a quarterly

VOIRIAD

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FICTION:

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LEWIS SHINER

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GOING MODEM

LUCIUS SHEPARD
STARK RAVING


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(who put up with us—*or else*).

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contents

OPENING

It is commonly believed that a successful come-on line will reveal nothing and promise all. Consider the classic, "Wanna fuck?": a marvel of concision—and in the appropriate circumstances, it gets *results*. Perhaps not the *desired* results, but so what? In a world made boring by hedged bets and risk aversion, it's refreshing to encounter *anything* straightforward.

"Sure," the quarry says, making eye contact, and the ball is back in your court.

Most people would consummate this social contract in privacy, but the true zealot will get down to business right there on the floor, wherever that may be. Does anyone truly deserve such an opportunity? *Don't screw it up.*

Wired makes its own overtures, and this is your chance to respond with the same brazen initiative. With our premiere volume, we nearly *broke even*. . . . Break out the *Dom*, take the lid off the hot tub—let's party! With this, our second deflowering, we hope to do even better. (We hope to make enough to cover our loss on the first one.) So here goes.

GAMBIT

Revealing Nothing

What is this? you're wondering. *A book? A magazine?* Well, there's only one way to find out.

Promising *All*

Brilliant fiction, astute analysis, engaging wordplay! Handsome, economical design! Great graphics! Shelf-worthy, enhancing its owner's personal image, evoking acquisition-envy among one's associates, thrilling to *possess!*

The Moment of Truth

It's now or never, here on this very spot. Put up or shut up. Get ready to start reading, or to spend the rest of your life wondering.

Wanna fuck?

commentary

J. B. Reynolds

Pictures in the LIGHT

Reality Management in the Gray Zone

**"The most important things in life,"
George Burns is reported to have said,
"are Truth and Sincerity.
If you can fake them, you've got it made."**

(And if you're not careful, you could get a job in television. Or even politics!)

George has made (and, bless him, continues to make) a well-paying career out of standing around and smoking a cigar, dourly–if drolly–shovelling one-liners. Modern audiences know him as the strange little old guy in the raincoat who turned out to be God in that movie, but George Burns the actor is really only the last vestige of George Burns the vaudevillian. There was George the singer, George the hoofer, and, then as now, George the solo stand-up comedian. One at a time he tried every form of popular entertainment except leading a band, and managed to bomb at every one. So how did he finally succeed?

Television had a lot to do with it, but really, television was just a chance for George to do his regular vaudeville schtick for a much bigger house.

The real secret was that he got a partner named Gracie who played a character completely opposite to his own, who was even more charmingly nutty than he was acerbically sane. Together they could touch a friendly nerve in every audience they played, because between George and Gracie loomed a vast gulf where an infinite number of surprises could occur in the free admixture of reality and nonsense.

In a world where one's expectations are always one-upped (that is, in the world of comedy) nothing can afford to be second-guessed. And so Gracie's looniness could freely compound itself, twist, twist again, and suddenly become much more mundane an observation of daily fare than George's. While George's feet were mired in plain, predictable ol' reality, Gracie's head was soaring blissfully in another dimension, another realm entirely.

And yet, on her own Gracie would have bombed as regularly and as surely as her cigar-puffing spouse (and for all I know, she did, before they teamed up) because the humor—and the point—of their act was not reality or nonsense, but the tension created by the continual interaction of the two. One is never enough, does not explain enough, without the other.

These moments of interest at which we sometimes laugh, sometimes marvel, always occur at the points of intersection, the moments of collision between two not necessarily opposing forces. These extra-real, extra-ordinary instants succeed (get noticed, stay remembered) because of a meaningful, personal synthesis which they create.

As A.D. Murphy, the greatest movie industry business analyst of our time put it, "You never have a problem with one opinion or another, or with one technique or another, or one bit of business or another. One thing over here and the other thing over there is *not* a problem. The problems always occur at the *interface* of the two things." And as if to prove his own point in a highly unique fashion, Murphy took up recreational skydiving.

Burns & Allen

"You see," he explained to me later at Hollywood Presbyterian Hospital, "it's just like I was telling you. I was right all along." He had somehow fouled up his first big jump after all the lessons, and snapped his femur—the strongest and most difficult bone in the body to break. On his first big jump.

"Like I said, I was fine in each of the two worlds. I have no problem on the ground. I'm fine, there. And I have no problem whatsoever in the air—hell, flying is *easy*. You'd *love* it. I'm *fine* in the air. The problem occurred at the *interface*, when my jump was suddenly over and I hit the goddam ground. It's the *interface* where the problem came up."

That point of interface, I pondered, watching Murphy call the nurse for morphine, is where the real interest lies.

As I was driving home from the hospital, mentally crossing "skydiving" off my list forever, I thought a little about what he'd said and for the rest of the drive I found that I couldn't get the theme song from *Leave It To Beaver* out of my brain. Finally, I figured out why.

Spring 1990

When I was a kid I watched what experts determined to be an average amount of television: three or four hours a day. Every day. Maybe triple that on Saturdays. I have almost no memory of *what* I watched, merely that I slavishly watched it; 80% of my TV viewing memory is a total blur to me. A part of that blur, along with *Car 54 Where Are You?* and *The Patty Duke Show* and *The Paul Winchell/Jerry Mahoney Hour*, was *Leave It To Beaver* which itself held no particular attraction for me except for Eddie Haskell, whom I thought was wonderful because of the evil purity of his approach to things. Richard Nixon holds the same fascination for me, but more on him later.

Anyway, I was aware that a television show was really a faked-up skit like the ones we did for the Pack 139 meetings in Cub Scouts, and that The Beave and Wally and even Eddie Haskell were not who they appeared to be on the tube. Growing up in North Hollywood, a few blocks from TV studios, gave you that kind of casual awareness. I didn't feel like some kid who just fell off the turnip truck, believing everything he sees between the used car commercials, but I did believe that what these shows made me *feel* was the real thing. For instance, I might have felt sad because The Beave was losing his allowance, but at the same time I knew that The Beave called himself Jerry Mathers and was really doing just fine, thanks, somewhere in Sherman Oaks. I could hold each of these mutually exclusive concepts comfortably in my head. In each world, I was at rest.

The problem came with the Universal Studios Tour.

Now . . . I knew how movies and TV shows were made from a young age. After all, every family occasion of any significance at our home was seared forever into my memory by the presence of my dad and the grinding Bell & Howell, perched somewhere behind a bank of dazzling, ten thousand watt photo-flood lights. "Move!" came the commanding voice behind that incredible tide of photons. "It's Christmas! Look happy! This is a *movie!* Don't just *stand* there! I don't want to have to splice this out!" I figured that The Beave and the others must have worked like this, standing in front of hot lights in somebody's house, trying to

look relaxed and natural while whoever ran things ranted at them from out in the dark to do this or do that.

By the way, those of you who have actually seen a movie being made know that this is *exactly* how the process works.

The real shock, the unresolvable problem, came halfway on the studio tour. I was thinking about the neat-o western gunfight that I knew we'd be seeing in a few minutes, with guys falling off roofs and smashing bottles over each other's heads, and trying not to pay attention to the corn-pone patter of the dimwitted tour guide: "And you see that little trail leading up to the *Psycho* mansion, there? You know what we call that? Well folks, we call that the 'psycho – path!'" A chorus of groans rose above the sputtering of the tram engine. "OK folks," the tour-guide-only-until-I-get-my-big-break said, "and who will be the first one who can name the street we're on *right now?*"

"Is this the street where Ben Casey lives?" a woman ventured.

"Nope!"

"Did Godzilla, like, *destroy* this street?" a kid in the next tram car asked hopefully, apparently oblivious to the fact that the street was in perfect shape.

"Nope!"

One chance left. This was important to me. I was a bright kid and I was from around here, so I reckoned I should know this. Also, I was sitting right next to the tour guide. The street in question kind of looked familiar, but it also looked so exactly like the endless suburban lanes I grew up around that I wasn't sure. It could have been anywhere in the San Fernando Valley. Of course, it might be just another of the tour guide's dopey trick questions.

"Give up? Why, it's . . . Beaver Cleaver's street!"

"Ohhhh, yesss . . . " a dozen people said, more or less at once. They found the moment of recognition to be delightful. I found it appalling.

Suddenly, the two separate and equal worlds that I had kept orbiting around one another had collided, and I could no longer look at each the same way.

Wally & The Beave

I mean, I could easily see The Beave and Wally "doing a scene" together in the kitchen, with one of their dads behind the blinding lights shouting "Now! Pick up the sandwich! Tell Wally what a goof you think he is!" but here on this dingy back lot was the very street they lived on—*practically my own street!* Here was the sidewalk they walked along together at the end of every show while the credits went rolling by and the theme music was playing, all the houses they walked past, the gate they walked through, the path they walked on, the trees they walked by, the Cleaver home they walked into . . . and here it was right in front of me, a TOTAL FAKE!

For reasons that wouldn't really dawn on me until driving down Vermont Avenue seventeen years later after visiting Murphy, I was so shaken by this satori that the rest of the Universal Studios tour was like a horrendous mistake, like realizing I was in the middle of reading a book written in a language I didn't speak.

My tastes in television shows changed practically overnight. My new preferences—which, incidentally, comprise the 20% that I *do* remember watching—became shows like *Johnny Quest*, or *The Man From U.N.C.L.E.*, or even better, *Supercar*, *Fireball XL5*, and *Stingray*. Stylish science-fantasy, even the garish and self-conscious junk of marionette operas, was the new drug of choice.

Let's face it, ever since we looked up from the primordial slime and realized that hey this was *us* looking up from the primordial slime, reality has never been good enough for us. There is a secret something in the very act itself, in realizing, that changes us just a little bit, but forever.

We each become a spontaneously generated Zarathustra, momentarily looking up at the sunrise and thinking, "Hah! Your beauty is dog meat without me to *realize* that it's beautiful!" and thus quietly take over the ancient human task of Reality Management.

Reality, once that four step process where we 1) look up from the slime, 2) eat a few lizards, 3) reproduce, and 4) die, becomes permanently superseded in the minds of us ambitious apes by "better" things. Criminy, who needs reality when we can think up something better? Reality certainly is not the way we would *like* it to be, not at *all!* We can think up some much better ways of being than this. We, of all known creatures, can play Let's Pretend. We can imagine.

This critical step of imagination for survival's sake was *theatre*, the timely practice of *un*reality, and was found to be beneficial in helping to overcome the critical limitations of the real world (the cave man's experiential world), when it ran

head-on into the "spirit world" of the animal he was hunting. The moment of collision of those two realities was instructional and cathartic, and proved the key to survival. And that point of interface is precisely what ancient man sought, because he needed to know that he could overcome the threat to survival which the interface posed.

Do the magic too much, though—journey down into those secret caves where the walls are so brilliantly painted a few times too often—and the magic may not work any more. Like crack, the fifth experience is never as good as the first. Even the second time, we can still remember which world we are in and find out too late that there is no thrill or profit in a knowingly fake confrontation. Still, this theatre magic is potent juju and even a little is better than nothing at all.

Well, time passes. After millions of years, after all these chances to practice and invent, we have managed to conjure our essential unreality into two immensely popular but still rather sophisticated forms: movies and television.

Both of which, by the way, can be had for a price on the Universal Studios Tour.

I think that for a contemporary audience, movies are by far the more powerful of the two because they more closely emulate their point of origin in the secret magic caves of ancient man. That is to say, we go through a ritualistic pattern of behavior when we see a film that simply isn't a part of the television experience. Just the need to get up and *go* to a movie—even if it's not to the Egyptian Theatre in Hollywood, still a glorious landmark in American kitsch architecture seventy years after its erection—even if it's just going down the block to a beaverboard 16-plex in the most hideous mall imaginable and for seven dollars all you get is a screen the size of a bedsheet in a room shaped like a one-lane bowling alley with only twenty seats and they *don't even validate parking*—***EVEN THEN***—there is enough of the old ritual to make some of the magic happen. The dark is still dark. The images still seem to move. Potent juju indeed, and still better than nothing.

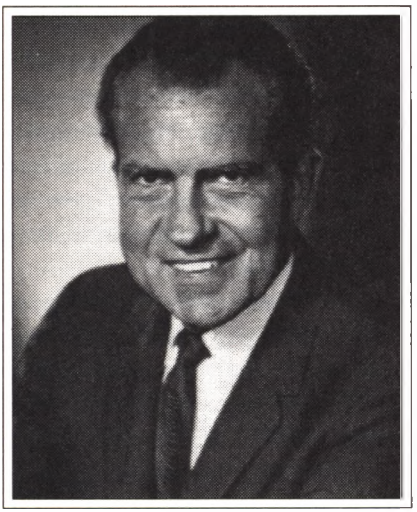
To watch television properly, say the gurus of the sofa, you should be in your underwear with a bowl of pretzels balanced on your stomach, with a vacuum cleaner going in the next room, working on your third brewski of the morning. The experience becomes passive to the point of stupefaction. As a matter of fact, that's kind of the idea. Low recall level means more re-runs can be programmed. And in a mesmeric state the subject is more open to suggestion . . . say, to *BUY BUY BUY!*

Even with the advent of the videotape cassette and movies invading the home via the tube, watching a motion picture can still generate an intensity all its own, a special absorption that commercial TV can't. Films maintain their air of palpable unreality, since the prerequisite of a good film is not so much that you *believe* everything that's going on, but that you merely agree to *suspend your disbelief* for as long as you are in the theatre—or in this case, in the theatric frame of mind.

Curiously, then, the most personally meaningful point of my "film experience" just might be the long walk back to the car, when a lobe of my brain about the size of a cashew takes over the mechanics of movement toward the parking garage and leaves the rest of the mind to momentarily re-live the favorite moments of the film. With me as the star, of course. Or, at least as a featured sidekick.

That walk back to the car, like the trip back from Universal Studios in my mother's station wagon or even my drive home from Hollywood Presbyterian Hospital, is like the gulf between George and Gracie. It is the vast empty space from which comes the most surprising of results. By providing that space, films "work."

And, curiously, this is the gulf that television only rarely *even attempts* to provide, and as such, as a medium of interest, it fails. And fails and fails, gets up, and fails again. But because television keeps on going in spite of its failure (since its real aim is to part you with your money by promising miracles will happen if you just *BUY BUY BUY* the right product) it has become an ugly but pure, meretricious but helplessly schizophrenic, increasingly evil



The Trickster

influence that will not die or go away no matter how awful it becomes. Like ... Richard Nixon!

I would have been much less shocked had the Beaver Cleaver street turned out to have been only four feet long, or if it had been made entirely out of dyed mozzarella cheese, or if it was just a painting on a backdrop in Stage 9. Instead, it was a perfectly real phony street. We drove on it, and it functioned—it was a street. But it had existed only that The Beave might walk on it, and so was not a street at all, but a *set*. It was an "authentic replica of a street" as the tour guide said, which seemed to me to equal "genuine fake." It was "actually and truly bogus."

Whoops! Interface time.

Television, like the Cleaver Street, does not exist in one realm or another. It is neither genuine and spontaneous as "live TV" pretends to be nor seriously *un*real enough to provoke the intensity of response that makes a film worth the bother. Network news is a beautiful example: is that the "real world" over handsome Dan Rather's shoulder, there? Or is he just sitting in front of a blue-screen in a studio, reading some whimsical, narrow-minded nonsense that a paid professional whacked out for him a few minutes before? Is this what *really* happened, or is it some honest idiot's best guess? (Hint: ever notice that when network news does a segment on something about which you know a great deal, that they never *quite* get it straight? And yet when you listen to a segment about something you know nothing about, you accept what you hear as gospel?) Are we finding out

what's really "news" or did they kill that segment on liposuction because Pizza Heap bought both commercial slots on either side and thought that lipo was a bad intro? Is that *real* reality news happening behind lovely Connie Chung's back? Or is it an "authentic replica" of a *simulated* reality, "recreated for our studio cameras?"

And what's that disclaimer at the end of those Bill Burrud "nature" shows, where it says that "the scenes depicted, whether actual or created, represent real events" . . . ?

A movie, like a life, begins, flourishes, and then ends; films exercise, if nothing else, a marvelous sense of closure that we might do well to ponder more often if we want to learn to accept death—and what's more, they represent life in only a very stylistic, artfully removed way. I think one of the real dangers of television is that it's become a twenty-four hour phenomenon and thus seeks to resemble life *too closely*; television, supposedly aping our life in a talented fashion but in truth just hysterically shucking consumer junk, insistently posits a self-contained and continuing "reality," but it is a *bullshit* reality. Commercial television is composed primarily of bald-faced lies concocted by a few clever advertising people, directed to part you from your capital, regardless of need or reason. After all, they want capital because capital is the only thing of accepted value in a capital-mad realm.

Why does America have sixty-two jillion TV stations while other nations—far better educated nations than our own—have two or three? Well, probably because we are more obsessed with selling consumer junk than anyone who has ever lived. The average hour of television has now eroded below forty minutes of programming, and the balance is relentlessly padded with over twenty minutes of advertising. About a third of your television time is vaporized listening to actors pretending to be ordinary people, screaming at you—begging and cajoling and remonstrating you—to buy a lot of crap that you don't need from only the right company. And use only as directed. Lather. Rinse. Repeat.

And that under-forty-minute hour? The insidious creeping slime mold of "product endorsement" is slithering its way into that, too. Feature films are no longer safe, either. Only with an abacus could you hope to count the product endorsements in *Back to the Future, Part II*. And that is only the beginning.

Television is so pervasive in the American mind, and advertising so pervasive on television, that commercials are now treated like a happy little world unto themselves with their own "stars," their own "awards," and their own "news." They might as well. People think soap opera characters are real, why not a manicurist pitching soap? Or for that matter, Rula Lenska?

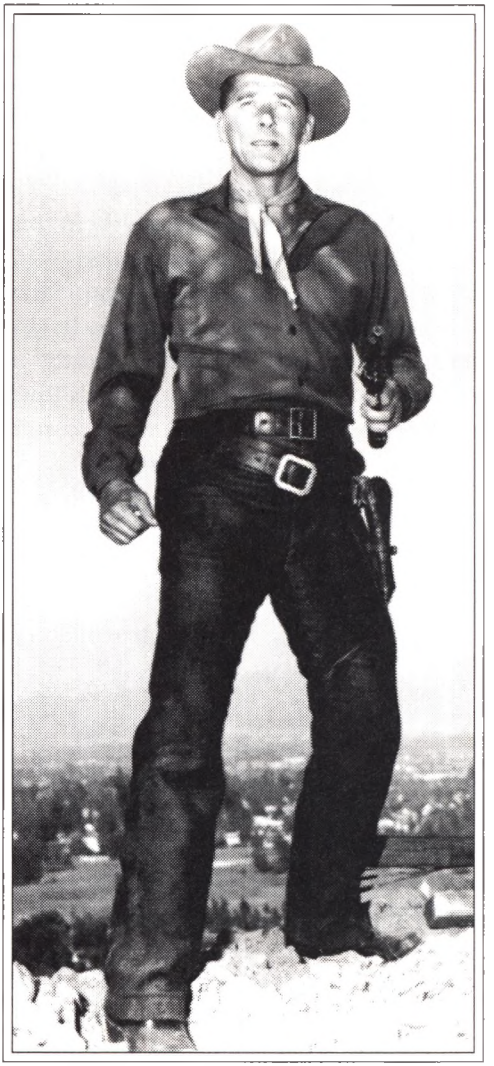
Commercials command loyalty. My friends' kids, when they come over with their parents, inevitably park themselves a foot away from the box and watch raptly even when I "mute" the ads so we can hear ourselves think at the other end of the room.

Commercials (even laconic ones) are equal to the programs they interrupt. You may not look away as long as the box is on.

But I'm talking about future generations, tomorrow's buyers of things safe when recommended dosage is not exceeded. Television, the bullshit reality that never stops, has already bred generations of converts who have been weaned from the teat like those experimental rats who after months of a nibble at a time, actually learn to rather like rat poison. Who are these generations of converts? Why, the ones who helped bring about the ultimate logical culmination of the bullshit reality of television: the voters who made the Reagan presidency a "reality."

If Richard Nixon is the first real TV president, the man who taught us all the hard way that no matter how stupid or mean or worthless or treacherous or evil you are, if you can just make yourself look good on TV (and, even better yet, make your opponent look bad) you can win everything, then Ronald Reagan is our still-living television mass media icon, the holiest of vapid vapors, the TV flicker made flesh. Like the hologram man in George Lucas's greatest film, *THX 1138*, he has been plucked from within the system's darkest innards, serenely free from any taint of actual knowledge. Reagan, like good LSD, is pure: he

says nothing, he knows nothing, and for the longest time it seems like he does nothing . . . but he can act. Or at least he tries; this is the point where LSD always wins, since it's never predictable and far more entertaining. Reagan is gloriously predictable and not the least bit entertaining: he always simply tries to act Presidential, or maybe what Beaver Cleaver would think is Presidential. He, like, salutes a lot, reads these swell speeches, and mostly looks really really pleased with himself. Y'know what I mean, Wally? Yeah, Beave, like Eddie Haskell.



The Great Prevaricator

I will admit that it's hard for me to *hate* Ronnie (at least, as much as I despise Nixon) because though I loathe television, yours truly is a rat who still needs a tidbit of poison now and again to feel "real"—I always thought that Ronnie was so awful he was

hilarious. If Nixon showed us that the presidency was up for grabs to shifty criminals, then Ronnie went him one better and showed that even shamelessly mercenary, *totally amoral imbeciles* can wear the suit and do it proud.

I mean, with Nancy prompting him on the lines, and him telling stories about his "experiences" in World War II, or telling the Russians about how Indians are so rich in America because of all the oil on all those reservations . . . it's obvious that when left to himself, Ron thinks he's still between takes on *Death Valley Days*, chatting with camera assistants. I bet that if he ever had a thought, an actual original thought, it was that being president was the best part he ever had. As he lies in bed in the morning, I think he must hear a voice, a ghostly voice from behind the bright lights saying, "OK now, here's Ronald Reagan getting up in the morning . . . very Presidential . . . roll cameras—ready Ron? . . . ACTION!" Then at night, safely abed, the voice returns: " . . . aaaand CUT! Print it! Nice work, Ron. Beautiful work. You're an artist, baby. Academy material! See you in makeup tomorrow at six!"

Acting as president was fun. He had only to read his lines, hit his marks, and point up at the helicopter blades whenever he had to answer an unrehearsed question.

The same went for Nancy, for that matter. And god, the loot she made off with. She made Imelda Marcos look like a Payless Shoes franchise.

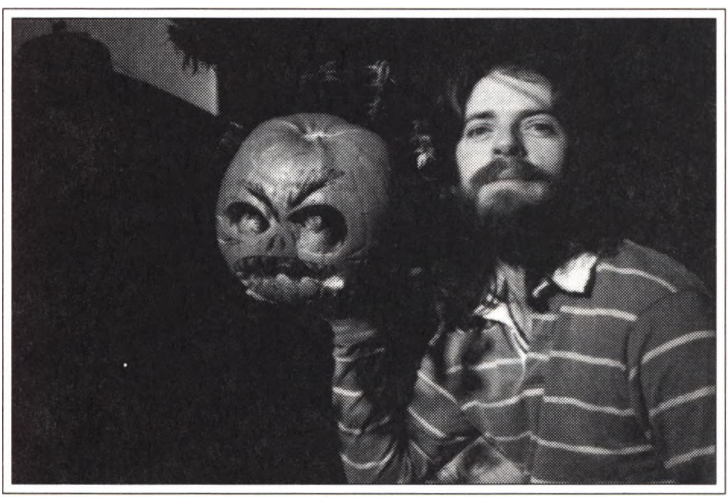
I wonder if the Reagans sent their agents 10% of their salaries, you know, reflexively. And then there's the matter of residuals. Not to mention product endorsements.

That Ronnie can find such staunch defenders of the flamboyant void he calls "policy," is the scary part. It tells me that the Television Generation *prefers* their bullshit to the real world, and will defend anything they've seen on the tube regardless of whether the scenes depicted were actual or created. (Hell, it sez here they *represent real events*, and there's a *Money Back Guarantee!*) Well, why shouldn't they defend Reagan? In doing so, they defend the very apostle of their *own* bullshit

reality. Or they defend him because he made them very, very, very very rich. They defend Reagan because they're either insane cold-blooded opportunist creeps like Eddie Haskell who were busy looting the cellar while grampa played cowboy upstairs on the TV, or they're just cement-brained permanent dweebs like The Beave who sat up there and applauded the TV while Eddie swiped their new skates.

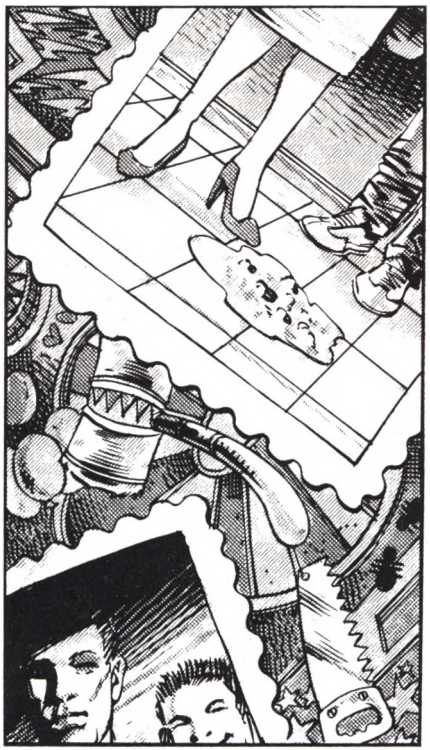
And now that reality and television have become pretty much interchangeable in the American cranium (100% tested / avoid prolonged use), the gulf between them has vanished—and with it, all the tension that made it, for a moment, interesting.

So maybe I'll finally take up skydiving . . . ? Say goodnight, Gracie. [*puff, puff*]



J. B. Reynolds & Friend

An avid devotee of organic gardening, the author communes with nature (whether actual or created) on a daily basis and is peculiarly proud of what surely must be the most talked-to compost in Marin County. Needless to say, a similar *modus operandi* characterizes the writing of his screenplays. . . . *Over the Shoulder* is featured regularly in this journal.



"Kidding Around" Illustrated by Mark A. Nelson

fiction

Lewis Shiner

kidding around

Mom pulled out the fake vomit again yesterday. It's been almost a year and I thought maybe she was over all that. Guess not, huh?

We were in the doctor's office. I'd just had a checkup so I could stay on the Pill. I'm not on it because of *that*, it's because my periods are messed up. Like there's somebody whose periods are normal? Could I see a show of hands, please? Mom is paying the bill. She waits until the nurse looks away for something and plop, drops it right there on the linoleum. Then she goes into her act. "Oh, Miss?" holding a handkerchief to her nose. "Miss? Don't you think you should do something about this? I mean, this is a doctor's office, and how healthy can it be," and on and on. I have to admit it's a little hard not to crack up when I see the nurse's face. The nurse has her hands up and fluttering around

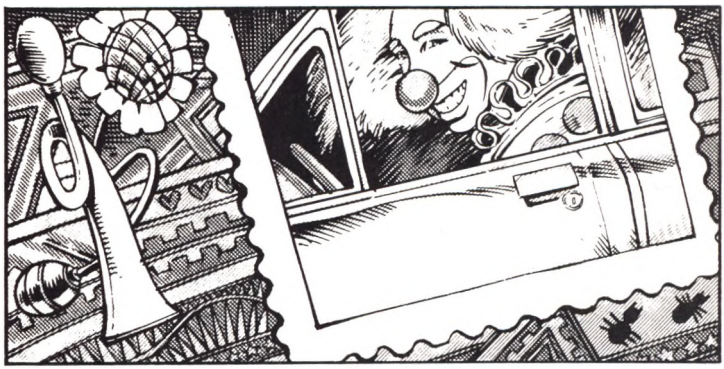
and runs out front, turning green like she's going to lose it herself. Mom gets That Look and says, "Well, if you won't do anything about it, I guess I'll have to take care of it myself," and sweeps it up with her handkerchief. She says, "Come along, dear," and we're out the door.

This is pretty typical. It can go on for weeks. One time last year she drove me and my little brother Ricky to Houston for a speech tournament. Everybody was there, my best friend Gail, even this guy Ryan who I'm not really interested in, but is as close to cute as they get in Tomball, Texas. So my Mom dresses up in a clown costume. I'm *not* kidding. Purple wig, red ball nose, big net collar, the works. And in case there isn't anybody in the entire city who hasn't already noticed that I came with her, she pulls out this three-foot bicycle horn and honks goodbye to me with it.

My Dad's not any better. He doesn't carry around itching powder and Chinese finger traps, but he's never serious either. What kills me is he won't ever admit to anything. He'll like leave a *Playboy* centerfold around and there'll be something really gross written to him on it, like it was from the girl in the picture. Mom yells at him and he just shrugs and says, "Well, *somebody* did it."

Gail has been my best friend since I was three years old. She lives on the other side of the highway from me. We're totally different people. I'm kind of big-boned but I have a pretty okay face, just wear a little eye shadow and lipstick. Gail is short and blonde and dresses to the max every day. All she really wants out of life is to marry some cute guy in Houston with a lot of money and a fast car. But that's okay. She'll be my best friend until I die. How can I make new friends when I don't dare bring them home? Gail is at least used to whoopie cushions and plastic ice cubes in her drink with flies or cockroaches inside.

When I sat down to eat with Gail today I found a note in my lunch that said, "I fixed your favorite, peanut butter and maggots. Love, Mom." I peel my banana and it falls apart in sections. Gail's seen it a hundred times but it still makes her laugh.



"Your Mom is so weird," she says.

"No kidding."

"At least you've got your hearing left." Gail's Mom plays this sixties music at unbelievable volume all day and night. Gail's absolutely most shameful secret is that she was originally named Magic Mountain. I'm *not* kidding. Her first day at school she told everybody she was named Gail. Only she didn't know how to spell it, and wrote it G-A-L. I had to take her aside and explain. Anyway, she kept on her Mom about it until her Mom finally made it legal. Nobody else remembers all that, but I do.

Everybody's parents seem to think the sixties were this unbelievably wonderful time. They even have TV shows and everything about it now. What I can't understand is, if it was so wonderful, why did they stop? Why don't they still wear long hair and bell-bottoms and madras or whatever it was? I don't think it was the sixties. I think they just liked being young.

Which is more than I can say. "Mom's into the plastic vomit again," I tell Gail.

"Oh God. Geez, you know, I can't come over this afternoon after all. I just remembered this really important stuff I have to do."

"Thanks, Gail. Thanks a lot. That means I'll be stuck at home alone with her."

"What about Ricky?"

"He'll spend the night at the Jamesons'. At the first sight of novelty items he's out the door, and Dad with him."

"I saw him this morning, did I tell you?"

"Ricky?"

"Your dad."

"No. Where was this?"

She looked sorry she brought it up. "Oh, it wasn't anything. I just saw him when Mom drove me to school."

I wanted to say, if it wasn't anything, then why did you bring it up, dork-brain? But she looked embarrassed and a little scared so I let it drop.

When I got home Mom was already in the kitchen. You can imagine my nervousness. Among the delights she's cooked when she's in a mood like this are: lemon meringue enchiladas, steak à la mode, chili con cookies, and banana pizza. The pizza was actually not too bad, but you understand what I'm saying.

We all sit down at the table. Mom brings out this big aluminum tray with a cover over it, like in the movies. She takes the cover off with a big flourish and goes, "Ta da!"

It's a casserole dish with what looks like overcooked brownies inside. We all stare at it.

"Eat," Mom says. "Come on, eat!"

No one wants to go first. Finally Ricky breaks down and pokes at it with a fork. It makes this nasty grinding sound. "Oh gross," he says. He looks more tired than really disgusted. Not like the time Mom walked around with the plastic dog mess on a Pamper, eating a piece of fudge. I lean over for a look myself.

"Mom," I say, "this is a mud pie." I sniff at it. It really *is* mud. Dried, baked mud now. "This is like not funny."

"If you don't eat every bite, you don't get dessert."

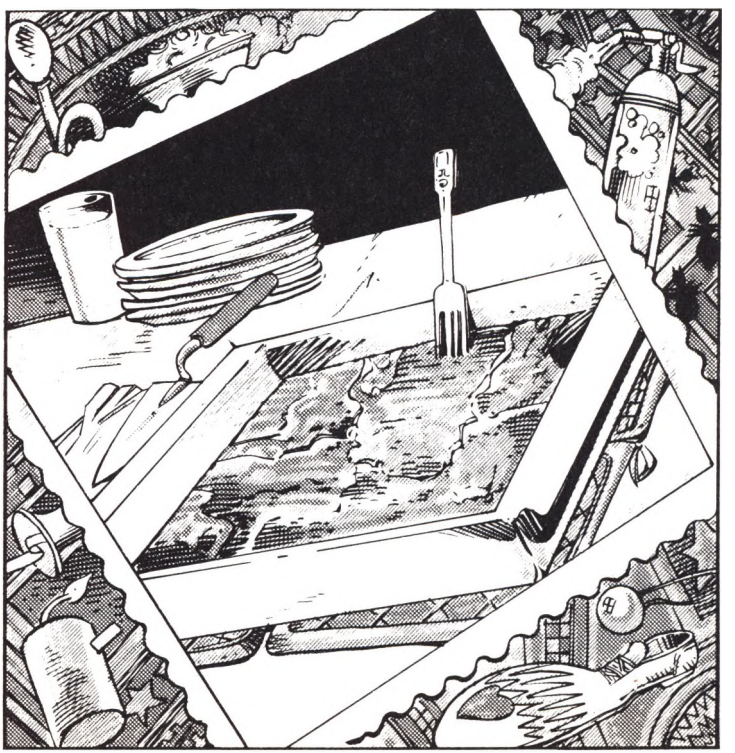
"You're slipping, Mom," Ricky says. "You're losing it. This is not even remotely funny. I'm going to the Jamesons'. If I hurry, maybe I'll be in time for supper."

