent formative journey to set alongside my own. It all seemed so timely, a real synchronicity, something of what Giorgio de Chirico, Max Ernst or Andre Breton would have meant by the mystique of the chance encounter. I wanted to resolve that picture somehow, using these new kernels of stories to do it.

That pretty much determined the format of the book: a prolonged journey to explore a single, haunting image. My earlier horror 'novel', *An Intimate Knowledge of the Night*, was of necessity a linked work after the fact, a way of bringing together diverse stories as Ray Bradbury had done with *The Martian Chronicles*, *The Illustrated Man* and *Dandelion Wine*, using a semi-autobiographical metafiction that was in itself a tale of fear. With *Blackwater Days*, I set out to do the whole thing go to whoa – writing a single work of seven sections leading to an appropriate

climax, but able to be used as separate parts as well. Quite deliberately it's both a single story and seven stories. Each tale, each segment or chapter, if you like, brings you closer to the centre of the work.

The approach seems to have worked well. Of the three sections released for prior publication, two of them – "Beckoning Nightframe" and "Jenny Come to Play" – were chosen for the Datlow/Windling *Year's Best Fantasy and Horror* in 1997 and 1999, and "Downloading" appeared online at Ellen Datlow's *Event Horizon*.

As for the book's form and flavour, the narrative approach, well, there's this. A storyteller working regularly at the craft usually develops an instinctive sense of dramatic effect and placement. It's an intuitive thing. I knew that the book had to be a mystery box, a sustained, prolonged yet delayed (even denied) pattern of revelation. In short, I wanted to have it both ways: providing mystery, resolving mystery, yet retaining mystery. Hard to do, but crucial for dealing fairly with Shaun's painting and tapping that force underlying the best modern horror.

While never consciously recognised at the time, it's no coincidence that the idea of a mystery box is a refrain throughout the book, carried on to the climax with the dioramas made by Peter Rait in the closing story. There's also the theme of the importance of remembering in our lives and so keeping faith with all that we've ever been; there's the theme of orthodoxy throughout – of how marvels and private views are constantly being reduced to convenient handles and methods, tidied up into the business of communal living. Orthodoxy may be great for maintaining community, but it's often lousy for the human spirit, so at odds with what actually *is*. The motif of closure is there too, of trying for appropriate

resolution in our lives. If we can have resolution *and* mystery, then we're really doing well. It's probably somewhere close to the cutting edge of what being maximally human is.

Again, just look at the Greeks of Pericles' day. We don't have that vital, ultimately civilising link as dynamically now. Sometimes you find it in shared experiences like going to movies, concerts and theatre, but it's mostly diffuse and diluted compared to what some older societies had. We desperately want mystery in our lives, but frantically try to contain it, resolve it and prove it false, then find we're disappointed once we've done so.

I feel I've learned a lot recently from entering the immersive environments of better computer games like *Myst*, *Riven*, *Amber*, *Morpheus*, *Temujin*, *Amerzone*, *Lighthouse* and such (and from my own recent work on the story and script for *Schizm: Mysterious Journey* for Poland's L.K.Avalon). Such potentially potent personal journeys, such intimate involvements with false realities that become the real (just as in a book, a play or a film), invariably with some vital narrative mystery to solve or simply resolve. Inevitably, when such 'games' (to call them that) are done, there's the flatness, the inevitable coming down. That's how it is with any kind of mystery in our lives now: we crave more, more, more, then impatiently wipe the board clean as quickly as we can and start again. We need the diet of mystery and wonder, but are at the same time actively involved in its destruction. What a situation:

The Greeks knew that to enact catharsis properly, you had to leave mystery intact and powerful and then enact it vigorously. So, I like to think, it is with my horror writing, I'm not on the side of the devils or the angels, but of the Night Sun himself, old Dionysos.

CHARLES N. BROWN – A HARD LIFE

MARIANNE S. JABLON

Charles N. Brown hasn't worked a day in over 30 years. He faked a couple of moves early on, sure – a stint in the navy, an engineering job with Boeing – but an early love for science fiction and the passionate persistence of a little journalistic habit proved stronger than all the training and brainwashing conventional society could bring to bear. Upon losing his 'safe' engineering position in San Francisco, he gave up job-hunting in favor of a more risky venture — to try to make a little hobby newsletter into a viable, self-sustaining, even lucrative publication. Thus was born *Locus: The Newspaper of the Science Fiction Field*.

Is it work if you'd do it anyway?

Picture this. A house in the hills across the Bay from San Francisco. Daily walks in a beautiful State Park minutes from home. Yearly travels to places like China, Spain, Italy, Australia (to SF conventions of course), not to mention the more mundane trips to 'local' Worldcons and World Fantasy Cons in places like Chicago and New Mexico, Los Angeles and Arizona. Now picture (and I know you can appreciate this) all the new science fiction and fantasy books being published in America (and a number of the ones in Great Britain, Australia, Germany, Russia – you get the idea) flowing into the house on a daily basis. Picture the library in the basement with thousands of books signed by the likes of Arthur C. Clarke, Robert Heinlein, Gene Wolfe, Ray Bradbury, Marion Zimmer Bradley, Robert Silverberg, Ursula K. Le Guin, Stephen King. And picture original science fiction art on the walls by Richard Powers, Jim Burns, Virgil Finlay. And a fireplace mantle which holds Hugo Award after

Hugo Award after Hugo Award – a forest of them. And that's just scratching the surface.

I'm not saying it's all tea and crumpets. Charles's house in the hills is an office five days of the week, invaded by a staff of four, plus humming computers, ringing phones, and constant deliveries. He's on the phone to New York most mornings by 7am, where he can take advantage of the difference in time zones to talk to publishers, agents, and editors about what books are being bought and sold, who's been promoted, or which publishing company has been bought by what German conglomerate. He still writes most of *Locus*' news articles himself, conducts all the interviews, looks at every single book that comes in. He works damn hard. And yet, I'm willing to bet there's a big part of him that doesn't realize it's work at all. For some, the separation between life and work is necessary, desirable. For Charles Brown, there often is no separation. *Locus* has become a well-respected, highly influential magazine in the field – a monthly *Publishers Weekly* of science fiction. It tries to be fair, but it would be untrue to say it's unbiased. Charles N. Brown is *Locus*. And just as any good editor colours the flavor and intent of a magazine, Charles has colored *Locus* and, indirectly, science fiction itself. Over the years the magazine has emphasized important books with thoughtful, scholarly reviews, it's paid attention to up-and-coming authors, and it's acted as *yenta* of the SF field, providing a central 'gossip' area where writers could see what other writers were doing instead of being closeted in their solitary dens. *Locus* has garnered 21 Hugo Awards in nearly 33 years of

publication, but perhaps more important are the Locus Awards it's *given* over the years, voted on by more readers than the Hugos and Nebulas combined. It's reflected the science fiction field and it's helped shape it.

That little 2-page hobby fanzine became a success. Not overnight, but slowly, with thought, intelligence, and, most important, passion. Charles Brown was lucky enough and smart enough to find something he loved to do and brave (or tenacious) enough to do it. He's been reading

science fiction for most of his life, and he can still get excited about a brilliant new novel. He probably knows more people in more areas of the field — writers, editors, publishers, fans — and in more parts of the world than anyone on the planet. He's strong-willed, opinionated, difficult, generous, discreet, interesting, and passionate. And he's doing what he loves and loving what he does, which makes him one of the smartest people I know.

DOWN THESE MEAN STREETS A PIG MUST GO

PETER NICHOLLS

This is the third part of a four part meditation on George Miller's movie Babe Pig in the City, dealing with its film noir aspects. The full piece is entitled "In Dante's Dark Wood, a Piggy-wig Stood". It has not been published before.

Some of the vagrant allusions listed above are fleeting, others are central and continuing, but the most central allusion of all is to *film noir*. The dialogue in the film is archetypal *film noir*, so precise as to go beyond pastiche: Miller adds a genuinely new vision to the tragic iconography of *noir's* bitterness, fatalism and rue.

To begin with, remember that nobody in *film noir* is wholly innocent; the coldly indifferent operations of Original Sin (a belief in which is fundamental to *noir's* philosophy) forbid total innocence. We are tainted just by being human. Or by being pigs. Thus Babe, on one level a Candide-style innocent, is also very nearly a two-time killer, for all that he didn't mean it. At the beginning, back on the farm, he almost kills Farmer Hogget (whose survival is clearly achieved through supernatural means, since a tonne of pumping equipment falls fifty feet or so onto his head). Later Babe accidentally kills—or appears to kill—sinister impresario Fugly Floom. Babe, then, is a pig burdened with horror, guilt and regret, just such a hero as *film noir* archetypally demands. And what better way to deal with regret in a *noir* movie than to deny it with a defiant lack of conviction? Thus at the point of both of Babe's manslaughters, in the mice's imitation of Edith Piaf's brittle, wounded-sparrow voice, we have them singing "Non je ne regrette rien". It sent shivers down my spine. I knew at once, when the Greek Mouse

Chorus did this, that I was in the hands of a film-maker I could trust to go *noir* all the way.

