

Hub

Issue 13 - June 29th 2007

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Published by *The Right Hand*.

Sponsored by Orbit.

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NEWS

See that little logo at the bottom of the page (or "later on" if you're reading this on a hand-held reader)? We've just been awarded a grant from the Arts Council! Not only is this a validation of all the work we've put in to date, it will help us spread the word about *Hub*. The grant that we have been awarded is to be used purely for marketing purposes – letting people know that *Hub* is here, and it is free.

Quite frankly we were surprised to have been awarded this funding, as we assumed that genre fiction (and emailed genre fiction) would not be viewed favourably by the Arts Council. We are obviously pleased to be proven wrong.

That – along with the news that those lovely people at Orbit have renewed their sponsorship – means that *Hub* will be here for a while, yet.

We still only just cover our costs, though, so don't let the Arts Council award prevent you from considering a donation if you enjoy reading your weekly dose of genre fiction and features. We're a free-to-read magazine, but we pay our writers. All donations are extremely welcome – regardless of size.



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More than a Butterfly

by January Mortimer

It begins the way it ends: with butterflies and dawn. On that beginning morning, it was late September and I was nine. I dozed on the sofa as pale sunrise slipped in through the window and washed my trailer home, making it new.

The trailer door creaked; my mother came in. "Nita, get up! They've come," she said.

I scrubbed sleep from my eyes. In the tentative sunlight, Mama gleamed. Laughter hovered on her lips and hoop-earrings and pony tail bobbed and danced.

"Where're we going?" I took her offered hand, ready to follow her to Mars if that's where she was headed. This smiling mama was a miraculous stranger.

"Outside!" She flung the door open and pushed me out into the dew-damp yard.

If he exists, God has a snap-shot of me on that morning, standing unshod on the trailer stoop. In that captured instant, my face is turned up to the sky, mouth an 'o' of wonder.

I saw Him, you know, on that day in September.

There were no trees in the vacant lot where we camped. No hint of green besides the broken beer bottles and a few sparse spikes of grass. But that morning there were leaves: swirling, rising, falling and filling the sky with autumn-touched orange.

Butterflies. Millions of butterflies.

"What are they?" I breathed.

Mama's hand squeezed mine; her fingers were all bone. "GATCGATA... They're the Kings and Queens of the world, my darling." The words were a teary murmur and the string of nonsense a prayer.

Together, we stood in silence, rapt in the wonder of it all.

"Look at them, darling, you can love them. You can love them and they'll never hurt you," said Mama. She wore Walmart clothes -- cheap and bright and ill-tailored, not quite the mystic size zero -- but she was radiant, just that once. No TV supermodel could have outshone her. "They're all we need."

A breeze blew across the lot, lifting the butterflies and speeding them away.

3.2 million lab-reared *Danaus plexippus* coaxed to life from entomologists' corpse hoards, the newspaper said. Genetic biodiversity restored and given wings.

Later that week, the town churches hung black banners across Main Street and the pastors made speeches on talk radio. I didn't care: they didn't want anything to do with my mother and me, either. Mama dieted down to size zero, for all the good it did her: my father didn't come home, the miracle modeling job never came and Mama didn't think she was beautiful enough.

I was in love with the butterflies. Years past, and they were all I ever wanted.

But they died. All of them. The Madgellion spill wiped them out. I was a nine year old in love, and on the stark screen of my TV I watched them die.

#

The season's fashion *Must Have* was optics cloth. Gucci and Jlake had come out with wearable discos in vintage cuts and the department store brands had followed. From the window of the bistro, Sam and I watched the pedestrians move through the evening like neon ghosts. We were celebrating: a lab in Boston had offered me a post-doc place.

"Nita, what are you feeling?" Sam rested his elbows on the table, leaning forward. Nothing remained of desert save scattered cake crumbs and a smear of icing. My Levardi scarf reflected blue and gold rivers across the table and the light caught upon his cufflinks.

"Very full!" I said.

"You always do this."

"Do what?"

"Avoid the question." Sam shook his head, aggrieved.

I shrugged. At twenty-six, I had long since learned that questions were optional.

"Marry me, Juanita Diaz."

A wine glass stopped halfway to my lips. I stared at him, aghast. Sam and me met in Harvard Square, in the rain, at 3 am, as freshmen.

I did not love him.

Sam said, "That was a 'No', wasn't it?"

We sat in a silence fraught with unsaid things. The waiter arrived with the check.

"You love your butterflies."

I nodded, relieved. "Yes," I said. "I love the butterflies."

#

When I left -- fled -- the night shift was seeping onto the streets. Billboards lit the way through the campus, flashing famous faces and famous brands: movie star/perfume, athlete/shoes, blog-lord/e-pad. *Flash-Flash-Flash*. Stray snowflakes fluttered from the dark, technicolored in the billboard glow.

The lab welcomed me with a chilly breed of warmth and the hum of sequencers. Poster of pheromone structures and artsy DNA spirals hung on the walls, stuck up with yellowing tape and grungy blu-tack. Someone had left a news report on the proposed UN gene-rewriting restrictions on my desk; I crumpled it with great pleasure.

Professor Terry Roberts, my supervisor, bustled by. "It's cold. Isn't it cold? More snow coming!" She was a motherly woman with graying hair, no interest in fashion and a face caught between age and youth.

"Yes," I said. "It's cold."

"Are you all right, Nita? You sound--"

"I'm fine."

I compared the notes on my e-pad to gene-code on a main monitor, matching up the lines of guanine, adenine, thymine and cytosine. G, A, T and C: the building blocks of life.

An hour passed. Then another. I was fine.

"You've had a fight with Sam, haven't you?"

“What?”

Terry and the lab technician stared out the window, their faces carefully blank. I pushed back my chair and joined them.

