



W **R** **E**
JOURNAL

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WIRE

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and
Mark V. Ziesing

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Journal Wired•Summer/Fall '90

Andy Watson & Mark V. Ziesing, Editors

Linda Gruno, Managing Editor

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Bride of

OPENING

Hi, it's me, Mark Ziesing. I wanted to write the introduction to *Journal Wired* this time around. I don't trust that screwball, Watson. Andrew manages to be both a bowery bum and a bourgeois white-collar genius—Lenny Bruce with a hard-drive. That's cool—I'm sworn to love the guy no matter what peculiar form his various afflictions take.

Well, if Andy is Lenny Bruce, I'm Milton Berle. I think that's why we make a good team: we're completely different people with radically different attitudes and sensibilities. Okay, we're both a bit twisted, we both have a flaming passion for goofed-up literature and we both like to dabble in the very dangerous world of small press publishing. Other than that we don't have a great deal in common. If we lived close to each other we'd spend a lot of time together, but most of it would be spent looking at each other shaking our heads.

I didn't bother to read the intro to the last *Wired* (Spring '90) until I saw the proofs. I was shocked. The thing that came immediately to mind was: *How in hell am I going to explain this to my Mom and my mother-in-law?* That was followed closely by:

G A M B I T

*What if my son or my daughter take a copy of Wired to school or give a copy to their English teacher like they sometimes do? Gads! I was afraid. Then I got to thinking about it and decided that the kind of bookazine that I'd be most interested in producing *would* be the kind that would require an explanation before I gave a copy to my Mom and it'd probably raise an eyebrow in the teacher's lounge if one of my thoughtless children were to drag a copy to school.*

I've decided I'm getting old too fast and conservative mountain-man attitudes are seeping into my subconscious. I haven't developed an interest in the Republican Party nor have I started to stare longingly at the local firehall bingo games, but I can still feel a sort of mental magnetism for things that, just a few years ago, would have seemed totally alien to my radical footings and revolutionary foundation.

I'd better be careful. I want to nip these feelings in the bud and preserve my washed-up, burned-out, beat-up old hippie attitudes. *Wired*, I feel, will be good therapy for this endeavor. *Wired*, I hope, will nourish my latent goofy tendencies and strange

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enthusiasms. That's what it's for—not just for me I hope, but for any readers that bumble their way into these pages.

Maybe Andy's right—if we can't ask nicely to come and hang around on your coffee table, maybe we should blow up your bathroom, and while you're putting out the fire we can land a huge stack of *Wired* right on the kitchen table. I still have to explain it to my mother though. Sorry, Ma.

letter

No, Journal Wired hasn't changed its policy with respect to letters to the editors: we still won't run 'em—see our first volume, Winter/89, for more on this burning issue. . . . As for what follows, it is of such extraordinary import that an exception quite simply had to be made.

Dear Editor:

Something in your column reaches right out and touches me. Chills go up and down my spine. I get giddy and giggle uncontrollably. My heart pounds and my cheeks get brighter and then I start to foam at the mouth. I think you know what I'm trying to say. I have a medical condition but I love your column.

I want to meet you. I want to get to know you. I want to have your children.

Let me tell you a little about myself. I'm a single, professional woman. I'm kind, warm, and I make people laugh whether I mean to or not.

Picture you and me. In a restaurant. Talking. Laughing. You order lobster and I order the chuck roast. Later that evening I develop botulism. You nurse me back to health and I become your love slave.

If you're interested, call me fast because I've got suitors breaking down my door. It's cute to a point but I'm thinking of calling the police. Anyway, I'm in demand, so don't procrastinate. I mean it. If I don't hear from you by November of 1992 I'm history as far as you're concerned.

I'll be waiting for your call. Or letter. Or package. Or flowers. I like candy, too. But not those orange-filled ones because I always spit those out.

Love, Wanda

Wanda, assuming this letter was not directed to us in error, please get in touch. You neglected to include your address and/or phone number. . . .

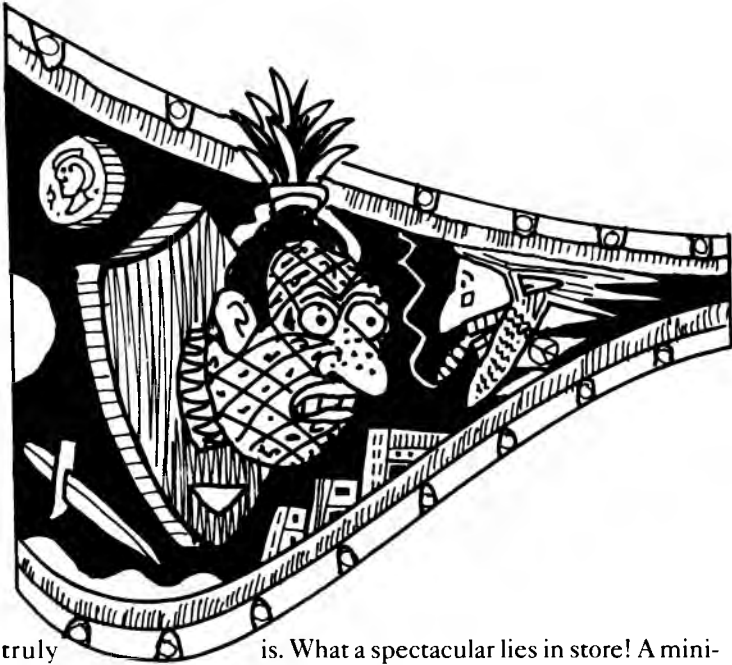
stark raving

Lucius Shepard

GEORGE BUSH
AND THE
PINEAPPLE
OF DOOM



According to those in the know, the biggest of the summer's movies is certain to be Warren Beatty's *Dick Tracy*, depicting the adventures of a square-jawed, morally upright defender of the American Way as he does battle against a host of villains whose features are so grotesquely deformed, they give rise to colorful nicknames such as Pruneface and Egghead. Later this year, in a classic example of life imitating art, the big reality production promises to be the show trial of General Noriega, also to be known as George Bush Versus Pineapple Face, in which our prez, the square-jawed ex-wimp and Yalie, will attempt to finish off a villain who has already been painted with the comic-strip colors of voodoo worship and the ownership of taxidermied bears dressed in Russian military uniforms, and whose image, by the time of the trial, will likely have been so distorted by the Fifth Estate that we will perceive him to be an evil larger-than-life deity wearing a necklace made of children's skulls instead of the pawn of American foreign policy that he



truly is. What a spectacular lies in store! A mini-skirted Barbara Bush as Tess Trueheart. John Sununu as B.O. Plenty. Thrills, chills, and—that staple of every great entertainment—loads of utter bullshit. Surely the patriotic fervor and renewed sense of manifest destiny that will result will prove a fair trade-off for the lives of the several thousand Panamanians, mostly civilians, lost during our little martial fling of the year past. Surely once Pineapple Face and his depraved minions are safely behind bars, all drug traffic in the United States will abruptly cease, and the streets will be safe for spry Seniors and curly-haired babes alike, and it will be Morning in America once again, and children with flags will line the city streets to pledge the democratic evangel, and a halo will appear over the ears of Mickey Mouse, and skies will not be cloudy all day.

In a recent article for the English press, the novelist Carlos Fuentes expresses incredulity over the fact that while the walls of the old tyrannies are crumbling in Europe, the United States continues to exercise an antediluvian foreign policy whose essential tactic is a brutal adventurism that brings to mind one of Godzilla's forays through Tokyo. He implores our leaders to notice the changes taking place around them, to join with other

ILLUSTRATIONS
by KENNY BE



nations in building a new and enlightened world. One cannot but applaud such sentiments; however, for all his wisdom and experience, Mr. Fuentes has failed to recognize that our gung ho Panamanian adventure was not merely a reprise of hoary political tendencies, but reflects a marked evolution of our national character. In the tradition of Grenada, of Maggie Thatcher's Falklands War, of Iran's invasion of our Teheran embassy, the capture and ensuing trial of Noriega will have absolutely no effect other than to draw our attention away from the problems that afflict us. It is a cheap sleight-of-hand tactic like those used by tyrants in every portion of the globe to rabble-rouse and obscure, and George Bush's use of this tactic has, I submit, firmly established our status as an emerging Third World nation.

Now no one in their right mind would suggest that Manuel Noriega is a misunderstood innocent. He is slime, pure and simple. There's no getting around that. What does it matter that we have been supporting slime like him all over the planet ever since Teddy Roosevelt took to carrying a big stick? I'm speaking here about outstanding statesmen like the Somozas, the Chilean generals, D'Aubuisson, the Shah of Iran, Marcos, Thieu, Pol Pot (yes, indeed, your government and mine is actually giving military aid

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to the man responsible for the Killing Fields), and hosts of less notable yet equally bloodthirsty beasts. But that's just *realpolitik*, baby. As Teddy R's favorite nephew and fellow president Franklin once remarked concerning the late beloved Anastasio Somoza, Sr., "That Somoza is a son of a bitch, but he's *our* son of a bitch!" And what does it matter that we have given tacit approval to the drug business for decades by allowing our "friends" in Panama and almost everywhere else the poppy or the coca leaf grows to make a few bucks on the side in return for saying, Communism is bad, and looking stern? That has no bearing on the situation. Noriega is guilty, guilty, guilty of daring to Just Say No to the CIA, and because of this we have been forced to terminate a few beaners, okay? (Hey, their average life span's only about thirty-eight or something, anyway, right, so what's the big deal?) And because of this we must try Noriega, convict him, and throw his grungy ass into the deepest hole we've got. Or better yet, let's cut off his hands and feet, force him to crawl down Pennsylvania Avenue at high noon while singing our favorite commercial jingles, Coke Adds Life, Oh, What a Feeling, all that, and when he reaches the White House, we'll nail his tongue to the steps, chain his arms and legs to four John Deere tractors heading in opposite directions, and let ol' George do him in by throwing the same switch he uses to light the nation's Christmas tree. Never mind the fact that it is not the drug problem that's undermining our country, as every politician who has failed a saliva test is dying to tell you . . . You see, now that the Red Menace is no longer a threat, drugs are the sexiest problem we've got. I mean if you're running for public office you cannot go fucking wrong by standing up and screaming, "God, I love you so much, America! Death to the Dealers!" Do this, and every little old lady in Kansas will immediately want to get a haircut like your wife's, and every convention of swimming pool salesman and shower accessory manufacturers will add your name to its list of potential keynote speakers. But as I was saying, it's not the drug problem that is undermining our country, destroying our culture, and raping our economy.

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It is our leaders.

It's those third-rate, back-stabbing, power-mad, asshole-sniffing hounds who pretend to be the guardians of the American conscience, and have not a clue of how to solve their incontinence problem, let alone bring a measure of sanity to our foreign policy or our treatment of the homeless, the afflicted, and the wretched of the earth. It is they who through greed and ineptitude and a failure to comprehend the forces of history have transformed a wealthy nation into a land aswarm with beggars, who have turned the greatest manufacturing power on earth into a service economy, who have created paupers where once there were farmers, who—by their lack of foresight and by virtue of the horrific environment they have created—have effectively licensed the dealing of illegal drugs and bred a hopeless generation in need of narcotizing, and have set in motion the machinery that will ultimately make of us an oppressed nation ruled by a tiny, obscenely rich elite, distinguishable from El Salvador and Guatemala only by our geographical size. It is sad, demented sociopaths like Richard Nixon, withered hormone-less old thumb puppets like Ronald Reagan, treacherous macho tumors like Lyndon Baines Johnson, flesh and blood entities who have, through the gone-mad factory of the American political process, been mutated into things who only want and grasp, who have the compassion of lizards and the vision of jackdaws, who react not to

LUCIUS SHEPARD IS A VIRGINIA BORN NOVELIST BEST KNOWN PERHAPS FOR HIS NUMEROUS BRILLIANT SHORT STORIES AND NOVELLAS (WHICH HAVE APPEARED IN *OMNI*, *PLAYBOY*, *IASFM*, *F&SF*, AND ELSEWHERE). HIS NOVELS INCLUDE *GREEN EYES* (1984) AND *LIFE DURING WARTIME* (1987), AND 1990 WILL SEE PUBLICATION OF AT LEAST ONE (AND POSSIBLY SEVERAL) MORE, AS WELL AS A SECOND COLLECTION OF HIS SHORT FICTION—THE FIRST WAS *THE JAGUAR HUNTER* (1987). *STARK RAVING* IS A REGULAR FEATURE OF THIS JOURNAL.

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crises or cries for help and justice, but to the results of opinion polls. Oh, now and then we are treated to a brief respite and instead of the usual psycho we are guided for a time by an nerdish Christian faun like Jimmy Carter or a bungling Eisenhower clone like Gerald Ford, but we quickly lose our patience with such as them. We want a real man in the White House, a Monster from the Kiwanis Club, a Three-Piece Suit From Hell to strike fear into the hearts of those who dare to hope that the USA has been de-balled. And so, obeying the dictates of this grand tradition, we have selected as our current leader a repressed twig of Yankee protoplasm and meanness named George Bush, who in the voice of a Methodist spinster has proclaimed himself The Education President and has done nothing toward that end other than to cut funding for various educational programs, whose most salient contribution to the fight against AIDS has been the planting of a tree in the name of Ryan White, and whose greatest accomplishment has been the bringing to earth of the fiend Noriega, the centerpiece of an invasion that has cost thousands of lives and millions of dollars, just so we could know there's a swinging dick in the White House and feel good about America again.

I will be the first to admit, now, that George Bush was the only choice in the past election. I mean if Dukakis had won, we could never have had a real swell War on Drugs, what with some dude with a pencil-line mustache named Ramon or Shorty making suspicious deliveries of powders and pills to the back door of the White House every evening, and telling the guards, "Hey, man, Kitty says it's cool, okay?" No, George was the choice, definitely. The man jogs, he looks good in blue jeans for an old geeze, he's tall enough to mount a horse without a boost-up, and

[GEORGE BUSH'S] GREATEST ACCOMPLISHMENT HAS BEEN THE BRINGING TO EARTH OF THE FIEND NORIEGA, THE CENTERPIECE OF AN INVASION THAT COST THOUSANDS OF LIVES AND MILLIONS OF DOLLARS, JUST SO WE COULD KNOW THERE'S A SWINGING DICK IN THE WHITE HOUSE AND FEEL GOOD ABOUT AMERICA AGAIN.

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he's connected with the CIA. What more masculine credentials could you ask for in a president? He is a man for the times, just the man, I believe, to lead us in our colorful and inevitable decline. He has proved himself the most mucho macho leader in the whole hemisphere, and I have confidence that he will continue to provide proofs of his potency throughout his entire glorious term of office.

But perhaps we should have listened to history, to the specific lesson which tells us, Never elect to high office a man who has something to prove.

Case in point—Lyndon Baines Johnson, a man who was out to show the world that his charlie was bigger than the Washington Monument, and that his vast paternal governance would make plain what sissies them Kennedy boys really were.

Remember the Great Society, remember bombs away over Vietnam?

And now, creeping out from the continent-wide shadow of Death's Republican Uncle, that gun-totin', Clint Eastwood quotin' centerfold for the AARP magazine, here comes this little teensy bug name of George Herbert Bush, and he by God is not going to stop until his shadow grows as bloated and profoundly black as that of his predecessor, and first off, he is going to flat-out kick some butt and clean up Dodge City, starting with Pineapple Face. Then, once all the other villains have scuttled back into their holes, he's going to lean back, roll the makin's and see what else is out there for a bad-ass hombre like him. Man says he feels as frisky as a spring colt, and wouldn't you, you just got through kicking sand in a bully's face? Big George needs a new challenge.

And that's where our real troubles will begin.

George, you see, has a few more brain cells left alive than did Uncle Ron, and once he has had time to absorb the view from the Oval Office, he will realize that there is nothing to be done . . . nothing, at any rate, that he has either the energy or the wit to address. It is too late for the Puritan ethic, for religious revival, for a renewal of Rockwellian homespun virtues, all those cornbread potentials which Ron loved to dangle like heavenly treats before

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the Nielsen families. George will understand that the country has been so spectacularly ravaged by previous administrations, it would take a Jesus of Nazareth or at the very least a Harry Truman to lead us from the wilderness, and George has enough Yankee pragmatism to recognize that he is no Harry Truman. In fact, I have it on good authority that he often walks in the White House Portrait Gallery at night, stopping before the portraits of each of his predecessors to mutter, "I am no Millard Fillmore," "I am no William Howard Taft," and so forth. Sometimes Dan Quayle, who has long since come to terms with who he is not, joins him on these walks, following close behind, chanting in Latin and ringing a small bell. But be that as it may, George will see—if he does not already—that the nation is teetering over the abyss, and all that is left for him to do is to be the steward of our fall, to guide us downward into the splendid wreckage and Roman darkness of the has-been, replete with bread and circuses, where a grim, destiny-less proletariat will baste in the juices of a Twenty-First Century delirium.

It may be that some of you will feel I am overstating my case by characterizing the USA as an emerging Third World Nation. If so, I urge you to have a look around. The signs of decline are apparent. The homeless are proliferating everywhere, no longer confined to the cities, but roaming the countryside, occupying Cape Cod and Florida beaches and small towns in northern California. Then there are the tactics of evasions, the show trials, the renewed public outcry in favor of executions (can televised electrocutions be far behind?), and the flag-burning statutes. And then you have the imminent destruction of the two-party process, the steady increase of scandal in government, the gradual devaluation of the dollar, the incredibly high infant mortality rate, the decay of our schools, the ever-increasing influx of immigrants, illegal and otherwise (can a country which is unable to maintain the integrity of its borders expect to prevail?), the media's transformation into a mouthpiece, on and on, each of these failed systems analogous to the way of things in Africa, Southeast Asia, Latin America and elsewhere.

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And consider the rising popularity of soccer . . . perhaps the clearest philosophical signal of all, this falling away from the contemplative purity and Jeffersonian ideals embodied by our national pastime.

But seriously, folks, if you wish to gain an appreciation of the swift certainty of our slide, I suggest you do some traveling in the Third World. I recall being shocked by the poverty there when I first went traveling some twenty-five years ago, yet now when I visit those same places I find I am no longer shocked. Calcutta is no more horrifying to me than Detroit or New York, its poverty—though more exotic and somewhat more persuasive of a terminal society—is no less affecting. Everywhere one goes, one is brought hard upon the truth that the vices and afflictions of the disenfranchised have been planted in American soil and have spread thick roots that threaten to break into rubble the foundations of our society. It is true that we have not yet reached the terrible passes of famine and martial law, that we retain reserves of food and materiel, that by the standards of the broken world around us we remain comparatively wealthy and free, but these things are a kind of weather we inhabit, the end of a beautiful season, not the telltales of an unshakable principle. We lag behind in the trappings of oppression only because we have been so numbed by luxury and lies that we have lost the keen edge of our perceptions and the focus of our national will, and thus have come to perceive protest and civil disobedience and all manner of bold activism as symptoms of extremism. We are, to put it bluntly, in deep shit, and instead of trying to dig ourselves out, we are buying gallons of perfume.

So what can we expect of George Bush by way of a response to this dissolution?

THE HOMELESS ARE PROLIFERATING EVERYWHERE, NO LONGER CONFINED TO THE CITIES, BUT ROAMING THE COUNTRYSIDE, OCCUPYING CAPE COD AND FLORIDA BEACHES AND SMALL TOWNS IN NORTHERN CALIFORNIA.

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It is possible that George once agonized over these problems, these questions, that he once saw himself as the nation's savior and swore to bring justice and freedom and equality in new measure to the world. However, since his winning effort against Pineapple Face, there have been signs that whatever sliver of conscience remains to him has given up the ghost in face of the realities, and that he is preparing to do what all tyrants must—to hang on to his last scraps of power, every penny of treasure, every jewel of a lie, until he has become a creature of pure self-invention, a larger-than-life eccentric much like his dread enemy, Pineapple Face, a man given to odd religious convictions and the ownership of curious artifacts such as taxidermied bears in uniform and ten tons of pornographic gambling accessories and such. This is, I would imagine, a form of madness resulting from the chemical mix of great wealth and a modicum of despair and the delirious exercise of power. Or perhaps it is simply that in order to preside over the ruins of lost America, in order to command the final nights of the democracy, one must suffer an evolution like that endured by the nation itself, one must become warped and twisted like Nero and Caligula, grown from the shape of a mere president into the monstrous image of the first Third World ruler of the United States.

Again, some may think I am overstating the case, but I insist that something is very wrong at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue.

Otherwise, what can be the explanation for the following:

- 1) the delivery to the White House during the past few months of six Poulan chainsaws, over two thousand Birds of Paradise, and more than fifty thousand dollars worth of intimate apparel from the Victoria's Secret catalog.
- 2) the addition to the White House kitchen staff of sixteen nubile Latin girls and sixteen Samoan youths, each designated as a "pastry chef" (I think we all can guess what sort of sweets they are intended to provide).



And then there is the Lambada. That this horrid, bawdy Brazilian dance has failed to catch on with the American public implies there may yet be some tiny fragment of hope that we may elude fate, and suggests that we have not yet succumbed to the depravity of the barbaric south. However, while the public may have proved temporarily resistant, there is no such resistance in the White House. My sources inform me that each Thursday a Lambada Night With George And Barbara is held in

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the Grand Ballroom, and that these graceless evenings are initiated by the President and the First Lady, dressed in ruffled shirts and tight-fitting trousers and skirt, dry-humping across the floor to a sinuous rhythm that would have made José Carioca blush and lower his head in shame, and that following the First Couple's dance, the so-called pastry chefs will take to the floor and engage George and Barbara in a variety of erotic sequences. Not a pretty picture, you may say, and somewhat sad as regards the First Couple's delusions concerning their physicality, but nonetheless a harmless and salubrious form of exercise.

But is it harmless? Is it not a sign of worse to come?

To answer this question I have consulted psychics, Gypsies, Yogis, saddhus, seers of every sort, and at last, after months of searching, of following false trails and blind alleys, I have succeeded in my quest.

The world, as you know, is full of bullshit artists, and what we consider truth, even scientific truth, is usually no more than a fictive consensus. However, the knowledge of what exactly is going on in this vale of tears is from moment to moment visited upon a single individual among us, no sage or mystic, but an ordinary citizen who, though he or she is a prevaricator like the rest, has reached that particular time and circumstance when the illumination of the Uncreate happens to shine upon him and everything he says—even though he may not believe it—can be counted on as gospel.

This person is known as The One.

I learned of The One's existence from a beggar in the brimstone, incense-burning streets of Calcutta, a sexless ancient with a club foot and saffron in his hair. He was sitting on a pallet and preaching to the congregation of ruby-eyed rats that haunted the surrounding darkness, and though I could not trust what he told me, for he was not The One and thus capable only of lies, it is now apparent that his lies flew up into the mystic and conjoined with some fateful imminence and so brought The One into being. In any case, armed with the signs that would give away The One's presence (I am sworn not to reveal them, but I can

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state this much—that processed cheese food and twilight are two elements of those locations where The One may be found), I went about my search with renewed vigor, and finally, one evening in Manhattan, in a bar which must remain nameless, being a locus for certain unspeakable cosmic practices, I tracked down The One and put my question to him.

He was a slight, dour, thirty-ish gentleman several drinks to the left of sober by the name of Vernon Gross, who had once owned several frozen yoghurt franchises, all of which had failed, and—made bitter by this experience, wanting to avenge himself on fickle consumers—had taken an entry level position in a major publishing house, intending one day to flood the market with hideous, soul-perverting pap (I did not enlighten him as to the redundancy of his mission). On hearing my question and the intriguing facts that had provoked it, he lifted his Seven & Seven to the light as if to read some oracle there, and said, “You have to understand, the history of George Bush is essentially the history of the United States. It is, I admit, a facile analogue, but apt all the same. From such a dry twist of Yankee principle, from the seed of tax evaders and religious fanatics, you can expect no straight-limbed oak to grow, but rather an occult and listing tree. Oh, from time to time, green birds may nest in its branches and shining banners may be hung from its twigs, but this is mere illusion. Thus, while in its youth the country—like the tree—may appear to stand tall, to emblemize freedom and a striving toward heaven, eventually it will accede to the imperatives of its beginning, and in its maturity it will seize the weak things who stray near in its forked hands and squeeze blood from their bodies to nourish its gnarly roots. And in its senescence, as power slips away, it will develop grotesque forms of vegetable display with which to amuse itself and the parasites who crawl in the grooves and hollows of its bark. Young George Bush, baseball in hand, full of impish democratic spunk, doubtless felt he was some winged creature launched toward the golden glow of destiny and great deeds. But when he reached his prime, what did he become? Head of the CIA. The prince of the spiderbats,

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the mutant cockroach killer king, leader of a deadly vermin swarm entrusted with the magic of covert misdeeds and secret agendas and dirty tricks. And now"—Vernon Gross gave a dismayed laugh—"what can you expect of him other than an impotent eccentricity."

Gross knocked back his drink, signalled the bartender for a refill, and proceeded to tell me of the future, painting a terrible picture that I will briefly summarize.

Imagine, if you will, it is 1996. The second Great Depression (a misnomer, since depressions are temporary, and this moral and fiscal blight is here to stay) has begun, with all the attendant oppressions and horrors, with the armies of the homeless and ecoterrorism and mad abortionists and new drugs that convey hostile alien sensibilities and fresh psychoses such as fear of the Millennium, with even more daunting horrors in the offing. A landscape so pyrotechnic in its despair and chaotic momentum that it will appear to be the onset of a new Middle Ages. Death squads are cropping up in the cities, their purpose to slaughter the gangs of abandoned children who prey upon the citizenry and to put the fear of God into the latest dread minority—Indonesians, perhaps, or possibly Russian Muslims. Out on Pennsylvania Avenue, protestors are gathered about oil drum fires. Ragged figures lapped at by flame, silhouetted like great black shabby birds, they no longer have a clear idea of what they are protesting, for everything they see and know is worthy of protest. It must seem to them that they are protesting some dark absence at the center of things, some nuclear failure of the American cell. And from within the White House issue odd slants of incendiary light and distorted music and whistlings and keenings—of pain, apparently—and the incessant buzz of a chainsaw.

OUT ON PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE, PROTESTORS ARE GATHERED ABOUT OIL DRUM FIRES. RAGGED FIGURES LAPPED AT BY FLAME, SILHOUETTED LIKE GREAT BLACK SHABBY BIRDS, THEY NO LONGER HAVE A CLEAR IDEA OF WHAT THEY ARE PROTESTING, FOR EVERYTHING THEY SEE AND KNOW IS WORTHY OF PROTEST.

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“Certainly,” Gross said, “only some of this is inevitable. But since the future is rarely the consequence of premeditation, and given the current tendency toward passivity, it is all very likely to happen.”

His time as The One was nearly past, the signs of benediction were winking out, and I noticed a vagueness stealing over him, and that his speech was growing less fluent. Moments later, he looked confusedly about and begged my forgiveness for forgetting my name. Not long after that, he began rubbing his hand along my thigh and offered me a three-book contract in exchange for sexual favors. I knocked him to the floor and left him for the bartender to manage. Nothing is more vile than an editor bereft of farsightedness.

So, here we are. Noriega doomed, his pitted features soon to be displayed on giant screens like those of the political villain Goldstein in *1984*, and George Bush, prim and triumphant in his gray business armor, will be shown rampant upon a field of red, white, and blue, the expression of our American values and their continuing superiority in the face of cartoon monsters such as the Panamanian Devil. Dick Tracy has once again drilled smoking holes in Pruneface, GI Joe has gigged another Commie rat. But none of us should take heart from this, for although—as Vernon Gross said of his evil future—only some things are inevitable, it is clear from various signals recently received, most notably from George Bush’s pitiful and sadly comic performance at his press conference with Mitterand, reduced to making sign language, embarrassed and bewildered by the more articulate Frenchman . . . it is clear that the Bush we see now is but a shell and from that shell will soon burst the florid and intemperate creature described by Gross in his vision of the ’Nineties, the devolved relic of a man whose true mandate has not been to lead, but rather to become the encysted emblem of a country whose devastating slippage he must oversee, a raving perversity at the heart of the law, an albino Republican beetle creeping in a ruin of bleached, bone-white wood, a Third-World pest for whom an exterminator—be it merely in the form of a decisive vote or a sexually

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transmitted disease—must eventually come, just as he himself came for Noriega.

Here, now, is Gross's vision of George's future.

It is night in the White House, but the only lights are torches waved by the naked Lambada dancers as they writhe and twist in through the corridors of the venerable building toward the Oval Office, driven to orgiastic heights by the feverish music, preceded by Dan Quayle leashed and oiled, wearing a spiked collar and growling at shadows, restrained from attacking illusory enemies by the firm hand of Barbara Bush, who is dressed as that first and most honorable of President Georges, wooden teeth and all. There is straw on the floor. In various of the rooms, chained animals can be seen. Goats, a jaguar cub, a mule, and so forth. Bringing up the rear of the procession, a wild glitter in his eyes, dressed in a black lace teddy, is that stainless defender of freedom, Noriega's Bane, our George, the Bushmaster, making vicious swipes with a switched-off chainsaw at the air that seem ritual in their patterned regularity. At last the doors to the Oval Office are flung open to reveal a shadowy interior, and several dancers enter, forming a ring about the room, their torches illuminating dozens upon dozens of long-tailed birds with brilliant plumage chained by their feet to a number of floor-standing perches. The rest—including Barbara and Dan, who begins to bark madly—watch as George strides to the center of the room and strikes a heroic pose, the chainsaw held before him like a lance.

Despite the grotesque aspect of a sexagenarian male dressed for the boudoir in frilly woman's undergarments, he seems for the moment almost beautiful and noble, our president, like a creature out of some perverted myth, his gray-milk skin agleam in the torchlight, his meager features relaxed a touch from their usual parsonish rigor, and amid the dancers whispering like silk and the crackling of the torches and the intermittent cries of the birds, his stillness seems central and important, the source of all movement. And when, with a savage pull, he revs up the chainsaw, the dancers catch their breaths, for he suddenly appears



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great and deadly, an elemental force, a lingerie-clad Kali with lignam. The birds flap up from the perches in alarm, their cries arcing above the insane snarl of the chainsaw, and George, who is now fully erect, bursting with mystic presidential violence, laughs the laugh of a conqueror. Denied the hot potentials of political extremism, no longer capable of bullying weaker nations, he sees not birds but tropical adversaries, feathery presidents, beaked tyrants—they are the magical analogues of those villains whom he must destroy in order to keep the nation free. And destroy them he will! With a flourish, he severs a green neck from an iridescent turquoise body, letting the blood jet inscribe the name of the fallen on his chest and and face. It is so beautiful, he thinks, the spray of blood, the feathers drifting down, dipped like fanciful pens in the crimson ink of life. How could there be more beauty than this liberation from old laws and party-line constraints? He strikes again and again. The birds' heads leap from their necks like bizarre shuttlecocks, their golden eyes grow glazed. The dancers couple in the shadows, Dan Quayle lifts his voice in an exultant howl, and Barbara surreptitiously touches her secret flesh as the president whirls and whirls, a black lace demon with a horror-movie sword, hacking and dicing our enemies. He sees their souls, spurts of white mist erupting from the wounds, and attacks these as well, swinging gleefully, slicing them into nothingness. Goaded by their blood and cries into an ecstatic frenzy, he can no longer hold his vital fluids, and gripping the last surviving bird—a golden-throated thing with eyes like apertures into a universe of sapphire stars and misty cerulean darkness—he sinks to his knees and spends himself on its strangling, spasmed flesh, then collapses atop the heaped corpses, becoming to all appearances as moribund as they. With his final thoughts before unconsciousness claims him, he remembers the old days when he used proxy armies, treaties, and foreign investment to make war, and realizes that he was only half a man, doing only half the job, and that now he is truly the giant deliverer he hoped in his youth to be. Then, one arm flung in a balletic gesture of peaceful abandon, he surrenders to

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his passion's necessary coma and begins to snore.

The dancers retreat into the corridor. There are many things to be done, more birds to be ordered, new Lambadas to be choreographed, repairs to be made on the chainsaw, which is clotted with gore and feathers. Dan Quayle, ever faithful, sits back on his haunches and pants, and true-hearted, kindly Barbara, though she yearns to run to her man and cover his shaking body with hers, all tenderness and solicitude, understands that she must withhold such consolations, for he must weather this night alone in order to dream the new day into being and comprehend the rites that must be performed to exorcise the



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demons that will come with the sun. And yet she is far from discontent. She realizes it is the strictures of his lordly and isolate office that have brought us through these spirit-haunted hours, and she is proud to bursting of her man. He has denied himself so greatly, how can she now do other than to deny her wifely instincts and stand apart, though every cell in her body urges her to smother him with love. A solitary, perfect tear trembles at the corner of her eye. "Oh, George," she says, and shakes her head in wonder at his courage, his willingness to suffer such debasement for the sake of sainted mothers and little children everywhere. Once again he has made the vital difference. Once again he has slain the fevered monsters that assault the motherland.

Once again, America is saved!

fiction

Robert Frazier

THE GUIDE

Mother told us that there are times when the extremes of your circumstance can push at the envelope of truth, or what is perceived as truth, and our brother John had been raised under so many extremes that it seemed to us his reality had warped, gone awry, been forced beyond the limits where truth still held sway. He'd been born during a California earthquake, then swiftly orphaned when the hospital collapsed about him, leaving a dark air pocket, fetid with death, which rescue crews peeled back to reveal the glory of the sun. He once explained how he felt—looking back at this experience—that he'd been born in Hell and uplifted from the underworld. His early years were spent with a survivalist couple in the wilds of the rural Northwest, where he developed a paranoia of some other terrible and blinding energy, one that lurked in silos just beyond the snow-peaked mountains. The couple walked off one day, and John managed on freeze-dried vegetables until a hiker found him and brought him to the Iowa farm of her grandparents,

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devout parishioners in an area where religion, Mom said, consisted of thousand acre tracts of the same feedlot crop. From there he abided puberty behind the dead bolts of several households, deep into the heartland of the Redeemer, where blasphemers burned and John trembled at the dark embers of sin that flickered within his heart. A social worker discovered him in central Iowa, in a sleepy town with a buffalo on the commons and a string of snake churches that used John in their ceremonies. He was relocated to the Orphan and Foster Home System of Cape Cod, where true Christians showed him warmth and salvation, and since we lived on Nantucket and her sister island Tuckernuck, within thirty miles or so of the Cape, we qualified to adopt him.

He would be our big brother, she had explained, and we believed he was one of the world's lost souls. That spring, Mom made us remember just how she said these things, like she was teaching a history lesson, and with the aura of mystery surrounding the long days and hot nights, she guaranteed that we would not forget a word. Or an event that followed.

None of us have.

The sun baked the dunes and left everyone languid and dull on the August day that John arrived at our boat landing with only a battered black suitcase as a companion. The suitcase piqued our interest; its wrap-around straps looked worn by the hands of many bus drivers, and the fiberboard faces were obscured by stickers declaring a full range of exotic names like Keokuk and King of Prussia and Corpus Christi, including those of recent stopovers on the journey to Nantucket, then Tuckernuck. John dropped it with a thud by the door of the cottage and collapsed in the middle of our shell pile as we three girls tried to pry information from him. Little Robby sat down beside him and shared his silent protest. Shiner, who'd received his latest black eye from a boy who lived at the other end of the island, showed him his fiddler crab in a pickle jar. He became paralyzed by us all, unable to comprehend the next question or penetrating look while the first ones still churned in his skull like the slow beacon of a lighthouse.

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John was handsome, with Viking features: chiseled cheek bones, a prominent chin, straw blond hair, eyes blue as the depths of a fjord. Mom whistled at his muscular build when he stood to greet her, but he seemed oblivious to his Adonis-like looks, if not oblivious in general to all things surrounding him. Shiner, at last, led him inside and showed him his bed in the small room where he and Robby slept, where the breeze and sound of the surf could soothe him. From the beginning, Shiner held the closest rapport with him, if anyone, indeed, could hold a rapport with John. He fell asleep while listening to Shiner talk, out like a brick without changing his sweaty clothes, and over dinner Mom explained that by the time we'd got him here at Tuckernuck, he needed our compassion. He needed us to be tolerant and understanding and talkative. But by the time the full moon's tide waters ebbed to normal, she'd died of pneumonia, leaving John as the oldest. We were stunned into silence. We feared most that we'd be divided between several foster homes. We vowed to stick together.

Mom was buried in a sea trunk at a special place in the dunes, while John—taking his new reins of authority in hand—read from the Bible, something about a time to be born and a time to die, about things passing on as others replace them. That helped a great deal, for it gave us perspective, and hope. For a week we cried, and then we reacclimated to life in isolation: the empty stretches of beach, the fierce sun, the fog, the jets streaking over head like distant reminders of a world far away. Within another week, two quirks of John's nature became high and dry and obvious to us.

First, he discovered an unsatisfied craving for junk food, and second, he'd been deprived, absolutely, from experiencing the miracle of television. He was a quick study at correcting both.

On Monday mornings, he sat in the big stuffed chair with the torn sides, the one that looked out the screen door and down to the boat landing, and he'd watch the old Zenith as we waited for Pap Beasley to bring our groceries in a battered lobster scow, then up the long path between the dunes. John didn't care to

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leave the house any more than Mom had cared, which was rarely. Pretty soon he spent whole days there, fattening himself on Smart Food and ice cream and Devil Dogs, while we tended the vegetable garden and cleaned the sand out of the cottage and dug ground for the new two-holer. After a last load of food and three extra drums of gas for the generator, Pap refused to carry in supplies, perhaps offended that Mom no longer met him, probably thinking—since we'd neglected to inform him, and everyone else, of her death—that she avoided him, and we had to walk down to the landing and haul up our food and John's TV Guide on a rusty wagon found washed up on a sandbar. Shiner and Little Robby complained about John's laziness, but our feminine, majority viewpoint held that boys weren't worth a damn until they got much older anyways. We three began to run things then, to manage the money for Pap's supplies and the decisions about work.

Yet late in the afternoons, as the sun would arc down over the ocean and set the tops of the dunes ablaze, making the green dune grasses glow like spikes of jade, we'd all sit in the living room. The terns that nested near our back door would stammer out nature's morse codes, messages we strained to interpret, hoping to quench our thirst for knowledge. The cicadas and crickets buzzed a mantra to hurry evening along. The light slid down the beach, passing from sight, as darkness pooled in the marsh lands and welled up around the cottage. When night reigned, and we'd gleaned what we could from this passing of another day on the island, then John would switch on the light by his chair and speak, and tell us what he'd learned from his day at TV. He became our connection to the rest of the world, as Mom had been our connection before.

"Listen to what The Guide says about this one I saw." John itched under his coveralls and read in a slow, stumbling monotone. "'A group of Vietnam veterans sufferin' from post-traumatic stress disorder undergoes a therapeutic program that pits them against rugged terrain and ungiving circumstances.' Whew! Ain't that like us? We're workin' hard to get over Mom's



death. Workin' to do what she'd want us to do."

We nodded our approval. We hoped that some of the news and the glory might rub off on us, hoped that what John absorbed from the big screen could be digested and used to our advantage. That it might add newer insights to everything Mom had said. Might replace the emptiness in our hearts where she had been.

"Here's another. *Joseph Campbell and the Power of Myth: Part 3, The Message of the Myth* explores why myths are clues to the

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spiritual potentialities of human life, and what role ritual plays in the transition from child to adult.”

We found these encapsulations weighty and often asked for explanations, but John would seize up, paralysed with having to answer, and when he did, he seemed vague and evasive. He returned again and again to *The Guide*, as he called it with reverence, stating that the purities of its word, the distillations that it captured, were nearly as sacred as the Prophecies. Certainly beyond his ability to embellish. *Knocking on Armageddon's Door* was more than a documentary on survivalists, for it embarked on ‘a journey into the darker side of reason and paranoia, hosted by the experts.’ A chapter of *Bodywatch* went beyond a medical showcase to ‘an examination of the cutting edge of teenage psychiatry.’ *An Interview with Patty Duke* transcended questions and answers to take an ‘in depth look at the nature and treatment of maniac depression.’ We commented to ourselves at the peculiar self-focus of his choices, and at the regularity of their appearance, constituting an unusually high percentage of viewing time compared to fluff viewing like: *Alf* or specials with country singers dolled up to look Hollywood.

We listened. We absorbed what we could. The next day we went about the necessities that kept ourselves, and John, alive.

In the fall, we saw less of John. When Pap stopped boating groceries altogether, thinking we’d moved back to Nantucket as usual on Labor Day, we foraged for shellfish and netted fish in the shallows. We worked in the summer kitchen to pack the garden in colorful rows of canning jars, storing them on the

Robert Frazier is himself a resident of Nantucket. Having produced award-winning poetry for many years, he has recently begun writing prose and has sold stories to several major markets over the last year. His first book, *Nantucket Slayrides* (containing Frazier’s novella, “The Summer People,” collected with two stories by Lucius Shepard), was published by Eel Grass in 1989 to much acclaim. “The Guide” is his first story in *Wired*.

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pantry shelves. These mornings, like all mornings, John slept soundly, slumped over in the chair after a late night of talk shows or grade B horror flicks in which, for example, great energy machines connected into household wiring and controlled peoples' thoughts through electromagnetic fields. In the evenings, he was deep into the anchormen, clicking the channel controls in a blur, orchestrating the evening news until slivers of unrelated reports were strung into a bizarre montage. When he turned the volume down enough to talk, gathering us at his feet like sheep for a sermon on the mount, he recounted programs that bordered on the unbelievable. *The Race for the Psycheconductor*, followed efforts by the US, Japan and other nations to find a material that will transmit cerebral activity at room temperature with zero resistance. *Ring of Weird: The Dream Wanderers*, in which explorers encountered quicksand, an hour-long tropical shower of poison frogs, and a nomadic tribe known as the "dream wanderers" that live half in and half out of an alternate continuum.

Though none of us questioned it, knowing what reaction he might counter with, we wondered how the schedule grew more and more bizarre. How improbable these sounded. We kept the generator going from the big gas tanks, but we began to avoid him.

This wounded John, who made renewed efforts to touch base with us, though his efforts only worsened the situation. He would order us on little errands to the kitchen, or command us to adjust the antennæ. He would attempt to counsel us individually with readings from The Guide, intoning them as if they infused our fates with tarot-like import. He pleaded with us to watch programs with him.

"Come. Look. I'm inside the TV. Goin' to all the sports events and gettin' myself on camera."

Sure enough, when the camera would line up on Fuzzy or The Shark or The Golden Bear blasting away with a fairway iron in the latest golf tournament, there in the crowd stood a man wearing a Biblical tee, lettered in bold with "John 3:16." The man haunted the line markers during the football playoffs. You'd

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catch him in the stands as he cheered on the Lakers, or lurked behind the Celtic's announcer as he announced in Elmer-Fuddish that "Laawy Biwd fiddles and diddles, passes to Paawwish, who puts in the wayup." John became obsessed with the idea that he could travel into the TV, could transport himself into the 'Empire of Phosphor,' as he called it. He believed that he already had, and he offered to show us how. He said, with *The Guide* in hand, that he could lead us out of our poverty to a universe where happy endings abounded, where paradise waited behind Door Number Three.

"The television already contains the right elements for a psyche conductor. We have to harness our human potentials to make it all work. Focusin' them to overcome our unginvin' circumstances. We can travel anywhere!"

We ignored him, and he in turn ignored us to such an extent that we called him our Musselmann, the ultimate couch potato, a creature that had to be hand-fed pudding and cakes as he gripped the armrests of his chair and focused unblinking on the TV, or *The Guide*. In the end, he was comatose.

One autumn evening, we were making clam chowder, with lots of fresh-raked quahogs and powdered milk as a base, when Shiner slipped out of the kitchen and into the living room, only to find it vacant, John's chair looking wrong without his great body pinning it to the earth.

As we searched the house, Little Robby yelled, "There he is."

Within a segment of *Joseph Campbell and the Power of Myth*, a shadowy figure wore a teeshirt that said: "Myths are public dreams. Dreams are private myths." The man—who half resembled John—discussed the fragile nature of reality with a show guest, sounding too erudite for our adopted brother, but when the TV flashed to a game show, and he sat in the audience with a big teeshirt declaring: "It's John: I'm here!" Shiner let out a wail of despair. That shook us. Shiner was tough, a veteran of the beach wars. We avoided that end of the cottage for the rest of the month, and used the back door.

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No one could find the strength to unplug the set. In our beds, with the lights out and our heads falling toward slumber, we'd hear the late shows babbling in a murmur, preserving John, or what we had come to half-believe was his spirit, in a manner beyond our comprehension. Then one morning we found Shiner with his hands pressed against the picture tube, drooling, colored dots crackling in his eyes, and we—the three girls—decided to act. We packed up our most important belongings in the rusty wagon, strapping them down with knotted blankets. Shiner emptied John's suitcase and filled it with the remainder of our food stocks and clothes and long underwear for us all. With the collection of all of John's Guides shredded in a pile in the seat of his chair, we dowsed it in the last of our generator fuel, torched it, and spread fire with rolled newspapers to all rooms in the house.

Rushing out onto the porch, we hugged our sides and stared into each other's faces. We felt hysteria mount within us, while flames licked up the walls and branched in sputtering pitchforks across the ceiling. We were unsure if our decision was correct, and damn sure it was irreversible. As we trudged down the beach, heavy with sadness and regret, Shiner said he heard the volume warble from the old Zenith. We cocked our heads. There seemed to be a voice crying out in a strained, tinny plea.

"Come Back! We can travel together."

But we'd already chosen what our future would be: wanderers in a dreamy land, children who traveled to places avoided by man, hoping to avoid the orphanages and foster homes they would thrust us upon as John had been thrust all his life. We planned to break into one of the summer homes on the far side of the island, and before those people returned next summer, we'd find a ride to Nantucket, and from there to the world beyond. We'd be nomads. Shadow people.

"Come back, my children. Come back before it's too late."

Alas, these garbled cries began to move us. Little Robby and Shiner pushed the red wagon through where an overflowing pond caused a mudhole at the edge of the marshes, and there the light from the fire danced on the dew-coated reeds and rushes,



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making us anxious, scaring us with flickering, demonic forms. The tin roof of the cottage began to groan with expansion. It popped the nails we'd taken such pains to seal with tar that spring, black goo that left us so filthy that Mom had had to fill a galvanized tub with well water and baking soda and tell us to soak in it until the the tar stripped away. We remembered Mom as we ran, tugging the wagon out of sight of the cottage. But the voice raised to a high pitch, and now, at last, unmistakably John's in its whimper, it called one last time.

"Kids! We can become dream wanderers together."

Then the gas tanks caught, causing a scream that sent a chill like a spike of electricity up our backbones.

We knew then how we'd get by, how we got by. With the waxing moon casting its pale beams on the path ahead. With our memories of Mom acting like a balm on our upturned souls, acting as the sole guidepost on our move from home to some distant land where a new reality awaited us. Yes, we felt it. And we knew especially how we'd have to cover our ears whenever we heard the blather of a television, all through our lives. How we'd block out that strained plea. That voice that always, always, seems to be there.

"It's John: I'm still here."

Illustrations for "The Guide" by Mark A. Nelson. Having distinctively illustrated all three stories in the second *Wired*, he generously agreed to do *five* stories for this latest volume. Renowned for *Aliens*, a popular six-issue limited series he did for Darkhorse, he is currently finishing a two-issue *Aliens* series entitled, "Newt's Tale." Mark is also working on Clive Barker's *Nightbreed* and *Hellraiser* projects for Marvel, and collaborating with Joe R. Lansdale on a project for DC (Nelson illustrated Lansdale's collection, *By Bizarre Hands*).



Patrick McGrath
photographed by Orshí Drozdik

Patrick McGrath

❧ An Interview ❧



Has the splatterpunk phenomenon plateaued? Has the seemingly insatiable appetite of the horrorhead crowd for gore and gratuitous sex 'n' violence waned at long last? There are signs, portents . . . trends in sales figures. No, readers are not deserting horror, but as an aggregate, tastes are beginning to shift away from the heavy-handed contrivances of the spunks, towards the subtle, lean-yet-rich allure of nouvelle gothique. It is no longer enough simply to be more disgusting than what has gone before—at least not superficially. . . .

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One consistently excellent practitioner of “nouvelle gothique” is Patrick McGrath, the author of one published “horror” novel, *The Grotesque* (1989), and one collection of short stories, *Blood and Water and Other Tales* (1988). His new novel, *Spider*, is scheduled to be published this autumn by Poseidon Press. Born in England, he has lived in New York City since 1981, where he kindly agreed to be interviewed for *Journal Wired* by Kevin B. Parent.



KP: I couldn't help catching the name of the school in the story “Ambrose Syme”—you named it Ravengloom—was your schooling that bad?

PM: Yes, that was the boarding school I went to. It was a very grim place.

KP: Intellectually grim?

PM: Well, physically grim to start with. It was out in the Lancashire Moors, a vast, gray pile of a building. It had the feel of a totally enclosed asylum-like place. There was a small village nearby but basically we were shut up in this institution, and it was grim in the sense that discipline was strict and old-fashioned and rigid.

KP: Sounds somewhat like the Catholic schools in this country.

PM: Oh sure, quite. And it was, as were the Catholic schools, very dogmatic. A complete imposition of religious practice that grew more and more irksome the older you got. I mean, by the age of fifteen or sixteen you were trying to think these things out for yourself. It was terribly constraining.

KP: The last thing you wanted to think about.

PM: It was a conflict between an emerging adolescent identity and a very rigid institutional structure.

KP: Was this just a rebellious attitude on your part?

PM: No, I think a lot of us felt this way. This was the late

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'sixties and outside of the institution society was in a state of some ferment. We couldn't be insensitive to that. It felt as though we were inside some type of a time warp. Caught up with the grim Jesuits who felt Victorian to us.

KP: Is this when the idea of writing first took hold of you?

PM: Oh no. After college I spent ten years or so trying various ways of making a living. I did some teaching, I worked in a mental hospital for a time. To be honest I wasn't very good at any of these jobs and they never felt terribly fulfilling. It was actually as a last resort that I turned to writing. I guess it had been lurking in my brain for some time, but it felt romantic, risky, irresponsible. But there came a time when I simply had no choice—I'd run out of alternatives.

KP: You've also spent some time on an island in the Pacific?

PM: Yes, I was on the Queen Charlottes for a few years.

I started out teaching there, but I bought a piece of land along the ocean and built a primitive log cabin—this was around the time that I didn't think I was going to be going anywhere with the teaching. I began to think quite seriously about writing, and soon after I quit the teaching job. I was living very cheaply, earning my money playing guitar in a local bar. This was when I started to write fiction. It was very romantic and isolated, very dramatic.

KP: And you fell for it—

PM: From day one!

KP: Was it the isolation that finally flipped the switch?

PM: It helped, but it was mostly the idea that you could get by so cheaply. I didn't need a substantial income like I do in the city. I only needed around a hundred dollars a month. This was mostly for kerosene and gas. We were awash in fresh salmon, I had a roof over my head. Everything else was had through barter.

KP: Did you read anything that led you to become a writer?

PM: I think close to the time I had decided to give it a go I'd read Henry Miller on writing. He's quite good at describing the condition of being a writer, what the psychology of

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being a writer is all about, in particular the early stages of it. He said some very useful things.

KP: The experience of finding a voice, finding something to say?

PM: Yes, yes. This business of finding a voice, his vivid description of how he himself became a writer. He came to it fairly late also, and having made the decision to write he had “claimed his place in heaven.” He was euphoric for months before he’d even written a word, but just the fact that he made the decision was enough to fill him with great excitement.

KP: You’ve come to writing later than most writers. Do you think it has made a difference, I mean as far as having more experience available to translate?

PM: Yeah, it’s made a difference if you think of experience in the very broadest sense possible. I’ve exploited my childhood somewhat in fiction, the England I knew, the settings I grew up in. My father worked in a mental hospital, and that has been used to a great extent. But I think that the experience you draw on is not merely the experience of lived life, but also the intellectual experience that you have, the moral experience. Just the fact that you might be thirty instead of twenty, you’ve had many more relationships, you’ve come to understand things about yourself, other people, society. You’ve read more. You have a much richer reservoir of mental imagery to draw upon.

KP: Was it a struggle for you to get your work into print?

PM: That took a while. I suppose the first step was getting anything published at all. I was writing some fiction but I was also doing some journalism, pushing that out. I had spent a year in Toronto, and I had had some articles and art reviews published there. Moving to New York was yet another level of commitment, where I told myself that from now on I’m just going to do fiction. I can make my living any way I can, but I’m going to concentrate on writing fiction.

KP: What time period are we talking about here?

PM: Let’s see—I got here in ’81.

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KP: And your fiction started appearing soon after you'd made the move?

PM: Oh, I think in '83, '84. I'd gotten one of my stories published in the *East Village Eye*. One of the stories that appeared in *Blood and Water*.

KP: Which one was that?

PM: That would've been "The E(rot)ic Potato." I had been giving a reading at a local club and the publisher asked to buy it after he'd heard me read it.

KP: How did you manage to twist the sexual theme around and use insects?

PM: The idea came from the consciousness that many people had at that time that Ronald Reagan was an extremely dangerous character.

KP: He still is. . . .

PM: [Laughs] He's just not visible anymore! It seemed that he would quite likely drive the Soviet Union and the world into a nuclear war. There were the books that began to explore what a nuclear war would mean, what the world would look like afterwards, whether it was survivable. The concept of the nuclear winter began to emerge around that time also. I was reading Jonathan Schell's *The Fate of the Earth* and he described the Republic of Insects and Grass.

I got the odd notion that the stories, the myths of humanity would somehow persist even though no humans were left to tell them. Would they be taken up by our successors, the insects? With that idea came a sort of D. H. Lawrence theme within the insect community.

KP: "The Boot's Tale" has the feel of this period also.

PM: Yes, again we've got the same basic assumption, an entity surviving to tell the tale of what the last days were like.

I suppose for a couple of years we were thinking in a post-apocalyptic sort of vein.

KP: How had you been supporting yourself up to this point?

PM: I'd been working as a freelance copy editor for several publications—a textbook company, computer magazine.

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I had even worked for *Forbes* magazine at one point. A stint with *Art In America*. Anywhere I could, really.

KP: Was this a tough time for you?

PM: One of the advantages of being freelance was that I could structure my work around my writing. It was not a bad way for a writer to make a living.

KP: Did you sense an air of discouragement when you began to send your stories out?

PM: It was difficult, sure. That really came across with the first agent I had, who was enthusiastic at first and then after three or four rejections of my work started to say things like “Listen, I can’t do anything with you. You’re not fish, you’re not fowl. People don’t know how to take you, how to categorize you.”

KP: Oh shit, there’s that word. . . .

PM: It was terrible. I seemed to be slipping through the cracks.

KP: What had you sent her?

PM: Let’s see. She got *Blood and Water* at an early stage, before that I’d sent a trilogy of novels that were sort of wild and surrealistic. An odd mish-mash of science fiction and gothic material. Not too elaborately plotted. I don’t know—they were like nothing I’d seen. They weren’t as finished as the short stories.

KP: You do seem comfortable dealing with horror as well as the traditional gothic novel.

PM: Well, I suppose with every genre you don’t have to be constrained by the cases that are in existence at any one moment. I mean, why should the gothic be poorly written? Why does it have to depend on splatter? Why should it come across as crude or adolescent? There’s no reason why the gothic should not aspire to a certain level of sophistication.

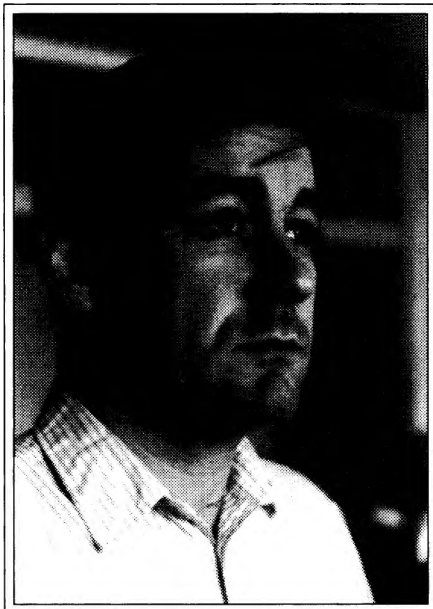
KP: Literature—

PM: Yeah, exactly!

KP: It doesn’t sound as if your agent was helping matters much here.

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PM: What was so frustrating about her—and I certainly don't want to generalize about all agents—was, she'd gone off the boil, put me on the back burner, and was saying things like, "Well, looks like it's going to be small press for you." And at no point did she come out and say, "Look, I'm not the agent for



you, look elsewhere." She wanted to hang on and it was up to me to realize that I must go out and hunt for somebody more energetic, which is what I did.

KP: What did this new agent do that the first one didn't do?

PM: He got me pegged as a literary writer, and sent my work out to *Grand Street*, Gordon Lish's *Quarterly*, *Harper's*. Places with high

literary reputations. He had a much better take on my work.

