

UCD SCIENCE FICTION & FANTASY SOCIETY

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DARKLANDS

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NEWS
REVIEWS
FICTION

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UCD SCIENCE FICTION & FANTASY SOCIETY

DARKLANDS

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Each page of *Darklands* is lovingly handcrafted by trained llamas (actually, it's not— it's typeset using ClarisWorks 1.0 for Windows)



HALL OF SHAME



Committee 1994 - 1995

| | |
|------------------|----------------------------|
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AUDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

This being the first issue of the New Year, maybe it is time to look back at events in the past year and at some of those in the coming months. *Darklands* the Magazine has gone from strength to strength (aw shucks, 'twere nothing really – the Editor) with increased support and its A4 size. The society has run a successful coffee afternoon for the last two months; details are available

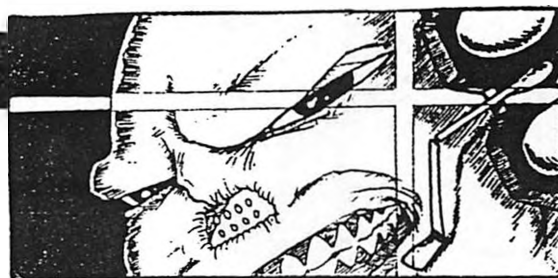
for the last two months; details are available every Tuesday from our Noticeboard in the Arts block. We have also shown a range of great films with an even better selection coming your way this term, ranging from *The Crow*, to hopefully, in conjunction with Film Soc, *Interview with a Vampire* and *Stargate*. If possible these will be shown before the year's end. So in parting for this

be shown before the year's end. So in parting for this month, we can only say that the Society is all geared up for the New Year and we hope you will all enjoy and support our activities

Ronan Farrell
John Nisbett

EDITORIAL

Miscellaneous Ramblings...



The Editor. On a good day.

Greetings and Salutations,

I hope everyone had a happy New Year. You'd better have enjoyed it, people, 'cos it's yer last (happy one, that is). This time next year you should be just about recovering from your study- over- Christmas semesterisation vibe (ooh, bit of politics there)

I also hope you enjoy this copy of *Darklands* (which hopefully will be around next year to lighten your semesterised days). As you can see, we got plenty of submissions this month, especially artwork. And this issue we have three (count 'em) works of original fiction. Plus the usual roundup of society news, reviews, and your regular dose of All Along the Water Tower. What is happening? What does it mean? Where can I get the drugs the artist obviously ingests in copious quantities? You're asking me...

In case you don't actually read this column, I won't bother telling you about the Short Story Competition which we have been running; submissions will be accepted up till the end of February. And you will certainly not be interested in the fact that Waterstones Bookshop have offered to give us Something Nice for the prizewinner.

Anyway, don't work too hard (I certainly don't) except on dreaming up some material for inclusion in the next hard- hitting, up- to- the minute, absolutely not produced by any llamas whatsoever, issue of *Darklands*.

Ken Keenan
Editor

BOOKS WANTED!!!

Does anyone out there have the following books?

- ☞ Any E.E 'Doc' Smith's *Lensman* books, especially the last of that series (or any books by Smith)
- ☞ *Skylark Valeron* of the *Skylark* series by the same author.

I am also interested in any *Star Wars* books, printed in 1979-1980, especially the adventures of Han Solo

I am interested in loans, but I would prefer to buy any books I need for my collection.

Contact: Ronan Farrell

Note

If you are trying to sell or obtain books, videos, etc. drop a note to the Society, and we'll print a message in *Darklands*.

Society News

Horror Branch Not Dead— only Dreaming

The Horror Branch of the Science Fiction and Fantasy Society has ceased to exist. Its Chairman, Gavin Cassells, was unable to get people to serve on its sub-Committee and hadn't the time to run the Branch on his own. The Committee would like

to point out to any horror fans that horror films may still be shown as Main Branch features. The idea of Branches is that they can be formed and dissolved as the interests of Society members change. If you would like to resurrect (or

reanimate— the Editor) the Horror Branch, or indeed set up a new Branch, contact the Branch Officer Donal O'Brien at the Society addresses or at events.

Proposed New Branch: Classical and Televisual Branch

The Society has to date been showing films which have a mass appeal as well as popular TV shows such as *Red Dwarf*, but little besides. Due to what I consider a limited range of programming, I think that it is desirable to have another Branch in the Society. This Branch would show some older TV series. (mainly British TV, but also some from other countries) as well as perhaps some of the older *genre* films.

I envisage showing series such

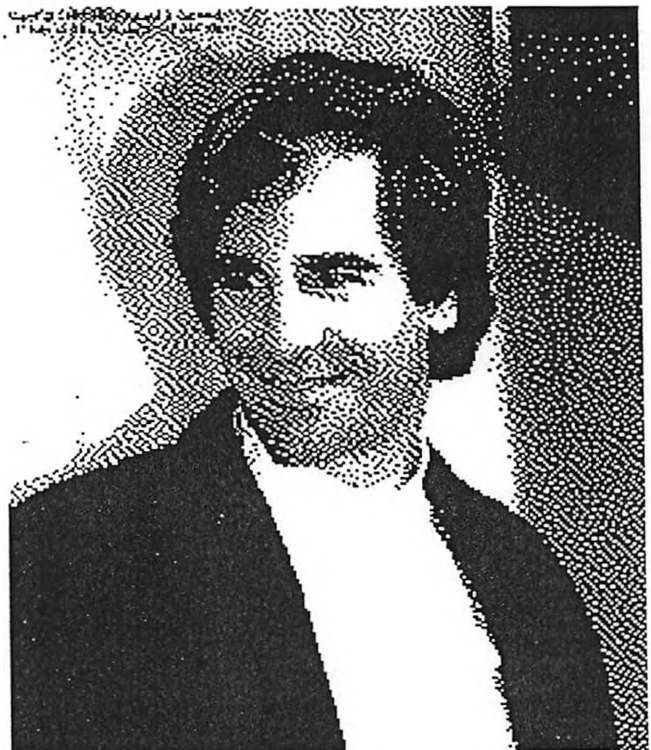
as *Blakes 7*, *Doctor Who*, *Quatermass*, *Survivors*, *Beauty and The Beast*, *Quantum Leap*, and many others. Possible films include *Dark Star*, *Flash*

Gordon, *Silent Running*, *The Day the Earth Stood Still* etc.

The name that I am proposing would be 'Classical and televisual branch', but that is up for debate.