There was Sam. Sam standing in the snow: coatless, scarf-less, in a cotton vest and blue jeans. And wings. Wings of amber and scarlet and indigo sprouted from his back, made of chopped up silk ties and wire coat hangers. Students paused to stare, then hurried on, thoughts of Christmas shopping and exams visible in their hunched shoulders.

“Oh fuck,” I said.

Sam saw me and waved. He blushed and the wind tore his hair into a wild tangle.

“What an interesting young man,” said Terry. The technician giggled.

I took the back stairs two and three steps at a time. The fire door wailed a protest as I stumbled out into the night; cold air slapped my face and stole speech from my tongue.

In his snowdrift, Sam smiled. “Hey,” he said, casually.

“Are you insane? What the fuck are you doing? Oh, no, don’t you dare—” Sam was kneeling, a ring box in hand.

“For fucksake, Sam!”

“Juanita Diaz, I’m a butterfly. Will you marry me?”

Muffled cheers drifted down with the snow. At the lab window, the technician gave me a thumbs up and Terry beamed.

“I’m a shallow, selfish bitch, Sam. You know that! I’d make you miserable.”

He offered the ring: three rocks in platinum. De Beer’s best. “I love you,” he said.

I warned him. What else could I do?

#

A lot could be said about my brother-in-law, not all of it complimentary and some of it of interest to the fraud squad. But damn, Albert knew what a party should be.

Sam did not want to go, did not think I should go, did not think it was appropriate to discuss babysitters yet. In the vestibule, while we waited to be announced, he stood in stony silence, holding The Baby. I could see the man’s universe shifting, the constellations realigning to center on one newborn boy: Benedict, apple of his father’s eye.

It was all very nu-paternal. And nu-pat was all the rage: at the party Sam and Baby would blend right in, despite the storebrand dippers.

I doodled *Lycaena hypophlaeas* and *Strymon alea* on my pad, coding variants with wings like abstract cityscapes and eyes like emeralds. At the top of the screen, the news ticker flashed an alert: a report plucked from the news bulletin sea, just for me.

It was tagged MADGELLION.

In the brief moment before I shut the pad, the vid showed a reporter standing before a backdrop of fetid grey goo ruin, haunted by shambling hazmat suits and dying trees. I imagined I could hear the earth screaming.

Sam shifted the baby. “They have enzyme machines, sweetie, and more funding than they could shake a stick at,” he said. He watched as I buried the pad in the bottomless depths of my handbag. The baby gurgled; I eyed the kid.

Motherhood and I had a distinctly ambivalent relationship.

“Is he going to puke?”

“Nita!”

Albert’s major-domo straightened, the grand doors slid aside. “Mister Tyne and Doctor Diaz!” the man proclaimed.

The light and laughter of Fashionable Society welcomed me in. The air smelled of expensive perfume and menthol cigarettes and slightly of sweat and stress. A digital runway snaked through the hall, the pencil-thin models draped in Albert’s latest line; from a distance, you might think they were really there, right up until the point when they dissolved in sparks and rainbows. Lace was coming back in, I noted. And shades of silver.

God, Albert’s parties were like coming home!

Baby Benedict opened his mouth, breathed deep... and wailed like an air raid siren.

Sam elected to remain in the vestibule with our screaming offspring. He really *was* very nu-paternal. It was very cute and trendy.

A waitress in traditional black and frilly apron minced up with canape trays balanced on each hand. I smiled at her. “Albert is expecting me. Here’s my card. Now get me a cappuccino.”

#

I found Sam’s older brother in a leather executive chair lording over his backroom domain. The real runway snaked before him: a darker version of its digital self, hung not with flowers, but leering cameras. On the green-screen floor, young women strutted and preened for an audience they could not see. To either side of the stage, half-naked models shimmied into creations of lace and air while armies of seamstresses and makeup artists battled to repair and touch up. Others girls stripped, dropping dresses and shivering in their undies as they waited for their next garment.

Albert watched the nudity, pageantry and hysteria with a cool gaze. “Margaret, it needs more sleeve! Deal with it!” A manicured hand gestured to a young beauty about to mount the runway steps.

A localized riot snatched the girl down and thrust another in her place. Margaret dealt with it.

Mother wanted to be one of those girls. I was glad, in a way, she had never made it.

“Albert, your party is lovely, as always,” I said.

He stood to greet me and we kissed the air by the other’s cheeks. “Dearest Juanita, I hear I’m an uncle. Any other delightful news for me, on this finely feathered day?”

Albert spoke with a precise baritone, a voice as smooth and slick as an oil spill.

I tucked my arm through his. “Would I have come if I hadn’t?”

He laughed.

We moved away from the gaggle of peons. False windows — high res-monitors set in frames — looked over the party. The celebs and socialites drank, the girls strode, and media’s cameras twinkled. A soundless pantomime of a party. A stock ticker ran at the window tops.

On the runway, the girl with the sleeves swirled a final time. On the screen, she dissolved into a swarm of red minnows and rose petals; behind us, I could hear her swearing as she descended the steps in too-high heels.

The stock ticker dipped, the graph cutting jagged red lines across the gathering.

Albert frowned. “Margaret!” he said into his headset. “Deal with it.”

“Problem?”

Albert watched his stocks dance. He said, "The pundits are predicting a Punk revival next year. Do you know how many times 'nu-punk' has been done? It's just sickening. Bland, bland and dull, Juanita. Optics and e-integrates won't spice things up forever."

I extracted my pad from my handbag and passed it to Albert. Deeper in the bag a sandwich box and a perfume vial waited. "I took the liberty of filling out the paperwork," I said. "It's ready to send."

To the Patent Office... and the press.

Albert read.

Then he had Margaret fetch a model. The girl was whippet thin with large, bruised-looking eyes.