In *film noir* we need (a) a dark city, (b) shadows, and (c) wounded creatures of the dusk. *BPITC* delivers all of these with an astonishing certainty of touch. The design of the city, flamboyant, rococo, menacing, just beneath the flight path of giant aeroplanes, and containing direct visual allusions to Sydney, Manhattan, Venice, Los Angeles, Rio de Janeiro, Paris, London and *Metropolis*, is spectacularly achieved by production designer Roger Ford. One glance at this deeply sophisticated artistic creation, and you realize that *BPITC* is not only intended to have adult appeal, it is problematical—according to some bewildered critics—whether any of it could be understood by children at all. (In my experience children derive a good bit of pleasure from it, and understand more than you might expect; I watched it with kids aged 9 and 13 the first time I saw it.)

Film noir stands or falls on its dialogue, which should create an enigmatic area between toughness and sentiment—difficult to locate—and should at its high points aspire to the condition of an urban poetry like Mallarmé's or T.S. Eliot's. (In a small way, Eliot's *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats* is another likely literary forebear of this film.) Miller's particular triumph is the terseness and resonance of his dialogue.

A minimalist example, which refers back I think to the two cricket fans in Hitchcock's *The Lady Vanishes* (1938), is one of the several exchanges between two elderly gay dogs (in every sense of those words) when the streets outside their hotel erupt into animal riot:

'This is what happens, Alan, on the outside.'
'It's the times, Nigel.'

We have already been warned about the inside/outside dualism in the lines, '...outside—without a human—could be kind of dangerous, you know, in a lethally sort of way...' But Babe, by inviting the city's lost animal souls, a vast collection of strays, back into the hotel, abolishes the distinction between inside and outside, and in doing so rings a death knell to the hotel as sanctuary, poor deluded piggy. His friend the duck gets it at once when he crashes half way into the film down through the hotel skylight, looks around at the *Narrenschiiff* of beasts, and asks succinctly, 'Who are these losers?'

Babe is out of his depth, despite his courage, and he is unable to put things right by words alone, as in his feeble 'Maybe cats and dogs should be nicer to each other.' Early on, an animal trying to help says truly of Babe, 'He's of foreign extraction your honour,' at which Babe—in one of his Eeyore-like moments—mutters darkly to himself, 'Possibly even an alien.'

These are merely passing pieces of deftness, quoted for their poignant brevity, but the key moments of animal *noir* occur in four places: Babe's meetings with the chimp actors, the pink poodle, the pit bull, and a much later passage with the orang-outang, Thelonus.

Babe's first realization of the injustice that can be expected in the big city comes when the world-weary lady chimp, Zootie, one of Uncle Fugly's troupe, explains the facts of life.

Babe: 'Just tell me... there is no reward, is there... was there ever such a thing?'

Zootie: 'O little pink thingie, this is the city, as Bob always says... Waddaya say, Bob?'

Bob: 'It's all illusory. It's ill and it's for losers.'

Zootie: 'No, that wasn't it... you know, that stuff about no yesterday and no tomorrow...'

Bob: 'All you got is this actual nowness, the past is

gone, and as for the future...'

Zootie: 'Yeah, no guarantees my little pork pie, it's a dog-eat-dog world and there's not enough dogs to go around, so you look after Number One, get my drift?'

Babe: 'I'm not a pork pie.'

Zootie: 'Whatever ya say cutie pie.'

Babe: 'I'm not any kind of pie, I'm just a pig on a mission.'

(Mountebank cynic Zootie is later softened when she becomes mother of two baby chimps, whose fate the final, farcical rescue scene depends on.) It is soon after this memorably *noir* exchange that the narrator comments:

'It's tough if you're a pig alone in the city. It can leave you empty... The farm was fading. It had become just a comforting dream, an echo.'

And the sound fades to three mice singing "Are you lonesome tonight?"

Those three mice are know-it-alls, but they get their comeuppance when they stumble horrified, into a room full of tough feral cats singing an *capella* chorale version of "Three Blind Mice". Music is important to the film. The animal hotel is reported to the authorities by a nearby opera lover, and the clean-up occurs to the strains of the Figaro song from Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*. Babe's ability to make things better (Babe as Christlike healer) is symbolized by a reprise of the song from *Babe*, "If I had words", sentimental but nicely ironic in its title, and set to a beautiful melody, a theme from Camille Saint Saëns' Symphony No 3.

If Zootie is the first to remove the scales from Babe's eyes, she is not the last. A key moment of the film occurs when Babe is taken on a food-gathering expedition outside, and then abandoned by the selfish chimps, when a pit bull on a chain lunges at the group. The dog's chain breaks, and a chaotic chase ensues.

Narrator: 'Something broke through the terror, flickerings, fragments of his short life, the random events that delivered him to this, his moment of annihilation. As terror gave way to exhaustion, Babe turned to his attacker, his eyes filled with one simple question.'

Babe: 'Why?'

The dog charges, is deflected, and falls off a bridge in which the chain catches, leaving him hanging helplessly, drowning with his head under water. Babe saves him. From this moment the pit bull is Babe's faithful sidekick, speaking always in a husky *mafioso* Brooklyn accent.

Pit bull: 'Whatever the pig says, goes. Anyone hostile to the notion?'

Babe questions him keenly about his vicious ways:

Pit bull: 'I have a professional obligation to be malicious.'

Babe: 'Then you should change jobs.'

Pit bull: 'No, I can't, it's in the bloodline: you see, we were once warriors... a murderous shadow lies hard across my soul.'

And with that last phrase, true poetry rises up through the pastiche, and just for the moment—not too long a moment, it's true—the name Shakespeare rings in the watcher's ear.

The pit bull claims his emotional crippling is in the blood, is destiny in other words. A genetically programmed badness is another of the central tropes of *film noir*. And if it's not nature, it's nurture.

Consider the pink poodle bitch, who is prominent among the small horde of stray dogs and cats that implore Babe for help, recognizing the piglet's saintliness. She speaks in a soft, sexy, corrupt, Southern accent. She is, in effect, Blanche Dubois.

Poodle: 'Kind sir, kind sir, can you help me? I have been cruelly cast out and have nowhere to go. Please, please, I know you're different from the others, those that have had their way with me and made their empty promises, but they're all lies. Lies. And I'm afraid and [trailing off] terribly, terribly tired.'

Come to think of it, it isn't just Vivien Leigh as Blanche Dubois (*A Streetcar Named Desire*, 1951) in this pink-poodle *tour de force* of special pleading, it's also Gloria Grahame, the dame who has the boiling coffee flung into her face by Lee Marvin in Fritz Lang's *The Big Heat* (1953). You can't get more *film noir* than that.

So the pit bull and the pink poodle are creatures manipulated by destiny, by events, helpless. (Subsequently, they become lovers.) But this does not make them merely to be pitied. These animals are, after all, only human. They are capable, too, of surprising us by joy, as when the pink poodle prances at last into the hotel, throws her head back, and rejoices in her southern-accented honey voice, 'This recalls the old days when I was dizzy with privilege.'

The most pitiable creature in the film is Thelonus, the orang-outang, so neatly dressed. He half belongs to the human world, which is to say the unnatural world, since even the good people seem physically to sin against nature, eccentric, even grotesque: what with Magda Szubanski (Mrs Hogget) being so spectacularly stout and rubicund (a flawless performance) and the hotel proprietress (played by Mary Stein) so insanely angular, and Mickey Rooney at the end of his long life looking like some gothic parody of the one-time child star. Why would any righteous animal want to be part of this world? At best, as with the Hoggets, humans are quite unable to cope with anything beyond the farm, or as with the kindly judge who lets Mrs Hogget off the charges against her, humans themselves are half-animal. In the judge's case, appropriately, half-pig.

And at worst, humans are dangerous or untrustworthy. As the pink poodle says:

'My humans belong to someone else now, someone younger and prettier... Take pity on us. We are the excluded with nowhere to go.'

So Thelonus models himself on Uncle Fugly, whom he calls 'himself', his human master, at the cost of his own animal integrity. Thus, during the escape sequence when Babe and his cohorts break into the animal Alcatraz, and urge all the prisoners to leave at once, Thelonus, wounded, old, baffled, can only stammer, 'I'm not dressed.' Poor Thelonus, almost destroyed by his false

but unshakeable belief that he is somehow human. For me, it was the film's greatest moment of heartbreak. And even at the end, back on the utopian farm (but altogether too utopian for the pink poodle who goes off with a new lover), Thelonus still in his jacket is helping Esmé Hogget to peg the clothes out on the clothesline, a beautifully understated symbol of his dreadful illusion that clothes maketh the man. Meanwhile the chimps, now naked, are playing in the trees.

These are some of the moments that make *BPTC* the outstanding *film noir*/fantasy of our time.

ACCIDENTALLY IN TRANSIT

CATHY CUPITT

Judy pushed the football shaped bundle out onto the bitumen, then grabbed onto the lip of the manhole with both hands and lifted herself up and out. In the distance she could hear the sirens of police cars as they converged upon the museum. It wouldn't be long before they discovered her escape route. But that was OK. Judy had planned on that, and had timed everything so that she would have plenty of leeway; she was paranoid that way.