KP: Did he consider the genre magazines at all?

PM: You know, we never really talked about it. He had two considerations. He wanted to make money for me, and he wanted to get me a reputation. I guess he wanted the reputation to develop in the mainstream literary field, rather than aiming for the genre-specific sort of markets.

KP: Do you think it's a case nowadays of either falling neatly into a category or not getting published?

PM: I don't know if it's that bad, no. Certain people really work well in genre markets and quite happily do so. I think our friend Clive Barker knows exactly what he's good at, and he does his own thing over there with his particular brand

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of horror. Stephen King tends to do the same. But then you have all sorts of people whose work you can see as crossing certain boundaries, that is maybe literary.

I suppose there are people who are purely of their genre, but then there are a lot of folks who you'd say are literary, in whom you can find traces of genre. That doesn't seem to be a problem, I don't think. The new Martin Amis novel, you could look at that from a certain angle and see it as science fiction—it's futuristic, it's millennial and doomsday-like in its concerns.

KP: But you'd never classify it as science fiction.

PM: Not exclusively as science fiction. This is a literary novel on the first order, but it's a novel that's not afraid to employ anything that will serve its purpose. And I think that's the attitude, finally, we come to—if you're writing anything these days you need have no compunction about appropriating from wherever. Iris Murdoch, who's been called by Harold Bloom the "Tolstoy of our day," the only one with grand moral visions of human life in the twentieth century, in every one of her novels you'll find a big gothic patch in the middle. She's quite happy to pull in something that is recognizably gothic in order to make certain points about the darker areas of man's moral nature. I guess what I really believe is that you can get away with anything if the book is good.

KP: I guess I've always perceived excessive categorization as being a hindrance to writers.

PM: Well, it takes time. Publishers will produce a list of say ten or twelve books a season, of which three are by established writers. They'll get the advertising, so that the people who've read them in the past will know there is a new book out there for them. Unpublished or fairly new writers will tend to be thrown against the wall. If something sticks, arouses word of mouth, the publisher will get behind it with advertising, help it a little. Basically you are tossed in and it's sink or swim. The bottom line is that the book has got to do it on its own merit. I also tend to think that it's the exception that a book establishes a writer on the first go.

KP: Doesn't that go back to taking a risk as an aspiring writer? If what you're doing isn't selling you've got to compromise, and most good writers don't like that.

PM: Yes, I would tend to agree. You just keep on doing it, keep banging away. You might not make the money you'd like but again, it takes time, maybe three, four books.

KP: I believe it was Harlan Ellison who was asked recently if he thought Clive Barker was the "breakthrough" writer the horror field had been waiting for, to which he answered no. When pressed further as to who might be he mentioned Dan Simmons, Steve Rasnic Tem, and your name.

PM: Now what does he mean by that?

KP: I drove over seven hours to ask *you* that! Do you find that you can look at your work objectively and say that you're doing something differently from Barker?

PM: I don't know—you and I talked about this on the phone. Maybe he meant the breakthrough of the genre into a wider literary respectability.

KP: This phrase "literary respectability" caught my attention, this sense of craft that you bring to your writing. And the fact that you don't depend on splatter to do the job for you.

PM: No, not at all. I think it's the psychological aspect of horror that is much more interesting, rather than the basic violence. I think quite early on I saw the possibilities of horror for its depiction of states of mind rather than states of violence, particularly the depiction of forms of madness and neurosis producing distortions in perception and interpretation,

I think it's the psychological aspect of horror that is much more interesting . . . the depiction of forms of madness and neurosis producing distortions in perception and interpretation, and these in turn producing moments of horror.

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and these in turn producing moments of horror.

KP: How do you arrive at these specific moments of horror?

PM: Well, think of being spoken to by a narrator who is beginning to tell you about a second character who is persecuting the narrator. You trust the narrator, then slowly that trust is undermined, he starts to get it wrong, but he can't see he's getting it wrong, and you start to realize that he is going to take vengeance, lash out at this imagined persecutor, and suddenly what you begin to realize is that the second character is innocent but the first character plans some very nasty mischief, and with that comes a sort of helpless feeling that within the madness of the first character there is a certain sort of logic.

KP: Your story—"The Skewer"—would fall within this system.

PM: Exactly. If you center your fiction within a particular mad system, a particular mental system that is kind of off whack, you begin to realize the implications of that madness for the characters around the madman, and the danger in which they unwittingly find themselves. You are looking at it through this warped perspective and yet at the same time you're understanding this perspective. Yes, "The Skewer" is a good example. Here you've got a guy who's going to take out a psychiatrist's eye, but there's no need for me to show you this. All I need to do is build up the tension by getting you thoroughly inside a mind that believes that this course of action is necessary and justified. I think the horror lies in the intention rather than the act itself. At least that's how I'd like it to work.

KP: Have you read Sir Edmund Burke's essay on "The Sublime and the Beautiful?"

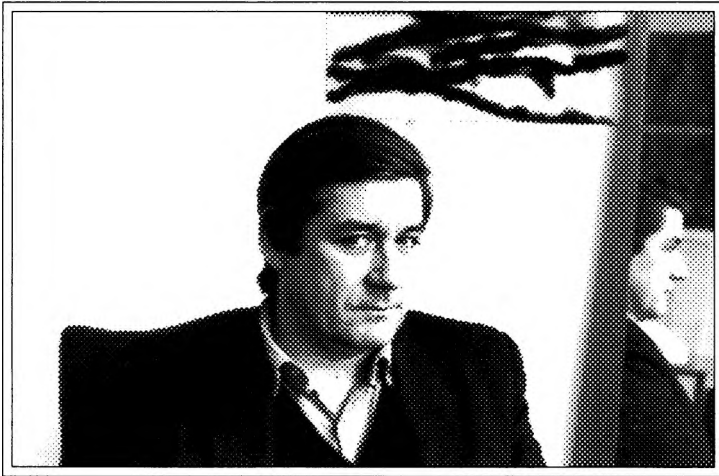
PM: Yes, I've read bits and pieces of that.

KP: He mentions "Beauty, which is founded on pleasure and is placid, and the sublime, which inspires awe and terror and with pain as its basis, disturbs the emotions." You don't see the need to dull the emotions as splatter tends to do—

PM: No, oh no. Not at all.

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- KP: Do you fear being misread or ignored if you don't incorporate the elements of splatter into your work?
- PM: I don't fear it, no. I think there are different constituencies involved here. I don't know who is reading or watching splatterpunk; I read an article in the *Voice* recently about splatterpunk and they said that here we're talking about young, white adolescent males.
- KP: The coming-to-terms-with-sexuality, pent-up-anger crowd.
- PM: Yeah, like that. Formless anger, rage against society. The article said that splatter was speaking to an urge to destroy the integrity of the body and by association the system of authority, logic, reason, structure. A rather blind and inarticulate sort of rage was being addressed through this work.
- KP: Is that something you'd agree with?
- PM: It sounds right to me. I don't know what else, or who else could take the sort of pleasure in bodies being torn to bits that splatter seems to encourage. I don't know why you'd take any pleasure in that unless you had a lot of this rage bubbling within you.
- KP: You're the one who's reading about a mass murderer at the moment—
- PM: [Laughs] But for me that's more interesting in the sense Dennis Nilsen got away with it time after time. He was very intelligent, disciplined. Weird as all hell, yeah. I mean he hid the bodies under the floorboards, in the closet. But the impetuous, wild rage wasn't there.
- KP: A sophistication that terrorizes, rather than a chainsaw.
- PM: Most definitely. Also, I'm more conservative than a lot of these other guys. I'm still interested in character, specifically in pathology and in what can go wrong and the way that people can get it badly wrong.
- KP: Like the husband in "Blood and Water."
- PM: Exactly, oh yes, he gets it badly wrong. Gets it so wrong that he goes and cuts the doctor's head off. That's how wrong he gets it.



KP: A far cry from cutting someone's head off for the sake of a four-ninety-five paperback sale or an eight dollar movie ticket.

PM: Yes, I think it's much more interesting when you can show the method in the madness. If you can illustrate the method, the madness becomes comprehensible. A certain sort of identification can occur if this is done properly. If you can get the reader to understand and identify, and even empathize with someone who's quite clearly mad, and has been or will be rather violent, that's no small thing. I'd be very happy if I could pull that off!

KP: You're looking at the motivation *for* the violence, rather than the violence for its own sake—

PM: That's the way I'd prefer it, yes.

KP: You don't see any distinction between your work and that of others who are a bit bloodier?

PM: Well, I'd always thought that, hell, I can straddle both. I can have one foot in that camp, and one foot in whatever I'm up to here. I always imagined that I was going down rather well in the straight horror community. I'd hate to think that I wasn't bloody enough!

KP: So you definitely have a sense as to who your audience is.

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PM: Oh sure. I'm right in the middle of the literary mainstream, at least the reviews suggest that. I'm getting reviews as good or better than most literary authors in this country and in England. I don't have any qualms about that—the fact that I'm perceived as a literary writer.

KP: Hell, that's not such a bad thing!

PM: No, it's fine! And if I'm getting some horror people at the same time, great. I don't know who the common reader is, possibly someone who is maybe not a fanatic about horror, but has a soft spot for it all the same. The people who have reviewed me have led me to believe that all sorts of readers with rich and nourishing literary diets are quite happy to spice up their reading with more morbid material, and I think that's very much of the times. We live in a rather morbid, gloomy, millennial sort of period, and I think we're more alert to and fascinated by questions of decay and transgression, and of death in general today than maybe was the case forty or fifty years ago.

KP: More receptive to the consequences, more willing to do something with the whole mess?

PM: Yes, sure. We're not in some sort of constructive phase, despite it being morning in America, and all the rest of that. Most people, certainly most intelligent readers don't believe it's morning in America. Most people think that with the exception of Eastern Europe, the developed world is in a fairly critical shape and certainly if you live in a northeastern American city you see an awful lot of breakdown, not only in the physical structure, but in the moral and intellectual spheres as well. You have a collapsing, a despairing, a fascination with matters gloomy rather than with matters bright.

KP: So the "Happily ever after" ending doesn't work?

PM: No, it's just not appropriate anymore. I think Martin Amis is possibly the best at articulating what it feels like to be alive in the late twentieth century. How confidence in money is an entirely inappropriate response to contemporary life. And I think, in as much as that's there in the collective

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sensibility, then you'll find a taste or receptiveness to gothic material.

KP: Where does this gothic tradition in the context of horror fiction go five years from now? What sort of transformation would you like to see?

PM: Yes, good question. What I see is that we're just beginning to get a grip, getting better at delineating pathologies, psychopathologies. Off the top of my head I'm thinking of Hillary Johnson, Scott Bradfield, the first books by those two. John Banville. The work Dennis Potter has been doing. I think we'll do well at talking about, in a word, madness.

KP: One thing I've noticed about your short stories is the way you grab the reader's attention with the first sentence. Do you start with an idea or do you write a sentence down and go from there?

PM: I usually start off with an idea, and this can be an image, a visual image. I find that what happens with the first sentence stuff is that I'll write a few paragraphs or pages to get me into the frame of mind of the thing and after that, after it starts clicking then there'll come a paragraph I can be happy with. What happens next is that all the stuff that has preceded the writing of that paragraph can get junked, and there you've got your nice, crisp opening which as often as not would have a good snap to it.

KP: How about influences? "The Lost Explorer" hints a little at Conrad.

PM: A core, seminal influence, *Heart of Darkness*. A wonderful book. The best and tightest depiction of man's nature, the Congo being in some way the outward expression of that dark, inner nature, man's deepest and most primitive area of darkness, that "old stuff" left over from the apes.

KP: Evelyn sees the explorer less and less—she seems to be losing some of her innocence.

PM: Yes, she is slowly being inducted into her father's world. He's a doctor, he's committed to a certain sort of empirical, scientific, anti-imaginative worldview. She wants to be a

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doctor also—she can't maintain this vivid imagination.

KP: Before we started you mentioned Evelyn Waugh.

PM: I'm very fond of him, of his wit. I simply like the sorts of characters he tends to develop. He gives me an England that I've played off of several times. Sir Hugo [in *The Grotesque*] is based on Waugh to an extent. "Blood and Water," "Blood Disease," late '30's upperclass English society, everything terribly civilized, elegant, witty.

KP: I didn't want to forget about "Hand of a Wanker" . . .

PM: [With a devilish grin] Yes, yes! Well you see, the hand is an old figure in horror fiction. Many stories have been written in which hands separate from their bodies and take on a life of their own, do various dark deeds. I came across somebody suggesting that the obsession with hands with a life of their own arose as a sort of Freudian nonsense, masturbation guilt. I thought, let's see if we can't get that silly piece of psychoanalysis worked into a story and at the same time, in the story, employ the Freudian interpretation of why such stories get written in the first place, as well as milking a bit of humor out of it!

KP: While you engage the reader with your short stories, *The Grotesque* is a novel that demands reader participation. One cannot just sit down and read the thing and come away with an easy answer.

PM: The idea in this case was that if you do a murder mystery you generally tie up all the loose ends rather neatly.

I thought it would be interesting to leave the story with two explanations. There are actually three.

KP: You've got the reader involved in making some important decisions as to innocence or guilt.

PM: Yes, absolutely. The reader has to evaluate all sorts of evidence.

KP: Hugo goes on at one point concerning . . . the nature of memory—"The old days are always the good days, such is the nature of memory." But Hugo's memory certainly does come under close scrutiny.

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PM: I guess what's fueling all of this is the sense in which all of us remember in partial ways, construct our own pasts, and in a sense our own selves, but not in any true or objective way. Such a thing is impossible. Any construction of reality that we produce is going to be selective—we're going to leave out certain things, privilege other things.

KP: Tailor it for the moment.

PM: Tailor it for the moment, according to certain preconceptions or ideals we hold about ourselves or the way things are in all the areas where we think we're certain. I think what we are building is a skewed, selective, very biased scenario. This has happened with my wife, as I'm sure it has with yours—I'll remember a certain incident and my wife will inform me that, no, it didn't happen like that, you didn't say that, it happened somewhere else, etc.

KP: Yes, I think we all do that. Major arguments can break out over the smallest details, fights can ensue, all over nothing.

PM: [Laughs] Yes, yes. But you see, there is a fair degree of fantasy at play here. Our mind tends to remember things in an edited sort of style.

KP: How about the new novel? Are we going to see a radical departure from *The Grotesque*?

PM: In some ways *Spider* will be similar, different in others. It's set in London, a working class novel, probably bleaker than anything I've done so far. [Editor's note: an excerpt from *Spider* follows this interview.]

KP: In atmosphere? Character?

PM: I've set out to give a plausible picture of a man who's suffering a fairly intense schizophrenic illness. He [Spider] is telling us the story so we've got the same narrative viewpoint as Hugo, a mind that's not seeing clearly. Unlike Hugo, this character becomes psychotic, his contact with reality becomes weaker and weaker. He's hallucinating quite vividly—visually, audibly, olfactorily.

KP: Another *Perfume*?

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PM: This is a smelly novel too! Rather nasty smells!

Spider lives in a seedy boarding house in the east end of London, and one day he starts to smell gas. He hunts for the source to no avail, and finally comes to the realization that it's coming from him, he is the source. This works in with an entire delusional system that's based on a very deep sense of guilt that is producing these hallucinations that his own badness, wrongness, his own corruption, that he feels as a sort of moral corruption, is manifesting in the way that he perceives his own body, and this gets worse, more bizarre. He begins to imagine that all his inner organs have rotted away, that he's empty inside. He hesitates to make eye contact, for fear of his whole body shattering.

KP: These inner conflicts appear, affect his interaction with others?

PM: In the beginning of the novel he's not that good at mingling with the world, and it does get worse. He becomes more isolated the crazier he becomes.

KP: We're hearing all this as first hand information?

PM: He's actually keeping a journal, writing every day. This helps him keep

things under control—when he stops he hears these voices, creatures in the attic, he smells this stuff oozing out of him.

KP: Do we ever get the story from another viewpoint?

PM: Good question.

There are a number of scenes in which we hear other people talking to him, or about him. We are fairly sure that we're getting the real account of

All of us remember in partial ways, construct our own pasts, and in a sense our own selves, but not in any true or objective way. Such a thing is impossible. Any construction of reality that we produce is going to be selective—we're going to leave out certain things, privilege other things.

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what has happened, which is the death of his mother when he was a boy. We feel comfortable at the end that we've got the real story, the complete story.

KP: Spider is not out to deceive us?

PM: He's not doing it in the fashion that Sir Hugo did, no.

Spider is deceiving himself as well, he doesn't know the truth. This is why he has such a hard time telling us. Since his boyhood he's lost touch, he's buried it so deeply that he's lost touch with it, and in the meanwhile he's built up this structure of explanation of what went on in his childhood that is basically all that he's got. But the more of these things that emerge, memories that he's blocked out, the less peace he finds within himself. There is still some ghastly secret hidden away producing these hideous delusions, nightmarish hallucinations. Basically, Spider is living in hell.

KP: Sounds as if you have less of a conflict at the end of this book.

PM: Yes, oh yes. You'll find a much neater ending, but you will still be left with questions, although these will become answerable, you won't have the ambiguities. The ending will basically make the reader think about certain instances in which Spider told us specific things. If you can take the trouble to think things through, everything in the end is explicable, the pattern, the clues are all there if one wants to look for them.

KP: Do you find that you are influenced more by books or film?

PM: I think it's the reading. When I get down to work I'm constantly using other books, texts. I'm reading other novelists to see how they're solving the kinds of technical problems I encounter. The watching of movies works on a much different level. I guess at some level I'm taking in other sorts of scenes and ways of handling them visually. I find that it's pretty rare that I actually take conscious note, i.e. good scene, can use in future, etc. In my reading I'm constantly annotating and going back over the text for specific things I want out of them.

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It's feeding the imagination at a much more conscious level than the watching of film.

KP: But it is a bit more than entertainment. . . .

PM: Oh sure. I do see myself as yes, a writer, but a bit more generally as a narrative constructor. Novels are my first love and the richest way of working, but I've also started to do some screenplay writing and I figure it's sort of fair game. Over the last ten years I've learned how to construct a story, a character, how to do sorts of dialogue. I see no reason not to apply those traits to film writing. I certainly don't feel the necessity to remain exclusively with the writing of fiction.

Watching films is feeding a professional, albeit young, interest.

At the moment it's a challenge because I don't know how to do it. It's interesting to set out to acquire the skills that make for a good screenplay, and I don't know how to do that—but I am enjoying figuring it all out!





Spider illustrations by Sandra Toland

fiction

Patrick McGrath

Spider

 An excerpt from a novel to be published in October, 1990, by Poseidon Press, taken from near the beginning of the book. Please see the author's synopsis and other comments in the interview preceding this excerpt (statements specific to the novel start on page forty-eight of this journal). 

I am a much taller man than my father was, but in other respects I resemble him. He was wiry and short-sighted; he wore round, horn-rimmed spectacles that made him appear owlish. His eyes had a deceptively mild, watery sort of look to them, and when he took his spectacles off you realized what a startlingly pale-blue color they were. But I've seen those eyes of his fire up with anger, and when that happened there was nothing mild and watery about him at all, and as often as not I'd be taken down the coal cellar and feel the back of his belt. Not that he'd let anyone else ever see his anger, he was much too

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careful for that—but my mother and myself, we saw it, he had no other outlet for it, we were the only people in the world weaker than he was. I remember my mother used to say, “Run down the Dog, Spider, and tell your father his supper’s on the table,” and that’s when I knew I’d see that furious pale light come up in his eyes. The Dog was the pub on the corner of Kitchener Street, the Dog and Beggar. It was not a big pub; there were four rooms, the public bar, the saloon bar, and two small snugs where private conversation could be had, each room separated from the others by a wooden screen inset with panels of frosted glass. My father drank in the public bar, and I can still recall pushing open the door and being immediately assailed by a welter of sounds and smells, men’s talk, their barks of laughter, thick smoke, beer, sawdust on the bare boards and in the winter a small coal fire burning in the grate. Above the mantelpiece, I remember, was a mirror with a black toucan on it and the words: Guinness Is Good For You. I couldn’t read the first word, I only knew that something was good for you. There wasn’t anything good for me in the public bar of the Dog and Beggar: I’d see him at the bar, his back bent, leaning with his elbows on the counter and one boot up on the brass rail that ran the length of it at ankle height; someone would say, “Here’s Horace’s boy,” or, “Here’s your boy, Horace,” and I’d see him turn toward me, a cigarette hanging from his lips, and in his eyes there’d be only that cold loathing that came of being reminded, again, of the fact of his family and the house to which he must return from the careless sanctuary of the public bar. I’d blurt out my message, my little voice piping like a tin whistle among those shuffling, grunting men, those cattle at their beer, and he would tell me to go on back to the house, he’d be along shortly. No one would know, only I, only I, how intense, how venomous, was the hatred he felt toward me at that moment, and I’d hurry away as quick as I could. I was never able to tell my mother how much I disliked going into the Dog and delivering her message, for my father disguised his feelings so effectively she would have laughed to hear me explain what was really going on.



When he was in this frame of mind—and drinking only made things worse, drinking broke down his reserve—mealtimes were hell. I would sit at the kitchen table gazing at the ceiling, where an unshaded bulb dangled on the end of a braided brown cord. I tended always to slip into reverie in that poky little kitchen, with its clanging pots and dripping tap and everpresent smell of boiling cabbage, it made those ghastly meals tolerable. Outside the twilight darkened into night, and from over by the railway embankment came the scream of a whistle as some suburban train went steaming by. My mother put in front of me a plate of boiled potatoes, boiled cabbage, and stewed neck of mutton, the meat coming away from the bone in stringy grayish patches. There was a terrible tension in the room as I picked up my knife and fork. I knew my father was watching me, and this made things worse, for I was a clumsy boy at the best of times, only poorly in control of those long, gangling limbs of mine. I stuffed a large lump of potato in my mouth, but it was too hot so I had to cough it back onto my plate. “For Christ’s sake—!” he

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hissed between clenched teeth. My mother glanced at him, her own fork poised over a potato that sat like a plug in a greasy puddle of thin gravy. "Don't lose your temper," she murmured, "it's not the boy's fault."

The meal progressed in painful silence. There were no further train noises from over by the railway embankment, nor was there anything moving on Kitchener Street. Cutlery clattered on cheap china as we ate our neck of mutton and the tap dripped into the sink with a steady plop plop plop. The bulb overhead continued to spread a sickly yellow light over the room, and having devoured my food I sat once more gazing at the ceiling with my lips faintly moving, pausing only to pick at a shred of mutton caught between my teeth. "Put the kettle on then, Spider," said my mother, and I rose to my feet. As I did so I banged one of my kneecaps against the side of the table, jarring it violently such that my father's plate moved several inches to the left. I felt him stiffen then, I felt his grip tighten on his fork, onto the end of which he had just scraped a soggy pile of pale limp cabbage; but mercifully he said nothing. I lit the gas. At last he finished eating, laid his knife and fork across the middle of his plate, placed his hands on the edge of the table, elbows arched outward at a sharp angle, and prepared to get up from the table. "Off down the pub, I suppose," said my mother, still at work on her last potato, which she had cut into a number of very small pieces, and without lifting her eyes to my father's face.

I cast a quick fearful glance at him; and in the way his jaw worked I knew what he thought of the pair of us, his gangling, useless son and his mutely reproachful wife, who sat there making little pokes and stabs at her potato, and refusing to meet his eye. He took his cap and jacket from the hook on the back of the door and went out without a word. The kettle came to the boil. "Make us a nice cup of tea then, Spider," said my mother, rising from her chair and brushing at her cheek as she began to gather the dirty plates.



Later I would go up to my bedroom, and I think I should tell you about that room, for so much of all this is based on what I saw and heard, and even *smelled*, from up there. I was at the back of the house, at the top of the stairs, and I had a view of the yard and the alley beyond. It was a small room, and probably the dampest in the house: there was a large patch on the wall opposite my bed where the paper had come away and the plaster beneath had started literally to erupt—there were crumbly, greenish lumps of moist plaster swelling from the wall, like buboes or cankers, that turned to powder if you touched them. My mother was constantly at my father to do something about it, and though he'd replastered the wall once, within a month they were back, the problem being leaky drainpipes and decaying mortar in the brickwork, all of which my mother thought he should be able to fix but which he never had. I would lie awake at night and by whatever moonlight penetrated the room I would gaze at these shadowy lumps and nodules, and in my boyish imagination they became the wens and warts of some awful hump-backed night-hag with

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an appalling skin disease, a spirit damned for her sins against men to be trapped, tormented, in the bad plaster of an old wall in a slum. At times she left the wall and entered my nightmares (I was plagued by nightmares, as a boy), and then when I woke in the night in terror I would see her sneering in the corner of the room, turned away from me, her head cloaked in shadow and her eyes glittering from that horrible knobby skin, the smell of her breath befouling the air; then I would sit up in bed, screaming at her, and it was only when my mother came in and turned the light on that she returned to her plaster, and I would then have to have the light on for the rest of the night.

As for school, I was never happy there, and I tried to avoid the place as much as I could. I had no friends, I didn't want any friends, I didn't like any of them, and over the years they'd learned to leave me alone. I shudder to think of those days, even now: there were long rows of desks in a vast, high-ceilinged barn of a classroom with wooden floorboards, and sitting in each one a bored child with a pencil and an exercise book. I was at the back of the row closest to the windows; the windows were set high in the wall so I could not gaze off into space and escape the tedium, and through those windows streamed the light of the day, and in it there was a constant thick drift and swirl of dust; the effect of dust dancing in sunlight has always been soporific, doubly so when there came from the front of the room the dull flat weary tones of some disaffected teacher in a shabby suit and heavy leather shoes who paced back and forth in front of the blackboard—a distant world, dusty eons from my own—interrupting himself to chalk up a word, or some numbers, the chalk scraping on the board with a hideous screech that had the pupils squirming, and the dust swirled as they shuffled on the floorboards with their shoes, and your Spider drifted further and further away, further into the back parts of his mind where no one could follow. Rarely was I called upon in class to answer a question; other boys and girls were better at that than I was, confident clever children who could rise smartly to their feet and tell the teacher what he wanted to hear. These children sat at the front of the classroom,

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closest to the blackboard; back here in the netherlands was where the “slower” children sat, a fat boy called Ivor Jones who was less popular even than me and was made to cry in the playground every day as a matter of routine; and a very messy girl called Wendy Wodehouse whose nose was always running with snot, and whose dress was always filthy, and who smelled, and who craved affection so avidly that she’d pull her knickers down behind the toilets if you asked her, and there were rumors she did other things as well. These were my closest neighbors at the back of the class, Ivor Jones and Wendy Wodehouse, but there was no sort of alliance possible between us, in fact we hated each other more bitterly than the other children hated us, because to each other we presented an image of our own pathetic isolation. I doubt I was missed when I stopped going to school; there would have been a neat line of “absents” in the register, and one less set of homework to mark. Nobody cared.

On Saturday nights my mother and father always went to the pub together. From my bedroom window, where I sat with my elbows on the sill and my chin in my hands, I’d see them leave through the back door and go down the yard, then through the gate and into the alley. They always sat at the same small round table in the public bar, close to the fireplace. They didn’t have a great deal to say to one another; from time to time my father went up to the bar, and the landlord, a man called Ratcliff, served him. “Same again, is it, Horace?” he’d say, and my father would nod, his cigarette between his lips as he fumbled for change in his trousers.

I’ve mentioned that I lived in Canada for the last twenty years. About those years I intend to say nothing at all, apart from this: I spent much time, in Canada, thinking about the events I am here describing, and I arrived at certain conclusions that would never, for obvious reasons, have occurred to me at the time; these I shall disclose as we go forward. As regards my

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father's first glimpse of Hilda Wilkinson, my guess is that he heard her before he saw her—she was a loud woman (especially when she had a drink in her hand), and there was a slightly hoarse edge to her voice, a sort of huskiness, that some men seem to find attractive. I see my father sitting stiffly in the Dog in his hard-backed chair by the fire, while on the far side of the room Hilda stands at the center of a lively group of drinkers. Up comes that laugh of hers, and for the first time he becomes aware of it. I see him startled, I see him turning, I see him frowning as he seeks the source of the noise—but he cannot locate it, for the Dog is crowded and he is not wearing his spectacles. He is far too guarded a man to allow my mother or anybody else to know what's going on, so the image he constructs of Hilda that night is assembled from the gleanings of a series of furtive, short-sighted glances, taken when he goes to the bar, or out to the Gents—he catches a glimpse, perhaps, between a group of men, of her neck (flushed pink with warmth and alcohol) and the back of her head, the blonde hair piled and pinned atop it in an untidy heap; or, a little later, he sees her hand for a moment, with its pale plump fingers grasping a glass of sweet port and a cigarette; or staring, apparently absently, at the floor, he discovers a white ankle and a foot in a scuffed black high-heeled shoe—and all the while he hears that hoarse-tinged voice erupting in husky laughter.

As he walked my mother home, his hobnail boots ringing on the stones of the alley, my father still held in his mind's eye these scraps and fragments of the laughing woman in the public bar. My parents had sexual intercourse that night, as they did every Saturday night, but I don't think that either of them was really in the here-and-now. My mother was distracted by a headful of her own concerns, and my father was still thinking about his blonde; and in his imagination, I would guess, it was with her that he copulated, not my mother.

He was back in the Dog the next night, and Ratcliff had leisure to rest a forearm on the bar and drink a small whisky with him, and pass a few remarks about Saturday's football. It was in the course of this exchange that my father fleetingly glimpsed,



behind the other's head, in the snug opposite, a large, flushed face beneath an untidy pile of blonde hair; and a moment later he caught the tones of that boisterous voice again. A rapid flare of heat inside him, and he lost all interest in the landlord's talk. "Customer, Ernie," he murmured, indicating the snug, and Ratcliff glanced over his shoulder. In a low voice he said: "It's that fat tart Hilda Wilkinson"—then made his way in a leisurely manner down the bar to serve the woman.

Little enough occurred that night in terms of an actual encounter. My father stayed in the public bar, straining to see and hear what went on in the snug, while at the same time attempting to learn what he could from Ernie Ratcliff, though the landlord proved disappointing, for this night he wished only to talk about football. At one point my father noticed another woman come up to the bar, one of the group that had surrounded Hilda the night before, a small woman in a hat who pushed empty glasses across the counter and asked in quiet, mannish tones for a bottle of stout and a sweet port.

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He did not leave until closing time. The night was cool, and a slight rain had begun to fall. He stood on the pavement with his cap pulled low and spent some moments rolling a cigarette. A sudden splash of yellow light some yards away, at the corner, told him that the door of the snug had opened, and glancing up he saw that Hilda Wilkinson and her friend had emerged. For a moment she gazed straight at him, and he met her gaze from the corners of his eyes, his tongue on the edge of his cigarette paper. For the first time he saw her clearly—and what a glorious woman she was, a spirited woman, bosomy and fair-skinned, a *yacht* of a woman! With her ratty fur coat flapping about her, and the rain drizzling down on her bare head, and lit still by the glow from the pub, she gazed squarely at my father, her big chin uplifted, and suddenly dear God how he wanted her, this he knew with more certainty than he'd ever known anything in his life before! Then the door swung closed, the glow disappeared, and the two women hurried off together into the rain and the night.

commentary

Paul Di Filippo



What does spandex mean,
and why does it mean it *now*?

More precisely, to focus our examination below the waist, what does it mean that now in our culture it is suddenly okay for your average housewife to pull on a pair of rubberoid biker shorts or running pants which reveal every bump of her patellas, accessorize it with an oversized sweater that barely conceals her panty lines—if any—and bop off to the market, whereas maybe only ten years ago she would have attracted stares and perhaps been arrested for indecent exposure?

(I would like from the start to exclude a certain arena from this discussion: the meaning of spandex tights when worn as deliberate costume. I have no interest in what Cher or Jon Bon Jovi or Hulk Hogan intend when they don spandex, since their motives are on a conscious, mercenary level. Only the mundane unconscious proletarian usage of clothing permits any true content to be read.)

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The obvious entry point into any discussion of spandex is what it looks like, how it fits the human form.

The most salient aspect of spandex is how tight it is, how it clings to every swelling and shadows every hollow of the wearer's body. The viewer—and a viewer is implicit in any discussion of clothing, since the transaction mediated by clothing is incomplete and meaningless without a witness—is able to see in fine detail every portion of the wearer's anatomy, up to and including the genitals and buttocks, areas normally minimized or hidden or slyly suggested in most modes of dressing.

The next most obvious feature of spandex is its texture. Spandex is futuristic and alien; glossy, rubbery, plastic, less like woven cloth than like something extruded. Its texture bespeaks the ultramodern, whereas that of cloth harks back to an old-fashioned era. Spandex, if you will, is science fiction, whereas cotton and wool are mimetic fiction.

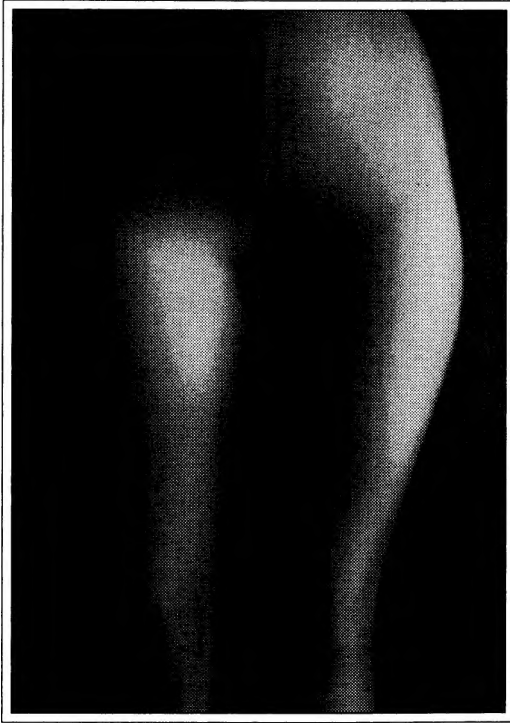
Granted these features—eye-catching, shiny, futuristic skin-tightness—it is easy at first to assume that spandex represents merely an advanced stage in sexually suggestive dressing, the latest method of displaying one's sexual attractiveness and availability. In other words, spandex initially seems a direct descendant of the mini-skirt and tight jeans. In addition, if we wished to argue this way, we could cite a certain element of sexual kinkiness, a filtering of the sensibilities of the rubber-fetishist into the mainstream.

However, I would like to argue exactly the opposite. In my reading of spandex, I find an undeniable anti-sex, do-not-touch message, a warning that the wearer is off-limits. Along with this message comes a second, deeper, perhaps ultimately more important one: that the wearer wishes no longer to be human.

A radical interpretation, perhaps. But ultimately, I believe, quite defensible.

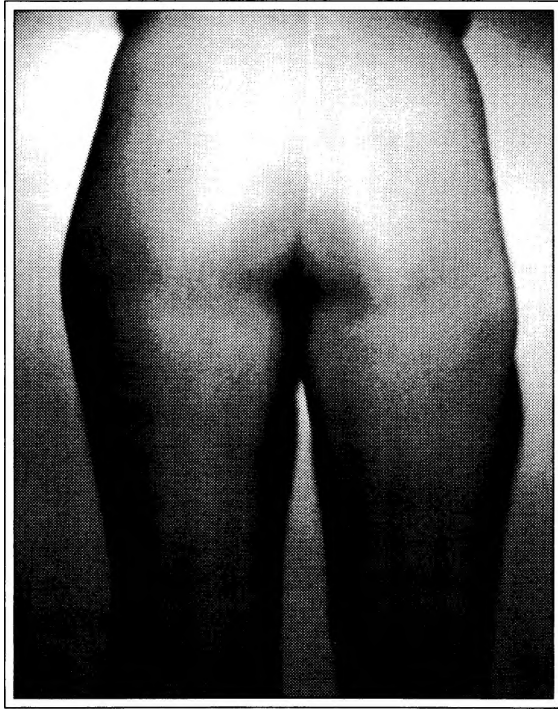
Let's examine the anti-sex message first.

Over-stimulation has been shown to lead to a shut-off in sensory input. After days of wearing a watch, one no longer feels the band around the wrist. Constant visual stimuli are filtered out;



sexual attractiveness and availability?

noise and smells likewise. How then does one react to the extreme sensual touch of spandex? When every square millimeter of the erogenous zones are continually stimulated by spandex's grip, perhaps the initial feeling is one of heightened sexual potency. But soon the body's innate capacity for message-processing is flooded, and one feels nothing. And when—if ever—the spandex is stripped off for actual sex, must not a vast disappointment await? How can human touch—hands, tongue, even full-frontal contact—limited as it is to exciting only a few receptors at a time, possibly compare to the wraparound excitement of spandex? How can over-stimulated nerve-endings react to a more subtle touch?



an undeniable do-not-touch message?

In this sense, spandex represents the reification of the imaginary polymer Imipolex-G, the erotic plastic invented by Thomas Pynchon in *Gravity's Rainbow*. Like Tyrone Slothrop, whose sexual predilections were warped by his Imipolex diaper, the culture seems intent on raising a generation whose sexual desires are predetermined by a kind of artificial second skin.

This numbing and skewing effect pertains to the wearer of spandex. What of the viewer? What message can be read from his or her perspective? Only, I believe, a message that there is an unbreachable technological barrier between the viewer and the body which initially seems tantalizingly available.

Pantyhose have long been regarded as modern chastity belts, cumbersome garments inconducive to easy sex. (It is interesting

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to note that pantyhose are a *de rigueur* portion of the modern businesswoman's uniform, as if women had to have their sexual portions sealed up tight before being permitted into the executive suite. Why are there no cotton ankle socks among the female members of the Fortune 500?) If we accept this reading, then spandex becomes the ultimate expression of pantyhose and their denial of easy sexual access. At least pantyhose—even tinted—permit some glimpse of the actual color and texture of skin; at least pantyhose, concealed beneath a skirt, can masquerade in the mind's eye as the quintessential libertine fantasy of thigh-high hose and garters. Without openings, impermeable, opaque, inescapably *there*, spandex is the ultimate barrier.

The disjunction between what is worn below the waist and what is worn above now proves to be a crucial point. In contrast to the message the spandex-wearer radiates from below the waist, the message broadcast by the accompanying wool sweater or long cotton shirt and freshly scrubbed healthy face so often a portion of the total modern look is one of natural human desire for closeness and accessibility, and even hints at the possibility of sexual contact of a petting nature. But note that the invitation stops at the waist, in a schizophrenic denial of complete openness and availability.

What could account for this confusing mix of messages, this frustration and throttling of ancient needs? Nothing more nor less complicated than the rise of AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases.

Spandex is the ultimate condom, the final oral dam. Spandex says, *I'm wrapped up and protected. There is a second, impervious skin between me and any possible sources of infection.*

Graphing the spread of AIDS and the popularity of spandex would, I am convinced, result in exactly parallel lines.

Like shrink-wrapping around a rump-roast or a pornographic magazine, spandex keeps its contents pristine. Unlike the shrink-wrapping, spandex does not permit even a glimpse of the actual contents, but only a modelling of them—a simulation—in some medium other than flesh.

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The material from which an object is sculpted is crucial in determining its reading. A stuffed toy lion is cuddly; one carved from marble is another thing entirely.

To glimpse beneath a miniskirt Janis Joplin's cunt covered by cotton or even rayon panties; to see the outlines of Jim Morrison's cock in his jockey shorts. These are vanished experiences of a completely different nature than to see genitals modeled in spandex.

When we fashion a penis in latex, we call it a dildo. A woman's vulva in rubber is part of a love-doll. How different are the actual human members from these when covered in spandex?

It is this simulation of the actual human body in some alien, more perfect material, that leads us from the anti-sex message of spandex to its anti-human implications.

The spectacular failure of the body in the face of AIDS, its inherent weaknesses and vulnerability through the inlet/outlet of sex, has created an unconscious longing for life as a machine or robot, invulnerable to viruses and bacteria, where every part is replaceable.

By accentuating the articulation of the muscles, of bones and tendons, spandex succeeds in conveying an image of the essentially machine-like aspects of the human body, its resemblance to a mere collection of rods and levers. Beneath the taut, well-filled spandex surface of a leg, it is as easy to imagine pulleys, cables and gears as flesh and gristle.



Paul Di Filippo is the author of numerous highly-regarded short stories, and has two novels scheduled for publication in 1991 by WCS Books. A regular contributor to this journal, his story "Moloch" appears at the end of this volume.

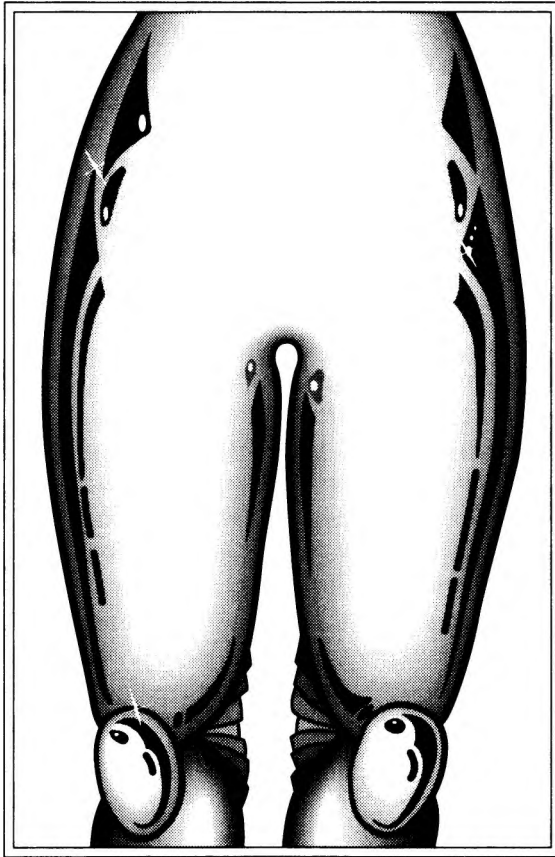
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Consider the fact that the popularity of spandex originated first among athletes, those who are most used to treating their bodies as machines designed to perform a particular function. The Olympic runner or gymnast—how enviable their oiled grace is, how finely engineered they are, how unsusceptible to breakdown. The three Olympiads of the 'Eighties represent an accelerating perfection of this image, until finally a figure such as Flo Jo in her asymmetrically patterned tights—each leg from a different manufacturer?—races right off the human spectrum, breaking all previous records for speed and sleekness and untouchability.

Now we finally know what superhero costumes are made of. Superman's unrippable, acid-proof suit, Krypton cloth, dreamed up by two prescient SF fans some sixty years ago, now stands revealed as spandex, allowing all who wear it to share in the Man of Steel's invulnerability and certainty of purpose.

As Peter Lamborn Wilson has pointed out, there is a persistent undercurrent of anti-body sentiment abroad in both our fiction and our politics. And the pervasive image of the off-duty spandex-clad yuppie intricately and symbiotically fitted into various Nautilus devices represents an even more radical image of man-become-cyborg (a goal which science fiction promotes by telling us we are inevitably bound for it, and by cloaking it in alluring forms of omnipotence). The passage of spandex from gym to street, its legitimization as everyday clothing, signals the deepening and tacit admission of the all-too-human, but impossible, desire to shed carnality, the same desire expressed in face-lifts and butt-tucks. The wrinkles, freckles, scars and puckers of skin traded in for the unblemished surface of polyurethane fibers.

Perhaps the most naked apotheosis of this desire to supplant flesh with rubber, genitals with pistons and gaskets, bones with titanium, muscles with colloid-filled sacs, is the artform pioneered by the Japanese and known as "sexy robots." These anthropomorphic creations, airbrushed to tactile reality, with their LED eyes, chromed breasts, sculpted midribs and featureless crotch bulges appear in more and more advertisements and entertainments. Often contorted into erotic poses which, had the model been



the wearer wishes no longer to be human?

human, would have resulted in the banning of the advertisement, these robots are sometimes paired with representations of actual humans. A half-naked flesh-and-blood woman, gripped from behind by a male robot, tosses her head back in ecstasy and sucks on a metal index finger inserted in her mouth. How far is this surrender from fantasizing about lying between spandexed thighs? If one dressed a sexy robot in spandex, could it be easily differentiated from the human in spandex? Is that runner jogging past you not indeed dreaming that he is a sexy robot?

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In a recent case of industrial blackmail—reported in *The New York Times*, among other media—two renegade chemists from Dow demanded millions of dollars from the company for the return of a proprietary formula they had stolen. What had these experts seized on, as the most valuable intellectual property of the huge conglomerate, the theft of which brought in myriad Federal law-enforcement agencies?

You can bet your human ass it was *spandex*.

**Collages for *The Carve-Up* were created by
Larry Mori, and are reproduced at actual size**

fiction

Colin Greenland



THE CARVE-UP

DISCRIMINATION

Meet Robin Brand. **I** He's in software, and diversifying fast. Today, hypertext; tomorrow, data engineering. "It's a busy old world," says Robin Brand. Brand first showed up, looking wobbly, in the lower reaches of the new hopefuls in 1984. "I was in it for the fractals," reminisces Robin. "Let's just say in those days the only kind of turnover I knew about was the kind with apples in." Now he networks thirty other outfits from the tiny dockland office where we met him for lunch. All geometric shapes and glossy primaries, the office, says Brand enthusiastically, "looks just the way they told us in the 'sixties the future was going to look."

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Robin Brand is a man of fine distinctions. His impressive track record shows his hair-trigger business reflexes, his instinct for the financial jugular. Why does he choose Alaskan mohair?

"Because it's good," he says. He pauses; and smiles. "Very good," he says.

C U T T I N G 2 A S L I C E

His secretary is called 2 Fiona Conway. She lives in a flat in Battersea and collects drinks mats from many countries. With Blu-Tack she fastens them to the walls and ceiling of her bedroom. At night they waft the tenuous ghosts of a thousand spilt Camparis around her sleeping head. In her dream Fiona is at work, not as the secretary but the cleaner, his initials mechanically embroidered on the pocket of her overall. Mrs Moynahan is there too. Mrs Moynahan was their real cleaner once. "He's good to himself, that one," says Mrs Moynahan, in Fiona's dream. She would never have said any such thing; nor carried a scrub bucket full of squid.

Fiona's radio comes on and wakes her. "Bright and sunny," it says. "Looking very nice indeed." Fiona lies there, thinking of Robin Brand. She doesn't find him sexy. She had, at first. His drive, his *élan*. The way he folded his arms and leaned his hip on her desk. But it was too much, working with it every day, hearing the rubbish he'd talk if you let him, watching him fondle his cuff-links. "They're open wide," he said once, all excited. "We can slice right into them." He was just back from Hamburg. She'd been in a funny mood that day, thought he was talking about something else. Perhaps he was.

T H E F A I R 3 C H I L D

He has his peaceful 3 passions too, his avid relaxations. He likes to watch birds, wading birds for preference, sucking things off the bottoms of marshes. He takes the Chinese trade delegate to Slimbridge, to see if the avocets have arrived

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yet. He helps her focus the binoculars. A fair child disturbs them, running up and down in the hide, his little Kickers loud on the bare planking.

“Our pictographic inheritance will furnish the iconic grammar which must marry systems thinking of East and West,” says the Chinese trade delegate. “Oh, look at that one. Look at his pointed wings, his funny forked tail.”

“You understand me so much better than my wife,” says Robin Brand. “That’s a tern.”

“Blam!” says the fair child. “Gobots fight the Rock-Lords for peace, love and justice in the galaxy! Eeeeeoow! Blam! Blam! Blam!”

“Come and sit down, Raymond,” says Robin.

THE FATHER OF 4 **THE CONCORD**

He reads, in an old color supplement, that the management of Disney gather annually to watch an inspirational talk filmed by the old man when he was in his prime. The idea of this appeals to him strongly. He sees himself, in years to come, after his death, smiling down benevolently from the big screen at an office party. Everybody will be getting happily drunk, their differences forgotten. The programmers will be trying to persuade one of the secretaries to sit on the photocopier and have her knickers xeroxed. There will be guacamole, tequila, multi-colored cocktail cigarettes in perspex bowls. Everyone will sing a disrespectful song, a current pop song with his name inserted into it.

B A S I 5 **C A L L Y**

“My dad flew Hurricanes. He had the time of his life, in the War. They taught him to do everything like clockwork. My mum would put his egg on when he went up to shave. When the shave was done, the egg was done. He’d come downstairs humming.



“He was always inventing things. Rain-repellent shirt collars. A self-serving tennis ball. A machine for killing spiders, because mum couldn’t stand them. Actually, it was him that was scared of them, because she made him deal with them. He had to get rid of them for her. He used to say, Always look out for the spiders, Robin. Always look out for the spiders. He sent me a postcard once, when I was a boy, with a picture of a spider on it. I can see it now. A green cloth, with a great big bird-eating spider on it, so big its legs went off the edges of the picture. They just want to catch you and eat you, he said. They can’t help it, it’s their nature.

“It was ghastly, that postcard. I wish I’d kept it now. I wish I had it now to show you.”

T H E 6 S P L I T

Jennifer Juliet has her own career. She works an atomic microscope at a research hospital. She is the only one who knows how to work it. Without her there the microscope could go critical at any time!

She met Robin Brand when he came in for a bioscan. The doctor shook his head, and Robin smiled and said: "There goes my shuttle flight." He bought her a Japanese meal and fondled her bottom when he kissed her. She didn't see him for months, then they met by merest chance, at the Thalidomide relaunch binge. After that she followed him to Minsmere and Duck Island, sat shivering in three sweaters and two anoraks on the beach at Shoeburyness on New Year's Day while he showed her again which was the teal and which the tern.

They were inseparable for a while, except at the wedding, which was by satellite because Robin had to go to Abu Dhabi suddenly. They were very much in love. They finished each other's sentences and had sex in the sitting room. Jennifer supposes that was being very much in love, what people mean when they say it. When she had Raymond, all that stopped. Before, really, if she's honest. The trauma with the aubergine. Standing in the kitchen brandishing an aubergine, shrieking: "It's not a metaphor, it's just a bloody vegetable!" Now she and Raymond live in Highgate and shun moussaka.

T H E M A N 7 H I M S E L F

Imagine Robin Brand's astonishment and delight when he eventually walks into his office and finds Walt Disney himself waiting to see him!

"What is this?" he will say with a smile. "An inspirational hologram?"

"I like that, young man," says Walt, with a smile of his own. "I declare you're as sharp as everyone says."

Walt himself is perfectly corporeal, although rather smaller

than Robin has always assumed. He looks very neat. He wears a trim little moustache and a scent of good cologne comes from him as he plucks the knees of his trousers and sits down in the conference corner.


He tells an amazing tale. Having faked his death, he retired to his secret HQ, concealed in a dead volcano in the Caribbean. There, with the aid of the most powerful computers known to science, he has spent more than twenty years developing a totally new cartoon character.

“All over the world they love Mickey Mouse,” says Walt. “Even today. All over the world. But if they love Mickey Mouse, you wait until they see Fernando Mouse! He’s the character for tomorrow’s world.”

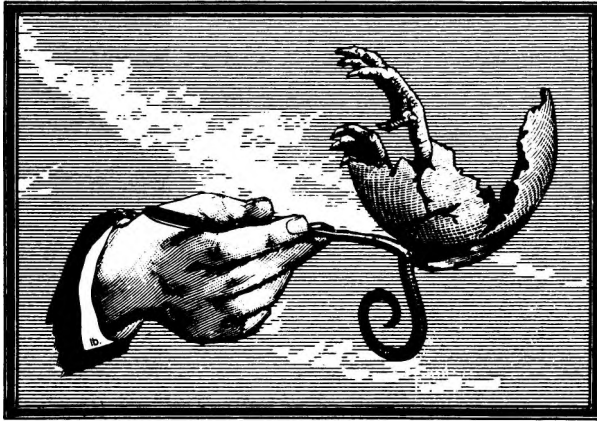
Walt has come to Brand to commission an entire post-synch modular redigitizing system. He waves a pencil in the air, and taps it on his thumbnail. Robin hopes Walt will draw the new character for him. Scratch pads are lying on every convenient surface in the conference corner, for just such an occasion. Walt doesn’t seem to notice them.

Robin wonders, privately, whether Walt has kept his edge during the years of silence.

S H O R T  **C U T S**

Robin Brand’s house  is called Brand’s Hatch. Its location is so exclusive, so private, that were I to intimate it here, discreet pressure would be applied to the publishers of this story, and the relevant words would prove unaccountably missing from every copy. I must warn you plainly: don’t go searching for it.

The River runs through Robin Brand’s house. It enters just outside the scullery, passes through a conduit under the dining table and debouches in a kind of geodesic stoa made of brass pipes and polythene sheeting. In this shelter it fills a muddy little pool, where five fat old geese live. Once a day, Raymond falls into the pond, sometimes twice.



The portico was an idea of Jennifer's sister's. Robin was very pleased with it. He spends almost as much time there as he does in the chapel, where he is continually on his knees praising God and thanking Him for his great good fortune. The chapel is done out in beige, stripped pine and hessian. The reredos is original Pawnee quiltwork, very valuable. The altar furniture is pure Shropshire clay, thrown by Jennifer's other sister. The gutters of the altar are scrubbed weekly by a local woman who must be eighty if she's a day; her husband sharpens the knives.

A QUIET EVE 9 **NING AT HOME**

This evening Robin has invited Jennifer round, and bought a present for her. Recently they have been out of touch. He knows she has been having an affair with one of her patients at the hospital, a man with an allergy to money. Robin has no intention of letting her know he knows this. He has bought her a personal stereo that works underwater. It resembles one she admired once at a notions bar in Guadeloupe. It has a tortoise-shell case, with her birth sign on in lapis lazuli.

Jennifer is pleased with his attentions. She feels sentimental. She lets him put his arms around her. They sit together on the couch, watching *Moonlighting*.

Suddenly the door bursts open and a man comes in with a gun. Robin and Jennifer jump up and stand staring at him. They can't believe it. It's like something on the TV screen, but it's happening right there in the sitting room.

The man is blond. He has a white suit on, and an open-necked shirt. He is wearing sunglasses with brushed aluminium frames and shoes of pale green leather. "Brand, you've got to help me," he says. "It's Walt. He's right behind me. For Pete's sake don't let him know I'm here." He throws a swift look over his shoulder.

"Walt?" says Robin. "You mean Walt Disney?"

"You don't think he would," says the man, impetuously. "Nobody thinks he would. Not old Walt. Listen, Brand: *don't underestimate him.*" He licks his finger, noticing a drop of gun oil on his cuff, and begins to rub at it. "Listen, lady," he says, addressing Jennifer, "I'm really sorry to just burst in like this ... "

"Actually, we were hoping for a quiet evening on our own," she replies, curtly. Robin can hear she is getting angry with this man, but he's intrigued by his mention of Walt Disney, in terms that suggest a side of the great *auteur* completely different from his popular image. Naturally he has said nothing to Jennifer of his own meetings with the man who made *Snow White*.

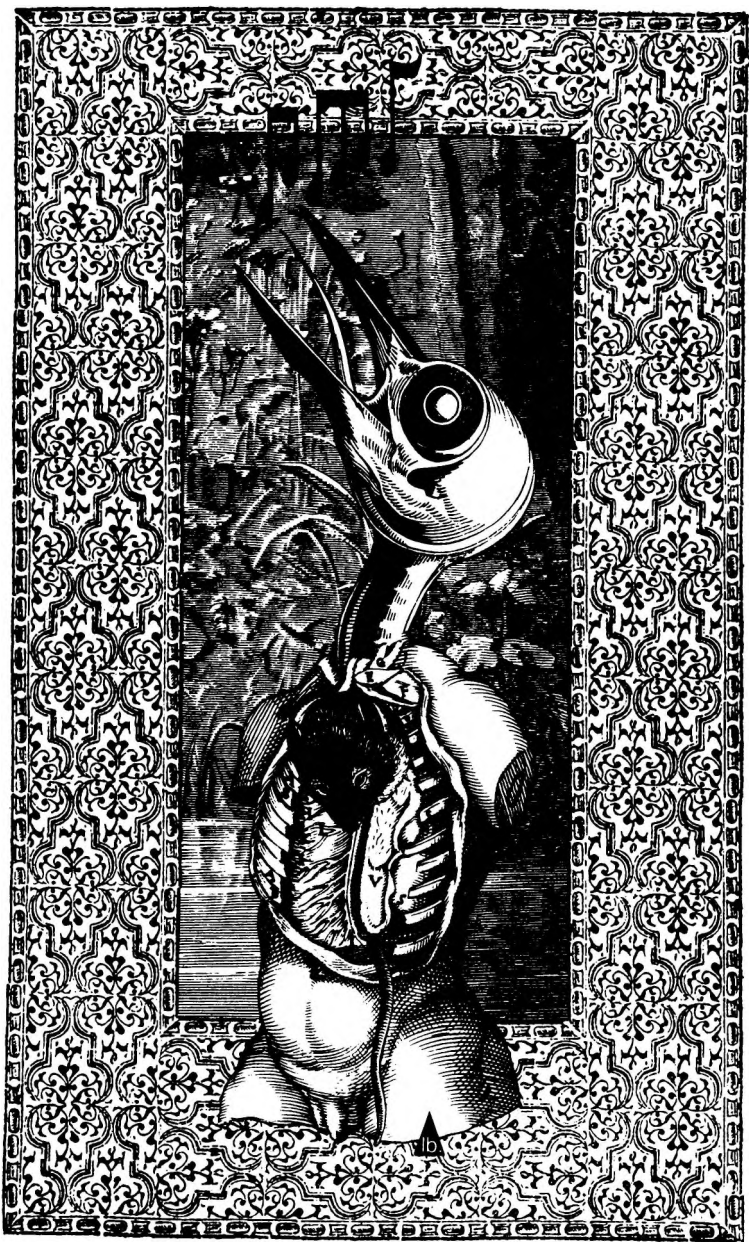
"Well," he says, turning an armchair towards the nervous intruder and decisively switching off the tv. "You'd better sit down—here, let me take your gun—and bring us up to date on this. We were under the impression Walt Disney died in 1966, weren't we, Jennifer? You couldn't get the brandy, darling, could you?"