In order to run the branch, I will need a branch committee. Therefore I am inviting any

member with a wide interest in the *genre* to contact me at any meeting in order to discuss the possibilities.



"Hi, I'm Scott Bakula from Quantum Leap. It's a good idea, Ger, but the name sucks"

NOTICE

DUBLIN LOCAL GROUP

A new DOCTOR WHO local group is being formed in the Dublin area with a view to organising meetings, trips, activities, etc.

If you are interested, please phone Eamonn at 6280744



APPRECIATION SOCIETY

Library News

The Library is still available at all events. Borrowers pay a £1 deposit on any books borrowed, which is refunded on the book's return. A list of all books in the Library is available from Ruth Cassidy, the Librarian, at events. The list is updated regularly as new books are added; suggestions for new books are also welcome.

The Committee would like to express their thanks to the following people who have donated or lent books to the Library during the year: Niamh Hynes, Mark Schulz, Pat Fanning, Hugh O'Byrne, and Frank Mullany. Their gifts are much appreciated.

Note

Borrowers are reminded that all Library books should be returned before the Inaugural (first week of Trinity term)

FREE RAFFLE!

Tonight after our presentation of

THE CROW

we will be raffling two tickets to the recently- released

Highlander III

Make sure you get your tickets for this raffle on your way in. We will be running similar promotions during forthcoming events!

ADVERTISEMENT



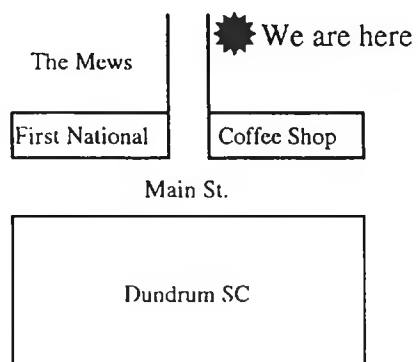
Taney Books

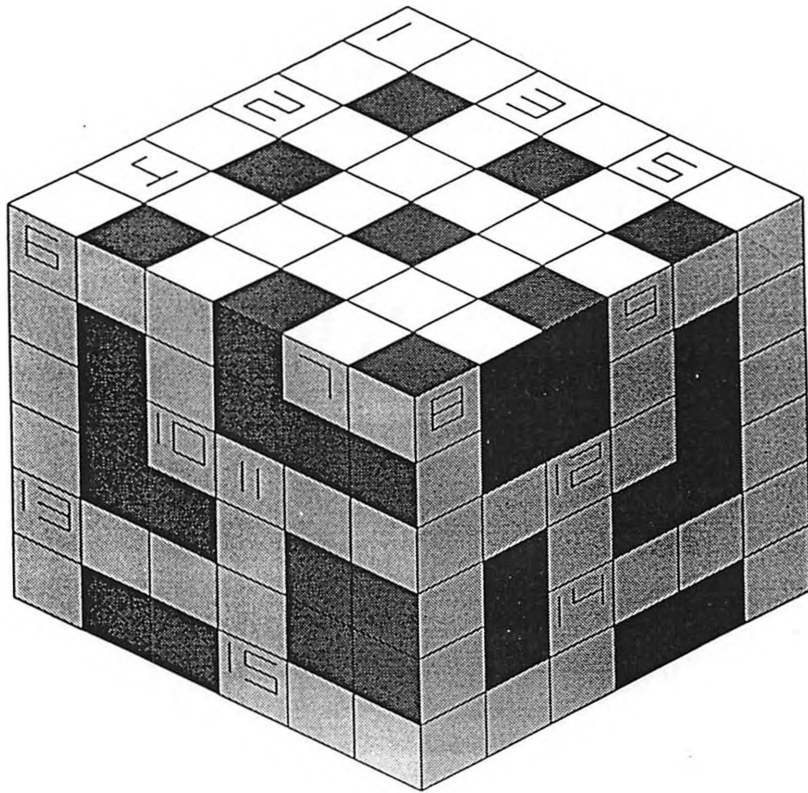


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W B O R D D

- ↙1 The dunlop reason for a Science Fiction writer (4,8)
- ↘1 Puncture this crossover SciFi-Fantasy author (5,7)
- ↘2 Not of this world (9)
- ↙3 Part of the Trek transporter system (9)
- ↘4 Jargons (6)
- ↙5 Imps and goblins (7)
- ↘6 McCoy, Crusher and Polanski, in short (3)
- ↘7 Invisibility field in Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy (1,1,1)

↘8 Examined or tested, with an instrument (6) ↗9 Solo in StarWars (3) ↘10 Haphazardly (8) ↘11 Planet of these is classic Science Fiction film (4) ↘12 This is more, at least inside a Tardis (4) ↘13 Horrible giant (4) ↗14 Common phaser setting on Star Trek missions (4) ↘15 You might find one of these ghosts in Hades (6)

SFFS GETS WIRED!!!

New World- Wide Web Service Available Real Soon Now!

Anybody who actually reads the *UCD News* or the *University Observer* may have seen articles printed there about the World Wide Web – usually with cringe- inducing titles like: "Surf the Information Superhighway. Dude!!!" Just what the hell are they on about?

The World Wide Web (variously known as WWW or W³) is a way of sending information over a network so that it can be viewed by a variety of different computers (anything from a VT100 to a PC to an Apple Mac) and look fairly similar regardless of the make of computer you are actually using. It is a hypertext system – you can highlight certain keywords to get more detail –

very much like the help files in Microsoft Windows. As well as text, the World Wide Web can also handle pictures and sounds. The Trekkers can think of it as Unitel: The Next Generation.

So why all the racket? Firstly, WWW makes navigating the Internet almost painless. Secondly, UCD are replacing the Unitel system with a set of World Wide Web pages, so you no longer have to struggle with arcane function key combinations just to find when the 17 bus is running.

All well and good, say you, but why haven't I seen it yet? That's because

UCD Computer Services are still in the process of installing the Web reader programs on the various servers (except MACOLLAMH which already has one, apparently) The WWW service is expected to be available in early March. Branch Officer Donal O'Brien is the resident WWW guru (well, he read the handout Computer Service gave us) and is busy preparing our Web pages.

I mentioned the Internet up there, didn't I? Well, with a Web reader, it is possible to, say, connect to a dodgy WWW server in Bangkok to download dirty pictures (dang! you know about that, do you? And I almost had a complete set! — Editor) but it's more than likely that UCD will place restrictions on where we are allowed to view information. However, users outside UCD will be

(continued)

able to view our pages, which means that if you take that Erasmus course in Ulan Bator next year, you can still see what the SFFS are showing in the Bin on Wednesdays.