"Juanita, allow me to introduce Lizzie. Lizzie, meet Dr. Juanita Diaz, a woman about to become so rich that she could buy your soul from God. She has some perfume for you."

The girl took the offered vial; sweet floral spray hissed out.

I removed the sandwich box's lid.

"Oh!" Lizzie said. "They're so pretty!"

Golden green as peacock feathers, the butterflies tested the air and took wing. They circled Lizzie like courtiers around a queen; now sliding close, now backing away, now darting in to kiss her with their wings. Lizzie stilled, big eyes grown bigger. Against the cinnamon of her skin, the insects gleamed like living jewellery. All thanks to pheromone magic and some judicious biological reprogramming.

"Many insects have complex chemical signals. I fiddled with receptors..." I shrugged. It felt like explaining $2+2$ and the colour blue to someone who could neither count nor see. And Alfred didn't care.

"The rewrites are legal?" He played with my pad. The gears in his head turned, calculating profit with mechanical efficiency.

"They're all sterile."

The UN mandates doomed my creations to die: forever barren, their artistry ending with their brief lives.

Alfred thumbed the pad screen. Contract signed. Patent application sent. Press releases released. He said, "Get on the run, Lizzie."

Lizzie ran; butterflies soared in her wake, following their goddess: the ultimate accessories.

Through the false-window, I could see Sam returning with quietened baby. He was smiling. They both were. Beautiful Sam and baby. Benedict looked like a gremlin-creature or one of those chubby swallowtail caterpillars: endearing and as ugly as sin. *I can try to love them*, I thought.

My brother-in-law stood beside me, his hand on the small of my back. He bent to murmur in my ear. "What do you want, Juanita?"

Lizzie stepped onto the runway. The media's cameras went nova.

"Butterflies," I said.

Albert kissed my cheek. His next kiss was less than chaste. "Money then," he said. "Money I can give you."

#

In parlors, nightclubs and film premiers, butterflies floated on the blue updrafts of

cigarette smoke. On the high street, Fairyfly(tm) drifted from earth to heaven and back, like folded paper messages from god. We'd launched and fashion was following.

"You're getting death threats." Sam paced our living room. Benny, a year old and discovering hands can grasp, thumped plastic dinosaurs together and giggled.

Sam's tie -- orange, so last season -- hung askew; I straightened it. "Lunatics and fundamentalists," I said. "They're just words, Sam. Words won't hurt me. Besides, what are bodyguards for?"

Newspaper headlines glowed under the glass of the coffee table; Alfred's picture smirked from the business section. My name was there too, hidden somewhere in smaller font.

"Are you sorry about this?" I said.

Sam exhaled, shaking his head.

Benny tugged my tights, jabbering. I patted his head. "Good boy." He grinned with pink gums and handed me a dinosaur.

"You're happy," Sam said. "And I'm glad. . . ."

"But?"

"But I'm afraid. It'll all get bigger. And there are still the mandates."

I said nothing. Churches were already hanging black flags in my butterflies' honor. The ban on viable and long-lived rewritten organisms would not be lifted in my lifetime.

"I know you, Nita," my husband said. "One day, the mandates are going to look tempting."

An autumn breeze blew through the curtains. It smelled like leaves, like a morning in September years gone. I imagined I could hear my mother's laughter. "I could stop the Magellion Spill," I said to the wind. "A self-perpetuating population. Enzymes to digest the nano-compounds. Tell me that's wrong."

Sam said, "I love you. And I'm asking you, please, don't do anything stupid. For Benny's sake, if not for mine."

My pad rang; it was Albert.

Benny waved the dinosaur, splattering drool on my heels. Sam waited.

"I promise," I said.

And I answered the call.

#

I purchased the Reserve with the first royalties, spreading green across the hell of a New Jersey ex-industrial estate. By Benny's fourth birthday, the meadows rippled with clover and dandelion and overhead dragonflies and swallows competed in games of aerial acrobatics.

Alfred was happy: he was rich.

Sam was happy: he was always happy.

And I had butterflies.

"The blue ones are best!" Benny informed me. He sat at my feet, peering up at my work screen.

"Why's that?"

The bright colors of Benny's toys lay scattered on the lab tiles. Vivariums lined the walls, home to fluttering multitudes. I thought of Terry and the grim, cold lab I'd begun in. Benny pointed to the tank of *Pieris protodice* variant XA52. Their wings were a rich summer-sky blue.

“They’re happy.”

“Happy like chocolate chips?”

Joyous laughter tap danced between the sequencers. “Silly!”

He had my mother’s eyes.

A ways off, a car pulled into the parking lot.

“Do you know who that is?” I asked.

Benny listened. “Is it—”

A door creaked open. Sam crept in, mock-sneaking. His tie hung askew.

“--Daddy!” Toys went flying as a small bundle of excitement flung itself at its father, who whooped and swung the boy off the floor and onto his shoulders.

“Have you behaved?” Sam asked, tickling him.

Benny shrieked and beat his father’s shoulders and head with small fists. “Yes!”

“Good as gold,” I confirmed.

“Guess what we’re going to see!” said Benny.

“What?” I asked, as if I didn’t know.

“Cars! Lots of cars! Racing! Right? Right, Daddy?”

“That’s right.” Sam bounced on his heels, delighting the boy. “I’ll be home in time to make dinner,” he told me.

“Have fun.”

“Be a horse!” Benny commanded, and the two of them trotted out.

My brother-in-law arrived not long after. The years -- and the botox -- had been kind to him. He wore a simple charcoal suit and loafers, confident enough in his wealth that he had no need to flaunt it.

“What do you want, Alfred?” I said. I clicked my tongue; the work screen obligingly loaded the XA52 template.