Judy hoisted the manhole cover back into place and pulled off her gloves, folding them both carefully into the inside pocket of her jacket. She picked up her bundle and then pulled out her keys as she walked over to where she had left the car.

The car was gone.

She stared and blinked at the empty space.

'Typical,' she muttered.

This was exactly what she hated about the getaway phase; too many variables could go wrong. Especially now that it was getting so you couldn't drive anywhere in the city and still have a ride home afterwards.

Judy didn't take time out to curse the thieves; she'd make sure they got theirs later on. She knew people who knew people, and her car was unique enough that it would not be easy to on-sell.

It was just as well she believed in contingency plans. Now that she was accidentally in transit, she would need them. Judy took a moment to slide her bundle into the concealed jewellery pocket of her backpack, and then began walking towards the nearest train station. She pulled out her mobile as she walked and called for a taxi.

'Hello, Speedy's Taxis,' said the operator.

'I have a booking; I want to confirm it,' said Judy.

'What was the name?' asked the operator.

'Punch,' said Judy.

'Pick-up at seven-fifteen at the corner of Seventh and Main?'

'That's right,' said Judy, as she came to the corner of Seventh and Main. It was five past seven. 'Will the taxi actually be here at seven-fifteen?'

'Our service is currently experiencing a thirty-five minute delay,' said the operator. 'We apologise for any inconvenience this may cause you.'

'I see,' said Judy.

'Do you still want the taxi?' asked the operator.

'Yes,' said Judy, and hung up. She pressed the speed dial button for the second taxi service.

'Hello, Pink and Blue will get you through. How can I help you?' asked the operator.

'I have a booking in the name of Lambchop,' said Judy.

'Seven-fifteen at Eighth and Main?'

'That's right,' said Judy.

'I can confirm the booking,' said the operator. 'Unfortunately we are experiencing a forty-five minute delay. We apologise for any disruption this may cause to your travel plans tonight.'

'Fine,' said Judy, and hung up.

Judy kept to the shadows and ran the next two blocks. She made it to the Ninth and Main bus stop just in time for the seven-fifteen bus. She wasn't breathing hard; Judy had trained very thoroughly for this job. If she was going to be caught it was not going to be due to

something stupid like a lack of fitness or poor organisation.

The electronic notice board was scrolling: OUT OF SERVICE. On the back of the bus shelter a sign had been posted:

Due to poor working conditions the Transport Workers Union has commenced a strike against City Transit. We apologise to commuters for the short notice before the commencement of the strike.

For a moment she was tempted to thump the bus shelter, but it wouldn't do to be leaving any incriminating fingerprints or DNA. Instead, she moved on. It was definitely time to cut her losses and go underground; the underground was always the safest place in this city for a crim to be in transit.

Once at the train station Judy pulled on a new pair of gloves and went over to the main gate. She nudged aside the Public Hazard notice to get at the security grill and used her lock-pick to let herself in; she locked up again behind her. It took her a few minutes to get into the building itself, as she had to wind her way around all of the pressure sensors and alarms.

The main platform was deserted; not even any Deros sleeping in the corners tonight. In the glimmer of moonlight coming in through the broken windows Judy fished around in her backpack until she found her torch. Flashlight in hand, she headed down the motionless escalators to the lowest level of the station. When she reached the bottom she switched on, waited until all the rats had disappeared from her circle of light, and then headed towards the tracks. At the edge of the platform she jumped down, landing with a splash that flushed out a new wave of fleeing rodents.

'Lovely,' she muttered.

Tonight the water was up to her knees, a good ten centimetres higher than the last time she'd been here. It was starting to become all too easy to believe in the myth about the alligators living in the tunnels.

She waded south through the greasy water until she came to the second access hatch. The door was well-oiled and easy to open. Once inside, she followed the corridor to the de-commissioned pumping station, and played her torchlight over the assorted pipes. The yellow stripe on the waste water pipe was faded but still visible. She followed it to the entrance to the city sewer system, opened the air-lock door, and dropped down into the tunnel. She landed on a plinth set slightly above the sewerage level.

Judy turned the light of her torch onto her watch. Seven-twenty-five. Right on time. She juggled her torch and her backpack so that she could pull out a chocolate bar.

At seven-thirty she heard the quiet *phut, phut* of a modified engine; then an approaching light illuminated the intersection a few hundred metres to the north. A moment later the ferry itself slid into view and Judy flashed her torch twice. The boat edged out of the main current and headed for the plinth.

When it pulled up, Judy hopped on and tossed the driver the chocolate bar. There were only two other passengers, sitting close together on one of the rear benches. She chose a bench near the driver.

'How far?' he asked.

'The Junction,' Judy replied.

'Ah,' he said, eyeing her backpack. 'There's police at the Junction. Random Dero sweep.'

'Oh,' she said. 'I don't much like the police.'

'Don't fancy 'em much myself,' said the driver. 'They keep arresting off-duty drivers. Mucks up the schedules more 'n storms do.'

'What about The Warrens?' asked Judy.

'Well you could try 'em,' the driver replied. 'But the Deros and the Skins have started up their war again. You'd be better off trying Christo's jetty.'

'Christo and I had a little disagreement last time we met,' said Judy.

The driver shrugged.

'I guess the harbour's still got forensic teams all over

it?' asked Judy.

'You guess right. Can't trust those polities to die somewhere decent these days,' said the driver. 'It's always murder and assassination. No respect for the way the investigations stuff things up for regular folks at all. Do you know it takes seventeen gangs to keep the underground safe and secret for honest crims these days. Seventeen!'

Judy nodded her head sympathetically, while thinking things through. Not that things needed much thinking. She was trapped.

Trapped like a rat in a sewer pipe. She was safe enough as long as she could afford to keep paying the ferryman; the police didn't dare come down here. The gangs who ran the underground system had old-tech weapons, and liked to use them. But temporary safety down here didn't help her get clear of the net above. All the exits with connecting transport were off-limits. All her careful planning and effort were for nothing.

Judy looked at her watch. Seven-forty. The cops would be on her trail by now; tracking her stolen car and chasing empty taxis. If she wasn't out of the sewer and on an inter-state transport in the next ten minutes she might as well forget the whole thing. They'd have the city on alert for weeks; there was no way she'd be able to get past them if she missed the window.

For a moment she contemplated dropping the object overboard; the liquid roiled, thick and inviting, by the side of the ferry. If she dropped it, it would be at least three days before they found it in the filters. And she *could* drop it if she had to; she'd been careful not to touch it directly, so no DNA residue would be left behind. She most definitely did not want to be linked to this...thing. Theft charges she could bribe her way out of, but trafficking in prohibited old-tech was a whole different story. And there was no way anyone would believe that the object was anything other than old-tech; it was made of real plastic for godsake! Even worse, it was suffused with the faint stink of petro-chemicals. If she was stupid enough to try

and take it back up, she'd never get it past the sniffers, even if she did get it past the cops.

On the other hand, without the prize in her possession it would be easy to just walk away, get arrested with the Deros and bail herself out when things had calmed down in the morning.

Of course, she'd have to explain why she'd ditched the artifact to the client, which was never a happy task. And there was the fee to consider; two mil was a big job to just drop over the side. But that was not the worst part; the worst part would be having to concede defeat.

'Bugger that,' she muttered.

She took a quick inventory of her backpack while she thought through her options. She had plenty of emergency supplies in the pack, but not many options.

In fact, the more she thought about it, the more it seemed there was only one thing to do. If she was going to take the prize, it looked like she would have to stay right here, in transit, for the duration. The cops knew that she hated the getaway phase; it was in her psych-profile. By now they must have figured as their prime, so their preoccupation with the psych-profile could actually work in her favour. They'd be expecting her up top and moving fast. So if she played this cool and stayed underground, in a few weeks there was every chance she could just walk out of here.

Besides, if tunnel rats could enjoy being stuck in a sewer, then for two mil, goddamn it, so could she.

'Listen,' Judy said to the driver.

The driver shrugged a shoulder to show he was listening.

'I think maybe I'll take a little nap,' she said, tossing him another couple of chocolate bars. 'I'll make it worth your while if I'm not disturbed.'

'When d'you want me to wake you?' asked the driver. Judy settled down on the floor of the ferry, her back against the side, her head resting on her backpack.

'In about three weeks, I think,' she said, and closed her eyes.

Mermers of the Heart

Barefoot through the
Passages of this great fortress
The sole insinuates the cold
(creeping death by lovelessness its other name)
Is vicious as broken glass

Not really so

My hair is gone
That's true
My mouth is empty
No tongue at all
That's true

And the witch must have come from the sea
floor -
That dank hell of detritus sinking from a sunny
consciousness -
Don't they all?

But..

One forlorn question is really the filleting blade
(offered by my sisters) for the heart
Then used against the power of the tail
(Oh, spell it tale and call it true!)
Why did I exchange the becoming, watered
womb
For bargain basement pain
While he (who had only legs to lose)
Eschewed the scales of history
Though he had all the world to gain?