ROBIN BRAND'S

10

SECRET FEAR

Brand has only six serious competitors in the whole of the European market. He is on top of the game. Competition is everything to him. He cannot conceive of a relationship which is not zestier for it. At university, he used to think everybody was equal, and world peace would be cool.



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He was a visionary, even then. Hell, he was a *better person*, then; he admits it. But then it was a better world. More visionary, more free-form. More stoned.

He has an abiding, irrational fear that one day one of the astute, self-possessed young men who used to sell him dope will walk into his office with an accountant and a sales director and offer him another kind of deal, a deal which he cannot refuse, a deal which will ruin him. Cut him apart. This above all he dreads. Secretly he scans the faces of the men he meets, fearing to recognize a former associate. Chiefly he looks at their eyes. Hairstyles and waistlines change, but there will be something, he feels sure, something about the eyes.

THE END OF II THE WORLD

The world adores II Fernando Mouse. Political prisoners are released in the name of Fernando, and of his murine consort Federica. The Vatican adopts the fetching little creatures as its principal marketing device. Everybody, all over the world, is so pleased Walt Disney is back once more to entertain them, and of course make more of those wonderful nature films, that they throw away their weapons and vow never to be nasty to one another again. Brand Brand (Systems) makes more money than ever, and moves to an expensive suite high up in the Barbican.

But for its founder Robin Brand, the world is already over. The dolorous blow has fallen, and it has come not from the past at all, but from the future! The future, which had always promised to be Robin Brand's friend. A consortium fronting for Raymond is test-marketing the boy's first recombinant careware. Word is that the trade pre-buzz, based on the pre-preview feedback, is apparently awesome. Soon even people who are too busy to notice cartoons will be able to be nice to each other, or the rich ones will, anyway. And when rich people start being nice, bypassing the philanthropy market entirely—who knows where it'll all end?

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Raymond, his *own son*. And Jennifer is his legal guardian. Robin suspects an international conspiracy of feminist atom scientists. Either that or spite. He phones Walt in Miami, but all the lines are busy. To entertain him until the first available operator can take his call, the phone plays a synthesized version of "When You Wish Upon a Star." But Robin Brand is no longer there. He is sitting on his window-ledge with the birds, the birds of the city: the pigeon, the sparrow, the starling, the sparrow, the starling, the starling, the starling.

Colin Greenland is the author of four novels: *Daybreak on a Different Mountain* (1984), *The Hour of the Thin Ox* (1987), *Other Voices* (1988), and *Take Back Plenty* (1990). He has also written quite a few excellent short stories, two of which are included in the first two volumes of *Zenith* (1989 & 1990, edited by David Garnett). All of the above titles were published in the U.K. For more information about Colin Greenland and his work, please see the interview with him which appeared in *Journal Wired* / Spring 90.



Paul Williams—the founder and editor of *Crawdaddy!*, the first US rock magazine (1966)—has also founded the Philip K. Dick Society and is the editor of the PKDS Newsletter. The author of *Outlaw Blues*, *Das Energi*, and *The Map — or Rediscovering Rock and Roll*, among others, he has three new books appearing in 1990: *Remember Your Essence* (in paper, Harmony Books), *Performing Artist, the Music of Bob Dylan* (Underwood/Miller), and *Nation of Lawyers* (Entwhistle Books). In addition to *Rock and Roll: The 100 Best Singles*, at least one other new book of his will see publication in 1991, *Heart of Gold* (WCS Books).

commentary

Paul Williams

ROCK

AND

The 100
Best Singles

ROLL

Ah, lists. The 100 best *novels*, the 100 best *sf* novels, the 100 best *horror* novels, the 100 best *fantasy* novels—there have been a noteworthy spate of them in recent years. And they are not unwelcome. Much entertainment can be derived from them: vindication with agreement, and the stimulating pleasure of argument for when *they get it all wrong*. There is another valuable dimension to them, too. Sometimes the composer of the list actually knows something worth sharing. In this case, Paul Williams has credentials, has a constructive and enthusiastic viewpoint, and has powerful means for communicating his ideas. His is one of the most

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influential critical voices in the world of rock music—one of the *first* of significance—and is especially remarkable for the attention given to *all* components of a recording or performance. Most rock critics analyze lyrics almost exclusively, and are largely incapable of even correctly categorizing the music, much less providing informed comment on it. Paul Williams stops short of the dry deconstruction of sound endemic to musicological theorists, but *does* manage to convey a sense of the music underlying the lyrics which gives a pop song its magic, its appeal, its lasting, experience-coloring effect.

This list is not yet final. Paul is continually reworking it, refining his selections. Writing his way from the front to the back (chronologically: the ranking is by date of release), as we go to press he has finished roughly half. *The 100 Best Singles* will be a 1991 book; he will probably be shuffling and making substitutions right up until the eleventh hour. Several publishers have expressed interest but there are no formal arrangements yet with regard to imprint or publication date.

The selections for *Wired* are ours. Linda Gruno and I chose excerpts which were both representative of the book as a whole as well as likely to be recognizable to the age group of most of our readers. It was a difficult process because we pretty much wanted to use them *all*. For that, though, you'll have to wait for the book itself. . . .

— Andy Watson

Robert Johnson
Terraplane Blues

First release: Vocalion
03416, probably early 1937

History has nothing to do with it. Let's wipe away the romance too, all the stuff about Johnson being seventeen years old and less than two years from death by poison at the hands of a jealous woman. Somebody should make a movie, and they did, so let's forget it, okay? Everything that matters is in the grooves. Pick it up, play it again (just as if you actually owned the 1937 Vocalion disc, with "Kind Hearted Woman" on the flip, and a 78 rpm phonograph to spin it on). Turn up the volume. It's all there.

"Mr. Highway Man, pleee-ease don't block the road." What do we hear? The guitar. The voice. The rhythm. The lyrics. What do we feel? Passion. Honesty. Pride. Fear. It's all in the grooves. And it goes straight (correct me if I'm wrong) through the needle, through the ears, into the blood, and into the heart of the listener.

ROCK AND ROLL: THE 100 BEST SINGLES
by Paul Williams—A Chronological Listing

1. <i>Terraplane Blues</i>	Robert Johnson (1937)
2. <i>Rolling Stone</i>	Muddy Waters (1950)
3. <i>Tutti-Frutti</i>	Little Richard (1955)
4. <i>Heartbreak Hotel</i>	Elvis Presley (1956)
5. <i>Fever</i>	Little Willie John (1956)
6. <i>In the Still of the Nite</i>	The Five Satins (1956)
7. <i>Mona</i>	Bo Diddley (1957)
8. <i>Whole Lot of Shakin' Going On</i>	Jerry Lee Lewis (1957)
9. <i>Peggy Sue</i>	Buddy Holly (1957)

continued

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I'm not saying that rock and roll begins with this incredible, prescient recording that Robert Johnson made in a hotel room in San Antonio, Texas, in November, 1936. Rock and roll to me is not the sort of thing that begins and ends, or if it does it begins in a personal way for the individual listener, like Lou Reed's Jenny:

"Then one fine morning she puts on a New York station, You know she don't believe what she heard at all—"

and ends probably sometime long after death or else on the day you finally sell your soul irretrievably to the faceless corporate mobsters whose purpose it is to own all the vision and rhythm in the world or eradicate it, whichever comes first.

So the best rock and roll records don't really exist laid out end to end in chronological order with a pre-set history marching through them to bring us up to this extraordinary or (usually) all-too-ordinary moment. They exist rather in random order on a jukebox in some low dive (college snack bar, favorite pub) or as a pile of 45s on the floor, scratched and disordered or else stacked neatly in envelopes by a compulsive collector who knows the only right way to wash and dry 'em. They exist in the mind, waiting to leap out and blind your emotions and leaden your foot on the accelerator as you turn up the radio in surprise and delight (no fun however if they play them too often and take away the cachet, the mystery). There is no key to them and you cannot make them

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| 10. <i>At the Hop</i> | Danny and the Juniors (1957) |
| 11. <i>Johnny B Goode</i> | Chuck Berry (1958) |
| 12. <i>All I Have To Do Is Dream</i> | The Everly Brothers (1958) |
| 13. <i>I've Had It</i> | The Bell Notes (1959) |
| 14. <i>Crossfire</i> | Johnny and the Hurricanes (1959) |
| 15. <i>Memphis, Tennessee</i> | Chuck Berry (1959) |
| 16. <i>Runaway</i> | Del Shannon (1961) |
| 17. <i>Stand By Me</i> | Ben E. King (1961) |
| 18. <i>I'll Try Something New</i> | The Miracles (1962) |
| 19. <i>You Belong To Me</i> | The Duprees (1962) |
| 20. <i>Please Please Me</i> | The Beatles (1963) |

continued



Robert Johnson

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yield their secrets, except by listening and letting yourself be carried away by whatever it was that carried away these recording artists before you.

"Terraplane Blues" is relentless. From the guitar notes that begin it, to the first words ("I feel so lonesome") to the inevitable and necessary pop hook (the little guitar twist in the payoff line—it follows the word "terraplane" the first time you hear it) to the glorious moaning bridge in the middle, to the muffled last words (like on a Rolling Stones single, you can't quite make them out; I think he's saying "your sparks 're gonna give me fire"), this record drives, once or twice you can actually hear his pounding foot but mostly you just feel it, as the sole accompanying instrument slips back and forth so effortlessly between rhythm and melody, structure and elaboration, form and content, hard muscles and a pretty face.

Rock and roll is sometimes a saxophone or even a synthesizer but most of the time it's a loud guitar, with an implacable rhythm in it or behind it or both . . . and a human voice speaking not story so much as half-formed truths, phrases that cut through the limitations of ordinary language and, with the music, allow identification, allow reason to unite with emotion beyond explanation, producing truth. And when the words fail, the guitar is there, the rhythm takes over, and spirit fills in the blanks.

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| 21. <i>Sally Go 'Round the Roses</i> | The Jaynetts (1963) |
| 22. <i>Louie Louie</i> | The Kingsmen (1963) |
| 23. <i>Fun, Fun, Fun</i> | The Beach Boys (1964) |
| 24. <i>I Get Around / Don't Worry Baby</i> | The Beach Boys (1964) |
| 25. <i>Dancing in the Street</i> | Martha and the Vandellas (1964) |
| 26. <i>You Really Got Me</i> | The Kinks (1964) |
| 27. <i>Baby Please Don't Go / Gloria</i> | Them (1964) |
| 28. <i>A Change Is Gonna Come</i> | Sam Cooke (1964) |
| 29. <i>I Can't Explain</i> | The Who (1965) |
| 30. <i>The Last Time</i> | The Rolling Stones (1965) |

continued

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Robert Johnson believed in the Devil, and well he might have, sensing his own fate. In that hotel room something technological combined with something spiritual to make his existence eternal as Shakespeare's, and what I want to know is, how do you like your brown-eyed boy, Mr. Death? Leaving history and romance out of this, of course.

Muddy Waters *Rolling Stone* First release: Chess [catalogue number?], 1950

Aha, you say, I've got the wrong book, this is the hundred best *blues* recordings. No no, just stay with me for a minute. There are all sorts of forerunners of rock and roll, some country, some jazz, some pop, some gospel, some blues or r&b, and I'm doing my best to ignore all of them here, due to my anti-history stance with which you are already familiar. This record, Muddy's first moderately successful single (on the r&b charts), earned its place in history by inspiring the name of one of the great rock bands, The Rolling Stones, and it also played a part in the naming of America's leading rock magazine (it probably didn't have much to do with the title of Bob Dylan's masterpiece "Like A Rolling Stone," however—that seems to derive from the line "I'm a rolling stone, I'm alone and lost" in Hank Williams's magnificent country single "Lost Highway"). But "Rolling Stone" is in this book for one reason only: it is one of the best rock and roll singles I've ever heard, which is all the more remarkable in that it is not only pure urban blues, it is also a solo performance, just Muddy and his amplified guitar. Stick it on any modern radio station and it would sound a) out of place, and b) like the hottest rocker they've played in months.

It has dignity and it kicks ass. It rocks, unquestionably; and oh God it is also the textbook example of what it means for a performance to *roll*.

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The song is a self-proclaimer, part of the “look out world—members of the opposite sex especially—’cause here I come” school, which is an essential subtheme in rock and roll (even when it isn’t directly in the lyrics, you can often hear it in the singer’s tone of voice). Musically “Rolling Stone” draws unabashedly from Robert Johnson and Charlie Patton and their ilk, but there is also a startling leap here which effectively defines the rock and roll band sound (electric bass, drums, electric lead guitar, vocalist) even though there is no band on the record. It is as if rock and roll were an idea in Muddy Waters’s head which is outlined here, a black blueprint passionately seized on by several successive white generations to come. Which Muddy predicts:

“I’ve got a boychild coming, gonna be a rolling stone.”

And while the lyrics and guitar-playing are excellent and the vocal performance superlative, what really distinguishes this recording and makes it such an irresistible listen is the *sound* (presumably producer Leonard Chess, and the gods of serendipity, also deserve a nod here).

This is the sound that, in one package or another, has captured and converted every set of young teenagers that’s come along in the last thirty-five years. If there are hormones and chemicals that induce doubt, depression and confusion in the average adolescent, there is also a particular clear echoing ring of guitar and voice, a particular pitch and form of audio intensity, that seems to be the

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| 31. <i>Subterranean Homesick Blues</i> | Bob Dylan (1965) |
| 32. <i>Ticket to Ride</i> | The Beatles (1965) |
| 33. <i>Mr Tambourine Man</i> | The Byrds (1965) |
| 34. <i>(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction</i> | The Rolling Stones (1965) |
| 35. <i>In the Midnight Hour</i> | Wilson Pickett (1965) |
| 36. <i>Like A Rolling Stone</i> | Bob Dylan (1965) |
| 37. <i>Daytripper</i> | The Beatles (1965) |
| 38. <i>Going To A Go-Go</i> | The Miracles (1965) |
| 39. <i>Oh How Happy</i> | Shades of Blue (1966) |

continued

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natural counterforce and restorative. A certain sound that reaches into the electrochemical circuits of the human body and provides the energy necessary to push through this crisis of physical and emotional growth—certain chords that cut the cords and give the young human entity strength to stand on its own, confused but proud, scared but also filled with a mysterious confidence.



Muddy Waters

“Rolling Stone” precedes the general emergence of rock and roll by five years and probably didn’t have much direct influence on the form until the blues-aware British burst on the scene in the 1960s. Like most of the recordings discussed in this volume, it exists outside of time. Its power relies not on aesthetic context but on its ability to speak directly to the inner emotions of the listener. And the sound that moves us most, I suspect, is not actually the guitar or the voice but the sound of the empty walls these calls in the night bounce off of. Robert Johnson and Muddy Waters are the discoverers of this sound; their pioneering efforts have been

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imitated and duplicated and embellished upon but no one as far as I know has yet gone further. Perhaps that's because there is nowhere further to go.

The Kingsmen

Louie Louie

First release: Jerden

712, June 1963

Sing swap grows blim blam fleegle, den possumcup hoppy potato pancake. Aftermumps, slackjaw fleegle den slalom inda mogsteroon, but not riffen or raffan exempt fleedermouse (dream baba dream baba dream).

A very long time ago, in a land considerably to the west of the Delaware River, there lived three passably talented musicians known as the Kingsmen. One night as they were walking home to their cold water triplex after many hours of playing "What'd I Say" and "Peggy Sue" and "Who Wears Short Shorts?" to seven or eight disinterested customers at Fernando's Pink Tulip Roadhouse, a Fairy Godmother appeared to them. Each Kingsman was granted a wish. One wanted to make a hit record. Another asked for wealth, fame, and plenty of sex. The third, who was drunker than the

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| 40. <i>River Deep, Mountain High</i> | Ike & Tina Turner (1966) |
| 41. <i>Reach Out I'll Be There</i> | The Four Tops (1966) |
| 42. <i>Knock On Wood</i> | Eddie Floyd (1966) |
| 43. <i>Good Vibrations</i> | The Beach Boys (1966) |
| 44. <i>Gimme Some Lovin'</i> | The Spencer Davis Group (1966) |
| 45. <i>For What It's Worth</i> | Buffalo Springfield (1967) |
| 46. <i>I Never Loved A Man</i> | Aretha Franklin (1967) |
| 47. <i>The Love I Saw In You Was Just A Mirage</i> | Smokey Robinson & the Miracles (1967) |
| 48. <i>Waterloo Sunset</i> | The Kinks (1967) |

continued

others, wished to create a great and enduring work of art that would communicate to all the world, including future generations, the existential essence of the evening they'd just spent on the bandstand at Fernando's. And so it came to pass.

Dream baba fleegle—no, no, enough of that. “Louie, Louie” is



a very famous record. The song was actually written by a black man named Richard Berry, who had a minor r&b hit with it in 1956. (He borrowed the dominant rhythmic figure from a Mexican song, supposedly “El Loco Cha Cha Cha.”) Years later a white guy in Seattle, Washington, who played in a local band discovered the single (according to legend) in the bargain bin of a record store (very important truth about the single: it is an object, a fairly indestructible piece of plastic, and it has the ability to endure as a physical object even when the performance and song impressed on it are long forgotten).

The guy in Seattle liked the song and included it in his standard repertoire; eventually he joined a group that made a record, and that first garage band recording of “Louie, Louie” (by the Wailers) became a regional hit in the Pacific Northwest. The song was easy to play and easy to dance to, and it became part of the standard playlist of quite a few Northwest bands. One of those bands was the Kingsmen. They made a record of their version at a small Portland, Oregon, recording studio with highly primitive acoustics. Nothing happened for five or six months and then a copy of the object wandered into the hands of a Boston deejay, and the record became a national hit. And more or less from that day forward “Louie, Louie” has been the international anthem of local bands (high school or college or dropout rock and roll bands, playing parties, bars, dances—not bands people look at, bands people *dance to*), surely the rock song that has been performed the most, at the grass roots level, every year since the Kingsmen first

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introduced it to the world.

So it's a famous record. (Its fame also derives from an intense controversy about "dirty lyrics"—the song was investigated by the FCC and even the FBI, without result—the point being that if you slur the vocals enough, whether through vocal technique or recording methodology or both, people will be able to hear in the song's lyrics whatever they want to hear.) A very influential record. But is it really one of the hundred best rock and roll singles, in terms of direct reward, listening pleasure, and like that? Yeah. I think so. It is.

Why? Well, see, it's the attitude. And the persistence of the rhythm and the crude clarity of the sound and the sloppy, undeniable fluidity of the guitar solo and the way the singer says "Okay, let's give it to 'em, right now!", all of which of course are simply the component parts, the external form, of the song's attitude. Beatitude. Like a Buddhist chant, one size fits all—no need for lots of different words or forms to entertain and impress the mind when the point is to lose and let go of your mind in the chant, the dance, the thrust of the sound. Let's say there's a precise right timing that triggers the essential experience of hearing and moving to rock and roll. Maybe the right attitude puts a musician in touch with the timing, maybe the timing and the attitude are one, a certain angle of incidence, who cares? The Kingsmen stumbled onto it. Oh, baby. We gotta go. Uh uh. Fairy Godmothers rule. Right now.

The Beach Boys

I Get Around / Don't Worry Baby

First release: Capitol

5174, May 1964

At a certain level of intensity there is a complete lack of artifice. "Don't Worry Baby" is one of the pinnacles of rock and roll artistry because of its utter unselfconsciousness, its innocent, unmatched power and sincerity. "Well, it's been building up inside of me



The Beach Boys

for oh I don't know how long . . ." This first line is self-referential; it describes the music we're hearing, the feelings that are being shared. What's been building up is the speaker's need to confess his anxiety to the listener. Intuitively, the listener knows that the singer/ writer/producer (Brian Wilson) is speaking directly to him, to the person on the other end of the recording process. Brian's courage in sharing his "irrational" fears so honestly, so directly, is extremely affecting. "I don't know why but I keep thinking something's bound to go wrong." It is the power of his relationship with us that frightens him; yet he holds back none of that power here. The singer is totally present with his fears, naked before us, and his honesty is liberating; it gives the listener permission to be in touch with his (her) own anxieties, if my hero has them it's okay that I have them too. Having set this up, the song can go about its business, which is a) direct reassurance, and b) celebration of the female, the lover/mother, as the sole power that can (for the male) disperse the anxiety, make it bearable, allow me to face the world, keep breathing, go on with my work.

The rest of the lyrics, placing these feelings in the context of an impending car race, are awkward; their purpose is to put a fig leaf over the song's unprecedented intimacy, thus allowing it to be performed, released, listened to. And the awkwardness doesn't matter, because all we need to hear are those opening lines and the three words of the title; everything else is layers of sound—primarily vocal (lead and harmonies) but there are extraordinary instrumental (percussive) inventions here too—so human and real

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and unspeakably beautiful that one sinks into them as into a cloudbank of heavenly reassurance, safety, harmony, love, surrendering all care, transported by the fullness and grace of these incomparable melodic and sonic textures.

These voices. Our awe at Brian's courage, musical imagination, and creative power should not cause us to overlook the importance of his constant inspiration and primary tool: the sound of these harmonizing voices, never more exquisite or personal than in the first few seconds of "Don't Worry Baby," like the comfort found walking by the edge of the ocean, waves breaking on our shore, invaluable natural resource.

"I Get Around," other side of the record and the Beach Boys' first #1 hit, is also a masterpiece. Two for the price of one. And the closer one listens, the more awe-inspiring it is. It's like the forerunner of some major new musical form that's still unexplored, even now, twenty-five years since this single was released. I'd go so far as to say that there's no way to represent on paper, with current notation, the lyrics, melody, rhythm, or arrangement of this song and come remotely close to what the listener actually hears and experiences. And of course it also flies in the face of conventional wisdom that anything so wildly experimental and avant-garde could be so popular, so dumb and friendly and instantly accessible. Unselfconsciousness is the key. Brian is so keen to please us, and to get into music certain feelings that he knows we feel too, that he invents a whole new musical language without necessarily realizing it, innocently finding the shortest distance from here to here, it's simple, bass guitar sounds like this, handclaps here, sing this in this pitch, this in this other pitch and right here, lyrics vanish into falsetto here, chorus comes out of the clear blue sky with an attack like *this*, I'll keep the tempo, ready now? Let's go—

And you look back and you've just crossed hyperspace. Hey, that's cool. Listen, bring this master tape to Capitol and tell 'em it's the next single. And could you get us some milkshakes?

The Kinks
You Really Got Me
First release: (UK) Pye
7N 15673, July 1964

Possession. As in, *possession*. “You got me so I don’t know what I’m doing.” It can be a peculiarly satisfying state of mind, even though the probable subtext is “I don’t got you.” But this classic work of musical art goes beyond boy/girl to deal directly with the state of being that frustrated and impassioned boy/girl stuff produces, a state often arrived at through other passions and frustrations as well, a state of joyous self-directed more or less contained violence, over-excitement, over-the-edginess, screaming inside, screaming outside if you can get away with it, and loving every moment of it, a state of feeling possessed . . . by life, by love, by aliveness, by irrational fascination. Now imagine capturing the *sound* of this. Folding the whole feeling into two minutes and thirteen seconds, with such attention to detail (I didn’t say “careful” attention) that twenty listenings in a row won’t exhaust the surprises, the richness, the resonating, throbbing bliss of the experience. Here is truth. Here is the anguished, joyous, claustrophobic,

49. <i>Light My Fire</i>	The Doors (1967)
50. <i>Purple Haze / The Wind Cries Mary</i>	Jimi Hendrix (1967)
51. <i>Heroes & Villains</i>	The Beach Boys (1967)
52. <i>Brown-Eyed Girl</i>	Van Morrison (1967)
53. <i>(Your Love Keeps Lifting Me) Higher and Higher</i>	Jackie Wilson (1967)
54. <i>I Can See For Miles</i>	The Who (1967)
55. <i>(Sittin' On) The Dock of the Bay</i>	Otis Redding (1968)
56. <i>Magic Bus</i>	The Who (1968)
57. <i>Hey Jude</i>	The Beatles (1968)

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liberating, beat-your-head-against-the-door, ultimately unspeakable essence of adolescence—and not just adolescence, though we're most in touch with it then. Rock and roll at its best is the raving, gleeful self-expression of the terminally inarticulate, and we all recognize ourselves in its mumbled shrieks. "You got me so I can't sleep at night! Oh, no . . ." A complaint and a boast.

Is this music? I'm here to argue that, noisy and "anti-beautiful" as this crude recording may sound to unreceptive ears, it is in fact music as good as it gets, comparable to the outstanding works of classical, jazz, or traditional folk/ethnic music-makers; the musical language is different (arising to fit the environment and meet the needs of the times) but the intent and accomplishment and ultimate impact are closely related. I'll even assert that "You Really Got Me" is a thing of beauty, functioning perhaps at cross-purposes to the commonly-held image of beauty precisely because beauty is ultimately stifled and lost when the necessary conditions for its existence become too well-defined. So the alienated and disaffected become the visionaries, working in the forbidden zone to rediscover the vitality that has been lost in the insecure and therefore deadening, excessively-careful mainstream. Kick out the jams. Mutilate the speakers in your worthless little stage amplifier until your guitar sound begins to accurately convey all the angry dirty fuzziness of what you really feel. Attack the drums, hurt them, fall over into them.

But this is mere prelude. Honesty and vitality count for a lot, but actual beauty is transcendent, illuminating the normally perceived world and making us thrillingly aware that there is something more here, something deeply satisfying and arousing, awakening, a divine presence, something worth taking another breath for even though all of our conscious needs and problems remain unmet and unresolved. I'm saying I feel it when I put on the headphones and play "You Really Got Me" at ear-splitting volume, feel it as much today as when I was sixteen, and not as some kind of nostalgia. It takes courage. You blow out the nostalgia with the first few listenings, just as you can blow out your ideas about what's pretty and what's not and whether or not you speak

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the language. And then, if the work of art happens to speak to you, happens to be tuned to your soul like Monet for me but Gauguin for some other person, if this is a beauty your heart can respond to, terror! as the universe opens up, your private universe melts down and opens up and you fall through the floor of it. You may feel yourself possessed by forces unnameable, clenching your fists and rocking and screaming with fury, passion, joy. The scary thing is that the music, beautiful as it is, doesn't create this. It only triggers it, sets it free.

You really got me. I am really caught by you. This is truth for me, at this moment. I am filled and bursting with it, intoxicated by it, bleeding from it, can't live without it. Play the song again, please. I am starting to have a sense of my own existence.

Bob Dylan *Subterranean Homesick Blues*

**First release: Columbia
43242, March 1965**

Having put seven inch vinyl on a pedestal elsewhere, I want to acknowledge that the compact disc mix of this one cannot be improved upon. Sensational.

When this record came out I was critical of Dylan for the monotonous rhythm, his narrow idea of how to make rock and roll. I was so utterly wrong—it's sobering sometimes to look back on one's past pronouncements. This is a great performance, and every year it sounds better to me. Dylan made rock and roll in exactly the best possible way: no preconceptions whatsoever. "Subterranean Homesick Blues" is, quite simply, contemporary poetry (rapping, verse-making) as good as it gets, rock and roll singing as good as it gets (one of the great vocalists of the century), and small-combo live performing as good as it gets. It's also not like any other Dylan song, though it does have its precursors—Chuck Berry's "Too Much Monkey Business"—and of course its

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progeny (R.E.M.'s "It's the End of the World As We Know It" springs to mind).

What makes art? What you have to say, the way you say it, how well you say it (impact on audience), and who you are as you say it. You can have "something to say" when you're writing the words of a song, something to say (often a feeling) when you're composing the music, and something to say as you're performing (singing, playing an instrument). Doesn't have to be the same "something"; it just has to all be moving in the same direction.

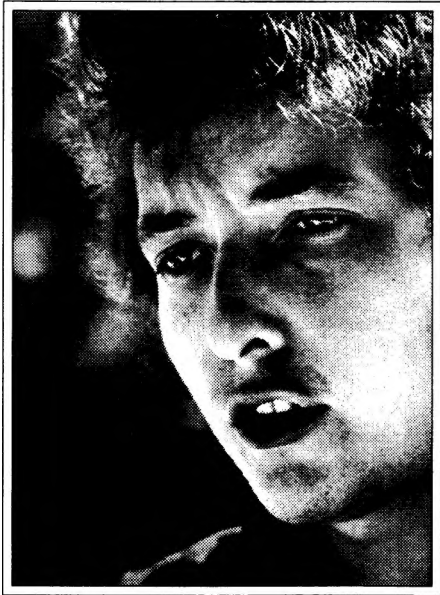
Words, music, performance (singing), and performance (playing) are different forms of expression that combine to make a recorded song. The power of Bob Dylan's recordings is so great that a listener may be moved to self-defense instead of or in addition to appreciation. One (unconscious) defense is to separate the elements of the experience, as when people say "he's a great writer but I can't stand his voice." That's a paradoxical statement but not an illegitimate one. Love and hate can be very close at times; indeed, we hate love for making us so vulnerable. Embrace the message, attack the messenger. A good messenger makes use of, encourages, this process. If they reject messenger and message,

- | | |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| 58. <i>Dark Star</i> | Grateful Dead (1968) |
| 59. <i>I Heard It Through the Grapevine</i> | Marvin Gaye (1968) |
| 60. <i>Honky Tonk Women / You Can't Always Get
What You Want</i> | The Rolling Stones (1969) |
| 61. <i>Green River</i> | Creedence Clearwater Revival (1969) |
| 62. <i>Foggy Notion</i> | Velvet Underground (1969) |
| 63. <i>Whole Lotta Love</i> | Led Zeppelin (1969) |
| 64. <i>Thank You (Falettinme Be Mice Elf Agin)</i> | Sly & the Family Stone (1969) |
| 65. <i>Maggie May</i> | Rod Stewart (1971) |
| 66. <i>Drownin' in the Sea of Love</i> | Joe Simon (1971) |
| 67. <i>All Down the Line</i> | The Rolling Stones (1972) |
| 68. <i>Knockin' On Heaven's Door</i> | Bob Dylan (1973) |

continued

he's failed. If they receive message and satisfy themselves with the symbolic act of rejecting the deliverer, he's done his job.

It's a struggle for survival. We have to resist the killer of who we've been, even as we welcome the liberator of who we're becoming. The artist unconsciously acknowledges this by following his instinct, which is to wear a mask. The mask says, "This isn't real." We relax, suspend our defenses;



Bob Dylan

as a result, something real can happen. This is the essence of performing, of the artistic process: a conspiracy between creator and recipient, in which we pretend something isn't real so that we can be free to express and receive it fully.

Dylan's great prop or mask is his assumed accent, that obviously false yet extraordinarily durable Okie twang, telling you and himself, "I am an actor, this is an assumed identity, let's pretend this isn't really me and I'm not really speaking straight at you." It allows him (and us) the rich humor that permeates every line of the song, every phrase of the (deadpan) vocal performance ("I'm on the pavement, thinking about the government"). It allows the frightening honesty and directness of this political statement aimed right at the "kids" Dylan imagines listen to the radio (as *he* did as a still-forming adolescent): "Get born, keep warm/Short pants, romance, learn to dance/Get dressed, get blessed, try to be a success/Please her, please him, buy gifts, don't steal, don't lift/Twenty years of schoolin' and they put you on the day shift."

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The immediacy of the language is also its durability; it will be appreciated forever, like Shakespeare. If we had recordings of Shakespeare performing we might find his voice as grating, and ultimately as irresistible, as Dylan's.

“Look out, kid—” It's a warning. A portrait. A declaration of camaraderie. A stand-up comedy routine. A virtuoso display. A scream. An expression of self. A rock and roll single. A work of art.

The Beatles *Ticket to Ride*

**First release: (UK) Parlophone
R 5265, April 1965**

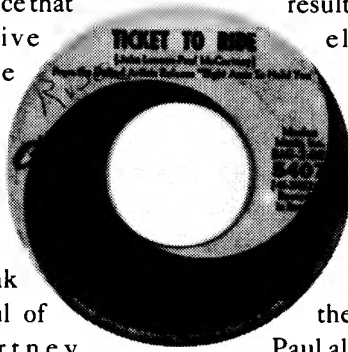
So often it is the color of the painting that attracts us. It seems impossible that every painting should be a different color (how many colors can there be in the universe?), but there can be little question that in fact every great painting has a distinguishable tint and pigmentation all its own. “Ticket to Ride” doesn't sound like any other record ever made. Its words, its structure, even its tune are fairly ordinary, and yet there is something about the song, the recording, that is strikingly unusual and immensely appealing. If it were a painting it would be its color—warm, enticing, deep, vibrant—and its texture. It's like I want to live (or at least go for long visits) in the world of this song's sound.



The Beatles

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“Ticket to Ride” was written by John Lennon, and he sings the lead vocal; but it would be a mistake to give him all the credit for the masterpiece that most distinctive element in the recording is the lead guitar riff that opens it and threads through it, which is played (and was created) not by John or by George (as I’d always assumed, he was perhaps the Beatles) but by Paul McCartney.



Paul also plays bass and is credited in the book *The Beatles Recording Sessions* with having suggested the drum pattern Ringo plays here, another primary element in the freshness and specialness of the song’s sound. The third identifiable contributing factor in “Ticket to Ride”’s brilliant freshness is the sound of the vocals. The hook in the song (that element that creates in the casual listener a hunger to hear the song again, vital to selling records and building radio station audiences) is—along with the bursts of crystalline lead guitar at the start of the song and twice in the middle—the way they sing

69. <i>You Ain't Seen Nothing Yet</i>	Bachman-Turner Overdrive (1974)
70. <i>One Of These Nights</i>	The Eagles (1975)
71. <i>No Woman, No Cry</i>	Bob Marley & The Wailers (1975)
72. <i>Hurricane</i>	Bob Dylan (1975)
73. <i>Gloria</i>	Patti Smith Group (1975)
74. <i>Drive Back</i>	Neil Young (1976)
75. <i>Anarchy in the U K</i>	The Sex Pistols (1976)
76. <i>Handy Man</i>	James Taylor (1977)
77. <i>Roadrunner</i>	Jonathan Richman and the Modern Lovers (1977)
78. <i>Complete Control</i>	Clash (1977)

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“today, yeah” and “away” and “down, yeah” and “around” at the end of the verse lines. I say “they” because it’s a harmonic effect, probably achieved in part by a doubling or more than doubling of John’s voice, but I also hear a flavoring—just enough to add color, add spice—of Paul’s and George’s voices throughout this “solo” vocal. In any case, whoever’s singing, we know enough of the Beatles’ recording techniques to know that the creation of the vocal sound was a collaborative process, in which at least Paul and John, and possibly all four plus producer and perhaps engineer, would toss ideas back and forth, experimenting intensely, searching for something, creating together. Another hook (the Beatles never liked to rely on just one hook, that might be good enough for a top ten single but not a number one) is the gliding vocal that climaxes the chorus, “ri-*hi*-hide.” Whose idea? It could have been the singer’s, but didn’t have to be; and if it was his he likely wouldn’t have come up with it away from the interactive maelstrom of collective creation, the Paul-and-John environment, which in turn was always a Paul-and-John-in-relation-to-Paul-John-George-Ringo-George Martin environment, the individual within the partnership within the group. The bottom line is that “Ticket to Ride” is a spontaneous (worked over, but in a brief, intense, spontaneous burst, specifically three and a half hours on the afternoon of Feb. 15, 1965, in Abbey Road studio) masterpiece that could not and would not have been created by John Lennon by himself. It is an expression of the genius of a gestalt: the Beatles. The whole that is greater than the sum of its parts.

If John were still alive people would still be trying to put the gestalt back together, but only because we fail to understand that a gestalt is not simply a group of persons (not that that’s simple!)

79. <i>Watching the Detectives</i>	Elvis Costello (1977)
80. <i>Holidays in the Sun</i>	The Sex Pistols (1977)
81. <i>We Will Rock You / We Are The Champions</i>	Queen (1977)
82. <i>Take Me to the River</i>	Talking Heads (1978)
83. <i>I Wanna Be Sedated</i>	The Ramones (1978)

continued

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but a group of persons *in and at a particular moment*. The moment comes out of nowhere, lasts as long as it lasts (typically, twenty minutes; in the case of the Beatles, eight years), and then vanishes again, and when it's gone the people look at each other and don't know what they're doing here.

"I think I'm gonna be sad . . ." The girl, the spirit, was here and now she's gone. She's got a ticket to ride, biggest ticket ever written in modern pop culture history, but it doesn't matter, when it's over it's over. And we don't have to be sad. We can thank God instead that we were chosen to be visited by the Mystery.

The Rolling Stones *(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction*

**First release: London
9766, June 1965**

You could think of it as some sort of grim pursuer, that riff, ominous, relentless, following the singer, the protagonist, the persona who speaks and with whom we identify. And—it suddenly occurs to me, after twenty-four years of chewing on the matter—the riff consists not of the eight repeated fuzz-tone guitar notes alone, but of guitar *and* drums, together, that's the riff, the combination of the two, running parallel throughout the song, not something you can write music notation for, it has to be experienced, heard, felt. One of the more physical, tactile, recordings ever made by white musicians. Again a nod to Hassinger please, and to Keith who wrote and performs the guitar part of the riff and came up with the title phrase, and to Mick who sings, acts, and shakes his voice in our face here like no one before or since, but most of all let us give credit where credit is due: Charlie Watts. His record. Charlie manages to be both the pursuer and the pursued, the sound of both, the tangible presence of both, my restlessness and that which won't give me rest, Charlie's drumming creates it, expresses it, releases it like nothing before or since, which is why late one night I heard a deejay in Troy, New York, play this record

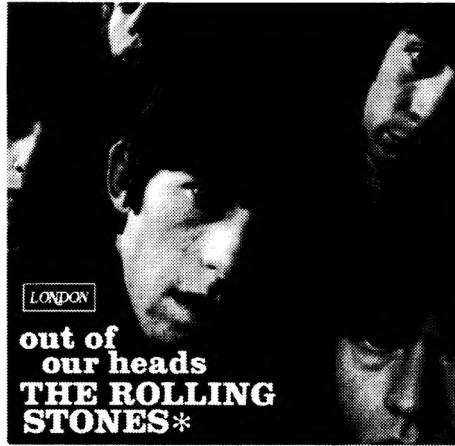
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three times in a row and declare it our new national anthem. International anthem. Transtemporal. *This* is what it means to be a teenage male, and not only. It is also present in us all, any sex, any age, buried or right on top, all the time. Can't get no. An exaggeration, perhaps, but a truthful exaggeration. This is what it feels like. And this is what to do about it. Listen to Charlie. Again and again and again.

What is it that's after us? Ah, well you can wax poetic about that, if you like. Certainly in a real sense it is the times themselves, and of course we're also the engine driving them forward as fast as they'll go, faster than we can bear, push, pull, we are the oppressed and we are the oppressor. Modern age. Factory. Jet plane. Power. Noise. "I would tear this building down." Rock and roll speaks to and of that part of us that is excited about change and angry about change and hungry to make this changing, angry, exciting world its own. Our own. We express in order to get out from under and seize the reins. Turn up the volume. Make the music louder, shake my bones till they rattle, shake the walls of the empire. Scream louder

84. <i>Sultans Of Swing</i>	Dire Straits (1979)
85. <i>Ring My Bell</i>	Anita Ward (1979)
86. <i>Funkytown</i>	Lipps, Inc. (1980)
87. <i>I Will Follow</i>	U2 (1980)
88. <i>Walking On Thin Ice</i>	Yoko Ono (1981)
89. <i>Radio Free Europe</i>	R.E.M. (1981)
90. <i>Gimme the Car</i>	Violent Femmes (1981)
91. <i>New Year's Day</i>	U2 (1982)
92. <i>Little Red Corvette</i>	Prince (1983)
93. <i>Middle of the Road</i>	The Pretenders (1984)
94. <i>When Doves Cry</i>	Prince (1984)
95. <i>Shout</i>	Tears For Fears (1985)
96. <i>Fall Down</i>	Tramaine (1985)
97. <i>Sledgehammer</i>	Peter Gabriel (1986)
98. <i>The One I Love</i>	R.E.M. (1987)
99. <i>Fisherman's Blues</i>	The Waterboys (1988)
100. <i>Twist In My Sobriety</i>	Tanita Tikaram (1988)

than the buzzing in our ears. Reclaim the space. Rock and roll's a prime tool for the job, we know it when we hear it, shock of recognition. I hear it coming, the beast of the age, and my heroic response is to pretend to be the beast myself, but wiser, younger, more beautiful, more outrageous. Scare it off, take



its place. Revolution. Is this mere folly? Folly yes, but maybe not mere. The walls of the city do shake, and my bones also. This crashing drumbeat must be an authentic statement.

Yes, I feel it, I know that it is. It has heart. It is personal, and collective, at once. It speaks for our moment.

What the enemy—which is time, cowardice, laziness, fear, ambition, logos-worship—will try to do is turn it into a nostalgic object. A symbol of some lost or remembered time. Bullshit. This record moves the heart, or it is nothing. Moves the present-day heart, touches me, shakes me, redirects my life. Is dangerous. Is not a symbol of anything. Is not for sale. Does not belong to the musicians or the record company. Does not belong to the person writing about it. Belongs only to the listener at the moment of contact. Guitar/drums riff and vocal *tour de force* hammering and dancing, through body and brain. Endlessly, eternally satisfying. A contradiction. I am fulfilled. I want more. “I just can’t be satisfied,” Muddy Waters said that. “Just can’t keep from trying.” Start the machine. Bum bum, ba ba ba, ba ba, ba; bum bum, ba ba ba . . . (bam bam bam bam bam bam bam bam)—

Better *Homes & Women*



Mrs. Harris Megma of Normal, Illinois

READER OF THE YEAR

Why I Would Like To Be Reader of the Year

I am a *Better Homes and Women* reader. I bake quite a lot—at least 10 different recipes a day. But I never touch anything I bake, being a slim Better Woman. I send everything I bake to underdeveloped countries. Then I snack on my allotted broiled shark fins with a squeeze of lemon, sticking loyally to my weight loss regime. I've already lost 50 pounds in two weeks and feel so much lighter, especially in the head.

I make all my own clothes, and hope someday to own a sewing machine. Most people comment on my clothes with such envious remarks as, "You made that by hand, didn't you." I always blush modestly and confess that, yes, I did.

I have a wonderful husband and 17 cherubic children who range in age from three months to 17 years. They certainly keep me hopping. My husband believes a woman's place is in the home, a philosophy which I certainly share. Someday, though, I'd like to step outside for a walk, perhaps to the park or the liquor store, as my friends sometimes say I look pasty. My husband does help with the housework, though. By downright laying down the law, I've gotten him to place the dinner dishes in the sink every night. This

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makes it so much easier for me to wash them, as now I no longer trip on my seven toddlers while bringing dishes from table to sink. I'm so glad, because two of the toddlers were taking it personally and are now seeing therapists.

Between caring for three infants and seven rambunctious toddlers, taking four of my kids to school every day and packing their lunches, and listening to the woes of my 14- and 15-year-old girls, as well as visiting the 17-year-old at High House (we discovered last year that my 17-year-old is a head and, darn it, I'm not ashamed to admit it. We suspected something when he stopped speaking except for an occasional obscenity, but the turning point in our lives came when he made us all some brownies and we were soon stoned out of our minds. Then we knew he had a problem, and we did something about it), I'm one busy lady. My husband, George, is very supportive, always reminding me of chores I still have yet to do. I don't know where I would be without him.

Right now, little Danielle is sitting in my lap, playing with the typewriter *(!_@# What a little handful she is. Uh-oh—trouble upstairs.

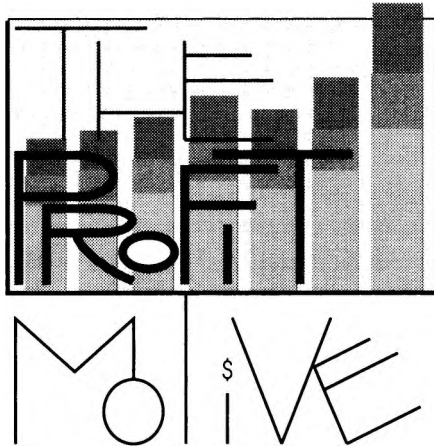
I'm back. Timmy was letting the dog walk on his bed, which he had covered with peanutbutter and jelly. He loves peanutbutter and jelly. Well, I put the dog outside, but now I've got a wall to wash because Timmy stuck the peanutbutter-smears sheet to the wall. At least he's healthy. I keep reminding myself of that.

Got to go—Bobby is beating his sister senseless with a nerf bat. And Joey is trying to unplug this typew

commentary

Andy Watson

After eight years of what 1980 presidential candidate George Bush rightly called “voodoo economics,” the United States finds itself immobilized by an untenable



national debt. The immediate effects are devastating. And it will only get worse.

“You know, if you let me write two hundred billion dollars worth of hot checks every year, I could give you an illusion of prosperity, too.”

**—Senator Lloyd Bentsen (D,TX)
1988 Vice-Presidential Debate**

Reagan took office in 1980 with two overriding goals in mind. Clearly, his primary objective was the worldwide enhancement

of American armed forces. Second on his agenda was the destruction of the federal government's ability to regulate the activity of big business. Possibly by accident, but probably because of the shrewd insight of his advisors, he was able to accomplish both by means of a grossly irresponsible economic policy.

By undertaking a massive military build-up without offsetting the attendant cost by cutting other government spending commensurately, his deficit spending added two *trillion* dollars to the national debt in the 1980s, roughly tripling it. It now requires the entirety of collected income taxes west of the Mississippi simply to service the interest on that debt! And continued deficit spending under Bush has aggravated the problem significantly. Was this merely *incompetence* on a magnificent scale? Or was it a deliberate act of *sabotage*?

The case for incompetence is, of course, very tempting. A necessary ingredient for truly stunning incompetence is stupidity, a quality possessed by Reagan in such large measure that it is difficult to quantify—or even to imagine. . . . (Was it his squinting idiocy that so endeared him with the public?) More than stupidity, though, authentic incompetence requires hubris.

Was this merely incompetence?

Reagan's appointments alone (e.g. Anne Gorsuch Burford to preside over the dismantling of the Environmental Protection Agency, James Watt to sack the rest of the Interior Department, Ed Meese to make a mockery of the Justice Department as Attorney General, Samuel Pierce to lead the fleeing of Housing and Urban Development . . . a discouraging litany of deliberate wrong-headedness) displayed a surreal, cocksure excess that could only have been labeled *farce* if it had been concocted for theatre or film.

If indeed incompetence explains all, one can theorize that our pathetic marionette/ideologue/führer was stymied by the failure of supply-side economics to produce the promised results. Maybe appearances do *not* deceive in this instance: maybe Reagan *did* believe that he could cut taxes and reduce federal

spending even while implementing history's largest-ever peacetime military build-up. Perhaps he was a well-intentioned fool and nothing worse.

Look at the early '80's from Reagan's walnut-brained perspective. His tax cuts were widely celebrated and *nuke-'em nuke-'em nuke-'em* was the mantra of the masses. It seemed for a time that the whole darn country was tuned in to the Gipper's frequency!

But what about that bloated federal budget? Well, they'd just have to learn to walk without the crutches, wouldn't they—the New Deal just *had* to be repealed. If only that pesky Congress would give the President what thirty- or forty-some-odd state governors had, a line item veto. . . .

Then, again, it might be hard to get re-elected if the cuts in entitlement spending were traceable to the Oval Office alone. Without the much-vaunted line item veto power, he was free to blame Congress for not cutting all those giveaway programs! To blame the *Democratic* Congress for the deficit! Reagan was able to complain about the runaway federal deficit *and* get re-elected for protecting Social Security and military spending.

Or was it a deliberate act of sabotage?

Not that he *meant* it to work out like that, remember—these are all just the side effects of incompetence.

So, let's suppose that Reagan *honestly* wanted to eliminate deficit spending and believed that his supply-side tax cuts would do the trick. Thought that he could persuade Congress to give him a line item veto—or better yet, do the budget cutting themselves and take the political heat off the White House. Thought that he could lead America to new heights of glory. But that proved to be impossible; Social Security, military pensions, and interest payments on the national debt ate Reagan's lunch.

Possessed by a prolonged regal snit, he unleashed hordes of miniature accountants with itty bitty red pens to hack away at school lunches, education grants and student loans, welfare mothers, and every other bleeding heart liberal boondoggle that would

**A world not living
under the constant,
imminent threat of
nuclear Armageddon,
surgical strikes, and
gun boat diplomacy,
is no world worth
living in at all!**

cost the least votes in the next general election. With righteous zeal he could maul the EPA and make sure that HUD money went into the right pockets (*if you have to spend it, at least for Chrissakes don't give it to the goddamn poor people!*). Congress might allocate funding for these programs, but the President could administer

them any way he damn well pleased.

The social impact was disheartening. The fiscal results were unimpressive. Those paltry few poorly-defended line items in the federal budget were trivial, noise-level stuff compared to the billions of committed funds and the growing tab that the Department of Defense was running up. Nevertheless, a world not living under the constant, imminent threat of nuclear Armageddon, surgical strikes, and gun boat diplomacy, is no world worth living in at all!

The spending continued, accelerated. The Laffer Curve turned out (surprise!) to be a bad joke—the expansion of the domestic economy never did produce the predicted tax revenues needed. The deficit grew to astronomical proportions. And every day the President became more wooden-headed, more putty-like in the hands of the big business interests that pulled his strings and staffed his administration. The *What—Me Worry?* idiocy of the Reagan years infected the private sector, where corporations gobbled one another in a feeding frenzy underwritten by staggering debt while a handful of individuals collected obscene short-term profits at destructive long-term cost to the national economy.

All due to malefic incompetence?

No.

The lunatic deficits (generated by Rambo-ism and a self-serving acquiescence to entitlement spending), thinly veiled by

the bogus doubletalk of supply-side Reaganomics, were cynically inflicted on the United States by its elected leader with the full knowledge of the consequences. So soporific was his bumbling cretinism that neither the public nor the news hounds became alarmed. Reagan's legacy is not a new style of lean government—it is a national debt so astonishingly huge that it virtually pre-empts further domestic spending programs and will likely *eliminate* them in coming years. Not by the decision of the elected representatives of the American people in Congress. Not by the power of a line item veto wielded by President George Bush or future presidents Elizabeth Dole or Dan Quayle. Not by the Will of the People nor the Manifest Destiny of Fundamentalist Christian Theocrats. By the laws of compound interest and the number of digits in \$3,200,000,000,000 (and counting). The federal government has been cruelly gut-shot by its own gun, and the whole country will be made to bleed profusely for many years to come.

Not that Reagan gives (or *gave*) a shit. He'll be dead before the really big turds hit the turbine. And so will most of the rest of the people making these greedy, myopic decisions.

Age does have its privileges. . . .

Chapter 3

We've got world music and a global economy. Everybody everywhere is on-line, using credit cards to have telephones installed in their cars so they can receive junk fax while sitting in traffic. The cheap thrill of consumerism has mesmerized the masses, and even the KGB can't resist a photo opportunity. Yet, while the whole damned world signs on the bottom line, buying now and paying later for a dose of American-style fiscal free sex, the US is entering the tertiary stage of a long-endured plague of economic syphilis.

Right about now, the Poles badly need substantial assistance rebuilding their economy. (So do the Hungarians, the Czechs,

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the Romanians, the Lithuanians, the Latvians, the Estonians, the Georgians, the . . .) Naturally, they look to the United States for a “Marshall Plan” in the aftermath of the Cold War. And if the Bush Administration *had* two nickels to rub together it *would* loan one out—maybe even make a gift of the *other* one, too. *Sorry guys—nice revolution, lotsa good sound bites an’ all, but . . . y’see, we spent all our dough (and then some) on these neat-o planes and missiles and bombs and boats and other tools of freedom fightin’.* Even getting foreign aid to Endara’s Panama and Chamorro’s Nicaragua had become all but impossible in the absence of Ollie North’s can-do knack for getting things done.

Despite his promises to the contrary and his pledge of allegiance to the flag of Reaganomics, Bush is now forced to confront a harsh reality. While income tax rates *may* not go up—one possible interpretation of his blithe campaign promise and weasleworded (*some* new taxes?) backpedaling—an array of other taxes or “fees” will spring into being.

No new taxes? Wake up! It is time to pay the piper. In fact, it is probably too late to pay the piper. The piper is a loan shark who has already dispatched sadistic minions to make an example of another worthless deadbeat.

But there have been distractions—an amazing parade of diversions. . . . The sudden appearance of Gorbachev has made it all seem worthwhile. He’s given us *glasnost* and *perestroika* and peace initiatives. Improvements in human rights behind the Iron Curtain and the dismantling of the Berlin Wall. The relaxation of the USSR’s terrible grip on Eastern Europe. The implementation of democratic reforms and free multi-party elections. The dawning of Russian environmentalism. And on and on: Gorby’s the right man at the right time, and even things over which he has no control are making him look good.

Perplexingly, Reagan’s DOD shopping spree illogically continues to enjoy a deluded, retrospective aura of undeserved credit for all of the above, and more. This is a specious notion. Would the Soviets’ controlled, collectivized economy have succeeded if not for their own military spending? No; though it

probably hastened the end. The Cold War is ending not because the US out-spent the USSR on militarization, but because planned national economies function no better in the Ukraine than they do in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The fact is that totalitarian socialism has run its painful course and is not merely failing — it has *already* foundered miserably. The Soviet people are among the

Sorry guys—nice revolution, lotsa good sound bites an' all, but . . . y'see, we spent all our dough (and then some) on these neat-o planes and missiles and bombs and boats and other tools of freedom fightin'.

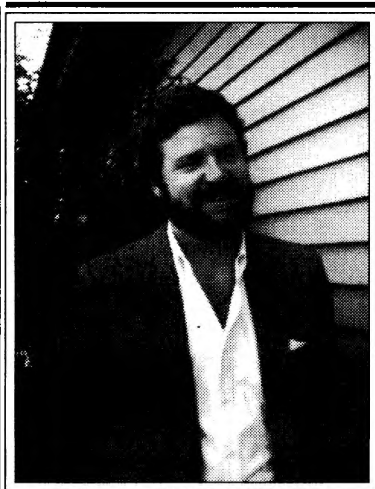
most impoverished populations on Earth. The Russians are relinquishing the outer layers of their empire not out of altruism, but out of necessity. They can ill afford the cost of subsidizing the economies of their oppressed satellites, nor the even greater cost of further repression by force. It was a clear case of self-destruction, and was not at all related to the American addition of naval fleets, the opening and expansion of military bases, the procurement of redundant ICBMs and such. The US could have saved at least a trillion bucks (and billions more in compound interest on that trillion) by staying to a steady course of demilitarization. (This scenario is the likely alternative history I envision had Carter been re-elected; Gorbachev's overtures; the end of the Cold War; and in contrast to the dire consequences of Reagan's lunatic deficit spending, a *manageable* national debt. If only the hostage rescue mission hadn't gone so embarrassingly badly . . .)

It is also true that non-military aspects of the federal budget have made significant contributions to the deficit. *Noooo shit!* But deficit spending for *any* purpose, guns or butter, is a calculated risk. It worked in the early '60's, but at that time it was practiced with more restraint. And though mild by comparison, Johnson's early version of Reaganomics—his escalation of the

Vietnam War combined with no cutback in the Great Society programs and no appropriately scaled increase in federal tax revenues—brought on the recessions and bouts of inflation experienced in the '70's. Recognizing that the deficits under Reagan-Bush in the '80's dwarf the Kennedy-Johnson deficits of the '60's, we can cheerfully anticipate recessions and inflationary spirals in the '90's that will propel the US into the ranks of the Third World.