Alfred strolled over. “Must I have a motive, dearest Juanita?” A hand slid down my shoulder; I could feel him waiting: would I shrug him off or lean in?

I did neither.

“You, have ulterior motives? Heaven forefend.” Even in this innocent conversation, a part of me listened for Sam.

Yes. I had slept with Alfred.

He chuckled, a low and knowing sound. “You aren’t just another pretty face, my dear. No matter how hard you pretend.”

“Alfred, my mother was a pretty face. And it killed her. What makes you think I would ever--” I stopped; I was being taunted. “This is about your new line, isn’t it? What do you want, new colours or new base genotypes?”

Fashion was a fickle, ever-evolving king.

Alfred grinned like a shark. “I’m thinking bigger. Better.” He pulled his pad from a blazer pocket and showed me. I scanned it, reading the titles of biochemistry journals and with growing bemusement. Alfred believed in knowing as little as possible about the things that earned him money. . . .but here was research, in linkblue and white.

A shame most of it was pseudoscience.

I put the pad aside. “Alfred, humans do *not* have pheromonal communication. Our

vomer nasal organ is practically vestigial," I said.

"My dear, that isn't the point."

I took another glance at Alfred's reading list: human mood indication via analysis of minute skin secretions. Reports of interest to security services, interrogator and divorce lawyers, but few others.

Ah. I understood. "Let me guess, you want me to key the butterflies to these chemical secretions instead of perfume."

Alfred leaned on the back of my chair, smelling of cologne and warmth. "You make it sound so *scientific*, Juanita. Think what it could do. . . . colour-coded emotions. *'Know your partner's moods! Broadcast your state of mind! A whole new form of communication!'*" He gestured as he spoke, underlining advertisements only he could see."

"How droll. And you think that is commercially viable?" I wished Alfred would leave. He had pet geneticists now.

And I had guilt.

"Darling, 'Moodflies' would take the emotionally repressed yuppie world by storm. I promise you." He leant over so that his cheek brushed my hair. "This is what you wanted. Butterflies the world could not do without."

On my work screen, I called up a particular XA52 chromosome. The screen filled with strings of dots in primary colors, annotated with tiny footnotes. Here a metabolic regulator, there a sex-linked immunity to parasitic attack, further down, the corrupted remnants of a rare invertebrate retrovirus. Life: adjusted to my preference. Life that would never be loved by anyone but Benny and me.

"You would never get a permit," I said. The mandates were explicit on rewrites that 'embraced humanity'. . . and once, years ago now, I'd made a promise to Sam.

And of course, sometimes you don't want people to know what you're feeling.

Alfred's silent laughter stirred wisps of my hair. "You should know by now darling, that cash can make problems disappear."

"Yes." I tapped an icon on the screen.

The door banged; two ex-marine security guards filled the doorway. Alfred's devil-may-care smile sharpened, becoming something diamond bright and sharp and cold. "Does your husband know you're such a frigid, conflicted bitch, Juanita?"

"Yes." I'd explained it to him the day he proposed. "Now get out."

#

They were late back from the racetrack. I cooked pasta. I didn't even burn it.

It sat concealing in the saucepan.

They didn't come home.

At 8 o'clock, the doorbell rang; I answered it to a vaguely familiar woman and two stiffly silent policemen.

The woman whispered shrilly to the police, "I can't tell her! She'll fire me! She'll make my boss fire me..." It was Lizzie, Alfred's model, an assistant PA now, having fucked her way up the food chain. Her eyes were big and bruised and tearful.

"Ms Diaz?" an officer said. "Can we come in?"

I gripped the door frame, feeling my nails dig into the wood and splinters dig into my fingers. Blood sang in my ears. Blood does sing; I never thought it did before.

"Who?" I asked the officers.

Benny or Sam.

An officer doffed his cap. He was young. Earnestly so.

Sam or Benny.

"I'm sorry, ma'am. There was an incident--"

"--Benedict," Lizzie interrupted in a deafening whisper. "The car hit little Benedict."

#

Hospitals smell dead. They smell of lemon antiseptic and wax floor polish and the cloying stench of new plastic. I sat in a private waiting room, where faulty lights flickered and buzzed like raging wasps. I borrowed a pad from a nurse; when the doctors came, I was hard at work.

They said soft, horrible things. Things like "lumbar vertebrae," and "oxygen starvation" and "internal hemorrhage" and "do you want to come and say. . . ?"

No. I didn't. I wasn't going anywhere.

The fluorescent lights flickered. A clock ticked away the time.

Sam wandered in. His shoelaces were undone and his tie was still crooked and his face was full of listlessness and pain. A prim, white-coated doctor walked at his elbow, brimming with compassion.

I smiled at her as pleasantly. "Fuck off. I'm busy."

Sam knelt by my chair like a puppy begging for attention. "Nita. Sweetie. Talk to me!"

I flipped a page on the e-pad. "Do you think *Heliconius charitonius* would make a good base genotype?"

My husband withdrew; I didn't look up. "That's all? Benny's *gone*, Juanita. He's... he's..." Sam's voice broke. "Do you care? Did you love him at all?"

Did I care about Benny? Benny with Sam's face and Mother's eyes? What a fuss.

I pointed to the pad, to the winding line of base pairs on the screen. In my mind, I could see its lacy wings and the faceted glitter of its eyes.

"I'm making them blue."

Blue like a summer's day and happy like chocolate chips.

I tabbed onto a fresh page and began to sketch. The lines were shaky, as if the stylus trembled.

Sam's turned and walked into the citrus-antiseptic distance. The doctor hovered in the doorway like a white-clad moth, then she, too, slipped away.

"GATCGTA . . ." I whispered my mother's nonsense prayer -- the name of a cloud of monarch butterflies -- to the failing lights and polished floor of an empty room. G. A. T. C.