Note to Unitel users: There have been many vociferous complaints left in the Suggestion Box that we are no longer replying to the suggestions. Sorry about that, but with Computer Services saying that the Web will be going live Any Day Now and

foretelling the doom of Unitel, we've been kinda neglecting it. As a postscript to this article, it is far from clear how you go about making a suggestion box on the Web. There's progress for you.

Review Interview with the Vampire

Starring: Tom Cruise, Brad Pitt, Kirsten Dunst, Antonio Banderas

Director: Neil Jordan

As reported in Darklands 3.2, this film has been surrounded in controversy since it first went into production. Many people, including Anne Rice, the author of the novel on which the film is based, were surprised and disgusted to learn that Tom Cruise had been cast as the vampire, Lestat. After much to-ing and fro-ing, Anne Rice made a very public retraction of her previous comments (leading many to speculate that the film company paid her off)

Controversy aside, what is the film like? Well, I reckon it is good enough to justify a lot of Irish people generally (and UCD students in particular) wandering about with silly grins on their faces, smug in the knowledge that "one of our own" managed a) to make a film very faithful to the original cult book, and b) get a worthwhile performance out of Tom Cruise.

When the film was released, and it was decided that a review should be prepared for publication, it was thought that someone who'd both read the book and seen the film would be ideal for the job. The job fell to myself, the humble author, who in true Darklands tradition is writing this some thirty minutes before the issue is supposed to go to press.

One of my big criticisms of the book was that it was a little boring; being a vampire did not seem to be much fun. In Interview, this is caused by Rice's choice of Louis as the narrator, who is a bit of a wet really (the second book in the series, narrated by Lestat is faster-paced) Because the action in the film is there before your eyes, rather than being presented secondhand by Louis the Wuss, it moves far quicker than the book does.

For those who have neither read the book or seen the film, the plot goes something as follows. The vampire Louis is relating his life story in present-day San Francisco to an anonymous interviewer (played in the film by Christian Slater. River Phoenix was originally cast for this role but died before production started) A wealthy plantation owner

in eighteenth century French-run Louisiana, Louis lost both his wife and child to disease, and began a downward spiral into drunkenness and self-annihilation. Whilst he is about these jolly pursuits, the vampire Lestat intervenes and makes a vampire of him. Louis has difficulty being a vampire, particularly the blood-drinking bit, and settles for drinking the blood of rats (and on one blackly humorous occasion in the film, poodles) Whilst touring a plague-infested area of New Orleans, he breaks his pledge and feeds on a young girl called Claudia. Lestat completes the job and makes a vampire of her. Although Claudia's companionship cheers Louis up initially, and the three become one big happy (albeit very homicidal) family. Claudia becomes unhappy, as her mind matures to that of a woman's but is trapped in the body of a girl. Louis and Claudia both conspire to murder Lestat, and leaving him for dead, return to Europe in search of their origins as vampires...

Well, that should have spoiled the plot sufficiently for most. So how does the film measure up? Jordan has successfully transferred the decadent feel of the novel to the screen, so if you are a fan of gaslight and wood panelling and opulent eighteenth century costume, you'll love it for that alone. Cruise plays Lestat with great energy; while the character of Louis spends most of his time agonising over his fate as a vampire, the character of Lestat is far more extrovert and enjoys every moment of being cast in the role of a blood-drinking demon. Cruise captures the character of Lestat down to a T. Beside him, Brad Pitt is a little overshadowed; this is more to do with Louis' colourless character than lack of ability on Pitt's part. Newcomer Kirsten Dunst is brilliant as Claudia, and the juxtaposition of her sweet little girl act and her bloodthirsty nature provide for some of the blackest humour you're ever likely to see.

Hardline horror fans will probably be disappointed in the low levels of gore in the film (though the slurpy-slurp noises made by the feeding vampires ought to amuse them) Interview with the Vampire is more of a psychological novel than a horror book, and the film stays close to this.

All in all, a great film, and highly recommended.

In a Quantum Universe...

ALL ALONG THE WATER TOWER

THE COMIC STRIP THAT DARES TO CLAIM CONTINUITY

THIS WEEK'S EPISODE:
QUEST OF THE
VENGEFUL
SHALLOT

© 1995 UCDSFFS
AND
MULL
RMA ←?

I DON'T LIKE BEING A SHALLOT VERY MUCH

WHAT RAPSCALLION HAS CAUSED THIS DREADFUL TRANSMOGRIFICATION?



SHOULD WE NOT QUESTION FIRST IF THERE HAS IN FACT BEEN A TRANSMUTATION AT ALL? PERHAPS THIS IS A CASE OF MERE SEMBLANCE, AN ILLUSORY TRANSFORMATION. PERCEPTION MAY BE MORE POWERFUL THAN REALITY.

SHIT UP!
I WANT BLOOD



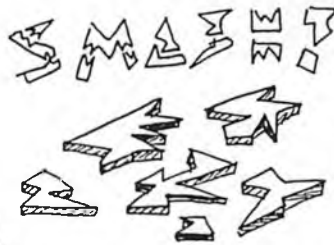
I NEED TO SMELL THE HEAVY COPPERY ODOUR OF BLOOD. (READER ALERT: LAST SENTENCE IS A "IN JOKE". IGNORE IT).

SOME EVIL GENIUS HAS OBVIOUSLY RIGGED UP A PARALLAX NEUTRINO SPIN REVERSER, IN SUBSPACE PARALLEL WITH AN ENERGY SINK/ SOURCE THINGY OF CLOSE TO BLACK HOLE MASS-DENSITY, VIA A CRYSTAL TRANSDUCER INTO MY MIRROR. THIS IS THE HEINOUS RESULT:

I AM AN ONION!!

FIRST: WE DESTROY THE MIRROR BECAUSE SMASHING GLASS IS ALWAYS DRAMATIC I MEAN SO THAT THIS SAD FATE WILL BEFALL NO OTHER.

TRENDY ASIDE...



JUST ADD H2O



HMM, BLOOD. AND SCIFI. I WONDER WHAT THEY CALL A BIG MAC ON MARS?



PERCEPTUALLY THERE IS LITTLE DIFFERENCE TO ME BETWEEN A PUMPKIN AND AN ONION. I CANNOT TOLERATE THE TASTE OF EITHER.