Unrestrained deficit spending is not a well-advised long-term national economic strategy. Unless of course it is *you* doing the buying and someone *else* doing the paying. It is time to take the masks off and re-humanize the institutions of government—those are *people* behind those desks, lobbying for that legislation and inflicting their administrative willfulness on us lowly citizens. And most of those human bureaucrats are *old*. . . . Why did we trust them?

For many years now, politicians at all levels of government have been justifying deficit spending by pointing out that the arrival of the baby-boomers will solve all their fiscal problems. Our parents and their parents have had what amounts to a free ride with their high-minded notions of Great Society beneficence and, yes, unparalleled militarization. And rather than leaving us



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and our children a better world, they have left us a precariously mortgaged one.

Talkin' 'bout my g-g-generation: we're fucked.

Consider Social Security—what a ripoff! Never conceived as a pension fund to support anyone on a sole income basis, but rather as a *supplement* to their savings, since the mid-'60's it has accrued the status of an inalienable right as the previous generations have retired. Who pays? The baby-boomers. The rates go up up up; it's an egregiously unfair tax on working people, one that touches not the unearned income of the oldsters' investment portfolios. What a scam. . . . When everyone who stood to benefit from Social Security is dead, they'll cancel it. There will *never* be enough *post*-boomers to underwrite our generation's retirement.

And to add insult to injury, we are also asked to pay to keep them around longer (so they can collect more Social Security benefits!). Old people now, it seems, have a *right* to heroic medical treatment. The Catastrophic Healthcare Bill expressly guaranteed it. The original language of that bill levied a modest tax on the very people who stood to benefit from it. Seniors of low income would pay nothing, and well-heeled ones would have confronted a maximum tax liability of \$800 per year (which they could easily afford, no longer burdened with mortgages on homes, children to raise, commuting and other job-related costs—hell, they even *eat* less!). Most would pay a small amount somewhere in between. This produced an astonishingly vocal opposition from *the* Political Action Committee whose constituents have nothing but time on their hands (and no inconvenient *jobs* to interfere with their ability to turn out on Election Day): the AARP (American Association of Retired Persons). And sho nuff they done got that nasty ole tax ee-laminated! Only the *tax*, of course. The extraordinarily expensive healthcare itself is still theirs. It was just a question of who got stuck paying for it.

Not that I truly begrudge anyone's grandmother her umpteenth liver transplant. The fact that these people are free-loading on the system is not the issue. The real question is this:

If *they* are entitled to healthcare, why not *everyone else*?

Why is it that a seventy year old senior citizen is entitled to government-paid healthcare, but a five year old child is not? Which person is more valuable to society? Which is more deserving (given, perhaps, the arguable position that there is not enough money—nor deficit financing—available to pay for both): the five year old may be cheated of seventy more years if denied appropriate medical attention; the seventy year old has already had a long life and is not *likely* to live beyond another five more years (nor contribute productively to society in an economic sense) anyway. But one of these people can re-elect an incumbent, and the other is utterly powerless in every sense of the word. Guess whose side the feds are on?

Enough. I'm getting myself depressed (and you are no doubt tiring of reading all this bitching and moaning about obvious inequities).

Sad as it is, we do not even have to look to the future to count the costs of the last ten years of "hot checks." Our options have already been curtailed. And will become increasingly limited, as the cost of the fedgov's debt and its gargantuan interest (increasing by roughly \$600,000 *every minute*) gradually outstrips growth in the gross national product, driving interest rates up in the fierce competition for capital until only self-financing multinational corporations will remain.

But not all is lost.

The West Germans are rebuilding East Germany's economy. Once the pain and strain of *that* strenuous process is behind them, they will step up the process they have already begun elsewhere in Eastern Europe. While the no-longer-very-super "superpowers" grudgingly unload their guns large and small, the Germans will be positioned to establish global economic hegemony. Eventually they may even get around to rebuilding the *American* economy. . . .

By the end of the century, the Germans (who already dominate Western Europe's economic activity and have well-established

lished trade ties with the rest of the world) will have developed markets and distribution networks throughout Eastern Europe—making them one of the most potent economic forces of the Twentieth Century. The Japanese will not be far behind, having virtually enslaved the Pacific Rim with their own methods of market development. Already *Nihon* is well known for having deep pockets—and for having strings attached to every loan, every grant, every investment. Which is as it must be, I suppose—certainly the US has played by those rules for the last hundred years or more.

(By contrast, the Germans have a reputation for being expressly amoral with respect to the internal affairs of their trading partners: consider the sale of chemical weapon components to Gadhafi.)

Meanwhile, the Soviet empire will disintegrate (some pieces falling into the German sphere of influence, others to the Japanese, one or two to the Iranians), and the US—staggering under triple-digit inflation of South American proportions—will retreat behind walls of trade barriers. To cope with our national debt there will be currency devaluations and asset freezes and rationing of food and fuel. . . .

Not a pretty sight. Still, it's not entirely fair to blame it all on Ronald Reagan; he needed (and got) the help of several overlapping generations of World-War-II-era Americans to implement his tragedy. They, like him, knew they'd be comfortably retired or safely deceased before the ramifications of their consensual

Meanwhile, the Soviet empire will disintegrate, and the US—staggering under triple-digit inflation of South American proportions—will retreat behind walls of trade barriers. To cope with our national debt there will be currency devaluations and asset freezes and rationing of food and fuel. . . .

Since the Federal Insurance Contributions Act went into effect in 1977, increases in FICA taxes have been noticeably eroding real family incomes in the US. The median family income *might* have increased a measly 0.25% (after adjustments for inflation) between 1973 and 1989, but when FICA taxes are taken into account, that same median family income actually *fell* 1.5%. Insignificant? Perhaps. Yet during a similar span of time, 1946–1961, the same inflation-adjusted median family income increased by nearly 50%, continuing with an additional increase of another 35% by 1969!

Those days are gone. Now, even while there is no such growth in working wages, FICA taxes are being extracted from the baby boom generation not only in sufficient quantity to meet current demands on the system by retirees, but further—a *billion dollars every week* further—to offset the ongoing deficit spending.

For those readers of *Journal Wired* who have never seen what happens to a paycheck originating in the U S of A, it is worth noting that FICA taxes are exclusively applied to *earned* income only. Income from interest, dividends, capital gains, pension distributions and Social Security benefits are immune to FICA.

How convenient.

greed culminated in fiscal crises on an unprecedented scale. With their money behind him, with a slim majority of the popular vote and a “mandate” of electoral college landslide derivation to keep the media pundits at bay, with the kind of confidence only an ignorant moron can ever hope to possess, he boldly painted on the canvas of history, consuming no end of brushes as he covered it margin to margin with one *hell* of a lot of red ink—all but the

lower right hand corner, which he left blank over an area quite small. Kindly, grandfatherly mentor that he was, he left that area blank, to be filled in by that pleasant and deferential *youngster*, George. And if George isn't up to it, no matter. All he has to do is stand by and watch. It will fill in by itself.

Ours is the first generation in the history of the United States to assume power amidst the ruins of a sacked economy. Even in the Great Depression of the 1930s, at least the federal and state governments' treasuries were intact. *They* had a secure base from which to operate. *We* have nothing but ruptured, violated institutions.

The national debt tripled under Reagan. How can the United States hope to sustain any semblance of economic growth when its commercial borrowers are forced to compete with a profligate Uncle Sam for the very capital needed to finance expansion? American companies are already borrowing money at roughly twice the interest rate charged in Japan, and given the other impending demands on the banking industry here and abroad, those rates can only go up. A \$3.2 trillion national debt generated by deficit spending might by itself be enough to bring on a major recession, but given the bad news from other areas of the American economy, a dire outcome seems *unavoidable*.

In 1989 alone, thanks to deregulation of the Savings & Loan industry—a tactic clearly designed to funnel money to campaign-funding real estate developers—206 banks failed nationwide, running up the federal bailout (“deposit insurance”) cost to over \$300 billion (including interest) over the next ten years. The tapped-out Treasury is also liable for over \$863 billion in “federally guaranteed” investments like Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, much—if not all—of which will default during any kind of serious recession. Furthermore, private debt (especially that of corporations, many of which leveraged themselves to absurd levels in takeover orgies and management buy-outs throughout the '80's) amounts to about \$9 trillion, which when added to the national debt and banking subsidies above gives a cumulative

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total of over \$13 trillion dollars—approximately \$55,000 per capita!

Every child in elementary school—dreaming of growing up to be a detective, a doctor, an astronaut—*every child* will have to work off *fifty-five thousand dollars* of debt, plus interest (plus interest, plus interest, plus interest . . .), along the way to their own impoverished, inhospitable retirement. This virtually impossible task will be undertaken amidst housing costs the like of which the older generations never could have imagined. Amidst enervating inflation, unaffordable food and unavailable fuel. Is this not a description of life in the Third World, where individual horizons are foreshortened by the service of staggering national debt?

Consider this: a large number of baby-boomers (mostly Yuppies, Dinks, white collar welfare recipients in and out of uniform, bible-thumpers and skinheads) have piously voted for Reagan in two consecutive elections—and have endorsed Bush's calculatedly hypocritical "more of the same" platform in '88. Accomplices to their own destruction, it is arguable that *they* deserve all that is coming to them and more.

But what about the rest of us?

Perhaps *we* ought to bail out before it's too late: become economic refugees escaping a tyranny of sanctified incompetence and a conspiracy of greed. Flee, too, persecution by the thousand points of interrogation lights and Bennett's Brown Shirts as they whip America into shape! Let the smug Young Republicans persist in their fatuous pronouncements of supply-side optimism—*we* still have time to learn to speak German, to fill out the forms, to emigrate to Eastern Europe: *the land of opportunity*.

CHEMICAL AGE



FICTION BY
DAVID BLOUNT

ILLUSTRATED BY
MARK A. NELSON

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Brenner lurched through slow ruin. The city around him savored decay. Most windows had been shattered; fires had reduced whole blocks to ghetto husks. Abandoned cars and garbage clogged streets paved with broken glass. He knew the others were close. The congealing twilight was viscous with their smell.

Movement in shadow through jaundiced fog: a flash of blue worms or beckoning fingers. When Brenner stopped, he saw only crouching dumpsters, but beneath the whisper of trash in the hot breeze, subtle stirrings grew bolder. He heard glass ground beneath bare heels, the hushed noise of clothing, bits of refuse disturbed. The mist's tint deepened as the last daylight shrank from it. Their smell had grown heavier. Moaning or chanting crawled slowly from the backdrop of sound, as if it had been there all along, scarcely subaudible. A trashcan crashed against pavement.

He found himself running, without sense of direction. Somewhere he had a safe hole to hide in. Sara. But whichever way he ran, the festering streets remained insolently alien. Violated storefronts, derelict cars, alleys, shadows, everywhere garbage. A fallen streetlight formed quickly at his feet. Asphalt broke blood from his gums; bright blue burst on a field of black.

When he opened his eyes he was lying on his back. They had closed close around him, bending forward and down. He heard Carla's voice.

"You are with us now."

Thunder gargled beyond the ruins. The mist seethed with an electric tension. It was going to rain.

But before the poison could seep down on the streets, the others found voices: perverted echoes of lost family and friends, crowding against each other, cooing gently depraved promises of pleasure and permanence and priceless comprehension. As the first acidic drops spat down, their altered hands fell upon him.

Fingers on his shoulder drew a shuddering gasp.

"Dad. It's okay. You're having a dream."

A hand gripped his shoulder. . . .

"Wake up. It's me: Sara."

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The candle she held drew silver glints from wide dark eyes, dusted gold onto sand-blond hair. Sweat sucked at her T-shirt, forcing Brenner to notice that time hadn't stopped for her. But still her face and throat, arms and thighs were creamy, unchanged. Behind her, shadows laughed on the hotel curtains. The windows were boarded; the streets lay beyond them. Sara's hand remained on his shoulder as he rose onto his side.

"You were dreaming about them."

He nodded.

"Don't be afraid. Nothing bad is going to happen to you."

"I'm glad to hear that."

"You're special. Something special will happen to you."

Brenner dropped back to face the ceiling, hoping Sara would take her hand away. Instead, she let it rest on his chest.

"What do you know about these special things?"

"I have dreams too."

Her gaze was odd again. He wished he knew the rules to whatever game she had been playing.

"You miss Mom."

"Of course I do."

"I guess you miss her most at night." Her middle finger probed the tip of his sternum.

"Yeah."

He thought he saw her mouth hook into a smile. But then the lower lip trembled; her eyes shimmered like pools of petroleum. This was only his daughter, a little girl dreaming at the edge of a ruined world.

"Come here," Brenner said. He took her in his arms.

Light slit between boards and soaked through the curtains. Brenner was lacing his boots. Sara said:

"Let me go with you."

She sat cross-legged on her bed. A slice of light caught her mouth, leaving the rest of her vague in shadow. Her lips seemed swollen.

"You can't, honey. You know that. It isn't safe."



“How safe would I be if something happened to you? I’d have to go out there by myself.”

Her mouth turned toward the window. A moment later, gunfire sounded. If the youths had little to gain by their violence, they had less to lose. They shot at Brenner on sight. One day he would be forced to respond with the 9mm. A man dies by killing children, but you can only die once. Brenner had done it by putting a bullet into Carla’s throat. His object wasn’t life. It was Sara’s preservation.

“Why don’t we get away?” she said. “Out to the country where there was no one for them to poison.”

They had toyed with this idea for weeks. Although only white noise could be heard on the radio, there might yet be other untainted adults, even civilization.

“You’re going to say we could never get out by nightfall. But I don’t see why we can’t just drive.”

“I’ve told you why. The streets are impassable.”

“Okay, say we get stuck after dark, and we have to get out and walk to another car. What’s going to happen to us?”

“You never saw your mother at the end.”

She let a token moment pass.

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"I know. And I understand what you did."

He nodded, examining his boots. They must have been saturated, though all he could see was a pink wad of gum turning gray on one heel.

"But she couldn't have hurt us. She was all soft. I think they're all like that."

Sara seemed to be staring at him with some indefinable intent. Though aimed at his eyes, her gaze squeezed an imaginary organ just under Brenner's stomach. He wanted to get out, let the brats shoot, let the sky suppurate, so long as he was free of this leaden emotion.

"What happens?"

He looked up.

"When you get the disease. You never really explain."

"It's the chemicals they dropped."

"I know that, silly." Her silhouette tossed its head in a girlish gesture, reassuring if not for a sarcastic puppet-like quality that he probably imagined. "What happens to you?"

"The chemicals cause mutations. Joel thought they must have interacted in some way that no one had foreseen."

"How come he thought that?"

"Because no one could have wanted it like this. No one would have had anything to gain."

"Except kids."

He stared for a moment before he realized she was joking. "Except kids," he repeated.

"What happens to kids who get older?"

Out on the streets, gunshots unleashed an adolescent scream. Brenner stood up, wishing Sara had flinched.

"Stay."

He sat down.

"Please, Daddy. Just for a short while. I need to understand. I'm not a little girl anymore." He watched her lips move, center stage in the slash of light. "It happened to Joel, didn't it. Did you shoot him too?"

"Yes."

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"I remember the first time he came here. I wasn't really asleep. I just pretended, so I could hear you talk. He said it's speeded up evolution. Now we'll be different."

"Joel said some crazy things."

"Does it hurt?"

"Yes, honey." He couldn't tell her that his wife and friend had died in some perverse state of euphoria. "It hurts."

"And they only come out at night because light hurts their eyes."

"That's right," he lied.

"I knew Joel was changing. He smelled funny."

"Do I . . . smell funny?"

"No. You just smell like you. Joel was getting kind of religious, wasn't he. He said that people who changed could see a great secret. It sounded mystical."

"The chemicals had made him go insane. He was raving. Try to forget about it."

"But what if he was right?" Her voice was suddenly wry, almost patronizing.

"Joel was wrong. About everything."

"Daddy? How do I know you're not lying?"

"Sara . . ."

"As if they had eyes."

"Have you left the room, Sara?"

"No, Dad. I told you: I have dreams too. Why are you so afraid of them? You know they're not dangerous."

Why he was afraid Brenner didn't know, or want to know. It was too late to fear infection. And as Sara had said, they were soft. Yet the boys bold enough to shoot each other over cans of corn were never seen in the streets after nightfall.

"Some things are more frightening than danger." He pushed the automatic under his belt and took up an empty rucksack. "I have to go, Sara."

"Daddy?"

His hand paused on the deadbolt.

"Yesterday I had my first period. I guess that's about right, since I'll be thirteen soon."

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He looked over his shoulder. Sara had turned her head to face him. The light still brought out her mouth, which betrayed no more embarrassment than had her voice. He unhooked the chain and slipped out.

As the day passed, he came upon supermarkets, delis, bodegas, restaurants—all stripped bare. Either the gangs were hoarding food, or soon starvation would spare them the future. Eventually he realized he couldn't go any further and make it back by nightfall. Their small reserve of tuna would have to do for dinner. Tomorrow he would take a single direction and hopefully reach new territory. If all else failed, there were apartments. The only thing he dreaded more was bringing Sara out of the hotel.

He made it back at the far edge of twilight. Sara had again neglected to fasten the chain. As his eyes adjusted he made out her shape, sitting as if she hadn't moved since morning.

"Bad news, honey. Nada. Looks like tuna again."

"That's okay. I'm not hungry."

He felt his way toward the Coleman lantern.

"Don't," she said.

"What?"

"The light will hurt my eyes."

The sarcastic edge was subtle, unchildlike.

"Sara . . ."

She burst out laughing.

"It's just that I've been sitting in the dark all day."

He found his bed and sat down across from her.

"How come?"

"Why waste kerosene?"

"But you must get so bored. I'll bring you more books."

"There's not much use in reading now. What would it lead to?"

"It would help pass the time."

"It doesn't take help for that."

He felt her looking at him.

"Are you all right? You're sure you won't eat?"

"I'm fine, Daddy. How are you?"

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"I'm okay. A little tired though. What do you say we turn in?"
Nightmares or no nightmares, sleep was the only escape from the tension he felt constricting around him.

"You don't want to eat first?"

"Nah. I'm not hungry either."

"Okay. Good night, Daddy."

Brenner took off his boots. He felt he should give his daughter a kiss. Somehow he didn't dare. He lay on his bed and stared back at the darkness.

"Good night, Sara."

"Good night, Daddy," she said again.

He waited for the sound of Sara lying down. He was still waiting when he lost hold and fell asleep.

His dream took him to an untainted beach. To one side, the promise of sun surged across ocean. To the other, the last night breezes sidled through palm leaves. Sand chilled his insteps. It seemed right that he was wearing nothing; he wanted to drink through his pores the whisper of foliage, the salt smell of seawater, the electric blue of the air. He wished this perfect half-light could be preserved forever. Above him the stancher stars still glittered. He wanted to seize them so they wouldn't slip away.

A figure approached, wrapped in a sheet that trailed through the surf. It was right that Sara should be here. As she drew closer, her private smile came slowly into focus. Gasoline rainbows floated in her eyes.

Her hand rose to his shoulders and the sheet fell away. She drew him down over her within reach of the waves. Brenner

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turned his head as the sun flowed over the brim of the horizon. His own scream had carried to him across the placid water.

The echoing scream was just a ringing in his ears. Nothing stirred. Dawn licked at the edges of the curtains, but made no headway against the darkness. He brought out Sara's name. It sunk in the absence of sound and light.

He put on his boots, took up the gun and rucksack, silently worked the deadbolt and chain. As he opened the door, ocherous light washed in from the hall. The conviction seized him that if he turned his head now, he would see Sara sitting cross-legged on her bed, silently laughing or mouthing incantations. Her name stuck in his throat. He slipped out and locked the door.

Somewhere in his mind hid a thought or image that would be safe to hold on to, if only he could find it. Later in the day the sky sank to threatening amber and remained poised on the brink of an outburst. But rain seemed too vague a danger to trouble him now. He roamed through debris.

Behind a shattered storefront window, a stuffed bear lay on a beach of broken glass. It was the same orange-brown as Sara's Willy Bear, who had been left behind when they escaped their burning neighborhood. The toy fit snugly in the bottom of the rucksack.

"Better," he said. The bear's plastic eyes reflected contentment.

But Sara needed more than a new Willy Bear. She needed food and her daddy. The sky's glow was least dull low on the horizon; in the opposite direction, it had darkened to bronze. Too late now to go any farther, and there was no guarantee that he would find food on his way back. The time had come to break into an apartment.

The buildings around him housed them above ground-level stores. Their rows of damaged windows eyed the street inscrutably. Beneath the bouquet of sewage and garbage, the other smell was no stronger here than anywhere else. A door swayed by its bottom hinge beside the entrance to the toy store. Brenner brought out the automatic and stepped over the threshold.

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A groaning flight of stairs rose to murky light, which shafted through gashes in an oilcloth curtain. A corridor of doors tapered to black. The first was unlocked.

Taking this as a bad omen, he moved on. The next door was locked. He took stock of the silence. The smell conjured a blurry image of quasi-mammalian births in the back of a butcher shop. Obviously they were here. Obviously he should try someplace else.

Obviously he would feel the same way wherever he went next. Sara needed him; this was no time to take up cowardice. His first kick slapped the door open. Ecru light lurched in through cracked windows onto beer cans, makeshift ashtrays, clumps of laundry. The only decoration was a taped-up centerfold. At least the girl was attractive: sand-blond hair, very dark eyes . . .

Turning sharply from the picture, he felt his way into the thicker darkness of the kitchen. A screeching rat scrambled over his boot; he barely refrained from shooting it.

The cupboard was a gold mine. Brenner shoved a dozen tin cans into the rucksack before replacing the bear. Breath came more easily now. They might be able to travel on a cache like this. Feeling a fresh conviction that they must escape soon, he moved toward the stairs almost recklessly, but then stopped in midstride in front of the door that he had found unlocked.

It was ajar. He stared at it, as if the door might tell him whether or not he had closed it.

And a voice did come, vaguely feminine, inviting him by name. It knew about his new organ and just how to coax it. Brenner's lips formed soundless gibberish. The door was sucked inward. His legs slipped into gear.

No lurid grotesqueries wrenched him in from behind or blocked his path as he crashed like an avalanche down the stairs and through drifts of garbage, onto pavement where a fallen street-light kicked out his feet, sending him sliding to a stop on his belly.

His vision pulsed. Gangrenous breeze teased scraps of garbage. A slight suggestion of sound seeped out of the shadows that spilled into the twilight, a distant echo of moaning or chanting . . .

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Brenner pulled himself up and was running again. His knees degenerated into sluggish jelly as the blocks lurched past him. Darkness slammed shut across the sky. Drizzle hit his skin like a spray of red ants. The growing chorus might have been only the rush of his blood, but it kept him moving. Instinct hauled him through the alien streets to the room where she waited.

The chain had not been fastened. He stumbled into the darkness and nearly gagged on the change in the air. Shutting and locking the door behind him, he laid the gun on the floor and wriggled out from under the rucksack. Her voice came to him as he fumbled with the bear.

“Daddy.” Beneath his stomach, the imaginary organ twisted into coils. “Come here.”

“I have something for you.”

“I know.”

“A new Willy . . .”

He must have moved toward her. Cool streaks were traced across his cheeks. He could only see in shades of blue. Limbs emerged and snaked upward, boneless and glowing. Sara’s obsolescent eyes drooled like rotting egg.

“I love you, Sara.”

“Of course you do.”

“How . . . how is . . .”

“Beautiful.”

The new organ was real. It unclenched, spreading upward, while Sara’s smile stretched impossibly wide. There was no jaw to impose limitations. Her limbs waved with undersea motion before



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settling on Brenner like a shroud of rubber scarves. Outside, thunder ruptured the gut of a downpour.

“Too late,” he whispered. “We’ll be like the others.”

“Oh no, Daddy. Not *we*. I told you. Something special.”

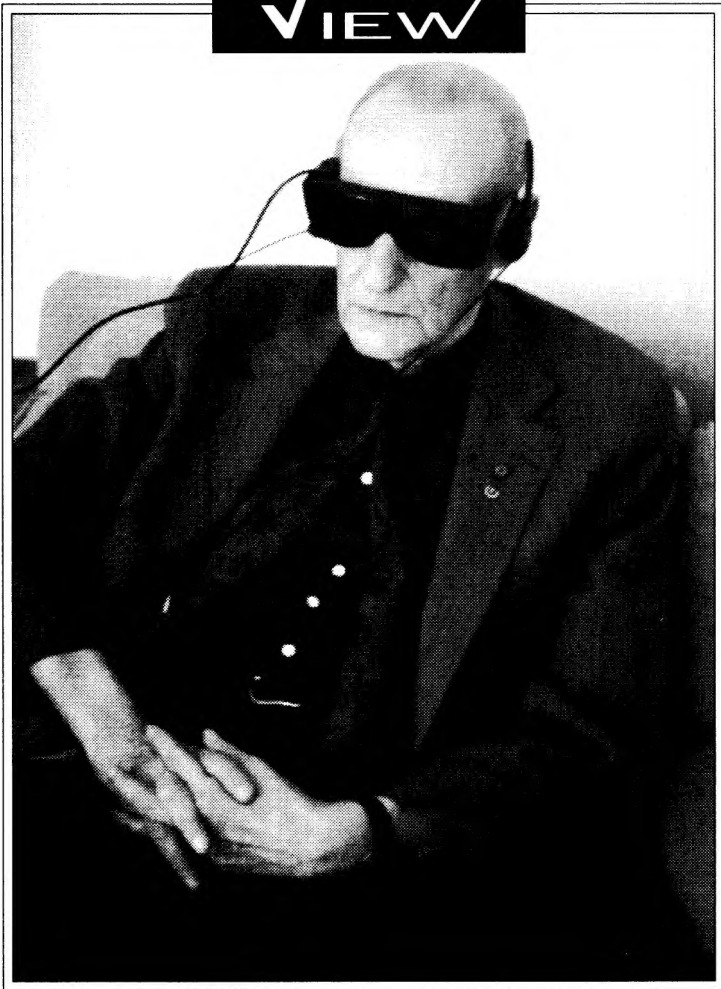
The limbs wrapped around him with lascivious grace. They were drawing him forward, into the matrix of the imperious miasma.

“Sara . . .”

“Please,” she said. “Call me Carla tonight.”

William S. Burroughs

INTER
VIEW



Going where no writer has gone before, William S. Burroughs has filled his works with collages of ribald humor, psychic landscapes, parenthetical knowledge, stunning poetry, violent imagery, and dream-like shifts in time, place, and narration. His books have shocked, entertained, and informed for over thirty years, most notably: *Naked Lunch* (1959), *The Soft Machine* (1961), *The Ticket That Exploded* (1962), *Nova Express* (1964), *The Wild Boys* (1971), *Exterminator!* (1973), *The Last Words of Dutch Schultz* (1975), and a recent trilogy—*The Cities of the Red Night* (1981), *The Place of Dead Roads* (1983), and *The Western Lands* (1987). His first book, *Junkie: Confessions of an Unredeemed Drug Addict* (1953) was originally published (as half an Ace double paperback!) under the pseudonym “William Lee” but was re-issued in his own name in 1977. Most of his earlier books languished in manuscript for years before their appearance in print, sometimes by the decision of the author: a case in point was his novel *Queer*, written in 1952 (the title was suggested by Jack Kerouac), but not published until 1985. Burroughs is considered by many to be among the most significant and influential American writers of this century (see also the interview with William Gibson, later in this volume).

Born in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1914—grandson of the inventor of the Burroughs adding machine—he graduated from Harvard in 1936, having studied English literature and archaeology. He served

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with the US Army in World War II before becoming addicted to narcotics (as well as experimenting with various other drugs). He and his wife moved to Mexico after the war, where—during a party with friends where an afternoon had been spent drinking—he accidentally shot her dead while attempting to re-enact William Tell’s feat with a handgun. Subsequently, he explored the Amazon River basin and continued to experiment with drugs. In Peru, he encountered *yagé*, a psychedelic drink made from bark scrapings taken from a vine indigenous to South America. He chronicled these experiences in letters to Allen Ginsberg written in 1953 and published as *The Yage Letters* ten years later. When not exploring, he lived in London, Paris, and Tangiers, where he was widely known as one of the foremost authorities on mind-altering chemicals of all kinds. His involvement with drugs exposed him to underground countercultures all over the world; his first-hand knowledge of the sordid, low-life contexts of drug addiction (criminal activities, clandestine homosexuality and sexual perversion, prostitution, police harassment and so on) are exactly detailed in his books.

Despite this colorful past, Burroughs at age 76 reportedly leads a sedate life, making his home in Lawrence, Kansas, with six cats. In addition to writing, he paints. (His artwork sells at several trendy galleries, such as New York’s Tony Scharfazi Gallery.) He has also appeared in films, most recently with a cameo in Laurie Anderson’s *Home of the Brave* (1986), and with a dramatic portrayal of an addict/priest in Gus Van Sant’s *Drugstore Cowboy* (1989). Also, in 1983, documentary filmmaker Howard Brookner created a cinematic biography: *Burroughs*.

The late artist Brion Gysin introduced Burroughs to making collages out of words. They cut up texts and re-arranged them to construct—by chance—new sentences: this was the now-famous “cut-up method” used in several of Burroughs’s books. In addition to experimenting with words, they tried different “altered states,” dabbling in (among other things) an early alpha-wave generator, a precursor to today’s sound-and-light devices that was dubbed by Gysin the “Dreammachine.” A Burroughs collaboration with

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Brion Gysin, *The Third Mind*, was published in 1978. Prior to this interview, Burroughs readily agreed to don the eyegear and headphones of one of the more current brain machines. The following discussion with Gregory Daurer followed a half hour's meditation.

GD: **How did you enjoy it?**

WB: Oh, I loved it. Very interesting, relaxing.

GD: Kind of mandala-like, a repeating pattern.

WB: Yes, exactly.

GD: I've read how you'd experimented in the early 1960s with the "Dreammachine."

WB: "Flicker" machine. Well, the principle is "flicker."

Are you acquainted with the book, *The Living Brain*, by [W.] Gray Walter? Gray Walter was associated with some kind of physical-neurological foundation in the 1960's, and [with] just using "flicker": pulses of light into the closed eye. What he found was this produced many of the effects of hallucinogenic drugs: seeing sounds, hearing pictures . . . you know, the sense impressions sort of overflowed.

GD: Yes, he was one of the first to do the tests on human beings and notice the difference in the states. Are you familiar with the book, *Megabrain*? *Megabrain* mentions his experiments . . . and then it mentions the experiments you did with Brion Gysin.

WB: Those were just using the "flicker" principle; his [Gysin's] machine had a light in the middle and then a slotted cylinder that turned at certain speeds, which precisely controlled the number of pulses per second.

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GD: What was the general experience?

WB: Like a hallucinogenic drug. Gives you sometimes visions, pictures . . . you know, similar to mescaline, but much milder.

GD: You've said in your writings, Anything you can do *with* drugs, you can do *without* drugs.

WB: Presumably that's obvious. If we knew the principle of precise effects—the precise brain areas that were influenced in a certain way by drugs—we could do it electronically. But, at that time, no one had the expertise to precisely reproduce the drug effects without drugs. It's just that they didn't know enough. That's all.

GD: What do you think about the "Drug Czar," William Bennett?

WB: Oh, the whole drug thing is nonsense, of course.

The answer is so obvious. In the first place, they don't even look at history. Now, all through the nineteenth century drugs were sold across the counter from sea to shining sea. It is these conservatives—these rabid anti-drug people—that are always talking about the "good old days" . . . forgetting that was the time drugs were legal and there was *no problem*. The answer, of course, is maintenance for people who don't want to stop; effective treatment for those who do. *There is no problem*; it's a "problem" they've created out of whole cloth.



All photographs of William Burroughs by Gregory Daurer

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GD: What are your current projects?

WB: I've been painting, mostly.

GD: Is it still the "shotgun" art?

WB: Oh, it's all kinds—brushwork, shotgun, paint, knife . . .

GD: What exact process do you use?

WB: There is no exact process. If you want to do shotgun art, you take a piece of plywood, put a can of spray paint in front of it, and shoot it with a shotgun or a high-powered rifle. The paint's under high pressure, so it explodes! Throws the can three hundred feet. The paint sprays across your surface in an explosion of color. You can have as many colors as you want. Turn it around, do it sideways, and have one color coming in from this side and one from this [other] side. Of course, they hit. They make shapes of all unpredictable kinds. This is related to Pollack's drip canvases, although it is a rather more basic process with more possibilities to work at in the end. Sometimes it takes pretty much nothing, and sometimes I work it over for months. I get the original after the explosion and work it over with brushes and spray paints, silhouettes, until I'm satisfied. Sometimes you get it right there, and you don't touch it. The most important thing to know in painting is when everything is finished. Doesn't mean anything in writing.

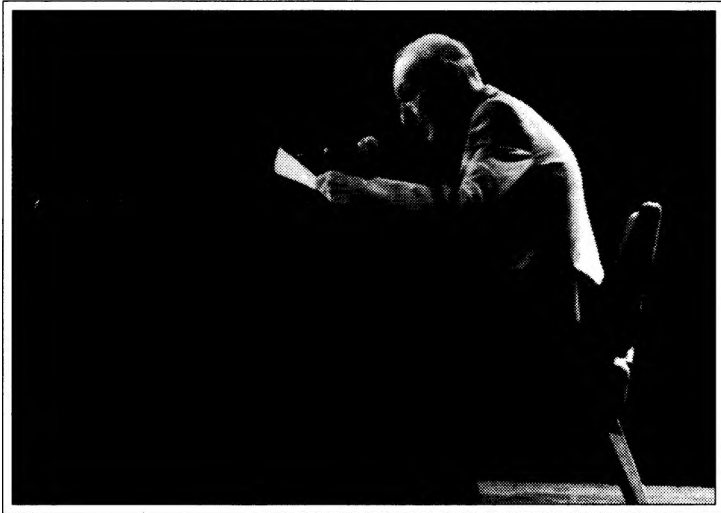
GD: It does rely to a high degree on chance—the shotgun art.

WB: It certainly introduces a random factor.

GD: Just like the cut-up method.

WB: Yes. But you don't have to use it all, you can use that as background. There's a lot of other randomizing procedures. Like marbling. Take water and you spray your paint on top of the water, and then put your paper, or whatever, in the water. Pull it out and it sticks in all kinds of random patterns. Then there's the old ink blot. Like that. [ruffles imaginary sheet] Sometimes they're good only as background or sometimes you've got a picture at once.

GD: I noticed that a couple of your paintings—"Wood Spirits" and "Mink Mutiny"—have photos of animals in them. Is that a theme?



WB: Yes, it's a theme. lemurs, the theme of my book. I've just finished a book. It's with the publisher and I've got to do the illustrations for it. There will be fifteen illustrations, or thereabout. It's called *Ghost of Chance*. The title hinges on the fact that the word *lemur* means *ghost* in Malagasian. It's set in Madagascar, where I haven't been. It's one of the few places I wouldn't mind going.

GD: From what I've read, you're concerned with the extinction of a lot of these species.

WB: Who isn't? It's a disaster.

GD: Do you see any transformation happening on the planet?

WB: No. In the present tense it [environmental destruction] seems to be accelerating.

GD: You've often said—or your characters have said—that we're living in a magical universe.

WB: I don't think we're living in a magical universe. I said there *is* a magical universe. I think the whole tendency of the world we live in is very *anti*-magical.

GD: Anti-magical?

WB: Good God! Mass production. McDonald's! Destroy all

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the rain forests to build McDonald's for profit! You can't get any more anti-magical than the tendencies of corporate capitalism. So far, the people in control, the mainstream . . . extremely anti-magical. All the emphasis on quantity, and not quality. War is always better.

Gregory Daurer had previously discussed Burroughs with poet Allen Ginsberg.

GD: You've popularized William S. Burroughs's ideas over the past forty years. Why?

AG: Why I personally popularized them? Well, I didn't know I was responsible for popularizing his ideas, but they always struck me as being full of common sense and incisiveness; beginning with the first time I ever met him, when he quoted Shakespeare in such an intelligent way it opened my mind to appreciate Shakespeare. It was a description of a fight between a young, wild bohemian and a lesbian at a gay bar in Greenwich Village. He said, "Tis too starved an argument for my sword!" And I thought it was so funny. [smiles] I thought *oooooh! what an intelligent way of reading Shakespeare.*

Then I got into an argument with that same wild bohemian about whether art was supposed to be social or whether it was self-ultimate, ivory tower. The question was: "If a walking stick is carved into a sculpture and put on the moon where nobody saw it—is that art?" I think I said it *wasn't* art, because art was social-Marxist, or something. My friend, who was a follower of Rimbaud, said art is self-ultimate and didn't have to be seen by anybody to be art. So we took the argument, in 1944, to Burroughs, and he said, quote, "That's the stupidest argument I've ever heard! It makes no sense at all! *Art* is a three letter word. It means whatever you guys want to agree it means; it doesn't *have* a built-in meaning." Then he explained that

- GD: When did you first become aware that there is that “other” universe, the magical universe?
- WB: Well, I suppose since I became aware of *anything*. They asked [Jean] Genet when *he* started to write and he said, “Birth.”

Allen Ginsberg

he had studied the theory of General Semantics with the philosopher Alfred Korzybski in Chicago, who had written a book called *Science and Sanity*. Bill had pointed out that the word is not identical with the event. Or, the error of the “is” of identity.

Nowadays, when people come up to me and say, “Are you Allen Ginsberg?” I say, “No, I’m not Allen Ginsberg—that’s my *name!*” It was a simple way of dealing with semantic confusion and it saved me endless bewilderment in later years in a way similar to zen understanding of the difference between *conceptions* of things and the *events* that they represent. He’s always had interesting and sort of Yankee-practical ideas and experiments on all sorts of subjects, especially language.

In his later development of the cut-up method—growing out of his understanding of semantics, his own psychotherapy, his addiction/detoxification from various drugs, his exploration of Scientology, as well as his literary background in connection with Brion Gysin and old Surrealists—all combined to make use of a traditional, dadaist literary form—the cutting up of texts as a method of counter-brainwashing technique. A deconditioning technique. A method of tracing all the word lines back to the original imprinting that was projected by the controllers of media. Or as Burroughs in those days called it, “Thoughts, feelings, and apparent sensory impressions.”

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GD: So, all through childhood then?

WB: Certainly. Most . . . well, maybe not most, now . . . fewer and fewer . . . It used to be that many people did have magical experiences as children—in some cases which they later discounted. Certainly the tendency of the mainstream goes in the other direction. Not that there aren't things to offset that to some extent . . .

GD: Is that what you feel your writing does? Offsets that to a certain extent? Throws a curse on the anti-magical universe?

WB: [chuckling] Well, I'm not trying to convey a message.

GD: What are you trying to do?

WB: Write. Paint. What are all writers and painters trying to do? Create life. They want something that will step off—literally move—off the canvas or page. As Klee said, "Any serious artist is trying to create something that has life apart from the painter, apart from the creator, which may even put him in danger." Which is the clearest indication that it is separate, has a life of its own.

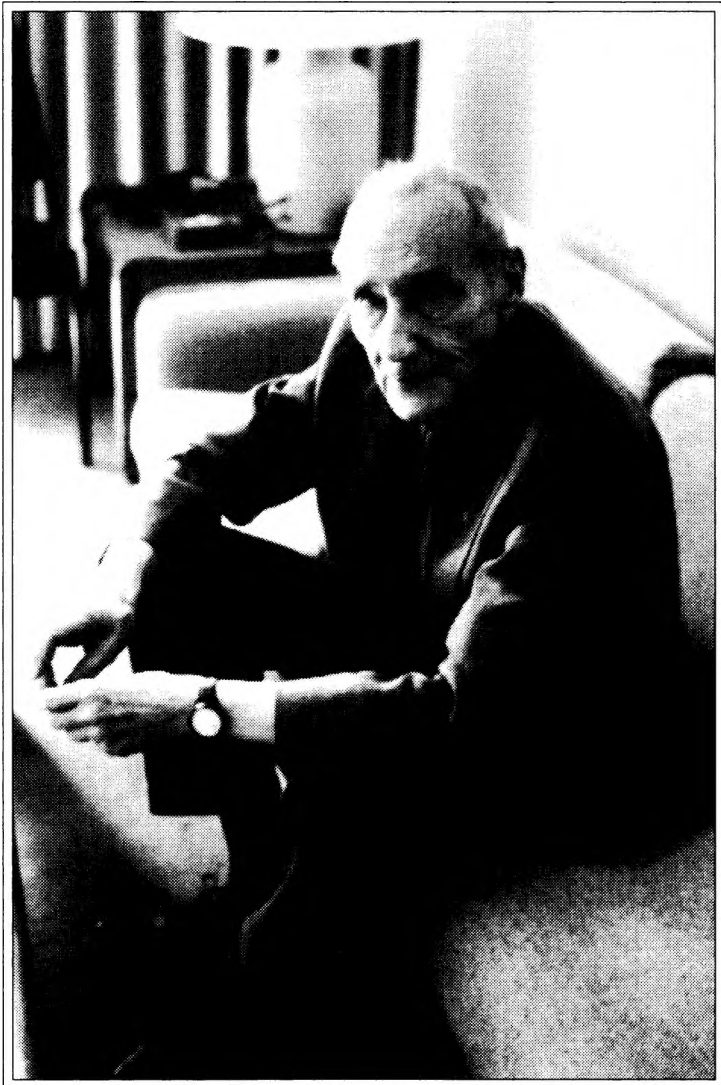
GD: Allen Ginsberg suggested that you used the cut-up technique as a "counter-brainwashing technique."

Do you agree with that?

WB: Yes. It has that aspect in that you're breaking down the *word*. Right as soon as you start cutting you're getting new words, new combinations of words. Yes, it has that aspect, sure. But all this brainwashing and propaganda, *et cetera*, is not by any means expected to reach any intelligent corners. It isn't expected to reach anybody with any sense. If they can get ten percent, that's good. That's the game of propaganda, to get ten percent. They don't try to convince people with any sense.

GD: In your book, *The Western Lands*, you talk about the Egyptians' belief system of reincarnation.

WB: No. I don't think the Egyptians had any concept of *reincarnation*. There's no evidence of that. They say that some of the priests may have believed in that, but it's not part of Egyptian mythology at all.



GD: But there's a journey of the soul—isn't that what you're expressing?

WB: Yeah, but that's got nothing to do with reincarnation. The soul after death, after physical death, has to go

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through the Land of the Dead to reach the Western Lands—Egyptian Paradise. However, if anything happens to their mummy, they're fucked. So that's why they have their mummies so guarded, so protected by potent curses. Because the continued existence of the soul in the Western Lands depends on the mummy remaining in good condition. It's a very three-dimensional concept. Very materialistic. That's one reason why the Egyptians took to Christianity like a vulture takes to carrion. Because that's what mummies are all about—the resurrection of the *body* and life everafter.

GD: Why does the Egyptian system resonate for you as a mythology?

WB: There's a lot of interesting things about the *seven soul* concept. The fact that there's not *one* soul but *seven*, with different interests. Their interests are not synonymous. In the Egyptian system, *that* is an interesting idea. As I say, some of it is interesting and some of it is not.

GD: I understand you've corresponded with Lynn Andrews?

WB: Yes. I met her in Santa Fe, briefly. She's the female Castaneda, covering much the same area. Whistling Elk, that is her mentor.

GD: What do you enjoy about her books?

WB: They're about the whole matter of consciousness. Awareness. Extension of awareness. The idea that there *is no reality*. It's all in the perception. There's no such thing as reality. Which is, of course, a very old idea in Eastern philosophy—it's all an illusion.

GD: How much of your work comes from dreams?

WB: That's hard to say. Depending on whether I'm in a period where there are a lot of vivid dreams, I would say roughly a third of it. But that doesn't mean it always comes directly from dreams. It may be suggested by it. Some of the material comes almost verbatim from dreams. Dreams are obviously one of the main sources of creation. Don Juan puts a lot of emphasis on dreams. You've read the [Castaneda] books? The whole emphasis on dreams was true to the whole area of

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Indian magic, native Indian magic. Dreams were essential. Power dreams. Totem dreams. *Et cetera*. It was one of the more important factors.

GD: It doesn't seem like our culture has held that in much esteem, at least until the twentieth century.

WB: There's no such thing as "our" culture. What do you mean by "our" culture? We don't have one.

GD: I guess that's right. Like there are many "Americas."

WB: Well, yes. As [Alfred] Korzybski, the founder of General Semantics, said, "Never talk about 'Americans' or any other generalities. *Who* did *what*, *where*, and *when*?" Any time somebody starts to say, "We think this way," I say, "Wait a minute! Include *me* out of your 'we.'" [laughs] It doesn't *mean* anything. There isn't any *we*. There isn't any *people*.

GD: This system was kind of a zen for you.

WB: No, it's just a very simple statement about meaning.

The meaning of meaning. The fact that generalities don't mean anything. It's not *zen*. It's knowing what you're talking about. And he [Korzybski] points out that the old either/or dictum is one of the great errors of Western thought. It's usually *both*. Either/or is a proposition that doesn't exist in what little we know about the universe.

GD: Especially from quantum physics.

WB: Yes, exactly. The Principle of Uncertainty. And so on.

It [either/or thinking] just doesn't correspond to any real or viable picture of reality.

Jonathan Lethem

is an increasingly popular writer of strange and uncategorizable contemporary fiction. His stories have previously appeared in **Wired**, **Pulphouse** and **Aboriginal SF**, and he has recently sold a new story to **Isaac Asimov's SF Magazine**. A second short story of his appears later in this volume.

Illustrations for "Using It and Losing It" were drawn by **J. Calafiore**, an artist and writer who has made several noteworthy contributions to the **Caliber Presents** anthologies, as well as having done several Caliber projects of his own—including the popular **God's Hammer** series.

fiction

Jonathan Lethem

Using It and Losing It

They sent Pratt to Montreal for a three day conference, but after the first day he stopped attending the meetings, and spent the remainder of the long weekend wandering around the streets of the city. He liked Montreal, though at first he didn't understand why. It reminded him of America, of the United States; not the least bit exotic—in fact it was startlingly familiar. The only difference was that he couldn't understand what other people were saying. And that was what he liked.

Pratt had taken Spanish in high school. He passed the classes, but only narrowly, and he didn't retain any memory of the language. He certainly didn't have any handle on the French he heard around him in Montreal. He went to the store for cigarettes and pointed; first at the brand he wanted, then at the bowl of matches behind the cash register. He switched on the television in his hotel room and watched the news in French (weathermen gesturing at the odd Canadian-based map) and was unable to understand anything; all he could puzzle out were the categories: international news, local items, sports, weather, human interest. The news seemed very simple that way; reduced to a series of formats it

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became oddly small and comprehensible.

Pratt felt alone. He felt alone in New York, and it was a feeling he thrived on; his aloneness insulated him, made it possible for him to live in the city. Now, in Montreal, he felt the flowering within himself of a potential for a new kind of aloneness, something much deeper, and something more unique. Walking alone through a city of strangers, unable to share their language, suggested enticing possibilities to him.

Back in New York the following week Pratt walked the distance to work, stopping in at his accustomed cigar store to buy cigarettes, and rode the elevator upstairs to his office; in short, his standard routine, without deviation—yet it didn't feel right. Pratt felt hemmed in by the people around him for the first time, his invisible Gardol shield of isolation stripped mysteriously away. He heard snippets of conversation as he passed or was passed on the sidewalks, and the packets of language landed unbidden on the doorstep of his consciousness, and intruded on his cool, solitary thoughts. The cigar man struck up a needless conversation about the humidity, despite Pratt's silently pointing at the desired items, the way he had in Montreal.

Pratt isolated himself in his office, put his folder of papers into the bottom drawer of his desk, then gathered the accumulated inter-office memos of the last week and balled them up and threw them away without reading them. Pratt had learned something about not being reached in Montreal, and he determined to apply it directly to his job. At some deeper level he knew that such an attitude would quickly mean the end of his job, but he could live with that. The path he was about to follow would lead him far beyond his job. He was on the verge, he felt, of developing a philosophy.

Pratt wondered what came next. He was carefully retying his shoelaces when the door to his office opened. It was Glock, Pratt's supervisor, and the man who'd chosen Pratt for the Montreal deal. Glock didn't come into the office; he leaned in the doorway, crossing his arms. His face was expressive and rubbery; now it expressed a scowl.



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“You didn’t find things interesting in Montreal? Geez. You should’ve called. Northern’s guy really liked you, he really did, he called me to ask if anything was the matter. What’s the matter? Didn’t you like the guy? He said you two hit it off. That’s a good connection, Pratt. You should’ve called, we could have talked about it. What’s the matter?”

Pratt winced at the flood of language Glock undammed in his direction. He couldn’t even remember the guy from Northern. “I don’t feel good,” he told Glock.

“Geez. You don’t look that good. You don’t feel good? You didn’t feel good?”

“I didn’t feel good.”

“You should have called. You don’t feel good? Geez, go home. This isn’t high school, Pratt. Go home if you don’t feel good.”

Pratt went home. He did his best to avoid overhearing conversations on the way back, taking side streets and veering wide when he passed couples or groups of people. A gray man with a tattered hat stepped up from against the side of a building and stuck his hand out at Pratt. “Spare change man? I gotta get something to eat.” Pratt edged away from without answering.

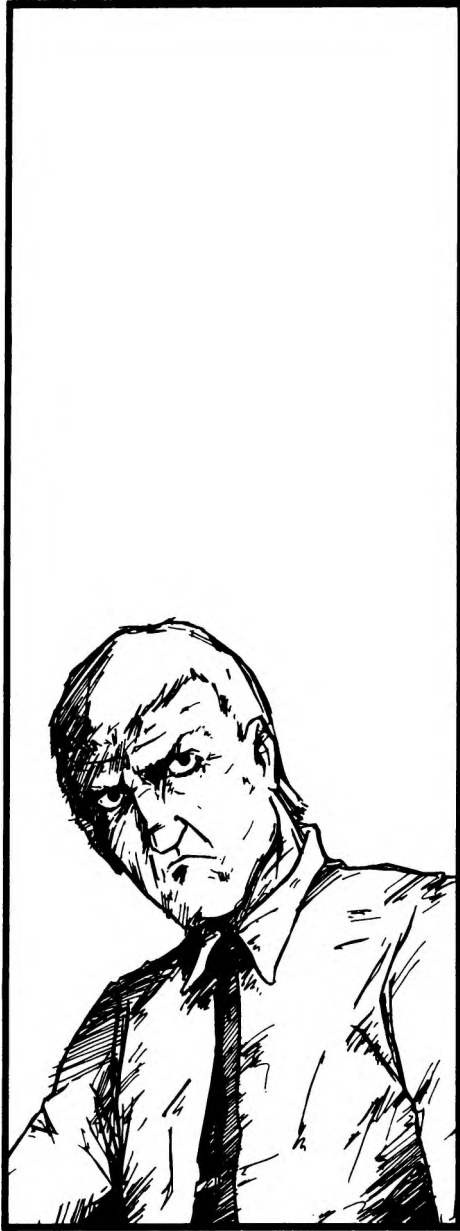
By the time he was safely back in his apartment Pratt had formulated his new ambition: he wanted a divorce from the English language. He felt amazed at the simplicity and grace of his plan. The relationship he strove to strike up with the world was uniquely shallow: the world consistently misunderstood, and pressed him for further commitment. Pratt wanted to turn the world down, definitively this time, and the abandonment of the language of his fellow men seemed to him the perfect embodiment of this ideal.

Pratt knew from lifelong experience that words sometimes slipped free of their meanings when he repeated them over and over, or wrote them down again and again; they became abstract, and refused to adhere. Words could hemorrhage, and bleed empty of their lifeblood meaning. He decided to perfect this technique, if it could be perfected, to systematize it, and through it, forget the entirety of the English language. The very thought of it made him hungry and impatient for this loss, for the empty completeness of

it, like a man finally stepping free of his shadow, yet he knew it would take a long time—years perhaps. Pratt didn't mind. He knew he could rein in his impatience, he knew he had what it took. He knew he was good for it.

Nonetheless, Pratt shook with excitement. He went into the living room and sat down in the middle of the couch, fighting to breathe evenly and cleanly, struggling not to cross his legs. I'll start now, he told himself, and began searching for a word with which to begin. *I'll lose my first words first*, he thought; *that's the proper way to do it.*

Mommy, mommy mommy, Pratt thought heavily and intentionally. He said it aloud: "Mommy, mommy, mommy, Mommy-mommymommy." He groped on the coffee



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table for a legal pad and scribbled the word again and again in looping script: mommy, mommy, mommy.

The syllables were perfect, near nonsense to begin with, and they lost their meaning for Pratt almost immediately. But he didn't stop there. He pressed on, his tongue swelling on big mommymommy syllables, spittle collecting in the corners of his mouth, four pages filled with illegible mommymommy and then on to the fifth, pencil point blunted fat like tongue, mommymommymommy.

He killed the word and flogged its corpse, only stopping when he couldn't go on, collapsing back on the couch, exhausted. The word was gone, eradicated, nowhere to be found. Pratt waited, but it didn't come back. He probed for it fearfully, turning over mossy stones in his consciousness, but no mommy crawled out. He looked at the pages of scribbled mommymommy but it seemed another language to him, unreadable, meaningless, baffling. The word was gone. *One down*, he thought.

The next word took less time, and the one after that even less. Pratt was suspicious; he checked each word for its absence, but each seemed obediently banished. He finished with dad, then cat, then man and bad and boy, then hat and hot together, repeating them alternately: hathothathothathothatohot. He finished a dozen words before he felt his eyelids slipping down towards the floor, his grip loosening on his pencil. He put himself to bed.

The next morning he deliberately avoided the living room, where the coffee table sat littered with sheets of the yellow pad. The words—whichever words they had been—were gone, and he didn't want them back. As he sipped his coffee in the kitchen he grew increasingly pleased with the events of the previous night, and increasingly resolute. Waking with a smaller vocabulary was exhilarating; he felt lighter, freer, less hemmed in. The clear priority was to send the rest of the language packing, the sooner the better.

After cleaning up in the kitchen, Pratt went out for a walk in the park. The crisp air felt good in his lungs, and the sun felt good on his head. There was nobody in the park yet. Pratt warmed up by disposing of tree and sky, defying categorical reality by staring up at the oak leaves drifting in the wind against a backdrop of blue

even as he eradicated the words. This done, he felt immediately ready for bigger things. He rid himself of a couple of unusual, once-in-a-while words: sundial and migraine, mixing them into midial and sungraine before allowing them to fade completely.

It got easier and easier. Even the most tenacious words proved banishable after fifteen or twenty repetitions, and some others slipped away after Pratt pronounced them twice. He'd developed a muscle for destroying language, and it grew strong through exercise. Pratt spent the day wandering through the park, forgetting words: he forgot words as he clambered over boulders and he forgot words while he lay with his eyes closed on the great lawn. When he got hungry he found a vendor and bought a hot dog, and in the process of eating it killed hot dog, killed frank, killed wiener and sausage and wurst, until all the words disappeared and he was left to finish a nameless tube of meat.

Things seemed to like being unnamed; they expanded, became at once more ambiguous and more real. The speech Pratt heard as people strolled past seemed littered with meaningless, musical phrases; their sentences were coming unhinged, and the less Pratt understood the more he liked. As meaningful words assailed his ears he spoke them and rendered



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them meaningless, then tossed away their empty husks to the invisible wind.

Pratt arrived home exhausted, yet buoyant. He no longer feared the yellow pad on the coffee table; he rushed in and happily made neither head nor tails of it. He opened a book from his shelf and read a sentence, delightedly baffled by most of it; when he found a word he knew he pronounced it and it disappeared. He had it down to a single utterance now. To use a word was to lose it.

Glock called. It jolted Pratt to be on the telephone. He hurriedly conducted a search for the words that were left, to try and patch together a response.

"You should see a doctor," said Glock. "It's paid for, it's taken out of your paycheck, so why not just go? Do you know a good doctor? Why don't you see mine?"

Pratt didn't understand. "Overabundant," he said. "Inconspicuous." He couldn't think of anything else to say.

"Dr. Healthbronner, 548-7980," Glock went on. "He's good, I've known him for twenty years. I mean, Jeezus, take care of yourself. You sound like shit."

"Shit," repeated Pratt into the receiver. Without knowing it, Glock had opened up a whole new category of words. "Piss crap cunt prick snatch," said Pratt. The words disappeared as he mouthed them.

"Okay, okay, Jeezus," said Glock. "I was only trying to help. Stay home, for god's sake, stay home until you feel better. One hundred percent. Call me if you need anything." He hung up.

The call unnerved Pratt. His job, he saw, was lost to him forever. Quite a lot, in fact, was lost to him forever. He began to wish the process had not gotten so automatic. The few words left began to seem more and more like commodities, things to be treasured. Not that he didn't want to finish the job, eliminate the language entirely, but now it seemed important to savor its going, to draw the process out.

He slept fitfully that night, and although he had never been a somnolinguist he awoke several times, bathed in sweat and trembling slightly, to the sound of his own voice calling out some

stray word into the darkness, always too late to know what he was losing. He felt he'd only slept an hour or two when the sun began to creep through the window.