#

Outside the lab, the Reserve blossomed. Painted ladies and cabbage whites flitted like angels, fragile and as fleeting as dreams. I watched the news, curled in the lab's lobby sofa after kicking the secretaries out. There was the crowd, the racetrack, and there was Benny and there. . . the camera shied away, jumping to interview a white-haired patriarch with a ruddy face and God on his side. His son was gone, too: a formula-one driver. At high speed, helmets can only do so

much. Too much god on the brain, too much hate on the brain, brain gone squish out the ears. . . .

“You fucker! I wasn’t there!” I smashed in the patriarch’s righteous face with the chair, smashed it until glass and plastic crunched on the lobby tiles and the rage collapsed in on itself, as broken as the television.

Beyond the sterile confines of my lab, the butterflies danced. God, they were so fragile: a little poison and all that magic would disappear, leaving bodies of brittle sticks and colored tissue paper. The Madgellion spill all over again.

Alfred was right. I couldn’t let that happen. Couldn’t let Them stop me. How could there be a world without butterflies?

On the third day I muted the terminals’ ringtone. On the fourth day I packed up Benny’s toys. I didn’t want to step on them.

They’d break.

Benny would be sad.

Terry did not bother with calls or doors.

“I’m too old for this.”

Sleep abandoned me on the shore of cold, hard consciousness. I sat on a lab stool at work bench, my head pillowed on an arm and hair in my mouth. Terry gazed down, arms folded, foot tapping. I was twenty-six again, discovered napping on my night shift.

Then the world came back.

A draft gusted by, raising goose bumps; somewhere nearby, a window had been forced.

“I need to fire security,” I said. Or had I already done that? I could not remember. The building echoed oddly: an empty noise of lonesome corridors.

Terry snorted. I had not seen her for... years. Age had finally settled on her face and her hair had gone white and fine. She leaned over my shoulder, reading the sequencer outputs and my softly glowing pad.

“You never published,” she said. “I waited and waited, looked in all the journals, but you never shared what you found.” She touched the e-pad. The pages flipped: a chromosome; annotated genes; chemical equations; the Mandate, black text accusing.

“I’m sorry,” I said. And then, as thoughts shed sleep, “What the hell are you doing here?”

Terry did not answer. She explored the lab -- so much finer than her humble college domain had been -- running fingers across tech and tools and tables. “Sam is frantic. You aren’t answering the phone.”

I looked away. My mouth tasted sour, like dreams gone bad.

“That project you’re coding is beautiful. Elegant. It might even live.” Terry came around the table again. She smiled, a small smile, mouth just turned up at the corners. “It breaks every single regulation.”

“I know.” And I did. The haze of frantic madness was clearing, leaving dull nothing behind.

“Are you going through with it?”

I had made a promise once. I’d kept to it, through everything, because. . . . But it had not helped. It had not saved--

“I’m rich, I’m beautiful, I’m everything my mother wanted to be and wasn’t! So Why--” I gripped the desk edge; there was nothing to throw. Nothing to break

“Do you love, Sam, Nita? He’s still here. He’s waiting and he loves you.”

I said, “All I ever wanted to love were the butterflies.”

Metal jingled. “My jeep’s out front,” Terry said. “It’s nothing special. Take it if you need

to... The spill's a long way off." She left the keys beside me. "If you need to do this, he'll still love you. Mandates be-damned."

It was the pollen in the air that made me cry.

I sat up the rest of that night, watching the stars wheeling. An automatic recombination program ran in the lab, adding a final sequence and injecting artificial eggs with my creations. It was a special sequence, that final one, and it would nestle there in the noncoding DNA and continue on and on and on forever.

My Benny.

It wasn't the only change. . . but it doesn't matter. It would be like explaining 2+2 and the colour blue.

#

The jeep could do 0 to 60 in 8.8 seconds. On the drive south, I never did more than a speed limit-strict 59. I slept an uneasy night in North Carolina, parked on a residential back street under sulphur street lights.

I dreamed of half-remembered things and barren winter and police sirens.

The air changed from mild to warm to sultry heat. Towns grew thinner and the golf courses overgrown. The air smelled of distant filth: of contamination and swamp mud. An hour passed the last house, the road was washed out; the jeep revved as the four wheel drive tasted dirt for the first time.

The Madgellion spill had made a wasteland, a nightmare of poisonous mud and the twisted corpses of moss-draped trees. Restoration fungus sprouted in irregular lumps like so many grasping hands. Zombie hands, mottled and slimy. They'd permitted some moron to rewrite and he'd messed it up.

That evening, the jeep dipped into a hidden mire and could not escape. Terminal traction failure, the dashboard told me.

In the trunk, life stirred.

I rested my head on the steering wheel. I would not cry.

"They'll take everything away from you." My voice sounded odd, unused and rusty. "They'll take the Reserve and your work, your butterflies and everything."

But not Benny. Not Sam. And all the world apart from me would have butterflies.

My mother's voice whispered across years and miles. *"Look at them, darling, you can love them. You can love them, and they'll never hurt you. They're all we need."*

Truth. But truths can change.

I heaved the crates one-by-one across the desolation. Eggs had hatched and eaten and grown and wrapped themselves in silk cases. *Like seeds*, I thought, and sewed them.

Midnight had given way to twilight when I came for the last crate. I could hear them: the sound of autumn leaves. All the old, unwanted flesh cast off. They hatched quick, grew fast and they would spread to every corner of the earth

"Nothing short of a nuke can stop you," I told them. "And who would want to stop you?" Mud seeped through my jeans as I knelt to split the box seam with Terry's key.

Seven-dozen wings unfurled and fanned. Green for envy; yellow for love; red for anger; dusty silver for pain...

And blue for joy.