Dad is just staring off into the corner, holding onto his chin. It's like he's not really there at all.

I went into the den and put on MTV. If there was a God it would have been Al TV, but it wasn't. I think Weird Al Yankovic is the greatest thing in the world. He plays the accordion and does goofed-up versions of songs, in case you've never heard of him. I saw him in concert in Houston and broke through his bodyguards so I could hug him.

I watched TV for a while and then Mom came in dressed in a maid's costume and started dusting. She has this huge feather duster, a joke feather duster, so big she can hardly move it around without knocking things over. Dad comes in and says, "Let's go for a burger."

I was glad to get away. That mud pie business was just *too* weird. We got in his pickup and headed for the Wendy's just down the highway. Outside the pickup is Tomball, Texas, in all its glory. Flat, except for the gullies, brown except for the trash.



In a little over a year I go to college and I won't ever look back.

"Gail said she saw you this morning," I tell him.

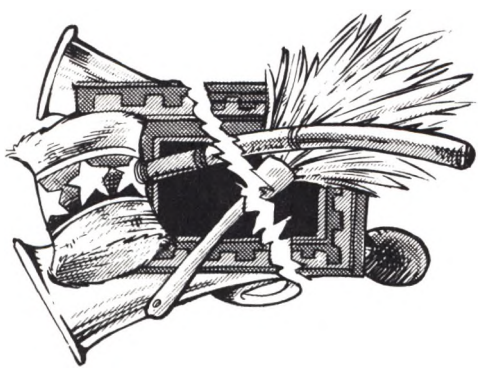
"She could have, I suppose."

"She was real weird about it. She acted like she shouldn't have told me. Do you know why that is?"

He rolls his window down with one hand, and makes a big deal out of scratching his head, real casual, you know, with the other. He's pretending not to pay any attention to the road, only he's really steering with his knee.

"Were you doing something you weren't supposed to do, Dad? Were you *with* somebody? Is that why Mom's acting weird? Because it's really hard to be in this family, you know? I mean, at any minute it could hit me. I could get this irresistible craving for an exploding cigar. It could be like diabetes. One minute I'm fine, the next I'm filling up my pockets with plastic ants. So I want you to tell me. Did you do something?"

He cranes his head out the window and drives for a while that way, then settles back into his seat. He shrugs. "*Somebody* did."



Lewis Shiner is the author of numerous short stories and several novels: *Frontera* (1984), *Deserted Cities of the Heart* (1988), and *Slam* (1990). He resides in Austin, Texas.

INTER VIEW

TÊTE-À-TÊTE::

LISA TUTTLE VIS À VIS COLIN GREENLAND

These two popular and widely-respected writers of sf, fantasy, and horror, as well as copious and varied non-fiction, were asked to interview each other for this journal. They agreed, and the following fascinating discussions occurred during December 1989 and January 1990. . . .

CG: Lisa, what would you have done if you hadn't come to England at the end of 1980?

LT: I've sometimes tried to imagine how different my life would have been. I'd already quit my job, after selling *Windhaven*, more than a year before. But I still thought of writing full-time as an experiment: when I was too broke I could get a part-time job, and if the strain of being perpetually broke got to be too much, I could probably, with my past experience, get another newspaper job. My big decision was to leave home and come to England—because I'd fallen in love. And once I'd made that choice, others were no longer open to me. By moving to a foreign country, I cut myself off from the possibility of getting another "real job" and so I had to concentrate on writing and somehow make a living at it. Of course, there are various ways of doing that—writing hack novels, trying to get into television or movies, reading for publishers, doing journalism, reviewing. . . .

CG: Which is what I do.

LT: That particular kind of freelancing wouldn't have been open to me in Texas; the local paper didn't pay for book reviews, and there were no book publishers there. And if I'd stayed in Texas, even if I'd resisted getting another full-time job, I would have written different books. Maxim Jakubowski wouldn't have known me or commissioned me to write the *Encyclopedia of Feminism*; and my other non-fiction book, *Heroines*, was a direct off-shoot of that. I might have written most of the same short stories, but I wouldn't have had two short story collections published—I'd already tried and failed to sell one in the States. I only sold *A Nest of Nightmares* because Sphere had just published Clive Barker's *Books of Blood* and they were looking for some more.

Was there a moment of decision for you?

CG: The only decision I ever made was not to become a lexicographer. The day before I was due to start my first job, working on a new dictionary—£4,000 a year and as much job security as anyone had here in 1980—I was offered a

writer's residency at the Science Fiction Foundation. I was stunned. I hadn't thought I was even eligible. I hadn't had any sf published, I'd only applied because my friends pestered me to. That was £6,000, and only for one year. I didn't know what I should do. But I knew I had to take it.

LT: Oh, absolutely! When life hands you something like that . . . That was about the same time I came to England.

CG: Why did you stay?

LT: That's the real question. Chris and I split up in October 1985. Partly I stayed through inertia. These flats are really nice and relatively cheap. . . .

CG: Aren't they just?

LT: I'm legally resident in Britain, but if I leave for a year, I have to reapply. So if I'd gone back, I'd have gone back for good. I wasn't prepared for that kind of upheaval. I thought, Do I really want to make this kind of major decision, a traumatic move, to another country, when I'm already suffering from a broken marriage? For one thing, it felt like admitting defeat. Slinking back, as if I was saying: "Oh, it was a big mistake, I should never have gone." That was the emotional charge. It would have been running away, and I knew, no, this is not a smart thing to do. Practically, I was thinking, What will I do to make a living? I knew I wanted to write a novel, but how was I going to support myself while I did it? I had a little money, because Chris and I had divided everything. I was finishing the *Encyclopedia of Feminism*, which was going to be published in Britain and didn't yet have an American publisher, so I'd be going away, missing the publication of the book. I knew a lot of publishers here, and I thought it was very possible that I could get a job editing, or that someone would commission another book, not hackwork, but a non-fiction book I'd enjoy doing.

CG: Which turned out to be *Heroines*.

LT: I felt I had all these options open to me in London, and if I went back to the States I'd be narrowing them down. Even if I went and lived in Manhattan, which I've never had

any urge to do at all! I'd have been just another unknown writer who's had a couple of books published.

CG: You often write about women who are unexpectedly called back by the past, which threatens them or makes claims on them they aren't prepared for.

LT: I do write about that, I'm not quite sure why. If I do have that fear, it's not a conscious one. I wouldn't have gone back to Houston, to my parents' house. There was no way it was going to be like "Flying to Byzantium"!

I can't make comments about themes in *your* work because I've only read one book. I haven't read your first novel, because you told me not to.

CG: And you're a nice person.

LT: Malleable . . .

CG: You didn't think, Aha, I wonder what Colin's trying to hide, I must read this immediately! No, you can read it now, now you've read *Other Voices.*

LT: I did like *Other Voices*, very much. It really pleasurably surprised me, because if I didn't know you, I'd have thought, these aren't the kind the books that interest me. They just look

All photographs of Colin & Lisa by Colin Murray

like, well, fantasy. And indeed, *Other Voices* is fantasy. It's an imaginary world, there's a princess in a castle and court intrigues and all these things I have no interest in whatsoever. But when I started reading it, I really liked it, because the characters were believable, they seemed to be human beings! I was just as caught up by it as if it had been a contemporary novel of character; probably more, if anything. But if I hadn't known you, the only thing that would have made it more attractive than the average fantasy novel is that it's thinner!

CG: And there's only one of it. I feel the same about that; I'm not interested in trudging through somebody's imaginary world for the sake of it. I'm not into world-building, I'm into book-building. What I was doing in *The Hour of the Thin Ox* and in *Other Voices* was writing real people in imaginary histories. In a way, I designed those books to fit with the genre, to be publishable there, but to be versions of that material that I could write, that wouldn't bore me silly.

LT: Tell me about your other books.

CG: *Daybreak on a Different Mountain* was the first. I wrote in 1975-76, and spent seven years sending it out before the market finally came 'round to it. I'd written some short stories and a lot of crappy poems, and I'd always thought, I'd love to write a novel one day. So after I graduated, I just sat down with a stack of blank paper. All I had was an image of two guys on horseback riding out of a city towards a mountain. It was a really ritual, symbolic image—practically just geometric shapes. So I wrote a city for these guys to leave, and a missing god for them to quest after, and then I followed them along. It couldn't have been more naïve. A lot of that book is marsh and fog, and there's a very good reason for that. At any given point they couldn't see more than a couple of yards ahead, and nor could I. Dave Langford said it lacks a certain narrative drive, which was very kind, and absolutely true!

The Hour of the Thin Ox has two plots that converge. Bi tok is a little boy in an imperial country who starts to feel he doesn't belong, and Jillian Curram is from one of the countries

that's being taken over, she's had this wonderful inheritance of wealth and power and lost it all. I wanted to write about what it actually felt like to be inside the sort of grand sweep of empire that fantasy writers usually observe from the top, where the heroes are. That and *Other Voices* were designed very much from what I'd learned by reading the genre, doing a lot of reviews, getting to know fandom and the market as far as I could observe it. I couldn't have written a hack sword and sorcery novel, I was too wayward for that. But I was fascinated by some of the imagery. You like female warriors? All right, I can give you a female warrior. She won't be like anyone in Jessica Amanda Salmonson's *Amazons!* Nor will she wear revealing chainmail and swing a big sword about. In fact, she'll be more like somebody you might meet in a bar. She'll be more like *you*. . . .

LT: When you started writing, you didn't have anything you particularly wanted to write about? You just wanted to write a novel?

CG: Yes, I didn't have any message for the world. I wanted to make one of the things I liked to read.

LT: I'm not talking about having a message. I imagine that for most writers the desire to write comes long before they have anything worth saying. I've been writing all my life. I started out at a very early age thinking, I love to read, I want to do it too.

CG: So did I. I wrote my first story at the age of five.

LT: But why fantasy? If what you're interested in is characters, why do you want to put them in an imaginary world?

CG: One thing is, from the earliest age I had a suspicion that the world might not be what it appeared to be, what grown-ups said and believed it was. I needed magic. I was fascinated by fairies. I wanted there to be little people who lived under the bushes in the garden, I wanted that to be possible. That there were worlds behind the wardrobe, or behind the mirror.

LT: It was just a matter of finding out how to get there.

CG: Exactly. There'd be a word, or a key, or you'd just be in the right place at the right time, and you could step through. I read books about flying saucers, and codes and ciphers, and secret agents, and how to do conjuring tricks. Those fascinated me, I read them over and over.

LT: Did you teach yourself?

CG: Not at all. I was lousy at it. When it came to performing, I found I wasn't interested.

LT: I'd have thought that was the opposite of fantasy. Magic with explanations of how you can do it. It's not magic.

CG: Maybe it was just a secret of power. The audience didn't know how it was done. . . .

LT: Doesn't it imply, though, that the world behind the wardrobe is not really there? Maybe that's a good thing for the maker of fiction to think, that the magic exists, but only in the perceptions of the audience, for that moment.

CG: And it's made up anyway. People read my last two books and keep saying they want more—another volume, or more detail. There's all kinds of placenames and references just dropped into my stuff, and people want to know what goes on there. I tell them I don't know. It's all made up. It's not a pretend world, it's a real book. I feel a great affinity with William Gibson, whose work is absolutely nothing like mine, but we have exactly the same working principles. All he knows is there on the page too, in the contours of the prose.

LT: You have to give convincing detail, which includes brand names, placenames, whatever. You don't have to build the stage set. You don't actually have to have the interiors of all the houses of which you only see the windows! That's what the imagination's supposed to do, that's what the *reader's* supposed to do.

CG: Yes! Exactly! I'm really pleased people think there must be insides, but I'm disappointed how many fantasy readers don't *want* to use their imaginations. They want everything spelled out, everything literal. And a map.

LT: There are readers, especially hardcore fantasy fans, who

have the attitude that leads to asking questions like, what did Sherlock Holmes do that morning before he came downstairs and met Dr Watson? As if that were a question that could be answered.

CG: "How many children had Lady Macbeth?"

LT: It's a purely non-literary response. I heard years ago about Dan Blocker, who played Hoss in *Bonanza*, that people would go up to him in the supermarket and ask, "How's your pa?" and "Give my regards to the boys", and they'd be completely unable to realize that this man was an *actor*, who *played* Hoss. They know on one level that this *is* a fantasy, this *is* an actor, and yet they don't want to know. They're watching it every week, or reading it, or whatever, and they think it's going on between the episodes. They think there is a world behind the wardrobe that goes on regardless of whether you can see it or not! I wonder how much of that naïveté is willed. It may be connected with the way people read things in books, even in science fiction books, and assume they're autobiographical.

My first published short story, "Stranger in the House", drew on a lot of personal details from my childhood. It's about a woman in her twenties, twice divorced, I think, extremely unhappy, who presumably at the moment of her sudden death—physically returns to her childhood, to the last time she was really happy, before the father left and the family fell on hard times. This was *not* an autobiographical story—I don't come from a broken home, I was eighteen when I wrote it, had never been married let alone divorced, but a lot of the details about how the house was furnished and what the little girl looked like did come from my own life. And when one of my mother's sisters read it, she fixed on the "fact" of the father smoking cigars: "Bob didn't smoke cigars, did he?" "No, of course not." "Well, why is it in the story, then?" "*Because it's a story!*" So I became aware very early in my career, that people will read fiction and make assumptions about the author's life.

Of course, some stories are more obviously autobiographical than others, and one of the games of fiction is to take details from real life to make imaginary situations seem real, and I do take details from my life, because that's the material I've got most of. But at the same time, a lot of very "real" details are put there for purely dramatic reasons, stolen from other people's lives, from history or movies or books. I do understand that impulse to look for autobiographical details, because I feel it myself when I'm reading books by people I know.

CG: Or people you don't. I'm just reading *Trying to Grow*, a book about Brit Kotwal, a dwarf living in Bombay, by Firdaus Kanga, a dwarf who lives in Bombay. How do I know how much is literally true? Especially as my whole career is a campaign against this. Fiction is fiction. Not to be taken literally!

LT: Don't you think that fantasy is one of the ways out of that trap?

CG: That's so important. Or it should be. The one thing that is absolutely overt if you're writing science fiction or fantasy is that you're saying, This Is Not True. You're saying it loud and clear in the first sentence. Once upon a time on Mars. Right, now we're in fiction. Some things here may be imported from real life. But they may not have their original values or relationships. This is play, this is the world of imagination. Fictionality is declared in fantasy and science fiction in a way that it's hidden in—

LT: —so-called "realistic" fiction, which is still fantasy! The author is pretending this happened.

CG: And pretending it's even possible. Pretending that people are accessible to narration. That you can write down, "She thought it was time to leave."

LT: And that that's all she thought. It's like that convention about telepathy which I find so irritating, that it's just like speech. If there is telepathy, it might be verbal, but it's not going to be like overhearing a radio broadcast!

CG: That's one of the attractions of fantastic genres to me. I want fiction for the sake of fiction. Fiction to me is valuable stuff. It's got a powerful and necessary social function, especially popular fiction, things that people choose to read. These stories are lies, and people know that, they're just black marks on paper, but still they're willing to part with money to be told these lies, because they mean something true. I owe a lot of this to Gwyneth Jones. She was the one who pointed out to me that stories do things, they work. We wouldn't have been making up stories all these centuries if they didn't work.

LT: I think we have a need for fiction. Do you know that theory about dreams? Why are dreams little stories? The idea is that when we were the first little mammals, whatever we were, to keep us from wandering around at night, we had to be immobilized, and so we sleep. Dreams are what our brain does to keep from being bored. It tells itself stories.

CG: I'll go along with that all the way. Story is a primal function. That's one of the reasons I get irritated with the sort of snooty criticism, and the sort of self-conscious writing, that says, Stories are inadequate, stories are misleading because life doesn't have a plot or consistent characters.

LT: But that's assuming novels are only manuals to tell us how to live our lives. They are, partly, but that's not the only thing they are. People do tell stories to make sense of their lives, but that's not the same thing.

CG: I never felt I had a very good handle on real life. When I was growing up I always felt shut away from real life in some way. I was an invalid as a child, I was sent to boarding school, then I went to live in the cloisters of Oxford—I always felt real life was outside, somewhere else. That used to make me anxious and insecure. Now I'm very grateful for it. But also strangeness and exoticism have always been important to me, and I've never really analyzed that fully, I don't think I want to. I'm particularly attracted to exceptions, or strange things that intrude. One difference between my short stories and my novels is, my short stories are set in this world, with people who

live in banal circumstances, and then a weird thing comes along and upsets everything.

You do that too, Lisa. In "Heart's Desire", the world is fixed and familiar. The list of the tube stations they go through is there on page one. It couldn't be more banal! Then Jill goes into the house, she opens the chest, she finds the little red thing, she doesn't know what it is, and she swallows it. At that moment the strange, the inexplicable, the irrational, simply invade the story. She may be transformed, she may be exalted or destroyed or whatever, but after that there is no way she is going to simply get back on the tube and go home to Clapham!

LT: I wanted to write that story for a while, and what was holding me up was, I just kept thinking, Will anyone believe that anyone would just put this unidentifiable thing in their mouth and swallow it? Oh . . . you're shaking your head . . .

CG: No! But you say she does, so she does!

LT: By the end, that's what I had to do. I must have rewritten that scene more times than any other part. I kept trying to make it believable, and it never was, and finally I thought, I'll just have to say it happened. But the thing is, to me, that seems like a perfectly normal action, and I don't know how to

explain it! On one level, there's autobiography in that story.

CG: Oh, Ms Tuttle, have *you* ever walked into a stranger's house and swallowed the first thing you saw?

LT: It's never happened, but I think it could! It seems so natural to me. I guess I got arrested at the oral stage. I still have this impulse to put things into my mouth. Maybe you don't. Maybe most people don't!

CG: No, *I* have an irresistible urge to put things up my bottom.

LT: That's British boarding schools for you . . .

CG: But that's why the first scene in "Heart's Desire" is so crucial, the mysterious reminiscence by an unknown first-person narrator, that as a child she drank turpentine.

LT: That was how I came to the story. I started thinking back to childhood, and I remembered, I did do that. My mother was painting something, and she had some turps in the bottom of *my* yellow plastic bucket. There was my bucket, I picked it up, I drank from it. I know I did that, I can still remember my mother being frantic, phoning the doctor, saying, "*Why* did you do it?" I don't *know* why I did it!

CG: And that section in the story ends with the mother saying, "Why? Why? What made you do it?" There *is* no answer. In the next section Jill goes ahead and does it. Something you often do that ruins for me the initial image in a story is to over-rationalize it. You have somebody talk too much about it, or you explain the function of the weirdness and assimilate it, and it stops being weird. But here it seems to me you've found a way through that, because the story establishes early on that "I" did this. Who is "I"? Is it Jill, is it the narrator, is it the author? We don't know. The "I" sort of floats off the page, definite but uncertain. The ambiguities unfold, and they remain ambiguous. And that's important, because if they don't remain ambiguous, the story goes flat.

LT: It becomes a very naturalistic story.

CG: Or a simple allegory.

LT: Which I didn't want it to be. I wanted it to be strange.

CG: In my stories it's more like, there's a world behind the mirror, and the central character has slipped through, often without realizing it. A very self-confident male character who doesn't realize his certainties don't apply any more. Maybe as a consequence of his own arrogance. Like a tragic pattern: the character's arrogance inevitably leads to his own destruction. Steve in "The Wish" is now living in his own private heaven, which is also his own private hell, and he doesn't quite realize it. Or the father in "The Traveller" who takes the world to be his own private Wonderland. Since *Daybreak*, all my work has been versions of *Alice in Wonderland.*

LT: Is that conscious, or is it something you see looking back on it?

CG: I only realized a few months ago. In the novels there's a self-sufficient, somehow isolated woman who's doing her best to cope with the mad world she finds herself in. She's quite down-to-earth, sometimes a bit grumpy, a bit impatient, and she's surrounded by grotesques who are making impossible demands of her all the time. And it ends with her having to resort to some convulsive act of violence to get out of it, or to resolve it.

LT: When did you read *Alice*?

CG: Many times as a child. I don't remember the first.

LT: Have you always thought of that as the major book of your childhood?

CG: No. *Winnie-the-Pooh* was more important to me when I was a child, because I learned to read with that. But *Alice* satisfies me as a model for my view of the world. I was talking to Stephen Lawhead, who writes those Christian Arthurian fantasies, and I said, Why should Tolkien be the model for fantasy fiction? Why not, say, Lewis Carroll? And he looked surprised and a bit supercilious, and he nodded and said, "Oh. Yes. Nonsense fantasy." And I got quite cross, because I know they're called nonsense, Carroll called them nonsense; but to me that's because they're true. It's the world that's nonsense!

LT: Doesn't that run counter to the idea of story, though, which is trying to make sense of it?

CG: It's not so much counter to it as before it and after it. Story exists *because* the world is nonsense.

LT: But it's not enough to write fiction that just says, the world doesn't make sense. Like metafiction, that keeps saying, "This is just a novel." Margaret Drabble saying, "What does Julia think? Does she think this? I don't know; do you?" The answer is, if Margaret Drabble doesn't know, nobody knows, because there is no answer. That's the same kind of question as, What does J. R. do between episodes? or, What did Sherlock Holmes do that morning? If it's not in the story, on the page or on the screen, then it doesn't exist. I've just realized: these metafiction writers who refuse the text, try to break out of the text, are maintaining that same kind of naïve attitude to fiction. By exposing it, they're actually revealing their own belief in it.

CG: Admittedly, there is a kind of thrill in that, because they're moving the goalposts in mid-game. You lurch from one level of reading to another. You're playing the game, following the detective, and then Paul Auster suddenly says, Actually, he's not a detective, I made him up; and you go, Ooh! But he thinks it's revelation, and it's not.

LT: You already know you're not following a detective through the streets, you're sitting on the sofa reading a book!

We both seem to write more often about women than men. I know why I do it—why do you?

CG: I tend to write short stories about men and novels about women.

LT: Because women are more interesting.

CG: Kim Newman pointed out to me that male heroes are very familiar by now, and pretty boring. Whereas a woman in the same role can do the same things and it's relatively interesting, because it's still relatively new. I'm all for that.

But why do *I* do it? I used to say it was because science fiction and fantasy are imaginative fiction, and for me the challenge, the great leap of imagination, is to try to see things from a woman's point of view. The last time I said that, I listened to myself saying it, and I thought, This is bullshit. It's not challenging to me, it's automatic. She is a woman. That's all.

How do you feel about writing from a male viewpoint?

LT: I don't feel unable to do it, I just don't do it very often.

Some people talk about writing the "opposite" sex, as if it were this incredibly difficult task. Which it usually isn't. If you think about it, particularly in the modern world, and presumably even more so in the future, women and men encounter so many of the same things. The things I'm interested in writing about occur to men just as much as to women. Occasionally I get really pissed off with men, and I think, Oh, who can understand them? But basically I believe, certainly on the emotional level, where my fiction is, there isn't a great difference. Life experience may be different, but then I don't know what the life experience of a starship captain is either, whether they're male or female.

CG: The experience of a male Masai is far more alien to me than, say, yours is. Sympathy is not necessarily polarized on a gender axis. I thought that was one of the things I'd learned from feminism, that we have the same problems. We're constructed differently by our society, our history, our conditioning, but we're not really that different. I thought that was the lesson.

LT: If you take a man and a woman from our society and put them in strange circumstances, they will react differently. "In Translation" is about a man who's obsessed with aliens. That's a man's story, I never thought of writing it about a woman. I could easily write a story about a woman who's achingly in love with an alien creature, but it would be a different story, because of sexual drives, the way they're interpreted, the way they're translated. Male sexuality is constructed and perceived in a different way from female

LISA TUTTLE

(born 1952, Houston, Texas)

is a Clarion alumnus, class of 1971. She sold her first story that summer to a Clarion anthology, and, soon after, sold other stories to the *Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction* and to the legendary *Last Dangerous Visions*. In 1974 she won the John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer, tied with Spider Robinson. After graduating from Syracuse University in 1974 she moved back to Texas and began working for a daily newspaper, the *Austin American-Statesman*, first as a typist, then a features writer, and eventually as the television columnist. In 1979, on the strength of having sold a science fiction novel written in collaboration with George R. R. Martin (*Windhaven*), she quit her job to write full-time. Before *Windhaven* was published, in 1981, she had moved to England, where she married fellow writer Christopher Priest. She continued to write short stories which appeared in various science fiction publications, and her second novel, *Familiar Spirit*, about hauntings, black magic, and sexual obsession, was published in both Britain and the U. S. in 1983. Her next novel, *Gabriel*, another tale of sexual obsession but minus any trappings of black magic, was published by Sphere in Britain in 1987, packaged as very down-market horror, and by Tor in the U. S. in 1988 as "A Novel of Reincarnation". Two short story collections have been published in Britain, *A Nest of Nightmares* (forthcoming from Tor in the U.S.) and *A Spaceship Built of Stone* (The Women's Press, 1987), as well as a thematic collection of interviews, *Heroines: Women Inspired by Women* (Harrap, 1988). She is the author also of the non-fiction reference work, *Encyclopedia of Feminism* (U. S.: Facts on File, 1986), and one third of *Night Visions 3* (ed. George R. R. Martin), and editor of a collection of horror stories by women writers, *Skin of the Soul*, forthcoming from the Women's Press and Pocket Books in 1990. Now divorced, she is newly in love and cohabiting, still living in England, still managing to support herself by writing, but not really able to explain how.

sexuality. But how different our *desires* are is something we don't actually know.

CG: And what we're told the differences are is clearly wrong.

LT: The problem is not so much to make a male character or a female character, but to make an individual. Much more of a challenge, I think, to put an individual into a situation that's something I've never encountered and probably never will.

CG: I think I'd find it very hard to write about a mother and child.

LT: But you've been in that situation—as the child.

CG: Oho!

LT: The difficulty for me is a man alone among men. It's probably more difficult for a man to write a group of women together than for a woman to write a group of men, because we've got examples all the time, on TV and film, of men together. And there are plenty of books by men about men talking to men about men. The difficulty for women would be just the incidental technicalities, and those can be researched. I have a fair idea of how men talk to each other, and the power games that seem to be going on constantly, but I'd find it difficult to sustain it for very long. For one thing, I wouldn't be very interested!

CG: I think I expect a given woman to be more capable than a given man. I write short stories about men falling apart, and novels about women who save the universe! Or at least they survive the shit that the universe insists on throwing at them.

LT: Isn't that really having the male character stand for the order of things as they are, which is very patriarchal—reality as it is, or as we are told it is? Women are, in that world, like *Alice in Wonderland*. I mean, we don't construct it, but here we are and we have to cope with it. So if your belief about the world is that it's not like people say, then the way to engage with that is as an outsider, who is other, and doesn't quite buy it, which is what a woman's position always is. Whether she

likes it or she doesn't like it, she has to cope with it. It isn't necessarily that she's more capable than a man, but she's always in the position of having to cope, whereas a man is a part of it, and has the option of saying, This is reality. If your idea is that reality isn't all there is, or isn't good enough, then all that can happen to him is that he can have his reality shattered.

I suppose the next step would be to write about a man after his reality has been shattered, who has to put himself together again, possibly with the help of a woman, and go on, and build something new. That's the difference between short stories and novels anyway. Dave Garnett said to me once that he didn't understand horror stories because it always seemed to him that they stopped just where he thought the story began. I don't agree with that entirely, but I think there is an element of truth in it, that the whole point of short stories is that you set it up, you have the revelation, and then you end. You don't deal with the consequences. Maybe that's why I find them easier to write! In your short stories, you take a man and put him in a situation where he falls apart; but in life it's not like that. So novels don't end there. Once your reality has fallen apart you have to do something about it.

CG: In a novel, the climax comes—

LT: —*after* the revelation.

CG: And then you have to go on to a resolution.

LT: You say, That map of reality didn't work; what now? In a short story you just leave him, like in "The Wish", building his own coffin or whatever he's doing.

CG: What do you think about shifting around the genres, between science fiction and fantasy and horror, the way you do, and the way I do, too?

LT: I'll tell you my latest thoughts on that. Yesterday I was thinking about putting together a short story collection. I've been writing a lot of stories that are thematically connected, like "Heart's Desire" and the story I've just finished, "Bits and Pieces". They're about emotional states and feelings externalized, made concrete in some way. And they all seem to

have a lot to do with the body. So I was thinking, Maybe I'll call it *Memories of the Body*, and that could be the first story in it. I've had two collections published, one sf and one horror, and I thought this would have to be one or the other. I was making a list, and I thought, three of those stories are science fiction; some of them are horror stories; and some of them are strange stories I don't really know how to classify, like "Heart's Desire". Then I got impatient. I thought, Why should it be sf *or* horror? I don't sit down and say, Now I'm going to write a horror story. I have something I want to write, and it takes a certain form; there's an image, like someone swallowing someone else's heart, or aliens that people fall helplessly in love with. I'm impatient with genre.

CG: Don't you think there's a positive side to it? I see genre as a set of fictional codes that give me the opportunity to put different aspects of my story in front. My story for *Zenith II*, "A Passion for Lord Pierrot"—you could call it fantasy; or horror, it's certainly Gothic, it's about a man taking women apart; you could call it science fiction because I put "on the planet of Triax" in every so often, because Mr Garnett said it was an sf anthology!

LT: You're saying that that's a positive thing. But that reminds me of when I was starting out. In those days, I was writing stories very similar to the stories I'm writing now—awful as that may seem! In those days there wasn't really a market for horror stories. It was *F&SF* or nothing. So I would write stories and set them in the future, or on another planet, just in the hope I could sell them to an sf magazine. And I find that intrusive, having to do that.

CG: I don't. I find it highlights aspects of the material quickly and conveniently—the themes, maybe. Then you have to do the work to make sure the balance is right between the material and the generic form.

LT: I find dividing writing up into genres just as restrictive as I ever found it. For example, my so-called sf collection is *A Spaceship Built of Stone*, and my so-called horror collection is

A Nest of Nightmares, and I tell you, I can't always remember which story is in which collection, and neither can other people. My latest novel, *Lost Futures*, is probably not a genre novel at all. I thought it was sf when I started it, but it got a lot darker in the middle, and I started to think, This is quite creepy; maybe it's a horror novel. But it ends up quite happily. I think. I think publishers are going to have a hard time with it because they won't know how to market it. That's the problem: if it's a genre novel, they know how to sell it; and if it isn't, they don't.

What I do find useful, I'd agree with you, is that these genres do say, This is not realistic fiction. I'm happy with that. I do write fantastic fiction, and I like the field, it gives me certain freedoms, but within the field there's all these little pigeonholes you're supposed to fit into, and I don't think I fit into them, and I don't think I ever have. In recent years I've fallen into a new one called feminist sf. Ten years ago I wasn't writing feminist sf, but those stories have now been collected as a feminist sf book.

CG: I've never had your problem, because I started out thinking, I want to write A Quest Novel, or A Fantasy Novel about A Princess. I always say my books are cuckoo clocks. It might be a funny shape, and it might have some unexpected numbers on it, but basically it's a device that goes all the way around, and then a little bird pops out. I don't think that's demeaning. The very opposite: it's craft. The device fulfills the function the people want it for. They can say, Yes, I'd like to buy one of those and hang it on my wall.

LT: That's not the way I work at all.

CG: I've sat down and decided how many chapters the book will be, and divided the plot up so I know what's got to have happened by the end of each chapter. The plot has got to get from there to there, and I've got a thousand words, five thousand words, whatever, to do it in.

LT: I've *never* worked like that!

CG: That was the only thing I could do, to make sure I'd write a whole novel, with a proper plot or at least a

COLIN GREENLAND
(born 1954, Dover, Kent)
was the first person to be granted a doctorate by the University of Oxford for research in science fiction. His first book, *The Entropy Exhibition: Michael Moorcock and the British "New Wave" in Science Fiction* (Routledge, 1983) was based on his doctorate thesis, and was awarded the J. Lloyd Eaton Award for S. F. Criticism by the University of California in 1985. From 1980-82 he worked as Fellow in Creative Writing at the S. F. Foundation, N. E. London Polytechnic. His first novel, *Daybreak on a Different Mountain*, was published by Allen & Unwin in 1984. It was followed by a pair of linked novels, *The Hour of the Thin Ox* (1987), and *Other Voices* (1988), both written in a little house in the woods in Colorado, and published by Unwin Hyman. His short stories have appeared in the *Fiction Magazine* and volumes in the *Other Edens* and *Zenith* series of original anthologies. About *Zenith I* Algis Budrys told readers of the *Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*: "There are several clear Nebula nominees in it. . . . In the Budrys poll the palm goes, narrowly, to Greenland." Colin Greenland comments: "Yeah! Right! Way to go, Algis Budrys!" In the absence of any U. S. publisher doing anything more than make approving noises about his fiction, he contributes regular fiction and cinema reviews to the *Face*, and the London *Sunday Times* and *Times Literary Supplement* and is reviews editor for *Foundation: The Review of Science Fiction*. Due out in 1990 are *Take Back Plenty*, a space extravaganza, and from Savoy Books a volume of interviews with Michael Moorcock. Colin Greenland is not in love and not cohabiting, but he gets around. He is Lisa Tuttle's upstairs neighbor.

satisfactory replica of one, so that it would get published. I'd written enough unpublished books. I'm thinking *Take Back Plenty* will be the last cuckoo clock. I can see I've learned as much genre craft as I'm capable of learning, what works for me and what doesn't, and now I want to write a book that's not predesigned, that comes from me the way yours come from

you. I've begun to think my experience might be interesting.

LT: Because you've lived long enough. I think it makes perfect sense that a lot of sf and fantasy writers start out young, because they're not writing out of experience, it doesn't matter what boring lives they've had. They can write about great exciting ideas.