Pratt showered, shaved, and flossed his teeth, trying to pull himself together. Words surfaced from the murk of his consciousness and he struggled not to say them aloud. He pushed them into a corner of his mind, a little file of what he had left, and like the tiles on a Scrabble tray he shuffled and reshuffled them, trying to form coherent sentences. It was a losing struggle. He could feel words receding, becoming abstract and meaningless just from his thinking about them over-strenuously; he reached the point where for a word to remain meaningful he needed to hear it spoken aloud, given the tangibility of speech, and he lost several words this way, because by now anything he spoke aloud destroyed itself, immediately and forever.

After a thin breakfast Pratt went downstairs, but after walking halfway to the park he was caught in a sudden rain shower, and forced back to his apartment. He was unlocking his apartment door when the phone began ringing, and fumbled impatiently at the lock while it rang, twice, three times, four times; he dropped his keys in the foyer and jogged through the dark apartment to the phone. It seemed suddenly terribly important to answer it.

It was a wrong number. "Dan Shard?" asked the voice on the other end.

Pratt had already surrendered *no* to the void. He made a guttural sound into the line.

"Dan Shard? Who's there? May I speak to Mr. Shard?"

Pratt shook his head, made the sound again. "Mr. Shard?"



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“Pratt,” said Pratt, before he could stop himself. “Pratt,” he said again, wonderingly, and then the word vanished.

“I’m sorry,” said the voice on the line, and hung up.

Pratt saw now that he was painting himself into a corner, in a room where the paint would never dry, where he would have to climb onto the wall, and begin painting that, and then from there onto the ceiling. The horizon of consciousness grew nearer and nearer. The world at large might be round but Pratt’s world was flat, and he was about to fall off the edge of it.

That night he watched the news on the television. The only words Pratt understood on the program were the neologisms: Crisisgate, Lovemaker Missile, CLOTH Talks, Oopsam and Errscam. Advertisements seemed bewildering and surreal. Switching the channels Pratt eventually stumbled on a station consisting exclusively of these miniature epics, one ad after another. He watched this station, transfixed, for almost half an hour, when it came to him that they were rock videos.

He called Glock back, but got the answering machine. Pratt had saved up a last message, a cry for help, and felt deflated at not being able to deliver it. It was already losing its meaning in the storeroom of his consciousness, and he decided to leave it on Glock’s tape.

“Well, I’m not home,” went Glock’s voice. “Relax. I’ll be back. Just leave a message. Just leave a message, and I’ll call, and we’ll talk. Relax.” The machine beeped.

“Ebbing,” blurted Pratt. He felt proud at having saved such a simple word for so long. The rest of the message wasn’t so easy. “John-Hancocked auto-mortality affidavit,” he continued. “Disconsolate.” He paused for effect, and then delivered the last word, the only word he had left, the payload. “Bereft,” he said, giving it all he had, the full thespian treatment. The machine clicked off between the two syllables of the word.

Pratt put the phone down. He couldn’t think of any more words. He went to the bathroom and brushed out his tired mouth with mint toothpaste, then went into the living room and gathered up the books on his shelves and carried them out to the incinerator.

Pratt slept surprisingly well that night, cool between the sheets, his mind empty. He didn't dream. When he awoke he felt cleansed; with the furniture of language finally cleared the movers' footprints could be wiped away, and the dust-bunnies swept out of the corners. There was nothing left to forget: English had become a foreign language to him, and the world was rendered innocent of connotation. His doubts about the process evaporated. He'd panicked momentarily, been a little weak in the knees, but now that he was language-free he knew how little cause he'd had for alarm. He awoke into a rightness, his wish granted. Like a snail with its shell Pratt now lugged his own private Montreal around on his back. He was a tourist everywhere, a tourist originating from a land so private and complete that it didn't require a language.

He went downstairs, and out. The sun was busy clearing the puddles away, and Manhattan warmed into activity. Pratt walked up Broadway, feeling confident. Everything seemed bigger now, more promising and mysterious, and, most importantly, further away. He considered going in to work; they couldn't harm him now that he'd become invulnerable. The air was filled with the musical chatter of conversation—the forest couldn't harm him now that he'd become invulnerable. The air was filled with the musical chatter of conversation as the forest air is filled with the singing of birds; New York transmuted itself into a wonderland of incomprehensibility.

Pratt passed a shopkeeper haggling with a fat black woman over the price of bananas; she waved her curled-up money and cradled the bananas like a long lost child. Pratt frowned disapprovingly at how much she communicated, beyond language, and at how much he picked it up despite himself. Pratt saw a teenage boy on a skateboard perform a flourish for a gaggle of girls who idled in a building entrance; transfixed by the subtleties of the interaction, Pratt had to tear himself away from it. Suddenly the walls



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of comprehension were closing in again.

A pair of businessmen with briefcases parted on the sidewalk to make room for Pratt to pass, and though their language seemed a babble of water-rushing-over-rocks, Pratt felt astonished at what he learned from their manner, their expressions and gesticulations. It was inescapable. Like a blind man whose other senses attune themselves in compensation, Pratt found himself involuntarily sensitized to non-verbal forms of communication.

He panicked, turned around and headed back towards his apartment, reverting to his former strategies of steering wide berths around groups of people who might be tainted with language. As he ran Pratt struggled to understand this new predicament, racking his brains like a snake-bit man who had once learned the formula for the antidote.

There was clearly more to communication than language; that had been an underestimation of his opponent, a mistake Pratt knew he couldn't afford to make twice. It seemed clear enough: he was going to have to forget body language.

Back safe in his apartment, Pratt sat on the couch and began shrugging mechanically.

commentary

Michael A. Banks

THROUGH THE WIRE

Well, I was going to talk about the United States Government and telecomputing this time out, but I've decided to cut that in favor of expanding info and commentary on international telecomputing. (There's not much happening in that area at the moment; you've read everything there is to know in the news magazines, or caught it on TV or radio news.) I'll still cover online elitism, and give you the reading list—all as promised. And I'll give you something to think about regarding online security.

First, let's take a look at what's happening with international telecomputing, on two levels.

International Telecomputing, Level One: "The Walls Come Tumbling Down"

If you're over 35 or so, you probably felt the same awe and sense of history as I did when you saw the Berlin Wall and all it symbolized come crashing down earlier this year. After all, we grew up with that symbol of what was known as the Communist menace and—far, far worse—of the sad legacy handed Eastern Europe in the wake of World War II. (My God—remember when

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those emergency broadcasting system tests used to be followed by “Had this been an *attack* . . .”?)

(In footnote to “the Communist menace,” you may assume that I concur with Dr. Jerry Pournelle’s statement on returning from Russia in April: “I have seen the fourth world, and it doesn’t work.”)

Now, in less than a year, we’ve seen four decades of oppression slough away like the rotting husk of a fallen fruit, revealing the seeds of a new world. Even Mother Russia is loosening her hold (though not too much) on satellite nations, and there are echoes of freedom in South and Central America.

What does this have to do with being online? Well, I’ve stated often enough that the online world tends to mirror the “real” world. This is no less than true where the growing freedom of long-oppressed (politically or otherwise) nations are concerned. Now that the political walls blocking free trade and communication in many parts of the world are coming down, so are the barriers to telecomputing.

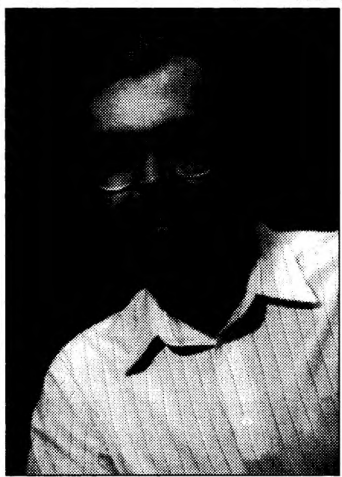
For example, US Sprint has commenced setting up a quality data communications service for the USSR. The Moscow-based service, which should be up and running by the end of the year, will see the installation of state-of-the-art data communications switching equipment, making it easier for Soviet citizens to telecommunicate with the rest of the world. The service will be a joint venture with Russia, called “Telenet USSR” (although the name could change, since Telenet has been renamed “SprintNet” here in the US, in the wake of its acquisition by US Sprint).

But in this instance, the online world has been and is anticipating as well as mirroring real-world events. Telenet USSR is not the first Soviet data link with the Western world. The famed Washington/Moscow “Hot Line” has been a data link for quite a few years. Nor is it the first commercial link: an existing data communications center in Moscow routes commercial telecomputing traffic via SprintNet/Telenet through Vienna, Austria (a similar link can be made via Helsinki, Finland, though that route cannot handle heavy traffic). Other links with Russia are

made circuitously via Tymnet and, it has been rumored, over Internet. Still another link, the cleverly titled San Francisco/Moscow Teleport (SFMT), leases time on a comsat to link Moscow to packet-switching networks in the US via San Francisco. (And now, users on the majority of American online services can, for a fee of perhaps five bucks for 150 words, send E-mail to Russia via SFMT, courtesy of DASnet, an inter-service E-mail carrier. DASnet ties in to almost all major online services. For more info, phone 415/559-7434 voice and speak with Anna Lange.)

Those links will be much in the public eye over the next twelve to eighteen months, but they are only half the story where the “opening” of Communist and Third-World nations are concerned. A public, international BBS opened in Estonia (one of the Soviet Baltic states) in mid-1989, and DELPHI and CompuServe have forged data links with South and Central American countries. (Text from sessions on some of DELPHI’s links—actually, local versions of the DELPHI online service—are shown on the next page. If you read Spanish, enjoy!)

Michael A. Banks



Michael A. Banks is the author of twenty-one non-fiction books and science fiction novels, including *The Modem Reference* and *Getting the Most Out of DeskMate 3*, both published by Brady Books, *Understanding FAX and Electronic Mail*, published by Howard W. Sams & Co, and *The Odyssey Solution* (with Dean R. Lambe, Baen Books).

You can contact him online by sending E-mail to KZIN on DELPHI, or to MBANKS on MCI Mail or PC-Link. He can also be found on GEnie (MIKE.BANKS), BIX (mike_banks), PRODIGY (WFRN66A), and lots of other places in the electronic world.

Sample session excerpts from DELPHI's Central and South American local services

Hola KIP

Bienvenido a DELPHI/Miami
International Telematics, Inc.
Copyright (c) 1987
General Videotex Corporation

Conexion : 18-DEC-1989 15:23:20
Anterior : 18-DEC-1989 14:08:51

Menu PRINCIPAL:

Anuncios Publicos Grupos y Clubes
Area de Trabajo Noticias
Banco de Datos Otros DELPHI (I)
Comunicaciones Shopping Center
Conferencia Usando DELPHI
Economia Viajes y Turismo
Entretencimientos AYUDA
Gente en DELPHI SALIR

PRINCIPAL>Que desea hacer? **otro**
Menu Acceso a otros DELPHI:

Argentina y Uruguay (SI)
Centroamerica
Colombia
Worldwide, Boston y Kansas (SI)
AYUDA
SALIR

OTROS DELPHI> (Indique cual)> **centr**
Tiempo de la sesion : 2 minutos.

Hola KIP

Bienvenido a DELPHI/Centroamerica
International Telematics Inc.

Distribuido por PRODATA, S.A.
Copyright (c) 1987
General Videotex Corporation

Conexion : 18-DEC-1989 15:23:48
Anterior : 18-DEC-1989 14:07:41

Menu PRINCIPAL:

Anuncios Publicos Grupos y Clubes
Area de Trabajo Noticias
Banco de Datos Otros DELPHI (I)
Comunicaciones Shopping Center
Conferencia Usando DELPHI
Economia Viajes y Turismo
Entretencimientos AYUDA
Gente en DELPHI SALIR

PRINCIPAL>Que desea hacer? **otro**
Menu Acceso a otros DELPHI:

Argentina y Uruguay (SI)
Colombia
Miami
Worldwide, Boston y Kansas (SI)
AYUDA SALIR

OTROS DELPHI> (Indique cual)> **colom**
Tiempo de la sesion : 2 minutos.

Hola KIP

Bienvenido a DELPHI/Colombia
Telecom - Bogota, Colombia
Copyright (c) 1987
General Videotex Corporation

Conexion : 18-DEC-1989 15:24:12
Anterior : 18-DEC-1989 14:08:06

```
#####  
# # # # #  
# # # # #  
# # # # #  
# # # # #  
# # # # #  
# # # # #  
# # # # #
```

Este sistema se encuentra en periodo de prueba y ajustes y sera puesto en venta proxicamente por TELECOM de Colombia.

Menu PRINCIPAL:

Anuncios Publicos Grupos y Clubes
Area de Trabajo Noticias
Banco de Datos Otros DELPHI (I)
Comunicaciones Shopping
Conferencia Usando DELPHI
Economia Viajes y Turismo
Entretencimientos AYUDA
Gente en DELPHI SALIR

PRINCIPAL>Que desea hacer? **chau**
KIP desconectado 18-DEC-1989 15:24:26
Tiempo de la sesion : 2 minutos.

Gracias por haberse conectado con nosotros!

Subj: Argentina & Uruguay main menus

Hola KIP

Bienvenido a DELPHI/Argentina
Siscotel S.A. - Buenos Aires
Copyright (c) 1987
General Videotex Corporation

... and so on, with connections
available throughout almost all
of Central and South America.

In these developments, the online world anticipated developments in the real world, as stated a few paragraphs back. And, there are some developments online that are unique to the online world. For example, on ConnectEd (an online university operated in conjunction with New York's New School for Social Research), you'll find a service that provides essays from Soviet writers and commentators on all manner of topics. (Freely written, I might add, and with a surprising undercurrent of Russian patriotism.) For information about ConnectEd, telephone 212/548-0435 voice and ask for Paul Levinson.

International Telecomputing, Level Two: Commercial Expansion

On a less sensationalistic plane, the three largest commercial online services in the US are expanding into Europe and Japan in a big way—shrinking the global tent city (a term I prefer to “global village,” because we all go home after those international interactions . . .) still more. Here's a summary:

CompuServe in Europe. CompuServe is offering limited (and expensive) service in Europe via the CompuServe Forum. (The service is lower in cost than previous means of accessing CompuServe via Europe, however.) A special TOP menu has been created for European subscribers, and there are plans for various CompuServe computer forums to add sections for European users. Additional plans call for “CompuServe software” (whether this is front-end software or the service itself is not known) to be offered in several European languages.

CompuServe already has access from Japan via a joint venture that offers CompuServe access or a mirror of same, called “Nifty-SERVE.”

DELPHI Introduced in Japan. General Videotex Corporation (GVC), parent company of DELPHI, has created a partnership with Japan's ASCII Corporation to distribute DELPHI services in Japan. ASCII Corp., which operates one of the three largest online services in Japan and publishes books and magazines on computing, among other topics, is creating a “regional” version of DELPHI called ASCII NET in Japan. According to GVC, the

ASCII NET Japan will “supplement DELPHI’s current regional partners in Buenos Aires, Argentina; Miami, Florida; Kansas City, Missouri; and Boston, Massachusetts.”

GVC and ASCII Corp. expect to sign up more than five thousand members during the first year of distribution. Presumably, there will be an extra-charge gateway service between ASCII NET and DELPHI, as is the case with DELPHI in the US and DELPHI/Argentina. There is talk of sub-licenses to Singapore and/or Taiwan.

GENie in Europe. GENie is now officially online in Europe. The service can be dialed up directly in Austria, Germany, and Switzerland via networks operated by distributors of General Electric Information Services (GEIS), GENie’s parent company. Unlike CompuServe’s European service, GENie is making almost all the features that are available to North American subscribers available to European callers. This augments international access from Japan, and will presumably be expanded to include other European countries (including the UK) in the near future.

BIX Clones. In footnote, it’s worth mentioning that clones of BIX exist in Japan and the UK. These are totally without connection (data links or business connection) with BIX (which is an online service sponsored by *Byte Magazine*). In Japan, the service is called “Nikki-MIX” and runs the same basic UNIX software as BIX, but with Kanji (written graphic character) capability. In the UK, the clone is called CIX; I don’t know whether it uses the same operating system, but the structure is close enough.

Online Elite?

Back on the topic of new-found telecom riches, it is worth noting that not everyone in Russia or in Central or South America has access to international telecom services—just as not everyone in newly “free” nations has access to the tools of capitalism (money and contacts.) For example, *any* Soviet citizen can walk into the Moscow data communications center and dial up Europe or America—in *theory*. In practice, however, access is limited to those who have a need to telecompute (certain scientists would

though the cost of telecomputing in both money and knowledge has dropped, the online world is still populated largely by elitists—either the techno-elite or a subset of the financially elite. Those who are online otherwise remain a minority.

That's going to change, however, as telecomputing becomes more and more a "legitimate" product/service. And telecomputing will indeed become legitimate. The majority will adopt it over the next decade, in the same manner as we adopted cable TV, VCRs, FAX machines, and telephones. Why? Because, like those other technologies, telecomputing is information exchange . . . and with information exchange comes freedom—not to mention the desire to have access to everything.

All in all, it looks as if telecomputing outside the Western world is merely a decade or so behind us—and catching up fast.

Things to Come

All this talk about what's happening with international telecomputing has me thinking about what the future holds.

The Online Elite Revisited

Some leftover comments on online elitism . . .

I spoke earlier in this issue (and in the previous issue) about an "online elite." We networkers in the Western world are an elite (of which I'll provide an example in a couple paragraphs). But we'll become less so over the next three years as the cost of going online—in cash and knowledge—continues to drop and modem communication becomes as "legitimate" in the marketplace as VCRs and pizzas.

In the meantime, a lot of people are smearing us with the same brush as the ubiquitous "rich man" and "Illuminati." The "lot of people" are those who hear about what goes online but aren't online. I've seen this happen time and again. Basically, those who aren't online are afraid they're missing something (they are), and that they're being barred from information and contacts (they aren't).

I first grappled with this issue a couple of years ago, when I was asked by some people in a national writers' organization of which I'm a member

(okay, it was the Science Fiction Writers of America, aka SFWA) to try to quell a flap over someone not online misunderstanding what "goes on" online. The best I could do (and it was and is legitimate) was to explain that the public, private, and semi-private exchange of information about which the offline person was paranoid was in its net effect nothing more than what went on via "street mail" letters, voice telephone conversations, and in-person chats.

It wasn't accepted then, and it's not being accepted now. In my capacity as Online Committee chairperson for SFWA, I set up a panel at a recent SFWA event, at which one or two offline people in the audience made accusations of conspiracies and power-plays and information control on the part of those online. If such exist (attempts at these things exist, anyway), it is no more than goes on in the physical world, albeit faster at times.

But we'll never convince those offline of that. So the offline "lots of people" brand those online as an elite group,

CONTINUED NEXT PAGE

So I've put together some of my thoughts on what's likely to be happening in the global online world (mainly involving its interfaces with the real world) over the next few years.

Note that these are not straight predictions (that's a con game), but extrapolations to which we can assign fairly high probabilities. Too, I've deleted a couple of them since I began writing this last month—because they came true, two or three years before the time I'd assigned to them.

1990–1991

Soviet special-interest groups spring up on various online services.

A few American BBS freaks dial into Eesti BBS #1 in Tallin, Estonia and copy off message bases and files, which are then uploaded to various online services and BBSs in the US. Similar material snakes its way westward via Internet.

Eesti BBS #1 is joined by other non-commercial Baltic and Eastern European BBSs.

1992–1993

CompuServe is the first computer network to offer TASS, the official Soviet news service, online; the surcharged

service is provided to CompuServe on a one-year exclusive basis for an undisclosed sum.

As topics covered by Russia's American-distributed *Soviet Life* magazine continue to mirror those in various American cultural and news magazines, the magazine runs a special feature on Soviet hackers, focusing on underground BBSs in Baltic nations and in Leningrad and Moscow. The tone is one of mild rebuke.

More and more Russian citizens sign on to American online services under the auspices of various institutions like the Soviet Academy of Sciences.

A few Eastern Europeans and residents of former Soviet states begin showing up on

American online services, some as individual citizens but more under the auspices of governmental agencies.

Russian and Eastern European hackers begin working the new packet network and other links to the West, and show up on Internet as well as various commercial online services and private BBSs. They are particularly ingenious in their techniques, which require that they use relatively ancient and unprotected telephone technology to gateway into more sophisticated systems in the Western world. They quickly discover that they are easily tracked and nailed, and their successors devise still more ingenious techniques to cover their trails.

1993-1995

A consortium consisting of General Electric, the now British-owned BT Tymnet, and unnamed investors vies with the com-

simply because they have access to communications channels' knowledge (and gossip) faster.

Interestingly enough, it has been my experience that those offliners who cry "Elitists!" are those who are most able but least likely to gain access to online services. Which is to say, they're the kind of people who either misunderstand things, and/or *like* to have problems. (I'm not certain this is true in the latter instance, but in general it is.)

On the other side of the coin, I should re-emphasize that the people you and I meet online who are not in the US, where telecom costs are low, are an

elite group, indeed. For it costs much in money and knowledge to get online if you're living in Tokyo or Buenos Aires. It's not unlike (to haul out the realtime metaphor again) foreigners visiting or moving to the US—you will rarely, if ever, meet someone from another country who was without money or power or special knowledge or training, or some special ability that enabled him or her to get here. Thus, we don't really meet the "common man" via a virtual visit to other countries—not yet, anyway. But, what the heck—being part of an elite group isn't *all* bad. [*<SMIRK>*, as we say online.]

bined forces of IBM and AT&T to win the right to provide commercial data communications links with Leningrad and Moscow via X.400 communications links through Austria and Germany. (This will offer links mainly with western Europe, with limited availability to North America and Asia.)

GENie, via its GEIS international X.25 service, offers limited service to residents of Moscow and Leningrad, as well as to various former Soviet states. The links are into Western Europe, with packet-switching networks like US Sprint and GE/BT Tymnet as record carriers.

With the increasing availability of hard currency in Russia, a relatively large number

(scores) of individual Russian citizens open accounts on American and British commercial online services. These will be professionals, intent on establishing information businesses and/or enhancing their own professional activities with information from the West. (Behind the scenes, an arm of the Russian internal security service—your guess—notices the information interchange and begins monitoring it, with no expressed or real intent.)

Online Security

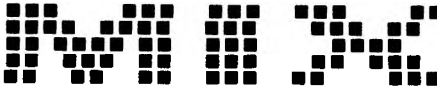
Speaking of hackers (and I was, a few dozen lines back) I've another bomb (well, a grenade in this case) to drop, along the lines of the unknown threat Wall Street and the money-heads mentioned in my first column. This time it has to do with computer data security.

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MIX login (enter "mix"): mix

***** M I X C O S Y 3.1.3J *****

日経



Nikkei Mix Information Exchange

Copyright (c) 1988 by Nikkei Business Publications, Inc.

CoSy Conferencing Software originally developed by
the University of Guelph, Guelph, Canada

Name? chino_a

Password:

あなたのラストログオンは、01月 16日 09時 47分です。
2 通のメールがあなたの受信メールボックスにあります。
あなたは 6 会議のメンバーになっています。

From Memo * Date
imaoka 54195 R Sat Dec 2 00:07 お久しぶりです
psh 66090 R Fri Dec 15 02:06 みっけっ！
To Memo * Date
psh 86902 Wed Jan 10 10:50 まいど
acchan chino_a hktwin kawagisi maeJun ono.ari shunichi
akio daigo litten kayumi manma oza_jun smura
ark.y danna Jean kiku maonyan pdp_7 snakayam
bal fksuny k.kanal kkat muransky pookas tasuzuki
cherry higasliur kashihar kumachan muzco.t sdouchi thosaka

会議名 / 分科全名 新しいメッセージ

system.news/main	385
system.news/closed.conf	8
sf/novels	947
sf/db	5
ax/digest	7
ax/main	422
long2/text	83
long2/pds2	270
long2/pds3	133
!bm.pc/digest	4
!bm.pc/main	331
!bm.pc/nihongo	272
!bm.pc/import	315

You all know what hackers are, how they break into systems and steal data for fun and/or profit, etc. This, thanks to the mainstream news media, which portrays them in a somewhat glamorous vein, like modern-day counterparts of corsairs in historical novels. The threat to data posed by *real* hackers has been missed, in large part, because the media prefers to focus on hackers who get caught, and on *soi-disant* computer security experts who emphasize the sensationalistic and speak knowingly of viruses.

(Compare John McAfee getting literally hours of air time and gallons of ink in the national media, with FLU_SHOT+ author Ross Greenberg getting maybe ninety seconds on CNN. The disparity comes from Ross's providing a level-headed, step-by-step

approach to virus protection. No blood-and-guts there . . . but I digress— as I shall whenever I can take a shot at media air-headedness. After all, is not the implied purpose of the *news* media to inform rather than entertain? Or am I inferring too much and is the avowed purpose of the media to not only sway but dictate public opinions, topple governments, and the like?)

That's not the only threat to data and privacy that's been missed. An equally dangerous threat, that of accidental data sharing or disclosure, has been mentioned *not once* in any book or article on computer security.

And what constitutes accidental data sharing? Easy: Someone mistakenly includes your E-mail address in a distribution list, or sends E-mail intended for someone else to you because your online ID is similar to that of the intended addressee. I've had it happen several times on one system in particular. I've received corporate-confidential information that conceivably could have been sold to a certain mega-corporation's competitors (something, I hasten to add, I didn't do; my ethics run counter to accepted Yuppie and pirate practices. If they didn't, I wouldn't be scrambling to make car payments.) I've received even more sensitive information. All because someone didn't pay attention to what he or she was typing. (Where this happened is your guess; I'm now on 31 networks with 36 IDs.)

The hell of it is, it's something that's easily fixed. And, no, I won't warn the service of it. Not at the moment, anyway. Why? I mentioned ethics a few lines back; in addition to what I said there, I have ethics that say "No" to professional rape. To keep it short, I won't give away my knowledge and expertise to a large corporation when said corporation is paying kilobucks to employees and "consultants" who are supposed to catch this stuff.

But, be warned; a typo, a tired person sending E-mail, or someone who's inattentive or untrained—any of these can result in sensitive data being given to those who shouldn't have it.

(Hm . . . there's a story in this, perhaps. Let's see . . . Big Bucks Corp. is losing big bucks because of a data leak. The data leak is an accident, but it means Someone's job, so Someone covers his

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=== P C - V A N === (MAIN)

1. 今週の新サービス 1 / 1 0
2. S I G
3. 電子メール
4. 電子掲示板
5. 電子会議室
6. O L T (＊)
7. -
8. ニュース／スポーツ／天気
9. マネー／ビジネス
10. ショッピング
11. 情報ファイル
12. C U G
13. P C - V A N 利用情報 1 / 4 (無料)
- Q. 終了

ass by inventing a hacker. Hm... could be particularly interesting if it were a national security leak...)

The Reading List (at last!)

Okay, here's the skinny: Whether you're new to this stuff or not, buy and read any of the books on this list that you haven't read (yes—even mine), with the exception of those branded as technical if you're not of a technical bent. I've intentionally left out some books that you've probably already read.

The bottom line: each of these is worth ordering if you can't find it in your favorite bookstore.

Communications and Networking for the IBM PC and Compatibles, by Larry Jordan and Bruce Churchill (good if you want to learn the tech-hardware end of things; Brady Books/Simon & Schuster)

The Cuckoo's Egg, by Clifford Stoll (you know—the bestseller; Bantam Books)

The Hacker, by Chet Day (interesting horror novel involving hackers—ignore the reviews and judge for yourself; Pocket Books)

The Matrix, by John S. Quarterman (non-fiction, explains computer networks around the world; Digital Press)

The Modem Reference, by Michael A. Banks (Brady Books/Simon & Schuster; a revised edition is due early in 1991, but the

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current edition is still good—has everything you need to know about buying and using a modem, getting online, what's online, etc.)

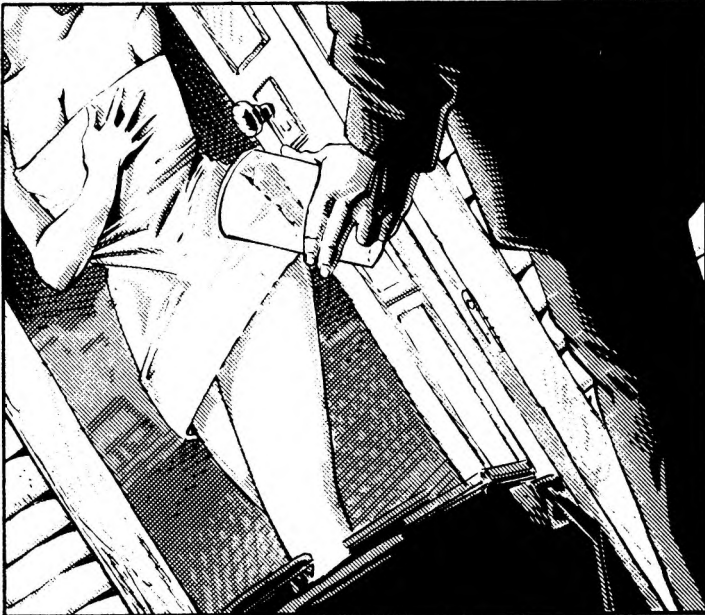
Synners, by Pat Cadigan (a novel, forthcoming from Bantam/Spectra)

True Names, by Vernor Vinge (a collection of short stories that also contains the novelette, "True Names," which is required reading; currently in print in a Baen Books edition)

Understanding Data Communications (good reference for tech-heads; pick it up at your local Radio Shack store)

That's a start. I'll add books to this list under an *In Print* header in the next volume and each time thereafter.

That's it for now. Next edition: the much-overrated compu-sex phenomenon, copyright theft (a bit of a scandal revealed), more international stuff, and whatever looks interesting. In the meantime, have fun!



Illustrations by Mark A. Nelson

Melinda Brindley has written, directed, and acted for theatre, film, and television, including dozens of plays and occasional stand-up comedy appearances. Her “Letter to the Editor” and “Reader of the Year” parodies appear earlier in this volume.

fiction

Melinda Brindley

the subject was

Tupperware

Call me Hans.

That's not my name but I like it.

I'll start at the middle, near the ending.

I knew she was trouble from the word "Go." That's the first thing she said to me: "Go." That's when I knew she was trouble.

I'm a self-made man. I sell Tupperware.

I rang her doorbell. I lit her fire. I blew her mind. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

She answered the door. She wore a towel. Nothing else.

She asked what I was selling.

But I didn't hear her questions, all I could see were those legs, all I could hear were those legs, all I could think about was—

She slapped my face.

"Mind-reader," I quipped.

"Asshole," she replied.

I showed her what I had to offer. She slapped me again. Then I showed her some Tupperware.

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"You move awfully fast," she said. "I didn't even say I was interested."

"I'll make you interested," I said.

"You're pretty sure of yourself."

"I've got a good product."

"I've heard that before." She sat on the couch, crossing those legs. She lit a cigarette. "Why should I believe you?"

I showed her our Jumbo Tumbler. "Pretty good size, you've got to admit."

"I've seen bigger." She burped it, letting the air out. Then she added, "Suppose I told you I prefer baggies."



"Suppose you run out."

"Suppose I buy more."

"Suppose you get a flat."

"Suppose I fix it."

"Suppose you need help."

"Yours?"

"Maybe."

She laughed then, a dry laugh. "Get out of here."

I knew I had to act fast.

I brought out our free gift.

"Suppose I threw in our deviled-egg tree."

"I don't want it."

"I think you do."

She stared at the Tuppy Egg Tree. "Free?"

"That's right, baby. All you have to do is ask."

She stood up. "I don't beg."

"And I don't push a sale." I put my wares into my suitcase.

"Here's my card. You know where to find me."

"Wait . . ."

I turned.

"Maybe . . . I could use . . . a lettuce-crisper—" she began.

"Don't waste my time, lady."

She lightly fingered my suitcase. "Perhaps I've been too hasty."

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“Perhaps you have.”

“Why don’t you—stay a moment.”

I looked at her. “Sometimes baggies aren’t enough, are they?”

She turned away. “Sometimes—I feel the need for . . . some other form of food storage . . . ”

“Don’t fight it . . . ”



“All right. All right, yes, damn you, yes—I *need Tupperware!*”

I made that sale.

And that customer.



Stuart Hamm

Stuart Hamm

AN INTERVIEW

The Bass Player's Bass Player
profiled & cross-examined
by Joe Silver

The house lights are dimmed at the Beacon Theater in Manhattan, and Joe Satriani and his band walk out onto the stage. The predominantly young, black leather- and spandex-clad audience launches into an ecstatic, raucous pre-concert frenzy of hooting and hollering. Prominent among the din is what initially sounds like a sizeable contingent of boos. However, it is readily apparent that it is not *Boo* that these people are yelling, but *Stu*.

The object of this adulation is 30 year old bassist Stuart Hamm, who, on the basis of aural evidence, seems to have virtually as many partisans in the crowd as does Satriani. His performance during the next two hours bears out the audience's enthusiasm—in fact, the most frequent comment overheard later from patrons leaving after the show was, "Stuart Hamm was great!"

For most of the show Hamm fulfills the role of the ideal hard rock ensemble bass player, laying down simple, supportive bass lines with energy and conviction and along with drummer Jonathan Mover, providing a solid backdrop for the leader's wild guitar excursions. There *are* several moments, though, when Stu has the opportunity to shine, displaying the qualities that

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make him one of the most respected practitioners on his instrument today. In order to recreate the multiple guitar parts on some of Satriani's songs, Hamm occasionally uses an unorthodox two-handed tapping technique (similar to that employed by guitarists such as Eddie Van Halen and Stanley Jordan) to play, in effect, guitar and bass parts at the same time. On two songs Hamm plays fretless bass in an expressive, singing style reminiscent of his idol, the late bass innovator Jaco Pastorius.

For bass *aficionados*, a highlight of the show is Stu's extended solo spot, incorporating a medley of his "greatest hits" — "Surely the Best" and "Count Zero," from his recent *Kings of Sleep* album; Vince Guaraldi's "Linus and Lucy" (a piano piece written for the early Peanuts television specials which has become a signature of sorts for Hamm in live performances); and "Country Music (A Night in Hell)," a tongue-in-cheek banjo-style romp. Hamm's performance is technically dazzling, yet thoroughly entertaining throughout. As Satriani says, "A lot of people have technique, but Stu has the knack for making people *enjoy* it."

Stuart Hamm was born in New Orleans and grew up in Champaign, Illinois. As a youngster he played piano and oboe, but later switched to the electric bass. He first tried to emulate rock bassists John Entwistle, of the Who, and Chris Squire, of Yes. Later, as an undergraduate at Berklee School of Music in Boston, he fell under the influence of the two men who sparked a revolution in electric bass technique and sound in the mid-'seventies, Jaco Pastorius and Stanley Clarke. His current style is rooted in the concepts brought forth by these important figures, but he has also charted new territory of his own, most notably in the area of two-handed tapping, which enables him to play chords, arpeggios and counterpoint lines, like a pianist.

Hamm has distinguished himself as a sideman on guitarist Steve Vai's *Flex-able*, *Flex-able Leftovers*, and *Passion and Warfare*, and on Satriani's *Dreaming #11* (three live tracks) and *Flying in a Blue Dream* (two songs). His own solo albums, *Radio Free Albemuth* (Relativity 8209, 1988) and *Kings of Sleep* (Relativity 8193, 1989), showcase his astounding virtuosity. He pulled out all the stops on



Radio Free Albemuth, his debut, with bass arrangements of two classical piano pieces, and an abundance of prodigious bass technique displayed throughout the album, as well as guitar guest appearances by both Satriani and Allan Holdsworth. While *Kings of Sleep* also leaves no doubt that, yes, this guy can play, the album is both more rock-influenced and more song-oriented than its predecessor, with flashy bass-playing relegated to a somewhat subordinate role.

A notable aspect of Stu's music is the influence of science fiction. Hamm is an avid reader, and a number of his pieces are inspired by (and titled after) sf works. *Radio Free Albemuth* takes its title from a Philip K. Dick novel, while *Kings of Sleep* is named after a hit album in William Gibson's short story, "The Winter Market" (included in Gibson's collection, *Burning Chrome*). The first album

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contains a delicate, intimate piece called “Flow My Tears” (named for another Dick book), which Hamm himself describes as “one of the better ones I’ve written in terms of capturing the mood of the original story.” Among the song titles on *Kings of Sleep* are “Black Ice” (jargon for cyberspace security “software” in Gibson’s *Neuromancer*), “Count Zero” (the title of a Gibson novel), and “Terminal Beach” (a short story by J.G. Ballard, one of Hamm’s favorite authors).

I spoke with Stuart Hamm while he was touring with Joe Satriani in support of the latter’s *Flying in a Blue Dream* album. Our conversation took place in his hotel room in New York City prior to the first show of a two-night engagement at the Beacon Theater. Hamm’s past interviews have been primarily with music trade publications; one of his objectives in granting an interview for *Journal Wired* is to try to introduce himself and his music to a more general audience. Before we began, he quipped, “This will probably be my first interview where I don’t get asked what kind of bass strings I use.” Nevertheless, for those of you who care, Stuart Hamm volunteered the information: GHS Bass Boomers, gauges .045 to .105.

JS: It’s rare for an artist to achieve widespread mainstream popular success with instrumental music. Are you hoping to do so?

SH: I’d like to think that, in some aspects, my music is an art form. I’ve been fortunate enough for the first two records that there’s been no one from the label telling me what kind of music to play, so I’ve been able to make exactly the records that I hear in my head. And it’s reached a few people—but, then again, we’d all like . . . I’d like to buy my father’s house in Vermont and raise kids.

Seeing the success that Joe [Satriani] has had . . . maybe I could pattern my music a *little* bit to fit more in his market. I don’t know what selling out is, but there is something inside me that I would like to say, and obviously I would like to have

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as many people hear it as possible. If that means making a few songs a little heavier rock to get one out of every ten people that buy Joe's record to buy mine, I could do that. But I certainly could never put out anything with my name on it that would just be crass, commercial bullshit.

JS: Would you ever consider doing any vocals?

SH: Oh, absolutely! I've sung my whole career. My problem with vocals is that I'm such a fan of . . . you know, I read a lot, I collect books. And my talent seems to be . . . I think it was Stravinsky who said that there are some emotions you can express through music that you can't through words, and I've worked primarily at communicating through the music. When I try to write lyrics, it's often very overt—you know, just "I love you." If I can come up with lyrics that I feel comfortable with, yeah, I'd love to sing them. I'm still hoping that they're someplace inside me and I can just find them, get them out. I've written one song where I'm real happy with the way the lyrics came out.

JS: Do you have a specific target audience in mind? Do you picture a certain type of person buying your music?

SH: Unfortunately—and much to the record company's chagrin—no, I don't. At this point it's been, as I've said, the music that I have heard in my head, and I feel real fortunate to be able to put it out there. Part of me would certainly like to sell a lot of records and make the money from that, but another part of me sees me playing with Satriani, with other big rock bands, touring six months out of the year and making lots of money with *that*, and then being able to keep my albums, you know, "aesthetically pure," or whatever.

JS: How do you like working as a sideman, as opposed to pursuing your own projects?

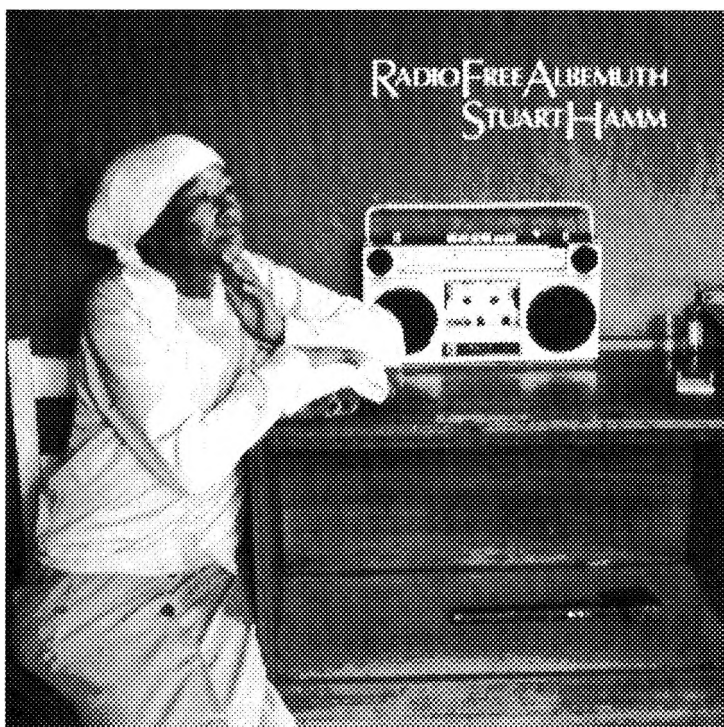
SH: With Satriani, it's a unique situation, because I've done a lot of other gigs where I have been just a sideman, but, this band being a power trio, I really get to put a lot of my personality into it. A lot of people come specifically to see me, and I get my solo spot. The live shows are radically different from

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the records, where the rhythm section is pretty straight and Joe solos over it; we *all* have a chance to play. So I really don't view it as being a sideman. The three of us are really a *band* up there. But obviously, ultimately I'd like to be playing for lots of people, playing *my* music.

JS: You began playing music at an early age. Have you always wanted to make music your career?

SH: When I was graduating high school, my plans were either to go to music school or film school. I really wanted to go to film school. Boy, I would have made some *disgusting* horror movies! But I think I knew from a pretty early age that I had, you know, some talent on the bass. I remember when I was playing in my junior high school jazz band at a competition in Illinois, and this guy, a director from another school, came up to me afterwards and said, "Hey, you've really got something



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special—keep with it!” When you’re fourteen, that goes a long way. That’s why, when I talk to young fans who are bassists, I really try to encourage them and not be a jerk.

JS: Are there any musicians, not necessarily bass players, whom you would cite as having had a particular influence on your musical development?

SH: Yeah. I’d say Miles Davis is probably the biggest.

When I was young, I was into Yes and all this art-rock stuff. A couple of friends of mine kept playing me tapes of jazz, trying to broaden my horizons, and I’d always say to them, “Ahh, Miles Davis, he plays out of tune, he plays wrong notes . . . ” I wasn’t into it. When I really started *listening*—I was listening to his solo on “So What” from *Kind of Blue*—I could hear him *talk*. Y’know? [sings first four notes of Miles’s solo] I mean, here’s a guy who totally transcends notes and scales, and just *communicates*—his early stuff maybe a little more than now.

Jaco Pastorius was definitely a big influence. When I first moved to Boston, I was still pretty much a rocker. I really wasn’t familiar with either him or Weather Report. On November 8, 1978, I saw him at the Orpheum Theatre, and it just changed my life.

JS: Are there any teachers you have had who have been especially influential?

SH: I’d have to say no. I learned a lot by just listening to records. First I copied John Entwistle’s licks, then Chris Squire’s, then I heard Jaco and I ripped the frets out of my bass and put my hair in dreadlocks, then I heard Stanley Clarke and I wanted to be the fastest bass player . . . you know, as a musician you just assimilate all these different styles. You learn the alphabet, then the vocabulary, then you reach a point where you’ve taken all this stuff in and you start making your own words—finding your own voice, or style.

JS: So would you downplay the role of formal education in your musical background?

SH: For me, yeah. Where I lived in Illinois, they had a great high school jazz band—state champions. I wanted to be in that

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band, so I learned to play bass by studying the Mel Bay bass method books and reading jazz chord changes. Then when I went to Berklee, I had some good teachers there—Rich Appleman, Bruce Gertz—but they had so many students that *couldn't* play that when they realized I *could* play, they gave me more *conceptual* types of lessons.

I have a problem with teaching; it's not one of my favorite things to do, because you can't really *teach* anybody anything. You can show them some of your licks, or you can point them in the directions of what to study and listen to, but you can't *teach* anybody how to play; they have to just work it out for themselves.

JS: Your instructional video contains a lot of useful material for bassists.

SH: And boy, am I *fat* in it too, huh!?! *Whooo!* [laughs]
It's good for just showing the basis of that technique.

Then the thing is for you to take it beyond that. Obviously, the objective is not for everyone to walk around playing the Charlie Brown theme—although some people do! [laughs]

JS: You toured for a year with an Elvis impersonator named El John. Any comments about that experience?

SH: Well, now that it's over, it was great! You know, I look back to all those years I was living—and that's using the term loosely!—starving in Boston, and you look back and say, "Boy, that was really a character builder," but they were *horrible* times, you know? But in the long run, I wouldn't trade it. I certainly learned something from all those experiences; it makes me appreciate whatever level of success I've got now. I've known other musicians that have made it pretty young, and they don't seem to have as much of a grasp of . . . you know, you get a real knowledge of music playing "Proud Mary" forty thousand times, as opposed to people who don't really know the pop song format. Plus, it kept me alive, y'know?

JS: Did you do any other unusual gigs in your formative years which you'd care to discuss?

SH: Oh, I've done 'em all! I'm a war veteran. Club dates,

Atlantic City, cruise ships . . . I played on a “cruise to nowhere” from Cape Canaveral, Florida. They’d just go out in international waters and open the casino, and people would play blackjack. It was the *gutter* of cruise ships—I mean, it burned down after I got off; they had a big fire. They finally condemned the thing!

. . . you can’t
really *teach*
anybody anything
. . . they just have
to work it out
for themselves.

JS: Have you ever considered writing music for movies or television?

SH: Oh, I’d love to, absolutely! I’ll do the soundtrack for *Alien III*, with William Gibson writing the screenplay—sure! [laughs] Music is really *emotions*, and writing music for films, I think, would be just total emotion.

JS: Also, the fact that many of your pieces are inspired by books or short stories suggests that coupling music with images would be a natural pursuit for you.

SH: Yeah, most of the stuff I write comes from . . . some of it is obviously based on licks or riffs I come up with while practicing, but it’s mostly just emotions. Like “Kings of Sleep,” you know, that short story, trying to take what I feel from that and then trying to translate it into the music.

JS: The cover of the *Kings of Sleep* album is quite striking.

SH: Yeah, I like it. It’s like a “before and after” type of thing, where the front cover is really bleak and the back cover represents a ray of hope. Originally, what I wanted to do for the front cover was have, strewn all over the background, old tape machines—reel-to-reels—and then, on the back, have me playing and all the kids listening on high-tech headphones to what I’m playing. However, we didn’t quite have the budget for that.

The cover of *Radio Free Albemuth* also relates to a science fiction work—in this case, the book of the same title by Philip K. Dick. In the book, God, or whoever, has a satellite

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orbiting the earth which beams down messages of hope to people in times of great need. Anyway, my father took that picture, with the woman listening to the radio with the axe there, in the black township of Grahamstown, South Africa. That one worked out really well. I mean, if anyone needs divine help and inspiration, it's those people.

JS: Do you think sf fans would have a particular empathy for your music?

SH: I don't know. I'd like to think so. There's a science fiction bookstore—Dangerous Visions, in Sherman Oaks, California, where I live—where I walked in and it turned out that the girl there had copies of my albums. And I've had a few good write-ups in the Philip K. Dick Society Newsletter, and letters from members. I don't know to categorize a science fiction audience, but they might like some of the mellower stuff; I'm not sure about the rock.

JS: With the proliferation of synthesizer and sampled bass today in contexts where the electric bass was once a ubiquitous element, do you think that the future of the electric bass belongs primarily to players who are interested in soloing and striving for new sounds and techniques, rather than those who choose to play in a more traditional ensemble style?

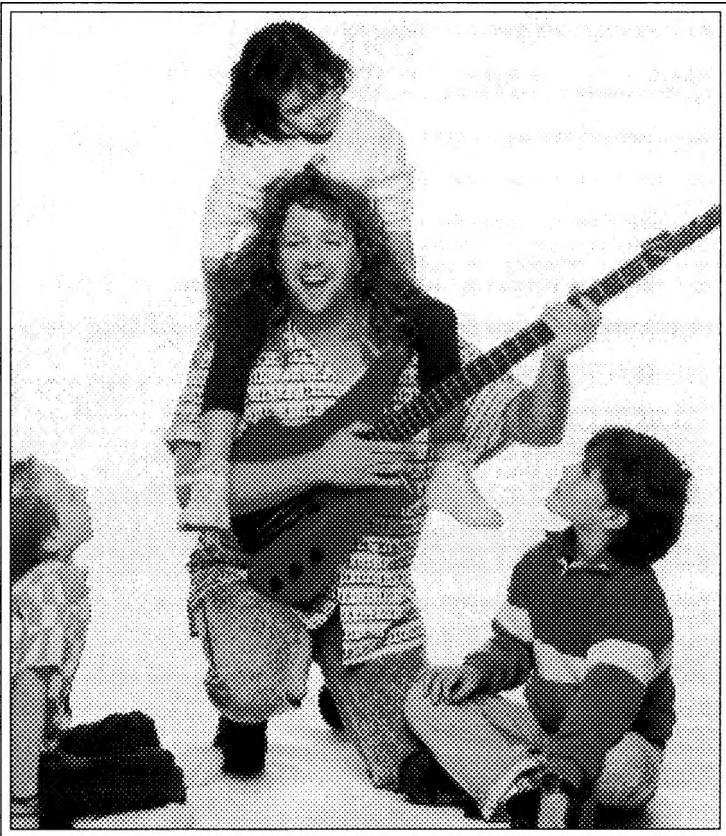
SH: I think synthesizer bass is a trendy fad. I certainly will admit to being an incredible snob about that. I hear a song like Janet Jackson's "When I Think Of You," where the bass line is played on a Yamaha DX7 synthesizer—I mean, that makes me crazy. But I have to feel that way 'cause I do play bass. I think there's always going to be a place for the four string bass. There will be some branches of music which will be totally sequenced and synthesized, but that can only go so far. People want to see and hear *interaction*. There are some songs where I like keyboard bass quite a lot—like some of the Chaka Khan stuff where they mix synthesizer with "live" bass. Hall and Oats do that, too. But I don't think it will ever . . . I mean, you look at someone like [studio musician and "Late Night With David Letterman" bassist] Will Lee, who's one of the best

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bass players in the world. He's not an outstanding stylist, but he does every style great and he *grooves*. Those kind of guys are always going to be in demand. There's no replacing a *real* bass player.

JS: At this point in your musical relationship with Joe Satriani, are you still learning from one another?

SH: He's the most consummate musician I've ever played with. As far as musical knowledge goes, I can always pick up stuff from him. He and Jonathan Mover and I have a really



Stuart Hamm with “rented” kids,
from the back cover of *Kings of Sleep*

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special communication. Some people think playing Joe's songs must be like playing in a cover band, but it's not at all. We play the *shit* out of them. We don't just, you know, "oh, play this chord . . ." We actually go BALLS TO THE WALL ROCK AND ROLL!! I love it!

JS: In an interview in the November 1989 issue of *Guitar Player Magazine*, Joe said that he was planning to add a fourth piece to the band for the *Flying in a Blue Dream* tour.

SH: We went through all that. We added a rhythm guitar player, and *then* it sounded like a cover band playing Satriani songs. The fact that there was a rhythm guitar player there playing definite parts every time took away a lot of the spark and interaction and energy that a live band has to have. It was too restricting to have a fourth member there. And without a rhythm guitar, I get to do a lot of my two-handed stuff; I get to play bass and rhythm in songs, whereas if we had a rhythm guitar or keyboards then I'd be back to being more of a *bass player* and less *Stu*.

JS: Is Jonathan involved in any other projects besides touring and recording with you and Joe?

SH: Yeah. He was in the Soviet Union for four months touring with a band called Skolly; he just got back. He was in a band called GTR, with Steve Howe and Steve Hackett. And he does a lot of session work. He's probably going to do some drum programming on my next album.

JS: You're planning to use drum machine on the album?

SH: Well, possibly—for composing the songs, and . . . I definitely want to get into more *sounds*. I might use sampled drum sounds triggered by live drums. For an *ostinato*, sequence-type percussion line, I have no problem with using drum machine if it fits the song. But I certainly wouldn't have [mouth noises simulating a simple rock drum pattern] played by a machine.

Usually, when we record, I'll play live with Jonathan to a click track to have the energy of live playing, rather than him just sitting there playing alone. Obviously, I wipe those bass tracks and go back and fix them.

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JS: When you say you want to “get into new sounds,” does that include varying the sound of your bass with signal processing?

SH: Thumbs down! I go straight into my amp. You know, it amazes me; I perform at trade shows, and people approach me and say, “You gotta hear this MIDI [synthesizer interface] bass thing, man! You play the ‘Moonlight Sonata,’ and it’ll sound just like a piano! Well, shit, I can *play* it on piano! [laughs] If that’s what I wanted to sound like I’d play it on the piano! No, that’s some other people’s bag.

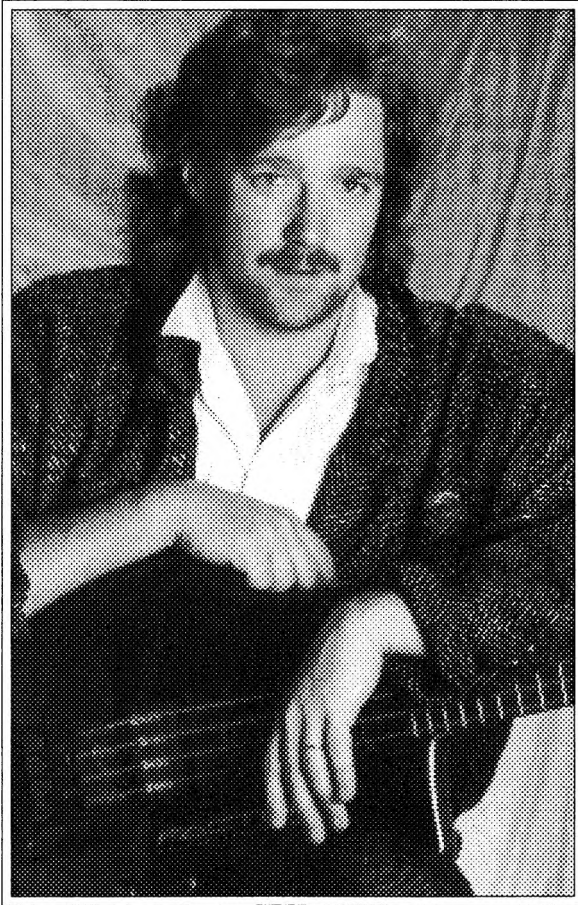
JS: Considering that much of what you play on the instrument is “un-basslike” in the conventional sense, what initially attracted you to the bass as a vehicle for your musical expression?

SH: Do you *really* want to know? Do you remember the show called *The Partridge Family*? Well, when I was a fourteen year old, red-haired, fat geek, Danny Bonaduce was also a fourteen year old, red-haired, fat geek, and he was my idol. It was great, because he’d be playing these bass lines with large interval leaps, and his hand wouldn’t be moving; it would be on one fret! I’ve been practicing that for my whole career, and I *still* can’t do that! Also, I went with a friend to Eisner Park in Champaign, Illinois, around ’72, and there was a rock band set up on the tennis courts. The bass player had this white, curly cord to his amp. I just thought that cord looked so cool—so I learned to play bass. Not good reasons, but they’re the only ones I’ve got.

The bass is both melodic and rhythmic; it unites the band. And you have ultimate power. If we’re playing a song and I go to the bridge, the song goes to the bridge; it’s everyone else who’s made the mistake! Wrong and strong, you know; no meekness involved. If you make a mistake, make it *look* good.

With Joe’s gig, 80% of the time I’m playing eighth notes, just grooving. But live, I *love* that! It’s so much fun; it’s a blast!

JS: How much of your composing do you do on the bass, versus the piano or other instruments?



SH: Quite a lot of it. I'll write melodies on guitar or keyboards for a different angle, but most of it's on bass. The best thing about using both hands on the bass fretboard is that I've finally, really got a concept of chordal stuff on bass. I can really visualize it a lot better, and it's helped with my writing.

JS: How do you feel about having your music and Joe's categorized by some people as *jazz*?

SH: It's funny; I won the *Guitar Player Magazine* 1989 Readers' Poll in the "Best Jazz Bassist" category. I mean,

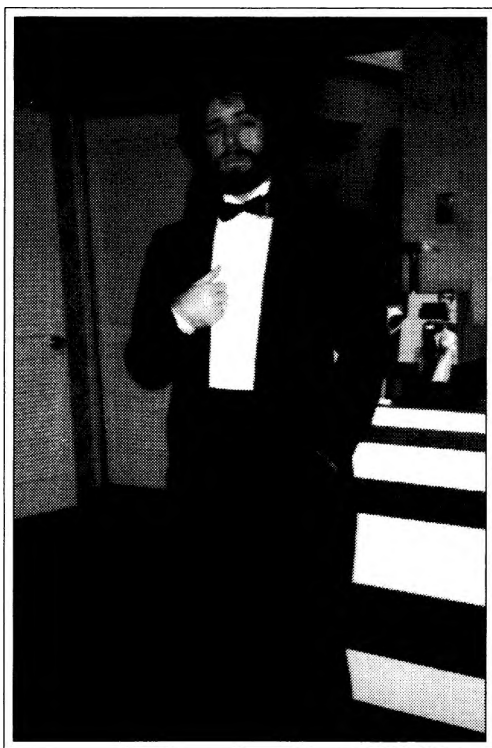
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I'm honored; it's the crowning achievement of my life, because I remember when I was eighteen years old, reading *Guitar Player*, looking at Jaco—who was voted “Best Jazz Bassist” at the time—and thinking, “Someday I'm going to win that.” To realize that goal and to see my name alongside Jaco and Jeff Berlin—I can't tell you how that makes me feel. But I also feel like calling up [Chick Corea bassist] John Pattitucci and saying, “Sorry!” I mean, I haven't played *jazz* in five years! People think that, if no one's singing, it's jazz.