“I made them, Alfred!” Dawn came rushing over the horizon, bright enough to blind, to burn, to chase night into shadows and nothing. Wings and sunlight brushed my cheeks. “I made them. But not for you.” Butterflies humanity would never be without.

They took wing all at once, sweeping upward in a million flurries of gold and red and green and blue. Each one more than a butterfly.

Each a prayer.

And a benediction.

About the Author

January Mortimer has been published in such fine publications as *Ideomancer*, *Fantasy Magazine*, *Heliotrope* and *Aeon Speculative Fiction Magazine*. She lives in London and owns up to a fondness for good books, cheese on toast and frogs – although not necessarily in that order!

REVIEWS

Broken reviewed by Marie O'Regan

Doctor Who: Robot reviewed by Scott Harrison

No Dominion reviewed by Lee Harris (mini review)



BROKEN

Directed by Simon Boyes and Adam Mason

Starring Nadja Brand, Eric Colvin, Abbey Stirling

Revolver Entertainment

RRP: £12.99. Released 2nd July.

The premise at the heart of **Broken** is a simple one – what would you do in order to survive? The film starts with a woman (yes, blonde, yes, pretty) seemingly buried alive in a wooden box. We see her struggle to force the lid off, only to be felled by a blow to the head from The Man (Eric Colvin) - yes, really - and his shotgun. From there, things get even more unpleasant. The woman is forced to remove a razor blade that's been inserted into her abdomen in order to cut the rope around

her neck tying her to a tree, before she slips and hangs herself, losing several feet of intestines in the process. Collapsing in a sobbing heap on the floor, she is asked by The Man, 'Would you continue?' We then fast forward two weeks to another blonde, Hope (Nadja Brand), who finds herself in exactly the same situation, trapped in the box. She survives the initial tests and by so doing becomes The Man's slave, intent on staying alive in order to find out what's happened to her daughter, no matter what The Man does to her.

Supposedly based on true events, this could have been an interesting exercise in the dehumanisation of a victim by the captor, and indeed there were flashes of this: when Hope eats whatever leftovers The Man throws her way; when she accedes to his demands that she tend the garden of vegetables; giving up attempts to escape when he stamps on her leg, breaking it badly; even when she screams at another captive to shut up (ostensibly to avoid The Man's wrath and what he might do to the new captive, a teenage girl, but also because the noise of her crying is

getting on both their nerves). But ultimately we don't empathise with the victim at all, as the only emotion the film provokes is that of disgust.

It's never explained why The Man inserts a razor blade into his victims' abdomens, nor why he forces them to prove they're strong enough to survive – especially as all he does is keep them chained to a tree. Hardly enough to kill them, as long as they do as they're told. Likewise, we never see how or why The Man chooses his victims, or indeed how he captures them. This leaves the story feeling disjointed, providing no depth – basically a series of gruesome set pieces that appear to be designed purely to shock rather than to demonstrate the strength of the human spirit. The film's ending - which I won't divulge here in case anyone still wishes to see it – appeared to be nothing more than one last chance to shock the audience for no good reason. It serves no other purpose that I could see. All in all, a disappointing film, with little to recommend it.

DOCTOR WHO: ROBOT

Directed by Christopher Barry

Starring: Tom Baker, Elisabeth Sladen, Nicholas Courtney, Ian Marter

RRP: £19.99. Out now.



In those dark times before *Doctor Who's* glorious return in 2005 if you'd have asked someone who didn't consider themselves to be a fan (of which there are far fewer now thanks to Russell T Davis and chums) who their favourite Doctor was undoubtedly they would have answered "That bloke with the long scarf!". There's no denying that Tom Baker left an indelible mark on the public consciousness during his mammoth seven years on the programme. Now we can see where it all began, thanks to the BBC's latest 'classic' Doctor Who DVD release *Robot*, the story that kick-started Tom Baker's record-breaking stint in the role of everyone's favourite 900 year old Time Lord!

Robot is an odd story indeed! Produced by Third Doctor producer Barry Letts, while new producer Phillip Hinchcliffe was still finding his feet, and written by outgoing script editor Terrance Dicks *Robot* feels more like a final season Jon Pertwee story rather than the moody, gothic, introspective serial that would become Baker's hallmark in the following three years. It also has the distinction of being the only debut story to date in which the Doctor suffers no ill effects from his regeneration whatsoever! Amazingly the Fourth Doctor arrives virtually complete and character-perfect within the opening two minutes of Part One - remarkable when you consider it took Peter Davison two stories to really pin the Fifth Doctor down and Sylvester McCoy's Seventh Doctor characterisation was all over the place for pretty much his entire first season!

Picking up directly from where Pertwee's swansong story Planet of the Spiders left off a newly regenerated Doctor, eager to sever all ties with Earth and hop aboard the TARDIS to wander the universe once more just like in the good old days, begrudgingly comes to the aid of Brigadier Lethbridge-Stewart and his UNIT lads, agreeing to help solve one final mystery before heading off into the Big Black. Top Secret plans for a deadly new disintegrator gun are being stolen from several heavily guarded military bases in the area by some immensely powerful and frighteningly unstoppable force. What could it be? No prizes for guessing, I'm afraid, as the story title rather gives the game away!

Viewed thirty-two years after it's original transmission *Robot* still stands up rather well. Yes, the effects are a bit ropey in places (Colour Separation Overlay never worked properly, so why did they continually insist on using it?!) and the armoured tank is so blatantly a small kids' toy pushed into shot directly in front of the camera so it looks huge and, yes, some of the supporting characters read like a whose who of outrageous stereotypes (Absent minded, loveable old professor? Check! Shouty, arrogant, man-hating feminist? Check! Mindless, fawning dogsbody? Check!) but on the whole the script is tight, well written and, above all, bloody

exciting! Even three decades on the beautifully designed titular robot still looks damned impressive, managing to be both ominous and pitiful by turns - literally towering over the other cast members as he stomps his way through the combined military might of UNIT's finest... as well as a few well placed empty cardboard boxes to boot!