TOO MUCH TEXT HERE FOR A COMIC STRIP. ON THE OTHER HAND, I'M SURE YOU'VE ALL BEEN THROUGH THIS IN AN ATTEMPT TO BRING THE AUTHOR TO YOUR ASPECT OF THE HOLY TRINITY OF PARADOX. BRING DOWN THE HOUSE!

SFFS SUPER PRIZE COMPETITION!
CUT OUT THESE SHARDS OF GLASS. REASSEMBLE THEM (JIGSAW LIKE) TO FORM AN OVAL MIRROR. SEND IT TO US. WIN! HUGE PRIZES. "YACHTS" HOME ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEMS. "HUGE" FITTED KITCHENS. "SUBSCRIPTIONS TO READERS DIGEST" LOGGED PENS.

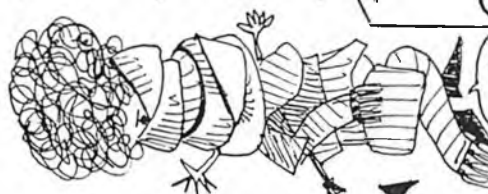


COME. WE SEEK MY REVENGE (AND SALVATION OF THE UNIVERSE TOO). WE WILL TAKE MY FLYING SAUCER. HAVE YOU GOT YOUR LIGHT SABRE?



NO, JUST MY HEAVY ONE.

THAT WILL DO.



DAMNED SCARE

MEANWHILE, OTHERS HAVE BEEN CHANGED INTO SHALLOTS SO EVERYWHERE UNIVERSAL SAVIORS ARE CHIRPING THEIR LIONS.



- ALL THOSE HEROES: LOIS LANE. SUPERMAN. SPIDERMAN. EVERYMAN. PICARD, RIPLEY AND SKYWALKER. FLASH, DALE AND ZARKOV. CAPTAIN AMERICA.
- RONALD MCDONALD AND SUPERMAC.
- ROCKY, RAMBO AND JUDGE DREDD.
- WONDER WOMAN, CAT WOMAN AND TANK GIRL (HMM.)
- JAMES BOND. THE SAINT. THE MAN FROM UNCLE.
- MAXWELL SMART, THE FAMOUS FIVE AND NANCY DREW.
- THE LONE RANGER, ZORRO AND MANDRAKE.
- MIKE DOONESBURY.
- GARFIELD, CALVIN, HOBBS AND WINNIE THE POOH.
- BUCK ROGERS. THE A-TEAM.
- THOR, CU CHULAINN, HERACLES AND THAT LOT.
- BATMAN, ROBIN HOOD AND IVANHOE.
- JEEVE S. THE STAINLESS STEEL RAT.
- KING ARTHUR. GAWAIN GRUMBLING ABOUT LANCELOT. KURT COBAIN.
- FRODO, BILBO AND SAMWISE GAMGEE.
- SNEEZY, DOPEY, HAPPY AND THAT LOT.
- TARZAN. MARY POPPINS. HURIN, HUOR AND TUOR. DAVID HASSELHOFF WEARING BRIGHT RED SHORTS AND (NOT) DRIVING A BLACK SPORTS CAR.
- THE X-MEN.
- ALL THOSE OTHERS.