CG: Imagination supplies the want of experience.

LT: Yes. Which is why a lot of sf, especially early sf, is awkward about emotions, because it was written by people drawing on nil experience!

CG: People who'd been sitting in their rooms reading a lot of sf.

LT: It's a bit unfair of me to say I've never written straight into a genre, because *Familiar Spirit* is like that. It's a horror novel, a supernatural suspense novel. I was in the middle of writing a novel called *Irrevocable Decisions*—oddly enough, the idea was the same as *Lost Futures*, though it's completely transformed—and I couldn't get on with it. It was going all over the place, and I was starting to feel desperate about finishing it. I'd written this story called *Familiar Spirit* and it had gotten a little out of hand and turned out to be 12,000 words long, and nobody wanted to buy it. So I expanded where I'd condensed, and added a whole other level, made it less straightforward than the original story. Part of the impulse to write that was that I knew where it was going.

Another reason I've always been drawn to genre fiction is that it does have stories. I wouldn't have a clue how to write a book that was just about someone's life and didn't conclude. I want a strong narrative drive, because that's what I like to read. You say you don't feel restricted by genres, and yet you're using them as restricted forms.

CG: Oh, yes. They're sonnets.

LT: Oh, no they're not. Sub-genres, like space opera or quest fantasy, have clearly defined forms, but science fiction as a whole doesn't. What I dislike about category fiction is the predictability of it—the fact that it has been predetermined,

and limited, before it's written. What's the point of reading another Harlequin Romance? If you've read one, you've read them all. What I like about sf is that it's *not* predictable, it's not a paint-by-numbers job, it's not a cuckoo clock. I can understand wanting to write a sonnet, but . . .

CG: I need the rules, the conventions, whatever you call them, to keep me on the track.

LT: What you're talking about is structure—not what might be called the conventions or tropes of science fiction. I find novels very difficult to write, and I do need the feeling of having a recognizable narrative structure, a definite story people will want to read. But I think there's a big difference between making sure your story has a complete skeleton linking head and tail, and writing yet another imitation of Tolkien or Heinlein, with all the trademarked genre furniture. It is possible to learn a lot by imitation—probably it's the way most of us learn: reading something you really like, then trying to achieve the same effects by writing your own.

CG: Yes, you're right, aren't you. I don't think I've necessarily learned from genre the things that I came to it for. Some things I've learned I just cannot do. But it did mean that I could get published.

LT: That *is* very important, it's true. . . .

CG: Well, there's ego, and there's survival; but also I have a strong conviction that to be worth anything, writing must have a reader. While I write it, it's mine; but as soon as it goes out in print, it no longer belongs to me, it belongs to the readers. They pay money for a copy of it and they read it, and if they don't enjoy it, I have no right to complain they've missed the point.

LT: Though people will misread you. But if several people are consistently saying the same thing, you have to admit you haven't done what you set out to do. You may have done something else without realizing it. It may be just as good. It may be better.

CG: If you're serious about what you're doing, you must listen to all of that.

Someone said to me the other day, "Oh, writing is so therapeutic, isn't it?" And I said *no!* It's bad for me, it makes me ill and anxious and miserable, it's hard work and the pay is pitiful.

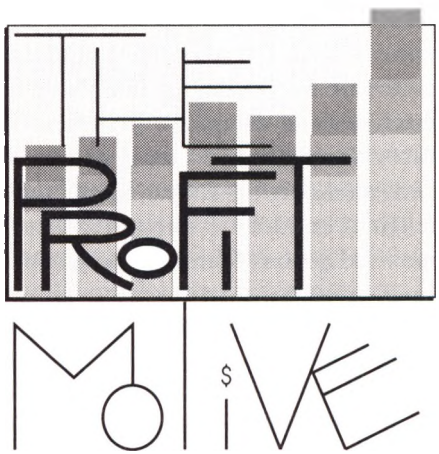
LT: You can satisfy yourself later that something good came out of a bad time in your life, maybe, but I don't think the actual writing is therapeutic.

CG: I think if you write things out and don't show them to anybody, that must be therapy. There's nothing else it can be. I don't believe it can be art.

LT: No, I don't want to write stories just for my own satisfaction. We both want readers, readers who want to read what we want to write. You've tried the cuckoo clock routine, trying to fit your story into what you perceive they want. I don't know how to do that. I believe in what I write, but I don't know exactly where my audience is. I rely on my editor to say, "What a good book. I know just how to sell it!"

commentary

Andy Watson



The Information Revolution is *happening*. The Global Economy is *happening*. And even as the "Triumph of Capitalism" ushers in the "End of History," technology continues to accelerate the pace at which the top-heavy power structures of previous generations erode to dust.

"Small is Beautiful."
— E. F. Schumacher (1973)

"It ain't the meat, it's the motion."
— anonymous (timeless)

Technological revolutions in Western civilization have always been accompanied by gradual cultural accommodations.

Creation of the middle class, empowerment of the underclass, concentration of wealth and influence—these are all side effects of the implementation of the Industrial Revolution. As Western society embraces the dawning of the Age of Information, new accommodations are the order of the day. The heaviest losses will be among the throngs of paper-pushing fat-cats and all others of their ilk.

Part of this phenomenon is the inherent inefficiency of bloated bureaucratic entities. Big business is hamstrung by group-think committee-style decision-making and the time-consuming nature of reconciling the schedules of participants whose entire *raison d'être* is the attendance of meetings. Governmental behemoths are blind-sided by nimble revolutionaries armed with fax machines and databases. Enormous military conglomerates are easily neutralized on a local, site-by-site basis by small bands of dedicated guerillas and so-called "terrorists." Even international religious entities are splintering into factions more in tune with their indigenous faithful (who just might be more interested in agrarian reform than the latest pronouncements on revision of doctrine from afar). These empires of authority are fragmenting and dissolving as natural selection drives the evolution of all political systems.

But that's so obvious as to be boring. Oh, yes, definitely fun in a way, to see the megalomaniacs scrambling, succumbing to infighting and assuming trendy ideologies in a desperate bid to retain a constituency of some kind. Pathetic, too, to watch the reactionaries of yesteryear confront the absence of their obsessions, to mourn the loss of a much-cherished *bête noire*. Too many people have profited from the Cold War not to regret its thaw; so very many greedy, self-aggrandizing parasites have infested the middle and upper echelons of large corporations that a future in which all members of a business unit must make productive contributions is unlikely to see the hearty welcome it deserves. . . .

There are two technological factors at work in this transition which are most interesting: telecommunications and affordable

computers. Elsewhere in this journal, beginning with this volume's debut appearance of his column,*Through the Wire*, Mike Banks will be tackling the former, touching on the latter, and here in the second installment of *The Profit Motive* I will focus on the latter, touching on the former. Got that? Let's see now, the party of the first part, henceforth to be referred to as the first party, in acknowledgement of the pursuits of the party of the second part, henceforth to be referred to as the second party, hereby affirms . . . I mean: Mike's got the telecomm and I've got the computers and there's gonna be some overlap.

IBM has maintained dominant market share in the computer industry since its inception primarily because of mainframes. In the early days, there were *only* mainframes. They were hard to use. They were astonishingly expensive. They were absurdly slow, by today's standards. There was very little software for them.

Engineers and research scientists used mainframes by writing their own programs, usually in the programming language IBM had developed for technical applications, FORTRAN (FORmula TRANslation). Programs were composed with a pencil by entering symbols (usually alphanumeric, but sometimes numeric only) on large sheets of pre-printed paper with the eighty columns of a punched card marked on every line (like the paper kindergartners use to practice penmanship, only smaller). After being processed by the gals in the keypunch pool, such homegrown code came back as voluminous boxed sets of punched cards which were carried around on gurneys, like corpses in a morgue. These were delivered to a receiving dock where knuckle-dragging bohunkoids would enter the "job" request in a log and stick the boxes in the queue. Sometime later—overnight or the next day if you were lucky and well-funded—the program would run. If it was the first submittal of this particular program,

it would bomb and the author would begin a cumbersome process of debugging. Eventually, probably several weeks later, it would run successfully. This was known as "software development" and is remembered fondly by many of the people in charge of the technical divisions of today's modern corporations.

Business people could not be expected to write their own programs, of course. Especially given that the programming languages developed by IBM for business applications were extraordinarily cumbersome. By design? Well, perhaps. But let's not be cynical. Let's not *allow* ourselves to imagine that any early computer manufacturers pursued strategies intended to milk credulous non-technical business people for all they were worth. That would be a digression better saved for a future column! The best example of a business applications programming language is the grandaddy of 'em all, COBOL. People who program in COBOL are like couriers paid by the hour who just so happen to *like* crawling between remote destinations on their knees, backwards. There is a zen to it, and if COBOL seems too easy, check out RPG or its descendants. The whole idea—aside from the cynical speculations which were narrowly avoided a few lines above—was to have an environment where it took so long and cost so much to produce useful executable code that you would never even *want* to even consider changing it dramatically, and therefore never consider buying a new mainframe from a different (non-compatible) vendor.

There were legions of support personal who worked around the clock in shifts to keep mainframes running, who mounted tapes on drives or monitored plumbing pressures for cooling fluids, or who keypunched miles of system-related instructions to keep the whole kluge from shuddering to a halt. Many of these people were provided by the

Andy Watson

computer manufacturer for a handsome fee, especially in the early days when there were no alternatives (similarly skilled workers were not yet available in the general labor force).

Things have changed. There still are mainframes, and much of the above still applies. But in the last fifteen years, dramatic improvements have taken place, the details of which are extraneous to this discussion. Nowadays, the performance of the hardware quadruples every five years and the cost is cut by half. And that is a trend that shows signs of steepening (looking ahead, a confident prediction can be made that performance will improve by a factor of ten while the cost continues to drop by half over the same five year period). Programmers are using highly portable languages like C and Pascal, or even modern versions of ANSI FORTRAN, to support rapidly evolving software environments and to shift between different brands of computer hardware with ease. The customers for computer hardware and software have successfully forced the manufacturers of large systems to conform to standards like the UNIX operating system, TCP/IP and GOS/IP for networking, IEEE floating-point representations, and so on. Most significant of all, the personal computer has become every individual's affordable, realistic option for both professional and personal use.

Business people are still incapable, by and large, of satisfying the rigorous and painstaking requirements of compiled programming languages (including COBOL, which is still out there in the make-work world of white-collar welfare), but now they have alternatives to a frustrating reliance on specialists. Now they can use pseudo-programming languages like Hypercard on the Apple Macintosh, or macro instructions inside software packages like EXCEL or LOTUS or DBASE III or 4TH DIMENSION or PANORAMA or even within word-processor programs. It's easy, and though the results are slower to execute than a compiled program, they are decidedly faster than the vintage stuff on mainframes.

Here, then, is a good example of a crumbling empire, a power structure on the skids. The mainframe-centered data

Let's not *allow* ourselves to imagine that any early computer manufacturers pursued strategies intended to milk credulous non-technical business people for all they were worth.

processing operation of ten years ago is no longer cost-effective. Dozens of specialists, whose entrenched self-interest was nowhere better represented than in the status quo, have been eliminated entirely. Between the user of a computer resource and the end results desired, no longer are there hordes of careless airhead keypunchers, teams of Cro-Magnons humping crates of punched cards around, crews of bored drug addicts mounting tapes, isolated alcoholic nightwatchmen-types staring at pressure meters, or herds of precious programmers and system managers. There is, in fact, *nothing at all* between the user and his or her own personal computer. It does not even require the financial depth of a corporation to pay for one—anyone with a job can easily qualify for the minimal credit needed to *take one home today!* Hands on keys and/or mouse, anyone with a Mac or a PC is now in a position to do in minutes, alone and unaided, what once took man-years.

Given that computers are cheap, powerful, and readily at hand, the question of how you might use them constructively is far from hypothetical. In the context of this discussion, you would want to be somehow using your computer(s) to propel the dissolution of outmoded societal structures. Well, for one thing, if what you desire is to organize and direct a grassroots opposition political movement, you are now on near-equal terms with those in power. If you are in the Warsaw Pact and your computer is linked to helpful folks in Western Europe and the United States, you may even have an *advantage* over the authorities (whose own resources are unimpressive, for the most part).

In the past, say, anytime before World War II, only a government could afford to maintain the large administrative staffs necessary to keep track of the population—including first and

foremost who had paid, and who still owed, taxes. Then, as businesses grew to take advantage of economies of scale, they, too, marshalled the manpower to keep extensive files. If there was anything to be gained by hauling some troublemaker—a noisy anarchist, a labor union organizer—off to jail or debtors' prison, it was no problem finding his or her address in the files. Keeping files on individuals was in itself a clever advantage, because it allows evidence to accumulate, patterns to emerge. The FBI continues this tradition to this very day.

Since World War II, the advent of data processing—through mainframes and what has followed since—has made the use of information for political purposes more accessible to smaller business. Information, such as someone's credit history, is disseminated via clearing houses like TRW's consumer credit reporting division. And with a modem and a phone line, your personal computer can now tap that rich vein, too.

You can use them to circulate secret messages. You can exchange data about the location of, and security surrounding, targets of interest (G. Gordon Liddy had a remarkable essay published in *Omni* in which he identified a half-dozen ideal guerilla warfare targets *within* the U.S. which could be "taken out" to devastating effect). You can build and maintain a database of names and addresses for funding solicitation purposes, or as a shitlist to be acted upon when you find yourself in power. And so on. The prerogatives of government are now shared by like-minded individuals.

Another good use for a personal computer is the creation of effective publications. Ravings once were restricted to the domain of mimeograph machines. But it's hard to get anyone to *want* to read such wretchedly blurry, æsthetically unappealing documents. Now, with a Mac at your disposal, and access to a laser printer (or better yet, a postscript-compatible photo-imagesetter), you can make something which people will take the time to actually *read.* (You can do this stuff with a PC instead of a Mac, too, though it's quite simply *easier* with a Mac.) And what with photocopy machines as ubiquitous as they have

become, proliferated throughout printing shops and copyshop parlors everywhere, you have all the tools you need. If you have a message to put across, it's worth packaging it to compete for limited attention spans. Otherwise, you're just wasting your time.

But let's save a few trees and skip paper entirely: post your theories and plans and proposals and wild-eyed ideas on electronic bulletin boards, or email and fax them to strangers everywhere. Get yourself a modem, go on-line, start networking your machine with everyone else's! Here is a technique that government and big business both seem very slow to adopt.

Bureaucracies *have* been quick to implement the personal computer, though. But thanks to institutionalized stupidity there has been less of a payoff than an individual or small business can expect. A middle manager in a large corporation is unlikely to voluntarily give up half of his or her staff when each of them become more than twice as productive after having been assigned a computer for their exclusive use. Conversely, such managers are also unlikely to raise their expectations of a worker's output or timeliness. Empires are built by accumulating resources and authority, not by shedding them and streamlining. The managers in the bowels of large corporations are rewarded with bonuses, raises, and promotions for their performance as measured by an old set of rules. The game has changed, but the inertia is preventing any adaptation.

No one wants vast numbers of people out on the street, unemployed and rendered redundant by new technology. But neither should anyone expect to be "carried" by a business as an overhead expense that decreases the business's competitive advantage—thereby threatening the job security of *all* employees! Those people who are shed during such transitions should find something else to do, perhaps as a result of retraining, if their current background and skills are overly specific.

Also, many of the best people in large corporations are leaving, starting their own businesses or joining smaller, smarter companies. This is an increasingly tempting option given the

lower cost of entry into most industries and the trend growing among big companies to sub-contract tasks to smaller companies who are inherently able to do a better job. In the publishing, music, film and other industries of popular culture—in which *Journal Wired* has an ongoing interest—this is especially true.

Ravings once were restricted to the domain of mimeograph machines. But it's hard to get anyone to *want* to read such wretchedly blurry, æsthetically unappealing documents.

The roles of the largest publishers, record companies, and film studios have been undergoing redefinition in recent years. Formerly their own exclusive source (by coordination and production) of products, they have tended to concentrate more on distribution and subsidiary redistribution schemes of late. By logical extension, it seems likely that they will eventually cease all production activities and focus on distributing products generated elsewhere—probably by smaller companies or individuals!

Consider the publishing industry. Individual people are capable of providing more service and consideration to authors, of creating physically superior products, and on the whole are simply *better* at publishing than the bigger houses. What they lack is effective national and international distribution, but this is changing. The door is open a crack and the thin edge of the wedge is already in place. Book distributors are increasingly willing to talk to the small press. New York publishers are open to suggestion about warehousing and distributing books as middlemen. By the turn of the century it seems likely they will do little else.

The music industry is an even better example. Recording studio time is expensive. Artists are at first dependent on the backing of their record label to produce their recordings for sale. Now, with a NeXT workstation and Digital Ears™ (from Metaresearch, Inc.)—total cost under $15K—you have a digital recording studio capable of creating CD-quality recordings, doing

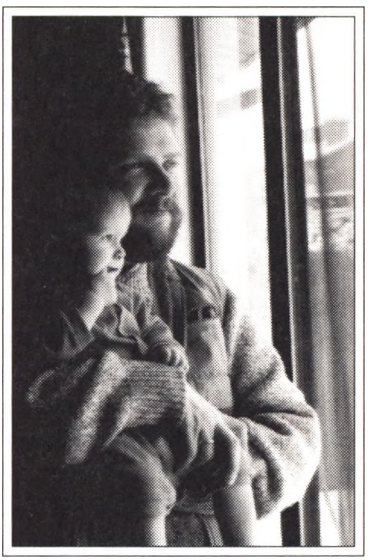
remixing, mastering to the RIAA curve, the whole enchilada. For much less money you can drive MIDI-compatible devices (mixing boards, synthesizers and samplers of every stripe, tape machines or other recording equipment—even additional MIDI-controllers) with a Mac or a PC. In short, the only thing you need a recording company for is distribution, and that too might change if digital recordings can be distributed over public data networks on a pay-per-download basis!

While the picture is a sunny one in publishing and music, it turns ugly where beauty inhabits its thinnest skin: Hollywood. The major movie studios have become utterly ossified. Their product is stale, predictable, uninteresting for the most part. It has turned into television. The few interesting films being made today are coming from independent filmmakers, often financed on credit cards. But given the box office success of so much of the swill originating internally at the major studios (just about all of them make money, eventually, once you add in videocassette and cable-TV sales), the film industry has less of a financial incentive than publishing or music (where mediocre products are sales failures, on the whole).

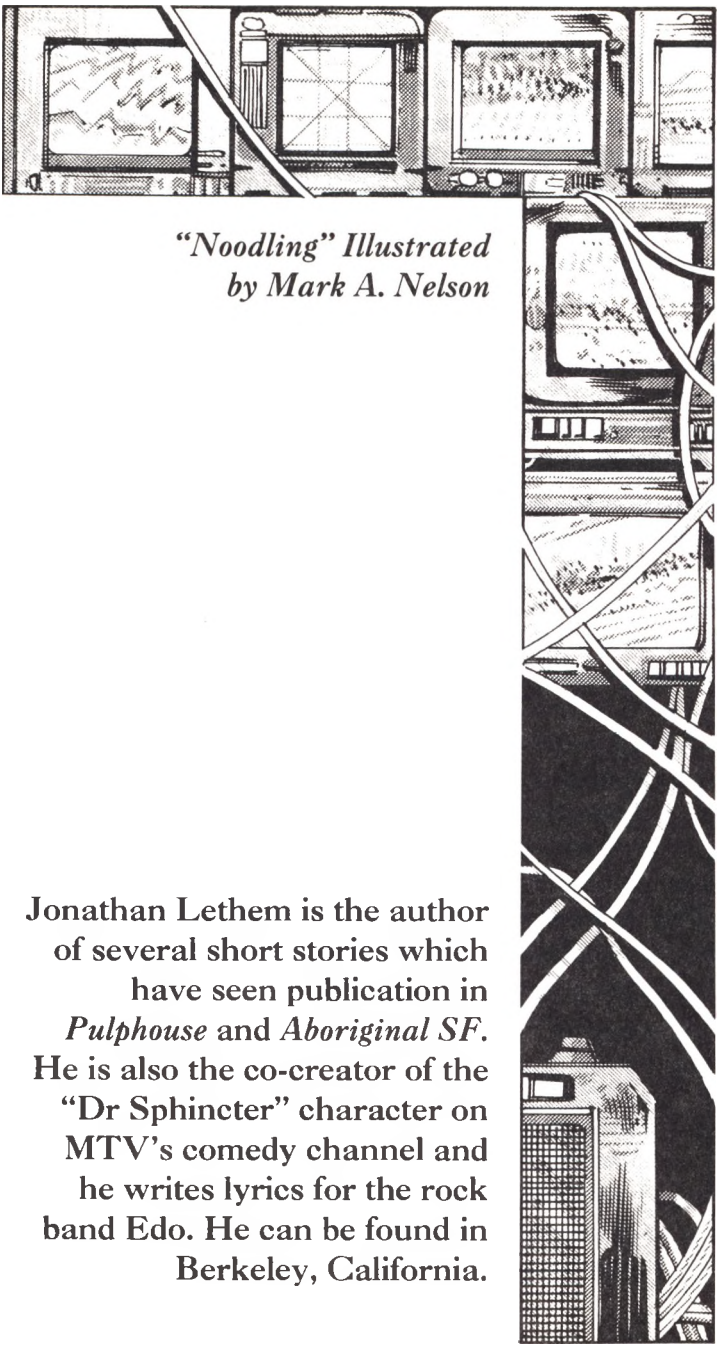
Nevertheless, while there is certainly a good æsthetic reason for them to abandon production and simply distribute the work of independents, it seems unlikely that a trend away from in-house movie production will be seen in the film industry anytime soon. Perhaps this reflects the as-yet limited role for affordable personal computers in this sector. When it becomes possible to produce professional-quality feature "films" entirely on a Mac or even a low-end workstation like the NeXT, the days of the Hollywood's production activities will be numbered.

The point of this harangue has been that wherever it has become economically viable for an individual or small company to produce goods and services that compete with the products of a large company, the advantage consistently goes to the smaller challenger. This is true for politics, technical analysis, and creative arts, and it seems certain that the institutions in these fields

will undergo considerable further change in the near future. Only where economies of scale in production are still real has this eventuality been postponed—neither the steel nor the film industries seem likely to face significant threats from upstarts armed with affordable high-performance computers anytime soon.



The author, shown here with daughter Emma, considers himself a cynic regarding the past, a pessimist where current matters are concerned, but an indefatigable optimist in his outlook towards the future. Who but an optimist would intentionally bring three children into the world, or be bothered with the aggravation inherent in producing a quarterly?
The Profit Motive
is a regular feature of this journal.



"Noodling" Illustrated by Mark A. Nelson

Jonathan Lethem is the author of several short stories which have seen publication in *Pulphouse* and *Aboriginal SF*. He is also the co-creator of the "Dr Sphincter" character on MTV's comedy channel and he writes lyrics for the rock band Edo. He can be found in Berkeley, California.

fiction

Jonathan Lethem

NOODLING

Barl and Lode stayed behind while Licks and Dunk went out for fried chicken at the Chuck E. Cheese. Barl laid out the focus on his mother's glass-topped coffee table and Lode went through the house gathering up the televisions and radios. When Barl snorted focus he liked to have a lot of different stuff to choose from.

Barl had always noticed that handling drugs could provide a little preliminary buzz, like the pre-echo effect on old magnetized cassettes. It worked this time, with the focus; Barl got seriously over-involved in chopping it into lines. Then he realized Lode was staring at him, and looked up. Lode had created a beautiful stack with the televisions, gotten them all wired together, spinning out pictures and muted, staticky sound. Barl gave him a thumbs up and said: "Where's the chicken?"

"Fuck 'em," said Lode. "Get out the Barlmachine."

Barl put down the blade and unpacked his guitar, unreeled his cord, and hooked it into the stereo amp. He'd already blown his mom's speakers twice; there was a little notch carved beside the volume control now to indicate maximum. Barl rolled it right

up to the notch and flicked on the power. Lode went and sprawled on the couch. Barl started picking out single notes, slipping in and out of scales, running up the neck and then riding back down into a free-for-all solo on the high strings, frenetic but essentially useless. Lode was suitably impressed. It was generally far too easy for Barl to impress these guys.

He teased into the solo from Ded Lesbian's "Grudgefuck," just to see Lode's jaw drop, then flicked the fuzz button and dive-bombed into grungy powerchords. Lazy, lazy, lazy. He was bored already when Licks and Dunk burst in with an armload of Chuck E.'s smelly fried chicken, falling over themselves with laughter.

"What took you Dannies so long?" said Barl.

"They got a new virtual down at the Cheese. Couldn't stop playing it, man. 'S called 'Route 80.' Whack shit. You're behind the wheel, right, driving route 80, watching the world go by. Changing lanes, racing tumbleweeds, whatever. Only you've got a knob in your hand controls blood alcohol content level, the higher you turn that knob the more points per mile, right? Only the road gets all small and wobbly, everything speeds up and blurs at the edges, and if you go too high it splits into two roads and you're got to drive down the middle."

"Licks played for fifteen minutes," said Dunk. "On one quarter. Made the high score for the day. Then we're driving home and he rolls off the side because he thought he had to go down the middle of a split screen. His license ought to specify: can only drive drunk."

"The clock's been ticking, boys," said Barl.

Licks chucked the greasy white package of chicken at Barl, who had to drop his guitar into his lap to make the catch. "Here you go," Licks said. "Party hearty."

Barl put the bag of chicken on the table next to the razor blade. Rolled up a bill, leaned over his guitar, and sniffed up a line of the focus. "Drugs first, Dannies."

"Which came first?" said Dunk. "Chicken or the drugs?" He tittered, then reached over the table, took the rolled-up bill from

Barl, and did a line himself.

"You been playing?" said Licks.

Barl looked down at his guitar. Feeling peevish, he said: "Oh yeah. Lots. All done for the night."

"What?"

Lode went along with it. "Yeah, man. Blistering hour-long set. His fingers were bleeding. I've never heard anything like it."

"Awww—"

"Relax, you stupid fuck. I'll play."

At that moment the focus kicked in, and Barl's world narrowed to his hand on the neck of his guitar, the rest fading away to quiet white. Just Barl and Barlmachine, in an otherwise vacant universe. One line was as much as a flight controller might use, to bleach away peripheral reality. Or a student, cramming in a noisy dorm. As far as Barl was concerned it was nothing more than a start. But it still made him smile.

Truth be told, the effect was always a knockout.

He looked up, turned his attention from the guitar to Dunk, who was smiling vacantly. Now reality was Barl and Dunk, cutouts against the white backdrop, isolated in blank space.

"Yo," said Barl, and he was still straight enough not to focus so much on the sound of his own voice that Dunk disappeared.

"Hey," said Dunk, his eyes lighting up as he found Barl.

Barl laughed and focused on the table. His range of attention was still wide enough that he picked up Lode, too, bent over the table, snorting up a line. The party was underway. Barl put his guitar to one side. He dug in the paper bag for a drumstick, and receded into a private little universe consisting of Chuck E.'s fried chicken. His awareness flickered away to the others just long enough to tell that they were snorting and feeding too.

Then someone belched, and for a moment that was a reality: Barl and the sound of the belch.

"Shut the fuck up," said Licks, and they all cracked up.

"Hey, check this out," said Dunk. "Which came first: chicken salad or egg salad?"

Barl tossed his chicken bone into the bag, wiped his mouth

on his sleeve, and picked up the rolled bill to snort another line. He leaned over the table and the drug came into view, lines trailing away like a field of cornrows viewed from an airplane. There wasn't any context to provide a sense of scale.

He sucked away another line in one gargantuan snort, then reared back his head and let the excess drain down the back of his throat.

When he looked up, his attention switched to Lode, who was up at the stack of televisions, turning up the volume. Barl let himself play with the televisions for a while, his eyes roaming from screen to screen, his awareness singling them out each in turn, and blocking all the rest.

He felt the second dose take hold: now even his self-awareness was blotted away as inessential. So his sense of choosing faded, and the screens seemed to melt one after another into view.

"Focused?" said Licks.

"Way focused," said Barl, and now he heard himself speak it and listened, as surprised as anyone else at what emerged. His own utterances were just another kind of phenomena.

One after another Lode and Dunk and Licks each sucked up another line.

"Like to play that new virtual on this stuff," said Licks. "There ought to be a focus control knob. You turn it and everything goes but the road."

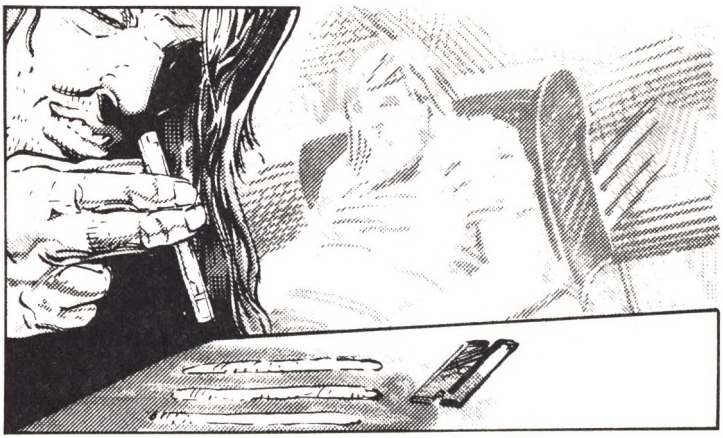
"LSD," said Dunk. "That's the knob I'd like to see. You crank it up and the road is full of hallucinations."

Their conversation was like the TV screens, words bleeding one after another into the empty soundscape.

"DrugTest 2000," said Licks. "You drive the Indianapolis 500 while involuntarily experiencing a random series of drug effects administered at five-minute intervals."

"Naw," said Dunk. "Hand-to-hand combat. You *and* your opponent. You don't know what drug is hitting him when."

"How about Shoelace 2000?" said Barl. "You: hallucinating involuntarily. Your Mission: Tie Your Shoes."



"Fuck you, Quayle-face," said Licks.

Barl laughed, and then a song from one of the radios soaked up his attention. It was the new Sterling Groundfog single, but the guitar was something else, someone sitting in on the session. Valdina? Cockroft?

The focus was still coming on, and now it helped Barl pick out the guitar line; the rest of the song bleached away. Valdina, he decided. The Great Valdina. It made his hair stand on end. It made him want to pick up his guitar.

He found it beside him, lifted it up and clipped the strap on over his shoulder. The conversation tuned back in:

"—if I focus on the *background*, the whited-out part? Get lost forever, man. They'd never get me back."

"Nah. You'd get bored and focus on something else."

"What if you took it in a sensory deprivation chamber?"

Barl retuned his E string.

"All riiight," said Licks. Barl looked over at Lode, who was slumped on the couch, smiling lazily. Then he turned and saw Dunk, who was watching Barl's hands on the guitar.

Star time, as always.

Barl could play on focus. His talent was that much at the core of him. Like breathing. The notes could flow out while he was only marginally attentive. It wasn't that big of a deal: to play good

lead you had to listen to the band, you had to be able to play without listening to yourself.

It was a very popular talent.

He started out quietly, building up a web of notes, sailing them out like a field of butterflies. Creating a background, setting a mood for his solo. He had all the time in the world.

Then an old Chuck Berry single appeared on one of the radios, pulling Barl's attention away from his guitar. He played along with Berry's intro reflexively, his fingers finding the notes to match what he heard, feeling his way into the song as it rolled out of the radio.

Dunk noticed, and said: "Wow."

"Drum it," Barl said.

Dunk tried slapping his knees along with the song, fumbling it mostly because he couldn't hear himself, didn't have Barl's coordination. But he kept at it. Barl got Lick's attention by waving the neck of his guitar. "Yo," he said. "Sing."

Lick was into it immediately, shouting out Berry's lyrics along with the song, his voice wildly variable, like he was wearing a walkman. Mumbling the first parts, squealing on the high notes.

Barl couldn't listen to them both at once anyway. The focus kept him selecting one or the other. He cracked up, couldn't keep playing, trailed off into riffing endlessly on Berry's chords. "Okay, Dannies, let's call it off."

"Come on, man," said Lode, his voice showing annoyance. He wanted to hear Barl really play.

"Relax," said Barl, and he filled the air with a cascade of notes, setting up the cushion again. They all leaned back, to just listen for a while. Barl included.

Then, while the rest of them followed the opening of the long solo, Barl's attention wandered to the televisions. One was playing an old episode of *Star Trek* that Barl recognized just from the pre-credit teaser. The ship was plagued by buzzing, invisible insects, who later turned out, Barl knew, to be aliens moving at such a high speed that the Federation crew seemed to

be frozen like statues.

Then Barl's own music segued back into his awareness. He was weaving the disparate threads together now, forming a couple of dominant musical figures for touchstones.

Create a *Thematic Nexus*, he thought—

—and then it was as if the words Thematic and Nexus were painted on the side of a dirigible and his mind was a big empty sky. For a minute there wasn't anything else.

Then he was watching the television again. A different one. A woman in a chef's hat was standing at a kitchen counter, stirring something in a saucepan. "On your birthday do something impulsive!" she said. "Buy yourself a fur! Or fly to another city for lunch!"

"Fly to another planet for a glass of water," said Barl.

"What?" said Dunk. He obviously hadn't been listening to that particular television.

"Uh, yeah," said Barl. "That's the name of the piece I'm playing tonight: 'Fly To Another Planet for a Glass of Water.'"

"Cool," said Dunk.

Licks rolled a joint, lit it, and smoked. Barl's attention was captivated momentarily by the smell of the smoke, and then he watched more TV. When he found the joint again it was being handed to him. He pursed his lips, and Licks lodged the joint there, so Barl could smoke without taking his hands off the guitar.