FAIRYTALE QUARTET

TESS WILLIAMS

Girlz in the Hood

A wild child
I cast no reflections
Breathing with the trees
Sleeping away from the trails
The Wolf folded in the curve of my belly

Then

Spring's dreadful blossoms dropped
Redly on the hem of my cloak
And the cottage kitchen mother bade the
woodsman follow me

Thoughtless as any prince
He took me

It was the only way, really,
For I could never cum willingly
Over the body of my beast
And that civilised murder
Leading to even greater loss
... My grandmother's voice

(Remember
Swallowed may be unswallowed
in Fairy Forests
but dead is dead anywhere)

Her castle?

Good question

A distant deal, where a tiny eyeless apple of flesh
was swapped
For some other strange fruit in Hecate's garden,
Forced half the title deed on me

And of course she did the motherly things
Like comb my hair
And lock me up
So I thought a life could not be rescinded
Any more than flame could be rescinded from
ash

He changed that

And left behind a map
Written in the fine traceries of his sons' veins
They sang a duet of blood I may never have
heard
But for that renegade droplet at the tearing
Anyway
I had to go
Once she and I knew, I knew more than she
The hymen's not found there!
(the science of old women is not absolute)
The hymen is the membrane
Wrapped atom to atom about a woman's heart.

The wheel of fate
Was weighted
Needle nursed
By watchful witch
And I succumbed
To inevitable narcolepsy.

Aye, and in that sleep what dreams did come!

Hooked deep in the belly of the continuum
Fusing with scales, feathers, fur and stars
Leaving behind the hollow men
Mapping the chronological genome of Old
Father Time
(Hal! They couldn't map one of his beard hairs!)

While I tasted chocolate earth
Was warmed in cloud fleece cloaks fastened with
rainbows
And brushed pearly tears from
The cracked face of the woman in the moon.

Until another prick woke me ... With a kiss.

SOJOURNER

STEPHEN DEDMAN

The creature passed as human, but that was largely because few people noticed it and no-one remembered it when they weren't looking directly at it. Lacking ears, it rarely spoke except to say what people expected it to say, and then only if they were close enough for it to read their lips. It swept and mopped different wards in the nursing home apparently at random, and no-one was entirely sure whether it was a patient or an employee. It had no bed there, and came and went freely, but its name appeared on no rosters and no pay slips; in fact, it had no bed, no home, no money, and went where it would without hindrance. If questioned, it would show a scrap of paper that might have been a ticket, a receipt, a passport, or a banknote. Its pockets contained coins from different countries, for it had learnt that these were important to humans. People who asked it for change might later find themselves in possession of sixpences, sovereigns or sestertii, but without any memory of meeting the creature. Occasionally it slept, for seconds or for centuries, and could not have said whether it was unique or one of millions. It had no memory of its own origin, but lived on the stolen memories of others.

It had eyes and could see, after a fashion, but depended more on the flavour of nearby human minds. Most afternoons, it travelled on crowded trains and buses, where it could get close enough to feed without being noticed. Surrounded by human dreams, it feasted, picking out such delicacies as anticipation and anger. Fantasies and dreams delighted it, and were easily stolen. Rage and joy were caviar and sashimi to it; the half-aware resentment and depression of early morning commuters were liver,

cauliflower, porridge. Its bite was noticeable only as a momentary blankness, the loss of a train of thought.

Sometimes, on weekends, it attended sporting events. Cricket particularly pleased it; few of the entranced spectators noticed if the creature devoured entire minutes from their consciousness, and the occasional spurts of enormous delight or despair were delicious. Other sports, cinema, concerts, strip shows, weddings and funerals rounded out his diet. Christmas shopping and the Royal Show were melanges of excitement and exhaustion, tinged with the sourness of frustration, depression, defeat, and the occasional tang of fury. Only at the nursing home, however, did the creature ever gorge itself, taking great bleeding chunks of memory from the defenceless.

When visiting hours were over for the day and most of the residents asleep, the creature drifted from bed to bed unnoticed. Tonight, as usual, it paused by Mr Ragno for a snack. Yesterday, it had stolen the old man's encapsulated rage at the dismissal of Gough Whitlam; today, it devoured memories of funerals, all melted together like Neapolitan ice-cream. Ragno was much obsessed with death lately, rather than lusts and luxuries, but it was all brainfood for the creature. He dined on the shape and colour of coffins, the scent of churches, the veiled faces of mourners, the words 'wreath' and 'epitaph' and 'beloved', and all the flavours of emotion that went with them. No-one would be astonished if Ragno forgot these, maybe not even Ragno himself.

Miss Fischer smiled politely as the creature swept around under her bed. She had no memories left of anything but the children she'd taught over forty years;

the creature wondered, occasionally, whether she'd met another of his kind before, or whether she'd somehow slowly devoured much of her own life. Her childhood, her adolescence, every night, all had dissolved into a thin grey sour gruel. From her, the creature took her dislike of pumpkin, the life cycle of the butterfly, and the story of Cinderella, then it walked away unsatisfied.

It paused in the corridor, watching two nurses as they brushed past. From one, it stole the name and cigarette taste of the woman she'd picked up in a bar on the night before, then shuffled towards Mr Mills's room, peering in before he entered; unlike the other patients, Mills frequently had visitors, and disliked being disturbed. The old man was alone, but he managed to glare at him without lifting his gaze from the yellowed letter in his hand. Every few days over the past few months, the creature had eaten a word or two of that letter from Mills's memory. Mills responded by re-reading the letter until he'd memorised it again. A week ago, the creature had devoured half of the number of Mills's Swiss bank account along with his memories of the feel of stolen gold. 'Who are you?' growled Mr Mills. 'Can't you let an old man die in peace?'

The creature said nothing, and slowly backed out of the room. Better to return when the old man was asleep, and feed on his delicious dreams. It turned the corner and walked into Mrs Morrison's room instead. Her eyes were closed, but she smiled as though she recognised and expected him. The staff knew better; Mrs Morrison no longer even recognised her children, and occasionally forgot that her husband had been dead for nearly twenty years. Successive strokes had eroded more and more of her memory, but there were still disconnected fragments that would attract a connoisseur, and the smile

promised good eating. The creature pushed the broom around the bed a few times, passed the chart that read 'Not for Resuscitation' without noticing it, and stood by her bedhead.

The memory on the surface of her mind was clear enough; a red curtain, a green cloth draped over a rail, a white plate, the colours incredibly vivid. The creature devoured this, enjoying the hints of almost-forgotten detail; an aftertaste of afterglow, a quiet giggle as she thought of herself as Mrs Morrison after only a few days of marriage, delight in a perfectly sunny morning after a week of rain, mild pleasure in a job well done, and the sheer joy of being out of her family home at last and in a house of her own.

The smile remained frozen on Mrs Morrison's face, and the creature probed again with its mind-tongue to discover the same memory - the white plate, the green cloth, the red curtain. He snapped it up, satisfying his hunger but not his curiosity. The image didn't fade; if anything, the colours became slightly more intense as Mrs Morrison, dying, relived the happiest moment she could recall. A white plate, a green cloth, a red curtain. A white plate, a green cloth, a red curtain.

The creature fed greedily on this one undying memory in the dying woman's mind. Its own identity faded, overwhelmed by the force of her memory, those simple forms, those pure shades. Mrs Morrison's breathing became shallow, her heartbeat faint; she opened her eyes, vaguely aware that someone else was in the room. She spoke, but no-one heard her. White. Green. Red.

Black.

A night nurse found the creature lying by her bed, the broom still in its hands, its pockets full of old coins and paper scraps.

THE MAP TABLE

MEREDITH COSTAIN

Adam Carter stomped into his room, steaming with anger. Rotten parents. Rotten school. Rotten, rotten homework.

The soccer finals were on TV. Everyone else would be watching. Except him. He'd be sitting in his cold bedroom, with his books and his folders and his pencils, doing his homework. It just wasn't fair.

Adam stared at the surface of his desk. Anything to take his mind off maths. The desk was old, a present from his weirdo uncle, Aldo. Aldo never came to visit much, but when he did, he always brought a gift for someone in the family. Then he'd disappear again, off on his travels. The desk had sturdy legs, and three small drawers down one side. 'For your secret treasures,' Uncle Aldo had winked. 'Use it wisely, now.' But Adam had filled the drawers with stubby old pencils with broken leads, crumpled bits of paper and lumps of stale chewing gum. Adam didn't believe in secrets *or* treasure.

The most special thing about Uncle Aldo's desk was the top, with its large, colourful map of the world. Africa beckoned, a dark and mysterious red. Cool, blue seas washed the shores of the shell-pink islands of the Pacific. The purple boot of Italy kicked poor Sicily into the Mediterranean. *Wish I was in Italy*, thought Adam, as he struggled with his algebra. Bet *their* parents don't make them do homework when the soccer finals are on. He doodled with the point of his compass on the long tip of the tiny country. Little flakes of purple paint piled up on the desk-top. It was no good. He just didn't *feel* like doing sums. Not while the soccer was on.

'Look at this,' said his father at breakfast the next morning. He wagged the newspaper. 'There was a massive

landslide in Southern Italy yesterday. Hundreds of homes were buried. Isn't this the village your grandmother came from, Anna?'