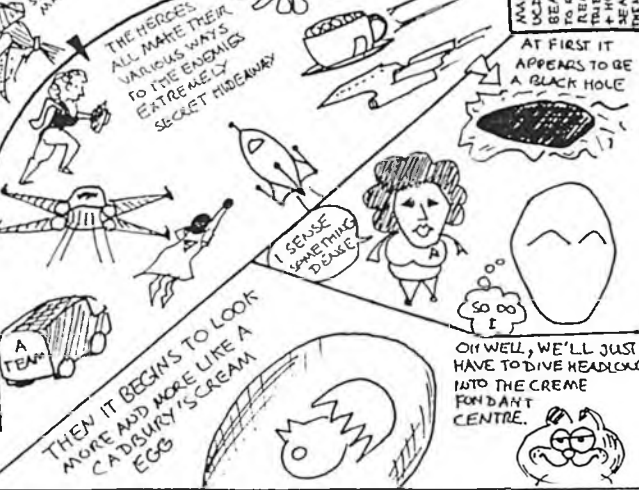
OH, AND OF COURSE, THE UCD SFFS AUDITOR

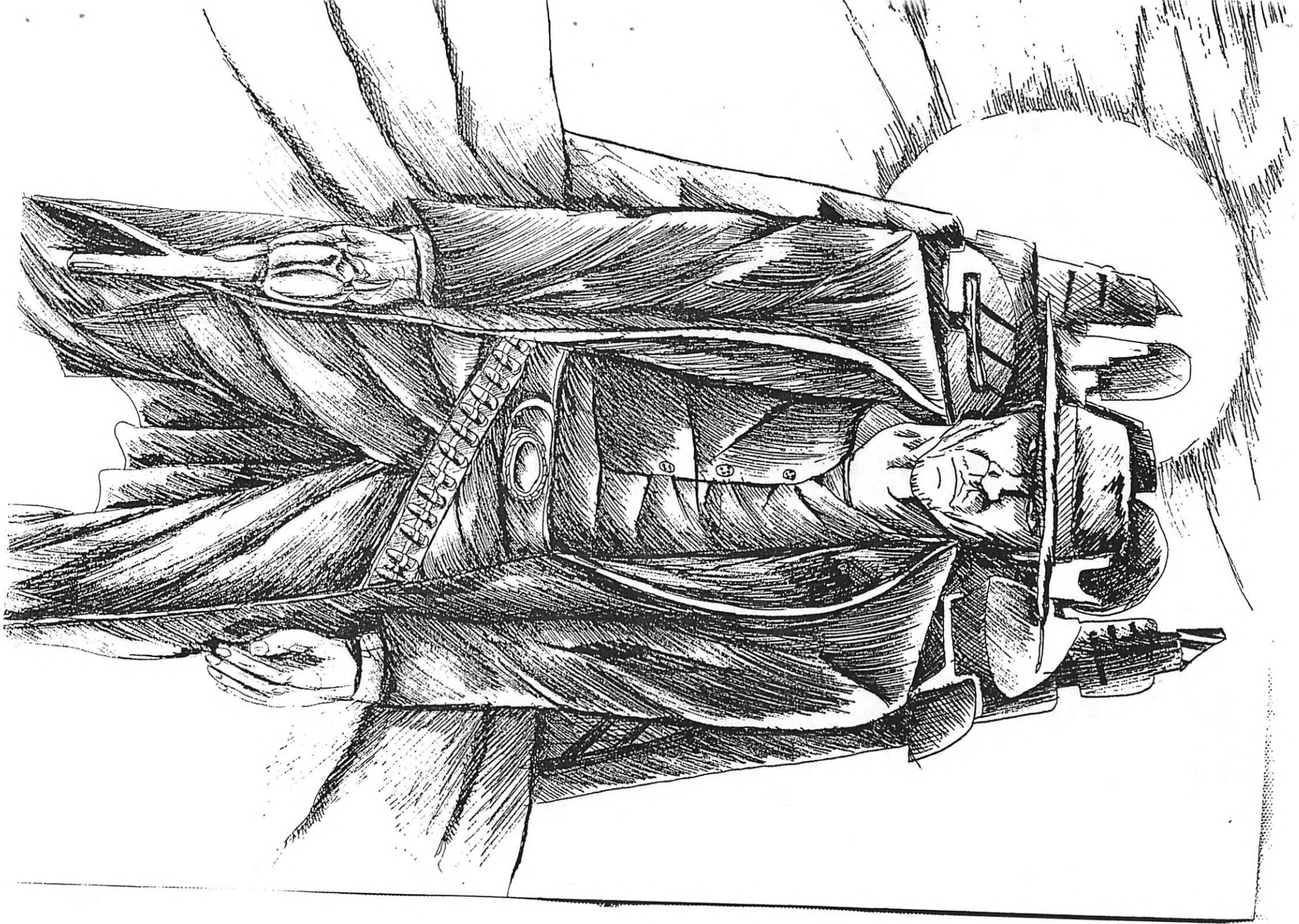
LET'S SAVE THE WORLD

MANY HAVE TRIED TO RID UCD OF SFFS. BUT THE FOUL BEAST'S AUDITOR, THE ONLY TO RETURN TO OUR, SOMEHOW EVEN THESE HEROES IT WITH BURNING AROUND. HOLDING THE LIFE FORCE OF HEAVY ROCK. THE BURNING JOURNALS OF VILL.



I HAVE A HUNCH THE ENEMY IS A SHORT ITALIAN PEER WITH BIG PEC'S AND A DUMB VOICE



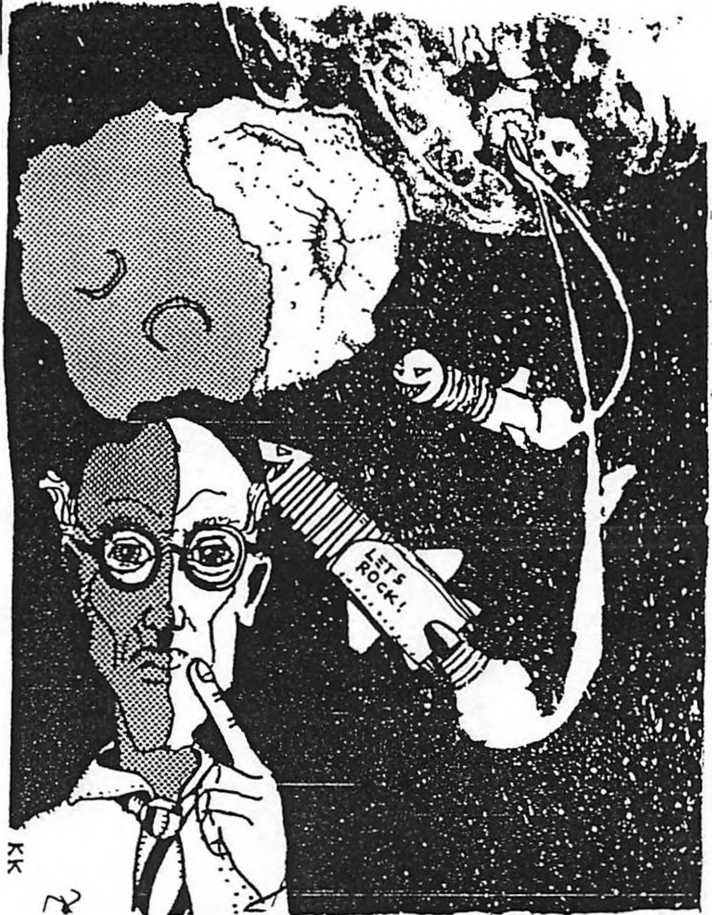


ASTEROID

It was ironic that the asteroid was discovered not by the Hubble space telescope, nor by any of the other hugely expensive technological wonders which existed in the world of astronomy in the early years of the 22nd century, but by a relatively old fashioned, ground-based, telescope located in Arizona. The discoverer, an Irish astronomer, one Dr. Steel, had remarked that it was purely by chance that he should be viewing the same part of the sky that 'Steel's destroyer,' (as the asteroid later came to be called), occupied. However, irrespective of its discoverer the nature of this huge lump of rock and iron was the same. Initial calculations, made with data from Dr. Steel's observations, showed that its orbit would come close to that of the Earth's in about two years' time. Later, as the asteroid approached the inner solar system, a more accurate calculation was made which led to the horrifying discovery. The asteroid was on course for the Earth!

In the following weeks a sense of panic swept the world as news of the impending disaster spread, with the speed of light, across the globe. The effect of the knowledge of the earth's impending rendezvous with the mass equivalent of several hundred megatons of high explosive was drastic and more or less immediate. Seventeen minor and two larger wars that were being fought across the world quickly died down to almost nothing. At the same time quite a few new ones started up as groups and some governments reasoned that this might be their last chance to get retribution for previous transgressions. In most countries crime rates rose and fell simultaneously as people discovered God and sought forgiveness for their sins or, more commonly, decided — like the world — to go out with a bang. The lunatic fringe which had long and often predicted the end of the world lapped it all up. With an air of smug satisfaction they appeared on television across the globe and said in effect to the world: 'I told you so'. Suicide rates rose as people depressed by the possibility of dying in the impending disaster decided to preempt the 'destroyer.' Finally, temporarily at least, most world leaders decided to forget their differences and their squabbles. (petty or otherwise) and to get together to actually do something about their common problem.

An old idea, dating back to the latter part of the twentieth century, had actually been given a feasibility study by the US Air Force. Basically fire a nuclear missile at the thing in an attempt to destroy it, or at least to change its orbit by the tiny amount necessary to ensure that it would miss the earth completely. In the months that followed, scientists and engineers from many countries worked to design the hardware and software needed for the task and to calculate trajectories which might be used to intercept the



the asteroid. Quickly, the project proceeded until, less than two months before the 'destroyer' was due to hit the earth, it was ready.