He hadn't noticed Lode leaving the room, but now he saw him coming back, with a bag of chocolate cookies from Barl's mother's kitchen.

Barl suddenly impressed himself enough with the guitar to hear it, to pay full attention. Nothing flashy, just a beautiful slow passage in an unusual mode. He heard himself build to a gorgeous, aching climax. He didn't have to check to know that everyone was with him.

When he switched keys the spell broke. Barl held a long note and rewarded himself with another line of focus. The note died away just as he sniffed up the tail end of the line, and Barl

got his hand back and filled the room with earsplitting power-chords.

Now the spaces between things were getting bigger and bigger.

In fact, the observation that the spaces between things were getting bigger and bigger floated through Barl's universe, another dirigible. Or maybe a spaceship this time, stranded between galaxies, its interstellar drive out of commission.

Barl was nudged out of his reverie by the sight of Sexy standing in front of him.

Sexy was supposed to be Barl's girlfriend. He'd taken her away from the singer in his first band. Now she was standing in Barl's living room, in what must have been the one empty spot between the coffee table, the stack of televisions, and the sprawled bodies. But for Barl, of course, she stood all alone. It was just Barl and Sexy, squaring off in the middle of infinity. Her mouth was moving, but he couldn't hear what she was saying.

"Slow down," he said.

Her voice faded in from some distant place and inhabited the void. "You're wrecked," she said. "You're a fucking mess."

Somewhere, somewhere in this universe, Barl knew he was still playing guitar. That's what the others would listen to. Not this conversation.

"Uh huh," he said. Then he was watching television. News footage, a blizzard of chaotic images. A video, maybe.

Sexy's voice came back. "I can't believe you're blowing another night hanging out with these regurgitated goofballs. What happened to your band?"

Barl was listening to the radio again. Polar Toady, doing "The Ballad of Polar Toady." "If we could do it all again . . . " Barl felt a tug of nostalgia for his band, for thinking they were going to the top. But it was bullshit, and he forgot about it.

Barl had trouble focusing on Sexy. It happened like this every time he snorted. He saw it as a really bad sign. He kept meaning to talk to her about it . . .

But then he was staring at the package of chocolate cookies

on the table behind her. They looked really good.

"Seriously, Barl. What about your band?"

Barl laughed, pulled himself together. Played a fast lick, focused on that. "This is my new band, Sexy. The Regurgitated Goofballs. Or maybe Band of Dannies. We got Licks, he can't shut up, he's the lead singer. Right Licks?"

"Huh?" said Licks, who must not have been listening.

"—and I'm teaching Dunks here to play the drums. And Lode, he's got that melancholy temperament, I think he's on bass."

Barl saw Lode smile silently from his place on the couch.

He watched Captain Kirk consult with Spock.

He heard himself bend a note.

A long minute later he found Sexy again. She was still talking. "—too far gone," she said.

"Yeah, I'm too far gone, babe. Why don't you just come over here?"

He played again for a while. Really got into it.

When he noticed Sexy again she was curled up at his side. Her expression impassive.

Barl figured he'd taken an unusual dose of focus. Unusual in the direction of large.

Something in the realization opened him up to it, and he sat there for a while, the words *dose* and *focus* bleeding in and out rhythmically.

Dose.

Focus.

Sexy, apparently bored with taking a stand, snorted a line and began nibbling on Barl's cheek.

Barl wondered if the other guys were staring at her, fixing on her body. I'm probably the only one here, he thought, who can keep from focusing on her. In fact, I can't even when I want to. So he lost himself in the guitar solo for a while, and that led to just losing himself entirely.

One of the televisions was giving off a test signal.

Dose.

Focus.

Unusual.

"Hey, check this out," said Dunk at some point. "Which came first: the chicken or the road?"

"Which came first," said Licks, "the chicken or the traveling salesman?"

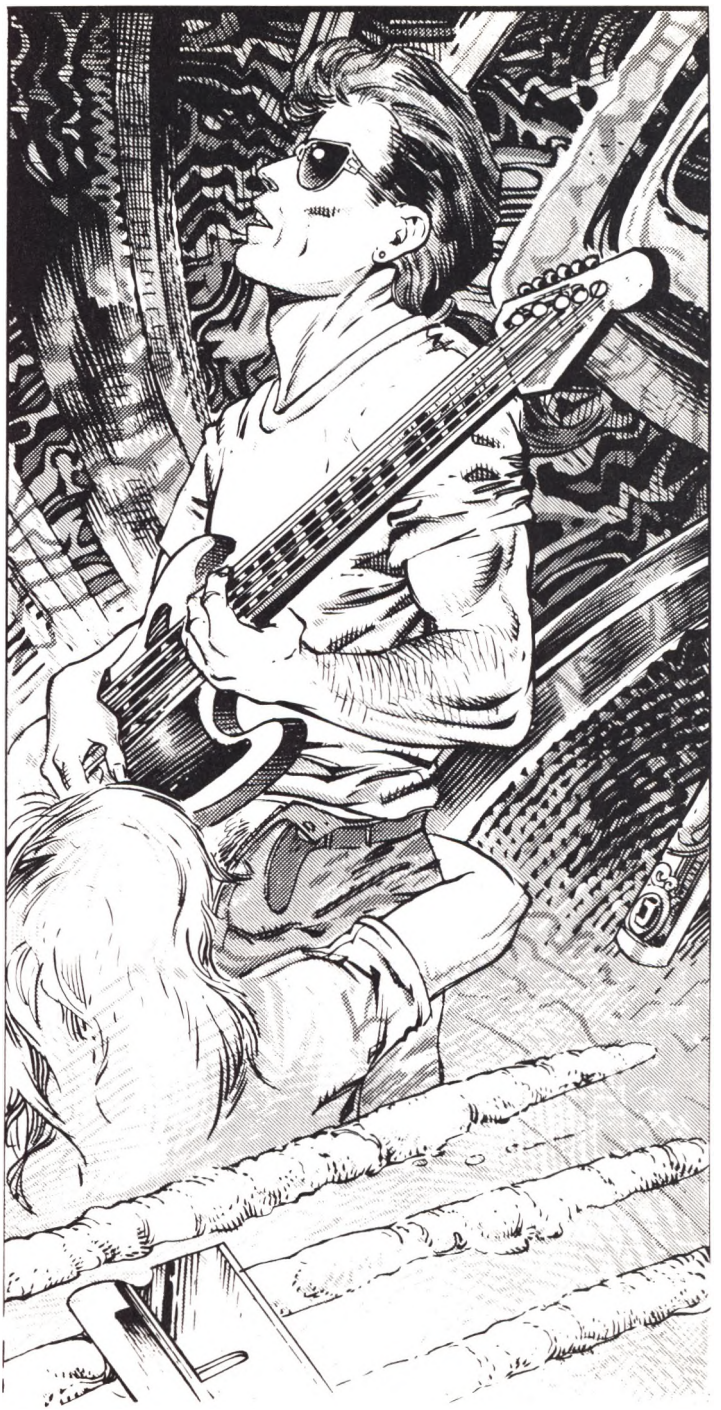
"Which came first," said Barl, "the bartender or the guy with the talking dog?"

"I came first," said Lode.

One of the radios said: "Algorithm, algorithm, algorithm, who could ask for anything more?"

Barl heard himself playing again for a little while. Then he didn't.

Sexy was sucking his cock. It happened sometimes, on focus. She'd get obsessed with his cock. He kept playing. Eventually it went away.



"You've been playing the same thing over and over again for a long time," said Dunk. "The same two notes."

"Uh, in a long solo that's sometimes the way it is, man. Listen to the whole thing, okay? Be patient. It all adds up."

There was a bird making noise outside. The first thing Barl had noticed outside of the room since taking the drug. He imitated it with his guitar.

Nothing.

Nothing.

Barl was floating through space. Not the empty space of focus, but outer space, the darkness of night, up and out through the night and into the stars. He was soaring away from the earth, which sank away beneath him like a glassy blue tabletop.

He flew through space for what seemed like hours.

When he returned it wasn't to earth. He touched down somewhere else. A world of mist, shot through with buzzy, staticky beings which Barl could only see out of the corners of his eyes.

"Welcome to the Planet of the Guitar Solos," said one of the beings as it hovered at Barl's ear.

"Guitar solos," said Barl. "They've got their own planet?"

"Kind of," said the Guitar Solo. "We call it a planet. You might say dimension, or realm."

"Planet is cool," said Barl. While they spoke other guitar solos whizzed past and disappeared in the mist.

"We can only enter your realm when someone plays," said the solo. "No other form of communication is possible."

"What am I doing here?"

"You took too much focus," said the solo. "You opened up too much space, you got all small and buzzy and fast and slipped between the gaps; you turned into a pure guitar solo. Thus—"

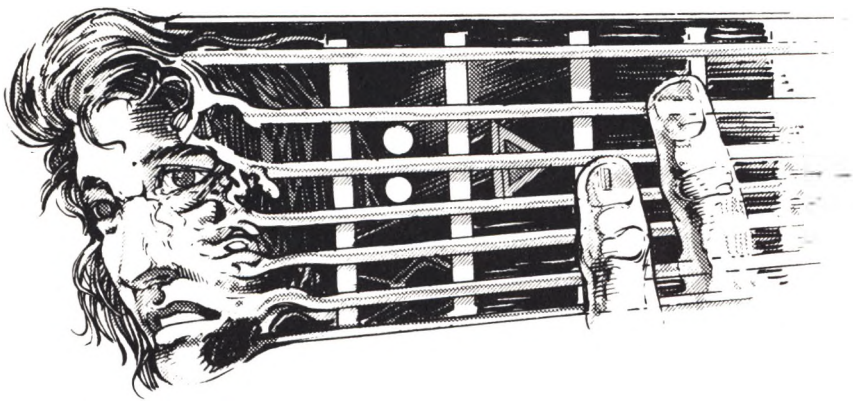
"Did I die?"

"No, I don't think so. I think you'll go back."

Barl stopped to look around, but it didn't do him any good. The more he tried to look the less he saw.

"I used to be in a couple of bands," said Barl. He didn't mention that they'd never recorded; he wondered if it mattered. It might be all the same to these guys; Hendrix and Valdina and Barl. "I made a bunch of you guys—"

"Made us?" said the solo. "Oh no, I'm afraid not. You may



have provided us with access to your realm. . . . "

"Whatever. Anyway, I'm not in a band right now. But I still play a lot. Is that the same—"

"What, need a band? Oh, fuck that shit, please. We don't care about a band."

"Cool," said Barl. "Sexy's always bugging me about a band. I'll tell her a solo said it was cool."

"Of course," said the solo.

Then Barl began to rise up through the mists, to leave The Planet of the Guitar Solos.

"What's happening?" he called down to the solo below him.

"Someone's playing you, apparently," said the solo.

Barl soared back to earth.

Nothing.

Barl noticed that Lode was still awake, and staring fixedly on the guitar in Barl's hands. He didn't know whether or not he was playing any more.

Barl noticed himself falling asleep.

The sun woke him up a few hours later. The focus effects had mostly receded.

Someone had switched off the televisions. Lode. Licks and Dunk were both laid out asleep on the carpet, and Sexy was curled up in Barl's lap. The guitar had slipped from Barl's hands to rest on her shoulder. Lode was sitting at the table, scraping together the last of the focus. He had a carton of orange juice from the kitchen, and when he saw that Barl's eyes were open he handed it to him.

By the time Barl got back from puking in the bathroom everyone else was awake.

Licks looked up when Barl came in. "Hey, man," he said. "That was a seriously great solo."

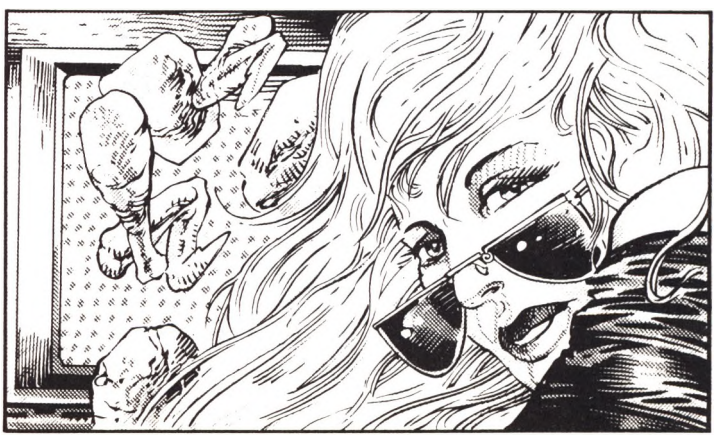
Barl didn't feel much like talking, or even particularly like thinking, but something in him was stirred by Licks' remark. "Uh, a solo doesn't mean anything outside of a long structure, Licks. It's just noodling—"

At that moment he remembered The Planet of the Guitar Solos, and realized it was full of shit. There was no such place. Or anyway, if there was, then the particular solo he'd conversed with was full of crap.

"I mean, context is everything," he went on. "You can't just have a solo. It's supposed to be a commentary on something."

Everyone was quiet for a long time.

"All I meant was that was a seriously great solo, man," said Licks again.



opinion

Dave Hyde

OPERATION GREEN MERCHANT Exposed!

For a long time we've known in our factories that management often uses spies and *agents provocateur* to cause dissension among the workers. We're aware too of corporate espionage on the management levels. But now it seems there's a new player in the game: government police agents posing as legitimate business consultants.

It's all a part of the War On Drugs that is now in it's 9th year. Here's how this new government tactic works:

"Operation Green Merchant," William Bennett's brainchild, is a coordinated nationwide effort that culminated in October 1989 in the arrests of thousands of suspected marijuana growers. Before this time much preparation and coordination on the part of all police agencies was required. And the suspects had to be found. We can assume this took months.

Let's take a closer look. . . .

By scouring local information from all over the country, a skimpy list of suspects was drawn up. When Drug Czar Bennett read it, he scowled. Not big enough, he said. He wanted a fatter list as this operation was, indeed, the centerpiece fantasy of his acceptance of the job as Drug Czar: Scour the nation of all the scum and create the Cleaner, Newer America of Bush's dreams. So He came up with another new idea, a brainwave to fatten his lists! To grow marijuana indoors, he supposed, you'd need lights. Where, then, do these scum get their lights? Why, right here! said a handy aide, pointing to a Sylvania ad in a *Penthouse* that happened to be handy, They've got advertisements!

So after the circle jerk was complete they reached consensus: Bust the people who sell the lights and impound their files!

Then, ready to dash out the door and bust the entire corporate and works body of Sylvania, the DEA elite laughed amongst themselves and Reichsführer Bennett was expansive in his praise. Go to it, boys, bust the lot of 'em! he said. This time we'll get *results*.

Luckily for Sylvania and its parent company General Electric, wiser heads lower down the scale prevailed and the Czar's directive was modified, mostly due to necessity. It's all very well for the Reichsführer-DEA to try and bust the world, he has the power, but for the average DEA pig it's something else altogether. Local police prerogatives take over. The light bulb company owns the town, no one fucks with them.

So, grumbling back to Washington went the DEA dogs, Waaah! They whined to their boss, We can't bust GE. The locals won't let us.

Bennett went into a rage. Fuck the locals! He screamed, They don't run this country. I'll bust GE any goddamn time I want to. I'll get them later. He paced around, mumbling Himmlerian fantasies of a centralized secret police state.

And as he paced, a slavering cur slobbered up to him. Herr Reichsführer, all is not lost! The light bulbs may be made by GE,

but, remember, these are special lights—they're assembled by *small manufacturers!*

Bennett lightened immediately. Ah! Small manufacturers. We can bust *them.*

And thus began "Operation Green Merchant" proper.

William Bennett

Nationwide, the DEA zealots went out. In daylight raids to the hinterlands they swooped on public telephone booths and stole all the Yellow Pages. In nighttime attacks on well known "Pot Palaces" they broke a few heads and twisted a lot of arms. Soon they had the information they needed. The next phase began: Coordination and planning for the attack itself.

But wait! Bennett reined in his dogs once again. There's still not enough suspects, he said tapping the massive list. I want more—thousands, millions!

The boys were unhappy. What had looked like a head-banging jaunt was starting to look like work. Geez! They muttered amongst themselves, why can't we just bust the scum and take our loot?

But a look from the Reichsführer cowed them down. You incompetents! he shouted, A few thousand specialized lighting manufacturers isn't enough. Get their files! I want that list ten times bigger by July.

So off they went to the IRS. But the Tax agency was uncooperative. They didn't give a fuck about the upstart DEA and weren't about to let Bennett's SS order them around. The IRS knew who held the ultimate police power and they weren't about to give it up.

The boys got scared. They couldn't go whining back to the boss again, he might get really mad and toss a few of them into his newly constructed concentration camp in Arizona, as an

example to the rest. So they thought really hard and came up with a second brainwave (though, as was only right, not of the same order of brilliance as that of the Boss's earlier spasm): *Infiltrate!*

Said one, a genius, a future Heydrich to Bennett's Himmler in the Republican Reich: We'll infiltrate these scurvy manufacturers and purloin their files. Then bust every sonofabitch we find.

So off they went. Teams of DEA agents masquerading as legitimate "Business Consultants," set up in office fronts in all major towns, armed with extraordinary references and snappy suits. Their targets: small companies like Seattle's Hydrotech, a manufacturer of hydroponic lighting systems for the Seattle Aquarium. Because they worked cheap they easily talked their way in. Their hook being that they would streamline the operation and save the owner money. But while they were freeloading and embezzling at the owner's expense, they pursued their real job: the duplication of all business files.

Leaving a trail of burned out copiers and trashed computers behind them, the DEA agents did their nasty work. Befuddled manufacturers scratched their heads and wondered where their profits had gone and how they were gonna contact their customers—the reason for their corporate existence. The customers, meanwhile, continued blithely on their way. A shipment of lights never showed up, a few endangered species died at the Aquarium. Little did they know that in a few short months they'd be shivering in their nightgowns while polyester-jacketed thugs would be stealing their possessions, trashing their homes, and tossing them in the hoosegow—the culmination of "Operation Green Merchant."

And that's how it worked. In Indiana during the first few weeks of October, massive drug sweeps were made—as they were in many other states. The number of arrests, taken from newspaper reports, was 775 Indianans and, to quote a State Police spokesman, "They're still out looking for more." Newly elected Democratic Governor, Evan Bayh, watched some of the

raids. "We're taking back our streets and cities," said the Governor. Drug dealers are "scum" and he told them to "get out or we'll put you out." This was supposedly a state operation, no mention of the DEA was made. But if that was so, isn't it rather coincidental that similar operations were made nationwide in the month of October?

Followers of the Drug Wars are familiar with other government drug containment efforts: Operation Zero Tolerance carried out by the U.S. Customs Service in 1988. Operation Crackdown in the nation's largest cities. They share a basic *modus operandi*: Complete disregard for civil rights; arrest now, give evidence later; and the seizing of all assets of those arrested. And if no arrests are made, trash the premises and scare the bejesus out of everyone in sight. In other times and other places such tactics were called piracy, extortion and gangsterism. What are they called now? Patriotism? Good Americanism?

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In the above fantasy I've made clumsy parallels between the Bush administration and the Germany of Hitler's Reich in the 1930's. That's because I'm in the middle of reading *The Order of the Death's Head* by Heinz Hohne. The political machinations of Goering, Himmler, Richenau and Rohm reminded me of what seems to be happening in America today as the country heads towards the complete establishment of a totalitarian state with order maintained by an autonomous federal police force that answers to no one: the Drug Enforcement Agency.

Heinrich Himmler

In Hitler's Reich in the 30's, intrigue amongst the various police agencies was the order of the day. And the winners in such vicious infighting were always the state (federal) agencies. Local

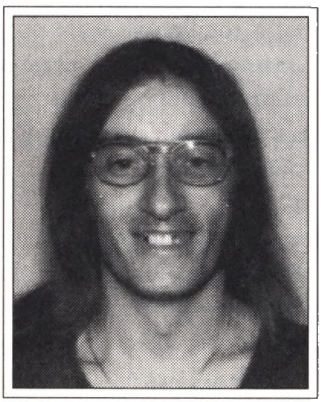
agencies were subsumed by fiat and with hastily written retroactive "laws." Local police commanders were forced to go along although, like Rohm, they held out for their prerogatives as long as possible and only capitulated in the face of a *fait accompli* or assassination. In the end they were reduced to subordinates of the SS or Gestapo, glad to accept any bone of local authority tossed to them.

So, a fantasy, right? Listen to Attorney General Dick Thornburgh (taken from the AP, the subject being the return of $4.6 million of confiscated drug revenues to the Houston Police Dept): "Booty of the drug trade can be turned into offensive weapons for law enforcement." Houston police plan to use the money to pay informants, buy vehicles, surveillance and other equipment.

"Booty of the drug trade."! One wonders where exactly the emphasis in this sentence is to be applied.

But that's going on in Houston, who gives a fuck about Houston? Except it's happening here wherever here happens to be for you. It's happening to friends of mine, people who write, create or produce stuff that is inimical to the Authorities. It's happening to me.

I don't know what to do about it except write and support as best I can those hapless fuckers busted for unjust and arbitrary reasons. Perhaps I've been reading too much about Hitler, so that I'm paranoid now. I feel like that bishop who's name I forget



A British-born transplant to Kokomo, Indiana, via Canada, Dave Hyde is an electronics repairman who claims to be living the life of a Philip K. Dick character. With his organization, Ganymedean Slime Mold, he published the outspoken *No Bullshit* newsletter of the 1988 political campaigns.

who said something about how the Nazis came first for the jews and no one spoke up, then they took the foreigners, still no one spoke up against it, then when they came and took the writers, there was no one left to speak up for the bishops when their turn came. (But, you know, fuck the bishops, it's the little guy who gets dragged off).

So, the point. What can we do to effectively halt this government shakedown going on under the name of the War On Drugs?

Perhaps we'd better do our jobs as writers—the real writers in America, not those scum who pull their punches for a published dollar—and write about it. An Outcry from the underground press!

Stop this ruinous harassment of harmless pot smokers and end this War On Drugs! It's turning us into a police state.

Enough phony nationalism! An end to this thought whereby a symbol is more important than a man.

Away with pornographic TV that sells all women as objects in the marketplace.

An end to all these paranoid military fantasies that make America the fear of the rest of the world.

We, the writers of America demand it! We're tired of this never-ending propaganda war; we want to get on to better things, create beauty with our art. No wonder all an artist can create today is a jar of piss with a crucifix stuck in it. In good conscience an artist can do nothing else, for a pleasing image is a lie, a mere alleviation of the harsh, governmental wrought reality. In America today Art must be garbage because if it wasn't garbage it wouldn't be Art. Ask the man in the street. All in all it's a sad place for the American artist to be in.

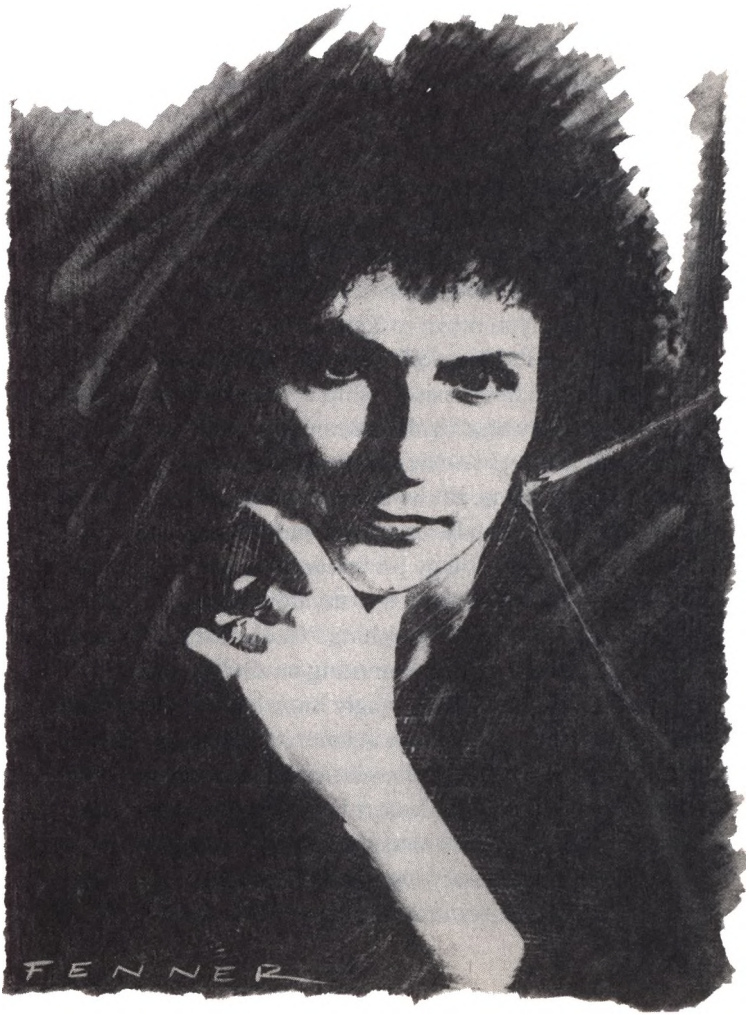
So, I guess, a plea: The Berlin Wall fell down; Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Romania, Poland, East Germany and even Russia herself have had oppression lifted from their lives and freedom flowering in their lands. Let us not let the politicians and the businessmen take any credit. What's happening in Europe today is no credit to Bush and his business ilk.

We see instead the effects of a realization on the part of the communist bloc that you cannot keep the people down and the more effort you put into it the more apparent this becomes. Until you end up with the whole apparatus of the secret police state which sucks the life force from any nation. Why should we, America, continue on that road when our erstwhile enemies are about to dismantle the whole clanking apparatus of the controlled state?

So let's tear it down too! Legalize drugs, ban those bombs, bring the boys home to a gala welcome and when 1999 rolls round we'll all get together and have a big goddamn party and celebrate America as still the free-est nation in the whole free world!

JOURNAL WIRED INTERVIEW

Pat Cadigan



At Armadillocon, in Austin, Texas, on October 14, 1989, Pat Cadigan [C] graciously submitted to a marathon interview over drinks and dinner. Most of the interview was conducted by Andy Watson [W], but also on hand (initially, at least) to help direct the cross-examination with pitiless curiosity were Mark Ziesing [Z], Arnie Fenner [F], and Jim Blaylock (who reserved his own remarks for when the tape recorder was disabled).

C: It's still only the beginning of the interview; I'm not drunk enough to talk about that yet.

W: Why Kansas? There you were, *almost* at the hub of the universe . . .

C: I was only born in Schenectady. By the time I moved to Kansas, I'd been living in Massachusetts for years and years. Not even in Boston. I grew up in a small town fifty miles northwest of Boston, called Fitchburg, and that's *not* the hub of the universe. It is the armpit.

W: Why did you move to Kansas?

C: I had gotten married and my first husband at that time had a teaching assistantship at the University of Kansas where he was getting his doctorate in theatre. So, I finished my undergraduate degree there. I was actually really glad I ended up there. I met some of the smartest people that I've ever met in my life on the Kansas campus. I met Ed Zeller. Now, Ed Zeller was my geology professor. The stuff I learned in Ed Zeller's class contributed to my development as a science fiction writer as much as anything. 'Cause Ed Zeller was a cosmologist and he was commuting on the weekends to work on the Mars probe. An amazingly knowledgeable man who happened to be an excellent teacher. So I learned all kinds of theories of the cosmos. It's an inside-out sphere—no, it's a saddle shape—no, it's a dessert topping—no, it's a breath mint. That type of thing. I learned something about geology, but it was more of a cosmology class. He had a great way of making mathematics understandable to those of us who were having

some trouble with it. I always had trouble with science and math. Not because I'm stupid. It was the form in which it was presented that was wrong. Because everyone in my class, with the exception of one or two guys who were going to grow up to become Einstein, was having trouble grasping algebra and chemistry.

W: This is in high school?

C: High school, yeah. Now, if I were to go back there and confront the same teachers, I'd say, "Look—it's all very well and good for you to feel so proud of yourselves for presenting this stuff and proving that it's so *hard* to these real smart kids, but why don't you just knock off that bullshit and make it understandable to people so that they'd like it and enjoy it and *get* something out of it?"

W: A lot of teachers' egos get in the way of the subject matter.

C: Yeah, and it makes me mad 'cause that stuff doesn't belong to them. It belongs to the kids. They deserve to have it.

W: So you moved to Kansas really by accident, but you decided to stay?

C: Well, after I moved to Kansas, I went through a real culture shock. It was like being on another planet. The people were different. And at that time, the times were changing a *lot*, too. The swing away from the '60's and back towards conservativism had started and there I was in the Bible Belt! Every day I would get up and walk to school and look around at the people and wonder, How did I get here? But then there were people like Ed Zeller and my archeology professor. I can't remember her name. But she'd uncovered a lot of incredibly important ruins. And she had this teaching assistant who was also a marvelous teacher. Except for them I think I would have gone out of my mind. And then I found out that Jim Gunn was on campus, in the English Department. I made contact with him, and I was doing some writing, and I found out about the WorldCon in 1976. So I went to Jim and I said, "Please, *give* me

their names." I could write to them and volunteer to do something. I didn't know anything about them because I didn't have any contact with fandom or the science fiction field as it exists. I was one of those people on the outside, people who read science fiction voraciously but live and die without ever going to a convention.

W: What relationship do you see between attending conventions and being a professional in the industry. How important would you say conventions are, in the larger scope of things. You seem to be fairly active.

C: I look a lot more active than I am. I don't go to very many of these things. If I had the money and the time to go to these things, I might get sucked in so far that I might not do a whole lot else. It's very easy to get into getting away for a weekend and have a great time, hang out with people you like. That whole thing. The people that I like to see don't go to that many themselves, so . . . I don't think I can make a general statement about it. It's—it's important to me to get to the ones that I like to get to. I get to Armadillocon no matter what else I do. And I try to get to the WorldCon.

W: Is that for professional or personal reasons?

C: Both. Like, at the WorldCon this year, it was the only opportunity I had to sit down with Pat LoBrutto to discuss *Synners*. I had just gotten through most of the second rewrite. It was good to sit down and talk about that. If I hadn't gotten to Boston, I wouldn't have had an opportunity to do that.

W: Is he your editor for that book?

C: He *was* the editor, before he quit his job. But fortunately, he waited to

quit until he had edited my book. Everything on that is pretty much settled.

W: So when is that one coming out?

C: It's a surprise. It hasn't been scheduled yet because I still have one more fixing thing to do to it. Depending on how quickly I get that done, then they'll put it on the schedule. [Synners has since been scheduled to for February 1991.] I've been behind on it because it was . . . I thought of this *great* idea—the whole thing came to me in such a complete piece that I was able to write the outline in about four to six hours. I don't do that normally. Usually, they gel for *months*. Then I worked on it for another few weeks 'til I finally had, y'know, *an outline*. But it came to me all at once. When I started to write it, I realized it was a lot bigger than I was. I had to learn how to be a better writer in order to write it.

W: Do you feel like you've done that?

C: I hope so. I like to think that I'm a better writer because of the excruciating experience I had writing *Synners*.

Z: What is it? I mean, is it cyberesque? Is it high tech?

C: It's *highly* technical. I don't think there's a whole lot of technical jargon that shows up in the book, but I had to do incredible amounts of research on the brain, and computers, and programming, and information, and . . . [to her husband, Arnie Fenner] Arn—from what you've read of the manuscripts, what would you say? Highly technical?

F: It's very technical.

C: 'Cause I can't tell anymore.

Z: Does it take place on Earth?

C: Yeah, yeah. It's, like, within the next fifty, sixty years.

Z: Are there any aliens in it?

C: Uh-uh. Unless you count the artificial intelligence that kind of congeals in the net.

Z: Is there lots of sex and/or blood?

C: There's . . . there's . . . there's enough sex to . . . y'know . . . Actually, there's more angst about sex than anything else. Which I think is more true to people's lives.

W: Um. I was going to comment on the concept of *enough* sex.

C: Is there such a thing as *enough* sex? No! Dammit, *no!*

W: So, how happy with Kansas have you become? Has it worked out in the long term? Are you planning to stay forever?

C: It's a surprise. I've lived out in the midwest in one area of another for sixteen years. People ask me where I'm from and I always *said* Massachusetts, but now I say I'm from Kansas. I was talking to Karen Haber at NolaCon and she asked me where I was from. I said, "I'm from Kansas." She said, "You don't give off a Kansas vibe." I guess I don't. But now I tell people that everybody in Kansas is like me and they put up all that shit about wheat and cows and everything to keep the riffraff out.

Z: So who is Arnie Fenner and how has he affected your life?

C: Come *on*. [Arnie is an artist/publisher/designer whose now-defunct zine, *Shayol*, was edited by Pat Cadigan. He has also been involved in a great many Ziesing publishing activities in recent years—including *Wired!*]

W: He's the father of your child.

C: I'm *married* to him, too!

W: So you're not a single working mother faced with all the challenges that implies?

C: No. My *mother* was a single working mother when I was growing up. You want to talk about having it hard being a single working mother, do that in the late '50's and early '60's. Compared to now—there's an awful lot of support for single working mothers, I mean, there's hardly *anything*, but compared to what there was *then*—it was like, you're supposed to be married, you're supposed to have *a man*.

W: Do you have any brothers or sisters?

C: No, there's only one at home like me, and I'm not at home anymore. I've got my own home.

W: So it was just you and your mother?

C: Actually, it was me and my mother and my aunt, and my aunt's business partner. That was how the family configuration ended up. We didn't all live together in the same apartment. My mother and I lived in an apartment, and my aunt and business partner lived in another apartment. We were all women, and there was a real feminist—it was what I would call a feminist household *now*. But then, the word feminism hadn't really been invented or wasn't in currency or anything, but when I was growing up then, they were telling me what people have been telling their daughters for the last ten or fifteen years, which is *You can be anything you want to be* and *You don't have to be anything you don't want to be.* The only thing that they used to have to add to that was *You're going to have it really, really tough if you choose to work in what's traditionally a man's field and you're going to have to be four times as good as any man at what you do.* Now you only have to be twice as good, so that's progress.