Live, however, I think a lot of what we do is more jazz than Kenny G., because to me, jazz is not laying down some straight groove while one person solos over it. We reach points during the night when we just absolutely go for it. The three of us communicate and experiment. To me, that's what the essence of jazz is, instrumentation aside. I got into jazz because of Miles [Davis's] *Bitches Brew* and *Jack Johnson*, and Weather Report—the energy, the real excitement and drive.

JS: Do you plan to do live performances with a band of your own in the near future?

SH: Oh, absolutely! I already got a band together and did about five dates in California. Depending on how long Joe's tour goes, I might go back out and do a club tour to promote *Kings of Sleep*—do thirty dates, you know, a six week tour—or just go in, record the new album, and come back out and do a tour to promote it. It remains to be seen; I've got a lot of time to work on that one.



J. B. Reynolds
Screenwriter and Raconteur
Sonoma County, California
a regular contributor to this journal

Illustrations for *Over the Shoulder* were drawn
by Ellen Kiyler

commentary

J. B. Reynolds

WELL DON'T JUST SIT THERE!

A Compleat User's Guide
To The Motion Picture Phenomenon,
Specifically: Your Part In It

•••••

Why do something poorly, when you can just as easily do it right?

Just like every gold ring in the world is said to contain a few flecks of Pharaoh Ramses' gold, I think every human family's gene pool has a few raggedy DNA strands of my Uncle Dwight floating around in it—or perhaps caught in the filter. Uncle Dwight was that man who freely cast out such aphorisms as the one above, every time he came over for a family occasion, which was plenty too often for me as he did nothing but follow the children around and preach at them. It's impossible to make small talk with somebody like him and it wasn't because he smelled of cigars (Dwight's breath was rumored to have been mentioned in a codicil of the Geneva Convention) nor that he had, in fact, never held a job in his life outside the Army (having survived Korea and eleven subsequent years of peacetime petrification), it was that Dwight knew the best possible way of doing *anything*, the more mundane, the better.

Serving red wine?

Of course when you see a decanter nowadays it's because someone is

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too embarrassed to show you the bottle but in point of fact a red wine from a decanter should signify that it was actually 'decanted,' which is to say an extremely lusty Bordeaux has the tendency . . .

Buttering toast?

Well you know your ordinary folk will just mash on the butter any old way, there, but those who know better can get the best out of their toast if they just hold the knife like this—like this—see? Like this . . .

Washing hands?

Hey Buckaroo now you don't want to put down a dirty bar there in the dish so howzabout giving her a little rinse there and while you're at it it's always prish-iated to swish a little of that water there around the basin . . .

Watching television?

You know there's a scientist did this speriment that it's always best if you turn on one or two lights in the room when you're viewing the TV because you know your the optic nerve will start to . . .

Taking a snapshot?

So what size is that lens?

"About a half inch across."

No no, what millimeter?

"I dunno, it's an Instamatic. Hold still."

Myself I always find that the best portrait results can usually be obtained with an eighty-five millimeter Zeiss.

"Smile." [click]

Ah, now if you were to put a small patch of tough-spun diffusion medium over that flash unit then the redness that an incandescent flash generates in people's eyes might . . .

And so on. Dwight never tired. It was his mission in life to illuminate the obscured, to eat their food, to make their drapes smell funny for days just by exhaling. And to follow their children from room to room discussing career opportunities for those special few who *really want to get ahead*.

Funny thing, though: as I got older and went to fewer dynastic feasts, I realized that by golly, Dwight was *right* about most of the shit he'd been babbling all those years! He may have been about

as inspiring as Oliver North but **he spoke the truth!**

So all of you who are wrinkling up your noses at the thought of someone telling you how you should go to the movies, well, keep in mind that since there are a great many ways to do it, there's probably a *best* way and my unique combi-

nation of long, serious training, professional expertise, natural talent and direct blood lineage to the relentless Uncle Dwight probably makes me The Guy To Know What That Best Way Is.

Okay. First of all, **don't rent a videotape.**

If you're going to go to the movies, why not actually *go*? Lounging around the house in your skivvies won't get you into the right frame of mind for anything not starring women with names like Seka and Crystal Sync. Put on a clean shirt, take some related reading matter (*Hollywood Babylon* is always an acceptable substitute) and go out to an actual movie theatre.

If you can, **go to an independently owned theatre.** They are easier to find than you'd think—usually they're even listed separately in the newspaper. I look at this as the most politically correct thing one can do in the admittedly, ahem, limited scope of correct political actions implicit in moviegoing, though making the effort to go see the latest Seka release is admittedly a political action, but another can of worms altogether. And while I'm on that particular can, let me point out that leaving home to go see an adult movie is not recommended in this humble guide. I don't say that for reasons of prudishness (on at least one occasion I have been positively *amazed* by the talents of Ms Sync) or feminism (yes, porno is degrading to women, but don't you think a Neanderthal like Ron Jeremy is degrading to men?), but rather for politico/economic reasons: adult movie theatres are all members of a very tightly run . . . shall we say, "franchise?" . . . and this violates the Go To The Independent clause. And most porn looks better on

Dwight never tired. It was his mission in life to illuminate the obscured, to eat their food, to make their drapes smell funny for days just by exhaling.

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videotape, anyway.

You know, perhaps the best thing the VCR craze has done for the movie industry is that it took fuck films and put them back where they belong—in the American home!

I think you may have a much better time at an independent; “indie” theatre owners are more likely to be in the business because they **want** to be in the theatre business. Chain theatres are owned by bloated, myopic, monopolistic cartels who couldn’t care less about the movies. They’d just as soon own Palm Springs or Wayne Newton. They’re in the *leveraged debt business*, not the entertainment business.

Though the idea of Mike Milken or Ivan Boesky actually going to prison is a highly entertaining bit of business indeed! Now, prison theatres are what you might call the ultimate in chain theatres. I’ve had films of my own shown in a federal prison, and believe me when I tell you it is a peculiar experience to know that you’re in a darkened room with seven hundred guys and *you* are the only one who is going to leave after the show is over.

Independent theatres have style, or whatever style is left. Chain theatres are rapidly becoming identical, shoddy multiplexes and I would rather have a drunk describe a first-run film to me scene by scene, than see it in a cheap, mall-engulfed multiplex theatre. Being in a theater with only thirty seats and a screen smaller than a mural on a van makes me wonder if the architects didn’t have “Barbie & Ken’s Dream Theatre” in mind. Do you really think a business featuring eight screens but only one projectionist will improve your entertainment experience?

And for full price admission, **at the very least you should get a curtain in front of your screen.** A slide show is an acceptable substitute for a curtain, except if the slides continually urge the theatre patron to purchase Coca Cola. I’ve been in mom & pop theatres in small towns that show slides of—you guessed it—Mom & Pop during the intermission. Mom & Pop meeting John Glenn, Mom & Pop last summer in Puerto Vallarta, Mom & Pop standing in front of the Great Wall. Hey, Chevy Chase should be so entertaining!

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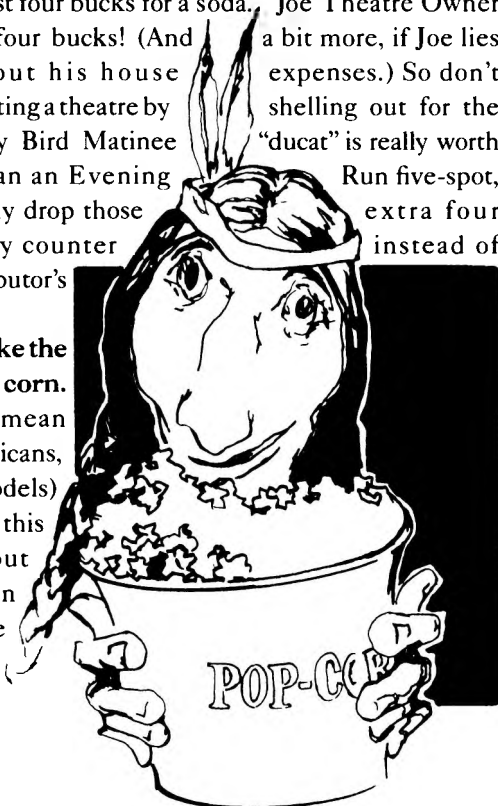
As a kid I never could understand why that curtain went up and down in front of a movie screen. Or sometimes up, down, and then up again just as the feature started. I still don't know; an atavistic pre-vaudeville ritual? But I'll be damned if I get cheated out of what could well be a mystical experience, one I've endured for twenty years. For my six—seven?—big ones, I want a curtain.

Or a slide show.

Multiplexes do not have curtains. Big fancy first-run theatres do, which is a point in their favor even though they're almost all chain owned.

To be frank, neither the chains nor the independent theatres are really in the "movie business" at all. They are in the *popcorn* business. The standard industry distribution deal calls for the theatre to hand over *ninety percent* of box office receipts to the film's distributor, after house expenses are deducted. The theatre owner gets only one tenth of the ticket money. One tenth! And you wondered why it cost four bucks for a soda. Joe Theatre Owner gets to *keep* those four bucks! (And a bit more, if Joe lies shamelessly about his house expenses.) So don't think you're supporting a theatre by shelling out for the ticket. A 99¢ Early Bird Matinee "ducat" is really worth more to ol' Joe than an Evening Run five-spot, since you'll probably drop those extra four bills at Joe's candy counter instead of into the movie distributor's pocket.

And so: if you like the theatre, buy some corn. Americans (and I mean actual native Americans, not the import models) *invented* popcorn, so this is another small but "correct"—even patriotic—gesture you can make.



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And Joe will like you, though Uncle Dwight would inveigh against cholesterol and tooth decay. Popcorn is a misunderstood food, and deserves your respect.

My next inveiglement often dismays the timid: **go see a film in the daytime instead of at night!** There are many reasons. If you have a job or go to school, sneaking out on bogus sick leave just to go to a movie can be a *terrific* thrill. Maybe it's the insubstantiality of it, the nihilistic glory in defying the rules for sheer entertainment that makes it attractive. Not to be overlooked is the fact that one is voluntarily abandoning the daylight—abandoning reason!—in favor of artificial darkness and vicarious, artificial conflict. Go at night and you might as well go to a drive-in which is an ersatz shadow-puppet affair compared to a true movie theatre. Few of the drive-in's patrons are there to even watch the movie, anyway.

Seeing a film in middle of the day, your mind is more alert and more able to appreciate a good cinematic achievement. And if you celebrate the occasion by making your mind *not* particularly alert, coming out from the dark into the daylight again makes you feel like you're getting an "extra day" for free, eh?

Go alone with a good book is a dictum I offer for practical reasons, not sociological. Going to a movie with a friend is fine, unless they don't agree with your choice of film or can't make it when you're available or tell you "but I don't like butter" after you've drenched the tub. If you want to see a film, get up and go see it! After all, when the lights go down you are as good as alone. You do forfeit the chance to talk about the movie with someone afterwards, however, and you geometrically increase the likelihood of being robbed while walking back to your car. This last tidbit, for those who have been to see movies *in* the town of Hollywood.

To wit: a friend of mine who had gone to the Pantages Theatre on Hollywood Boulevard was making a call from a payphone out front, when a car pulled up. A man got out, reached over and politely took my friend's wallet, got back in the car, and drove away! All the victim could think to do was say to the person he had

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telephoned, "So here I am on Hollywood Boulevard and, oh yeah, some guy just took my wallet."

For you dogged Hollywood Premiere and Big Loud First-run Theatre buffs, security precautions notwithstanding, going alone or going at 11:30 in the morning can mean the difference between getting in, or not.

Uncle Dwight had a clever trick that I employed once, and to my astonishment it worked. He rigorously deduced that a big fancy theatre couldn't afford to disappoint its patrons who come there for a "big time." Selling all of each performance's tickets makes someone *have to* sit down in the front row with the geeky kids and risk terminal eyestrain. This practice was, therefore, potentially unwise. So they must save nine or ten tickets to keep the row clear . . .

I went with three friends to see *Star Wars* on its premiere night at Grauman's Chinese Theatre. (Yes yes, I know, it's now called "Mann's Chinese" after the chain who bought it. Well, *piss* on them, the whole of Clan Mann. What's next, Metro Goldwyn Mann? DisneyMann? Santa Mannica?) At 7:40 we went up to the box office and asked about the 8:00 show. "Are you kidding?" said the kid in the booth, his white gloves contrasting nicely with his acne, "that line over there is for the 10:30 screening!"

"You're sold out?"

"The guy in front of you bought the last four to the midnight show."

"You're *totally* sold out?"

"Sold out."

"But we want to sit in the front row!"

"Well," he said uneasily, "I, uh, still have five seats in the front row."

"For midnight?"

"For 8:00."

I sheepishly here admit, before you all, that not a single one of us sat in the front row like we promised. And I even got a complimentary May The Force Be With You button, the supply of

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which was exhausted long before midnight.

So now that we're finally in the theatre of choice, **choose the right seat.** Uncle Dwight invariably sat in the second row from the back, aisle seat either side. *Better for the eyes.* Better for him to cop a peek at the teenagers making out, I figured, knowing as we all do that the last two rows of *every* movie theatre are the exclusive habitat of the Feral Makeout Couple. *You won't find me with no eye damage from sitting too close in a movie show.* I pointed out that sitting in the back made the screen so small it looked like a big television, so shouldn't they turn on some lights? I received a stern diatribe on filial piety that lasted right up to the scene where Bond almost gets castrated by a laser beam.

Human beings undergo varying states of mind when in a theatre. At first, people will sit as far apart as possible, but after a certain point they all begin to gravitate toward the central spot about two thirds of the way back from the screen. If the theatre is half full, this will be the most densely packed area. The secret: this is where the sound mixer sits when they put together the final composite soundtrack. Sit near there, and you will be in the Optimum Aural Zone.

Sound has been an area that has undergone a lot of expensive upgrading in recent years, to the point where the Big Prestige houses in L.A. are rigged up with "THX Sound," George Lucas's version of God's Own Ghetto Blaster. It's got to be the loudest damned thing since Morton Downey Jr. caught himself in his zipper and it costs only slightly less than a B-2-B, and I still don't think I've ever heard any film's soundtrack live up to the trailer for "THX Sound."



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“Dolby Stereo” has been one of the industry’s leading scams for over a decade. True, you can’t put that little Dolby “dB” on your ad unless your theatre’s got the system installed, but when it breaks and the Dolby people tell you they want eight hundred smackers for a repair call, budget-minded types like Joe Theatre Owner switch back to optical sound and turn it way the hell up. Gosh, it’s sure loud! Dig that “Dolby” sound!

Remember “Sensurround?” Remember “Smellovision?” “Dish Nite?” “3-D?” “Colorization?” None of them improved movies, even if they did sell a few tickets.

Personally, I prefer the center seat, sixth row. You get plenty of stereo effect (if in fact there *is* any stereo) and since more neurons in your brain are connected to your eyes than to any other sense mechanisms, why not give them the lion’s share by sitting close enough so that your peripheral vision is filled and you can eliminate the “boundary” of the medium? Give it your best sensory shot, so to speak. Granted, you are at the mercy of fickle projectionists; minor irritations such as soft focus areas or poor frame alignment are all, in the sixth row, warning signs of approaching world-class migraine. But if as *Daily Variety* so deftly puts it, it’s TECH CREDITS ALL PRO then you are in for as fine an experience as can be had for the money. To my mind seeing a good film, the right film, under optimum conditions is only bettered by having a good dream.

Choosing the right film. If you can’t decide on anything straight away, let any of numerous outside factors decide for you. Generally the onus of decision can be made much lighter if one first culls out the potentially **wrong** films; learning to **judge professional critical response** is one way to tell the wrong film.

Most movie critics are not really critics at all, since they have no standards to observe or uphold other than “stay published” and so will gush over nearly anything the distributor wants to see promoted. These gushes are ideally composed of short, coiffured superlatives since those are the kind most likely to be quoted on the newspaper ad. The more the critic is quoted, the more the critic gets published and (theoretically) the better the critic’s choice

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will do at the box office. Everyone gets well!

Thus the alert moviegoer must watch out for any such tell-tale observations as “A modern motion picture masterpiece!” or “Utterly redefines the term *totally superb!*” or “Move over Brando, the new kick-boxing superstar has arrived!” As a matter of fact, anything with more than a two inch column in the movie section of the paper is either expected to drop dead after a two weekend blitzkrieg run, and should be avoided at all costs, or is thought to be big enough to last awhile on its merits. The more critics’ quotes, the more forgettable the producers think their masterpiece may be.

Which means it will soon get into the three-dollar independents!

Go see something you haven’t already seen. I’m telling you this for your own good. Hollywood’s stupefying lack of variety in its offerings is partly because many people will gladly go see a film they like six or seven times. Films about obscure topics or bearing hideous titles can be full of surprises. Especially don’t be put off by a goofy title, because it’s only one word and the film should have lots more in it, many better ones. I ended up waiting a month to go see *Koyannasqatsi* because the name called up a total blank to my mind. I thought it was a gag word, maybe something a loathsomely cute and precocious child says in the film. I finally went, and thought it was one of the most unique pieces of work I’ve ever seen. And “koyannasqatsi” is the only god damned word anybody says (well, chants) in the whole thing! I loved it, and was angry that by the time I went back to see it again, it was gone.

Go to a foreign film if you’re really stuck. Oh, don’t make such a face. Most foreign films are way ahead of American cinema in a lot of respects, and much better made than the American ripoffs they inspire (like *Seven Samurai* / *The Magnificent Seven*, *The Seduction Of Mimi* / *Which Way Is Up?*, or Ingmar Bergman / Woody Allen). Of course, if there’s anything worse than a bad film, it’s a bad film in a language you don’t understand. As John Waters said while sucking languidly on a filter-tipped Kool, “I don’t understand how anyone can get through an entire film, let alone a *European* film, without having a cigarette. . . .” and I understand

his sentiments, so go ahead and smoke if you like, as long as you're discreet about it.

I could always tolerate someone smoking a lot more than someone talking, so **shut the hell up when the film starts.**

If there's anything worse than a bad film, it's a bad film in a language you don't understand.

This is not to say that you shouldn't react—by all means, don't be afraid to forget where you are and let yourself get into it. Laugh when it's funny! Cry when it's sad—that's right, cry! Nobody will notice, and if they do they probably won't follow you home shrieking, "Crybaby was bawlin' when the talented kid shot himself and it wasn't even Robin Williams's fault!"

Finishing a good cry is one reasonable excuse for sitting all the way through the credits, but I would offer another. Actually, it's a plea to all you potential audience people on behalf of 75% of the folks truly *working* in the movie business: when the film is done please don't leap up and bulldoze your way out as if Shiite fundamentalists had just set the theatre ablaze. Before your gleaming eyeballs, pass the names of the obsessed men and women who made it possible for you to abandon reality for ninety minutes; **do them the courtesy of reading their names!** If any of you had ever tried to cut film negative—as nerve-wracking, ulcerous and unappreciated a profession as dismantling bombs in Beirut—you would *applaud* as the neg cutter's name crawled by. That poor slob could be in the same theatre, two rows behind you, heartbroken that everyone has left by the time his credit is up. If you're from Los Angeles, there's the bonus possibility that you may recognize someone up there, even a wretched "3rd Assistant to an Executive Associate Re-Producer" or something. If you went to a Prestige Film School, these chances are slightly better. You the movie viewer can take an active role in suicide prevention simply by mentioning to them that you saw their name up on the screen! Not to mention that a substandard evening at the movies can be considerably livened up for the whole audience by a person

standing on his chair down in the sixth row, shrieking at the credits:
“Holy shit! See that guy’s name?! I know that guy!!”

Crowd reaction is certainly a gauge of how well the film is doing its magical thing, but Dwight (and I) will venture an idea that crowd pleasing alone isn’t the full measure of a film’s worth. There is an objective standard at work, as well as an emotional one, that makes certain works great . . . (dare we say it?) . . . “Art” . . . even though hordes of fourteen year olds weren’t waiting in line for three days to see them. In a way, their secret is the *lack* of immediate crowd reaction they draw.

The difference between Art and Entertainment is the difference between something Really Good and something Mediocre. Entertainment can be fully absorbed on the first pass because it’s designed to hit everybody somewhere, and Art will inevitably contain something which confounds the viewer—which *defies reaction* and sails wildly over the shoulder—and must be reached for, caught and accepted in order to go on. Or, it misses; draws no reaction whatsoever. When you first see it, Good Art—Art that works—provokes the mind such that you don’t



know how to respond to it, and yet it somehow feels appropriate and necessary that you *do* respond. Even Good Entertainment cannot take that chance.

A perfect example is the difference between the films *2001* and *E.T.* Stanley Kubrick planned that his film take every cinematic chance possible, to not only re-invent the cinematic technology of the “space opera” but to play with its dramatic guts as well. For instance, not a single word is spoken in *2001* until over half an hour has passed—*half an hour!*—and not a moment of story is lost. The plot is clear, and yet filled with unexplainable and abstruse elements. (Just what the hell *is* that black monolith thing?) Almost all of the film’s dialogue is chitchat. Technological triumphs of the future are set to waltzes. A machine’s judgment has superseded our own.

E.T., on the other hand, takes absolutely *no* chances. Every routine twist of the plot is played up to wring the most extreme emotional response possible, even if a lake is to be filled by twisting a dishcloth, resulting in holes left in the story that, well, you could fly a starship through. And yet *E.T.* was not a bad movie. Nobody sets out to make a bad movie. It was just a kind of mediocre, sappy one with funny moments. It was in focus, properly exposed, the camera was always placed in the right spot, the scenes went by but they had only one possible emotional response; it was as if the audience was not really a necessary part of the equation at all except to react on cue, like on a roller coaster. You are given only one appropriate way to react.

An elegant rearrangement of the priorities of Art and Trade is evident in the alpha and omega works of Mr. Lucas himself: *THX 1138* and *Star Wars*. His first film is Good Art. The filmmaker did what an artist does, namely take the same tools that everyone else has at hand and create something totally original with them. And although they may not understand it right away, it will call at them to look at their world differently than they did two hours before. All the necessary elements are present to tell an intricate and powerfully emotional story, but the *audience* must play an active role in figuring out parts of it by themselves. *You, the viewer*, are

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expected to make sense of what does not appear, at first, to be sense.

THX 1138 is the *Mademoiselles Des Avignon* of its film genre. It might even be the closest that mainstream movie-making has ever come to a Zen experience. What is there isn't as important as what is *missing*. Best of all, not once does it stop and explain everything to the viewer by the woeful use of what author K. W. Jeter refers to as "infodump" scenes. (The cruder of these scenes often begin: "But Professor Morris, how could the comet's arrival be connected with Johnny eating his dad?" The more sophisticated: "But Holmes . . ." The silliest: "But C3PO . . .")

By the time he got around to *Star Wars*, George was up for doing something with his hands instead of with his head, which is understandable for a guy who used to build hot-rods (all the snappy roadsters in *American Graffiti*, for instance, were built by George and some friends). Unfortunately, that meant most of the work spent on the script was in typing it, with time out for lifting ideas from *Hero With A Thousand Faces*. A lot of things went Zoom! and Kapow!, except for the characters.

Star Wars challenges nothing, except perhaps the craft of the special effects model builders. It is a movie about other movies, not about people, but remember that just because it continually explains everything does not make it a bad movie. Just kind of a mediocre one with a lot of things going Zoom! and Kapow!

And you know, Uncle Dwight was not such a bad fellow, despite his monumental halitosis. His preoccupations, like my own, were involved with trying to do those things that were objectively better than others, and knowing the reasons why. But he always insisted—insisted—on *explaining* the reasons why.

An artist, a Real Good Artist, never does.

my neighbor Bob

By
Jonathan
Lethem



This is Jonathan Lethem's second story in this volume, and his third for *Wired*. Illustrations for "My Neighbor Bob" by James O'Barr, whose popular series, *The Crow* (from Caliber Press) is being adapted to film. John Shirley is collaborating on the screenplay with O'Barr.

At first I was very proud of the thing I'd written, and I took it right upstairs to show my neighbor, Bob. He was sitting on his couch watching television when I came in, but he immediately got up and poured us each a drink.

"Look," I said. "I've written a story about our situation."

"Really," said Bob. "Here, let me see."

He took the manuscript from me, rested his drink on the coffee table, and sat on the couch to begin reading. The laughter started right away, when he came to the title.

"Imitation of Life," he said. "Are you aware there's a very campy, very melodramatic Douglas Sirk movie with that title?"

Actually I wasn't. That was when I felt my first twinge of regret at showing it to him. "Just read it," I said.

Imitation of Life

The landlady, I can see, is going to be of no use at all. Because she can't tell us apart either. "Who moved in first?" I ask her, and she shrugs. "It was so long ago," she says. "They all come and go. You expect me to keep track?" Yes, I want to say, it's vitally important, in this case. Instead I say: "I'm wondering if you've noticed how similar we've become." This reaches her, and she nods and backs away, afraid of me, afraid of us, smiling defensively, knitting her eyebrows. "When did it start?" I press at her. "When did you first notice?" Who is it, I want to scream. Me or him? Who's the original? She shrugs again. "I don't know," she says. "You shouldn't ask me. It isn't my business. I just take the rent. The apartment is okay?" I nod impatiently. "Enough heat?" "Yes," I say, "plenty of heat, but—" wanting to squeeze more out of her. But she's already shrinking away into her basement apartment, having willed the conversation to a close.

So I've added nothing to my understanding of the situation, gained no advantage over my nemesis, my double. The situation remains perfectly balanced. From what I've glimpsed of his apartment as he goes in it's exactly the same as mine. He works in an office on the seventh floor of the building where I work, and we often ride the same car of the same subway train. Sometimes I see him in the grocery. He looks up, hollow, haunted, and meets my eye, but we never speak. We're afraid of each other, or the one of us who isn't afraid is doing a good job of faking it.

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The other day I went through his garbage. It's as mundane as my own. He lives on canned foods, like I do, and his phone bill is brilliantly unrevealing, as if crafted that way. The way mine would appear, I suppose. There's nothing but the occasional long distance phone call, always to the same number—his family, presumably. In my case, anyway, it's my family. He gets nothing but junk mail, which, like me, he discards unopened, and he goes to the same pharmacy I do to refill his prescription for the same mild narcotic I use to help me sleep. When I brought his bag of rubbish back to the incinerator room I found him there, going through my garbage, jotting notes onto a small pad. We smiled at each other, grimly, and I left without either of us saying a word.

I have a serious problem. And I imagine he has it too. Just one of us is really living this life. The other one is a performance artist. Only I can't remember who is who. If I guess wrong I'll ruin everything. The



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other problem is that one of us—the other one, the original—is plotting to kill the other. It's driving one of us—him or me—crazy, and one of us can't take it anymore, is about to crack.

Only, like I say, I don't know who.

Critics and performance art connoisseurs appear every once in a while, creeping around on the landings of the building, watching us get home from work and go into our apartments, or waiting for us to come out in the morning, to watch us as we buy the newspaper and head for the subway. I haven't been able to discern anything from their actions; they seem to pay equal attention to both of us, and the attention seems to unsettle us equally. Which only makes sense: as an artist I'm something of a perfectionist, and it distracts me to have the critics leave their footprints on what is, in effect, my canvas; I view them as a barely tolerable necessity, and they always throw my rhythm off for days. And from the point of view of the original I'm of course incensed to see this pretender, this invader receiving accolades for imitating me in my perfectly ordinary, everyday actions, things I've done for years without receiving any attention from critics at all. I'm sure my neighbor feels the same way.

Artist or subject matter?

Portrayer or portrayed?

Back and forth I go, or rather, back and forth I went, for tonight, after so long, I finally have it figured out. That's why I'm here, waiting just inside his door. His, not mine. I told the landlady I lost my key, and when she supplied me with a replacement, her fingers shaking as she wrestled it off the ring, sure enough, it was his.

For you see, for me to have these thoughts at all means I'm the original. It's a mark of his success that



he's tortured me into this uncertainty. I believed we were both in doubt, both lost, perhaps even bound together in some way by our dilemma—but that's exactly what he wanted me to think. All this time he's been smug, assured, using my confusion to keep me at bay, to keep me from objecting to his intrusion in my life.

Of course, in assuming it went both ways I'd assumed, wrongly, that he knew of my plans to kill him, too. But he doesn't.

I listen now, the door open a crack, for footfalls on the landing. When I hear him coming, his step unmistakable, I close the door, turn my key in the lock, and wait. He approaches, and I hear his own keychain jingle. When the door opens he's looking down, perhaps alerted by some displacement of the doormat at his

feet, perhaps sensing that something is wrong. When he looks up I smile. Exhilarated. "What are you doing in my apartment?" I say, grinning. "Who gave you the key?" "I'm sorry," he says, "I thought—" He backs through the doorway, squints at the name under the buzzer, purses his lips. "This is my apartment," he says softly. When he steps back inside I grab him by the collar and throw him to the floor of the foyer. His briefcase slams against the wall and opens, and papers flutter down around him. The fake work from his fake desk in his fake office. I kick at him and he balls up to protect himself, hopelessly unprepared for this assault. "Please," he begs, "this isn't necessary—" "Oh yes," I say, "oh yes I think it is." He goggles in horror as I lift the wooden chopping block from the wall, grip its one handle and heft it like a machete. "No, wait—" I silence him with the first blow, smashing through his protesting fingers to open a bloody wound in his scalp.

Sitting amidst his papers like a child in a mess of toppled blocks, he reaches up and pats uselessly at the bloody hole in his hair, looks up at me drunk-enly. "Jesus Christ you're killing me," he says. "I didn't think you'd kill me."

I hit him again, harder this time, a deathblow. His tongue, caught between his teeth, is bitten nearly off. His eyes roll up into his broken, bloody head, and he collapses. I still his quivering body with a series of devastating, vicious blows, until it issues a pool of urine across the floor.

My agent steps in through the open door, smiling, and eases the bloody chopping block out of my hands, swaps it in a towel, for safekeeping I suppose. A memento. "I was afraid you were making a mess of it, babe," he says. "But you did good. You really pulled it off." He chucks me under the chin,

and I smile, gratified, and almost faint now. Now that it's over. My agent lifts the shrouded block, mimes my furious movements. "That was quite a finish," he says. "Here—c'mon." He tugs at me, and I follow him, in a daze, out into the hallway, which is filled with critics and fans, who break into a mild, respectful applause. The landlady is there too, clapping, happy it's resolved. My agent raises his hand, fends off questions until later, and hurries me away, his arm around my shoulder, like a boxing trainer, his mouth in close to me ear. "The early notices are terrific," he whispers.

The End

"My goodness," said Bob, and set the manuscript on the coffee table. He laughed. He'd laughed almost all the way through it. Out of nervousness I'd gulped down most of my drink, and now my head was swimming.

"What did you think?" I said. I hadn't actually meant the story to be so funny.

"Well, it's very extreme," he said. "Very sensational."

"Yes," I said, annoyed.

He smiled, picked up his drink. "Do you really feel that way? Mixed up about who's who? Murderously resentful of me? It's all so gothic in your story."

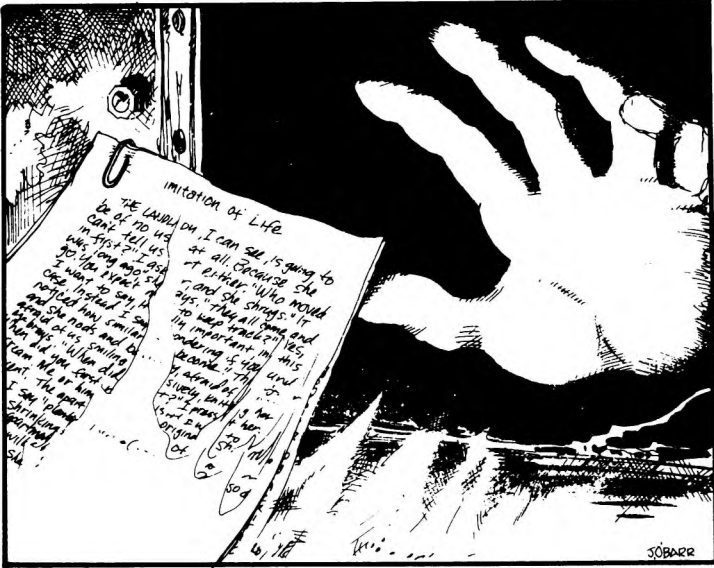
"No," I admitted.

He laughed again. "Good. I mean, it didn't seem very true to life. And then I wondered for a minute . . ."

I picked up the manuscript and rolled it into a tight tube. Wishing I'd known better than to show it to him.

"I mean, real life is never as dramatic as art," he said. "And art is never as mundane as real life. Except in this one very special case. So don't fault your story. Because what I'm doing here is the exception to the rule, right?"

"I guess so."



“And in your story you have it end, and you have those critics, and the agent, but if I did any of that I wouldn’t be doing a good job. It wouldn’t be true to my conception. The whole point is no one should ever notice. And that I never stop. You do understand that, Bill, don’t you?”

“Understand what?”

“That it doesn’t end. I’m with you all the way on this.”

“I know.” I felt peevish. “It’s just a story.”

“Yes. It’s probably good to get it out of your system.”

“I guess.”

“Well. Another drink?”

“No thanks.”

I went downstairs to my apartment, stopping on the way to toss the story into the incinerator. Then I went inside and turned on the television—same channel as my neighbor Bob.



SPACE
IS THE
PLACE

a profile
Sun Ra
and interview
by **Linda Gruno**

Jazz musicians: a group without a group, unfathomable, diverse, walking through mazes of mystery. Clump various jazz styles and players under one mantle. Include the traditional pioneers, beboppers, modern, post modern, avant garde, and fusion players. Study them closely. Carefully piece fragmentary similarities with lust for categorization.

There are no stereotypes that hold true for all jazz musicians.

The only constants are a lack of duplication in improvisation and the paths each musician takes throughout his or her career. Some are blessed to stand alone as innovators, creators of forceful legacies. But most are simply interpreters, victims of their mastered styles who gain a wisp of immortality through varying degrees of virtuosity, intensity, and structured creativity.

One jazz musician rises above the pack of interpreters and has gained many nominations for citizenship among innovators. He is Sun Ra. While I demure from acknowledging Ra's legal status in this elite group, he *has* influenced several generations of innovators, from post-bebop, the founders of The New Thing, fusion,

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and beyond. As a respected interpreter, fate (or celestial intervention) has made Ra an innovator in another field.

Ra is the original Cosmic Thing. Long before the Jetsons hit television, before it was hip to join UFO-watching societies, before astral walks were accepted as casual outings, before Shirley MacLaine joined the Space Cadets, and before Steven Spielberg's ET phoned home, Ra was publicly declaring his extra-terrestrial heritage and origin. While getting in touch with his roots, Ra also staked claim to a distinctive flavor of notoriety. Not just a visitor to this planet, a space traveler from Saturn who took on a cumbersome human form, Ra was a special being, immortal—one guy who would never die. Steps ahead by decades, in 1950 Ra was boldly walking where no jazz man, psychedelic rocker, acid drop-pers, or New Age gurus would venture toward for at least eighteen more years.

Was Ra a man ahead of his time? Perhaps just an unfortunate alien life form doomed to unending existence among lesser beings? Could he be an eccentric and unbridled—but harmless—four-star general in the ranks of the mentally ill? Maybe Ra was, and continued to be, just another talented musician who has never received well-deserved mass recognition for his talent and abilities, savvy to the attention gained from having a clever gimmick complement his craft. There's also the irrational possibility that Ra is indeed the fine-tuned alien he claims to be. Go figure.

While you're pondering that one, also consider that Ra, despite his unorthodox persona, is one heck of a fine jazz player. Jazz lovers and critics are in agreement when evaluating Ra's *musical* contributions. Sure, it took him over forty years to gain a major label recording contract and more than a small cult following. But all who closely follow developments within the jazz realm will testify to his musical artistry. In other words, if Ra the Spaceman is a gimmick, it's one that has outlived necessity. He's guaranteed a spot in all major jazz reference books. Ra even has other musicians who want to play like him. He doesn't need to sing about other worlds and speak in elusive metaphors. Time has proven that none of this was necessary from the start, musically

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speaking. But on the other hand, Ra has created a dandy mystique.

Ra was born, in human form, around 1914, in Birmingham, Alabama. No certificate registering his birth exists. Ra's publicity folk use this as an argument that Ra is indeed an alien being. After all, ETs don't come bearing birth certificates. Neither do many other people born in that era, as many parents neglected to register the births of their offspring, and vital statistics record-keeping wasn't the fine art it is today. Ra's given name was Herman "Sonny" Blount, an ordinary moniker that suggests his parents had no desire to flaunt their son's alien status.

Still working undercover, by the 'forties Ra was an accomplished jazz pianist and had become the house arranger for the Club DeLisa, a happening Chicago nightspot. By the time Ra became the pianist in Fletcher Henderson's swing-era big band, his image of himself was beginning to change. He began writing creative and radical arrangements for big band music and went by the name "Le Sony'r Ra." Before settling on "Sun Ra," he went through an assortment of AKAs, including "Sonny Lee," "Sunni Blount," and "Armand Ra."

While proving his chops in the jazz world, Ra put together his own groups, big bands that featured *unusual* costumes and diverse instrumentation. His musical formations changed identities as often as their leader. What is today known as the *Arkestra* has been occasionally called the *Intergalactic Space Arkestra*, the *Myth-Science Orchestra*, the *Solar Myth Arkestra*, the *Alter-Destiny 21st Century Arkestra*, the *Omniverse Arkestra*, and the *Cosmic Swing Arkestra*.

Gregory Daurer



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The band has earned a good reputation throughout the years. They're known for their marathon rehearsal sessions that sometimes last for twelve hours or more. The Arkestra is also considered unique in that many of the members live communally with their leader on a Pennsylvania farm. Today, thirty-three years after its inception, three original members (John Gilmore, Marshall Allen, and Julian Priester) are still with the band, proving membership isn't just a string of steady gigs, but a way of life.

No one even seems to mind the cheesy finery that's become regulation stage wear for the Arkestra. From turbans sporting lucite and fiberoptic tubing plumage to gold sequined Mickey Mouse ears, the Arkestra looks like they're ready for Halloween, space warp style. Their castoff costumes, the flowing lamé robes and rainbow tunics—all cheap gaudery made from fabric store budget cloth—would be more fitting in some suburban church Christmas pageant. Often it is the wardrobe, not the music, that attracts followers.

What draws more attention than the outlandish work clothes are the outrageous statements made by Ra. Glancing through the interviews made over the past twenty-five years, he comes across as a victim of uncontrolled senility, a constant over-indulger in mind-altering drugs, or a man desperate for a reaction. As part of his game plan, Ra has announced that he's the original cosmic civil servant.

"I never wanted to be a part of the planet Earth," he has said. "Anything I do for this planet is because the creator of the universe is making me do it."

He doesn't mention it, but we must assume that the pay and the benefits are good. Plus, one imagines that there must be a certain amount of job security in such a capacity. Not enough, it would



appear, because until last year's release of *Blue Delight* on A&M, Ra had recorded only on his own or for obscure record labels. It's funny—a man who claims to have knowledge that would right the wrongs of the universe, Ra didn't have the knowledge of making assured contracts in the record business.



Today, Ra seems to be making all sorts of contacts that he hadn't reached before. More importantly, he continues to produce a decent amount of new music. While some critics say that it is less creative than previous work, there is always an element of the unexpected in Ra's music. The same goes for his conversation: same old outer space lines, with a new and twisted plot. Balancing both worlds, he still manages to intertwine talk of music with cosmic philosophy.

Ra proved to be a surprising interview subject. He was quick and spontaneous, agreeing to the interview on a moment's notice. His mind is sharp, with no traces of senility, and he plays off each question, dancing around with words until his points are made and the original interviewer's question(s) long forgotten. I was amused to learn that Ra didn't remember a musician he had known in Minneapolis during the 'forties, another pianist who had been among his circle of friends [Denver-based pianist, Billy Wallace].

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One would think that an space invader of Sun Ra's stature would have a memory spanning millenniums. But it didn't matter. How often do any of us get a chance to speak with a self-professed ET?



Kevin Smith

LG: My field, like yours, is jazz, but I know you are into planetary travel and space stuff, also. Do you feel that jazz is a universal music, instead of a form peculiar to this earth? Could you explain your philosophy?

SR: Well, jazz is not of this planet. It came from somewhere else. 'Cause if it did come from the earth, everybody could play it. Things that come from the spirit level, only those who *can* do it are the ones who are *supposed* to do it. Not everybody is supposed to play jazz—because they *can't* play it. They're limited, I'll put it like that. They find themselves imitating the leaders, but they can't create.

Now, there *are* some people who *can* create. Those are the people who are the true expositors of jazz. Those only—it's

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something like the hundred-and-forty-four thousand that the Bible talks about. I would say that jazz *is* a division of the hundred-and-forty-four thousand. You know, it's written in the Bible, that only a hundred-and-forty-four thousand could sing. Well, I'm saying that jazz is of the hundred-and-forty-four thousand. And everybody can go to school and learn all they want; they will *not* be able to play it because they're not *supposed* to.

LG: Do you think that most people are aware of this? Is this the reason that there are so few jazz innovators?

SR: Well, other places, European countries know it. I was just there recently. When I was in Italy, a few weeks ago, a girl asked me, "Will Italians be able to play jazz with American ambition?" I said, "Well, America is a very fortunate place. It had Masters to be born there. The Masters taught the musicians how to play jazz. If the Masters had been born in Italy, Italy would be playing it. But all of them were born in America. And they specially taught musicians."

Now, this is something that is not taught in the jazz books. Because America itself doesn't know about it. They were a separate few who acted a godfathers to certain musicians, teaching this. I know, because I'm one of the ones they taught. From the time I was in elementary school, there was a man—whose name I don't even remember. He was a barber. He had the aptitude and the talent to teach me about jazz.

LG: Are you satisfied with what you've done with this knowledge? Is your work, in your opinion, more mainstream, or do you go over the edge?

SR: My playing—what I do with my music—is reaching totally, totally opposite. That's what my music's about. It's about breaking down barriers. I am, in fact, a pioneer, going through the forest, not really knowing who is there or what's in the forest. That's what I've been doing all these years. I've been sincere about it, despite critics and musicians criticizing me. I had to be me, you see. That's all I know to be and I know what I'm supposed to be. Enough of us will change the planet.

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So, therefore, I have an immense psychic mission. It's been very difficult for me since I'm not a politician. I'm not a militant or a philosopher, either. I'm dealing with equations—scientific, cosmic equations, galaxy equations, omniverse equations. It has something to do with people, humanity, both living and dead. So you see, it's a test. However, when I went to Turkey . . . I've just come back from Turkey. Played in Istanbul. When I first told people that I was going to Turkey, they couldn't believe that I was going to an Islamic country, playing the type of music that I am. But the teenagers in Turkey brought me there. They had been listening to me in America and they wanted me in Turkey. They achieved a purpose.

So after I played a concert, some people came to me. They represented outer space. They gave me these sheets of paper, a lot of them. I'd say about ten sections stapled together. Well, I gave them out to the band. It looked mimeographed, xeroxed, all alike. So, I gave them out so everybody could see what they were giving me. After I got back to America, I found out that everybody had something different. They were all part of a book, a book called *The Book of Information*.

That's what they gave me. This book was dedicated to them from another dimension. This book has things in it like, "To our human brothers and sisters . . ." Something like that, like it's time for you to evolve. You can't stay like you are. You have to change. You have to learn things you never dreamed are true. You have to look forward to other dimensions, then. This book has all kinds of equations in it. It's about the existence, how existence began. It talks about galaxy empire. It talks about the plan they've got for the Thirtieth Century.

I'm the only one in the West who has this book. They gave it to me. They didn't tell me to distribute it. They didn't tell me anything. They gave it to me. They gave it to the people who would treasure it.

LG: What are you going to do with it?

SR: I'm going to publish it. They didn't tell me *not* to.

They didn't tell me *to*. But the book has so much in it,

Kevin Smith



information that's for the good of humanity and for the survival of humanity. It speaks about Almighty God. It speaks about the Bible being a *filation* book. It speaks about the Koran being one, on a lesser plane, more like the business administration, governmental things. But it speaks about rising above the dimension of the Omega, to move past the Omega. Now, in this country, they've

got Jesus saying, "I am the Alpha Omega." *They're* talking about advancing *beyond* the Omega. You have to know something about the Bible in order to read this book. It talks about death itself, what death *is*. It says that death is the freeing of the cells. It frees up the essence of the person. The consciousness goes into these cells.

It's fantastic. I'd have to let you look at it. You know I've put it together, all the sheets together. I have to get it out to the people who are prepared.

LG: Okay. Can I see it today?

SR: Well . . . you can get to see *some* of it. We'll see what we can do. It's five hundred pages. It will let you know that it's another kind of a book. It comes from another dimension, dictated to the people in Turkey.

LG: I'm in. When can I see it?

SR: I'll show it to you tonight. You have to see it. One thing the book stresses is they're not trying to force anybody to believe what they're saying. Everybody is welcome to be a part

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of a greater dimension. But in this case, it's not about what the person has enough consciousness to see. We have to advance. The way we have to do it is to write what we see as relevant to them. They write out the book.

You see, that is very abstract. They're writing the book. What they write *is their book*. And then eventually that becomes *the book*, you see? But only if they write it. If they just read it, that's no good. And—the book that was written by them—in it they can say, "It is written . . ." and it *is* written, because they wrote it. So you see, it's abstract. It's very beautiful. Anybody can be a part of it. All they have to do is read and write the book.

LG: How does the knowledge gained from this book affect your work?

SR: It advances my mind. It makes me feel very happy that the people in Turkey, whoever they are, thought I should have the book. What I was trying to do was let them know I was sincere and that I can be a part of other dimensions. I've been doing it a long time. Unknown to me, so were they. Unknown came to me in Turkey.

LG: What about people who will never read the book, like those who follow your work for the music only?

SR: Well, I think it's really disgraceful who we waste our time on, with such a short lifespan. Terrible sad are the people who work so hard and end up with nothing. But this

book gives a way out. There *is* a way out. They know everything. They can influence people—they've got a lot of angels down here, too.

Kevin Smith

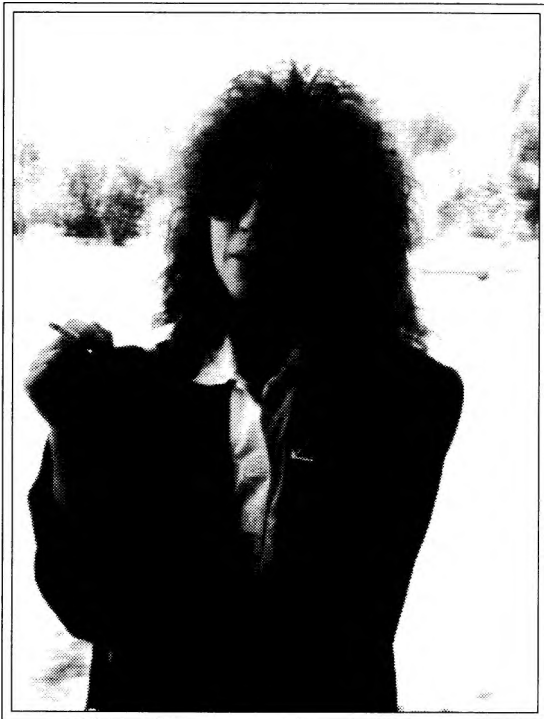




I laughed when Ra told me there are angels here. Any jazz lover already knows that. Most of them are jazz singers. They have heavenly voices and scars on their shoulderblades where their wings used to be. But I don't think that's the type of angel this old jazz man had in mind.

I did get a few moments with *The Book of Information*. Ra sat beside me, holding the book, leaning over just enough for me to peek at a few pages. I thought about how kind it was for a group of Turkish ETs to give Sun Ra a book that was all written in *English!* The Book looks like a cross between a simple algebra text and a metaphysical essay. Although I was assured that all who had

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Sun Ra Artwork by Paula J. McCreary

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viewed it had felt *the power*, I felt nothing other than ordinary (for me) anxiety about being so close to a stranger in funny clothes with hair and beard dyed the color of Santa's suit.

Ra wasn't just *any* stranger. After an almost three hour performance, he was a tired stranger, and old one, a mortal. As he gazed at adoring autograph-seekers through glazed and yellowing eyes, one well-wisher attempted to provoke a reaction with this simple proclamation: "Space Is The Place!"

Ra looked out beyond the crowd, nodded agreement. With a smile he said, "Most *definitely*."



Damian Kilby must have learned *something* at Clarion—he has begun his writing career most auspiciously with excellent stories appearing in major markets to much acclaim: the revived **Universe** anthology series (now edited by Robert Silverberg & Karen Haber); **Isaac Asimov’s Science Fiction Magazine**; and *even* **Journal Wired**! He explains, “I only hold down (paying) jobs here and there, having pretty well adjusted to mild poverty.” *Hmmm . . . next he’ll be starting a small press publishing venture.* Kilby lives in Somerville, Massachusetts, where he *claims* to be “working on both genre and non-genre short fiction,” and has “also begun work on a far future SF novel.” Yeah, *right*. But seriously, as is already apparent in his first three published stories, Damian Kilby is certainly one new writer who seems destined for greatness.

Illustrations by Mark A. Nelson

fiction

Damian Kilby

IN

ONE

In the county jail they call me “Pop.” I guess I am the oldest here; at least I look the oldest.

When I first came in a month ago the lieutenant told me, “Pop, you’ll lose that gut in no time. Special diet program we got here. Better than Jack Lalaine.” My stomach has shrunk a little but it still hangs way out over my belt. Five weeks just isn’t going to have much affect on a gut that’s been building for forty years.

Hogan, one of the cops, usually pulls the evening shift, so he serves us dinner. When he wheels the food out of the elevator he’ll say something like, “Time to feed the animals. I hate feeding the animals. I hate working in this zoo.” Mike—a young fellow, almost teenage—sometimes mutters back, “We might be animals, but least we ain’t no pig!”

Hogan heard this line once and tipped up Mike’s tray so all the food slid to the floor. “Better clean that up, boy.” Mike made snorting noises as he walked over to get the broom but he was careful to make sure Hogan couldn’t hear.



Maybe the pigs don't beat on me 'cause I'm old. Or maybe they can tell that I'm plenty afraid already. Most of the time, if they're smacking anyone around, it'll be Joe Bean. No one likes Joe. They say it's because he doesn't wash. Hogan and Mitchell especially like to take a whack at him. They'll smack into his guts with their clubs, bang his head against the wall and boot him into our tiny shower stall. "For sanitary purposes," Mitchell likes to say. "Got to keep the animals clean," Hogan explains. Jerry Potts and Mike laugh when Joe gets knocked around. They say he deserves it, smelling as bad as he does—almost as bad as a pig. Somehow it helps them forget times they've been knocked to the floor and kicked in the guts.

Being the middle of the summer, it's very hot out and I think it's even hotter in here. I feel like I'm living in a tin shed. I sweat all the time. If our jailers are in a good mood they serve us Kool-Aid with ice in the afternoon. When I can I take three showers a day. Can't understand how Joe Bean goes without them.

Each of us gets a counselor. All of the counselors are volunteers trained by some bleeding heart organization. That's what the pigs call it. They don't like it but the town is full of bleeding heart groups. What bugs the pigs the most is that Sheriff Moore pals around with a lot of those big talking liberals.

Once a week I get a visit from Jill, my volunteer. We're

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supposed to talk—about my feelings or my plans for the rest of my life. I usually don't think of much to say. Jill smiles a lot and tells me about her classes over at the university. She's very busy. She always asks me if she can get me anything from the outside or do some other kind errand for me. Sometimes back in my cell, I like to think about what things she might do for me.

Mike says these counselors are a perfect way to meet pretty girls. His is a nicely rounded girl with blondish hair, and Arty Simmons has a tall, classy volunteer. Jerry curses the whole thing. He got stuck with a male volunteer—some sensitive type who wants to reach out to those less fortunate. He's especially pissed because smelly old Joe Bean has the prettiest counselor of all.

Much of my time I spend sitting in my cell, maybe staring at the toilet right beside me or the walls leaning in over my head. Just beyond is the walkway area shared by six cells, the furthest I ever get to go except when I have visitors. This common space is barred off from another walkway where the pigs stroll through to keep an eye on us. The last layer around me is the outer wall with two barred windows. At nine o'clock we have to clear the walkway and stay put in our cells. Hogan pulls the lever which sends the iron bars slamming across the open side of all the cells. The crash of the steel trap always makes me grind my dentures. The silence that comes next is worst of all. I sit on my bed and stare out through three sets of bars. I catch glimmers of light from outside and try to guess if it is from a street lamp or maybe the full moon.

This isn't the big time—not prison. It's just the county jail. Mike and I are serving time for misdemeanors. Other guys are waiting on trials, like Joe Bean, who had no money for bail or Arty whose wife refused to pay, saying he needed a chance to dry out.

Arty is busy planning revenge and Mike is making plans, too. He tells me, "Pop, when I get out, I'm just scraping up enough money for a plane ticket to Hawaii. Got an uncle out in Honolulu. Just last year he said he'd find me a job. When it's winter here, you know, I'll be on the beach stretching out my legs."

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I sit on my bed and the bars are slamming shut again. I sit here and wonder what plans I should be making.

T W O

Here and there you get to learn a few things about the system. I've had forty years of hearing stories about the way these things work and I knew when they brought me to Windy Lane Psychiatric Center that this was the end of the line. You go through the system, one institution or hospital after another, depending on where you are and what kind of troubles they say you have, and if none of that does any good, they pack you away to Windy Lane. They've finally got me figured for a hopeless case. I've even been stored away in Holly House, the building for the geriatric crazies.

The only thing to do all day is sit in the Social Lounge. At one end of the room is a big color TV which is left on all the time. Game shows, soap operas and re-runs of old sit-coms play all day for us sickies. The chatter from the box makes it seem like something is actually happening in the room. Everyone sits, in chairs, on couches, some face the TV, some don't. I don't think anyone really watches the shows. No one reacts when the attendant changes the station. I certainly don't pay attention—I just sit still and try to ignore the dizziness.

The bedrooms don't have any doors. Every morning at seven o'clock the attendants come through our rooms ringing bells till we get up and get dressed. We have breakfast and then they give us pills. They always pay close attention, making sure I swallow all my medicine. We get three meals a day and pills three times a day. The pills I take come in four different colors. Red. Orange. Green. White.

I'm always lonely but I never get any privacy. I don't know anyone's name. The attendants never give theirs and I tend not to even look them in the face. I wouldn't want to offend them. They watch all day but never really talk to me. They only speak directly

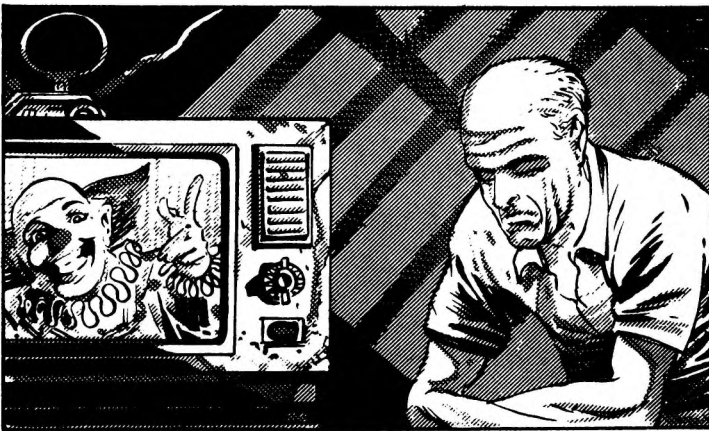
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at us when it's time to do something or go somewhere. And us patients never talk to each other. The air is full of fear.

I can tell I'm one of the youngest patients on the ward. No one would call me "Pop" here. The rest are prune faced and bent over. Plenty of them have aged into babies. One guy wets his pants, leaving stains on the carpet at least twice a week. Some old men bawl like babies and others just sob quietly when they think no one is looking. It's hard not to look at the fat man with the mottled face who sits shaking all day, his swollen tongue thrusting in and out. In and out.