At T minus twelve hours the two proton rockets stood on the launch pad in southern Russia. The launch vehicles, supplied by the Russians, were Proton boosters, the workhorse of the Russian space effort. The Proton had been in service since the 1970's when the old Soviet Union still existed. Of course these particular models had received a not insignificant upgrading for their mission. European Union built control systems and Japanese cryogenic engines had replaced the Russian built systems. To top it all (literally) were American built 1 megaton warheads which would be detonated remotely. There was of course an Apollo-style launch escape system, just in case.

The Protons were launched within an hour of each other, and less than eight minutes later were circling the Earth at an altitude of 460 nautical miles. The orbital modules, (consisting of the warhead and the American Japanese orbital transfer vehicle), separated from the launch vehicles silently, controlled by its manoeuvring thrusters. Although in more or less the same orbit, both warheads were more than ten kilometers apart when the signal came to fire the motors.

The modules containing the warheads slid out of orbit, as they accelerated. They reached escape velocity in a few minutes but continued to accelerate until they were travelling at over 40,000 kph.

Finally, some ten minutes after the orbital escape manoeuvre had commenced, it was over. The two robot craft carrying their deadly but so vital cargoes were on their way to their rendezvous with destruction.

The planned trajectory would take the warheads to their destination in three weeks, whereupon they would be commanded to fire their motors in order to match orbits with the 'destroyer'. Thrusters would then push them slowly to the surface, where they would be detonated. The resulting explosion of energy would cause a change in the asteroid's orbit, a minute shift which would nevertheless cause it to miss the Earth entirely.

The warheads were on course now. The first week passed uneventfully. Millions of tests were run on each spacecraft; all was in order. The second week went exactly the same. But as the third week passed something strange happened. Simultaneously and without explanation, the motors in both of the propulsion fired. They did so for 2

and 56 seconds and despite the efforts of mission control could not be shut down. After they had ceased to fire, the controllers tried in vain to regain control of the craft. Although other functions were unaffected, the controllers simply could not gain access to the thrust control section. Pretty soon it became clear that they, and the Earth, had lost. The warheads' velocity would carry them past the huge lump of rock and metal which was now going, without hope of reprieve, to smash the Earth. As realisation set in, so did in most cases depression. A few of the scientists and engineers however did (now purely out of academic curiosity) try to figure out what had gone wrong. Finally an Irish computer scientist located the cause of the impending catastrophe. The engineer who had designed the control system protested that due to fiscal limitations imposed on him (yes, believe it or not, it was a man) by his Government's finance minister he had no other choice but to do what he had. However it did not matter now. The future of civilization would be irrevocably changed, because he had designed the control systems around a faulty microprocessor.

He had used a Pentium IV...

— © 1995 Ger Quinn

THE ELVES AND THE STORY-MAKER

He could not believe his eyes (despite the fact that his window to the world was a train window and not a television) Outside the train, running up the steep embankment from a ramshackle cardboard metropolis stretching across the horizon, was an army of grin-faced beings camouflaged in rags. Behind their well organised advance the eye of the sun was crimson and bathed the world from which they came in a soft and gentle light.

He had just woken up. The view through the window from his sleeper, a good 8 feet above the train floor, soon became impressive as he could watch the invasion in peace and comfort from this perch. His comfort was short lived. Before long the train was completely over-run despite the fact that it was still moving. This did not seem to deter the invaders from jumping on board and making themselves at home. The operation went smoothly indicating that it was

well rehearsed. These tenacious little warriors were obviously seasoned veterans at this sort of manoeuvre.

He decided to stay in his sleeper. It had been his temporary home on the overnight journey from Varanasi and would remain so until the train reached Howrah Station in the centre of Calcutta now obviously quite near. There are some disadvantages

**The view became
impressive as he could
watch the invasion in
peace...**

to travelling alone. Everything moves with you when you need a movement. And trying to move around a sardine tin with a rucksack on was difficult at the best of times. Thus it was necessary to stay with your material possessions locked and chained to you otherwise you would

helpless if they were stolen in the night. It was a real trial to unlock yourself from these chains of security.

The other advantage of course of staying in this magpies' nest was that he did not have to mix with the filthy urchins now crawling on the floor below him. He might have his wallet, watch, camera or the locks too conscience stolen and then what would he do? Would the Gods of the Western World protect him then? Assuming his mobile was still available and working he could always 'dial a prayer of desperation' to some company offering last minute travel insurance policies to the would be Messiah's visiting Calcutta. The prayer would of course be free of charge as would the Gods' advice as long as a commitment to convert to their way was assured.

Yes, those urchins were crawling everywhere, under and over seats and lower sleepers (for Indian residents) filling strange bags on their backs (which seemed to double as their clothes) with even stranger treasures. Paper bags, plastic cups, cigarette boxes, scraps of food, used tissues - the list was impressively green.

And then it dawned on him as the sun rose further over what he only knew as a slum, that these urchins must be employed by Indian Railways to clean the train. The sun was now quite golden and the view of the City of Joy was a little clearer in a strangely smogless sky. They really should be provided with uniforms though, then he as a public consumer of the service would not have to have his senses bombarded by poverty. Clean suits would hide all that. Rags were a little too much after all. Sunlight crept into secret dark places and converted the night into day.

Looking down from his temporary throne with a regal indifference, barely interested in the by product of colonial corruption manifested below he suddenly caught the sparkling brown eyes of one of its innocent victims. The child smiled catching him completely off guard.

He who would be King coughed nervously not quite sure of how to communicate with a soul obviously quite comfortable with him. He hadn't really thought them filthy urchins had he? I mean he was looking at them from a distance and his eyesight is bad and...

The catching of eyes, the meeting of spirits and the opening of hearts had suddenly transformed the window display into a confrontation with a very much alive and kicking mannequin - only this one was wearing rags and not an Armani.

Hello, he muttered and was rewarded with another beaming smile, radiant and unassuming, warm and embracing, innocent and liberating all in a few pearly white teeth. The King attempted a smile but instead

returned a Yuppie leering grimace, intoxicatingly false and then found himself lost. Where did one go from here? Communicating in the Queens English (another Colonial cancer) was impossible and Hindi was not his strong point (after all, did not most of the 'educated world' speak English?) so in a pitiful gesture of finding an easy way to banish this ghost from his 'Just Very Comfortable' past he dug for his well protected wallet.