Z: You're probably sick of talking about it, but what about Cyberpunkism? Was it a conscious effort on your part to get involved with it? Do you like it? What did it feel like to be the only woman involved in it? What's next? And all that stuff.

P: Oh, boy. Well, no. I told somebody else in another interview that I was the accidental tourist of cyberpunk. I was getting interested in what is now "traditional" cyberpunk. Things that we commonly associate with cyberpunk are the things that I was getting interested in writing about. I had this friend when I was working at Hallmark. A guy named Tom. Working in the same department for a while, we discovered that we were reading the same books. *Gödel, Escher, Bach—The Eternal Golden Braid*, [Robert] Jastrow's cosmology stuff, and quantum physics, information theory. . . . I was very interested in that but I had kind of a weak background. Tom and I discovered we had this common interest, but Tom had this college education to fill in my gaps. I'd ask him questions and he'd tell me about it. I kinda educated myself up to things and I got through *Gödel, Escher, Bach* twice now, and understood it.

I found it really fascinating. Then, I went to the WorldCon in Baltimore. Rudy Rucker was there, [Bruce] Sterling was there, [Lewis] Shiner was there, Bill Gibson was there, John Shirley was there, and we were all talking about the *same* things. We'd all started—I don't know when they were all writing about what their things were and everything, but I'd already started. I mean, "Rock On" was written in 1982.

Z: What about your non-literary credentials to be in such a group. Do you listen to hard-core music? Do you spit on Arnie whenever you get the opportunity?

C: [Laughing] No, but I've always tried to keep up on music, alternative music, regular music, stuff like that. I keep an eye on my culture because I don't want it to blind-side me. I don't want to wake up some morning and say, "Wait a minute, I'm terribly obsolete. How did I get here?"

Z: What about your politics? What stripe are you?

C: Oh, I'm stuck in the 'sixties. I'm a 'sixties leftist. I mean, I did my thing. I marched for peace. I got beaten up in 1971, the May Day riots, Washington, D.C. I got my head split open by a policeman with a nightstick. No respect for authority. But that's as much my mother as anything: "Question authority."

Z: Not a patriot by any means.

C: Well, but then again, on the other hand, if you're going to live somewhere and take advantage of all the good things that it has to offer . . . I wouldn't recommend that anybody be totally ungrateful, "Piss on America," or anything.

Z: Well, if you have no respect for authority, and you're kind of an armchair anarchist, how do you get along with Jerry Pournelle?

C: I get along with Jerry real well. [long pause] Let me see if I can give an answer that doesn't make me sound like, y'know, like totally dumb.

W: The issue is not so much *political allegiance.* Usually, there's a lot of ideology. It's unnecessary, but with all the rhetoric, people draw lines. You're in this group, you're part of

that clique, or you're not. Whether it's for purposes of marketing your work, or marketing your personality, or analyzing your work, people tend to pigeonhole anyone with a public persona or visibility, according to their apparent ideology.

C: I'm not gonna make a call on that. I have never found a single ideology that could cover everything off satisfactorily. Not even my personal pet, stuck-in-the-'sixties leftist thing. There's nothing that has all the answers for everybody. There's always a blind spot in every ideology, something that it doesn't cover, that it doesn't answer.

W: Pournelle, since he's been mentioned here, is someone whose name and work is associated with right wing elements, warmongering, whether it's science fictional or otherwise.

C: Yeah, but that's not all there is to Jerry. I happen to know that Jerry Pournelle is capable of great personal kindness. He's capable of setting aside his prejudices and biases to honestly help somebody he has respect for. I don't feel comfortable judging anyone totally by their ideology. Y'know, "This guy believes this, this, and this: must be a real scumbag. This other guy believes this and this and this: must be a real saint." That ain't the way it is. Just because somebody's never killed anybody doesn't automatically make him a nice

person. And all murderers aren't total disciples of Satan. It's like "Sympathy for the Devil," you know: "Every cop is a criminal, and all the sinners, saints."

W: Is there any big difference that you see when you sit down to write a novel as opposed to writing a short story?

C: Yeah. Every time I sit down to write a novel I have to learn how all over again. Because I'm not by nature a marathoner. I'm a sprinter. That's a short story. When I started with my writing aspirations as a little girl, I'd sit down with a pad and a pen and the first thing I'd write at the top of the page would be "Chapter One." My mother came along and said, "I really think you ought to start with short stories. See if you can write something short, and *then* see if you can write something long." Later on, when I was seriously trying to get my career off the ground, I had to work a full-time job and a short story was something I could get accomplished within a short period of time. I could build up enough momentum to finish a short story. But I couldn't build up enough momentum at that time to plot out a novel and finish it in a reasonable period of time. So I got all my experience with short stories.

W: You mentioned developing your "career." You were working a full-time job at the same time. What sort of strategy did you follow? What was your agenda?

C: I was task oriented rather than ultimate goal oriented. If I try to swallow a whole career in one lump, I'm just never going to get through it. So the one thing I've got to concentrate on is: my goal is to finish the story I'm working on. Then, my next goal is to start another one and finish that. You just keep sending them out, sending them out, very steady. It's hard to read a royal road into anything like that. Most people who decide that they want a career in writing have some measure of raw talent. And raw talent can be refined. You can expand a talent and develop it, and make it bigger than what you started out with. The problem with a lot of people, like some of my writing students when I've taught classes now and then—these are people who are capable of eventually making a

professional sale, and going on to be professional writers, but they lack persistence. After the fiftieth or sixtieth rejection, they give up! You can't do that. Not if you supposedly want it that bad.

W: So how did you make the transition to full-time writing?

C: I'd gone through a particularly productive period, and then it hit me. "What am I doing? I'm going to go back to work tomorrow and I'm going to do this indefinitely. *Forget it!* If I can have days like this, I can write enough to support my half of the household, contribute my half of the necessary income, and I can do something I *want* to do, instead of this thing that I have to do." So I talked it over with Arnie, I pulled it together, and I did a countdown to my birthday. I was going to quit on my birthday as a present to myself. And that was it. Once I had actually made the decision to take a step, it was just a matter of having to work extra hard. I had already sold *Mindplayers* by then, and I was just waiting for it to come out. All the rewriting and everything was done. So, all I had to do was write another proposal and sell another novel. And keep churning out the short stories.

W: How long ago was that?

C: That was in '87. I quit September 10, 1987, when I was thirty-four years old.

W: No looking back, no regrets?

C: No, absolutely not. Absolutely not. I don't wish for the income, because I have enough income. I don't have as much playing money as I had, but turn it around and look at it this way: How much would you pay for *time?* You can get more money, but once the day is gone, that's it. And I don't need a lot of *things*. I don't want to buy a lot of *things*. All I want to do is cover off the stuff I need to cover off. You gotta pay the electric company. You gotta pay the mortgage and stuff like that. Beyond that, the one thing that I want is to be left in peace to do my writing.

W: What about smoking?

C: Yeah. What about that?

W: Well, as a general political sentiment, the wind is blowing against it. Last night you mentioned that it was difficult being in a large corporation where they were starting to dictate to you—

C: They wanted to "alter" me. They said, "We've provided you a place to go and smoke on your breaks, but we're not going to let you go somewhere to work and smoke. So if you can't work without smoking, we'll alter your behavior." Now, I understand why people don't want you to smoke around them. And there were people working around me who didn't care for it. That was fine. So let me go somewhere I won't bother them. But don't tell me you're going to *alter* me. I don't like the psychology behind that. You want to accomplish a good thing, but the motivation behind *that* is not good at all. There's nothing good about it. I had no wish to be altered. If I want to be altered I will alter myself. I don't feel that I should be altered by somebody. I certainly wasn't telling them to alter for me. I don't go around telling people that I will alter them. Not as a general rule. . . .

W: What's all this you were saying? "We need more mean chicks in science fiction!"

C: I guess I feel like I'm one of the original mean chicks, period.

W: You don't seem so mean.

C: No, I guess I'm not so mean. But when I was growing up, it was necessary to be very mean, many times. In that era, in order to get what I wanted—which was just a *fair chance*— I had to . . . 1969, 1970 . . . I graduated from high school in 1970, so, 1969. I was sixteen years old. I wanted to take calculus and trigonometry and physics. I put that down on my course list and they put me in Latin IV, French III, and Home Fucking Economics! Because they knew I had a boyfriend and they figured that I was going to get pregnant. So I was going to need Home Economics and, god knows, French III. So I wouldn't embarrass the guy I would be forced to marry—*to give my child a name*—at cocktail parties where he'd

have his career and I was just his wifey. Well, yeah, I had a steady boyfriend, but I had absolutely no intention of getting pregnant and getting married at any time in the foreseeable future. I knew that as soon as I graduated from high school that was probably going to be *it* for *us*. That was a high school thing. I was going to get myself in *college*. I was going to get myself *a life*. And so I stomped into the office and demanded a change. They changed it very reluctantly because they said I didn't have a good background for trigonometry and calculus and physics. I said, "I *do* have a good background. I don't have great grades, but it's only because I had rotten teachers."

The next day I walked into the trig and calculus class. There were four girls in it, counting me. Four women. The next class was physics and I was the *only female* there. They thought it was going to be *boys' playtime*, where they'd be able to say fuck and shit in class. The teacher was a guy and he'd *just* graduated from college and this was his first job. He was twenty-two. And they didn't want me there. They did *not* want the girl.

W: I would have thought—

C: This is *1969* and you have to cast your mind back to a small Massachusetts town. My mother would take me to these social gatherings where all the guys would go off together and all the women would go into the kitchen to make potato salad, and this was the social life.

So, anyway, they just really did not want me there; they

wanted me to drop the class. I said, "No. I'm *staying*. I *want* to learn physics and I'm *going* to learn physics." The first few labs we had, they did all the stuff and they wouldn't let me do anything. I really had to fight for my place there. The guys didn't like it because women weren't supposed to compete with men. Women were supposed to do their thing and let the guys achieve. That made me a real mean chick. I was going against the accepted grain. I got a lot of hostility from the guys, but not *all* the guys. And it wasn't that the guys who weren't hostile wanted to date me or anything. There were a couple of guys who were kind of enlightened. They were okay. But most of them were your basic kind of high school detritus. You just *knew* that when they graduated they were going to look back on these years as the *best years of their lives*.

We'd hear that from teachers. They'd say, "These are the best years of your lives." And I'd sit at my desk in class and think, *These are the* best *years of my life? Jesus, take me now—I got nothin' left to live for!* I thought, *My god, get me outta here! Scotty, beam me up—I'll be on* Star Trek. *I'll be* anywhere *but here.*

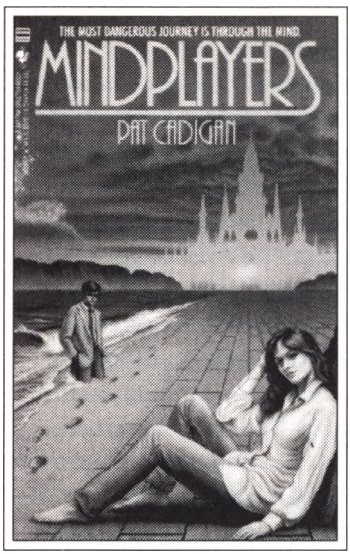
So, finally, by the end of the year, nobody was gonna get in my face. Some of them really did hate me. But others grudgingly decided to treat me like another guy. Then, later on—a couple of years later, I'd see them on campus or something (some of them went to the same college I did)—a lot of them said, "I really admired your nerve, your staying in class in the face of all that hostility." And I'd say, "I wasn't there for *you*. I was there for *physics*. I was there for *me*. I really didn't give a shit if you wanted me there or not." And that made me a mean chick, 'cause I didn't give a shit. A female in those days was not supposed to exceed; they were supposed to *submit*.

W: Assume *the position*.

C: Yeah, I gotta *position* for ya, pal.

W: Traditionally, the view of publishing is of an industry dominated by white, middle class men. That seems to be changing. Increasingly, a lot of the editors and people who make decisions are women. What do you think about that?

C: Well, you know, that's funny. That brings up something interesting that I've noticed. When I started writing the stories that eventually led to *Mindplayers*, some people cautioned me about *women* stories. Women protagonists with women's problems. [They said,] "You don't want to get typed as a *women's writer* because men won't read you." Then, *Mindplayers* came out. And I can tell every time there's a new edition of *Mindplayers* because the fan mail starts again. *Every piece* of fan mail I've gotten has been from men who like Allie, like the characters and like my work—and are *familiar* with my work—and they're not writing to me under the impression that Pat Cadigan is a *guy*. So that kind of gives the lie to that *women's writer* thing.



W: The first one or two stories of yours that I read, I thought that Pat Cadigan was a guy. Then again, I also used to think that Kim Stanley Robinson was a woman!

C: Yeah, well there you go. A lot of us writers with androgynous names seem to have an androgynous perspective. It's not just that, though. The whole perspective is changing, anyway.

W: That's what I was getting at. Do you feel like you have to be a mean chick anymore?

C: Actually, when I was starting out, I never had to be all that aggressive. A lot of that trail was blazed for me by people like Andre Norton and Judith Merrill and C.L. Moore, Kate Wilhelm, Joanna Russ. They fought the hard fight, and then we came in—people like Connie Willis and Cynthia Felice, Karen Joy Fowler, Pat Murphy, all of us—we didn't

have to fight a lot of the battles that the other women writers did.

W: But you mentioned that there was some concern, at least with *Mindplayers*, about the female protagonist, and so on.

C: Yeah. It was *still* the conventional wisdom that men don't read "women books." And that's just not true. Not a bit true. Anyone who says that is wrong. They're looking at the wrong statistics and the wrong demographics. It's not so, anymore.

W: I don't know that it ever was. It may have been a self fulfilling prophecy.

C: If it ever was so, it isn't so now. I meet a lot of people, men and women readers, who tell me that I am one of their favorite writers. And of course, that's very gratifying to hear from *anybody*. But I'm maybe a tiny bit amazed when I hear it from a *guy*. Particularly maybe a guy who's ten years younger than I am. But guys who are ten years younger than I am are like twenty-six years old, and they grew up in an entirely different society than I did. There was a woman at work who told me that she has a friend who has a fifteen year old son. And one night the late show was running *The Stepford Wives*. So they watched *The Stepford Wives* together, this woman and her fifteen year old son, and afterwards she asked him, "What'd you think?" And the son said, "I don't get it." And she said, "What don't you get?" And he said, "I don't know any women who are like the Stepford wives. I don't know *anybody* who's like that."

W: Even in Kansas?

C: Oh, god, in Kansas, women have been in business for ages. Kansas is, surprisingly, one of the most enlightened states. It was one of the first states to legalize abortion. We have Nancy Landon Kasselbaum in Kansas, and Elizabeth Dole. We have a lot of women in business, we have a lot of women executives—

W: I was thinking of Kansas as being in the Bible Belt,

where a lot of fundamentalists might think that a subservient role for women has been ordained by God, as written literally into the Bible. But that's more a function of the era in which the Bible was authored than it is of the will of God, if you ask me.

C: I also happen to know a lot of women that I met at Hallmark, women of my mother's generation or slightly younger, who have synthesized an odd compromise with that. They are basically of fundamental, very conservative persuasions—there's a large Mormon population—and I worked with a number of Mormon women in their forties and fifties who had had long careers at Hallmark. Working women who had somehow achieved a balance that was compatible with their standard, conservative, traditional views of a woman's role, combined with the satisfaction of having a career. And these were very ambitious women, not women who believed in the Mommy Track, either. These were women who were planning to be executives. And eventually did become executives.

W: Have you always been with one publisher?

C: Yeah, but I haven't been selling novels all that long. I sold my first book to Shawna McCarthy at Bantam, and now I have a two book contract with Bantam. They're the only publisher I've worked for on books. I've sold to anthologies from other publishers.

W: Now, with your collection, *Patterns*, was that something you offered to Bantam and they turned down, or . . .

C: They haven't turned down doing a paperback, yet. There were a number of publishers interested in doing *Patterns*, but Jim Loehr got that one. Jim Loehr and I are longtime friends. He's Arnie's partner on Ursus [Books]. Years and years ago, when we young and hungry, he wanted to be a small press publisher and I wanted to be a professional writer. We'd sit down and have drinks together and he'd say, "Someday I'm going to be a publisher and I'm going to publish your book!" And, *ta-da!*, it happened.

W: I didn't mean to imply at all that there was anything

about the book that made it hard to get it published. But usually there is some reticence among publishers about doing single author collections.

C: Yeah, it's very difficult. As soon as you start to market a single author collection, you hear, "Well, they don't sell." That's not a totally unfair consideration. If you do a lot of things that don't sell, you're not going to be in business and that's not going to benefit anybody.

W: Yes, but I wonder how good a rule of thumb it is to say that "single author collections don't sell." Perhaps there ought to be some further judgment exercised about the sales potential for your collection versus some other author's collection. I'm thinking about *Howard Who?* [Howard Waldrop's first collection, from Doubleday] going out of print in about a week. Not trouble selling *that* one! Authors like Howard and yourself have established your reputations primarily as short story writers, and your collections ought to do well compared to someone who is best known for novels, but who wants to collect together a bunch of lesser short stories for his own gratification.

C: Well, I guess if our names were Stephen King, there wouldn't be any question about it. However, I'm willing to bet that Stephen King's single author collections do not sell as *well* as Stephen King's novels. The *one* thing I *don't have*, I don't have my finger on the pulse of the book-buying public. I haven't gone around asking people "What do you prefer, a book of short stories or a novel?"

W: But an answer to a question like that may not be meaningful. What is much more meaningful is, that when looking at a rack of books in a bookstore, picking things up and leafing through them, reading bits here and there, what do they end up *paying* for? They may have a *stated* preference for novels, but it may be the case that when they see a short story collection by someone they like, they buy it.

C: People do tend to buy *names*. Readers do have their favorite authors, who write their favorite type of fiction.

Personally, I *like* single author collections, and I *like* anthologies. 'Cause you get a whole bunch of different types of things. When I was starting to write short stories, what I aspired to do was to make each story good enough to be in a Judith Merrill *Best of the Year* anthology. 'Cause I loved those so much—it was science fiction and fantasy and horror and slipstream at the absolute top of its form, it was state of the art, it was the *best* it could do. I would read through these things and her selections were *so varied.* Judith Merrill anthologies were not *one note* anthologies. There were so many different types of things. You might not care for all that were in there, but there was something for everybody, certainly.

W: Your stories get collected quite often in the various *Best of the Year* anthologies. Pretty consistently, in fact.

C: I thought, if you want to be good enough for a Judith Merrill anthology, you'd better be able to write science fiction *and* fantasy *and* horror, and you'd better be able to do all of that real well. Well, that's fine, because I wouldn't want to write just one kind of story all the time. So I taught myself how to write science fiction *and* fantasy *and* horror, with varying degrees of success.

W: Do you write for yourself, or do you have a particular audience in mind?

C: Oh, I feel that I'm part of an audience. So I guess I write for people who read the same types of things that I like to read, which could be characterized by the Judith Merrill anthologies.

W: Now, let's get personal. Last night you made a joke about either forgetting to bring along pictures of your kid, or forgetting your underwear, and there was that story ["It Was the Heat"] in *Tropical Chills* where your character goes out drinking at a convention and realizes she's forgotten to wear any underwear. Are you drawing on personal experience in these and in other details that show up in your work?

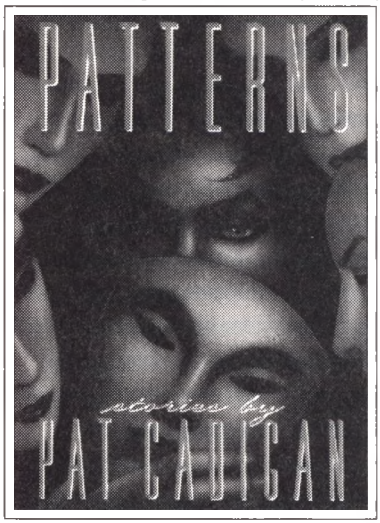
C: In fact, I have *never* forgotten my underwear. I *have* on occasion drawn on personal experience for my stories.

Most of the time, it's very masked. A few times, I have used direct personal experience. One of the stories in *Patterns*, "My Brothers Keeper," is one of the most autobiographical things I've ever done.

W: But you don't have a brother.

C: No, I don't have a brother, I didn't have a brother who was a junkie. But the stuff about driving around in the car, shooting up, spraying the water out the window from the hypodermic syringe to clean 'em for the junkies—and hitting a police car—that happened. That was back in Massachusetts. I went home for a weekend with this gal I knew. She had been into junk for a long time, and she had these friends. A very interesting person, in a lot of ways. Just *brilliant.* Absolutely brilliant. They'd warned me in high school I was going to meet the most brilliant people I'd ever meet in my life, in college, and they were right. I met all kinds of brilliant people and they had all kinds of problems of various complexities and degrees. Her particular problem happened to be junk. I didn't feel scared, or anything, going home with her, because I was from a pretty bad neighborhood myself. But that was really my first contact with hard-core junk. I changed a few things. The character telling the story in the story is not me. I didn't put a mask on myself. That isn't me. It's a character in the story. I don't have a brother. But I did use stuff that actually happened to me. People did come up to me and say, "You know, I read this story and it was so disturbing. I'd like to ask you how much you know about *this*." And I'd say, "Yeah, I know about that. It happened a real long time ago, and it stuck with me." I started the story years ago, and every now and then I'd take it out and work on it. Between drafts of *Mindplayers*, I didn't have to work on *Mindplayers* but I had to work on something, 'cause I still had a lot of momentum, the generator was still running. I don't like to waste that. So I finished four things in a row, during that time: "My Brothers Keeper," "Two," "Angel," and I can't remember which was the fourth one. They were all living in my fragment box. Things that I've started but I can't get any

further with them, or don't have time to finish, I just put them away as is, and then just drag 'em out again. What I did was just go through my fragment box and pull out stuff I was really interested in. That was one of them. Something that I did change was the fifteen-year-old kid. The real kid was a twelve year old. And he actually didn't ride around in the car with us. That was somebody else. But he *wanted* to. He got talking to his girlfriend or something, so somebody else went with us. We were looking for somebody. They were just looking to score some more stuff. And they did and everybody in the car shot up. That was when I started getting nervous, 'cause the driver did, too. I thought, *Geez, if everybody passes out I'm gonna be stuck in the middle of the street here.* 'Cause I didn't drive. It was strange. There was stuff that happened on that drive that I left out completely. Because it lengthened the story and I had to stop there or it just became a description of riding around in a car with a bunch of junkies. So I cut it down. There had been things I was trying to do with the story, and I didn't know what I wanted to to do with it, and I didn't know the *point* of the story all the way up until the end, when the last couple of lines just popped out. But I didn't have any idea where the story was leading until I finished it. I'm real fond of that story. It was a lot of work. When it was done, it was one of the few times when I felt I had gotten it down exactly the way it was supposed to be and said exactly what I wanted to say.



W: What about your own experimentation with drugs?

C: Whoah, I don't know if I should talk about that while

my mother's alive. She'll just faint. This could kill her. I've never had a drug problem, but I had one very wild semester in college where I did a lot of stuff. Mostly of a hallucinogenic nature.

W: Mushrooms?

C: There weren't a lot of mushrooms around. It was mostly the pill stuff. I never had a fascination with needles at all. I did not have *any* desire to shoot up. It was about all I could do to keep from throwing up in the car. These were people who were willingly putting needles into themselves! It's probably what saved me from becoming a junkie.

W: Hunting for the vein . . .

C: They were. It was like [grimacing with revulsion] *wugh! ughh! Oooh, oooh, oooh!* And *I* didn't want to take a blood test! When I was five, I had heart surgery, to correct this congenital defect. And, oh boy, there are a *lot* of needles connected with heart surgery. I remember my mother did her best to prepare me for what was going to happen. She told me what had to be done. I was pretty healthy for someone who had gone that long with that defect. Normally they find out when you're a baby and they correct it then. And I was way over the age when it would have been detected. You could hear it. It was the type of thing that you could *hear*. I seemed to be really healthy except that I caught a lot of colds. So my mother talked to the cardiac surgeon who said, "We have to do this operation." And she said, "She seems to be pretty healthy; are you sure we have to do this?" And he said, "Someday, she's going to get a bad cold, and she'll *die*." So she said, "I guess we're gonna do that." I said, "Is it going to hurt?" And she said, "Like a *bastard*." The one thing I wasn't prepared for finding out I was going to be hooked up to a heart-lung machine when I woke up. I had a tube coming out of my rib cage. I wasn't ready for *that*. That was *freaky*. I figured they just forgot to tell me.

W: That established your cyberpunk interest in the man-machine interface.

C: I woke up and I was a *cyborg*. And I was *drugged!* I was

high *a lot*. And I saw a lot of *strange things*. I didn't know what had happened to me at the time. I didn't find out for years that it's what's called a Near Death Experience. I had died. I investigated it later and I can't remember what-all it is, but I've got a lot of notes on it. It's a certain area of your brain that just starts *jumping around* when you die. Everyone pretty much has similar, if not identical, hallucinations at that point.

W: Well, that's the *biochemical* explanation. It assumes the experience is manufactured and not genuine.

C: Yeah, it's a biochemical reaction. You see certain things from it. Most people see the same kinds of things. You float above yourself, you see yourself. I thought I woke up during surgery. So, I suppose my experiments later—I call them "experiments," but I got high, I got stoned—my experimentation with drugs was probably looking to get as high as I'd gotten before. Probably trying to see if I could recreate the experience without having to actually check out.

W: Any success?

C: I can't say that I ever had an Out Of Body Experience, but I saw some pretty interesting shit.

W: There was a school in Virginia for a while where supposedly they would train you to have an Out Of Body Experience.

C: Oh, yeah. Sure, Jack! And I bet there's another place where you can buy beachfront property near *my* house. Come *on*. I'll go for the fact that they're gonna teach you to take a little tour of the inside of your mind. But I don't—I'm not especially mystical in that area.

W: You're not big on New Age consciousness, the metaphysics of it?

C: In terms of *Do I think I can leave my body and travel to other dimensions and channel Ramtha?* Absolutely not.

W: What about effecting or creating change simply by *wanting* to?

C: If you use that as a stepping stone to motivation to actually getting off your ass and doing something, yeah.

But I wouldn't say that you can sit around thinking *world peace, world peace, save the dolphins*, and have that come about without moving on it in some way. You're not gonna save the dolphins until you tell the tuna companies that are killing them with their nets to knock it off or you're not going to buy their goddamned tuna.

W: But there *is* this "squish-head conspiracy" to bring *soft science* into the sector which has always been reserved for hard science. I personally have a lot of problems with that, but a lot of people surprisingly don't. They're willing to accept what I would regard as farcically absurd.

C: Yeah, and I think we're going to see a lot more of that in the next decade as the odometer starts to go 'round to triple zero in the year 2000. People don't think of that as the arbitrary numbering system that it is. They think, *When it's 2000, Jesus's gonna come and* will *he be pissed!* Or whatever. Naturally, people do tend to look for *the* answer. But there isn't *the* answer. There's a whole bunch of things that could possibly lead to being a solution, but there isn't *the* answer. When I was talking about my friend Tom, before, and *Gödel, Escher, Bach*, and what eventually became cyberpunk topics, we talked about pre-millenial madness. How much real laughable stuff are you going to see in the 1990s as we count down, because people think it's going to be The Rapture. Or whatever their personal pet theory is. You might see a lot of that. People suddenly having these bizarre conversion experiences. I think conversion experiences may become more common because ideas are contagious. I've seen a couple of people that I would have characterized as real sensible and down to earth get sucked into strange kinds of Born Again Christianity cum New Age cum god knows what that is. Almost cultish, or outright cultish. In one way, I can see it can become very tiring being out there every day and having to face moral dilemmas when you can join a cult and have all your decisions made *for* you. I can understand that type of fatigue, but when you have *all* your decisions made for you, you have *all your decisions* made *for* you.

Including when you can eat, and when you can sleep, and when you can have sex and how many times and who with. And I don't think that was really what they had in mind.

W: You mean the supplicant.

C: Yeah, the supplicant.

W: Certainly, I think the organized religions have that in mind. I think they want a little piece of you because then they'll get all of you, eventually. That's always their idea.

[A break while we move from the bar to the restaurant]

W: You seem to know Ellen [Datlow, fiction editor for *Omni*] pretty well.

C: I can count on Ellen to be absolutely and totally honest with me about my work. The first story I sold to *Omni* was "Vengeance Is Yours." I mentioned in the introduction [to that story in *Patterns*] that working on the revisions for that story took me up another level as a writer.

W: Based on what her requests were?

C: Yeah, and the reasons given and what I had to do to fulfill those requests.

W: People seem to like her editing. Nobody seems to be rebellious about her, even where she's been said to have asked for repeated rewrites of a story.

C: There were a couple of times when we didn't see eye to eye on things. It was usually a story that she didn't want. Even when she returned stories to me that she didn't like—either because they weren't right for *Omni* or because of whatever reasons of her own—she would offer certain suggestions about them. Even though she knew they were going to another market. She'd say this is the way I feel, or I don't like this story, or I'm not going to buy this story *because* . . . and then she'd go into "you know, I think over *here* maybe you should've done *this*," or "over here I don't see *why* you need to do *that*," and so on and so forth. And sometimes I would read it and think, *yeah, she's right about that*, and sometimes I'd think,

no, I think the story really needs to be this way. But she really helped me as a writer a lot when I was working on "Vengeance Is Yours." After that I was selling a *lot* more. Because I was doing it *right* the first time, more often. Even if I had to end up doing revisions for Ellen or any other editor, I was selling a lot more after working on "Vengeance Is Yours" and learned a few things about fiction. I could have gone to writers' workshops or taken writing courses forever before I'd found out some of those things. There's really nothing like good advice from a working editor in the business.

She's such an *honest* person. She's absolutely frank. She's *incapable* of telling a lie. I just absolutely depend on that. It's like "friends don't let friends drive drunk." That sort of thing? It's like, if you're a real friend you don't let your friend walk around with spinach on her teeth—you *tell her!* She's got dirt under her eyes?—you *tell her!* Whatever. She's wearing the wrong colors?—you *tell her!* Those are your *real* friends.

W: Your name is going on this story and it's going out to the world. It may be good enough, but if it could be better, it *should* be better.

C: I depend on that from all my editors. And fortunately, they're all *more* than happy to come across with the honesty.

W: What would you say is the hardest thing about writing, about making it happen, getting it realized and put down on paper?

C: Oh. The problem is different with every story. There're some things that are incredibly easy with some stories, then I go to do the same thing in another story and it's not easy at all 'cause it's a different problem to solve. The same fixes, the same techniques don't work for every story. Every story is a new universe—even if the story is set in the same universe.

W: Do you find it tiring to write?

C: Sometimes. But, you know, there are times when I fly through what I'm writing. There's a story that's not in the collection, it's called "The Coming of the Doll," which is

an idea that occurred to me all of a piece, all at once. I sat down and I made one false start, wrote maybe a couple of sentences and threw the piece of paper away, and then that was it. I just wrote it straight through on one take. It took about as long to write it out in longhand as it took me to run it through the typewriter. I sold it to Ed Ferman [*The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*]. It's a story that I like very much. It's psychological horror. It's very strange, it's not very long, but it's not a short-short, either.

W: So writing comes easily to you?

C: Well, that time it did. But that's not the usual thing.

Primarily a writer of short fiction, it can sometimes be difficult to track down Pat Cadigan's stories. Here is a list of *books* a diligent reader might be able to find in bookstores and libraries. [Titles containing *only* stories collected in *Patterns* are not shown. This is not an exhaustive bibliography by any stretch of the imagination.]

Patterns
(1989, Ursus)
Blood Is Not Enough
(1989, Dutton) Ellen Datlow, ed.
***Wild Cards* (#s 2 & 5)**
(1988, Bantam Spectra) George R.R. Martin, ed.
Mindplayers
(1987, Bantam Spectra)
Fears
(1983, Doubleday) Charles L. Grant, ed.
Space Of Her Own
(1983, Davis) Shawna McCarthy, ed.
Berkley Showcase 4
(1981, Berkley) Victoria Schochet & John Silbersack, eds.
New Dimensions 11
(1980, Pocket) Marta Randall & Robert Silverberg, eds.

Also, Pat Cadigan's work is frequently chosen for "Best of the Year" anthologies, where one or two stories not collected in *Patterns* can be found.

W: Is the first draft usually relatively easy and the painful part sets in with the fine tuning, rewriting certain passages and asking yourself questions about why this is here and that isn't there?

C: Sometimes. Once again, that's idiosyncratic to the story. Sometimes the first draft is almost effortless, and then the fixing part is like, I know what I've done wrong, and I know what needs to be done, but I'm not sure how to go about it. I'm not sure how to get from A to B. And then sometimes, even getting a word down is excruciating because I know that I can put down any old word I want because as long as I've got it there I can rewrite it, but you can't rewrite what you don't have. Even though I know that, it can be really hard to just get the story down. It's like one of the stories that is in *Patterns*, "The Day the Martels Got the Cable." I started to write that one day and I knew the story, I knew everything. But I couldn't write it. It just wouldn't come out. So I forced out the first couple of paragraphs so that I would know what it was when I came back to it, and put it away for a while. Then later on I was ready to write the story. But that was a very strange experience, having the whole thing there, having the whole idea, and not being able to work on it. Later on I became experienced enough to know that when that happens to me, it means that my mind is actually at work on something else and I have an unfinished task that I really cannot let *go* to go work on something else. It's not *time* to work another story, it's time to work on something different.