'Not that one, no,' said Adam's mother, peering at the front page news story. 'Nonna lived near Brindisi. Still, it must have been terrible for all those people. Terrible.' She turned to Adam, who was eating his cereal hungrily. 'Did you finish your homework, Adam?'

'We-ell...' began Adam.

'Then you'll have to do double tonight,' said his mother. 'Understand?'

Boy, was she a ~~shave~~-driver!

There was a live broadcast of the footy on TV that night. Adam decided to do his homework straight after school, rather than after dinner. That way he might be finished in time for his program. He sped through his science assignment, raced through his reading review, and was just reaching for his geography book when his elbow made contact with the glass of cordial balancing on the corner of his desk.

'Blast!' said Adam. The cordial soaked into his science project, smudging the tricky diagram he'd just spent ages perfecting. A little puddle of cordial flowed over onto the surface of the desk, but he was too concerned with saving his precious drawing to notice.

'Muuuummm!' he wailed. He carried the soaked paper into the kitchen. Mrs Carter studied the ruined project. 'It's no good carrying on about it, Adam,' she said. 'You'll just have to do it again. Come on. It's not the end of the world.'

'Well, it is for me,' muttered Adam. The project was

due the next day. He'd have to do the diagram all over again, and miss his footy program. Rotten homework.

'Call your sister in for dinner please, Adam.' Adam flounced into the loungeroom. The news was on. *'...and in California, people are fleeing coastal towns in droves as tidal waves threaten the south-west coast.'* Adam watched the flickering images on the screen. His brow wrinkled for a moment. Tidal waves? There was always some disaster happening in the world. 'Dinner!' he called, plonking himself down at the table.

Half an hour later he was back at his desk again. He took out a fresh piece of paper and zipped open his pencil case. The little puddle of cordial stared accusingly at him from the map of North America. He soaked it up with the sleeve of his jumper and started in again on his diagram. But the drawing wouldn't come right.

'Rotten homework,' muttered Adam. He used his black texta to slowly and painstakingly obliterate a tiny principality in Central Europe. Bet they don't have to do homework in that American flooded place, he thought, widening the circle of texta marks carefully. He drew a ring of little dots around the black blot. Then he packed up his books and went to bed.

The next morning, the papers were full of the tragedy in Europe. A massive earthquake had struck overnight, annihilating the population of an entire country. 'Such terrible things that happen in the world,' said Adam's mother, shaking her head.

'Where was it *this* time?' asked Adam, his mouth full of cornflakes.

'A tiny little country in Europe,' said his mother. 'And now there's nothing. Just a black hole in the map.'

A hole? A *black* hole? Adam wiped his mouth with his sleeve and pulled the newspaper towards him. He studied the map on the front page showing where the country had been. After a moment he excused himself from the table and, knees trembling, headed for his bedroom.

He looked down at the map table. He compared

the position of the black marks he had made the night before with the map in the newspaper. A tiny alarm bell pinged in his brain. He looked down again at the map. The surface over California was still slightly sticky from the hastily mopped up cordial. The purple toe of Italy was flaking and peeling. It was just as if...

No. It couldn't be. He *couldn't* be controlling the events of the world. Could he? Adam looked down at the map. The brightly coloured countries looked back trustingly at him. No. It wasn't possible.

But he longed to experiment. To test out his theory. Just one little, insignificant country. One that no one had ever heard of. The power. Just think of the power! He wouldn't ever have to do homework again!

Adam pored over the map, looking for a place that no one would miss. Of course! Antarctica! Antarctica was just one gigantic block of ice, wasn't it? Surely no one would miss a few hectares of ice.

He reached into the bottom desk drawer and pulled out a box of matches. Slowly, carefully, he lit one, and held the blue flame to the white mass at the bottom of the map. The paint hissed and fizzed and the match glowed brightly before blackening and dying. 'No homework tonight!' thought Adam gleefully.

Adam was the first to breakfast. He grabbed the paper from the front step, ripping it open with trembling hands. 'Polar ice-caps melting!' blazed the headline. 'Threat to low-level countries.'

It was true! It worked! He could control the world. All through school his mind rattled and hummed, plotting and planning his future. He would be powerful. Powerful and rich. Kings and presidents would vie for his powers. He couldn't wait for school to end so he could get back to his precious map table, and play with the world.

As Adam hurried through his front door he heard a curious buzzing sound. *Bzzzzz*. Pause. *Bzzzzz*. The rasping sound filled the house with noise. 'Is that you, Adam?' his mother called. 'Come here, young man, I want to talk to you.'

Adam was in a hurry to get to his room. To his map table. To his world. 'Later, Mum, all right? I've got some homework to do.'

'Well, that's what I want to talk to you about,' said his mother, coming up close to him. 'That lovely desk your Uncle Aldo gave you. You've been ruining it. Just like a little vandal. All scratched and scribbled on.'

Adam paused, one hand on the door of his bedroom. The rasping sound was growing louder.

'It's a mess. And it must be distracting you from

your homework. So I've asked your father to clean it up for you.'

The rasping sound was now unbearably loud. The whine of an electric motor drowned out the scream that launched itself from Adam's throat.

'Nnnoooooo...!' he shrieked, throwing open the door. The buzzing sound stopped abruptly, as Mr Carter switched off his electric sander, and turned to face his son. But it was too late. Already the edges of the room were slowly starting to darken...

"The Map Table" won the Mary Grant Bruce Story Award for Children's Literature in 1992.

It appeared in *Fears and Fantasies* (Heinemann *Blasters*) in 1997 and *Spinouts: Last Gasp* (Lorigman) in 1999.

COELACANTH SOUP

ROBIN PEN

'In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
A Stately pleasure dome decree:
Where Alph, the sacred river, ran
Through caverns measureless to men
Down to a sunless sea.'

'Pardon?'

'Did you know I directed part of *Citizen Kane* with a broken leg? Yes, of course you did. Everyone knows everything about Kane. There are no secrets left. Funny, considering it's about a secret. Well, maybe it's not funny at all.'

He paused to draw deep from his Cuban cigar. I sat there, my flat white going cold, waiting for him to continue. Not just to hear what he had to say, but to hear his voice say it. That deep, smooth sound that belongs to things like a deep canyon river. That voice doesn't just demand attention; it seduces your senses into falling in with the harmonics, the rhythm. Before he spoke again he took the time to take several small puffs and exhaled a large grey dense cloud. Then, waving the cigar in front of his face, forming tiny smoke trails that, intentionally or otherwise, half hid his well-tempered smile, he continued, 'You know, I often wonder if I should have ever made that film. Yes, it made me, but it has been trying to break me ever since. When your first film is the greatest picture ever made, there is only one direction you can go.'

He silently chuckled, perhaps over something he didn't say. His chest and belly bobbed up and down like the experience of ages compressed tightly into a small space. He wasn't as thin as he first appeared in *Kane*, nor was he huge and bloated as in *Touch of Evil*. Sort of in

between, but not quite like in *Third Man* or *Lady of Shanghai*. He was a size never shown in his movies. Maybe it was his 'comfortable' weight. And he indeed seemed to be comfortable with his size.

We sat at a moderate size table in this cafe. Moderate still being fairly large. Not nearly as large as the long table where the Giant Japanese Monster Experimental Theatre ensemble were seated discussing character motivation. Nor was our table as large as the round table where all those crazy doctors were singing German songs of a bygone era. Caligari was trying to be louder than Mabuse and failing while Rotwang kept nudging Von Braun to keep in rhythm. Great men in their day, a lot of piss-tanks now. From their dimly lit corner booth, the three Men-In-Black gave the scientists disapproving glances when not staring through their sunglasses into their black coffees. I think their irritation stemmed more from jealousy that the mad scientists knew how to have a good time. Or the jealousy might've come from the fact that the MIBs were huddled over the smallest table in the joint, barely giving them room enough to hold the three black coffees, let alone their three black hats (not at the moment in their normal location, that being on top of their oily, black-haired heads), whereas the jovial doctors had quite a sizable table. Thank God Bugs, Daffy, and Harpo weren't at their usual table tonight or the MIBs would be really miserable.

I was tempted to go over there and tell those lads in black to lighten up. But I wasn't going to spare a moment away from listening to the gentleman seated across this moderate size table in front of me. Moderate as much as

we weren't close enough to be intimate or distant enough to be aloof. I think he likes to keep a respectable distance from his public, not that they come to speak to him often. But how could you not stop to listen to him speak? You can hear how he could be - is - The Shadow. 'What evil lurks in the hearts of men?' Only a man with a voice like that could present a knowing smile and give a short, clever witticism on the subject. And you can hear how this voice could send thousands of Americans screaming into the streets back in '38. If he cried 'Martians' I would look up too. But around here you'd see Martians. Martians and their invasion armada flying over head. But they hardly ever land, and when they do, it's only to sight-see and get autographs. Three (they always come in threes) were by our table a little earlier (receiving suspicious stares from the Men-In-Black who had their hats tightly on) to get the signature of The Man they felt had done so much to publicise their cause. He smiled and signed their napkins and they scurried back to their craft before the mischievous Rodan could scream by again (she keeps bowling their ships over for a lark).