It might have been the smile that scared the daylights out of the child or he realised that there was more important things to do than sit and give reverence to the King, either way the child ran off to continue his job of cleaning the train. Meanwhile the Emperor felt distinctly uncomfortable in his new clothes. Sort of naked and exposed. He patted his Levi's to make sure they at least were still there and then stared out of the window again.

The sun was quite high now but it was not required...

The Son was still climbing and losing Its original and obvious shape becoming a glowing light dispersed across the heavens. He could not help but notice Its reflections in the eyes of what he now recognised as children of this light. He decided to meet the masses head to head and so he attempted to climb down from the throne to engage with the grassroots of the kingdom. He landed quite heavily in the swarm of foraging children as he was still chained to his rucksack of security and so nearly gave himself a hernia. No sooner had he left the sleeper when it was lost from sight amid a frantic array of tiny hands and feet picking it clean of the royal left-overs.

The sun was quite high now but it was not required. There was enough light around him now to even dispel his own shadow and he felt humbled by its simple powerful presence. He

wanted to cry and grab the nearest child and hold them close to save him from the raging sea of turmoil within him. Children growing despite all, vibrant and resourceful in incredible circumstances all radiating life and love. And in the moment when he shut his eyes to revel in their light they left as quickly as they had come. These tiny elves graceful, cheerful and industrious vanished before the train had stopped, their precious gifts left in the memories of a most undeserving observer.

Indian Railways never complain about the work of the Calcutta Street Children. After all, they clean the trains for nothing, they do not bother the passengers, they recycle what they find and always leave before the train stops so the Railway Police can ignore their existence (and as a consequence so can the rest of the window world)

It was now midday and the sun was directly overhead. The King (now well and truly deposed) was in Calcutta trying to furnish a new career. The gifts he had been kindly and unexpectedly bestowed turned out to be seeds of hope and allowing them grow became (and still is) his primary problem. He started by giving up on the preaching until his practice was a little better. When they were allowed to grow precious little buds broke free on a barren ground. He found himself unable to argue with anybody who held and loved somebody dying in their arms. He found it impossible to ignore a handicapped man being beaten on the side of the street. The deaf and dumb child in the school for street children melted his heart. It was easy to argue and ignore it all from behind a window

When they were trampled on it really was a desert. He feels eternally indebted to them. Does the story end with the kindly elves being repaid for their generosity? Perhaps the story itself will be a start.

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THE SCIENTIST



A memory. No, not a memory. It's too dim and too unfocused. Even half remembrances are clearer than this. Besides I would never have. I couldn't have - but suddenly things are sharp. Well defined. I am stumbling across some waste ground. It is night and it dark because the moon, though full, is being chased about the sky by thin, mean clouds. They are the type of clouds that presage squalls of heavy rain, or follow rain or run between bands of thundery showers.

Indeed, it has been raining. I can smell damp concrete. And mud and wet rust and rotting leaves. The ground here is very rough and as my memory clears each step jolts a different decaying object into sight. Lumps of plaster and brick. Broken roof tiles. Part of a bedstead. A heap of cigarette butts, empty cans and broken bottles beneath an upstairs trellis suspended on a lonely gable end. Nettles. Urine stained steps leading to the remains of a wall. It is

here I stop. I am tired. The ground is bad going but it is not the only reason I stumble.

I set down my burden on the old tiled floor beyond the wall. I place my hands about her neck. She is about twenty-four years old. Her curly hair is auburn, a colour I cannot see in the darkness but which I remember from the light of the phone box. She has very white

skin but there is a contrasting dark stain on her temple where I struck her. She is still unconscious until her eyelids flicker as my thumbs squeeze her throat and she looks upwards, towards my face but beyond me, to the moon. The moon has ducked out beneath a cloud and shines on her lips. It occurs to me as I tighten my grip and wait to watch these lips turn dark bluish, then her eyelids and her cheeks, that she is smiling. I get up and walk stiffly away. I am stiff from having knelt motionless above her for so long and it raining again.

No, it is not a memory. That was not me. I couldn't kill anyone. It's a nightmare. I'm going to wake up soon.

Then, as happens in dreams, I see myself from outside my body. I see my back. My shoulders are hunched disconsolately against more than just the rain. I trip over something and turn as I half-fall. I am not that man. He is not me, he is the man who hit

me with something and dragged me up a stairs by my arms and tied me to a radiator in a room with narrow windows. He wears the same anorak and stubby beard that I could barely see as my head swung between his knees. And the same dirty trousers and high leather boots that I could see more clearly.

I can also see myself. Not as a killer in a dream about a girl but as a body being dragged clumsily along a wooden floor. I see myself from above as if from his eyes and as if his eyes are weak and a little bleary like those of an old man. He is panting and finding it hard to pull me up the stairs. The man who killed the girl has unwrinkled hands about her neck but he is the same man. I am relieved he is not me. I will wake soon.

Aha, you are awake. What is that you say, "I will wake soon"? But we are awake. I am awake and you, well you are as, shall I say unasleep as you ever will be. No, no. Please do not try to sleep again. So few become conscious. It is a problem but do not concern yourself about it. It is being remedied but for the moment, please just stay aware. It is so difficult to retrieve meaningful data from a dead man's dreams.

I feel irritated. My pulse rises. So does my breathing rate. My face reddens. I become angry. I cannot understand. I cannot get useful data. My idea does not work. My little piece of genius is just a nonsense. I feel like strangling someone. Aha, what an ironic little phrase. I must calm down. I must be scientific.

Why do I keep saying "Aha"? I never say "Aha".

No, but perhaps you are just a little scientifically minded. You grew angry as I grew angry. Over a lack of data, a lack that was not yours. Now you are beginning to ask questions and I think, because I have

a hunch, despite hating hunches because they are unreasonable, that yours is the mind and that I will explain. Just for amusement.

I always laugh at the explanations they give for psychopathy. Not those dilettantes who let their work fall away in the face of death. I mean full psychopaths. Men who kill people.

Explanations? I don't understand but I am not I. I am thinking the thoughts of two people. One could never kill anyone. But one could kill. And has killed. Often.

I do not mean the type of man who suddenly takes a gun and goes to a shopping centre and shoots a dozen people and then himself. He is just crazy - a nut you might say - and their explanations seem just as valid as mine.

They not however understand psychopaths. Men who carefully kill one person at a time over a period of time. Methodical men. Men like me.