In a time of features-heavy, multi-disc special editions and collectors sets it's so hard not to be ungrateful when faced with a must buy film or TV series that is somewhat sadly lacking in the extras department... but ungrateful we are! Frustratingly the BBC still remain wildly inconsistent with the quality and volume of extras offered to us on their continuing 'classic' Doctor Who DVD releases. It's odd that with a reasonably important story such as *Robot* the 'special features' are rather thin on the ground - particularly when you consider that the vastly inferior Seventh Doctor story *Survival*, released earlier this year, was offered to us in a rather impressive 2-disc set with over two hours of documentaries and featurettes alone! *Are Friends Electric?* a retrospective behind-the-scenes documentary of the story, features contributions from the good Doctor himself Tom Baker as well as companion Elisabeth Sladen, producers Barry Letts and Phillip Hinchcliffe, writer Terrance Dicks as well as a host of supporting actors and behind the scenes bods, but sadly offers little in the way of anything new in terms of background information and behind the camera gossip that we haven't already heard on the previous Fourth Doctor DVD releases and unfortunately, with an all too brief running time of just 39 minutes, it fails to impress. By far the best thing about this release (apart from the story of course) is the audio commentary, brought to us this time by Baker, Sladen, Dicks and Letts, and delivered with great passion and verve by a group of people who actually loved and believed in the programme they were making all those years ago. Sparkling with such wit and warmth listening to it makes you wonder why all commentaries aren't like this, rather than the cut-and-paste bland diatribes thrown together from separate commentaries you often get on big budget blockbusters (George Lucas I'm looking in your direction!). Now throw in a rather bland 'opening titles' featurette, the obligatory Blue Peter clip, a photo gallery and some Radio Times DVD-ROM bump and there you have your complete package!

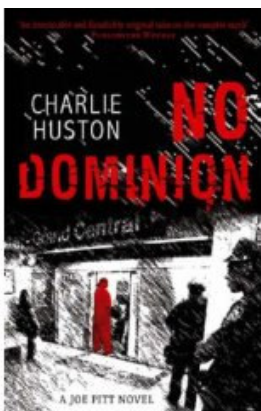
All in all a rather poor effort for a great little story that undoubtedly deserves so much more. If only a bit more thought and effort had been put into the extras this could have been a great little DVD, as it stands though its decidedly average.

NO DOMINION

By Charlie Huston

Published by Orbit

RRP: £6.99. Published 5th July.



No Dominion is Huston's second "Joe Pitt" novel - a direct sequel to *Already Dead* (also published by Orbit in the UK).

Pitt is a vampyre living in New York, but unlike the majority of his brethren he is not affiliated with any of the formal clans that run the vampyre underworld, preferring his rogue status which - though it causes him no end of trouble with the clans themselves - offers him a degree of freedom of movement.

No Dominion begins in a bar. Pitt is enjoying a drink with his girlfriend when the relative peace and quiet of his surroundings is disturbed by a drug-user, high, and irrational. What makes this user different, however, is that he is also a vampyre - but vamps are not supposed to be particularly affected by drugs. There's something new on the streets. Something dangerous, and Pitt is enlisted to find out what it is, and who's dealing.

Depicted in a pseudo-noir style Pitt and his world is ours, but with a twist. Vampires (or vampyres) exist, and have their own agenda - they're generally peaceful, but ruthless when the need arises (and in Huston's books the need arises with alarming frequency).

The book is an uncomplicated read. That's not to say it's simplistic – rather, it is extremely accessible, with a plot that thunders along through set-piece after set-piece. If Mike Carey wrote American vampires, this is what he'd write.

It isn't necessary to have read *Almost Dead* before this book (I hadn't), as Huston has provided all the necessary background information without having it feel too much like exposition-dumping (one of the lucky side-effects of writing noir). After reading *No Dominion*, I headed straight out to pick up a copy of Pitt's first adventure. I'd recommend you do the same.

Not Just a Pretty Face By Marie O'Regan



Women have come a long way in the horror genre over the last fifty years. You've only got to look at the difference between Merian Cooper's 1933 version of **King Kong** starring Fay Wray as Ann Darrow, and Peter Jackson's 2005 version starring Naomi Watts in the same role. In the first version, Wray screamed and fainted her way through the entire movie, waiting to be rescued by the men. Naomi Watts, however, painted a very different picture of Darrow – seeking to survive by befriending Kong and eventually growing to love and respect the creature, so much so that she is devastated by the death of Kong, in this film painted as a noble creature rather than no more than a ravening beast.

Traditionally, the view of a woman in a horror novel or film was that of an attractive woman trapped in a situation she couldn't control, whether that was a haunted house (**The Haunting**, 1963, starring Claire Bloom as the nervous Theo, haunted by her own demons as well as whatever is in the house), being stalked by a psychotic killer (**Psycho**, 1960, starring Janet Leigh and that infamous shower scene), or even victimised by some supernatural entity (Mia Farrow in **Rosemary's Baby**, 1968). In the earliest of these films, the woman almost always took a passive role – lacking either the understanding or the strength to defeat whatever obstacle she was facing alone, i.e. without a man to help her, or to save her. This was a reflection of society at that time, as the traditional image of the nuclear family was still very much the prevalent stereotype at the time – the man still being the provider and main wage earner, the woman being responsible for keeping the home and caring for the children. When women were portrayed as evil, as in Todd Browning's 1931 classic version of **Dracula**, it was in the form of Dracula's brides, in thrall to the male vampire, played brilliantly by Bela Lugosi.