He shrugged, 'I don't know why they keep coming to me, I didn't make that movie. But then George Pal can't stand the little buggers and keeps hiding in churches. Religion? I don't think even God understands that concept.' I politely chuckled, then fell silent. I really didn't know what I could say to this man that could possibly matter. He looked at me, understanding and a little sad. Then his eyes glazed over again and took another puff of that damn huge cigar.

'A savage placel as holy and enchanted
As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted
By woman wailing for her demon lover!'

There was a brief silence as he drew up some distant memory. 'Rita, she couldn't act, but who cared,' he said quietly, as if briefly oblivious to my presence. Just as quickly he was back to the present. 'Did you know that I had it put into the contract that Kane can never be colourized?'

Yes, of course you knew that. But that wasn't as clever as I thought it was at the time. Now I realized that I should have included a clause regarding 3-D.'

I raised my eyebrows, expressing my puzzlement.

'Computers. The devil finally found a temptation that God couldn't beat. Still it would have been damn handy in my day. I would have liked to have done a version of, say, *Pandora's Box* using such devices. Can you imagine Jean Cocteau with a computer? *La Belle et la Bete*, *Orphee*, *Pandora* with computer graphics? But even with traditional tools and in black-n-white he'll still beat most filmmakers using modern technology and colour hands down. What would Cocteau have done with a computer? Ignored it probably. Now if I had computers at my disposal. They might even have allowed me to finally make *Heart of Darkness*. Shoot it on the Hudson and generate the forest all around it, make it for peanuts. Still, I would have done it entirely with rear projection if I thought the studios execs could understand.'

'Understand what?'

'Anything. Anything that matters. Matters in making pictures. Matters in telling a story. And they are frightened by anything they don't understand. Which means frightened of everything. Especially frightened of *Citizen Kane*. Frightened of me.'

Welles showed a tragic smile. A look of victory-in-defeat. He didn't look at me. He wouldn't take his eyes away from the tip of his cigar as the mechanical waitress replaced the filled cigarette tray, topped our glasses of iced water and ignored our half drunk and stale coffees. I turned my head to her and studied her expressionless brass deco features that reflected everything on the table as frozen gold. The glowing tip of the cigar gleamed from her chest plate like a lonely soul trapped deep inside. When I looked back to Welles, he was sitting straight and proud with his huge cigar clenched hard between his teeth.

'They didn't understand John Ford either. Nor Eric Von Stroheim, Fritz Lang, David Lean, Billy Wilder, Val Lewton, Powell, Pressburger, Kurosawa, even Alfred

Hitchcock. They didn't understand and they were frightened. But these filmmakers could charm. Charm the budgets and go aheads right out of them. That's what you had to do to win over frightened children. That's what I couldn't do. Oh I charmed them, yes I charmed them alright. But it wasn't enough. They were too terrified of me. Too terrified of *Kane*. Too afraid to be that close to one of the greatest films ever made.

'They weren't too frightened of John Huston however, though they should've been. Not frightened because he treated them like the scared little children they are. Always reassuring them that all he was doing was in their best interests. A great liar was John. One of the few men I know who could lie to everybody and still keep his integrity. I enjoyed my time on *Moby Dick*.'

'Amusing that they would let John do Melville's massive whale monster epic, but when it came to me doing a Conrad novella, they were too frightened. We had to wait till decades later for a screen adaptation, using napalm, helicopters and hash, by yet another filmmaker they're frightened of. I have no idea what Joseph thinks of it. Wouldn't insult him by asking. He was disappointed, however, when he learnt that Lean died before making his beloved *Nostromo*. Who wasn't disappointed back here. We were all waiting for a decent movie to come along again.'

'Still, Joseph wasn't as bitter as H.G. I don't think Herbert liked anything they adapted from his writings. Verne loved them all, he'd be willing to do novelisations so his books fit more into the films. But Wells, no. *Island of Lost Souls* and *The Invisible Man*, he thought weren't too bad. I think he may have a soft spot for *Things to Come*, but he certainly despises that *War of the Worlds* panto they attached to his name. Actually, I feel a little guilty about that. Regardless, it doesn't stop Herbert from going to those silly conventions. The Martians and Selenites love him and he gets an ego trip giving his quaint speeches about time travel and free love. But then those guys were never the problem. The problem was and is those

frightened little exec people. They almost make me wish I stuck to radio or wrote novels instead.'

He chuckled once more and the smoke exploded in little puffs with every little 'huh huh' he made. He leaned back in his chair and before he could lapse back into reverie was disturbed by a burst of bright through the cafe windows. At that moment I noticed that the endless humming of the interminable Martian fleet had actually ended. They'd become a speckled cloud disappearing over the horizon, gone for the day. Almost as if it had been in waiting for an empty sky, the moon came out. Its meringue-textured faced looked fairly unimpressed about something. Maybe it was the big bullet shaped vehicle planted in its right eye. However, its other eye was staring aggressively down to the street out front the cafe.

I looked out to the cobble-stones and, as if on cue, a man with a huge moustache came bounding out trailing behind him huge sheets of card-board. He began erecting briskly what appeared to be crudely painted moonscapes. The man gibbered in what must have been French the whole time, trying to rally round an audience. But everyone seemed bored with the spectacle as if wasn't much of a spectacle at all, which it wasn't. Then a large banner with 'Folies Bergere' was lifted up and a bunch of dancing girls kicked off in a line across the shoddy scape as the Frenchman proceeded to get into a cardboard balloon, waving his hat to an uninterested audience, still shouting things French the whole time. The moon looked disgusted at the whole ordeal and seemed to be mouthing plenty of words of its own, but they all looked like German from this distance.

I was getting a headache.

'George Melies,' spoke Welles. He refuses to give up on his grand design. He just won't accept that all things pass. No matter what they are, no matter how far ahead of their time they are, they eventually get behind the times. Right or wrong, fairly or unfairly. Sabatini worked that out. Shakespeare did. Even Jules, though he still loves this sort of thing. Melies was a sheer genius once, but time

makes much irrelevant. Into little more than a history lesson, like *Battleship Potemkin*.'

If he was right, I thought, then when will Kane fall by the way-side? No, this time I felt I couldn't let his comments go by without any resistance. I summoned up my courage and spoke out. 'Pardon me for saying this, but I think you are talking from bitterness.' Without much of a pause he harshly replied, 'Don't you think I've earned my bitterness?'

I didn't speak again. I stared at him in silence.

Then we were both distracted by a whack and a thud and turned to the window to see that the moonscapes had been flattened and Melies screaming at the top of his Gallic voice at what appeared to be very a large leg. The leg belonged to Gertie who seemed rather perplexed, wondering why this strange little man was jumping up and down and screaming as if his butt was on fire. Disregarding him, as she knew it wouldn't do any good to listen to his cackling, she picked up the large ball she had been chasing and bounded back up the street with her happy Brontosaurus tail waving behind. Atop the paved hill she dropped the ball in front of a tall gentleman who gently led Gertie away from all the ruckus.

The Frenchman stamped up and down until his cardboard balloon fell over. That seemed to be enough for him and a he wandered off, with a rag-tag Folies Bergere, his head and shoulders drooped lower than Peter Lorre, who was hiding in nearby shadows. Oswald and Felix at a table near to ours found the whole Frenchman-and-dinosaur ordeal most amusing and fell into silent hysterics before getting up onto the table and running round in circles. Their other two dinner companions, Buster and Harold, just rolled their eyes and kept on eating as if they were quite used to this. I turned back to Welles and I was pleased to see that clever light back in his eyes.

'As if this earth in fast thick pants were breathing,
A mighty fountain momentarily was forced:
Amid whose swift half-intermittent burst
Huge fragments vaulted like rebound hail,

Or chaffy grain beneath the thrasher's flail.'

He stopped to listen to the departure of those words before he added, 'In this instance, crumpled cardboard.'

He leaned back into his well supported chair, even though this meant he had to stretch to drop his ashes into the tray. It was then that I noticed that the cigar never got shorter. No matter how much ash mounted up, the cigar remained the same. The same length to make this man always look his best, he who is Orson Welles.

'I wonder what George would do with computers, embrace them or run away terrified? Even with all his talk of so-called wondrous things, you cannot guess where his true love lies. I suspect he would use it, but never let on about his new-found technology. A showman rather than a story-teller is our Melies. I wonder if that's why they remember him so fondly - and deservedly so, I hazard to add. We remember our escapists fondly. People who successfully escape or show us how to escape or provide the sanctuary to which we escape, even if simply within a cone of projected light.' He smiled at me. 'Let me show you something,' he said, holding out his cigar vertically, smoke from its ashen tip slowly rising and twirling. 'Or not as the case may be.'

With a minute jerk of his palm, the cigar vanished, its leftover smoke dispersing in chaotic demise.

'It was a miracle of rare device,
A sunny pleasure dome with caves of ice!'

Unnoticed by me, his other hand had been under the table. He lifted it into view, the cigar between his fingers, and gently knocked fresh ash into the tray.