They say such funny things. For instance, they say that one man is so lonely he never wants his friend or lover to leave. So he kills her so she cannot go and then finds that though she has not left she is still gone. A beautiful *non sequitur*. So he makes a new friend and kills again. Or what about this? A man who kills only homosexuals or adulterers or whatever because God hates homos or because when he was a little boy he saw his father with a woman who was not his mother. Or whatever.

Then there is the man who wants to be loved by a woman. But he is small and shy and will never be loved by a woman. So he grows bitter and begins to kill women. Or perhaps this is because the only way to assert his manhood, apart from loving, is by killing. They say he seeks power.

They might be right about power but

but in the wrong way. Their reasons are silly. Power only comes through knowledge. Most humans are stupid, emotional creatures. When they see a psychopath killing only women they explain this in terms of their own sexual hangups. They get it so wrong. We are so much more rational than that. We seek knowledge. We are scientists. It may appear to be a narrow field but there are various areas of research. Some are mere technocrats, exploring methods of killing. Others are studying themselves, seeking the effects that killing has on their own psyche. A few others, like me, have a grander goal. The act of dying is important. What do you do when you die? Where do you go? This is the knowledge I seek. When I die I will know how to do it properly.

They might be right about power but in the wrong way. Power only comes through

Let me tell you about women. Some "serial killers" as they call us do kill a lot of women but for a very simple, logical reason. These claims about repressed or misdirected sexuality are amusing and they are false. It is a fact that most women are weaker than most men. It is important to collect data from close up, to look carefully. To see the whites of their eyes is an expression used. Thus it is a pointless experiment to kill from a distance of thirty metres with a gun. It is easier to overpower women and so we kill women. Or gays of course. Many homosexuals act effeminately so they too will not put up much of a fight.

That is why I have killed mainly women. I killed only women in the old days. Things have changed. That girl I remembered. I always remember her. She is the breaking point. She is the page between the Old Testament and the Gospels.

That was a night of torment. Staring into her eyes as she looked at the moon I realised that all my experiments had been a waste of time. Well maybe not a waste of time but no more than a necessary but preliminary step so that I could reach this moment of realisation. It was the way she seemed to smile. I could not even be sure if it was a smile. Maybe it was something else. Whatever it was, it was when staring at her barely parted, slightly curled lips that I discovered that the moment of death never belonged to me. As the killer I could only read the preface or hear the overture. My subjects could see and hear everything. Even though I killed them, the moment of dying was theirs.

You can always choose how you die. Certainly your choices may be narrowed down for you. It may happen in a hospital. Maybe death will be by a bullet on a battlefield or by strangulation in a broken house. No one can control everything but if the menu is never infinite then it also always holds choices. That exact moment of death is all yours. You can choose to smile or be sad. To look at the faces of your family or at the bedpan. To smell the flower blooming beside where you fall or to press the trigger on your own gun. To look at the face of he who kills you or to gaze at the moon.

I apologise. I am beginning to lose the careful preciseness that a rational man should strive for. I confess the this only reflects that state of my mind that night. I walked home shocked. I had prided myself as a scientist. Now I was aghast at how primitive I had been. Missing all the subtleties, my experiments were useless. How could I tell what someone thought as they died? Did their life history cross before their eyes? Did they see the gates of Heaven or the pit of Hell?

I struggled in despair across that dump. I felt like killing myself. However that feeling was an emotional response, non objective. Even the possible ratiocination that killing myself was an experiment that would surely show definite results could be ruled out. I would be dead. What would be the point? I could never carry out further tests to clarify my results. No one would ever see my results. I continued across the rubble and never even noticed I had fallen and gashed my knee. I did not know what to do.

The sun rose the next morning and the solution dawned in my brain at the same time. I was lying on my bed. My knee hurt. I looked at the dirty hole in my flesh. It was foreign, an invasion of sorts, but it ached and the pain was inside me. I had to get inside them. I could not die myself but if I were inside their minds I could die with them. I could truly know their deaths.

So I put away my killing tools and I began to research. I read books and papers. I attended conferences on the latest developments in psychology, neurology, and bioelectronics. I spoke to men famous as scientists but whom I found trivial, lacking as they did proper intellectual rigour. Their emotional qualms prevented them from performing any great work. The work of death. Some did nonetheless provide useful information and for a time I too killed no one. It took me forty years to build my machine.

I will not explain how it works. This is what it does. The helmets we both wear are brainwave transducers.

I am wearing a helmet. I hadn't noticed.

They pick up our thoughts, amplify them, transmit them across the room if needs be and then implant our thoughts in each others' brain. Then, like splicing a rope, our minds become one. I can hardly see the join but it is there. This is my one fear. You can sense me. This

changes things. The observation influences the observed. Thus my machine may not be perfect. A spliced rope may snap more easily. Despite this I must continue with things as they are. This machine is my life's work and I am old now. I do not have very much time and besides, no scientist's work is ever properly complete. Newton, for instance, went mad and turned to religion, or was it the other way around? Einstein never solved general relativity. I must bear with imperfections because my achievements will still be great.

I remember building the helmet. Years of despair. An instant of joy. Then despair once more. Until finally it was complete.

You are remembering my memories again. Sh. There is no need. I have explained to you and in a few moments I will kill you. I will be in your mind as you die. I will see everything. Hear everything. I will taste the dark lips of death. I will in fact be dead. But only instantaneously before my machine pulls me back.

He is going to kill me but I cannot feel afraid because he is in me and he is so excited. Rather unobjectively he is so excited. Rather unobjectively he has an erection. This means that I do too.

You are the first man who has stayed conscious throughout this process. I only killed women in the old days. I started that way again. I found this apartment, built over the ground where I killed the girl. I installed my machine and took out my old tools and my old clothes. I felt joyful and excited. I felt powerful in science as I sought my first subjects. These were women and even when they stayed conscious they were worthless. Women

are weak and they are fools. Their thoughts, feeble when they live, vanish quickly with death.

I had to begin killing men but so far they have all blacked out completely. When they die in their subconscious it is useless. But you. Ah, but you. I feel pain.

I feel pain. I am connected to electrodes. He is passing current through me and I am dying. I see a corridor. He is right, I can choose my death. For now I will ignore it. I watch him instead and see that he is looking toward the wrong end of the corridor. A blank wall.

I am dying. At last. Triumph! I must restrain myself. He is dead now. I died too for a moment. Where are my results? Nothing!

I have failed again. Nothing left. A little flickering here, some electrons echoing in his synapses. I have failed. Nothing but noise. Maybe there is nothing. (Did he go – will I go – to Heaven or to Hell?)

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Jonathan
Thompson