W: Well, there's got to be something subconscious going on in order for you to discover that you "have" the whole story all at once.

C: Oh, sure. I'm sure that there was stuff cooking away but I wasn't paying any attention to it. And sometimes that's really best. I did a short interview on local Kansas television and one of the questions that was asked was whether I'd ever had the experience that some writers talk about where a character takes over. And that kind of happened with "Angel," where

that quirky, funny little narrator character took over. I had gotten stuck on that story over and over again at the same point. I started to write that story maybe six or seven years before it appeared. I'd played every trick on myself trying to finish that thing. I wrote it all out longhand, and I forced an ending onto it, but it was a "nothing happened, what was the point of this?" But I thought, now I've got it, I can go back and rewrite it. So I went back and rewrote it all the way up to the same point and I couldn't even rewrite the mess that I'd made of the ending. So I thought, I know what I'll do, I'll trick myself into believing that the story *is* done; now I'll type up the submission draft. I thought I'd fool myself into suddenly having an ending flower on me. The idea would blossom because I thought I was done. But I was not going to be fooled by that, either. My mind said, sorry, I still don't have it. At that point I was so disgusted that I tore the last sheet that I'd typed out of the typewriter and I tore the whole submission draft into confetti and threw it away. And then, years later, like I said before with "My Brother's Keeper," I was between drafts of *Mindplayers*. I wrote one thing, and then another, and then I thought, *you know, I could probably write "Angel" now*. So I went looking for the submission draft, forgetting that I had actually torn the fucker up and thrown it away. Finally, I went through my fragments box I think half a dozen times, until something cued the memory of *tearing*, and I was *horrified* at myself. It was as if it was not even *me*, it was like, *what demon possessed you to do that?* Cadigan's First Law is, "Never throw anything away." You can tell by the state my office is in. And I still have my tonsils and appendix! *Never throw anything away*. Fortunately, I still had the handwritten drafts. But by then I had my computer with my word processing program and that made my life *extremely* easy.

W: What do you use?

C: I bought a Leading Edge word processor. When you buy a Leading Edge computer, they throw in for free the Leading Edge word processor. I'm not a computer person and I

haven't any background in computers or anything, so what I wanted was a word processor I could learn in a couple of hours in the morning and have a regular workday by five o'clock when I turn everything off. And that's what it is. It doesn't have a lot of bells and whistles. It's a lot like typing, only *much much easier.* If I had not had my word processor I would not have been able to finish my first novel and work a full-time job.

W: Does it change the way you write—*what* you write?

C: No. It just makes everything faster. There's so much less physical labor involved that I don't tire as easily as I used to. I can go on and on and on and *on.* If I want to. Lots of time I *do* want to, and my shoulders don't bunch up anymore the way you do when you're sitting at a typewriter. It was just infinitely easier. It was a little bit awkward at first, but I got used to it. I like the idea that if I want to transpose two paragraphs, it doesn't require me to type them again.

So, anyway, after many years I put "Angel" onto my computer, and I had matured enough as a writer that at last I could achieve the ending.

W: The character took over?

C: What I had been doing was letting the character take over all the way up to that point, but then I'd suddenly be interfering with the character. And I was smart enough to listen to the inner commentary in my head at that point, about what was going on. The character was saying, "*I'll* handle this. Just *stay* out of it. You just sit back and watch and *I'll* handle this." And that was finally why I was able to get to the end.

W: Let's talk a little bit *Synners.* It's about artificial realities, right?

C: It's like this paper that Kim Fairchild, Gary Knight, and I are talking about doing. Gary was saying, "If you have an artificial reality you can be anything you want to be, or be any*one* you want to be, in any place that you choose." And I said, "I should send you a copy of my manuscript because in *Synners* there are Wannabe Parlors." Hollywood releases are reformatted for the Wannabe trade. You can be anyone in the movie

that you wanna be. You have to go into the Wannabe Parlor because they'll be released there first. Then it'll be licensed for home consumption. But maybe you don't have the right kind of equipment hooked up to your data line, maybe you can't afford the head-mounted monitor and the format interface the full-coverage hot suit that you need to take full advantage of a Wannabe release. And some of them are probably more expensive than others because they're more in demand. Just like video cassettes of prerecorded movies are now.

So, you go off to the Wannabe Parlor and rent time there. And you can maybe make a recording of it. There's an extra charge to make a recording to take home and *play* on your regular plain old vanilla flavored head-mounted set—you can't interact with it but you can relive it. Like home movies—home movies of yourself as you wanna be.

One of the other things in *Synners* is that the networks are through. There are no more networks. What you have is a multi-channel data line. There's a wide variety of channels but there's no variety with*in* a channel. It's like the Weather Channel, the Local News Channel, the Regional News Channel, the National News Channel, the International News Channel. That sort of thing. And then there's porn. There's sex porn. There's food porn.

W: *Food* porn?

C: There's food porn. There's tech-fantasy porn. There's clothing porn. There's prison porn. Whatever it is, there's a *porn* angle to it. To me, *The National Enquirer* is like news porn. *The Midnight Tattler*, or whatever it is, is like real hard-core news porn, whereas the *The National Enquirer* is really more soft porn.

So, two characters are talking and one says, "Did you know that sixty-five percent of all new channels on the data line are porn now?" The other one says, "Where'd you get those figures? News porn?" And of course a tabloid would know. That's the general idea. There's war porn, there's disaster porn. This one character finds himself drugged out and in a

penthouse. He discovers that somehow he has managed to put the disaster porn channel on, and he's stuck watching the twenty-five worst air crashes in history series on TV because he's too 'luded out, basically, to get up and change the channel, and he can't decide what he's going to put on there instead. So he's just kind of *not* watching it.

I don't think that this idea is particularly original; it just occurred to me.

W: As if you'd thought up a product for Hallmark, though.

C: Yeah, love porn, Mother's Day porn.

W: What they need to do is invent a holiday like Porn Day, where everyone has to do something pornographic. With a greeting card, of course, to announce your intentions!

C: Well, in the hyper-marketed *Synners* world *everything* is hyper-marketed. Audience intensive. It doesn't really matter how small or large an audience so long as you *have* one. And that's why you can sustain something like a hundred million channels on this amorphous mass that I'm calling the data line. The *info* line—tv when *you're* ready for it. It downloads things to show you later. They're experimenting with that idea at the M.I.T. Media Lab; I got the ideas out of Stewart Brand's book [*The Media Lab: Inventing the Future at MIT*]. Eventually someone is going to tip to the fact that it is far more practical than making sure that someone is home at seven o'clock to watch *Cosby*. Instead, make it possible to watch *Cosby* whenever you want. But that eliminates competition. You don't have programs competing for time slot because there is no such thing as a time slot anymore. Then you have to ask, "Well, how are you going to get sponsors?" It's a whole new set of problems. They're clinging to this method of working and it is dying in their fingers.

I kind of saw the beginning of the end— I keep telling people this. Someday, someone is going to say, "Pat, you've said this on sixteen panels and we're tired of hearing it." Well, I'm going to say it again. It's my interview and I'll repeat myself if I want to. The Weather Channel is the death knell of

the networks. When I first heard of it I thought it was *really* funny. I thought, *One channel, twenty-four hours a day, devoted to the weather—gee, I bet a* lot *of people are staying in on Saturday nights to watch* that! And then I had to go to another part of the country for a convention and the first thing I did was check out that part of the country on the Weather Channel. *Damn!* Then, I'd miss the local weather forecast, so I'd put on the Weather Channel 'cause you know that every four minutes it's going to come up. So, no, people *aren't* staying home on Saturday nights to watch the Weather Channel because they can get it any time they want.

W: As the requirement for large audiences diminishes, the channels of distribution become increasingly available to individuals, and not just well-funded entities like multi-national corporations.

C: Yeah, but there're always drawbacks. One of the things in *Synners* is that, all right, people *have* these dedicated channels where they can get all this information but the catch is you have to know *how* the information is *filed.* This is a direct outgrowth of my experience at Hallmark. We used to keep all our greeting cards on file—the sentiments were on specially formatted index cards with special lines for us to enter when they'd been used, when they went into the stores, when they came out again, when we stopped using them and when we started again and so on. So they said, "We're going into the twentieth century now, we're going to put it all on computers." Billions and billions of greeting cards were going on to computers. And rather than hire a firm that would take a hundred years to do it, they decided that

everybody took a stack of cards that were stapled to special things that gave their serial numbers and everything, and you took them home with a list of categories. They were going to categorize the cards to make it easy for the people who were going to input them into the computer. You had to put them into their proper categories. And *some* people cared a *lot* less about filing them properly than others. So you had Easter cards that turned up in the General Wish category, General Wish Birthday sentiments. Cross-filing sentiments that had been rewritten between captions—a To Mother card that had been rewritten For Father should have been cross-referenced as the same card, but it would turn up in two different places as two different cards. Lots of ghosts, phantoms, and misfilings. Tons of things were misfiled. The problem was so bad that the computerization became practically useless. The flip side of that was they would change the filing, they would add things and we wouldn't know about it. We wouldn't know where to look for a certain card. We wouldn't know where the original caption had been, so we couldn't look up the proper cross-reference. So, when I was editing cards and I needed to look at a broad range of sentiments to put on these different cards, I'd enter all these things, I'd tell the computer what I needed and it would come up blank. And I *knew* that was wrong; I knew that there were sentiments that fit into this particular category, and I'd have to truck out to the file cabinet and look the fucker up by hand. Just like I always had before we got computers. So, in *Synners*, people are looking for information that they need, but there's a certain amount of ignorance on their part of where to look for it.

W: Is this meant to create an aspect of desperation in the book, or humor?

C: Humor. It's incidental humor in the fact that they've got so much information, yet they're still ignorant.

W: This is a semi-near-future novel. Do you agonize over the extrapolation?

C: [Here is] my favorite hypothetical story that might have

happened, and possibly did but doesn't seem to have, on the dangers of predicting the future on a straight line. Imagine you're an aspiring science fiction writer living in a commune on Haight Ashbury in 1967. The Summer of Love. Music is going to transform the world. *Love* is going to end the war and transform the world. Make love not war. A revolution is going to sweep the country and all that. All because of the anti-war movement, rock and roll, and marijuana. You smoke a lot of dope and you try to write a lot and maybe you're a little short on ideas. And then, one night you wake up in the middle of the night not really because you've had a *nightmare*, but you kind of woke up and you're dozing, trying to get back to sleep, when this idea pops into your head for a story. And it's so *horrifying*, it's a *repulsive* idea, but at the same time it's terribly compelling. You have to get up *right then* and go to the little space where you write, and *write this story*. So you start working on it, and you keep working on it for days until finally it's finished. And it postulates that twenty years in the future, by 1987, this terrible disease has surfaced. It's a venereal disease that is spread by sexual contact *and* (you figure this out and are real proud of yourself for doing it) blood transfusions and intravenous drugs. It is one hundred percent fatal. It is this disfiguring, horrible disease from which there is no appeal and no escape. It first seems to appear in the third world. And it quickly spreads to the gay male community. And, of course, to the intravenous drug users. And this is an epidemic. A conservative's *dream*. It's an Archie Bunker wish-fulfillment retribution dream. All those hippies, those free-love people, *get theirs*. They get a venereal disease that kills them.

You show this story that you've written around the commune and they're just *repelled* by what you've written. They accuse you of being a closet uptight conservative Republican. They tell you that you're *racist*, you're *sexist*, you're a *homophobe*. You should try to understand your gay brothers and sisters instead of putting down their lifestyle. Don't knock it if you haven't tried it. And you will *never* get laid again. Not today.

Not tomorrow. Not ever again.

Who would have thought that? In 1967, if you were predicting the future in a straight line from where you were sitting in a Haight Ashbury commune, that *isn't* what you would have predicted. And certainly not a swing back towards conservativism.

You can agonize and extrapolate like hell, but the chances are still good you'll wake up someday in the future and say, "Wait a minute . . . how the fuck did I get *here?*"

commentary

Michael A. Banks

THROUGH THE WIRE

I've finished writing this, and I'm still asking myself, how can I introduce *this* topic? Give you a reading list? A step-by-step walkthrough? Blast out with descriptions spiked with provocative metaphors? Hm . . . nope, none of the above. Let's try this:

"There's a place . . . in my mind . . . " So go the lines of an old Beatles tune. It's a tune that many modem users (aka computer "networkers") might sing as they sign on to their favorite online services, because they are indeed going to a place in their mind—albeit a place that exists in part because of and in/on computers. A place that exists as a true multi-human/multi-machine interface.

Right. The human-machine interface is here. Now. It's not waiting for scalp connects and nerve or brainwave inductance devices, nor is it waiting for drug-enhancement or for *you*. While you're imagining it, a few hundred thousand people are doing it, *living* it—living online lives that mirror or are distortions of their real-world existences (or lives that are what they would like to be). As you read this, gigabytes of information are quietly moving at near-lightspeed via telephone lines and satellite downlinks.

With the movement of that information, worlds and personas are created and die every second.

And it's virtually nothing like the seers and science fiction writers and cultural predictionists tried to tell you it would be. While public- or self-appointed gurus in the aforementioned categories were carefully laying out the online world, the people they thought they were writing about picked up the tools and parts lying about and created *real* online worlds, linking themselves in a global network that transcends whatever you thought cyberpunk was, along with most of science fiction.

To be sure, the media with which we'll be dealing herein are far less exotic than those marvelous mind-links brought to you in fiction. Screw all that intense poking around in single-vision futures, anyway, for what is fiction but polished reality, preshaped to fit the needs of plot and character and theme?

I'm talking clacking keyboards and computers and modems and online services like GEnie, CompuServe, DELPHI, Bix, etc., and computer BBSs that reside in someone's unused basement or bedroom or den. I'm talking *reality*.

Besides, the destination is the point, and is Nepal any less exotic if you fly there aboard a DC-3 rather than a 747? Think about it.

It's real. It's here. It's now. And it's what this column is all about.

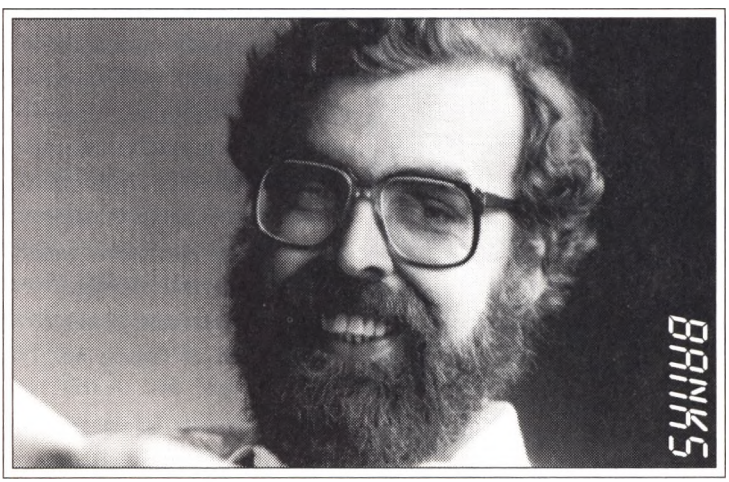
What I'm Doing Here

I'm here to talk about the worlds online—worlds to which many of you reading this are denied access. Which is too bad, because most of you would enjoy being online, where you can be and do virtually anything you wish. You can cruise for software and data of all sorts, meet old friends and make new ones, and the proverbial "much, much more."

Why me? Because A Friend recommended to the editors that I do this, and the editors asked me to do this, both of which I consider compliments. And why not some famous "name" cultural hero or whatever? Because I'm the only person who *can*

write this column. I'm the only fiction and non-fiction writer I know of who uses as many online services as I do (hell, I'm the only *person* I know of who is online in as many places as I am). I like this stuff. I write books and columns and articles about it, and those works are published in the U.S., Japan, Argentina, and the U.K. (In Japan, I'm a "famous American networker and SF author" to *Yomiuri Shimbun*'s 9 million readers, and to readers of various magazines.) I include it in my fiction. And all else like that. (If this indicates something of an ego, well, having an ego is a pre-requisite for getting published. Not that you need an over-inflated, abrasive ego like some writers of my acquaintance. But you gotta have an ego, to be able to present yourself, and this is the only one I have. What you see is what you get.)

What am I going to do with this column? I'll discuss strangeness and facts and oddities and whatever else comes to mind, ever-mindful that *you* are reading this, so I'll work to avoid over-indulging in games of style and technique, hewing to my subject as much as I can. Be warned, though: I'll drop in random blocks of commentary and facts at times, because when I'm writing about this stuff my viewpoint tends to change shape from moment to moment, just because online worlds are that way. Which is no less than appropriate, so pardon my skewed-ness.



Spring 1990

Since this is the first time out, I'm going to try to give you an introduction to and a "feel" for what's online and what's done with it. First, for those of you who aren't online, or who have limited online experience, here's a taste of the strangeness:

> My modem brings strange people and events into my home. No, I mean *really* strange, like you could write a million *genre*-fiction stories about it. Better than *The Naked City* and *The Twilight Zone* and Vernor Vinge's *True Names* all rolled into one. (Oh, add *True Names* to the reading list I'm not giving you.) Far better, because my modem links me to my choice of a bizarro group of worlds beyond the world we physically inhabit—and the access is under my control. I flick through them with almost the same ease as I flick through cable-TV channels, running realtime and multi-level interactive.
>
> These worlds are created almost without limitations by those who inhabit them. Created on computer bulletin boards and online services (networks, to some of you).
>
> Consider . . . in a given week, I might communicate online with pleasant Japanese editors and irate British writers and journalists seeking quotes and avowed transsexuals and rock singers and '60s TV sitcom stars and a West German computer consultant who's willing to spend twenty minutes of international telecom money figuring out what a palindrome is, and a Japanese translator who's equally willing, but never does figure it out (he did come back to get the lowdown on puns); or horny people cruising live-prose accompaniment for masturbation; or Dead-heads and wigged-out role-playing gamers and microcosmic power-trippers and general jerks; or jokers and hackers and voices of reason and maybe even *you*.
>
> Via electronic mail and realtime chatting, on sixteen online services with twenty-odd IDs, I daily flow in and

out of virtual worlds created by people who have one thing in common: they have access to something that maybe you don't. Endless virtual worlds offering endless information resources. And some of them have discovered that the *power* to create worlds in metaphor and sometimes fact is real.

It's interesting, it's fun, it's entertaining, it's absurd, and sometimes it's profitable—as is the case with anything put together by people with almost no guidelines.

Some might be tempted to say being online is participating in a work of art, but that would be bullshit (and it will continue to be bullshit when being online is "discovered" by the Andy Warhol crowd); being online is grabbing and giving and sharing hard information and idle chatter and gossip and intense ideas.

There are similes and metaphors galore for "the online experience," but I'll skip

GETTING ONLINE

If you're completely new to telecomputing (the term I prefer to use in referring to computer or data telecommunications), here's a quick what's what and how-to. (This will be fast and very basic, so pay attention.)

What You Can Do Online

First, the major categories of online activities:

- messaging (public via bulletin boards or message bases, and private via electronic mail)
- realtime conferencing (type to talk, read to "listen")
- file transfer
- online research
- online transactions

Telecomputing Channels

And now, a quick look at the channels of telecomputing. Broadly defined, telecomputing is communication via computer. More specifically, it is the transfer of data between two or more computers. Telecomputing can be as simple as connecting two microcomputers sitting side

those for now, because *none* of them are right on. Skip all the flash-hip glitz cyberpunk that's been zoomed at you, too, and all that silly Frankenstein stuff from the old-line science fiction writers. None of that's going to happen; the closest anyone in speculative literature has gotten to what being online will be in the future, when the high-tech hits its high, is Pat Cadigan, in her novel *Synners*. (And it's damned close. Add it to the non-existent reading list, too. Look for it in '91 from Bantam Spectra.)

(A note for intense science fiction readers: most modem users don't read a lot of sf, so if you're an sf reader don't look for people talking about "jacking in," and don't look for them to recognize the reference if you sign on to a system and tag the realtime conferences "anarchy parks," however appropriate that may be.)

Likewise, skip the "information utility" and "communications medium" and "data resource" stuff laid out in the promo for commercial online services. Despite the fact that someone else owns the hardware and software that make online worlds possible, and have laid out careful designs for those worlds, it is the users who shape those worlds. Why and how? Because those worlds exist in and depend on the interaction of the minds of thousands of modem users. (No—don't hand me any "group mind" concepts; put that stuff over in the corner, in the pile with channeling and crystals. Or, get a modem and find someone who wants to play the game.)

In sum, being online is a 36-hour day communications and information freak out and pig out and party, depending on who you are. And you're invited. (If you want to find out how to R.S.V.P. that invitation and get online, see the *Getting Online* section running alongside the main text, beginning on page 123). And the time dimension really does include a 36-hour day—consider Tokyo, 12 hours or more in your future. . . .

What Are They Doing There? (Or, Why Are They Online?)

Beyond the strangeness I rolled out a few paragraphs back,

you may well wonder exactly what people are doing online, or why. Or maybe not. But I'll tell you anyway; anything that people pay lots of money to do begs explaining. (But it's *all* strange, depending on the context.)

Modem users find all sorts of applications for being online. Friends separated by hundreds or thousands of physical miles can communicate faster and at less cost than via conventional communications media. Agoraphobiacs can mingle and be vivacious. Nervous investors can check and recheck and calculate and have decisions made for them.

What else? You can play formal games, alone or with others. You can play informal games (like adopting a *persona* and seeing how many people you can fool with it, as a substitute for not being the person you want to be in real life). You can stumble into some of the most amazing conversations (fourteen gay males comparing penis length, for instance, or half a dozen role-players bellying up to a virtual bar in a neo-Medieval inn, or an anonymous male teenager

GETTING ONLINE: CONTINUED

by side, or as complex as accessing a mainframe computer several thousand miles away with your personal computer, via a packet switching network computer and telephone lines.

Note that two computers connected in a telecommunications link are distinguished from one another by the terms *local* and *remote*. These terms are strictly relative. From your viewpoint, your personal computer or terminal is the local system, while the computer you dial up is the remote system. To a person who operates a BBS or online service, *his* computer is the local system, while yours is a remote system dialing in.

A modem is required for all but direct connections; any communications via telephone lines require a modem to "translate" computer data into a form that can be transmitted by wire.

Bulletin Board Systems

If you're like most modem users, your first experience with telecomputing will

GETTING ONLINE: CONTINUED

probably be with a local computer bulletin board system (BBS). This is because BBSs are so accessible. They exist in virtually every region of the U.S. and Canada, and usually don't require that a membership or account be set up in advance.

When you call a BBS you have access to a limited—but extremely useful—range of services. On most systems, you can post and read messages, upload and download files, and, in some cases, delete files. Advanced BBSs also offer online games, and nearly all provide for realtime conferences (chats) between the sysop and a user currently online.

Very few BBSs charge for access. Those that do normally charge a nominal annual rate for access—perhaps $20 or so—to cover the cost of a dedicated telephone line and computer equipment.

The majority of calls to a BBS are from the board's local calling area; for obvious reasons, computer users prefer to find what they want

chatting about sex with a self-labeled feminist female schoolteacher who invariably terminates such chats by typing "OhgodohgodohgodOhgodohgodohgodOhgodohgodohgodohgod . . . " until the screen is full. You may imagine the reason for this.

So much for the sensationalistic. Modem users also use the online services and BBSs to get software (pirated or not), conduct business (buy, sell, or deliver products), get news, and do research. And, for some of us, being online constitutes a big slice of our social life.

The networks provide a venue for experimentation, too. For instance, I'm collecting a lot of interesting data via a simulacrum I created. It signs on to an online service, finds a realtime conference, and talks. And yes, it's interactive. Artificial Intelligence? I don't know; perhaps it would be better tagged as Intelligence Implementation. Chat with me some night online, and see if you can tell whether it's me or the simulacrum. . . .

A Few Words Concerning Elitism

As you've probably figured out, being online can be as useful as being able to read or drive a car, depending on your lifestyle, profession, and interests. Until recently, the majority of people who could benefit from being online were barred from access, because online worlds were largely restricted to the techno-elite. But now all you have to be is techno-aware; hardware and software have become less user-belligerent, and basically if you are aware that the resources are there, you can use them. Still, the majority of the world cannot relate to being online the way they can relate to, say, VCRs or pizzas. Thus the techno-elite who used to make up most of the online population have been diluted with an influx of what you might call a sort of "plug-n-go" elite. You no longer have to know a lot to access online worlds; just get the equipment, introduce yourself to those aspects of the world you want to use, and that's it.

GETTING ONLINE: CONTINUED

locally rather than pay long-distance telephone charges.

Online Services

Online services may offer some or all of the same features of the average BBS (E-Mail, public message areas, and downloadable files), as well as any number of unique services.

Online services differ from BBSs in several ways. First, they cost money. In contrast to the vast majority of BBSs, an online service is in business to make money. Online services operate on expensive mini- or mainframe computers (often more than one), and employ programmers, customer service representatives, and other specialists to keep things running smoothly.

Typically, an online service bills by the minute (which isn't as bad as it sounds; billing for non-prime time on an online service is quite often less than per-minute rates for a long-distance voice telephone call). Certain kinds of online services bill by the

(To borrow an overused simile, it's as if the explorers and frontier-expanding types have finished marking the trails and identifying and clearing out the dangers, and now the settlers, who have intentions other than exploring—like *shaping* the land and bending it to their will—have moved in.)

There's another group of elitists that separates the public at large from those online, and is the main reason that computer communication is not fully "legitimized" (like, say, VCRs or pizzas). That group consists of the economically elite—and let me hasten to add that they are not an elite group by choice, in case that's not obvious. Those who cannot afford the money for the equipment to get online (anywhere from five hundred bucks for used equipment, to three grand or more for an upscale computer system and MNP error-checking 2400-bps modem with online help, power steering, A/C, 21 jewels and all the other options), and/or cannot afford the time to become aware of all this stuff and learn about it, well, those people are cut out.

Thus, while the online worlds are no longer restricted to the techno-elite, they *are* restricted to another kind of elite, in terms of financial resources and/or personal background.

Note that, in aggregate, this is true only in the U.S. In Japan and Europe and third-world countries (all of which I'll discuss in the next installment of this column), they're either living in the past (like in Japan or the U.K., where it's still 1985 online) or clamping on to American culture (as is the case in certain South American countries). So elsewhere, it costs even more to be online, and there's a higher techno-awareness required. In some cases, the techies still rule, and in others being online is almost a covert operation (consider the Soviet Union, or African nations, which, again, I'll discuss next time out).

Who's Out There?

Hopefully, I've not given you too distorted a picture of *who* is online. After all not everyone online (nor even a majority) assumes alternate *personas*. You'll find people like the woman up the street from you, who you didn't even know owned a

computer, online. You'll find writers online, in need of an excuse not to write or carrying on business with editors. Writers who don't mind talking with their fans are online, too—like Tom Clancy, who hangs out on GEnie, or Jerry Pournelle, or George Alec Effinger (who writes about this stuff anyway), or Douglas Adams.

Bored night-shift workers dialing out of factories, grocery stores, and warehouses are not uncommon. (People who are flat-out bored for any reason are not uncommon.)

Singers and performers and actors are online, too. Who? Lots of names you'd recognize, but many traveling incognito. Let's see . . . B.J. Thomas, who called realtime conferencing "the interview wave of the future"; several soap opera stars, who log on between rehearsals and takes; Martha Quinn of MTV fame (though she's kinda busy now, what with the new show and all); someone who may or may not be Peter Falk; maybe Carlos Santana or Patti Scialfia or Pete Townshend or John Poindexter; maybe lots of

GETTING ONLINE: CONTINUED

access—a flat rate for a data base search, for example.

Second, online services provide services and features offered by few (or no) BBSs: multiple-user realtime conferencing, personal file areas, and access to Telex and FAX service, databases, news services, and other services.

Getting There

Online services are national or international in scope, and are often accessed via packet switching networks (Telenet, Tymnet, and/or the service's own private network). A packet switching network is nothing more than a nationwide (or worldwide) network of computers, strategically located in various cities, whose job is to route data between your computer and a "host" computer (an online service's computer).

Packet switching networks provide a way for you to call a distant host computer without incurring long-distance charges. In practice, you dial a local telephone number, connect with the packet

GETTING ONLINE: CONTINUED

network computer and tell it to which service you wish to be connected, and the packet network computer connects with the online service via its own system of dedicated phone lines. There is a charge for such access, but it is normally built into an online service's fees.

What You Will Need

To dial up a BBS or an online service, you will need a telephone line, a computer or a communications terminal, a modem, and communications software.

You'll also need the number of local BBSs, and/or an account with and local access number for one or more of the online services.

You probably won't have to install a separate telephone line to telecompute. However, if you plan to use a direct-connect modem, make sure your telephone line connects with the telephone set with a standard RJ-11 type plug. This type of plug is used with most modern telephone systems.

other people you'd never expect to meet anywhere.

Lots of computer techies, of course; they've made room for the plug-n-go crowd, but they haven't given up their turf. Lots of special-interest people, too—people who share hobby or professional or personal interests.

All of which not only tells you a bit of who's online (pretty much a cross-section of the American middle and upper class), but also a bit more about why they're online. 'Nuff said.

So much for the basic intro. Between the foregoing and the sidebars, and what's coming up, you'll know your way around the online world fairly well soon enough.

"And Now, the News"

What the *Wall Street Journal* Didn't Tell You about the 'Quake of '89

Perhaps I should have used this header: "How the News Media Prevented Black Tuesday on Wall Street Without Even Trying (Or Knowing)." Put it up there yourself

if you like; either header applies. Anyway, if you're into conspiracies and paranoia, you'll probably enjoy this.

Picture this: It's October 19, 1989, and I get a call from a guy named Tom Curry at *Time* magazine; he'd been online asking for info on the central California earthquake that involved computer networks and I agreed to give him some. The same day, I get a call from the Associated Press to be interviewed on the same subject. On October 20, I'm asked by a writer friend to phone Mr So-and-so at the *Wall Street Journal* about the subject.

So I tell *Time* and the AP and the *Wall Street Journal* about how the San Francisco area is Data-Relay Central between the Pacific Rim and the U.S. mainland and points between. I further explain how RCA, the record carrier that moves data to and from the Pacific Rim for major American packet-switching networks, lost its satellite link, and how the domestic networks' equipment went down anyway (thanks to equipment that was vulnerable because of poor power-backup and lack

GETTING ONLINE: CONTINUED

Virtually all direct-connect modems come equipped with jacks that accept this type of plug, which is also known as a *modular* plug. If your telephone line doesn't use an RJ-11 plug, converting the existing connector to an RJ-11 plug is a simple matter (and something you should probably do anyway). Kits to make the changes can be found in any telephone or Radio Shack store, and the procedure is very simple.

(Note: Call-Waiting "announces" incoming calls with a beep-and-click that can interfere with a modem's operation; this sometimes results in your call being disconnected. More often than not, though, the only result of Call-Waiting's beep-and-click is a few "garbage" characters on your screen, and/or a temporary "lockup" of your system. Most of the local phone companies that offer Call-Waiting also allow you to disable it by adding "*70" before the rest of the phone number you are "dialing."

of alternate link provisions). A little more about how the technicians and engineers at the packet-switching networks had a particularly interesting priority: get the financial data-links up first thing. I also tell them that this meant money-heads throughout the U.S. (and elsewhere) were trading their pieces of paper based on totally outdated information.

So, what happened? Why didn't you hear about all this? Well, the *Time* story was killed. The AP never called back to complete their "interview," and the *Wall Street Journal* staffers with whom I spoke carefully explained that I wasn't a writer (as if I hadn't published three million words, and edited a few hundred thousand more), and therefore couldn't provide them with any useful information.

The sum total of information having to do with computer communications and the San Francisco earthquake provided to the public was:

- A front-page article in the *Wall Street Journal* concerning mainly local emergency communications on a relatively tiny multi-user system in the area hit by the 'quake (written by a guy who was on retainer by *WSJ*).
- A few mentions of same in the computer press.
- A few bits here and there about the emergency communications network that sprung up, controlled by the people who could do it, for reasons involving which online services' private packet-switching networks had reliable power backups and immediate microwave links rather than landlines. (Imagine that—for the first time, emergency communications in a disaster area in the hands of mostly average people. Lots of amateur radio operators' stations were "down," and voice telephone was all but impossible, but those with telecom capability *could* get out—many relying on battery-powered computers and modems.) Most of these were the results of fast-acting network publicity people.

That was almost it. There were a few stories about automatic teller machines (ATMs) being turned off, since they were

updating with out-of-date information, and about a couple of relatively brave banks turning theirs back on and trusting the honesty of the people who needed to get cash from ATMs.

Having been involved in relaying messages and information among several networks on behalf of the Science Fiction Writers of America (and, less formally, for the sf community in general), I was online quite a bit in the hours and days following the earthquake, and I learned quite a bit, formally and informally, publicly and privately, some of it being information of the "you didn't hear it here" variety. So I wrote an article about the combination telephone/computer communications emergency network that got word into and out of the disaster area *and* about the financial crash for Japan's largest telecom magazine, *Networking.* And I mentioned a bit of this (though not the part about the financial network being down and out) in a column I do for a little magazine called *Computer Shopper.*

The Japanese recognized

GETTING ONLINE: CONTINUED

This will prevent the Call-Waiting "announcement" from generating noise on your link.)

You'll probably use a personal computer to dial up bulletin boards and online services, and I'm assuming that if you can operate a personal computer, you already know or can easily learn most if not all of what you need to know about dialing up another computer.

The type of computer you use dictates the types and brands of communications software you can run, which in turn partially dictate the features available to you. But, the features available with a particular IBM communications software package, for example, can often be found in software for Commodore, Color Computer, Apple, and other brands of computers. So, you don't necessarily have to buy a certain computer to get specific features; you can probably find all the features you want if you look at enough software packages. But I'll leave that to you to

the importance of the story, of the facts concerning the financial networks (of course, the Japanese were acutely aware of the lack of data communications). *Asahi Shimbun*, Japan's second-largest daily newspaper, picked up the story, and I'm still getting fan letters.