'I always liked dabbling in magic. Thought I could be a bit of a conjurer. But then again, magic has always been my profession. My kind of magic. With the help of Walter Gibson I made people believe in a man who could hide in shadows and instil fear into the coldest hearts. With the help of Mr Wells, I caused panic across America. Maybe I went too far that time. I made Joseph Cotton

look like a hero. Maybe I went too far there as well. Joseph's a fine actor, but do you know how hard it was to make him look tough? See *The Third Man* sometime. Boy, did I have to be evil to make him look strong in that. Regardless, my life has been dedicated to performing feats of illusion. Maybe even when I was selling beer and photocopiers. Let me warn you that alcoholic beverages and xerox machines do not mix. It results in an image not palatable nor reproducible.' He formed a fist with the cigar gripped tightly, both ends protruding from his fingers. He lent his elbow on the table and, with his palm facing up, slowly opened his fingers. The cigar rolled gently to the centre of his palm.

'That with music loud and long,
I would build that dome in air,
That sunny dome! those caves of ice!

The cigar slowly lifted and wavered a few inches from his palm. 'Illusion can hide one from the reality of things, but that is a simple trick. A fiction worthy of many an entertainer, salesman or charlatan.' The cigar began to go in circles, steadily speeding up. The glowing end getting brighter as the oxygen fed it.

'Masters of magic use illusion, not to hide, but to show the true reality of things. Not to conceal but to reveal. Revelation is the magician's art.'

The disc that was the cigar became bigger and brighter, an illuminate frisbee with a glowing rim, growing larger and larger. I leaned back from it cautiously, as it began to spray a line of yellow light across my chest. It was also making a whining sound that was steadily increasing in volume until it was a high pitched squeal. My companion's voice grew ever louder so I could hear him, until he was shouting, booming, over the blaze of colour and sound.

'And as art is the revelation of realities through illusions, then film is one of its most cunning devices. And myself, along with my fellow artists, performers,

craftsman, conjured up one of the great illusions. I, Orson Welles, performed one of the great magic tricks.'

The disc winked out, leaving a silent vacuum in its wake, and the table and cafe were dark once again. And Welles was standing with his arms out wide, his eyes wild.

'I made *Citizen Kane!*'

The occupants of the cafe broke into applause and cheers. Some stood up and shouted 'Bravo.' Even Melies had reappeared outside the window to show his enthusiasm. Others like Bogart, Weismuller and Gish nodded towards Welles with silent respect. Welles seated himself, and flicked more ash from the cigar which was mysteriously back in his hand. The tray was again piled with grey soot.

Welles sighed with pleasure and directed a childish grin at me. 'Now, I think it's time to eat. Don't you?'

And, as if he had been there all the time, a large figure was standing by the table. With a white cloth draped over his right arm, stubby three fingered and shiny black, the maitre d' leaned towards the table.

'Are you ready to order, sirs?' It spoke in a deep gentlemanly voice rivalling Orson's.

'I'll have my usual, thank you,' replied Mr Welles, taking a puff from his Cuban cigar. 'Did I say that *Kane* may well have been the stylistic precursor to film noir?'

'And you, sir?' asked the waiter as two lights on his front panel turned toward me. 'What would you like to dine upon this evening?'

'Er, I'm not sure,' I replied. 'What do you suggest?'

The waiter stood erect and froze. Switches clicked and rings turned inside his clear domed, juke-box head, as Welles began to mutter to himself again.

'And all who heard should see them there,
And all should cry, Beware! Beware!'

After a moment, the twirling and clicking stopped and the waiter, from chest up, turned to me. 'Tonight, sir, may I suggest the soup.'

BIOS

Damien Broderick tells great stories. He has even, on the odd occasion, been known to write them down. This has brought him some reknown, less fame than he deserves, and a small collection of awards.

Apart from writing several novels, editing a handful of anthologies and writing countless short stories, Damien has been known to make his presence felt in other areas as well. As a reviewer, his writing currently appears in *The Weekend Australian*. He can also be heard at random intervals on various radio programmes discussing any one of his large number of interests.

Charles Nikki Brown was born in the USA, in 1937. Charles is the highly respected editor of *Locus* magazine, and has an impressive record, winning many awards and writing an amazing amount of material.

Charles has won numerous awards, so many, that there isn't the space to print them all. Similarly, any attempt to squeeze a bibliography into this space would be madness. And so we won't.

Paul Collins' first published work was the Western novel *Hot Lead-Cold Sweat* (1975). That same year Collins launched *Void* magazine, the first professional science fiction magazine Australia had seen since the demise of the joint Australian and British production *Vision Of Tomorrow*. Collins edited and published five issues of *Void* between August 1975 and March 1977.

As an editor, Collins has produced the *Worlds* original anthology series (1978), *Metaworlds* (1994), *Strange Fruit*, *Dream Weavers*, *Fantastic Worlds* and the *Shivers* range of

children's horror novels. He has published novels by Wynne Whiteford, A. Bertram Chandler, Jack Wodhams, Keith Taylor, Russell Blackford and David Lake. He is the author of *The Wizard's Torment*, *Cyberskin* and over one hundred short stories – the best of which were collected into *The Government In Exile* in 1994. His latest collection, *Tales Of The Wasteland*, will be published by HarperCollins in 2000.

Meredith Costain grew up on a dairy farm on the Koo Wee Rup Swamp in West Gippsland, Victoria. She preferred reading books and writing stories and poems to milking cows (although she loved playing with her dog and chooks). Her cousins, Lynnette and Susan, along with Meredith, produced a newspaper called *The Thrilling Thre*, and when she was nine, had her first poem published in the "Junior Age" section of *The Age* newspaper. It was called "My Little Creek" and she was paid 17 shillings and sixpence for it. She made up most of her poems while riding her bike to school and piano lessons.

Later on she went to work as an editor for these magazines. She also kept writing stories and now works as a full-time writer and magazine editor. Lots of her books contain the two things she likes the most: music and dogs. Some of them, like *Musical Harriet*, have both! Meredith Costain's work includes far too much to list in such a short space.

Cathy Cupitt is a name to watch in Australian science fiction.

She is the editor of the science fiction journal *The*

Rhizome Factor. In 1998 Cathy was awarded a Tin Duck award for her non-fiction article "Reverent Comic Subversion In *The Hobbit*". Her short stories have been published in *The Rhizome Factor*, *Twenty3: A Miscellany*, *Westerly* and *Quadrant*, and have been performed on RTR-FM and ABC Radio.

Not content to merely be a guest at SwanCon, she is on the organising committee of SwanCon 26.

Jack Dann is a multiple award winning author who has written and edited forty-eight books, including the novels *Junction*, *The Man Who Melted* and the internationally bestselling *The Memory Cathedral*.

His short stories have appeared in *Omni* and *Playboy* and other major magazines and anthologies. To list his work as an editor would require an entire book all of its own. He is a recipient of the Nebula Award, the Aurealis Award (twice) and the Premios Gilgames de Narrativa Fantastica award. Dann has also been honoured by the Mark Twain Society (Esteemed Knight).

His recent works include the Civil War novel *The Silent*, as well as the award-winning anthology *Dreaming Down Under* (co-edited with Janeen Webb).

Stephen Dedman is a familiar face in Perth fan circles, as he is not one to miss a social gathering. He can, on occasions, be found at A Touch Of Strange bookshop, where he works irregular hours.

Having started small, self-publishing fanzines, he is now one of Australia's premiere authors, with work appearing in many and varied forums. In addition to numerous short stories and gaming modules, he has penned two novels, *The Art Of Arrowcutting* and *Foreign Bodies*, which was released last year. 1999 also saw the release of the short story collection *The Lady Of Situations*, (published by Ticonderoga Press) to overwhelming critical acclaim.

Starting out as a performer on ABC television in the late

1970s, **Terry Dowling's** career brought him to *Mr Squiggle & Friends*, where he began an eight-year stint as a regular guest.

His earliest stories include "Illusion of Motion", "Oriental on the Murder Express" and "Shade of Encounter". He sold his first story to Philip Gore at *Omega Science Digest*.

Dowling rates his other career highlights as: meeting Jack Vance in 1980 after writing articles on his work for Science Fiction, becoming a very close family friend; meeting Harlan Ellison in 1983, really hitting it off, travelling together, visiting Harlan in LA and editing *The Essential Ellison*. Closer to home, his other highlights have included producing *Mortal Fire* with Van Ikin, his review column for *The Australian* and working on various projects with artist Nick Stathopoulos. Most recently, his short story collection *Antique Futures* was bestowed the Convenor's Award at the 1999 Aurealis Awards.

Many of his stories are intended to be read aloud.

When asked to provide us with a short little thing for the souvenir book, Mitch gave us **Danny Heap**.

Robin Hobb was born in 1952 in Oakland, California. Her debut novel, from HarperCollins, was 1995's *Assassin's Apprentice*. *Royal Assassin* followed in 1996, and the *Farseer Trilogy* concluded with *Assassin's Quest* in 1997. *The Liveship Books*, set in the same world, followed: *Ship of Magic* (1998), *The Mad Ship* (1999) and in 2000, *Ship of Destiny*. Another set of three books, scheduled for 2001 through 2003, will pick up FitzChivalry Farseer's tale and continue it.

Robin Hobb presently resides in Tacoma, Washington, USA. Her passions are writing, re-writing, and correcting galleys. Hobbies include running spell check and un-jamming the printer.