The rise of feminism in the Seventies, coupled with the disintegration of the traditional nuclear family as the dominant model, saw all that start to change. The character of Laurie Strode, played by Jamie Lee Curtis in 1978's **Halloween**, was a pivotal one in determining how women would be portrayed in horror film (and fiction) from then on. Yes, she was young and seemingly helpless in the face of an implacable enemy (her brother, Michael Myers), but she displayed a determination and strength that were to break the traditional mould – never giving up, no matter how many times she killed him only to see him sit back up and keep on coming...the fact that the most successful of all the sequels was **H20**, the only one to feature a now adult Laurie, intent this time on protecting her son, speaks volumes.

Another film that changed the perception of women in horror was **Carrie** – the 1976 film of Stephen King's first novel – starring Sissy Spacek as the bullied, introverted daughter of a religious maniac. The eponymous heroine is misunderstood by everyone, not least herself. Her peers reject her as weird, her mother sees her as inherently evil – a direct result of her religious mania. All women are the children of Eve, from whom the concept of Original Sin derives, and are therefore evil themselves purely because of their gender. Kept ignorant of her own biology and

unable to understand the psychokinetic powers that manifest when puberty arrives with her first period, Carrie embarks on a wave of destruction that kills anyone who has crossed her – hardly the passive female of the Fifties and Sixties.

These films were instrumental in changing the way women were portrayed in horror – both in fiction of the time and in film – and the ‘save me’ heroine of previous years became unbelievable as a result. She simply didn’t reflect the current society. Not that that stopped women being put in peril in the movies. Apart from anything else, a woman in peril elicits more of an audience response. As Brian de Palma has said, “Women in peril work better...if you have a haunted house and you have a woman walking around with a candelabrum, you fear more for her than you would do a husky man.”



Women in peril are still prevalent, then, that’s true, but they no longer have to conform to the stereotype recounted by the character of Sydney Prescott (Neve Campbell) in 1996’s **Scream**, “(They’re all the same. Some stupid killer stalking) some big-breasted girl who can’t act who’s always running up the stairs when she should be going out the front door. It’s insulting.” The heroines in horror films these days take a far more active role, routinely saving both themselves and anyone around them. According to Mike Carey, author of *The Devil You Know* and *Vicious Circle*, “Yes, women in horror are often – disproportionately often – cast in the role of victims. But the horror narrative is the victim’s story. And in the course of the story the victim (the point-of-view victim, at least) makes the metamorphosis into something else, into avenger or destroyer or survivor. That’s the prophylactic function of horror: to drown us bodily in our own fears and then allow us to kick and flail and claw our way to the surface again. We have to identify with the victim for that to work. The kick-ass horror heroine of the present day – Buffy, Faith, Selene in **Underworld**, Sarah in **The Descent** – just abridges this process by refusing the victim role in the first place. Stake or sword or piton in hand, she carves her name on the dark and denatures it, makes it safe for the rest of us.”

One of the most successful genre shows ever, **Buffy The Vampire Slayer**, blasted any lingering notions that this stereotype still existed. Sarah Michelle Gellar brought the feisty teenager slayer to life, but wasn’t the only strong female character in that show. There was Willow, played by Allyson Hannigan – a girl who went from geek to gay icon, playing a lesbian witch; Faith, played by Eliza Dushku – another slayer, darker and more overtly sexy than Gellar, Dushku won a legion of followers. The men, by contrast, took a more subordinate role. Xander (played by Nicholas Brendon) the class clown, hopelessly besotted with Buffy, and Giles the watcher, played by Anthony Head – an academic tasked with training Buffy, definitely more of a cerebral than a physical role. Although at times Giles’ alter-ego, Ripper, would surface, hinting at a darker, more violent side to his nature. Even the ‘good’ vampire, Angel (David Boreanaz), was no match for Buffy. Doomed to fall in love with her, he was denied the chance to act on his emotions, for fear of losing his soul and becoming evil once more. Joss Whedon, the series’ creator, recently said at an awards ceremony when asked why he writes such strong female characters, “When I created Buffy, I wanted to create a female icon but I also wanted to be very careful to surround her with men who



not only had no problem with the idea of a female leader, but were in fact, engaged and even attracted to the idea.” The premise obviously worked, as Buffy was to run for seven series, spawning a sequel, **Angel**, that ran for four series - and even now, four years after Buffy ended, its impact is tremendous. There’s been nothing like it since, as shown by the fact that satellite TV has been showing re-runs pretty much ever since it ended.

In the movies, a recent trend would appear to be that of the single mother seeking to protect her child: Naomi Watts in **The Ring** (2002) and **The Ring 2** (2005), Jennifer Connelly in **Dark Water** (2005), Radha Mitchell in **Silent Hill** (2006) – all feature mothers protecting or trying to find their children. Interestingly, three of these movies are remakes of successful Japanese movies, while Silent Hill is based on a popular (Japanese) video game. Here again, the women are powerful – far removed from the characters so in need of protection in films until the Seventies. Paul Cornell, TV writer for genre series Doctor Who and Robin Hood, says “In mainstream horror, our protagonist is probably not going to make it, no matter what their gender. But post Joss Whedon, there’s now a new market for Women Having Adventure in Horror stories. Which one might say is the creation of the first frontier specifically created for and by women.”

It’s certainly safe to say that women are no longer the helpless victim, waiting for a man to come along and rescue them – the modern day equivalent of a knight in shining armour. In this time of equality and families of all types, representing all shades of the spectrum, the old perceptions could not survive. What was needed was horror fiction (and movies) that reflect modern life, and its multiple facets. The new heroines of horror are modern women – clever, resourceful, and most of all independent. It’ll be interesting to see what comes next.

Coming Next Week: Fiction: *Passing Out* by Derek Muir

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