On this side of the Pacific, though, the facts were suppressed or ignored.

Why? *Was* there a conspiracy? Hmm. Well, I have my own ideas on that, which I'll get to presently. But first, some background . . .

You may well wonder why San Francisco is so important to East-West finance. It's like this: you got your Bank of Hong Kong and Bank of America and Bank of This and That there, and a *heavy* concentration of Japanese and Japanese-Americans there (in Tokyo alone, KDD phone company was going nuts trying to handle 60,000 attempted calls to San Francisco *per hour*, for hours after the 'quake). But, rather than leave it to you to infer what's what, here's a basic fact: San Francisco is the financial gateway to the Pacific Rim, physically, on paper, literally, and, in the computer sense of the word, virtually.

The bottom line: almost all commercial telecommunications with the entire Pacific Rim were lost due to the knockout punch the earthquake delivered to satellite ground stations, telephone switching stations, and power lines. (All of this information is straight from those who were in the trenches; from the techs working to get things up and running again, among others.)

So the money-heads went on trading and making and losing ghost money, blissfully unaware that they were cut off from the *right now!* information they needed. And <smirk>, the economic advisors and analyst types were likewise cut off—and didn't know it. (For the economic advisors and economists, being cut off from information is not unusual; take a look at how they justify their predictions sometime. Too many of 'em are regarded as such *bona-fide* seers that their predictions become self-fulfilling, which more often than not screws up the economy royally. The predictions are bullshit: for the majority plying that trade, the

"bottom line" is making a name and money by making those self-fulfilling predictions.

(But this is a topic for elsewhere. Still, it's worth noting that we now have a little hard evidence about the economic predictions; they come out the same with or without accurate information. Bottom line—since we're talking money I'll over-use that clichéd phrase: these people don't know what they're doing.

(There. I've taken my shots. Now, back to the main track.)

"So what?" you say. "So these business types didn't have up-to-the minute info on Asian corporate activities, stock prices, money values, and the like. So what?"

Okay, look at this: the money-heads were trading as if nothing had happened but an earthquake with mainly regional effects. But what if they *had* known that the info wasn't coming in from the Pacific Rim? What if they had known that what they were doing was based on the wrong information?

The answer's not obvious

GETTING ONLINE: CONTINUED

argue with your friends and yourself. Peripheral elements of your computer system (printer, hard disk drive, etc.) are pretty much a matter of personal preference, except where a serial [RS-232C, RS-422C, or "modem"] port is required to connect your computer to a modem.

In any event, the majority of online services (and BBSs) are "computer friendly"—meaning they can communicate with virtually any microcomputer. Thus, you should have no trouble accessing another system with your computer, provided you have a compatible modem and appropriate software.

BBS Numbers

Your best sources for BBS numbers are a friend who is already online, or your local computer users' group or computer store. (In fact, more than a few computer users' groups and stores operate their own BBSs.)

Other sources of BBS numbers include computer magazines —such as

until you think about it: they would have, as a Wall Street acquaintance put it, *freaked*. They would have absolutely fucking freaked fucking out! And how many points would the Dow-Jones Average have dropped? 100? 300? 500? It would have been interesting to find out. But it didn't happen. Why? Because the news of the data-link loss didn't get out.

And why didn't it get out? Well, it would be nice to imagine that it was intentionally suppressed because someone "in power" was aware of the damage that the fictions of stocks and commodities and money markets do to our society. Conspiracy fans will, of course, believe that the information was suppressed because "behind the scenes" types wanted it suppressed, for whatever reasons. But it wasn't suppressed as a part of some power group's hidden agenda. (Blame it on the Illuminati or the Rockefellers if you wish; I don't take stock in such speculations.)

No, it was none of that. This potentially panic-generating information was suppressed by simple air-headedness and ego-tripping, because it came from the "wrong" sources, and because the news types couldn't understand it. And I'll note that I wasn't the only such "wrong" source.

In other words, the facts didn't get out because the people who decide what's news didn't hear them via their legitimate sources, and being unable to comprehend the facts, ignored them. (Normally, each news decision-maker uses her or his own power trip or personal political agenda or sensationalism rating to determine what's news, but if they don't understand it, it takes too long to figure it out, and there's no blood, it ain't news. No conspiracies here, either; just a lot of small- and big-time would-be conspiracies. End of shot.)

Side note: all of this says a lot and implies more about the importance of data communications to the existence of our society.

Final note: if you doubt the importance of the financial information flow just cited, remember the fact that the number one priority of the data carrier networks was to bring the *financial*

elements of the Pacific Rim data net back online. Everything else was ignored until financial data communication was back in place. Hell, the packet-switching networks didn't even bother to bring Hawaii back up until 22 hours after the 'quake hit.

So What Else is New?

Speaking of significant items that didn't make "the news," the first-ever computer BBS in the Soviet Union went online at the end of 1989. This is a landmark event, because BBSs were all but unheard of in the Soviet Union until this BBS opened.

The board, called Eesti BBS #1, is in Tallinn, Estonia. International links are via Helsinki. The multi-user system is set up for messaging and file transfer, and is intended to function as an open communications channel to Soviet and non-Soviet countries.

The system is set up on a PC with 40 megs of storage and a 300/1200-bps modem that recognizes both international (CCITT) and American (Bell) standards. If you want

GETTING ONLINE: CONTINUED

Computer Shopper—that run general lists of BBS numbers in each issue.

BBSs themselves are a good source of numbers, too. You can find listings of local BBS numbers on almost any BBS. And some systems, like PCBBS boards, have lists of numbers for BBSs everywhere in the U.S. and Canada that use the same BBS software package.

Online Service Numbers

Because most online services are accessed via packet switching nets, you'll need your local Telenet, Tymnet, or (in parts of Canada) Datapac number to dial up a service.

You can also find local network access numbers by calling the packet-switching network's or online service's customer service number. Some are listed below.

A few services, such as GEnie and CompuServe, provide access via their own private networks. To obtain numbers for these services, you must contact the services themselves.

GETTING ONLINE: CONTINUED

Advertisements and reviews in computer magazines are another source of information on online services.

As stated earlier, you'll need an account with an online service before you can access it. Contact the online services themselves for information.

Contacts

These voice telephone numbers will put you in touch with the major packet nets and online services. (Please note: These are all voice numbers, and represent only a small portion of what's available.)

Packet-Switching nets:

Telenet	800-336-0437
Tymnet	800-336-0149

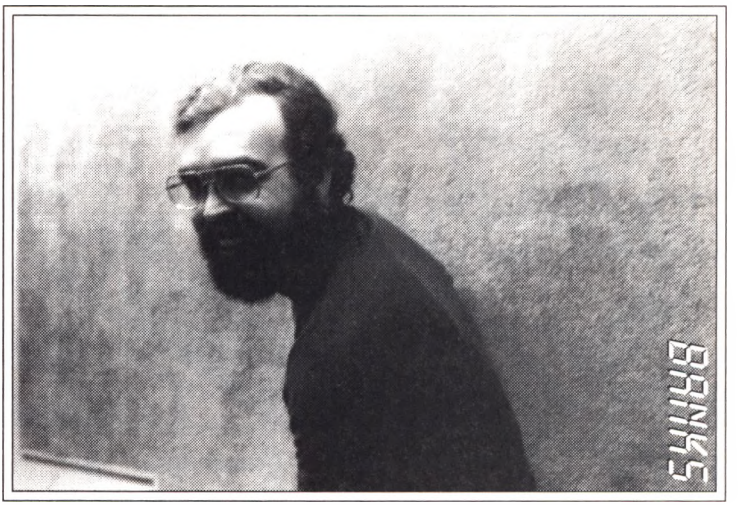
Online Services:

BIX	800-227-2983
CompuServe	800-848-8990
DELPHI	800-544-4005
GEnie	800-638-9636

—Michael A. Banks

to give it a try, the number is: + 7 142 422 583 [for the "+", substitute your country's outbound international direct dial code ("011" in the U.S., "010" in the U.K., and so on); the "7" is the USSR's inbound country code]. You may have to wait up to two minutes for a carrier, depending on the phone routing from the U.S. to Estonia. You may also have to delay the dialing speed, to compensate for delays caused by the number of phone exchanges through which the call is routed. Evening hours are the best time to dial up the system—try for a time slot when you're hitting evening/nighttime hours in your corner of the world as well as in Estonia.

That's it this time out. Next edition: more on the online elite and the implications thereof; telecom in third-world nations; samples of what's available online in Japan, South America, and elsewhere; the non-existent reading list brought to life; the U.S. government and telecommunications; and whatever else happens.



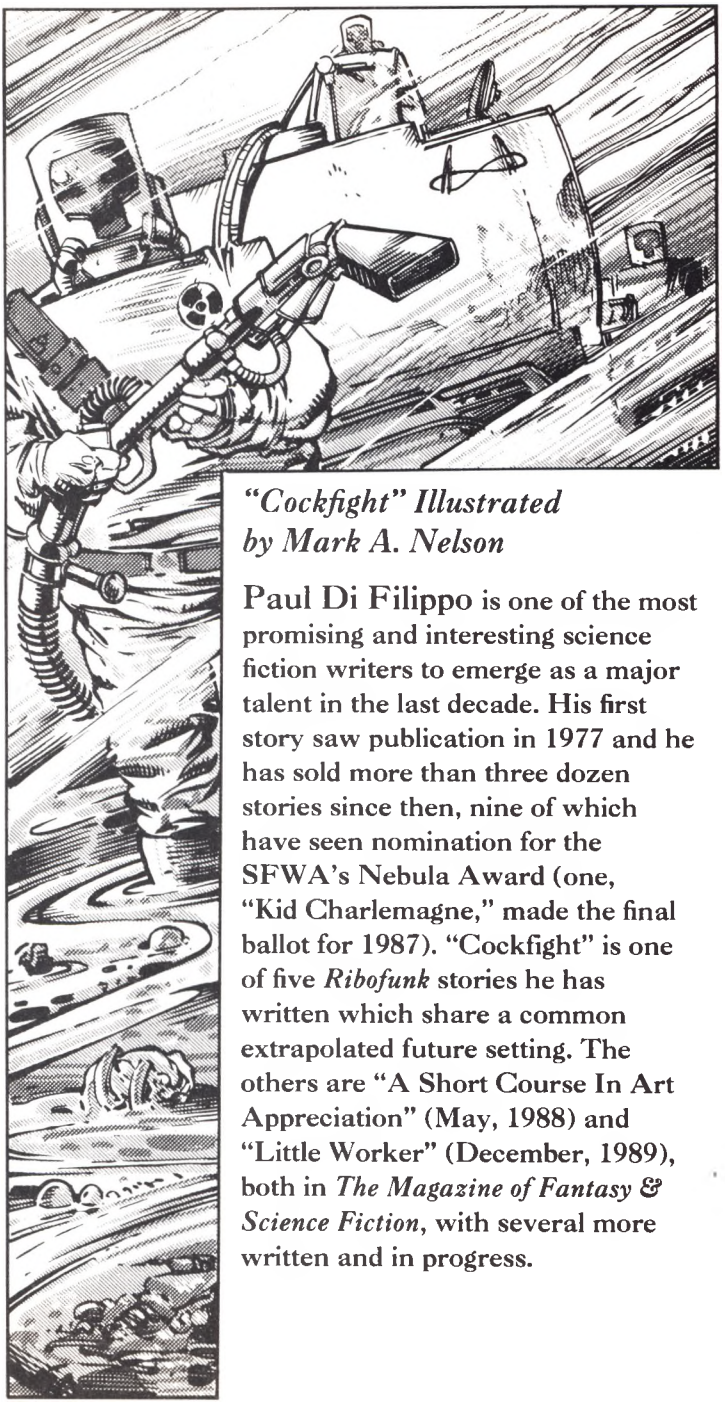
Michael A. Banks is the author of twenty-one published non-fiction books and science fiction novels (including the titles recommended below right). He's also published more than 1000 newspaper and magazine articles and short stories, lively technical documents, and " . . . a few catchy slogans."

He can be found online "almost anywhere," but if you want to reach him fast, try E-mail to KZIN on DELPHI.

Through the Wire will be a regular feature of this journal.

GETTING ONLINE: CONCLUSION

The material in this section was adapted from the book, *The Modem Reference*, by Michael A. Banks (Brady Books/Simon & Schuster). For additional information on telecom, look for Banks's books *Getting the Most Out of DeskMate 3*, *DELPHI: The Official Guide* (both published by Brady Books/Simon & Schuster), and *Understanding FAX and Electronic Mail* (Howard W. Sams & Co.).



"Cockfight" Illustrated by Mark A. Nelson

Paul Di Filippo is one of the most promising and interesting science fiction writers to emerge as a major talent in the last decade. His first story saw publication in 1977 and he has sold more than three dozen stories since then, nine of which have seen nomination for the SFWA's Nebula Award (one, "Kid Charlemagne," made the final ballot for 1987). "Cockfight" is one of five *Ribofunk* stories he has written which share a common extrapolated future setting. The others are "A Short Course In Art Appreciation" (May, 1988) and "Little Worker" (December, 1989), both in *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*, with several more written and in progress.

fiction

Paul Di Filippo

I will allow as how bein' a waste gipsy is not the most settled way of life, nor the easiest on the nerves. And it's surely no career for a married man—as Geraldine never tires of remindin' me.

But I ain't married. And I *never* listen to Geraldine.

Anyway, what's so rough about the life? First off, there's the constant travel. You got to learn to keep as little in your kit as a blind Bhopal beggar, and generally stay as loose as a bull's balls. Your in-demand ass is always bein' faxed around the globe, from one hotspot to another, whenever some muni or fabrik or werke or flot gets to feelin' a tad guilty and decides they're gonna clean up a little piece of the big, big mess they've all made durin' the last filthy century.

Some of these places ain't so bad, in terms of relaxin' when the job's over for the day. When we were in Milan, Italy, for instance, reamin' out their toxic sewers where some asshole back

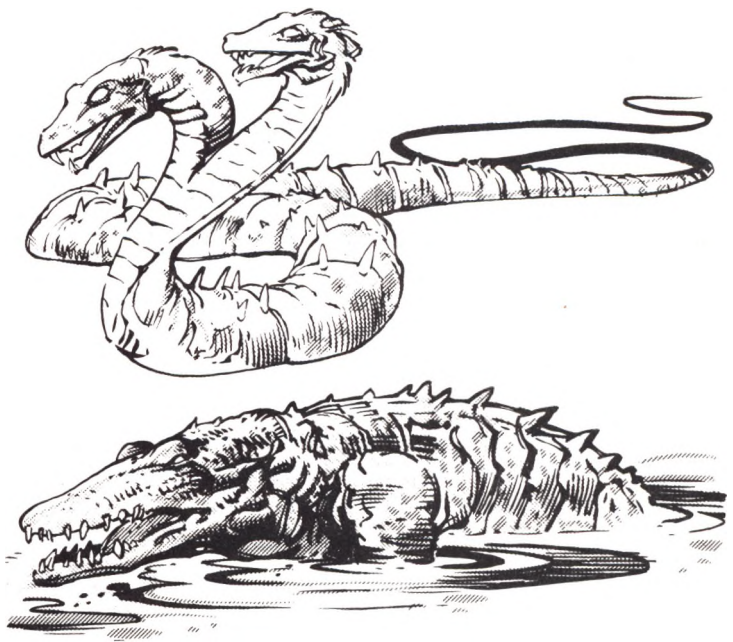
in '86 dumped twenty tons of assorted pollutants and contaminated the whole city's water supply, I was able to do all kinds of cultural things, like visitin' churches, and seein' The Last Supper (considerably improved, in my opinion, since they sprayed the restorative bugs on it, despite all the juicer critics sayin' it looked digitally enhanced), and checkin' out the architecture of the Eye-tie chickenhouses. (One was in a real palace, and some of the girls was supposed to be real princesses. It was just possible, too, cuz I remember that when Monaco was forbsed-over and trumped-up, there was a whole generation that had to latch onto jobs real quick.)

Other times, you're gonna find yourself in the ass-end of nowhere, some god-forsaken place that makes Robert Lee, Texas (my hometown), look like New Orleans at Mardi Gras. I have shivered at fifty below with no audience but dumb greasy penguins, cleanin' up an Antarctic oil spill, and baked my sandy britches at one hundred plus, decommissioning a Mideast CBW plant. And both times there was nothin' to do after your shift except play flashcards, get wiped on needlestrength-one 'tropes, and spill atmosphere with your fellow gipsies. (Maybe summa the talk might lead to bumpin' uglies with one of your fellow gips, if that's what fills your receptors, but I try to stay away from the gals that work in the same line as me, they all bein' as familiar and excitin' as your elderly mustache-wearin' aunt or some old-maid grade-school 'trope doser.)

It's times like these that you tell spine-tinglin' kings and barkers about all the shit you have seen. Times when the rems was sleetin' around you thicker than fleas on a junkyard dog, knockin' your chromos loopier than those of a two-headed snake, and you were wrasslin' a hot core. Times when you were standin' waist-deep in some stinkin' swamp full of PCBs and dirty antique motor-oil and industrial solvents and God knows what-all, and you seen the snout of a mutant Amazonian 'gator barrelin' toward you faster'n the Orient Express, and you barely had time to raise up your force-multiplier for a single blow before it was on you.

But surprisin'ly enough, the net effect of all these afterhours horror stories is not to discourage us gips, but rather to make us feel special and important. After all, who else has such a vital job as us? Cleanin' up this poor abused planet is—or should be—society's number-one priority, after all, and they ain't invented a robot yet that's smart enough or tough enough to do what we do, or take the shit we endure. Imagine some hunk of heuristics pokin' its sensors into the hells we gotta enter, without fryin' its CCDs and crispin' its boards. As for the splices, the union keeps them out. And as long as we get our regular search-and-repair silicrobe shots, we ain't gonna suffer any more weird diseases or terry-tomas than your average New Yorker or Nevadan.

Not that I do it mainly for glory or outa some sense of duty to humanity. Shit, no. I don't think you'll find one greenpeacer out of every thousand gipsies you talk to. I do it cuz the eft's damn good, and so are the bennies, and you can retire after fifteen



years. (My company, Dallas Detox, Inc., was one of the first to pioneer that particular policy, and that's one of the reasons I'm purely proud to work for them. Another's that they are one hunnerd percent American, and there's not many companies left that can make such a claim, 'specially since they phased the Union fully in ten years ago. Now, I don't hold with them Sons of Dixie, or any of the other constitutionalist groups, legal or underground, but there is something about being ruled by Canucks that just goes up my craw a mile. And if I got to be ruled by them, leastwise I don't have to work for them. Yet.)

Anyway, it's a decent life, and sometimes an exciting one, even if, as I said, it's no career for a married man—as Geraldine never tires of remindin' me.

But I ain't married. And I *never* listen to Geraldine.

When Stack came into the dorm, wavin' the fax that bore the DDI logo in its upper corner (a pair of tweezers nippin' a double helix) and smilin', we all knew we had gotten a good postin'. But we couldn'ta guessed how good till the crewboss spoke.

"Parliament has voted, boys and girls. The Slikslak is deadmeat, and DDI's gonna pick the corpse."

Well, the roar of excitement that greeted this announcement rattled the biopolymer panels of the big Komfykwik Kottage we were livin' in, there on the shores of Lake Baikal in Greater Free Mongolia, which stagnant pisshole we had finally finished deacidifyin' and ecobalancin' and revivifyin' and suchlike. We were goin' home, Stateside, back to the good old U. S. of A. (and I'll continue to call it that till my dyin' day, despite all laws to the contrary). To actually get an assignment back in civilization—it was too good to be true. No more funny food or dark-skinned women or comic jabber which you couldn't understand without takin' a pill. It was hog-heaven for a poor gipsy.

I was emptyin' my locker and packin' my kit on my bunk when Geraldine sidled up to me all innocent-like. I pretended not to notice her.

"Lew," she said, in a voice as sweet as corn syrup on candied

yams, "Stack is making up the room-roster for Waxahachie. We are going to put up at a local motel, and all the rooms're doubles. I don't suppose . . . "

I looked up at Geraldine then. She was wearin' earrings shaped like biohazard signs, her brown hair was cropped shorter'n mine, with a lopsided swatch across her brow, her face was naked of makeup, save for silicrobe Tattoon butterflies at the corners of her lips, and she barely filled out her Size Small DDI-issue coverall. She reminded me of the kid sister I'd never had.

"Geraldine, I do appreciate the offer or suggestion or proposition or whatever you wanna call it. But if I have told you once, I've told you a million times. The chemistry is just not there. My probe don't match your target. Look, I like my women big, busty and dumb, and you are neither."

The Tattoons a milli beneath Geraldine's skin fluttered their wings in agitation as the tears leaked like Israeli root-drips from her eyes.

"I—I could be dumb for you, Lew, if that was what you really wanted. There's new 'tropes for that, I heard. Dumbdown, More-on . . . As for the other stuff, well, it'd cost me plenty, but I'd do it for you. Honest, I would—"

I slapped my own forehead. "Holy shit, Geraldine, I ain't askin' you to change, get that into your head right now. I was only outlinin', like, the kind of woman that jumps my gaps. Listen." I put an arm real uncle-like around her shoulder. "You're a helluva gipsy. I never seen anyone better at dredgin' a bay or sprayin' a forest full of pear-thrips than you. I'm proud to be your partner on any job Stack gives us. But that's where it ends, you latch? Strictly a professional relationship."

Geraldine had turned the taps off by the time I finished my speechifyin'. She knuckled her eyes, then extended one hand. We shook.

"Okay," she said, sadder'n a preacher who's seen the collection come up empty, "if that's the way you want it. It's better than nothing, I guess."

We loosed our shake. "See you on the plane, Lew."

I went back to my packin'. What a mixed-up gal. I wondered why people had to lose it when it came to their emotions. Thank the Lord we at least had 'tropes and strobers nowadays to help. It was hard to imagine how it had been just a few decades ago, before the bioboys understood all there was to know about the brain. Not that you should come to rely too much on such aids, I believed. There was something to be said for a natural life. Why, look at me, for instance. Once I had taken all the mnemotropins prescribed in school and learned what I had to, did I keep on takin' 'em? Nope, not me. As my Daddy always said, "Son, if we was meant to get our experience outa a pill, the Good Lord woulda made 'em easier to swallow."

Before that day was over, we were boardin' a DDI suborb, all laughin' and jokin' at the thought of hittin' the streets of Dallas once again. We had barely settled into the flight, however, when we were told to buckle up once more for the landin' and take our circadian-adjusters. That's the problem with these hour-long jumps: they don't give you no time to feel like you really been travelin'. One minute your ass is in Mongolia, the next minute you're home. It does require some mental gymnastics.

We got hung up in Customs for a couple of hours—longer'n the flight itself. Turned out a couple of our gips had tried to make a little extracurricular eft for themselves by attemptin' to smuggle back Mongolian bugs in their blood. Probably some kind of ethnic-specific high that they figured would sell well among the Dallas community of ex-pat Hong Kongers. The Customs probes had unzipped the non-somatype codes faster'n spit dryin' on a griddle, and Stack had some fancy dancin' to do to get off with just a bloodwash, by claimin' our innocent liddle boys was infected without their knowledge.

In the terminal we were crossin' the atrium when a squad of IMF crick-cops bulled through, carryin' their chromo-cookers and packin' splat-pistols, lookin' mean as eighty-year-old virgins with libido-locks, headin' doubtlessly for some Fourth-World infection or infestation of some sort. We gave 'em a wide berth outa respect, as they are about the only ones with a dirtier job

than us gips. We got it relatively easy, dealin' with old well-known hazards, while they get all the new and superdangerous shit.

Outside DDI had a couple of Energenetix cowbellies with drivers waitin' for us. Most of the folks clambered right into the minivans (I made a point of gettin' in a different one from Geraldine), but Tino and Drifter—the boys who had gotten pinched by Customs—had to take a piss real bad. Side effect of the bloodwash. They'd be leakier'n a sharecropper's cabin in a hurricane for the next day.

Stack called out, "Don't waste the biomass, boys."

Tino and Drifter grumbled, but they each opened up a fuel intake cap, unvelcroed their flies, butted their groins up to the vans and did their best to top off the tanks.

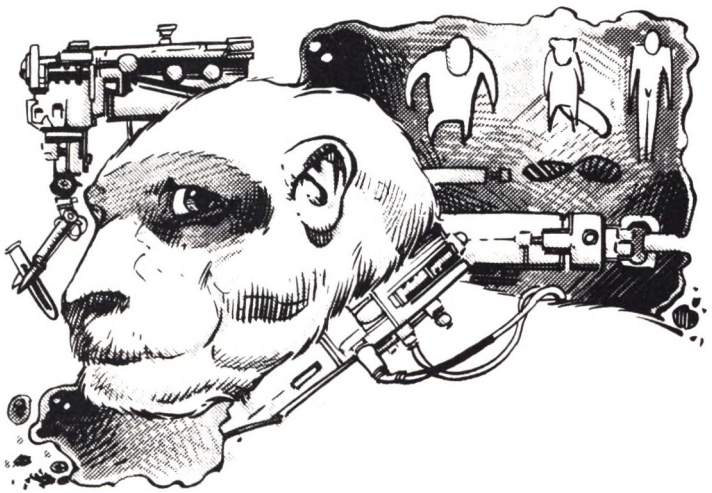
Refastenin' their coveralls, the two climbed rather sheepishly in. Tamarind, a bantam-weight black gal sittin' next to me, who always managed to get off a great zinger with perfect timin', said, "A lot different than the last sockets I seen you boys plugging."

Everyone cut loose with all the laughter we'd been holdin' in, roarin' and howlin' fit to burst. Even Drifter and Tino eventually joined in the gipsy camaraderie. Hell, we knew it could've been any of us that'd got caught, and we couldn't hold the wasted time against them. Come what may, us gips hang tighter'n the plies of steelwood laminated with barnacle-grip.

Thus enjoyin' ourselves in our loose gipsy way, we motored south out of the mass of gleamin', glassy Dallas towers, headin' toward our latest assignment.

Waxahachie was about twenty-five miles south of the city, so we had roughly a forty-minute drive. (You can't push a cowbelly much faster'n sixty KPH, especially when fully loaded.) Some gips settled in for a nap, which helps the circadian-adjusters kick in, but I was too excited to be back home to sleep, so I levered open a window and let the familiar dusty scents of a Texas summer waft in while I watched the scenery laze by.

We passed a small orchard of peach trees at one point. The trees were full of splices harvesting the force-grown fruit. The



human overseer lay in the shade, collar-box by his side, within easy reach. To me the splices looked about fifty percent chimp, forty percent lemur, and ten percent human. But I coulda been off by a few percent either way.

"I sure do dislike those splices," said Tamarind. "Thank heavens we got laws keeping them down."

"Not to mention the collars and diet-leashes," I added. Then I got a funny notion which I had to share. "Hey, Tam, you ever feel weird about the splices and your heritage and all? I mean, like maybe they hold the same position now that your folks did, a couple of centuries ago?"

"Shit no. They aren't *human*, after all, are they? And that makes all the difference."

I could see her point. "Well, I guess in a way the splices make it possible for an old redneck like me to be buddies with a gal of color like yourself and mostways not think twice about it."

Tam punched me in the shoulder. "You got it, Lew."

Shortly after that, we pulled into the parking lot of the motel Geraldine had mentioned to me back at Lake Baikal. There were a lot of other DDI vehicles there, all with the tweezered helix on their sides, and, as I later found out, some other gipsies

were even bunkin' in the quarters that used to house the Slikslak staff. I figured this for one of the biggest deconstruction jobs I had ever taken part in. With any luck, it'd last a good long time, so I could continue to enjoy the comforts of a real bed, good American food, and sweet Texas poontang, a juicy sample of which I was gonna make haste to lay my hands and stiff probe on as soon as possible.

In the motel lobby, Stack called our names off a roster. "Shooter, you're bunking with Benzene Bill in three-sixteen."

I swore. Benzene Bill—so called for the Tattoon of a spinning snake-in-mouth Kekule ring he sported on his massive right bicep—was a mean-natured sumbitch I had never gotten along with. Maybe I woulda been better off with Geraldine, even if I had hadda fend off her constant feminine advances.

I found Bill in the crowd and we headed for our room together in tense silence.

Inside, Bill said, "Lissen, Sludgehead, if I want to bring some nookie back here, you'd better clear out on my say-so, whether it's for the whole night or not."

I put my kit down and calmly faced him. "Bill, the facts is, you are as ugly as an ape 'n' hornytoad splice and no sleeve is gonna look twice at you, lessen she's paid some big eft, or she's maybe been dosed with a combo of uglybuster and lubricine."

Bill grabbed the front of my coverall. "Why, you cocksucker—"

"Bill," I said all calm and gentle-like, "do you remember Marseilles?"

He snorted then, but he let me go right fast. Retreating to his bed, he began unpacking his kit, and there was no more said about clearin' out for his improbable ruttin'.

It's good to get the terms straight in any relationship right from the start.

Well, the day was pretty shot by then, but we still had time for a tour of the Slikslak itself, to get acquainted with the place we were gonna be demolishin'.

Spring 1990

Everyone was kinda disappointed when we arrived at the old Superconductin' Supercollider. Wasn't much of the SCSC above ground. It was all buried beneath the prairie, a ring of deep-cooled magnets and beam-bouncers and particle-chambers some fifty miles in diameter, all contaminated by decades of experimentation in a nice mild way that promised low rems. (I understand the lunar facility that replaced the Slikslak is twice as big, and cost half as much to build, what with the free vacuum and new superwire.)

When we got down below, though, everyone's enthusiasm picked up. This job was gonna be easy—hardly any exotics aside from liquid hydrogen—and the sheer size of the place meant it would take practically forever. What a sugartit assignment!

Back at the motel, with dusk comin' down like silk sheets in a Paris helmsley, we found that DDI had laid on a humongous Tex-Mex barbecue for our first night. As I've said a hundred times—and not just when Stack was around to overhear—they are swell employers with a lot of class. Smellin' the beefaloes and leanpigs turnin' on their spits, holding a cold cheer beer in my hand, watchin' the stars poppin' out one by one like random pixels on God's antique monochrome display, listenin' to the joyful chatter of my fellow gips, contemplatin' the easy job ahead of me, I was as near to heaven as I have ever been on this mostly sad ol' earth.

And that peaceful feelin', so pure and unnatural, I reckon now, is what should have alerted me to my comin' troubles.

It was the first weekend after we had started the Slikslak job, and we gips were ready to party. Several days of bone-breakin' labor, with nothin' to do after hours except raster whatever gaudy gore'n'garters plasma-com the flatscreen was offerin' or play a hand of flashcards or metabolize some samogon at the dingy Waxahachie roadhouse known as Mustang Sally's (the lady owner wore a palomino's tail), had left us achin' for some release.

So a bunch of us—me, Geraldine, Tam, Tino, Spud, Geneva, IgE, even Benzene Bill and some others—signed out a van

and made the trip into Dallas, lookin' for some Big Fun.

I was drivin', and all my actions felt effortless. We had all had a thorough tonin'-up performed on us by the company cell-scrubber, so all my workweek aches and pains were gone. My skin was as tingly as that of a playpet from Hedonics Plus. Beyond the ultrapure single-crystal windshield, the speedy night-time scenery looked particularly hi-rez, with all the shadows dithered to fractal depths. I was confident tonight would rack up some megadigits on the Fun Readouts.

Once in Dallas, we headed straight for Deep Ellum, the prime pleasure district of the city. Parking the van and setting its defenses we hit the crowded sidewalks, walkin' with our kickass gipsy style, guys as if we had a barrel between our legs, gals like they were slidin' along on a greased pole right at crotch height.

I tell you, it made me proud as the ten-year-old who knocked up the neighborhood widow to be stridin' through the city with my fellow gips, confident in our solidarity and fully aware of our societal importance.

Deep Ellum was thronged with folks of every stripe and pedigree enjoyin' the false halogen day. There were splices runnin' errands for their owners. There were preteeny peptide-poppers four or five cohorts down the genetic line from my own, streamin' free 'n' wild with the members of their sets and posses, sportin' their fancy Action Potential clothes. There were gerries and gullas. There were NU cops carryin' flashlights and shockers to keep the peace amongst the various factions, not to mention the local dirty-harrys. All in all, it was a highly stochastic and organic scene.

Well, we began hittin' the bars around eight, exposin' our receptors to various bands rangin' across the noise spectrum, from multipolar music to old-fashioned country- western picked out on a lone synthesizer, and meanwhile not neglectin' to ingest all manner of delightful deliriants and insidious intoxicants.

Around midnight I seemed to come back to myself as if my consciousness was a balloon on a tether lightyears-long, which I had to oh-so-slowly reel in.

"Where are we?" I said to Tino.

"In Parts Unknown."

I gathered that was the name of the bar where we sat. It was a smoky, noisy, jam-packed troglo kind of place. On its raw stone walls hung neo-neon signs that said stuff like REDRAW YOUR MAP2 and WHAT'S YOUR AMP-ERAGE? The bartender was a simian splice which hung by its tail from an aerial rail and mixed drinks with four human hands.

All of a sudden, like stormwaters through an arroyo, or the opening of petcocks on the feedline of a breeder-tank, I remembered my urges of a few days ago, to bury my face in some down-home Texas target. In an instant I was hornier'n a kid's pet unicorn. I scoped out the dance floor, spottin' Geraldine shakin' her skinny little butt with some local dude. Then my eyes passed over her to alight on my dream-girl.