Only men live on this ward but every Wednesday and Saturday we get to mingle with the women. Wednesdays the attendants coax us away from the TV to join the rest of the Holly House patients in front of a big movie screen. I look around at the old women in their shapeless dresses, with their drooping heads and then I look down at the floor. On Saturday we see some of the ladies again, down in the basement for bingo. If you win, they give you a Milkyway bar or a big cookie. With my dentures the candy is a little easier to handle than the hard cookie.

At bingo I get a chance to look at the women more closely, looking as I've looked for years, full of dim thoughts. I imagine actually getting together with one. We'd talk, make each other brave and maybe be a little happier. I don't think I'll ever say



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anything to any of these women, so I always turn back to my bingo board as an attendant calls out a letter and a number. B-7. G-2. I-4.

I'm frozen. On the outside movement was scary and now staying still fills me with the same dread. And I'm afraid to tell anyone how sick with dizziness I am. Fears I used to have of Pa back on the farm, of obeying his commands, of disobeying them and fears about just making any choices, all of them, they whisper to me. My only conversation. Don't the doctors want to talk to me about my father?

I should be happy at having no more choices to make. If Pa was here, though, he'd probably tip up my chair and push me into action.

This jellyfish life goes on, motionless forever—except yesterday I did have a little fun playing checkers. It was a simple thing but it stays in my mind. I played with a man who told me how great he'd been playing second base back in the days when he had a job and girls to take to movies. I began to figure out that he was talking about his life back in the '20s.

In the Social Lounge today I sat down next to a guy with a hooked nose and a sneaky grin who actually told me his name. Monty. He and I even watched the TV some. We laughed at the commercials. Monty especially liked the big chested young woman who tried to sell us shampoo or perfume. I was big on one of the car ads with the shiny new sedan gliding down the flat, open road.

T H R E E

As a resident of the Pine Street halfway house I have to go to meetings and more meetings—almost one every day. We have house meetings, group therapy, progress sessions with fieldwork students, not to mention meetings with the program director. There are group dinners every night—I cook Mondays—plus

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activities on the weekends. We're so busy, important things must be happening. There's people around me all the time. It seems unnatural. It's so different from the times on the farm or in rented rooms.

The other residents don't always talk much at the meetings. I know how they feel. They don't want to spill out all those lonely thoughts. I thought maybe I should talk, since I'm the oldest. After a few weeks at Pine Street I did start talking, especially when there was a lot of silence to fill. With so many people sitting around listening it seemed I might as well try to say something. I tried to be cheerful. The group therapist cuts me down for talking so much and not saying anything. "Are you purposefully trying to block the group process?" he says, catching me right in the eye. "Are you trying to prove something by wasting the group's time?"

We have a lot of parties with the agency's other house. There's dancing, drinks and food. I even let the pretty young counselors talk me into a few of those disco dances. I talk to people and laugh lots when there's nothing to say. But then I feel stupid for acting like I'm young and the life of the party. I always end up leaving before the end. I go outside and take a long walk down the snowy street. Then I feel things I've always felt and I keep walking past one house after another, block after block.

I get mad feeling so low when I'm supposed to be having a ball. Sometimes I just sit in my room with the door locked and wonder what I should do to keep from sliding right over the edge. But I hang on and in a few days I'm on my feet, business as usual. Maybe I'm getting better at faking cheerfulness.

We all work at Greystone's Workshop for the Disabled, waiting till we're ready to find real jobs. People come to the shop with lots of kinds of problems. Karen, a girl at my work bench, is retarded and she always asks me questions as if I know everything about everything. Frank had an epileptic fit once while we were waiting in line for lunch and the fat lady at the bench in front of me likes to tell everyone that she's a catatonic schizophrenic. (I've probably been called that somewhere down the line.) Jimmy rides around in a motorized wheel chair and he asks me

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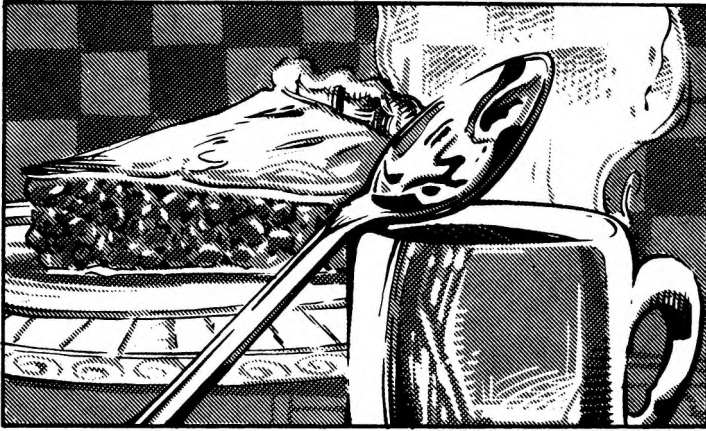
for change for soda everyday—sometimes I feel like his pa handing out allowance. Everybody seems to like me and some ask for my advice. I'm older, so I must be smart. Times are when I get started talking, my voice gets loud and I go on and on while we're busy packing pencils into plastic bags or dipping mechanical parts into cleaning fluid. Then I'll shut up suddenly, feeling stupid.

After work a lot of us from Greystone's drop by the Eastside diner for a cup of coffee or a piece of blueberry pie. People come and go and we all say "Hi!" and slap each other on the back. Sometimes people I know from years ago pass through and ask me, "How're you doing these days?" "Hey, not bad, not bad," I say with a hearty laugh like fat people are supposed to have. I'd like to say more but that's as far as it ever goes.

A lot of the time Frank and I share a booth or sit together at the counter. He tells me dirty jokes and I chuckle. He makes raunchy comments whenever the waitresses walk by and then stares at their behinds with a sloppy grin. I snicker and try to match him on the pick up lines. "You got to tip big," says Frank. "Tip big, my friend—that's the secret." I shift in my seat and think: we're two fat old men and back in the kitchen they probably laugh a lot harder than us.

Frank has to work at Greystone because he can't hold down a real job thanks to epilepsy. He's basically a loner, living on his own in a small room, almost never shaving or changing his clothes. Sometimes he just takes off on a Greyhound bus to see a different part of the country. Frank says he's been to Houston, Texas; Miami, Florida; Las Vegas, Nevada; and New Orleans, Louisiana; but he always makes it back to town, to where his social security check comes in.

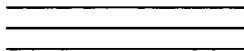
Maybe after an hour Frank leaves for home to fix his supper and write letters to friends he's made in all parts of America but I stay on, ordering more food. With my buddy gone I'm just plain friendly to the waitresses. They laugh at my joke about the honeymoon in Hawaii and when I order chocolate cake or strawberry ice cream they give me larger than normal servings. I think they feel sorry for me but maybe they just think I'm a good



customer. I can sit for hours sipping coffee, eating pie or french fries, greeting people I almost know as they walk by.

If I get tired of the diner I go over and sit at the lunch counter in the Woolworth's where I don't see so many familiar faces. I eat plenty there, too, and I get lost in thoughts; sometimes of a beautiful stranger who comes through the revolving door, takes the stool by my side and starts making relaxed conversation. I imagine a person I could talk to for hours. We'd get together every day for long walks. We'd probably discover all kinds of new places together. Then I look down at my thick plaid shirt stretched tight across my belly. I look up at the boy cleaning the grill and say, "Think I'll have another of those chocolate donuts."

The program director says I've got to stop spending money all the time because I'm already two months behind on the rent. Social security checks don't leave much extra for spending. What will they do with me? Maybe I'll hop on a bus and take off—leave it all behind—stop waiting. But now I sit away my Saturday at Woolworth's and sink into my own special hole. I can eat endlessly.



F O U R

Some nights Annie likes to let me know she hasn't forgotten the time I cooked dinner. She says, "You looked cute in the kitchen but . . . I think I'll do the honors." The night I played chef I served up a plate of spaghetti that was all stuck together. One pale grey lump. Somehow we ate it.

So the normal pattern is that Annie goes off to make bustling noises in the kitchen and I relax in our living room. I sit on the couch her parents gave us and turn the dial on the radio we just bought. At dinner we dim the lights just a little and sit at the big wooden table we found second hand.

Annie is happy to listen to me while we eat. I tell her about my friends who went off to World War Two or the trouble I always found in my drinking days. She nods to the words. I know she likes the sound of my voice even if she isn't learning much from what I have to say.

Frank and I still talk at the workshop but he'll ignore me if Annie's near. She likes to sit next to me at all the coffee and lunch breaks. Frank doesn't make the old jokes anymore. And I bet he's holding back on telling me what a dog my wife is. The buck teeth, the funny off center hair-do her mother does for her and the way she tilts her head. All that. I do remember the way she looked the first time I saw her, but I don't really notice these things anymore. I like the sound of her voice when she talks right at me, and only for me, and I like her slim young hands which look strong when she holds a cup of coffee.

Some days I run into counselors and other folks from the Pine Street Organization. They make the usual congratulations and ask me about my new apartment. Then they stand there, edgy, run out of polite questions, looking me over, looking for signs of something.

I didn't tell them or anyone about the marriage plans. I kept my mouth shut till it was all legal. I guessed my friends the counselors wouldn't just congratulate me back then. They'd have

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given me that close look. “How well do you know this woman?” I could just imagine their voices asking the questions. “It seems she just popped into your life all of a sudden, doesn’t it?” “What are you hoping to get out of the relationship?” “Are you sure you want to rush into this? Don’t do anything you’ll regret later.” And there’d have been other things. They probably wouldn’t have asked but they’d wonder how I could marry a girl less than half my age. What must be wrong with her?

But marrying Annie is not something I regret. Why should I wait around being careful when I finally get a chance? Even after her divorce Annie still believes in love and says age doesn’t matter a damn. She wanted to get hitched right away and I had no reason to put it off.

“You’re just like a big baby who needs someone to dress him first thing every morning,” she said once. I chuckle ‘cause she loves me even when she slaps my shoulder and scolds.

We live in a modern apartment with big windows. We’re in an apartment complex just outside of town. There’s a little private road comes up from Route 16 and a big parking lot between the three buildings. We don’t have a car so we have to be careful about catching the buses to and from work. There aren’t too many that come out this far. On weekends a different bus takes us to the mall for shopping.

Last weekend we painted the white walls of the weekend a light blue. “Bouncing Baby Blue,” Annie says. “Let’s bounce into the Baby Blue Room.” We moved the furniture around and it was like a new place to live. Our own nest. I can almost feel we’re parts of one person. Being around Annie is shaping me up. She’s got this financial chart that has it so I pay off my debts and still make rent. I might even be saving money soon. She’s going to write my sister in Florida and let her know I’m still alive and kicking. Annie wants everything right. We plan for the future. We’ll both get real jobs and earn real salaries. Late some nights Annie talks about having kids.

Now that kind of stills my thoughts. To look at Annie and think that life could grow inside of her! I never thought clearly

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about children of my own. Would I be around long enough to help bring up a baby? I can almost see myself bouncing a son on my knee and telling him stories. He could call me Pop. But I'm not sure what kind of stories I could tell him.

I think Annie's parents, Joan and Carl, are good to me. They never make anything of my age and they lent us the pick-up when we were moving. I hope they think I'm a good influence on Annie. She's never happy when we go visit them. She raps her knuckles against the walls and scratches at the cushions when she sits on the couch. I can't understand it too well. I wish we had a nice house like that one, with a front lawn to mow, a big back porch and a two car garage.

We went over there today. Annie and Joan went into the kitchen while I stayed in the living room and listened to Carl talk about the basketball on the TV. After a while we heard Annie screaming at her mom but he kept talking over the noise. At dinner Annie and Joan didn't speak to each other and I ended up telling stories about games I played as a kid, making all the memories good ones.

After Carl drove us home I told Annie I wanted to get a TV so I could keep up with basketball and football. She didn't answer me. She went into the kitchen and took out all the silverware and utensils and stacked them up in piles on the counter. I can hear her moving those knives and forks and spoons, now late into night, as if she expects to find the perfect order for them if she keeps trying.

I'm pretty sure she wants to be alone. I don't feel like sleep so I stand at the back window and stare out. There's a patch of trees out behind the building. In the dark there isn't much to see but I know they're there. Right now I like thinking it's a giant forest spreading out for a thousand acres. And Annie's out there with me. We're taking a walk under the trees, holding hands.





[a] *Wired* Encounter with [a]
THINKING PLAGUE

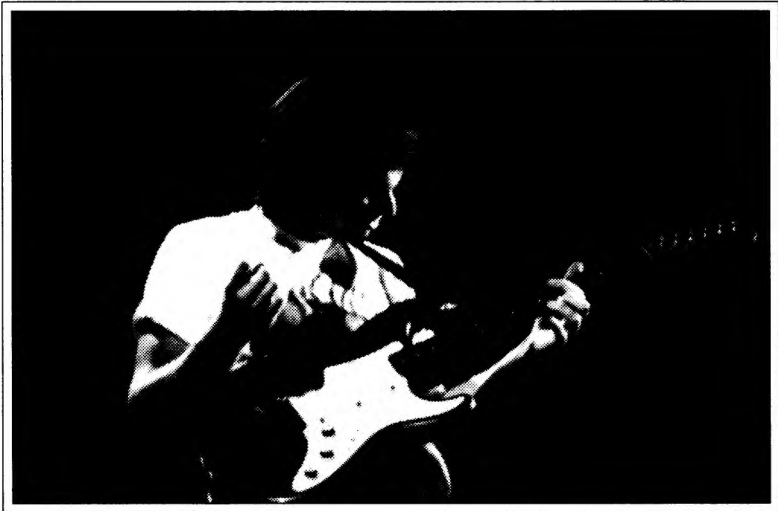
It is a rare pleasure to discover brave, peculiar music which combines intellectual stimulation with sensual reward—music so thoroughly satisfying that it immediately becomes a permanent part of the listener's context for appreciating all other music. Thinking Plague is such a phenomenon: a genre of music unto itself, eclectically derivative in a bold new way and spectacularly innovative in the old-fashioned sense of genuine originality.

Low-profile, almost *private* in their exclusion from the mainstream, the Plague first released two

cassettes on a local Colorado label in the mid-'80s. Quirky, unusual, these early recordings demonstrated evolution even within themselves (each project spanned over two years of activity), trailblazing the unknown frontier which even now remains only half mapped by their latest product: *In This Life*, a CD on RēR (a division of Recommended Records Mega Corp.) with international distribution.

Thinking Plague performances have always been infrequent, significant events, a condition aggravated by the the fact that their members now

[a] *Wired* Encounter with [a]
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live in southern California and New York as well as in the Denver metro area where it all began. However, they *are* planning a European tour and have hopes of following it with one across the States. Their cross-pollination of rock fundamentals with exotic avant garde experimentation translate surprisingly well to the concert hall. With remarkably accurate renditions of intricately complex and yet natural-feeling studio artifacts, they demonstrate consummate musicianship as well as a truly inspiring heartfelt enthusiasm. Watch for them particularly as participants at music festivals, but don't hold your breath waiting to hear them on playlist-infested radio anytime soon.

The following interview took place in June, 1990, the day before a performance in Boulder (where all photographs that accompany this piece were taken). Later that week they were to perform in California. The core band members were present: Mike Johnson [MJ], guitarist, composer of most of the band's music and primary spokesman; Bob Drake [BD], player of bass, drums and almost anything else handy in the studio, as well as the recording engineer; and Susanne Lewis [SL], vocalist and main lyricist. Absent were Dave Kerman (drums; perhaps best known for his work with another band, 5UU's) and Mark Harris (woodwinds; a nearly ubiquitous musical presence throughout the local Denver/Boulder music scene). Present, but curiously silent was Shane Hotle (keyboards). Curious, but not at all silent was their interrogator, Andy Watson [AW].

AW: Anyone want to summarize the history behind Thinking Plague?

MJ: I guess it was—

BD: Actually, I saw Mike's name on a bulletin board. I'd just moved to Denver and been living here a week—

MJ: In '78.

BD: In 1978, yeah. Oh, no; I put up an ad! *You* [pointing at Mike Johnson] answered *my* ad.

MJ: Right.

BD: This was something like the original band forming, and



Bob Drake

he was the first person to come over. Thinking Plague started that very night . . . in a way.

MJ: It wasn't really what we were doing though.

He and a friend were looking for some people to put together a band. It wasn't—

BD: But when you came over I knew that it had *all changed*. [laughter]

MJ: We spent about two years doing copy bands, but *meanwhile* . . . We were doing subversive musical projects in basements, on cassette decks. Composi-

tions with a '70s, progressive rock influence—Genesis, Gentle Giant, Yes. Most of the stuff we were playing was a cross between Genesis and Mahavishnu Orchestra, but not really fusion at all. Cosmic, glorious, New Age . . .

AW: Things nobody would *pay* you to play.

MJ: At the time, it was not extremely dissonant music. But we realized that we had to do something more radical, more unique and original. And we were of course under the influence of [Fred Frith's] Art Bears and those guys.

BD: We had lots of really trashy equipment, too. Bad drum sets, set up next to the furnace. Not much to record with, so we started coming up with weird ways to do things. Cheap effect boxes.

MJ: It lent itself to that whole school of thought, rather than try to do everything high-tech. Not go for that big record label sound.

AW: But on the first album [. . . *a Thinking Plague*], [Mark] Fuller is credited with playing Simmons [electronic drums],

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which were pretty expensive at the time.

BD: At that time, yeah. They were really new, strange.

MJ: They were really crummy.

BD: We don't like 'em.

MJ: But he had them and they were strange, so we attempted not to let him use them in any traditional way. He had this [trilled whooshing mouth noise] sound on one little passage.

BD: Actually, there's the bass drum on "Warheads" too.

MJ: Oh, yeah. On the second album [*Moonsongs*].

BD: No, it was "Thorns of Blue and Red," near the end, there's the drum war . . .

AW: I noticed the Genesis influence, but you guys have a lot more emptiness in between the big sounds that Genesis would always fill in with a wash of keyboard wall-o'-sound.

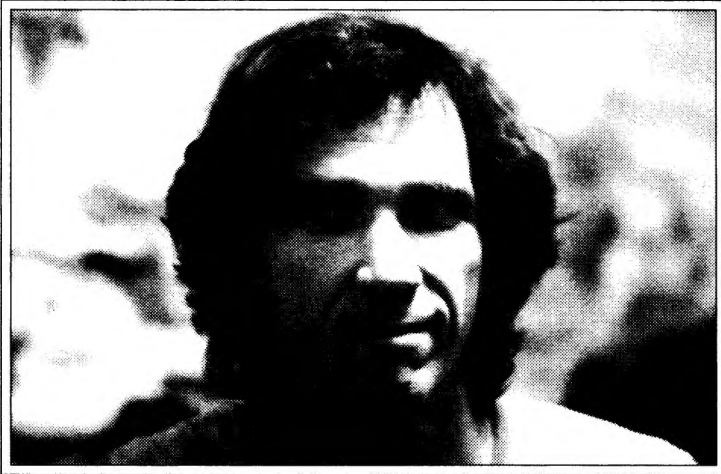
BD: I like a lot of space. More happens, then. It makes things more *mysterious*. I've wanted it to be a lot more mysterious than the bands people usually compare us to . . . People always compare us to Frank Zappa, too, which surprises me.

AW: Probably because of the orchestration, the careful, precise arrangements.

MJ: People who compare us to Art Bears—I think it was *Option* magazine that did that but said that we had a lot *more* going on, more complicated instrumentation. Which is true, I think. We go for a lot of different kinds of synthesized sounds, effects through production, a lot of different kinds of guitar tones. Whereas the Bears were always mellotron, guitar . . . always the same instrumentation. They chose to use a simple palette.

SL: We're more willing to experiment with different instruments. It's an adventure, thinking about new instruments to incorporate into what we do.

AW: I noticed on the CD [*In This Life*] that the only consistent sound—and even this is only true on the first three or four tracks—was the tone and presence in the mix of Maria's bass. That same big, rich sound is there but everything else



Mike Johnson

shifts and changes around it, it's all completely different.

BD: That's true.

AW: Did you start out sounding like what you wanted to sound like? Or are you only now getting there?

BD: [laughing] We never *have* gotten it to sound like what we want it to sound like.

MJ: That's impossible. It's always changing and you can never catch up with yourself. But when we were working on the first material, it was an excruciating process because we were using borrowed time at a friend's little eight track recording studio out here in the slaughterhouse region, called The Packing House. The basement of the place actually had what looked like blood stains on the wall. Horrendous place. We'd get in there once in a blue moon and spend four or five hours ... a tedious, slow process. And we didn't really know what we were doing. We just knew we wanted *something*, and so it was a lot of *playing around*. As soon as the thing was done I was completely dissatisfied with it. I liked it, but then right away I didn't like it. With the second album it took me a lot longer to not like it. Now, we were able to put a couple of those tracks on

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the CD and I'm able to think, *Wow, this is actually pretty good.* It renewed them for me. The current material is already a couple of years old.

AW: All of the credits on your albums always say the project was recorded over the course of a couple of years. It's not like you immerse yourselves in the studio for a month or two to produce these things.

BD: On the CD, we had a lot more equipment to use, really, whenever we wanted to—

MJ: And it was done in a shorter period of time.

BD: We spent a lot of time just messing around with it, experimenting. It was pretty cheap equipment. Two Fostex eight-tracks—

MJ: Most of it was recorded in the space of six months, except for one tune which was started way back in '87.

It was the old, previous Plague band that started it.

BD: With the CD, a lot more time was spent on it than on the previous two albums, which were a lot more rushed.

MJ: The entire piece, "Thorns of Blue and Red" [on the first album, ... *a Thinking Plague*] we did in two days, two eight hour sessions; we spent as much time on the one song, "Love" [on *In This Life*], as we did on the whole first album! [laughter] And over a shorter period of time, more crammed together.

AW: As a listener, the songs on *In This Life* have more consolidated identity than anything on the earlier albums. And they are less complicated, with fewer distracting, extraneous components. On the first two albums, every song has about fourteen things going on; it's overwhelming and confusing in spots. With the stuff on the CD, there's more focus, maybe only six or seven things happening at any moment, and it has more impact, seems to work better.

SL: I see each song as an entity. When Mike came up to me for a few of the songs, he'd have ideas and he wanted me to write lyrics. For example, "Malaise"—the whole concept was *right there*. Everyone had the idea, the mood; everyone really



Susanne Lewis

felt it while they were recording it.

MJ: I'd know what the song would be about, from the music, long before there would be any words. I'd say I want something that describes *this* feeling, and she'd have to go off and figure out how to do that.

AW: "Malaise" is probably the strongest piece on the CD, I think.

MJ: I felt that way about it right off, as a piece that is self-contained and fulfills its "mission."

AW: Is that how you go about the process of composition? Developing the music at the same time as the lyrics and the arrangement—?

MJ: No, no. I had the music already—

SL: All scored out.

MJ: Yeah, all scored out. And I put it on an old crummy sequencer that I have on my synthesizer, so I could hear how the parts sounded. And then I gave you [Susanne] a copy of that, right?

SL: Yes.

MJ: And then it was her job to . . . That was one of the only

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cases with any of the songs where I gave her a melody. I gave her *pieces* of the melody for “Lycanthrope,” but the rest of it was hers. For that one [“Malaise”], though, I gave her the whole thing, note for note.

AW: Now, that is just astonishing. The lyrics for that song are so well composed that I was certain that the lyrics had been written, like a poem, and then the music matched to it.

SL: It can be hard . . . that way. It sounds silly, but you really have to worry about your syllables. . . . It came out pretty well, but it was really hard to record, to get it just right, the phrasing.

MJ: She was trying to push it too hard, trying to growl the words out. We finally got her to just sort of whisper, plaintive, a soft kind of plea. The first time she sang the *Malaise* part, I had chills. I thought, *This is what we’re looking for!*

AW: Even though it is so carefully melded with the music, with a composed melody in fact, it has a “found” quality about it, as if the vocal were a recording of a street person talking to herself layered over this wonderful music. Very natural.

MJ: It’s supposed to be like that, like this victim of society is thinking out loud.

BD: We spent a lot of time on that song. It’s one of my favorite mixes. I did maybe five drum parts, just kept recording them over.

MJ: It ends up being a stereo drum part, with two different—

BD: I’d originally done a beat running all the way through, but I just didn’t like it, so I erased it and tried some more stuff.

AW: It has a great *lurching hump* to it.

BD: I thought that was more grim.

MJ: With the live version—talk about *lurching*.

AW: Do you try to make the live performances different than the recordings?

MJ: Not unless we have to. [laughter]

SL: There are bits and pieces here and there, though, you have to admit.

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BD: We're not trying to exactly duplicate them. Parts do come out sounding pretty similar just because it's all of *us*. But we don't rearrange the tunes hardly at all.

MJ: There are some changes in instrumentation sometimes, because we're using a woodwind player [Mark Harris] and that just didn't exist on the first two albums. And we're using him all the time. It's shed a whole new light on things, enriched our sound.

AW: What about sampling? With the programmed aspect of Thinking Plague's music, it'd seem to me that you could get sounds just the way you want them and then just *use* them.

MJ: If we were using a sampler, we would only use it to give us sounds we don't have. Manipulation of found sounds, or whatever. If we could afford a good one, we'd have one.

We've used cheap sampling techniques before—I mean *really* cheap. . . . We used a real clumsy instant replay, and a fifteen-second digital delay that was totally low-rent, on the first album. A vicious sounding thing, but it worked well enough.

BD: But I prefer people *playing* the instruments. Definitely.

That's why, like with the violin part in "Lycanthrope" we could have used a sample, but it just sounds better to me with someone actually playing it, even if they can't, you know, play



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very well. It's the intimate sound of someone with an instrument that I try to capture on recordings.

MJ: We would never be interested in using sampling to imitate other instruments.

BD: A lot of people have said, "you'd save so much time by just programming the bass and drum parts, then go in and run 'em off in the studio." But, it loses all the . . . the reason that I *play* those instruments! I like the sound of somebody hitting things, touching things.

MJ: You could program it, but it would never sound the same as a human.

AW: By the time you program in all the delicate articulations and nuances of delays and seemingly random anticipations and whatnot, it would be faster and easier just to have a real drummer or whatever sit down and play it.

BD: That's the thing; people think technology is a big time saver, that it will do everything for you. But it doesn't.

AW: Unless you can be satisfied with something very simple-minded.

BD: Right. In the studio where I work [Echo Sound, in Los Angeles], it's all automated, but it doesn't save time. It can even take *longer*. And people think it's gonna solve all their problems, but . . . It's not to say that that is something I'm not interested in, but for Thinking Plague it's just not very valuable. The other thing is, this stuff is so expensive to use.

MJ: That's our biggest problem. We'd be happy to try all this good stuff if we had a huge sponsor sitting on top of it.

BD: But at eighty bucks an hour—

MJ: We'd be happier just to have a whole lot more time to spend with some not-so-good equipment.

BD: The equipment can be *good*, and that's fine, it doesn't have to be the *best*, or the most newest thing, even though that would be great to have. *Time* is the thing.

AW: Well, what about new material, since the CD?

BD: There is *a* drum track recorded for *a* new song.

MJ: There's plenty of material written, but not much under-

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way. Part of the problem is that he [Bob Drake] lives and works in L.A., she [Susanne Lewis] lives and works in New York, and the rest of us are here. Well, our new drummer [Dave Kerman] lives in L.A., too.

AW: When you record, do you always do it track by track?

BD: Oh, yeah. I usually do the drums first. And then replace them later, in some cases. If I'm playing bass, I'll usually do that next.

MJ: Bob will play the whole drum track, sometimes with a click track but often not, without any prompting, from memory.

AW: Just listening to the music in your head.

BD: Yeah. And lately we've been doing scratch tracks, which is nice. The drum parts usually get better a few months later, after I do the songs.

AW: Which is why you replace them.

BD: Sometimes, yeah. There does seem to be a certain period of time when the song is still growing until it reaches a spot where it's mature . . . Most of the time when you record, you do it at that stage where it's still really new. The good thing about this new thing we're doing is that we've been playing it so long that it's really right now at like the best stage for recording.

MJ: On the other hand, we've had musical . . . songs . . . or pieces or whatever that had no existence of their own *until* they reached tape. Nobody in the band knew what they sounded like until they were done.

BD: It works both ways. Sometimes it's great to be spontaneous, come up with something the first thing, the first time you do it.

MJ: I think it's a general rule that it's always better if you've had a chance to—at least in segments—play it, let the players do something to it. Because no matter how I try, I can't match what happens after it's gotten into other people's hands. They add their own element. They may not alter the notes at all, but *something happens*.

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AW: Your rhythm section puts out a big sound. Have you always wanted to be a *rock* band?

MJ: Well, I can't speak for Susanne, she comes from a different background, but Bob and I—and now Dave [Kerman] as well, our new drummer—we all love '70s progressive rock. That big Chris Squire bass sound . . . mellotrons . . . all that. We wanted the ability to get that really large, awesome sound but at the same time, be *different*. We didn't want to have the sound that all of today's bands seem to have.

BD: Just the *energy* of those bands, their power—it's not that we're trying to sound like them.

MJ: We wanted to incorporate all sorts of other elements—

BD: —but still do our own thing.

MJ: In terms of the materials we're using, we wanted to be more . . . more like the Henry Cow kind of music.

Except more like rock. More like modern orchestra music, but with that *In Your Face* quality that rock has. With some of the expressive qualities that folk, or “rockized” folk music and various ethnic music has.

BD: Bands like Led Zeppelin, too. Raw, strong, but at the same time kind of innocent. Real rough.

MJ: Guitars out of tune.



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- BD: A lot of the acoustic stuff they did, there's nothing phony about it.
- AW: Some of the bands you've mentioned were the Art Rock bands that were often accused of being pretentious.
- BD: I can understand that. I think sometimes they were.
- AW: Chris Squire, for example, putting out that distinctive, terrific sound while flitting about on stage in wispy négligé-like outfits. It was somewhat absurd.
- MJ: Sure. It had that theatrical—
- BD: You could overlook some of that if you liked the *music*.
- MJ: I think that part of it was that it was *that* music which *hit* me when I *came of age*. But I also grew up with stuff like Stravinsky. For me, the idea is to take the best of those worlds and put them together in a way that somebody hasn't done yet.
- AW: It's uncategorizable music. I like the kinds of music you were listing as influences, and I think that is why your music works for me. It exercises so many aspects of music that are *familiar*, but at the same time puts them in a whole new context.
- SL: All these bands that you've been talking about haven't really influenced me *at all*.
- MJ: She's a different generation.
- SL: Yeah, I ought to make that clear.
- AW: So what are your influences?
- SL: I grew up listening to my parents' stuff. A lot of Frank Sinatra, jazz, and, uh, stage—Broadway hits. Later I got into rock and folk. Hmmm. The Beatles.
- BD: Definitely. Me, too.
- SL: [laughing] I really shouldn't say that, I guess. Let's see, there were tons of bands. But there really wasn't any one band changing my life or anything. And there was ethnic, mostly Eastern European. [More recently . . .] *Einstuerzende Neubauten*, Birthday Party, Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds . . . and Butthole Surfers.
- AW: What was that first one?
- SL: *Einstuerzende Neubauten*. Collapsing New Buildings.

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BD: They came to Denver.

MJ: Played shopping carts. Brought by Tom Headbanger and they did a performance in a junkyard. They're a German industrial music band. *The* industrial group, really.

AW: I'm shocked that you make every recording *one track at a time*. Certainly, the first four or five tracks on the CD sound like you have a band laying down the basic tracks.

MJ: On the first album, it was just me and him [Bob Drake]. We were the whole band, pretty much.

AW: And you never would play your parts at the same time?

MJ: No, not really.

AW: I thought that you did, because the live performance sounds so much like the recording. I just assumed that you recorded with the whole band playing and then layered on overdubs, vocals, whatever—punched in a couple of extra sounds here and there.

BD: Nope. In fact, it was usually weeks apart. I'd do the drums, weeks would go by, then I'd do the bass.

AW: I think that you can hear that on the first album [... *a Thinking Plague*], there's a little asynchrony here and there, but—

BD: I think that by the time we got to the CD, we had more experience, knew more of what we were trying to do. Not that we've reached some kind of plateau where we know what we're doing, because we're already trying to do something else.

AW: I wanted to ask you [Susanne Lewis] about the *sound* of your vocals. Almost unique in all of recorded vocalization—there's no vibrato, you don't use doubling to fatten the sound—for the most part, it's a very naked, fragile sound. It requires that you be dead on in your pitch and attack, you really don't hide behind anything. In some cases it's unpleasant, but in a deliberate way, for calculated effect, to give it *tension* or edge.

SL: Basically, I don't like to stylize myself. I don't want to *affect* anything that I don't have. I don't really feel I should force a vibrato if I don't have one. I've tried a variety

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of—I shouldn't say "styles"—I've tried a variety of *tones*, and yeah, I do try *styles*, but as far as vibrato goes I'm not trying to sound *professional*. That's not what I'm trying for. I'm aiming more for emotion. And if it hurts the listener, then it hurts the listener. But I don't think it *does*.

MJ: It hurts *some* listeners. I mean, we know that. We've had that laid at our feet.

SL: But I think I'm a better singer than a lot of singers. Not to sound vain or anything, but I think I have more emotional depth than—

BD: More *honesty*.

MJ: The honesty is what hits people.

AW: I have no problem listening to it. It doesn't *alienate* me from the music at *all*. But I can see where some people would want—

MJ: —to hear Kate Bush singing with Thinking Plague!

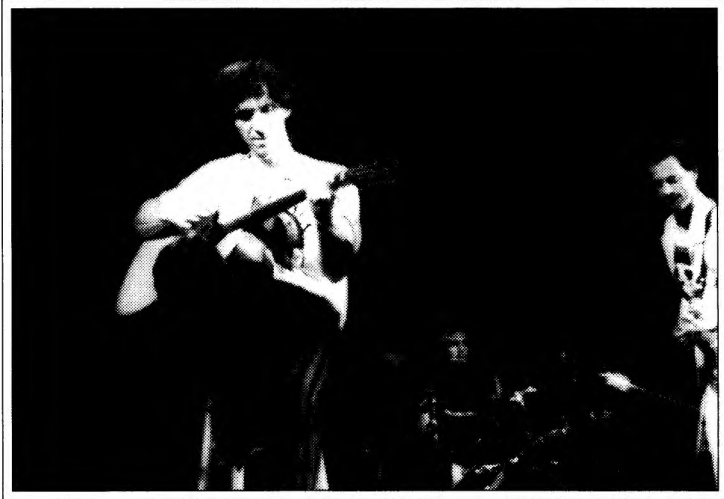
SL: Sweeter, but you can't *believe* in it.

AW: I was thinking more of the manufactured, generic sound of someone like Madonna, who has no discernible talent for singing whatsoever but is nevertheless tremendously popular. What you do requires a lot of skill and attention to detail. It's riskier than the sloppy crap that Madonna can put over.

SL: I was in a band with Mike called Cage of Reason where I was experimenting a lot with my voice. It got a lot of people really *hostile*. We were just experimenting. I was stretching the boundaries—or *thinking* that I was stretching the boundaries—of what I could possibly do. A lot of people felt positively about it, but there were *some* people who would actually call me on the phone and say, "You should really, you know, think about doing something else. You're ruining your voice." Things like that.

MJ: You never told me that!

SL: Sure. People would call me up, concerned that I was making the wrong choice. I mean, this was only *Denver*, but that was really important to me. But that was really important to me because at the same time I was trying to discover



what I could do and it was an honest attempt. But if people don't understand that, then they just *don't understand*. You can't really *explain* it. I can't really *defend* myself. I'm trying honestly to evoke the emotion that I think is a possibility for a song. Whatever.

AW: I think that it works. It's certainly another aspect of the Thinking Plague recordings that has matured and improved, *solidified* with the newer recordings. With the older recordings—I guess there's a risk with the kind of music you do, of being tagged as being over-intellectualized. The "pretentious" label. *Who do you think you are to do this? Why can't you just get down and groove? You have some objection to people dancing or something?* [laughter] *Why do you keep stopping and starting and changing rhythms?*

MJ: But you *can* dance to it!

AW: Depends on the way you dance, I guess. Anyway, on the earlier recordings, Sharon Bradford has a much more operatic style [than Susanne], which I think made the band more vulnerable to those kinds of accusations.

BD: That we were just being *intellectual*.

AW: As if you wrote these things on an NEA grant. [laughter]

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Anyway, with Susanne doing the vocals on every song you have a consistency that you don't have with different people singing differently on every track. And it's a perfect stylistic match.

MJ: We have an identity that we didn't have before.

AW: All the more remarkable now that you live in New York, LA, wherever, and have more cohesiveness than when you were all here in the same city. Did you finish the CD before Susanne and Bob moved away?

BD: Just before, yeah.

MJ: It remains to be seen how quickly we will produce another. . . .

BD: We're still trying to figure out how to do that. I'd like to *buy* some recording equipment, something I could just throw in my car and drive to Denver. Turn this house into a recording studio for a couple of weeks and then take it all back with me to mix it at my leisure.

AW: My guess is the odds aren't good for Thinking Plague to get much airplay. Any thoughts on that aspect of the industry? It's got to be frustrating for you to have such a fantastic product and virtually no effective means to develop a large audience for it.

MJ: It seems to me that when the Beatles, Elvis, and other big stars demonstrated the *economic potential* of the music industry—which had been, to a limited extent, demonstrated before, but not in as large a way—it created a kind of hysteria. Companies began to say, “We have to *own* that product. We have to own that *artist*. So that we can make as much money as possible.” And—rather than respond to and listen to what artists and musicians were doing, and become the means by which the music reached the public—they began to turn it around. To say, “We're going to find the artist *profile* that we want; we're going to *make* a product that we know will make money.”

SL: A spillover from Hollywood.

MJ: Yes. And the same thing happened in television, of course, and film. There are very few truly original films

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being made by, you know—there are plenty of great films being made by great filmmakers. . . . But the big money is going to *the product*. And that already has a preconceived format.

AW: *The sequel.*

MJ: Exactly. So, the listener has been conditioned by all this.

He's been hearing for several decades—for *four* decades but mostly since the '60s—what some business executives have decided he should hear. Directly or indirectly, they have made the decisions which have ultimately determined what's going to be heard. "We've *spent* the big money, now we want to *make* the big money."

AW: It's a vicious cycle, too. People who are learning to play guitar, piano, whatever, hear this stuff and want to play like that. They *want* to become part of the system. So there's no shortage of talent that rises to the undemanding challenge of regurgitative pop music product generation.

BD: And that whole way of thinking keeps people from listening to anything other than a very narrow range of what they've been taught to think is pretty cool.

MJ: But what happens when somebody gets sick of it and they want to reject it, revolt against it? Well, you get punk music and new wave, that kind of thing. Which were in many ways very productive and very professional but in many other ways it was like, "We're gonna throw out what you guys have learned. We're gonna reject where you've gotten to because we don't like the phony place that it's gotten to."

AW: You don't think that punk was a marketing phenomenon?

BD: It quickly became one.

SL: I think it was all contrived to be one.

MJ: Malcolm McLaren claims to have invented it *as a marketing concept*.

AW: It's ideal from the record company's perspective. They reduce their overhead tremendously. Instead of spending twenty-eight thousand dollars in the studio, they spend fourteen hundred and it makes absolutely no difference.

MJ: But there was a little bit of a *spontaneous* eruption of the

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general population.

BD: A lot of good stuff came out of it.

MJ: It happens every now and then. Not very much, but every now and then there'll be a spontaneous eruption from somebody a little bit different, a little bit fresh, that the industry will have to notice. They ignore it at first but it catches on. Then they say, "Okay. Now we want it."

AW: They come in to exploit it.

MJ: Somebody does well on an indie label, then they come in and buy the whole damn label up.

SL: But they *choose* to, though. I don't think that it's really exploitation.

MJ: But if a major label shows interest in the band, they're going to say, "Of course, we want more money, we want to be famous. We don't know—"

AW: Except that they still have the *choice* to—

MJ: The choice to stay poor and ride across the country in station wagons.

AW: If punk was an *authentic* rebellion, then why in the world would they *ever* sign a recording contract with a major distributor?

MJ: It was a musical rebellion, not an economic rebellion.

SL: It was the music that was happening anyway. It started, well, pretty much here, in New York City. Television, the Ramones, and all that.

AW: CBGBs.

SL: And from what I understand, Malcolm McLaren and a few other people came over, saw what was happening, and got the idea, "Yeah, I could really run a scam on this!"

MJ: I think Malcolm McLaren was really cynical.

SL: Oh, I think he was *desperate*, personally.

MJ: I don't know. I don't know about that. Did you see that film? What was it?

SL: *The Great Rock and Roll Swindle*.

MJ: Yeah. Complete garbage piece of trash.

SL: Oh, I liked it. [laughter]

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MJ: It sort of indicates the cynicism that McLaren had about the whole thing. Anyway, who cares about that?

BD: [melodramatically] *Who cares about that? Gawd!*

SL: Well, I think that it's important. They sprung an all-new type of possibility for music.

BD: Even if it *did* start as a scam.

SL: The music itself was legitimate. There were lots of bands that, right on the heels of the Sex Pistols, came out with genuine, really raw, earnest music.

AW: X.

SL: Yeah, X is a good example, but there were countless bands. And even the Sex Pistols at times. I really liked some of the stuff they did.

BD: I did, too.

SL: In a way, I think it was really cool that they exploited the major label. They're the ones that signed with EMI and then ran out on the contract. That was a statement in itself. That was what was happening in England, too, as far as kids wanting to defy everything that they were supposedly going to have to swallow eventually. For as long as possible, they were going to defy it.

MJ: It was the next version, reincarnation, of the attitude that happened in the '60s, when the music became the symbol of youthful attitudes. And once again, the industry bought it, picked up on it, packaged it, and resold it. And that's what I think is wrong with musical culture, as well as other cultures. Once it becomes a product, once it becomes too viable as a product, they step in and ruin it.

If you've ever spent any time with nine-year-olds, ten-year-olds, twelve-year-olds, fourteen-year-olds, they're *locked* to the TV set. MTV. And their radios and stereo, the media. They're not interested in this stuff. For the most part. Some of them are interested in this *sort of* stuff that some of the well known . . . bands like the Cure, Social Distor—what are they called?

SL: Social Distortion?

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MJ: Social Distortion. Bands like that. The Cure. The Cure is actually too large, but— [the kids listening are] *completely* conditioned by the media. You ask them to listen to Thinking Plague, for instance, and they don't have a frame of reference. They haven't learned how to listen to things *without* a frame of reference. They need a larger vocabulary to recognize the allusions or evocations. They just don't have it. They hear something like this and it just goes [hand motion over his head]. *Noise!* Or they hear Susanne and they picture some kind of weird shrieking banshee, and they hear this music going *eenk eenk* and they go, "What *is* this? Take it *away!*"

Our woodwind player [Mark Harris] gives lessons. One of his students is a fourteen-year-old, prissy, sweet, wholesome, suburbanite girl, and he played her some Thinking Plague music on a tape and she goes, "Oh, stop that. Stop that! Take that off!" [laughter]

BD: It has to do with the way everything is happening.

People don't want to think, don't want to be open to a lot of things. Maybe they're afraid. Or they don't want to think about certain aspects of life.

MJ: They haven't been *taught* how to do that. You have to *learn* how to learn. How to hear. Or how to not make snap judgments.

BD: The experience I've had in this business is—this music is only one way that I've seen this—I really think that a lot of times people just don't want to think about—they *want* to block out—a lot of things. And just concentrate on just what makes them happy at the moment. Or what makes them forget about a lot of other things they don't want to think about, either.

AW: You mentioned on the phone that you've done some film soundtrack work?

MJ: That's really Bob's thing.

BD: Somebody asked me if I wanted to do it and I said, "Yeah! That's be great!" Making sound effects for horror movies. I really like horror movies.

MJ: So [Bob] tore cabbages apart in front of microphones.

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- BD: Really disgusting sounds for really disgusting things happening on screen.
- AW: Did the film come out?
- BD: Yeah; there's three of them. One was called *Mind Killer*, another one was called *Night Vision*, and the third was called *Lone Wolf*.
- AW: I don't remember anything about any of them in theatrical release.
- MJ: They weren't.
- AW: Straight to video?
- BD: Yeah. Home video.
- MJ: Although a couple of them were shown on HBO.
- BD: They were all on HBO.
- AW: Was that music, the soundtrack?
- BD: At first it was just sound effects. And I kept saying—because I didn't like the music that they had—to let us do it. The first movie, the music wasn't even written for it. But it was totally low-budget and it was all he had. He had like twenty minutes of music that he used over and over. I said, "Let me do it. Me and my friends do the best horror music there ever was." So, he finally said okay. And for the next one we did the sound effects *and* the music, with Eric Jacobson and Ron Miles. That was fine; also, incredibly frustrating and impossible! And then for *Lone Wolf*, the third one, I didn't do the music but I did the sound effects again. And all the post-production sound. Putting that whole thing together was like one of the biggest educations I ever had.
- MJ: They ended up using Bob to do a lot more stuff than just the sound effects.
- BD: Yeah, I put the entire soundtrack together, put the dialogue in place. There was just nobody else to do it. I was sitting there with all these piles of video tape and I didn't know *anything* about any of that stuff. I just had to figure it all out.
- AW: Are you looking forward to doing more of that?
- BD: I *think* so. I'm not really looking for it, but if somebody asked me I would do it.



MJ: Actually, Bob and I went back and re-did some of the soundtrack for the first one, *Mind Killer*. We were just screwing around, not working *very* hard, and not that many hours, just using the synthesizers and a violin. We always liked Bernard Herrmann kinds of flavors.

BD: The director really liked it, so he got us in the running for a new *Amityville* movie [*Amityville: The Final Curse*].

MJ: *Yet another Amityville movie. . . .*

BD: It was supposed to be for theatrical release, but it turned out not to be after all.

SL: I was going to say [earlier] that I have an idea about *us* as compared to the acts you were talking about. As far as Social Distortion goes—the Misfits, Siouxsie and the Banshees, the Cure—they all have *symbols* . . . T-shirts and badges and things. So that kids can relate to them. Then the kids wear them and relate to each other that way. So there's like this *unity* thing. That's where I think *we* just don't—I mean, this is a real basic . . .

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BD: Go on.

SL: What I was going to say—the reason we're not relating to them that way is that for us the music is more important.

MJ: Than the paraphernalia, the surrounding peripheral stuff. That's true of so many musical groups these days. It's not so much the music as the *attitude*, or the *look*, or the *presence*, the *personality*, the *packaging*.

BD: I work with people who just say, "It's just the image."

There's times when the producer will re-do all the vocal parts. The first time that happened I just laughed. "Okay," I said, "That's pretty funny." He said, "It's just the image that we're selling." And that's true. Here's someone who *cannot* sing, who has *no talent*. Yet they're pretending he's the singer. He gets up on stage and lip-synchs to stuff that somebody else sang. And people go out and buy the record, wear his T-shirts, and idolize him. But he didn't *do* anything!

AW: What are they selling at that point?

BD: Just the image.

AW: Exactly. And the consumer buys the records and comes back for it again and again and *does not care* if it's really the actual celebrity singing. So what is it the consumer thinks he's buying?

SL: It's the *idea*. They live vicariously through the idea. They hope to incorporate it inside themselves. They're lacking that or they want to acquire that—

MJ: The symbols that these people create for their images *resonate* somehow with the consumer. It has nothing to do with who or what this person is. The record company picks up on this. "This is what they like, so let's give them this." And they hire some producer that knows how to evoke that. Even if it means completely reproducing, or replacing, or changing the vocal tracks. Or whatever. They take complete charge. So this producer is really the star, if anybody deserves to be. But he doesn't look right, he doesn't have the *image*.

AW: As you said earlier, they're working backwards from the intent to *market*. When you consider that they can do marketing

Thinking Plague's *In This Life* (1988–89) CD should be available through "a local music emporium near you," but probably isn't. In that case, you can ask your local dealer to stock it and pass along the information below or you can order a copy by mail. In the US and Canada, the following sources of alternative music are recommended: Wayside Music, POB 6517, Wheaton, MD 20906; and No Limits Distribution, POB 7438, Culver City, CA 90233. The CD retails for \$12 plus \$3 shipping & handling. For UK and international distribution information, contact the band's label: RēR, 19-23 St. Saviour Road, London SW2, UK. Thinking Plague's first two cassettes [... a *Thinking Plague* (1982–83) and *Moonsongs* (1984–86)] are no longer available—but watch for 1991 re-issues.

surveys—count how many times things occur in advertisements and what the sales are like as a result—they can determine in advance the specifications for the product that will succeed. Everything else—Thinking Plague or any other legitimate musical exercise—merely lends legitimacy to the whole industry. There's no economic reason for them to even *tolerate* the presence of something like a Thinking Plague CD—you take up space in the stores that they could use for *moving product*—but they *do* tolerate it because it helps them to perpetuate the myth of authenticity in their own products. But they don't tolerate it any more than they have to. You won't find independent music distributed in chain stores or other large commercial venues because the same people own those stores that own the record companies.

MJ: Let's not overlook the fact that there *is* an alternate marketplace in this country and in Europe and in other places—Japan. There are people who like the music that we do

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and that other people do. If you look at *Option* magazine, which has sort of outgrown itself a little bit. It's gotten slick and now they have to have big name people on the cover. But they still represent the coalescing of the interests of all these alternative people, be they zydeco fans or what-have-you. We've gotten letters and other contacts from people, some who were DJs who are starting their own distribution, whatever, and they *rave* about our music! *They* want it, they want to *sell* it and they want to *play* it.

AW: They want other people to hear it. They want to share their excitement.

MJ: And none of us have anything to do with them except that they like the *music*. So that's encouraging. That's our motivation.

commentary

Allen Steele

The Launch Pad

ON
MY





This is an essay about science fiction, space exploration, shared-universe anthologies, hyperspace travel, the sell-out of cyberpunk, the Moon, the galaxy, a neat plastic model kit and my kitchen table. Please be patient; we'll get to all that shortly.

My portable computer, on which I'm composing this essay, is set up on the kitchen table. Actually, the table is located in the so-called dining room of this house my wife and I have rented in New Hampshire, but since we rarely dine here, and because the table has moved with us, from house to house and kitchen to kitchen, across three states in the past five years, I still call it the kitchen table.

The launch pad is this gargantuan, monster-fuck Revell model of NASA's shuttle launch complex, still disassembled and packed in its three-foot-long box, which rests on a side table behind me. I bought the sucker last week after I sent the completed manuscript of my most current novel, *Lunar Descent*, to my literary agent. "Launch Tower & Space Shuttle & Booster Rockets" is my self-reward for turning in a 480-page novel ten months ahead of my publisher's deadline. My hobby is model-building—I've got a dozen different spacecraft, robots, jet aircraft and helicopters scattered across the house, and another dozen packed away in boxes out in the shed—but I tend to race through them. My last big model was an Bell/Boeing VS-22 Osprey, which I built partly for the fun of it and partly as research for a novella for *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine* ["Trembling Earth"; November, 1990]; the Osprey looks terrific, but it only took me a week to build and paint the thing. It's kind of disappointing when I finish something that fast: sort of like having good sex in only ten minutes. But the nice saleslady at the hobby store in Massachusetts where I

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bought this new model has assured me that my 1:144 scale shuttle launch pad will get me through the summer. “Your big problem,” she said as she rang up the charge on my credit card, “will be finding a place for it after you’ve finished it.”

No kidding. The model has at least two or three hundred parts altogether; it’ll probably take up the whole kitchen table by the time it’s complete. My hands are itching to get at the thing. Crack open a beer, spread out the business pages of today’s *New York Times* across the table, break out the Testor’s glue, the sandpaper, the trusty, rusty Xacto-knife, and spend the next few weeks slicing, glueing, prepainting, cussing, guzzling Busch Light, listening to Muddy Waters and Koko Taylor CDs, getting light-headed from inhaling the glue-fumes, and gradually watching the big mutha grow before my eyes. Fun stuff . . . but, unfortunately, it will have to wait a while longer.

I’ve got to write a science fiction story instead.

Damn.

I’m writing a new SF short story, and I’ve been procrastinating about finishing it because—to tell the godawful truth—I’ve lost interest in it. Normally I would just print out the fragment and toss it in a desk drawer until I either felt like completing it or the fucking thing rotted. However, because it was commissioned by a noted anthologist for a shared-universe series, and on a tight deadline to boot, and because I’ve seldom blown a deadline in my writing career, I have to turn it in within the next three weeks. So that’s why I can’t play with my new model kit right now. Look, I was raised in a Presbyterian household; you gotta eat your spinach before you get your ice cream. And this story is definitely SF—that stands for Spinach Fiction, in this instance.

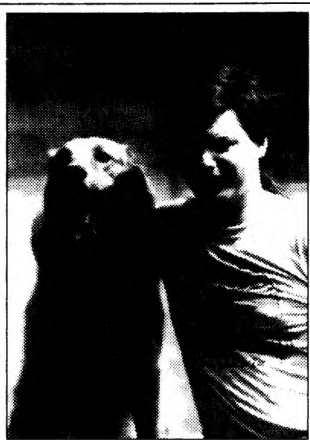
I took the assignment, even on a six-week deadline, for a couple of reasons. Yes, of course, because of the money: 12.5 cents per word ain’t nothing to sneeze upon, friends and neighbors, and I write for a living. Mainly, though, I’ve been interested in getting a closer look at this oft-maligned beast called shared-universe fiction. I’ve resisted offers by packagers to write sharecropper

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novels; writing from an outline seems to me to be about as challenging and creative as doing a paint-by-numbers watercolor of some New England seascape, when I can drive to Hampton Beach in an hour and see the real thing. But I figured that a 6000–8000 word story isn't that much effort to commit to what, for me, would essentially be a first-time experiment. And, because it's set in a universe outlined by a famous SF writer, and because I was invited into the anthology on the basis of my reputation as a hard-SF writer, I decided that I wasn't about to sell my soul if I accepted the assignment.

One-third of the way into the story, though, and I'm seriously wondering if I have made a mistake. Maybe this isn't paint-by-numbers writing, but nonetheless I'm still using someone else's brush and watercolors. For one thing, this shared-universe is set about 1000 years in the future; I haven't written anything which is set farther ahead in time than 59 years, and I've often said that I don't give two shits what happens in the year 2300. The major premise is that there are almost a half-dozen intelligent races populating the galaxy and that they're all in peaceful co-existence with each other. I found out last week that the Japanese, since they've been barred by international agreement from whaling past

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newspaper stringer and a country music disk jockey, he now writes full-time. He and his wife live in a small town in New Hampshire where they "are proud to be two of the only six registered Democrats." His second novel, *Clarke County, Space*, will be published in December by Ace. "The Launch Pad On My Kitchen Table" is his first appearance in *Journal Wired*.

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a certain limit, have now started to eat dolphins instead, and since Israel's new right-wing coalition government seems hell-bent on committing genocide on the neighboring Palestinians, I'm not sure if I truly believe that the human race could peacefully co-exist with a race of giant talking grasshoppers, even a thousand years from now. We may eat the first aliens we encounter, if they look tasty enough. Or just kill them because of some goddamn myth.

But I guess the assumption which nags me the most is that, in this universe, hyperspace drives have reduced travel time between stars to near-instantaneous. Ditto for communications; don't ask me how it works, someone else made this up. In the story I'm writing, therefore, I can have the crew of my free trader hop in their ship, push a few buttons, and wham-bam-thank-you-ma'am, they've hyperjumped across the local spiral-arm of our galaxy, from Wolf 630 to Epsilon Indi, in only a matter of hours. Hours, hell! *Minutes!* And even if intra-system travel, without benefit of the hyper-drive, costs these guys days or even weeks to reach their final destination, it still means that my crew could blow out of the Wolf 630 system faster than it takes my bank to call me about a late car-loan payment.

Now, I don't really doubt that hyperspace drives may one day be possible. Given the advances made in theoretical physics in the 20th century, I wouldn't put anything beyond the reach of human civilization in the 30th century. Not even faster-than-light travel, although Albert Einstein would probably be in hysterics if he was still around and reading SF. Even Stephen Hawking would shake his head if he touched the stuff. But what is *interesting* about this sort of spinach-fiction? I mean, what's the difference between postulating hyperdrives and, say, claiming that interstellar travel has been made possible in AD 2990 by flying carpets and enchanted dragons?

Where's the magic?

Lunar Descent is set in the same background as my first novel, *Orbital Decay*, some eight years later. *Orbital Decay* was my first attempt to re-invent the near-future space novel; for better or

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worse, it was intended (among other things) to depict a revised, modern view of how people might live and work in Earth orbit in the year 2016. The setting of *Lunar Descent* is an industrial base on the Moon in the year 2024; while researching this novel, I paid special attention to the Apollo missions, mainly to get a good handle on the special problems inherent in flying to the Moon and landing on its surface.