Her personal feeling is that the work produced as Megan Lindholm is substantially different from what she writes as Robin Hobb. All the reasons for that should

probably left to a trained psychiatrist.

Despite Robin's success, Megan Lindholm, is alive, well, and still writing short stories when Robin gives her a chance at the keyboard. Her most recent story is "Strays" in the 1998 Elizabeth Ann Scarborough anthology *Warrior Princesses* from Daw.

Marianne S. Jablon was previously the managing editor of *Locus* magazine.

Paul Kidd is that most unlikely of creatures - a full time author. This means that he is hard up for money and possibly may bite you. His novels are published in the USA and then imported back to Australia at ruinous prices. Paul writes comics to fill those lucid moments between book projects. Several of his cartoon projects and TV comedy projects are currently underway in France, Australia and Japan.

Among Paul's numerous credits are the role-playing games *Albedo* and *Lace and Steel*, two fantasy novels for TSR (another three are forthcoming), design work on countless computer games and the comic books *Tank Vixens*, *Fangs Of K'aath* and *Princess Karinam*.

Born in Sydney shortly after the last glaciation, **Dave Luckett** moved to Perth.

Dave was dragged reluctantly into fandom around 1981, and never left it. Being consistently unable to understand his own motivations, he writes books about those of others. He is the author of a number of short stories and children's books, as well as the *Tenebran* trilogy: *A Dark Winter*, *A Dark Journey* and *A Dark Victory*.

You will soon be able to read the *Tenebran* books in German, with a European edition of Dave's works due in the near future.

Mitch has sometimes been compared to Brad Pitt. And Mr Pitt should consider himself the greater for it. Originally a shy and retiring Melbournite, Mitch has

emerged from the shadows to put his own stamp on things. Mitch is now a familiar face at Swancons, and can be seen at all of the right panels, all of the coolest room parties and the grooviest of events.

Mitch is launching his own book this year, *Short Stories for Short Attention Spans*, with contributions from many well known and well respected authors. How he managed to achieve this is simple. He is Mitch. What a guy.

Peter Nicholls was born in Melbourne in 1939. In 1970s he launched and edited the English journal *Foundation: The Review Of Science Fiction*. Between 1972 and 1988 he worked as a science fiction and fantasy film critic for BBC's Radio 4.

His books include, most importantly, the two editions of *The Encyclopedia Of Science Fiction* - the first in 1979 with Nicholls as sole general editor, the second in 1993 co-edited with John Clute. Nicholls wrote approximately a third of each of these massive books, and both editions were awarded with Hugo Awards. A CD-ROM edition, *Grolier Science Fiction: The Multimedia Encyclopedia Of Science Fiction*, was released in 1995.

In his long and illustrious career, Nicholls has received two Locus awards, the Eaton Grandmaster award, the Pilgrim award, the Gilgamesh award, the European Science Fiction award, the British Science Fiction Association Special Award, and a cluster of other small awards of increasing triviality, including one from a New York cable television company.

Ian Nichols writes: 'A life in half a page is not easy. The bald facts are that I was born in Wales, in 1947, and migrated to Australia in 1950, with my family. Raised in Manly, mostly. Father died in 1956 and mother in 1966. Sister, last of family in Australia, went back to England in 1967, and we lost contact for about 25 years. Studied at lots of universities, various courses. Right now, I teach English for a living, and I try to write stories. Became involved in fandom at Swancon 2, and haven't missed a

Swancon since.

You can't summarise a person in a paragraph, and that's not me.

When you take the bus to Atrani, on the Amalfi coast, it swerves and dives around the rocky coastline. Above the road, there are olives and grapes, spilling over their terraces in a riot of green. Below, the lemon trees are held to the face of the cliff by chicken wire, and the bright yellow fruit peeks out from the deep green of the leaves. Even further below that are the tiny castles and gun platforms that once held off pirates and other invaders, above golden sand and a sea, the Tyrrhenian, that gave its name to a shade of blue. I really liked it.

That probably tells you more about me.'

Garth Nix was born in 1963 and grew up in Canberra. He now lives in Paddington.

Aside from his novels *The Ragwitch*, *Sabriel* and *Shade's Children*, Garth has also written theatre restaurant shows (in collaboration with several friends), short stories and the three *Very Clever Baby Books* (now being republished by Text Publishing). Garth is also the author of a novelisation of *The X-Files* episode "The Calusari" which came out in 1997 from HarperTrophy.

His new book is *Lirael: Daughter Of The Clayr*, which is set in the same world as *Sabriel*, but 22 years later. It will be published in two volumes, the first one to be published by Allen & Unwin in Australia and HarperCollins in the USA, from late 1999.

Robin Pen is a science fiction and fantasy film critic and author, whose writings have appeared in *Eidolon*, *The Coope St Review*, *Australian SF Online* and *The Rhizome Factor*. He is the author of the 1996 collection *The Secret Life Of Rubber Suit Monsters*. His 1999 essay "List In Space" was awarded a Tin Duck for Best Written Work (Unpaid or Fan).

When not writing, he can be found at Perth's most awarded video library.

Candice Schilder is a veterinarian, animé fan and convention convenor.

Grant Stone has been a librarian at Murdoch University since 1974. He has been instrumental in building the science fiction 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 (with Wolf Bilsma).

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 1980s.

Grant Stone has won the odd award in recognition of his incalculable contribution to the sf community. He is also an expert on Barbie Dolls.

Shaun Tan is an artist and illustrator, working mostly in young adult fiction. He is the author and illustrator of *The Playground*, published by Lothian Books in 1998. Among a huge number of published art works, he has illustrated two highly acclaimed picture books: *The Viewer*, written by Gary Crew, and *The Rabbits*, written by John Marsden.

Shaun has won numerous awards for his outstanding work.

Not only is **Janeen Webb** intelligent, friendly and attractive, but she is just plain nice. As a day job, she lectures in literature at the Australian Catholic University in Melbourne. In addition, she is internationally recognised for her critical works, edited the *Australian Science Fiction Review*. Second series for several years, and has recently started writing fiction (to considerable critical and public acclaim). She is co-editor (with Jack Dann) of the award-winning anthology *Dreaming Down Under*.

Janeen is a familiar face to regular SwanCon goers, having attended at least three of the last five SwanCons. Her panels and presentations are always interesting,

informative, and well presented. We are very pleased to be honoured by her continuing attendance at our conventions.

Sean Williams is rapidly becoming a permanent (albeit adored) feature at SwanCons, notching up his fifth consecutive appearance. His short fiction has appeared in *Eidolon*, *Aboriginal SF*, *Bloodsongs*, and *The Leading Edge*. He has won a prize in the Writers of the Future contest and been nominated for several Ditmar and Aurealis Awards.

His first solo novel, *Metal Fatigue*, was published in 1996. His second, *The Resurrected Man*, was launched at SwanCon Twenty3. He is co-author (with Shane Dix) of *The Prodigal Sun*, the first volume of the *Evergenae* trilogy (*The Prodigal Sun* is based on a previously existing novel by Sean and Shane, *The Unknown Soldier*).

Sean is an initiated witch, an atheist and a paid-up member of the Church of the SubGenius. His favourite writer is Robert Anton Wilson. When recovering from Perth, he lives in Adelaide.

Tess Williams is a relative newcomer to Science Fiction writing. Her first publication was a short story in the 1995 anthology *She's Fantastical*, followed by the 1996 novel *Map Of Power*. Her writing was included in the award-winning anthology *Dreaming Down Under*. Last year UWA Press published *Women of Other Worlds*, a collection of writings on feminism and science fiction edited by Tess with Dr Helen Merrick.

Forthcoming works include a children's story for Paul Collins and Meredith Costain's *Spinout Bronze* series, the novella *Out Of Time Come Prophets* and her second novel, *Sea As Mirror* – due this Christmas.

Connie Willis was born on December 31st 1945 in Denver, Colorado. Her first published SF work was the story "The Secret Of Santa Titacaca", in the Winter 1970-71 edition of *Worlds Of Fantasy*. Turning to full-time writing in the 1980s, she rapidly established both a firm following and a reputation as one of the USA's finest science fiction authors.

Connie is the first author to win a Nebula award in four different categories, and is one of the most awarded authors of today. The Nebula awards that she has won are: Best novel for *Doomsday Book* (1992); Best novel for *The Last Of The Winnebagos* (1988); Best novelette for *Fire Watch* (1982); Best novelette for *At The Rialto* (1989); Best short story for "A Letter For The Clearys" (1982); Best short story for "Even The Queen" (1992). Connie has also received six Hugo Awards, for *Doomsday Book*, *The Last Of The Winebagos*, *Fire Watch*, "Even The Queen", "Death On The Nile" and *To Say Nothing of the Dog*. She has also won the John W. Campbell Award.

Editors **Anna Hepworth**, **John Parker** and **Grant Watson** enjoy late nights, desktop publishing software and playing contact sports with recalcitrant computers.

Material in these biographies have been assembled from sources including *Eidolon.net*, *Australian SF Online*, additional web-based information, previous SwanCon souvenir books, other published resources and author submissions.