She stood a good six feet tall, thanks to her hi-heels. Five-inch ivory spikes that grew out of the calcaneum of her tarsus bones, they were tipped with gold caps. The rest of her feet were bare, with special hi-impact soles that I could see when she kicked toward the ceiling. She wore some Wind Skin neoprene tights, but nothin' above the waist. Her tits were enormous, and thanks to the implanted cantilever lifts, projected out as firm and confident as a CEO's handshake. She had had the refractive index of her aureoles altered so that they were mirrors. On her cheeks were little patches of iridescent fish-scales. I was willin' to bet a week's eft that her tongue was cat-raspy. In short, she was just what the cell-scrubber ordered.

I pranced out onto the dance floor, cocky as a dirty harry carrying heavy metal and a journal full of wires.

Her partner was a little south-of-the-border dude that I pegged right from the start as a Brazilian. The Brazzes was heavy into Texas lately, ever since The Doctor's Plot to assassinate the PM had caused such chaos in the upper echelons of the NU.

I tapped the Brazz on the shoulder. "Hey, *meninio*, how's about lettin' me cut in?"

The little sludgehead just ignored me. His sleeve, though, seemed to like the idea. She stropped her lower lip with her tongue, and I swore I could hear the sandpaper sound of it above the music. The Brazz's cockiness and his sleeve's allure got me so damn inflamed that I did something rash. I spun the Brazz around and coldcocked him with a right to the jaw. Then I grabbed his sleeve and tugged her toward the door. She didn't resist for more'n a milli.

Outside in some shadows I backed her up against a wall and stuck my tongue halfway down her throat. Then I took a handful of her crotch.

I was like to die when I encountered a basket full of male equipment. I disengaged quickly from the kiss, but was too shocked to withdraw my hand.

"What's the matter, honey?" she said. "Looking for this?"

I felt everything squirm and writhe beneath my palm like a hooked crawfish, resultin' in a slow and stealthy envagination and labiation.

Holy radwaste! I'd picked up a morph.

Last time I was Stateside, morphs had hung out in their own clubs, and a feller was mostly safe from accidentally hittin' on one. I guessed things had changed since then.

I backed off and trod on someone's foot.

It was the little Brazz. I fell into an offensive posture, then stopped.

He was holding something out to me. His card. I felt sorta dumb, still makin' deadly-like with my hands, so I relaxed and took it.

"*Senhor*," said the Brazz, "you will have the honor of meeting me, Flaviano Diaz, in the local cockpit, *daiqui a oito dias*, or your carcass will grace the window of the local *emporio*."

He bowed and left. That was when I looked at his card.

It said: Flaviano Diaz, *Capoeira* Instructor, Redbelt, First Degree.

I stood barefoot and -chested in the dusty yard behind the motel, sweatin' under a Saturday noontime sun hot as an episode of SIOUXSIE SEXCRIME. What a hell of a way to be spendin' my free time, practicin' for an engagement that was like as not gonna result in my own bloody death by evisceration. But I had no one to blame except my own fool self, and as my Daddy always said, "Son, there is no point in beatin' up on yourself if you can beat on someone else." And that was what I fully intended to do, or die tryin'.

I lifted another five-pound bag of flour from the crateful I had borryed from the commissary. I walked somewhat awkwardly over to the shade cast by the scrawny pin-oak that was the motel's sole foliage. Hangin' over a branch from a rope was a sling of plastic netting, just at head-height. I took out the empty slashed flour bag that was inside the ripped net and substituted the full one. When I walked off a few paces, I left a trail of white footprints leadin' from the pile of flour on the ground.

Facin' the suspended flour sack, I went all cat-like, tryin' to will the tension and doubt from my body and mind. I moved in on the enemy, fakin' and feintin', dippin' and glidin'. When I felt I had that dumb ol' flour-sack completely befuddled, I pivoted and launched a high arcin' perfect kick at it.

Sunlight flashed off a crescent of glass as it razored through the bag and netting, spillin' flour like a cloud of construction silicrobes.

Someone whistled behind me. I turned. It was Benzene Bill.

"I'm glad you wasn't wearing those when we tangled before," he said.

Bill's words flashed me back then to Marseilles, when we

had been involved in the big Mediterranean cleanup. He was new to the team then, and seemed to have taken an instant dislikin' to me, probably cuz I was the only one his size. I got sick of his endless hasslin' of me and decided to settle things once and for all. In the city, I found an academy that taught *savate*, or "ler box fransay," as they call it otherwise. With appropriate 'trope conditionin', I was soon qualified to kick the wings off a fly in flight. Shortly thereafter, I put Bill down once and for all. Bill, being a lazy bully, never upped the stakes by goin' in for his own conditionin'.

Later, when we were stationed on the Thai-Kampuchean border doin' jungle-biome restoration at the site of some old refugee camps, I took the chance to study a little at a monastery, under the monks what taught Thai kick-boxin'.

I had thought I possessed some pretty slick moves. But that was before I had seen the tapes of various *capoeira* masters.

Capoeira was Brazz hand- and kick-boxin'. The moves had an African basis, salted with Bahian tropico-funk. Sometimes it looked almost like innocent dancin'. Until the *capoerista* rocketed his opponent with a heel upside the jaw.

Me 'n' Flaviano Diaz in the cockpit was gonna be an interestin' match. I hoped I would survive to appreciate it in my old age.

Now I looked down at my moddies that Bill was rasterin'.

My spurs.

I had visited the bodyshop the mornin' after the mess at Parts Unknown, reckonin' I had no time to waste. The proprietor was a gerry who musta been born a good hundred years ago. I listened close when he spoke, figurin' to benefit from his experience.

"Believe me, I know these Brazilians. They share the Argentinian fascination with the knife. Your man will chose a superalloy steel pair of spurs, most likely the Wilkinson or Gilette. Those are fine spurs, but too heavy. They invariably slow one down. Now these"—he took down a slim case, opened it and revealed two transparent scimitars nestled on

black velvet—"are superior in every way. Bioglass by Corning. They hold just as sharp an edge as superalloy, but are feather-light. Hard to focus on, too. Moreover, they provide superior bonding at the bone-interface. We will grow the glass right into your tibia."

The old man paused. "Oh, by the way, the law requires me to remind you that these are sold strictly for decorative purposes. Now, if you agree to that condition, shall I begin the installation?"

What could I say? I took 'em. I also let the guy talk me into a

pair of musky scent-glands, located right at my wrist pulse-points. He said it would make me feel more macho, and attract more women. I didn't have the heart to tell him that was how I had gotten into this jam in the first place.

Archin' my soles, I jerked the spurs up and down a hair, showin' off for Bill.

"Yeah, pretty neat," Bill agreed. "However, the outlaw line still has Diaz favored over you at three-to-two. I plan to make some hefty eft off your loss, sucker." Bill started laughing. "See you in the pit tonight."

He left before I could contradict him. But I wasn't sure if he wasn't right.

I was gettin' another flour-bag set when Geraldine came into the yard. I pretended not to see her.

"Lew," she said, "please, don't do it. You know DDI will protect you from Diaz. There's no need to risk your life with something illegal like this."

"You say somethin', Geraldine?"

"Yes, I said something, you damn stubborn pig's asshole. I said don't throw your life away for your stupid pride."

"Sorry, Geraldine, I can't rightly hear what you're sayin', for some reason or other."

"Oh, go to hell, you ignorant shitkicker!"

Flour filled the air as my foot thumped back to the earth.

"When you see me whippin' that spic's butt, Geraldine, you will feel different about things."

She just glared at me, then stormed away. At the door of the motel, she stopped and yelled out, "And those scent-glands make you smell like a wet ox!"

I quit practicin' after that. With supporters like Bill and Geraldine, the spirit had gone plumb out of me. Standin' one-footed and lifting my ankle to my knee, I used a bandana to wipe off first my left spur, then my right.

At suppertime I stoked up by eatin' a big steak, a pound of pasta and a whole apple pie, chased with a dose of Digestaid. By fight time my stomach would be empty, and my body would

have all that protein and carbs to burn. Then I turned in for a little nap, sleepin' surprisin'ly easy, considerin' what I faced. When the alarm woke me, I got up and showered. I put on my ostrich-skin boots, which I had had to slit up the back to accommodate the spurs. With my jeans tugged down over 'em, they didn't look so bad. Then, without sayin' goodbye to anyone, I took a one-man fuel-cell utility vehicle into the city to keep my appointment. I didn't feel like travelin' with the others. Let them show up on their own, if they were comin' at all, I figured, after all the crap they had given me.

The cockpit was located in an old warehouse in the Camspanic barrio. The abandoned look of the place was somewhat belied by the quantity of cars parked in the neighborhood. I added mine to the ranks, and went inside.

There were rickety bleachers up to the shadowy rafters, and they were all packed with a restive crowd jacked up on Sensalert. At their focus was an ankle-high wooden ring about as big as a backyard swimmin'-pool. It was filled with sand. Two guys were rakin' some blood under, so I figured a match had just ended.

I found the referee, a blonde with pinfeathers where her eyebrows should have been, and told her who I was. In a minute she had rounded up Diaz from out of the crowd and brought him over to me. Sure enough, I could see he had gone for the Wilkinson blades.

"I am gratified to find you are a man of honor, *Senhor*."

"Honor my pecker, I'm just here for the satisfaction of thrashin' the ass of a perverted little foreign morphlover."

"Whatever the anatomical peculiarities of the lady, *Senhor*, she was an excellent dancer, and I will be happy to defend her character by leaving you expiring in the dirt from which you arose."

After this exchange of front-porch pleasantries we both stripped down on the sidelines, while the ref fetched the Bloodhound.

Diaz had a midriff that coulda been carved outa chocolate-colored granite. Despite his bein' three-quarters my size, his

upper-body musculature nearly matched mine. I prayed my longer reach would count for somethin'.

We peeled down to just our Kevlar crotchguards. I made Benzene Bill—who had moved up to the front row to gloat—hold on to my clothes and boots. Not that I was gonna survive to wear 'em. My balls felt 'bout as big as a hamster's.

The ref brought the Bloodhound round. It came up to me first, licked some of my sweat, then nipped the flesh between my thumb and forefinger to draw blood.

"Nuffin," growled the augie-doggie, after rolling the juices around on its palate. Then it did the same for Diaz, who came up clean too.

"Okay, gents, you're both operating under correct physio-norms, without enhancements. Let's get this show on the road."

We entered the ring, and the crowd cut loose with a barbaric roar that musta resembled what the spectators at the Colliseum sounded like.

The ref spoke into her lapel mike. "Okay, citizens and otherwise, we have a grudge match here. On my left is a visitor to Greater Dallas, *Senhor* Flaviano Diaz from south- of-the-border way."

Diaz got a big round of applause, which was only natural considerin' the ties here to his region.

"And on my right is a homeboy, originally from Robert Lee, Texas—Mister Lew Shooter."

My applause matched Diaz's—more or less. I scanned the audience, and thought I spotted Geraldine and some other gips. Then I yanked my concentration back to the cockpit.

"All right, roosters, you both know the rules—there are none. Except of course that the winner gets to decide if the loser receives medical treatment or not. Go to it, and may the best cock win."

The ref backed out in a hurry.

When her foot left the ring, Diaz moved.

He tried a *galopante* first, a blow of the hand to my ear to knock my balance out. I deflected it so that it glanced off my

temple with stingin' force. Then I drove two stiffened fingers into his sternum. It was like pokin' a plank. But I've pierced a few plies of steelwood before, and I knew he felt it, though he barely showed it.

The crowd was screamin' for blood. As if to oblige, Diaz launched a *bençāo*, a forward kick. I watched as his foot seemed to travel in slow-mo, its slice of sharpened steel headin' straight for my throat. At what seemed like the last possible moment, I dropped below the blow. Restin' on one hand, I kicked his single supportin' foot out from under him.

But instead of hittin' the sand, Diaz converted his motion into an *aus*, or cartwheel, finishin' up on his feet across the ring.

I closed with him, figurin' to soften him up with a few punches. We traded blows to the torso and head for a few dizzy seconds, and I won't say who took the worse punishment. We clinched, then pushed apart.

Somehow Diaz had ended up with his back to me. This was it, I thought, your first and last mistake, you little bastard. I got lined up to slice him open when he turned.

But he didn't turn. Instead, arching his back, he flew into a *macaco*, or monkey, shootin' halfway across the ring.

Now I had my back to him.

I spun around.

Too late.

Before I knew it, I felt two slices across my upper thighs.

The fucker had opened up both my femoral arteries.

I wavered, then collapsed onto my stomach, feelin' strength drain out with my blood.

"Now," said Diaz, "I will keep my promise."

His voice told me where he stood. With the last of my energy, I pulled a mule.

Goin' into what amounted to a handstand, I hooked both my spurs into his gut. And ripped down, draggin' Diaz to the ground and spillin' his innards onto the bloody sand.

"Any farmboy knows not to fuck with a mule, asshole," I managed to say, then blacked out, wonderin' as I did what kind

of medical attention two losers would get.

I musta been out only thirty seconds or so when the dirty-harrys showed up.

(I later learned that Diaz had diplomatic immunity, and the authorities were worried about him comin' up zero-sign and causin' a scandal. That was the only reason they'd crashed the usual Saturday night frolics, admittedly a little late.)

Well, they blew down the doors and dispersed a cover of Fear-o-moan and Whammer Jammer to handle any resistance. The folks in the crowd who wasn't pukin' were shriekin' and clamorin' like a buncha Girl Scouts who had wandered into a nudist camp, while me 'n' Diaz lay bleedin' to death. (Flat on the floor, I escaped most of the aerosols.)

Then I blacked out again.

Next time I came to, my head was in Geraldine's lap.

Geraldine was cryin'. Musta been the cop-gas, I guess. Through her tears, she said, "Don't worry, don't worry, don't worry, Lew, I had a medikit, I brought it for you, I patched you up."

I tried to lift my hand up to feel my thighs, but couldn't. Geraldine grabbed my paw and brought it up to her face. Then, unconsciously or not, she started rubbin' my wrist up and down the side of her neck.

"You'll be all right, Lew, I'll post your bail and visit you in the hospital. You'll see."

I found my voice deep down in some lonesome cavern of myself. "I—I ain't listenin' to you, Geraldine," I croaked like a bullfrog flattened by a semi.

"Yes you are, Lew. Oh yes you are."

stark raving

Lucius Shepard

Remedial Reading for the Generation of Swine

I was going to write more about the horror genre in this column, but fuck continuity . . . something else has to come up that strikes me as being more timely.

Not so long ago I came across a piece by a colleague in the magazine *Science Fiction Eye* that contained the following quote:

> "Having achieved the distinction of being arbiters of taste, they have lost whatever taste they once had, making certain that their deplorable lack of vision and integrity will be handed down to the next generation by selling their shallow ideas at writing workshops: Those who can, Do; those who can't, Teach; those who can't teach, teach at Clarion."

Clarion, for those not in the know, happens to be a writing workshop specializing in speculative fiction, which has counted among its students writers such as Kim Stanley Robinson, Robert

Crais, James Patrick Kelly, Ed Bryant, Allen Brennert, Vonda McIntyre, Glen Cook, Michaela Roessner, Michael Armstrong, Octavia Butler, Geoff Landis, as well as a number of writers from whom you will soon be hearing, writers like Tony Daniel, Jim Gardner, Carolyn Gilman, David Cleary, Brooks Peck, and Damian Kilby, to name but a few. Those who have taught at Clarion or are scheduled to do so include Thomas Disch, Gene Wolfe, Lewis Shiner, Avram Davidson, Karen Joy Fowler, John Kessel, Kim Stanley Robinson, Pat Murphy, Ursula K. LeGuin, Marta Randall, Gardner Dozois, Connie Willis, Samuel Delaney, and ad infintum.

By implication, as you can see, my colleague—let's call her Madame X—has gotten after a whole bunch of talented people here, people whose vision and integrity have already made quite a mark.

Now having attended Clarion as a student and having taught there twice myself, my initial impulse was to take this real personal and write a letter chiding Madame X for the patent absurdity of her statement, pointing out that to spout such an uninformed and generalized declaration serves only to reflect upon the ignorance of the declarer, because Clarion—like any educational circumstance—has its good teachers and bad, its virtues and flaws, its inspirational moments and its embarrassing ones, its successes and failures, and to denounce it with such a blanket and blaring idiocy as if it were somehow significant and hip and right-thinking to do so is either the act of a neglected child clamoring for attention or maybe that of a frustrated wannabe whose own vision and integrity hasn't yet been proved for shit . . . or maybe somebody operating under the disorienting influence of toxic shock.

But then I said to myself, Nah, why bother?

And my thoughts turned instead toward the climate existing in the field that breeds such irrelevant and tendentious proclamations, a climate in which snide cleverness attempts to pass itself off as radicalism, in which arrogance and back-stabbing and pettifoggery have come to dominate the ground of reasonable

discourse. Why, I asked myself, do a group of purportedly intelligent people waste so much time upon nitpicking, upon launching missiles at such feeble targets as writing workshops, upon fatuous self-congratulatory egofests at which various of their number grow sleek and bloated with soft-porn adulation and pretend that to besmirch John Campbell's reputation is intellectually of moment, upon deciding what is and is not a suitable credential for membership in this or that clique, upon inventing ludicrous categories to distinguish what they consider appropriate literature from what they consider inappropriate, upon so-called professional journals whose content is mainly comprised of querulous complaints or fruity arguments over some nicety of parliamentary procedure . . . why commit this fierce deployment of words and schemes and collusion, and at the same time completely omit from consideration the very real and pressing matters that menace them in their roles as men and women of ideas, and in some instances, menace their very lives . . . matters that should engage their moral energies and enlist something of an activist consensus? Where is there the least sign in all this petty *sturm und drang* of anything other than blatant small-minded self-interest?

Where is there the least sign in all this petty *sturm und drang* of anything other than blatant small-minded self-interest? Nowhere.

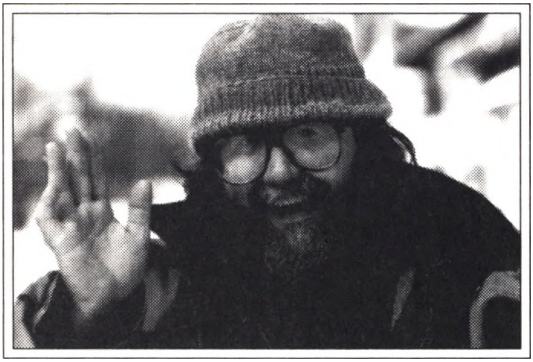
Nowhere.

I'm not suggesting here that things are different in any other field of creative endeavor, that groups of mainstream writers and art critics are devoid of pettifoggery and back-stabbing . . . though at least they seem to have mechanisms for reacting to world events that gives them the semblance of being men and women of conscience (Witness PEN's activism in response to the Rushdie affair and, previously, in speaking out against political excess in Latin America). Nor am I suggesting that we rush to create Science-Fiction Aid or concoct some other bogus strategy

for feeding the waifs in Ethiopia. I'm certain that such an effort would be either botched or deliberated to death by the same people who were unable to decide whether or not there should be a Science Fiction Writers of America tie tack. But even with all the bullshit expended upon arguing about awards and accusing one another of technophobia and trashing this and lampooning that, even given the fact that there's a growing tendency in the field to deplore serious intent in fiction, to redefine the genre as being a source of entertainment pure and simple, and perish the thought of trying to encourage a reader to think or feel, I'm still surprised that somebody hasn't thought of maybe channeling some of this energy toward the end of effecting something half-ass in the way of a compassionate act or some sort of consciousness-raising. I'm not expecting anybody to put away their toys and get real, you understand. Just a token effort, just enough to erect a facade, so that when someone glances at our little group from without they don't see what appears to be a pack of fucking retards jerking each other off and giggling.

Time, now, for a reality check.

Lucius Shepard is one of the last decade's most widely-respected and popular writers of science fiction and fantasy. He is currently at work on several new (mostly non-sf) novels now in various stages of completion. A second collection of his short stories will see publication later this year. *Stark Raving* is a regular feature of this journal.



I'm sitting here today after just having finished reading *The Boston Globe.* Hell of a piece in there about these six Jesuit priests who were offed by persons unknown (uh-huh!) in El Salvador. Not only were they dragged from their beds and slaughtered, but with that inimitable sense of style displayed by the death squads at their most inspired, the priests' brains were stolen. Scooped right out of their heads. Could be that pervert D'aubisson minced them up nice for a Caesar salad. Or maybe he's got them lined up on his trophy shelf in jars. Everybody in our government and the media is acting profoundly outraged . . . like they had no idea shit like this was going on, right? Just like they never had a clue that Noriega and the CIA were doing lines together, or that Somoza was actually a tyrant. They could have sworn the democratic process was alive and well in Bananaland, the death squads a thing of the past, blah blah blah, and lookit here: there's the president of El Salvador talking about one of the victims with grave respect and sincerity. See, I told you he was really a swell guy. So, to mollify the Catholic vote, there will be a furore for a while, public declarations of stern American intent, and maybe there'll be a show trial, but nothing more will be done, nothing will change, and soon the horror of life and death South of the Border will once again become invisible, and, as have the thousands of mutilated victims who preceded them, the six priests without brains will be forgotten (probably by the time this piece reaches print). Try to imagine the contemptuous evil that sanctions such vileness, that makes possible the license necessary to commit this sort of act, and try to imagine what it must be like to live in a country where such atrocities are the order of the day. Or better yet . . . don't try. This is America, after all. We can do whatever the hell we want here, we can ignore all kinds of bad shit, because—bless our hearts!—we can get away with it. That's the attitude I've come to expect from the average jerk, the What-me-worry attitude that goes hand in hand with the chicken-in-every-pot mojo litany preached by our prez the Bushmaster, his Grandmomma Bride and their whey-faced litter of Neo-Nazi Rotarians. It's the attitude that let Heinz and Heidi make be-

lieve that everything was just the coolest back in Reich Number Three, that let them tell themselves, hey, that black smoke pouring from the chimney of the place with all the machine guns and soldiers and Jews, they must be having some keen barbecue there, y'know? Same exact deal. It is not, however, the attitude I expected from my peers, from people with live minds. Oh, I'm sure there are a surfeit of liberals out there who do purely frown upon this matter of priests minus brains, and yea, upon divers other inequities such as the homeless and the environment and so forth and so on.

Well, that's neat, I mean, it's very nice that you have formed these opinions, but I'm here to tell you, people, frowning's just not going to cut it any more.

Ah ha, you say, here it comes . . . the left-wing whacko call to action, the summoning of the people onto the streets.

No way, man.

To my mind, the 'Sixties and all that rebel youth bullshit was a shuck, with only a few committed folk, and the rest out for getting laid, getting high, and giving the raspberry to mom and dad. I suppose the resultant noise did have some effect on hastening the end of the war, but I'm not too sure that Victor Charles couldn't have achieved the very same thing all on his own. The main thing I've learned from looking at the 'Sixties is that the majority of people in this country are too cozy and self-absorbed ever to risk going to the wall.

More pertinently, though, this ain't the 'Sixties, it's the 'Nineties, and things are a lot more grim and entrenched than they once were, because even though we've got *glasnost* and *perestroika,* and a kinder, gentler America, and a few other auspicious signs, what we've still got as relates to the process of world peace is just another Bad Breath Committee on Armchair Disarmament, and along with that, we've got the Greenhouse Effect, acid rain, war in the east, war in the west, everywhere is war, and famine, pestilence, plague, earthquakes, and a whole lot of serious inanition as regards doing anything consequential about these problems.

Now as far as I'm concerned, anybody who remains silent in times such as these, like Heinz and Heidi once did, they ought to have weasels set to gnaw at their groins, they ought to be forced to listen to Rick Astley records while drowning in tofu, or worse, they ought to be forced to watch close up and personal while some of the shit they maintain silence about is performed right under their nose. Silence, the ultimate symptom of a lack of concern, seems to me the most noxious of sins. And I feel that the days are past when artists can—as did the Surrealists—justify their privileged existences by making nonsensical and irrelevant statements for their shock value or by professing disinterest in anything aside from the sex life of aphids and the dissection of kittens.

To my mind, the 'Sixties and all that rebel youth bullshit was a shuck, with only a few committed folk, and the rest out for getting laid, getting high, and giving the raspberry to mom and dad.

But that's just my aberrant sense of values, I guess.

I realize that the fact I haven't been completely seduced by *chi chi* post modern cynicism leaves me open to charges of terminal uncoolness, and I realize further that the people at whom I am most aiming my words have been so thoroughly enraptured by their disengaged pose, they will perceive only my uncoolness and not hear the trendy core of the advice I am offering free of goddamn charge on how to upgrade their stylish posture without ever leaving the comfort of their living rooms.

But you see, it's not really activism that I'm encouraging. As I implied earlier, I'm suggesting an enlightened tokenism, something that's entirely in keeping with the insipid and dispassionate ambience of the post-modern mentality.

Let me show you how it works.

Out there in the real world, boys and girls, there are certain areas of contention about which nobody gives a flying fuck. No

matter how cleverly or eloquently you debate them, you will impress not a freakin' soul.

Here's a sample list.

1) Nobody gives a fuck about whether John Campbell was a hack editor who tutored hacks, or a godlike creature gifted with incredible powers of perception.
2) Nobody gives a fuck about what William Gibson does in his BVDs.
3) Nobody gives a fuck about whether a work of speculative fiction should be eligible for the Nebula award for one year or two.
4) Nobody gives a fuck about what one notable author did or did not do while editing the NAR (Nebula Award Recommendation) Report.
5) Nobody gives a fuck about the life of the mind in Austin, Texas.
6) Nobody gives a fuck about why one notable author finds another so utterly contemptible and why he is threatening him with the exposure of a secret sin.
7) Nobody gives a fuck about the nature of that secret sin.

I could go on, but you get my drift.

Naturally, now, I'm not saying that we should abandon these various cutting edge discussions of undeniable intellectual value. I'm simply saying we should leaven our discourse with the odd topic of wider relevance in order to present the impression that we are not without a holistic sensibility, to demonstrate that speculative artists, too, are creatures of conscience, and thereby bring credit to our profession. It's kind of like the strategy your mom had in mind when she cautioned you always to wear clean underwear just in case you had to go to the hospital—you want to look good when the doctor starts to check you out. And while I understand that these topics of wider relevance are nowhere near as involving as those on my list, I submit that by taking a stand pro or con regarding them, one can have every bit as much fun

and draw just as much attention to oneself.

For example, let's pretend that Madame X (remember her?) had made a statement in support of looting priests of their brains, claiming that such ghastly acts were necessary instances of democracy in action. This is, admittedly, unlikely. Madame X is doubtless of sterling character and high moral tone. But it would be no less witling an act than her anti-Clarion riff, and it would have so much more panache, so much more shock value, and would engage a considerably larger audience. And once this last is noticed by others of our number, they too would wish to jump on the bandwagon. Impassioned letters would be written, diatribes and polemics would proliferate, opinions would be polarized, teams chosen. The incident of the six brainless priests would become a happening thing, with T-shirts, slogans, in-fucking-depth discussions, and to those cool intellects who gaze upon us from afar, we would suddenly appear a keenly committed band of craftsmen in the forefront of political action, working with all the vitality at our command to develop a robust dialogue with the American people concerning the Important Questions. Just imagine the opportunities that would open up for pontification, for manifesto-making, for pure self-aggrandizement, for brunch with Ted Koppel, and all in the name of a Cause, all because Madame X, who would by this time have achieved the status of the Jeane Kirkpatrick of speculative fiction, with six figure book contracts in the offing and several sensationally blond television appearances behind her . . . all because she had taken a strong stand on an issue with more far-reaching implications than Beyond Cyberpunk or Should Wesley Crusher Come Out Of The Closet?

I think you can see the possibilities here.

So come on . . . let's man the goddamn barricades, let's jump start those rusted-out, cobwebbed moral reflexes and go cruising for a cause with some major teen appeal and TV movie potential. The six priests, now, they're a solid beginning, but we need something sexier, something with staying power, a truly insoluble dilemma chockful of human interest and complete with

grieving mamas and sad-eyed Keane children in rags. . . .

Fuck this!

What the hell am I hassling you for? All this column is going to achieve is to get some of you angry at me, it's not going to sway opinion or move anyone to pursue the avenue of good works.

And maybe it shouldn't do any more than that, maybe the days for good works have passed, maybe all I'm doing herein is what I'm accusing others of doing—venting my spleen in some patently worthless pursuit.

I don't know, I'm not sure I know much of anything anymore.

1982, that's the time I've been thinking about while writing this, the time that illuminates the event I've been avoiding, because I'm fucking sick of remembering that kind of shit, it's much easier to berate and accuse than to confront 1982, the fool I was, looking for adventure, I guess, or maybe just dicking around, pretending to be an adventurer, but finding adventure anyway, and finding also certain limits in myself, certain tolerances, certain failures . . . I remember being so fucking terrified, chased by this little gray Ford full of men in white shirts along a dirt road after searching for a friend at El Playòn, where the death squads dumped the bodies of their victims. I remember dust was flying up around the car, the green world disappearing in whirlwinds of dust. I couldn't find any place to put my hands. They were moving all about on their own, touching things, the dash, the seatcovers, my leg, my tape recorder, like crabs trying to locate a hidey hole, they wanted to separate from my wrists and save themselves. I remember staring at the gas gauge wondering how far a quarter tank would get us. I remember fear yellow thin sour in

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my throat, I remember trying to speak, intending to ask the driver something, what . . . I don't know. Where are we, can we do it, are we headed the right way? Just needing to hear my own voice and not even able to give out with a croak. I remember thinking about praying and being unable to recall the words. I remember some very freaky days and nights thereafter . . . still too freaky for me to confront, or else I'm just too chickenshit. I remember how it feels to smell the brimstone, with death's spade-shaped serpent tongue flicking cold at your asshole, and seeing the end of the road in the black eyes of every policeman. The whole country like that, the whole raped, cratered, widowed, amputated, military-advisored place no more than a filthy fly-swarmed lunch counter of Death in the diocese of the Devil . . .

Ah, Christ, have a little pity on El Salvador!

For pity there, I'm certain, is in short supply.

It might have happened something like this. Shortly after midnight, a group of uniformed men entered the church. Hot night in San Salvador. The air like black gas, and a crescent moon floating above all like an evil grin. They brought the priests out in their nightshirts from the rectory, which was connected to the church by a short corridor, and they killed them one at time in front of the altar, in the dim light of the votive candles, under the Virgin's consoling glass eyes. They slashed the first priest's throat and opened his skull with a surgeon's chisel, prying up great peels of bone, making horrid splintering cracks that reverberated through the vaulted space, while the other priests looked on in terror. Then one of the soldiers, probably a young captain—the older ones like to let the young ones gain a taste for brutality, like an initiation, they nod and chuckle with approval like adult troglodytes watching a hatchling learn to eat flesh . . . Anyway, this young captain dipped both hands into the cavity of the skull and after a tussle, he ripped out the brain and held it aloft like a huge bloody gray cabbage. Gore dripped onto his uniform shirt. He stared up at it, unable to tear his widened eyes away from this amazing thing he had excavated, this unholy artifact of his newly

comprehended ruthlessness and power. His lips were drawn back from his teeth, but he was not smiling. One of the priests began to weep, and a squat sergeant, a toadfaced man with a pencil-line mustache, butt-ended him in the balls with his rifle, dropping him into a foetal position, curled up around his pain. Another soldier spat on him. The rest of the priests began to pray, and when one tried to help his fellow who had been groined, two of the soldiers beat him to the ground and cut out his eyes while he was still alive. His screams went unbelievably high.

And it kept on and on and on.

All the blood seemed to make it hotter in the church, all the screams seemed to thicken the silence.

They saved the bad priest, he who had been causing most of the trouble, for last. The colonel walked over to him and smiled in his face. It was a broad, calm smile, the kind of smile that knows everything about fear, that understands the subtleties of being a victim. A smile that in its grand bemusement is an emblem of assurance, of experience in these matters. He was trembling, the priest, but he was trying to be strong. His body felt light with prayer, with surrender. At any moment he could go flying off to God. The colonel whispered something, and the priest was puzzled, he was almost sure that it had been an endearment. Then the colonel kissed him, forced his slick snail's foot of a tongue into the priest's mouth. The priest was too weak to resist, and the kiss drained the final residues of his strength. He could taste sweet hot peppers and beer. He felt nauseated, and he wanted to close his mind as tightly and completely as he had closed his eyes. Cold certainty was rising in his spine like mercury in a glass stick. . . .

Sometimes—Jesus, I realize how fucked and over-dramatic this sounds, but it's true nonetheless, it's true—sometimes I get sick at heart with all the crap I've seen. Sometimes all I *can* see seems to be a form of sickness. Just bad shapes like fever blotches spreading everywhere, browning out clean light and clean lines.

And that's what this is, I suppose. Just a sickness, a delirium

coming over me for a few minutes, a few days. I shouldn't have written anything now, because only poison can come out.

Forgive me.

Madame X and all the rest of you, forgive me.

I ask you to forgive me for what I've said, and for what I'm not fluent enough to say, I ask the dead to forgive me, I ask forgiveness for not being able to render sufficient light of your deaths to make some notice in the world.

Someday, maybe.

I'm going to let this stand unedited, this column, with its bitter title and initial venom and its schizoid resolution, because I meant the things I said as I wrote them, because I felt intensely about them, because it's all I know how to say at the moment, because I feel so strongly that something has to be said, and I'm hoping that mere intensity will suffice to do the job. But I mean it, I swear . . . forgive me. I've got no right to talk to you this way. You've got your own lives, your own priorities and your own imperatives. I can't quarrel with them any more than I can quarrel with the color of a star or the nature of an angel.

There's no point in talking more about any of this, no use in causing a stir.

Be happy if you know how, stay alive if you can, keep clear of the black places on the maps.

Go back to sleep.

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A.A. ATTANSIO
(a contributor commenting on the rest of volume 1.)

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