I grew up with the American space program; NASA was officially chartered by Congress in January, 1958, within a couple of weeks of my birthday. The Mercury and Gemini flights sparked my interest in science fiction, not vice-versa. I was just out of fifth grade when I watched Neil Armstrong make his first small step on the Moon, and my mother let me fake sick so I could stay home from school to watch the live coverage of the subsequent moonwalks. I remember the Apollo missions very well; twenty years later, I figured that re-acquainting myself with the program would be remedial reading at best. Sort of like watching an old *Star Trek* episode on a UHF channel for the sixtieth time; after awhile you stop paying attention to the plot and start looking for those shots when you can see William Shatner sucking in his gut. Familiarity breeds . . . well, if not contempt, then more familiarity at least.

Wrong. Very wrong. There was a lot which I had missed the first time around. One of my favorite models is the one I built last autumn of the Apollo lunar module. I had to search through many hobby stores to find a vintage model, and this one is exact, right down to the gold tin-foil on the sides. For once, I didn't rush while I was putting it together. The model now has a place of honor in my living room, on a shelf just below copies of my own books, because it's a vivid reminder of what a fragile little machine the Apollo astronauts flew down to the maria and mountains of the Moon.

If a car dealer tried to sell you a vehicle which was as stripped-down as the Apollo LM, you would laugh and tell him to send the clunker back to the motorhead teenager who stole it in the first place. The Apollo LM looks angular and funny because every piece of excess was removed from it to conserve weight, and

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therefore fuel. It didn't even have *seats* in it, for chrissakes! When the astronauts slept, they had to curl up next to each other on the floor of the LM. The fuselage had skin so paper-thin that, when a technician at Cape Kennedy dropped a screwdriver on one of the LMs, it punched right through the sheet-aluminum.

Each time an LM was flown down from lunar orbit, it came in on four legs and a prayer. During Apollo 11, the *Eagle* touched down in the Sea of Tranquility with less than sixty seconds worth of propellant left in the descent engine's fuel tank; another minute off the ground and it would have crashed. Not only that, but no one at NASA—let alone Armstrong and Aldrin—was absolutely certain whether the ascent engine would function at all, because it had never been flight-tested. There was an uneasy suspicion at Mission Control that the first men on the Moon might be marooned there. When a fuel cell in Apollo 13's service module exploded, the LM *Aquarius* was forced into service as a lifeboat. Make no mistake, the three astronauts on that mission almost didn't make it back alive; they had to jury-rig a contraption out of spacesuit parts and duct tape just to remove the carbon dioxide from the air they breathed. The landing of Apollo 14 was almost aborted because of a computer foul-up while the *Antares* LM was still in lunar orbit. Apollo 16's touchdown was nearly scrubbed when the *Orion* was stranded ten miles above the Moon for more than five hours. There were a lot of *almosts* and *nearlys* during the Apollo program; nothing was routine about any of the missions. God almighty, it took balls to ride in those things.

But it's also the reality of spaceflight. For me, that's a hell of a lot more interesting than hyperdrive jaunts to Epsilon Indi in AD 2990. Yet, somehow, all this has been forgotten in science fiction. In 1969, the members of the World Science Fiction Convention awarded a special Hugo to Armstrong, Aldrin, and Collins for the "Best Moon Landing Ever." Times have changed since then. I've actually had SF fans tell me that the Apollo missions were boring. "I liked *Star Wars* better," someone once said to me. "It was more exciting."

Christ. What has happened to science fiction?

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Twenty-one years after Apollo 11, I have written what is probably one of the very few major novels about near-future lunar exploration since Ben Bova's *Millenium* was published in the mid-'70s. Meanwhile, many SF fans and reviewers have welcomed its companion novel, *Orbital Decay*, with open arms; some of them have started calling me the next Robert A. Heinlein. I'm grateful for their support, but they seem to have me mixed up with Heinlein simply because I'm writing stories in the same general setting that Heinlein explored in the '40s and '50s. Not that I mind my work being favorably compared to that of one of the genre's grand masters. Hell, I'm flattered. But hundreds of authors have written fishing stories; does this mean that each new fishing story should be compared to *The Old Man and the Sea*, or that each new writer should cast into Hemingway's long shadow? I suppose they would, if no one wrote fishing stories anymore . . .

That's almost scary to think about. I'm a newcomer in the field, writing about what should be an obvious subject, but most of the big names are off in another part of the galaxy. Science fiction seems to have abandoned near-term extrapolation about space in favor of hyperdrives and galactic empires and cute pink fuzzy-wuzzy aliens from the planet Bongo, umpteen-thousand light years from Earth.

If our best writers explore the solar system at all, it's a hundred or so years in the future, and usually not much closer to Earth than Jupiter and its satellites. There's been a score of novels about Mars, but most of the time they take place on a far-future Mars which has terraformed and now looks like southern California. The Moon doesn't fare much better; in most cases, we're presented lunar colonies replete with swimming pools, train service and four-star hotels. One recent novel about a lunar colony presented us with a Moon which has been terraformed, despite the obvious fact that, given the Moon's low mass and gravity, it would be impossible to terraform the place because the atmosphere

simply wouldn't stay in place. It is as if the real-life conditions of the solar system have become inimical to SF writers; unless the Moon or Mars are terraformed to look like Earth, few writers want to touch them. But a terraformed Moon or Mars might as well be Bongo, for all it's worth; no difference so far as I can tell.

The only significant body of near-future space fiction in the last decade, in fact, has been thinly-disguised right-wing propaganda for Reagan's SDI program. That's not much better, though: instead of the exploration of space being conducted for purposes of science, commerce, and colonization, we've been given with a wildly optimistic vision of the high frontier as a new arena for a Cold War which would be dead by 1990. Let's go into space so we can zap some Russians! And some liberals and women's-libbers and anyone else who doesn't vote Republican!

Either that, or in substitution for realistic near-future SF we're given a stream of cynical futures populated by post-apocalypse studded-leather-jacket street gangs with wires sticking from under their mohawks, leftover bullshit from *Heavy Metal* and the album covers of a dozen interchangeable rock groups. Cyberpunk started out well enough, but has now degenerated into another branch of spinach-fiction. Stephen Brown lashed out against *Orbital Decay* in a four-page essay in *Science Fiction Eye* because it wasn't a cyberpunk novel. At first I was angered by his remarks; now I'm merely amused, because it has become apparent what has happened to that particular subgenre. I recently met a radio DJ from an FM station in New England who calls himself a cyberpunk. He dresses cyberpunk, talks cyberpunk, and plays cyberpunk music on his radio show; he's got a cyberpunk haircut and can do the cyberpunk glower. He's a real cyberpunk kinda guy. But he has never heard of William Gibson, Bruce Sterling, Pat Cadigan or John Shirley; he thinks cyberpunk was invented by MTV. Cyberpunk has got to be the first literary movement to have been co-opted by the music and fashion industries. For all of its initial bad-ass pyrotechnics, its manifestos and underground politics, cyberpunk now qualifies less as SF than as another disposable form of radical chic for the trendoids.

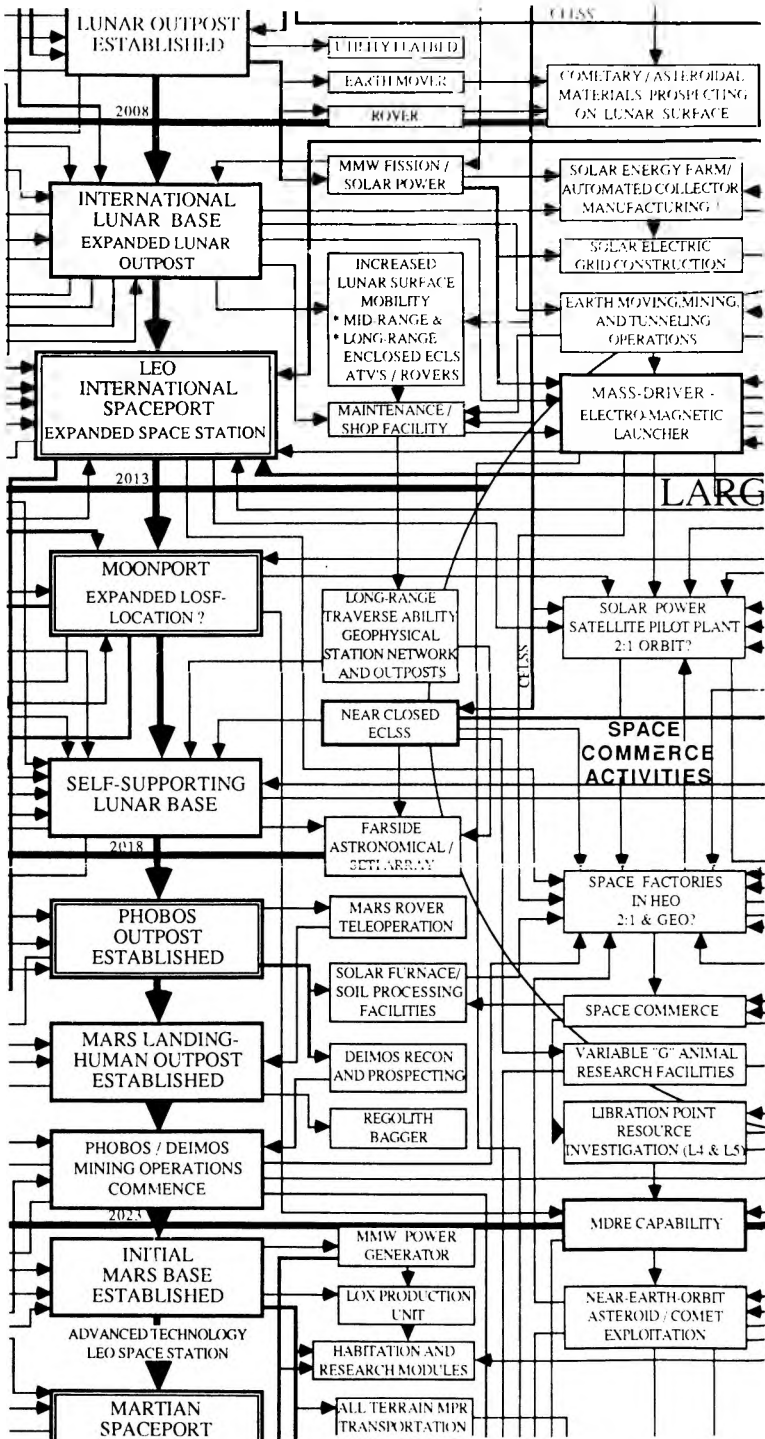
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So where does one find realistic near-future extrapolation? Not in science fiction; the field has abdicated its role as a prophet. Rockwell International, the aerospace manufacturer which was the prime contractor for the NASA shuttle, is doing a better job of looking into the future than the membership of the SFWA.

I recently acquired a massive wall-diagram which lays out Rockwell's Integrated Space Plan, a internally-funded program which is attempting to synthesize manned space exploration through the next century. The diagram is dated February, 1989, and looks like a wiring diagram, more complex than any flow-chart I've ever seen; almost every feasible technological development is integrated into this chronology. It starts, at the very top, with the American space shuttle program, and gradually works its way down through fully reusable spacecraft, the first international space stations, a return to the Moon and the evolutionary establishment of lunar bases, the building of solar-power satellites the first manned expeditions to Mars and, finally at the very bottom of the chart, to large-scale human habitation of Mars and the beginnings of interstellar travel.

No hyperspace drives and furry-ass aliens here. This is an incredibly intricate, well-reasoned, and *realistic* vision of man's future in space, as factual and believable as anything ever conjectured by Heinlein or Arthur Clarke or Greg Benford. There's enough packed into this single diagram to fuel a few dozen novels and short stories. But of all the people credited in the chart's margin, only the name of one SF writer—Jonathan Post—appears.

***The Integrated Space Plan*, version 1.1, produced by
Ronald M. Jones. The excerpt shown on the facing page is
reduced to 70% of its original size and represents roughly
5% of the entire 27 X 44 inch chart. For information:
Rockwell International
Attn: Ed Repic, Project Manager
Lunar & Planetary Systems, Mail Code AD21
Space Transportation Systems Division
12214 Lakewood Blvd, Downey, CA 90241**



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In hindsight, there really should be no surprise for this. SF laid out the groundwork for the exploration of space, but almost before the *Columbia* made its first flight in the early '80s, its writers had abandoned the future in favor of thrilling adventures on Bongo.

And, in the meanwhile, the best new hard-SF writer of the decade has turned out to be Rockwell International.

In many ways, reality is far more exciting than fiction. I've visited the real space shuttle launch complex at Cape Canaveral. I've stood in the grasslands below the mound of Pad 39-B, just beyond the perimeter fence at sundown the day before a launch, and watched the massive rotating service structure of the gantry slowly swing back as the floodlights came on to highlight the fuselage of the *Discovery*. Press cameramen swarm around me, shutters clicking like metallic crickets. Not far away, former Apollo astronaut-turned-artist Alan Bean has his easel set up beneath a set of portable lights, struggling to capture the minute with oil paint on canvas. Tomorrow morning the shuttle launches, and there is an excited tension all around me, even among the most cynical and world-weary reporters covering this mission; it's the Fourth of July and we're all a bunch of kids hanging around in the park, waiting for the fireworks to start.

This is what I mean by magic. . . .

Magic which I sure as hell won't get from writing this procrastinated short story. But I will complete it, because I made a promise to an editor and I always try to keep my promises. I may surprise myself; it might turn out to be a half-decent story after all. But I have found, despite of the anthologist's kind invitation into this shared-universe and the famous writer's guidelines, that I have no desire to continue writing in someone else's universe. This story will be finished and submitted by deadline, and I will do my best to make it worth every penny of my check, but after this I will politely turn down any more requests to participate in shared-universe anthologies. I don't think there's anything inherently wrong with shared-universe anthologies; many derive entertainment from reading them, and authors who are better wordsmiths

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than I have derived satisfaction from participating in these round-robin worlds. I can't knock either the writers of these things or the readers who keep them busy. It's only that I don't like sharing a future which I didn't create myself.

It may be that readers of spinach fiction—as opposed to readers to science fiction—have become tired of the future. On the other hand, it could be that readers are becoming jaded with intergalactic romances, tired of ersatz *Star Wars* movies repackaged as shared universes and sharecropper novels. Either way, I do believe, quite firmly, that the future isn't about hyperspace drives or galactic conquest or cyberpunk sex-fantasies. It's about . . .

Oh, hell, what do I know? And who am I to lecture you even if I did know? Maybe it's just about wanting to build a plastic replica of a space shuttle launch pad on my kitchen table.

Perhaps it's only about keeping your love alive.

Go figure it out for yourself.



Illustrations by Ted Garcia

Wayne Allen Sallee is an award-winning writer of contemporary horror fiction. "Drinking Buddies," like much of his work, scrapes away the misleading veneer on seemingly ordinary characters to reveal sordid, shameful secrets.

fiction

Wayne Allen Sallee



Jack Dolenz sat hunched over his beer at the far end of the bar, the way a man looks when he's trying to light a cigarette on a rainy, windy night, unaware that he was being watched. Behind the bar, directly in front of Dolenz, were three things: a metal box with a liquor-streaked sliding glass window which housed a lone hot dog cooking on a revolving, hypnotic mechanism and which resembled the old Riverview Ferris wheel in all its rusted glory; above that, a small plastic sign that warned *YOU WILL NOT BE SERVED IF YOU WERE BORN BEFORE THIS DATE* IN 1968, the number eight written in black marker, which was *also* streaked with beer; and above *that*, a huge, electronic *SILENT RADIO* display, the flashing red screen providing the bar's patrons with baseball box scores, updates on the World Cup Soccer tournament in Mexico City, and the toll-free number for *Playboy* magazine. All items that baffles the world over found important.

'Cause they ain't nothin' but a bunch of cowards, Dolenz thought disgustedly. *Take that babe three stools down opposite the Miller Draft*

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spigots. No one's going near her. All too caught up with blowing their time, afraid of rejection. Well, the *hell* with 'em. Dolenz never lacked the courage.

She *was* a babe, he mused, letting his eyes wander. Twenty-nine, thirty? A Real Dream.

Dolenz could hardly wait to get back to work.

At one a.m., which Dolenz noted was the correct time when he signaled to the bartender for another Bud Light, this place used to be jumping. But ever since Nolan Void's opened last month down State Street with its honey of a four a.m. license, the barflies—yuppies and burnouts alike—would buzz on out these doors at midnight, so that they could meet their drinking and pick-up quotas without being interrupted by the blinding glare of an early last call and surly bouncers eager to kick your ass out the door.

Deserted like a graveyard. Which suited thirty-one year old Jack Dolenz just fine, thank you. Murdy's would always be his private retreat whenever he was in town. And Jack Dolenz was planning on staying in Chicago for quite some time.

Yes, he enjoyed the solitude.

The bartender, barrel-chested and slower than shit out of a constipated moose, slapped the Bud Light onto the cheap black counter, splattering several huge drops on Dolenz's chambray shirt. Knowing that it was near closing time, Dolenz ordered another, as well as a shot of Yukon Jack for the road. The bartender sighed and moved like the tide to the ice-laden chests near the front of the long bar, stopping once to bellow "Last call for alcohol," again to scratch his crotch. The crowd was sparse: if anyone had heard him, they didn't care.

As if to spite the grungy barkeep, a deeply tanned blonde with hair cascading down her back in sworls of delight clunked several quarters into the old Seeburg jukebox near the washrooms. Dolenz kept a sideways glance at her blue-jeaned tush as she scanned the top rows and made her selections. The box shuddered to life.

Dolenz motioned the bartender for one last shot. A man wearing a grey sweatshirt over a pair of creased Sedgefields, sitting two

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stools farther down, ordered one also, though his choice of drink was José Cuervo tequila. The sleeves of the sweatshirt were pushed up around the man's elbows; a blue and red tattoo that read MOTHER was barely readable through the thick black hairs of the man's left arm. The right arm was similarly hirsute, but for a small patch near the wrist that revealed a newly-healed scar.

The "babe" to the left of Dolenz stood up shakily, as if somehow the gravity in the bar had increased through some freak of nature, left a buck tip, and walked out the door, waving her cigarette airily.

The song playing, Dolenz suddenly realized, was by Roxy Music. Jesus, when was the last time he had heard anything by *that* group? My boy, my boy, he was getting old.

" . . . dressed to kill and look who's dying . . . "

Reagan Andriot had certainly been dressed to kill tonight, Dolenz thought. Sharkskin grey sport jacket, white shirt open at the collar, gold chain, real snazzy all right. And that briefcase he was toting made him look like some shill salesman, instead what he *really* was. What he truly was, and wouldn't this be a gasser if *To Tell The Truth* was still on the air, was one of the finest serial killers in the country.

In fact, Dolenz thought that the young Andriot, six years his junior, was second best of them all. Dolenz considered himself to be first.

Dolenz took a long pull from the bottle, wishing in as wistful a way as was possible for a man of his character that the bars in the Midwest still stocked long neck bottles instead of these stubby little things. He checked the bartender's watch when he bent over to unplug the hot dog machine, the lone wiener inside getting a reprieve to live another day. Reagan should be back almost any second now; it was quarter after one.

He had run into Andriot in, of all places, the guys' john, about four hours earlier. The men's bathroom was where their entire meeting—their entire conversation—had taken place. After the traditional put-'er-there-pal handshakes (the kind you see in imported beer commercials) were out of the way, Reagan Andriot had

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set his briefcase on the sink, his beer on top of that (if you didn't take your drink to the head, it was gone when you returned), folded his arms across his athlete's chest, and asked just what the hell old, prematurely balding Jack Dolenz was doing back in the Windy City.

Andriot, always with a sharp memory, rightly recalled that the heat was on Dolenz after the Grant Park axe murders in the autumn of 1981, to which Dolenz replied that some Hispanic had babbled a "confession" while doing time in Joliet for breaking his parole on a CCW charge or some shit like that. Of course, if the authorities had asked, the guy would have confessed to everything from the Rapid Transit killings to the Suzanne Degnan murder back in 1946, even though he would have been but a glint in his mother's eyes back then. That was at the end of July: the papers



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had eaten it up. So Dolenz, reading the headlines in Nashville, was back for more.

He truly liked Chicago, and the infamy which preceded him there.

Spend the afternoon at a Cubs game (he laughingly showed Andriot the nifty Cubs shades he had picked up on Sunglasses Day the previous Tuesday), grab a babe for a quick roll and a couple of deep slashes, then off to Murdy's for a well-deserved bottle of beer. Or maybe pick up some slut at the 950 on Wrightwood. It didn't matter to Dolenz where he found them. Or where he left them, for that matter. He pressed his hand against his back pocket, satisfied with the feel of his pearl-handled stiletto. He'd be *stupid* to use an axe now, and besides, hacking away at his victim's bones would make him sweat in the oppressive heat of August.

It was especially hot and rank-smelling in the bar's open-stall, two urinal bathroom. Their beer bottles were slick with moisture. Dolenz glanced beyond Andriot back into the bar: nothing was happening. He stared at the mirror, seeing his own hair matted to his high forehead. Dried flecks of shit floated in the cracked blue toilet, resembling flies. A soiled Sports section of the *Trib* was bunched in the corners of the makeshift stall, propped against one of the yellow tiled walls.

Dolenz came out of his brief reverie after vaguely hearing the bartender ask something. *Probably wants me to drink up*, Dolenz thought. *Jesus Christ, it was hot!*

So there they were in the john. Dolenz's blue cotton shirt was soaked at the armpits and here Andriot was in a goddamn sport jacket looking as fresh as today's news. And just what the hell kind of name is Reagan Andriot, anyway? Serial killers should have more down-to-earth names, like . . . well, like Jack Dolenz, for chrissakes.

But Reagan *was* his drinking buddy, if only once every few years. A guy needed someone he could do shots with, and shoot the shit, reminiscing of past sprees and brushes with the law. Dolenz had only wished that the crowd was thinner, that he and

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Andriot could've saddled up to the far end of the bar (where Dolenz sat now) or in a shadowed booth.

It was a crying shame Andriot had to leave so soon, what with the crowd gone and all. A previous engagement, he had explained. Dolenz wondered what girl's name would make the headlines tomorrow.

Dolenz told Andriot the grisly details of the recent home invasion murders in Louisville, Kentucky, and Renfro, Tennessee; and of the 135 sniper killings—sniping was one of Dolenz's favorite hobbies—in Waco and San Antonio.

Dolenz wished the two of them could simply talk shop at the bar. He *really* did, but after nine years of drifting, one thing you did find out is this: you never know who's listening. And Dolenz was drunk enough to have a slightly louder voice that would carry easily. Better safe than sorry.

The two killers pondered the real identities of the Zodiac Killer and the Green River slayer in Washington State, the latter of which has had the murders of thirty-seven prostitutes attributed to him/her since 1982. Andriot and Dolenz both found hookers to be too easy a mark.

They joked about LA's Hillside Strangler and Richard Speck and David Berkowitz, the Son of Sam. Their laughter was deep and long. And then there was the grapevine gossip. Dolenz had heard that the guy who had killed the Grimes girls back in '55 outside of Chicago and later that decade terrorized the populace of Texarkana with four murders, Eddie Phillips by name (another down-to-earth name, Dolenz thought contentedly, and one the cops in both states would *never* know), had died of colon cancer in a Little Rock hospital a few weeks back, taking all his secrets with him to eternity.

The man in the sweatshirt swung open the door and made straight for the pisser, and the two killers shifted their talk to that of baseball and women. The new arrival spent several seconds shaking himself off before leaving. Dolenz thought that he probably expected the two of them were working out a coke deal or something.

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As the battered door swung shut, Andriot sipped his beer and told Dolenz of his involvement in the “sex-slave” disappearances near San Francisco last autumn. It was no surprise to Dolenz that his drinking buddy was the mastermind of the whole thing. He remembered the story as it broke: Merced county deputies, acting on an anonymous tip, broke into the shack Andriot was renting under the name Evan Colbert. Luckily, Andriot had been in SF at the time.

The deputies had found several dozen videotapes of whimpering naked women chained to chairs, and even more unspeakable things than that. *Entire families* had disappeared from the Bay Area that fall, including several from as far south as San Diego and as far east as Salt Lake City. Although no one had been actually snuffed on film, charred adult and infant remains had been found in a large compost area behind the shack.

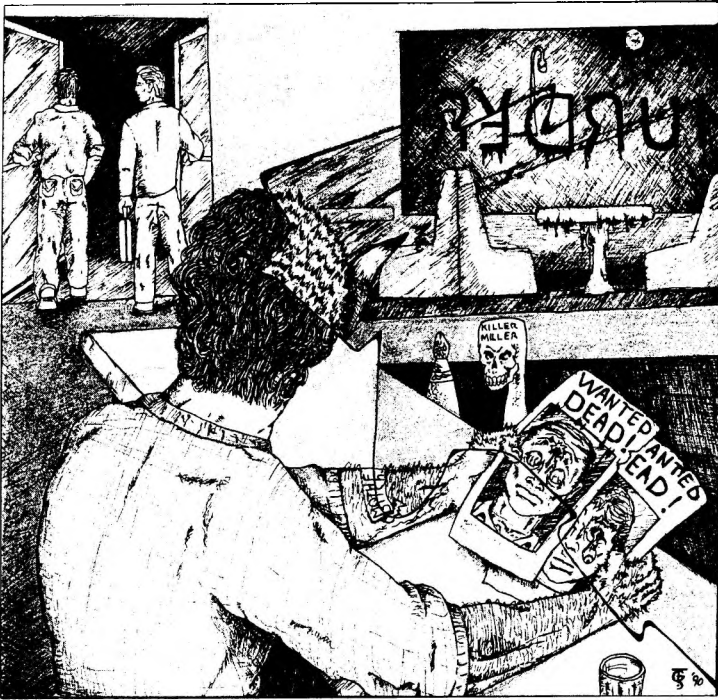
When Dolenz had asked what he had done about the family men, Andriot replied that he had let them loose in the mountains to be hunted and killed. Dolenz questioned the originality of that, saying that there had been books and movies done in similar ways, and if Andriot was anything, he was original.

Andriot grinned wistfully, his smile widening as he described the beauty of his “twist.” Andriot had kept the men shackled off-camera, releasing them to the mountains two at a time, naked, after the pair had been *sewn together*. Just like a three-legged race, he beamed.

Their beers drained, Andriot checked his Gold Rolex watch and commented on how late it had gotten. He had to get going. It was then that Dolenz had gotten the crazy idea. He knew Andriot was as much a betting man as he, both of them playing the odds against the cops for most of their adult life, and he proposed a little wager.

The wager was this: \$10,000 to the one who killed the most victims by Labor Day, twenty-one days away. The proof of each kill being ownership of the victims’ IDs.

Reagan had *loved* the idea, beaming like a small boy with a



new puppy. He opened the clasps of his briefcase then, showing Dolenz his treasure trove of torture (Andriot's words). Garroting wire. Hammer and nails. A jar of scurrying cockroaches. Hydrochloric acid.

They made plans to meet later that night here in the bar, and Andriot left with a cheery wave.

At the bar next to Dolenz, the man in the grey sweatshirt stared intently at Andriot when he departed, and at Dolenz now. He rifled through a sheaf of *Wanted* flyers. Finding Andriot's, he folded it neatly, placing it into his back pocket with Dolenz's.

This is excellent, he thought. Two in one town.

He walked into the street and lit a cigarette. He'd be back tomorrow, right as rain. The gun was comforting in his pocket.

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The man in the grey sweatshirt was a serial killer. He killed *other* serial killers.

His trigger finger itched.



Illustrations for “Deposition to the Inquisition”
by Ellen Kiyler

Dave Hyde was incorrectly reported to have come to the US from the UK via Canada in the previous volume of this journal. Apparently, it was a straight shot. As is the following all too possible “story.”

Dave Hyde

Deposition to the Inquisition

Sir, I swear I didn't *mean* to burn the Flag. It was an accident and can be directly blamed on the fact that it was the Fourth of July. Like all Good Americans on that great national holiday I was simply expressing my fervent patriotism in the time-honored traditional way of setting off fireworks. I didn't intentionally aim that bottle rocket at the flag on top of the Citizen's National Bank building. Like I said, it was an accident. And I did the best I could to put it out before our sacred National symbol got completely burned up.

But, as you know, when I rushed up to the roof I could find no water or soft drinks to throw on the flames. It was only an act of desperation, sir, a heroic effort on my part, I thought, to whip out my penis and thereby use my bodily fluids to put out the fire, thus saving our great symbol from total immolation.

Unfortunately, I was unsuccessful. The misguided, though, of course, completely respectable citizens who had followed me to the roof seized me at that time and prevented me from doing more than just dowsing the gold tassel.

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And yes, I did get angry and strike at them. I was shocked! They must be crazy, I thought, from all the firework fumes in the air. I remonstrated with them, just as you have it here in the transcript. "Blow on it!" I urged them, "Expectorate! Do something!" But they were more intent on restraining me. So you see, sir, it was all a misunderstanding that has me here before you tonight.

As for these other charges, these secondary ones, well, let me tell you what happened so you can see that the whole thing has been blown way out of proportion.

After I escaped from the outstanding patriots on the roof of the Bank building, I thought I'd better go home and forget about the fireworks show. I was depressed—though, not really *depressed* as that would indeed be an inappropriate emotion on such a Great Day—but saddened, yes, deeply saddened by the loss of the ol' Stars 'n' Bars. Plus I'd gotten separated from my wife while conducting my heroic effort to save our treasured symbol.

But while I'm on the subject of my family, sir. I'd like, if it's okay, to put in a word for my wife. She's a good Christian woman, sir, and truly loves the kids. God bless her, sir, she's completely innocent of any involvement in this, er, slight misunderstanding. Take it from me, she's a God-fearing motherly woman who'd rather die than be guilty of these anti-American charges that you have her up on.

And I would too.

Anyway, the point is, I was emotionally perturbed while driving home in my dazed state and I unintentionally drove by the Fifth Street roadblock, which I didn't know at the time was one of those new mandatory ones set up by our public defenders in their much-to-be-applauded efforts to apprehend probable drug dealers.

Naturally, when Officer Dalbo pulled me over and inspected my vehicle it came as a complete surprise to me when he found those shreds of tobacco under the seat! I can only say, in all honesty, that it's a used car and the vile weed was probably left there by the previous owner.

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Well, after Officer Dalbo gave me my summons and called the Substance Squad to further check out my car for other illegal contraband-type materiel I started to walk home. Which is when the next of these trifling incidents here on the transcript occurred.

You have to understand, sir, that Mrs. Grumbolly is an old woman, prone to seeing things that aren't really there. I'm sure that, had she known it was me, she'd have simply waved a cheery hi and went about her ordinary business; no doubt baking one of her excellent apple pies, of which I am proud to have partaken of oftentimes in the past.

But it was dark. I can't blame her for calling out the Neighborhood Watch. I *was* actually walking down the street at night and, you know, what with these ecologists about, you can never be too sure. . . .

Of course, my Neighbors quickly apprehended me and called for the police.

When Officer Dalbo again pulled up I greeted him like a long lost friend who would surely rescue me from this predicament I was in. But after the mild pummeling I'd received at the hands of the Watch, Officer Dalbo didn't recognize me and even as I turned



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to congratulate my neighbors on their diligent though unnecessary crime-busting efforts, he pressed me against his police car.

The immediate problem was that I didn't have any identification. Officer Dalbo had earlier impounded it along with my car. So, I suppose, yes, he was within the scope of his duties to arrest me at that time as a possible vagrant and probable Boot Camp escapee; God knows, there's certainly enough of *them* wandering about. . . . But sir, he *withdrew* those charges when I pointed out my home only two houses down. So, these charges of vagrancy, escape and attempted rape can be discounted.

First off, I was nowhere near Mrs. Grumboolly at all! I was merely walking down the sidewalk and whistling *The Navy Hymn* in an effort to pick up my spirits after the fiasco at the fireworks show. I most definitely did *not* wolf whistle at Mrs. Grumboolly and leer at her through the window!

And as for these next accusations: "breaking and entering," "lying to a police officer," and "possession of illegal subject matter"—it's all a mistake!

Look. It was my house I took Officer Dalbo to . . . though, *technically* he was right when he stated it belonged to the Government, him having impounded it not thirty minutes before—along with my wallet. And yes! I guess I did unlock the front door with my key but, hah, hah, that's hardly "breaking and entering" now, is it?

But "possession of illegal subject matter!" That's a serious crime and I do take it seriously. That stack of evidence you have before you, lemme see, items 1 through 9764E on this transcript, is most definitely not subversive subject matter. Five hundred years of *National Geographic*; three thousand copies of Philip K. Dick's *The Game Players of Titan*—I had the market cornered, sir; one hundred and twenty *Bloom County* comic strips (collected in one book, I might add); four *Destroyer* novels; three letters; and an overdue electric bill for \$432.10 from the Public Service Company. Sir! This is nothing more than the literary accumulation of any man in our enlightened Democracy!

To be a Good American you must be well read. A good citizen

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is an informed citizen, as the saying goes. Or, at least, as it *used* to go . . .

Forgive me for that outburst, sir. I'm upset, a little ticked off, if I may dare say so, at this heinous accusation. To be a common criminal is one thing, but a *subversive* . . . Sir, I have my dignity. As a taxpayer of this Great Nation I can only stand and look on in horror when I see these filthy columnists attempting to undermine our glorious capitalist state. It's a wonder to me that they haven't all been rounded up already. You have my sympathy, sir, in the onerous task that lies before you.

But you're a busy man with more important things to do than listen to the excuses of one poor defendant. I know there's several more pages to this transcript to cover yet so I'll go over them quickly.

Now this one: "listening to obscene music." This is another error, sir, and I must attribute it to the commendable overzealousness of Officer Dalbo. The music, merely a snatch in actuality, was from a passing car—no doubt one of those gang leaders on their way to the Boot Camp to visit their relatives. I didn't recognize it myself but Officer Dalbo said it was on his list. I knew I didn't want to hear it. I could tell from the beat it was shrill trash and not a genuine artistic expression at all.

And at this juncture, sir, I'd like to again express my admiration for Officer Dalbo and all the members of our fine police force for the wonderful job they're doing protecting us good citizens from probable criminals like me. In all the months I spent in the Agnew County Boot Camp I was not mistreated at all, the food was good and we had plenty of exercise. . . . Well, I just wanted to say that for the record. Oh yes, and I do like the new uniforms they have now—very sharp, very sharp indeed.

But I'll hurry along, sir. Time's a-wasting. This next item, number 27: "possession of pornography"—why I'm sure you'll see how ridiculous this is! That was no pornographic photo in my wallet but only a picture of my wife. I daresay Officer Dalbo was correct in his application of the Community Standards statute at that time—in comparison to the rest of the neighborhood my wife

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certainly does look like a movie star. But obscene! Sir, I'm forced to take offence! I hope you don't mind. My wife is a beautiful woman and most capable of arousing my "prurient interests" when I'm with her in the flesh, well, that is, *physically*, I mean, you know, *normally*, in a wholesome American way. She's a good cook, makes fantastic apple pies and I'm sure she's even better at it now what with all the good habits being instilled into her at the Federal Motherhood Facility in Dayton, Ohio. I bet she'll fix you right up, sir, with a great pie once she's finished her retraining. Maybe you could come over for dinner some time?

Well, how silly of me. I'm sure you don't associate with common defendants even when they're ex-defendants which, I hope, is what I'll be once you see how absolutely harmless these many allegations are.

This one, now: "indecent exposure." What happened here was, after I got to the police station and underwent the mandatory urine, gene and blood tests, I was just standing there, naked, to be sure, while Officer Topankin took my fingerprints. Then, when Officer Dalbo returned from organizing the trucks to pick up the evidence from my house, well, actually, not *my* house, it was the Government's house and I really had nothing to do with all the stuff hauled out of there as evidence, it didn't belong to me, after all. Well, once he saw me in my naked state he again slapped me with the community standards violation. "Policemen don't walk around naked," he told me, "we have *standards*."

I could only agree with him. What sort of respect would our Nation's Finest have if they walked around naked? Sir, the thought is terrifying. Naked policemen. Good God! Who would ever save us from ourselves?

Please excuse my blasphemy, sir, I'm a trifle agitated. In actuality I'm a Born-Again Christian and blessed to have been converted by that honored American and theologian, Jimmy Swaggart, right there on my TV back in '89. When it comes to the Good Book, sir, you'll find no more diligent a student than me. As Reverend Swaggart says: "Praise The Lord! I have sinned. . . . Forgive me."



Yes, indeed, forgive me. We are all sinners, sir, in the eyes of God—though, of course, *not* your exalted self. Judgment is mine, sayeth the Lord and I certainly wouldn't dream of passing judgment on one so righteous as yourself. I mean, who am I? Just a lousy defendant, is all.

Well, um, I'll cut it short and get on with my rebuttal to these final charges of "possession of an un-American attitude," "maintaining a common nuisance," and "visiting a common nuisance."

Sir, I'll have you know that I'm a veteran of our formidable Armed Forces and proud to have served under our military leaders—great men all—in our God-given defense of Democracy in this post-Communistic world. Why, sir, I even rose to the responsible rank of Airman First Class in our mighty Air Force. Do you think my superior officers would have promoted me if I had had a bad attitude? Sir, this accusation strikes not at me but directly at the competence of our military leaders. I can think of no accusation more outrageous.

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Now, as for these two “nuisance” charges. I think they’re a bit much. I’d like to remind you that at the time Officer Dalbo cited me I was in a cell in the city jail with several other probable perpetrators of possible crimes. Naturally, we commiserated amongst ourselves as to our plight and discussed the Nation’s problems; mainly the disgraceful state of the Arts and the low repute into which our schools have fallen. *We talked*, sir, that is *all*, as roommates will in any institution.

We didn’t realize we were doing wrong until we saw Officer Dalbo listening through the bars. Well, sir, after making a few cogent remarks concerning a general lack of discipline in the world, he booked me first for “maintaining a common nuisance” in the city’s jails and my roommates for *visiting* one. Then, in a stroke of punitive genius he booked *them* for “maintaining a common nuisance” and *me* for visiting *them!*

Sir, if I were you I’d keep an eye on that Officer Dalbo, he’s sure to go far. A good Officer, sir, who tempers his justice with a fine sense of mercy. He even went so far as to concede us a minor point of contention, namely, that our “gathering” did not constitute a violation of the conspiracy laws, as he’d first suggested, but only “illegal camping on public property.” For that I’m grateful, sir. A fine man. A true American.

I guess that about does it. My ten minutes are almost up. So I won’t address these additional forty-seven charges accrued while I was in Boot Camp awaiting my day in Court. As you can see they’re merely internal Boot Camp matters—murder, rape, and arson—and need not concern us here in the face of these other more serious allegations.

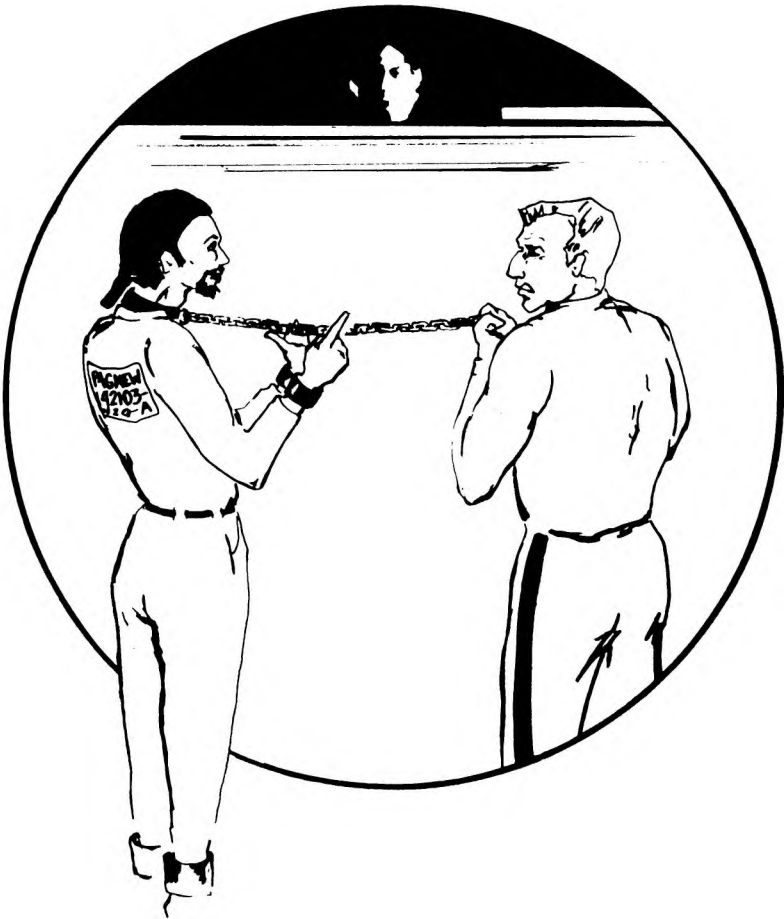
I hope, sir, that my remarks hitherto that I just got through saying will incline you to leniency in my case. Any un-American errors on my part were purely unintentional and I feel I have atoned for them in the last nine months I’ve spent at Camp Agnew. You see before you not the Liberal, card-carrying scum of nine months ago but a born-again American, a True Servant to the Conservative Cause, ready to go out to the Heartland of this Great Nation and *take charge*.

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And on that note I'd like, if I may, sir, to lead you and these fine officials of the Court in a rousing chorus of our divine National Anthem. Of course, my voice isn't what it used to be, so excuse me while I clear my throat.

Ahem, ahem.

After four, gentlemen? One, two . . . ?



William

Neuromancer was published in 1984 as an Ace Special, a \$2.95 mass market paperback. It was William Gibson's debut novel, and it could hardly have achieved greater popularity and respect—within, at least, the insular domain of science fiction. It won every major award in the genre and soon drew notice in the wider marketplace, especially among artists and performers working in other media. The 21st century world described in the novel involves a networked information-processing construct known as the *cyberspace matrix*, which can be manipulated and experienced by direct neural interface. Data structures and network pathways are represented

Gibson

visually and can be navigated in three “dimensions.” The fact that the main characters are mostly criminals and street hustlers led Gardner Dozois, editor of *Isaac Asimov’s Science Fiction Magazine*, to coin the term “cyberpunk” as a label for *Neuromancer* and the other sf writings associated with it. (For a definitive representation of cyberpunk as a literary phenomenon, we can, as always, recommend *Mirrorshades*, an anthology edited by Bruce Sterling.) The rest is history.

Gibson followed *Neuromancer* with a sequel, *Count Zero*, in 1986, and a third in the series, *Mona Lisa Overdrive* was published in 1988. Gibson has also written

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short stories, most of which were collected in 1986 under the title *Burning Chrome*, a book which includes a story of the same name. His latest book is *The Difference Engine*, a collaborative novel written with Bruce Sterling, published in August, 1990, by Victor Gollancz (UK), also scheduled to appear in the US from Bantam in 1991.

The following interview was conducted by Gregory Daurer in November, 1988, in the Brown Palace hotel, Denver. Never before published, it contains some interesting material that we at *Wired* have not seen in other interviews with William Gibson.

GD: Were you a child of the 'sixties?

WG: I guess so, to the extent that anybody was. It was more a scene for orphans. . . . What that has become *in retrospect* for people my age—I don't buy. I remember it as being *quite* scary. It wasn't like a warm and joyful time . . . I thought it was *very* spooky and paranoid, and people were remarkably innocent about some things. I remember being really shocked when I first realized that Nixon had *lied* . . . I'd always known that he was a scumbag, politically, but I didn't think he'd actually *lie* to the people. That's some indication of how far off-base *I* was.

I didn't have a particularly wild 'sixties, though. If I'd gone to New York I probably would have been dead; I went to Toronto, which was really a soft-core 'sixties, a kind of semi-European scene. I knew more West German draft dodgers than American draft dodgers. Their system said that you just had to stay out of sight for a few years and then come back. Very civilized. You just *hid* from the recruiter. But there was no legal hassle after that.

GD: What kept you out of the war? You were of age, right?

WG: Yeah. I think the thing that kept me out was that I was in Canada and I kept sending in my changes of address.

The notice on the back of the card said, "You must inform your local Selective Service Board every time you change address." So, every time I'd change my address, I'd *inform* them. But in

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fact, I was informing them that I was in *Canada*.

When I was in Canada, there were American draft dodgers committing suicide on a regular basis. I didn't know those guys; I was actually kind of scared of them. They had made *serious* political decisions. There wasn't a lot of *humor* in that community. But I knew people who worked with them. And they'd *kill* themselves . . . they'd be *nineteen years old*. I wonder how many of them did that? I look at somebody eighteen years old today and I think, *How could anyone do that to someone eighteen years old?* It's unbelievable.

I don't like to take any moral credit for evading the draft. I didn't really make a *moral* decision. I just didn't want to get *killed*. I just thought it was *bad news*. And anyway, I thought they didn't need me for a soldier—I would have wound up on smack in Saigon or something.

GD: Are you more optimistic now or just more aware?

WG: I think I'm more aware. I don't consider the kind of thing that I do to be *predictive*. If I were ever to sit down and think about the way the world is going, I'd just get depressed. So I think you'd be lucky to get *this* kind of future [the setting of *Neuromancer* and its sequels]. I just think of it as *another place*. Sort of an impressionistic version of *this*. I'm not one of those guys who sit down and work it all out on charts. I just go in and splash it all around.

GD: I read that that was exactly what you *did* do while writing *Count Zero*. That you had to break out some charts and graph out where it was going.

WG: Yeah, but that's not the same as—for instance, I have no idea of what's going on in *Ohio* in these books; I mean, *Ohio doesn't exist*. Neither does the Soviet Union. It's *off the map*.

I was talking to these computer game people who were making a game out of *Neuromancer*, and they were pounding their heads on the table because they thought I'd know where everything was. They'd ask, "What's the gross national product of the Sprawl?" I'd say, "I don't know." They'd ask, "Well, what's happening in Hong Kong?" I'd say, "I don't know."

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They said, "But that's not gameable!"

GD: What do you think of the Presidential election coming up next Tuesday?

WG: Frankly, it makes me wonder whether democracy is workable anymore in the kind of technological set-up we've got. The thing I'm absolutely sure about is that I'd like to see something written into the constitution that would prevent *any* former head of a national security service—the CIA, or any former intelligence head—from holding office. I think that's a very crucial thing. It's like the separation of church and state. The intelligence community is a sort of theocracy; secrets and higher knowledge. I think if we elect the former head of the CIA [Bush] we're going to get what we deserve. On the other hand, the other choice doesn't look all that encouraging. That's pretty scary, too.

GD: What scares you most?

WG: In terms of future scenarios? Have you ever read *On Wings of Song* by Thomas M. Disch? He posits a near future world that's very power-hungry—an energy-poor North America ruled by fundamentalist televangelists. I think that is the most depressing science fiction novel I've ever read. Brilliant. *Quite* believable. All *too* believable.

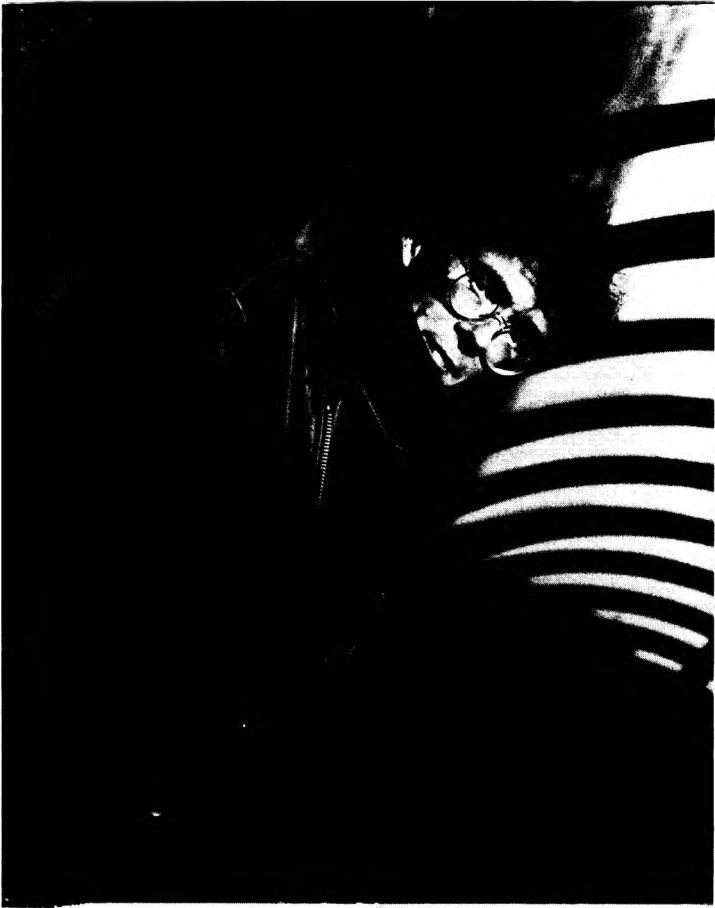
GD: Computer viruses are in the news these days, too.

WG: Yeah, it's interesting. I first heard about them in 1980.

It took eight years to make it onto the cover of *Newsweek*. I first heard about them from a couple of women I met in a bar who were ex-WACs, who had been Pentagon keypunch operators. They were plastered, talking about their days in the Pentagon. Somehow I heard this expression. "Virus . . ." I didn't even know them—I sort of went over and latched onto them. I said, "What *is* a virus?" They said, "We'll *tell* ya, honey." They couldn't actually *explain* it, but I got enough sense of it to realize that it was a *wonderful* buzzword, an interesting *concept*.

GD: Viruses worked well in *Neuromancer*, cracking AI [artificial intelligence] defenses.

Alex Waterhouse-Hayward



WG: I didn't realize how esoteric the concept was back when I picked it up. I just assumed that everyone knew about it, at least the computer people. In fact, they didn't. Now, as the articles come out you get the background on where these things come from. It wasn't in the public domain until recently.

GD: How has William Burroughs influenced you?

WG: I don't know. I think his influence is so pervasive on

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twentieth century literature that it's hard for anyone to know. His Japanese publisher recently asked me to provide a blurb to replace the old Norman Mailer blurb they've been using—the one saying that William Burroughs is the only American writer possessed by genius. I think mine is something like, *William Burroughs has created the literature of the second half of the twentieth century.*

I don't think you could have had Hunter Thompson writing *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* without Burroughs. Lots of very surprising people will immediately admit to Burroughs's importance. Like Walter Hill, the film director, told me last year—we were talking about Burroughs and he said, "Oh yeah, a very important influence."

GD: I understand that you met him recently.

WG: Yes, I did. It was kind of like meeting W. C. Fields. He's a real archetype of . . . something or other. He's very funny and he goes to bed really early, but that's because he's quite old. No—he's *amazing*. I'm really interested in his paintings. He recently opened a show in Chicago based on a passage from one of his books that begins, "Never fuck with a Chinaman." That's the theme of the whole show!

It always seemed to me that Burroughs was this guy who saw American science fiction lying there rusting in the gutter, picked it up like a bent can opener, and used it to gut American society in the 'fifties—slashed 'em with it. When he found it, I don't think he thought, *Oh, this is terribly important stuff and it demands our attention.* He just thought, *What an ugly, twisted tool.* I know he was reading pulp science fiction in the 'forties and 'fifties.

GD: Has Burroughs influenced your decision to write an alternate history in your upcoming book [*The Difference Engine*, a collaboration with Bruce Sterling]?

WG: I don't know. Influence questions are very strange in the arts, because I don't think artists really know what their influences are. I suspect that the more together you are as an artist, the *less* able you are to infer influence. Somebody who's

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consciously influenced is going to produce an imitation of something. That's not the way to go. I think I was probably thirteen when I first read Burroughs, so he's been in my life forever. When I wrote *Neuromancer*, there were a couple of things that were consciously Burroughsian. There're a couple of monsters that appear, where I was thinking, "Yeah—this is the way Burroughs would do it." But I don't really do that anymore. It's more after the fact. I go back and look at it and say, "Uh-oh, there's Burroughs popping up." Or Thomas Pynchon.

GD: You mentioned *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. Are you a fan of Hunter Thompson?

WG: Oh yeah, yeah! I read that when it was serialized in *Rolling Stone*. I had been living on this island in Greece and there wasn't anything to read except for, like, somebody's three years of back issues of *Private Eye* magazine and a bunch of these daffy English paperback ghost-story anthologies. It drove me crazy. That was in 1971. The woman I was eventually to marry, and I, had been living in Greece under the Colonels, as tourists. That's stupid to say, because tourists were never properly *under* the Colonels. They had these things posted that said, you know, "Be *nice* to the *tourists*." Spooky to see. Then we'd been in Spain, when Franco was still in business.

When we got back to London, we were staying with this Canadian guy who'd been buying *Fear and Loathing* as it came out in *Rolling Stone*. I'd just come back from two kinds of fascist state; Hunter Thompson was *perfect*. I remember sitting down and spending an evening convulsed in tears of laughter. It was just brilliant.

GD: Why did you write *Mona Lisa Overdrive*? What did you feel you'd left out of the other books that you wanted to clear up?

WG: Well, I started going down to Hollywood and it was the first time in my life I ever met people involved in that world. The material excited me. And then it seemed to me that it was very germane to the world I'd dreamed up in the first two books. I didn't see any point in inventing another background

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for this material, because it just seemed to fit.

I'd also had a strange mid-winter visit to London that made a big impression on me—because I'd never been there before when it was cold and snowing. When it's covered with snow, it really does look like . . . It covers up the power lines . . . You see this kind of eternal city.

Also, the publisher was *dead keen* on it. [laughs] They had a pre-sold market from the other two books, so I tried it. I don't really operate on considerations like that too often. I like to think I'm incapable of doing anything excessively commercial. I try occasionally and it just never works. I have to go and do what seems like the right thing to me and hope it will be popular.

GD: You've called *Neuromancer* the "Anti-Star Wars." Did you dislike the film?

WG: That's one of those throwaway lines that plague you for years. [laughs] No, *Star Wars* isn't science fiction. *Star Wars* is like unicorn fantasy, except the stage setting is pseudo-technological. *Star Wars* is more like Tolkien than science fiction. It wasn't really *Star Wars* that I was kicking against when I wrote *Neuromancer*. I was kicking against the whole Robert Heinlein tradition of militaristic, right wing, upper middle class American science fiction. *That's* what I didn't like. I still don't. [But] that, and unicorn fantasies, are the main trunk of the science fiction industry. The kind of thing I do is still actually very marginal. It has a certain popularity, but it's not really affecting the direction of the rest of the stuff.

GD: Do you view reading as similar to jacking into the Matrix?

WG: Oh yeah! I always get disheartened when people get too excited by the imaginary technology, because you don't need any of that stuff. The Matrix is the world of information and we have access to it anyway. It was a metaphor that I used to deal with these huge flows of information that we're all faced with. The problem is not that we can't *get* information—it's that we can't get the information we *need* out of the river of it that

A guy at [a book signing] came up to me—I'd signed his book—and asked, "Will this be worth more when you die?" And I said, "Uh, I don't know. Maybe marginally." He then asked, "How old are you?" I said, "Don't hold your breath." He looked at the book, and he looked really sad, and he said, "You know I was hoping to make some money getting these books signed," and he wandered away. He wasn't being cruel. He was just stupid.

we're stuck in. When you think that we're literally sitting there with cable channel signals passing through our bodies, radio waves . . . I love that thought.

When I was a kid reading science fiction in the 1960s in a one-horse town in rural Virginia, I discovered science fiction, and it was my sole source of subversive ideas. There was *no other place to get them*. It was so far below the notice of the authorities or my parents that it was *totally free*. So I could walk around, thirteen years old, and Philip K. Dick was addressing me from his amphetamine fog in California. I didn't realize that until years later; but I was getting *strange* data from these guys.

Even during the McCarthy era there was never any real censorship of science fiction. It was considered so debased, so far below the notice of any intelligent adult, that its practitioners *could do anything they wanted*. Unfortunately, that's no longer true. Not only are academics and others watching us—a bad thing—but science fiction has become something one can consider as a *career*. You can sit back and think, *Do I want to be a dental technician or do I want to be a science fiction writer?* I never did that. I have a kind of snobbism about that. Before, it was done by the people Bruce Sterling calls "paranoid pervert saints." People like Dick, who just had no choice.

GD: Why do *you* do it?

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WG: I guess I reached the point in my life where *I* had no choice. But I started writing very late. Science fiction is the domain of the child prodigy. I think Sterling published his first novel [*Involution Ocean*] when he was eighteen years old, and that's been *typical* in science fiction. The same thing is true of Samuel Delany. I didn't start writing until I was in my thirties. But Burroughs didn't start writing until he was about thirty-five. He told me it was a good thing to wait; you'll have something to write about.

GD: In your three books you've incorporated a techno-myth that has existed among science fiction writers. We hear about Philip K. Dick and a lot of other people in the 'seventies who believed they had been contacted by some . . . Other . . . something Out There. Robert Anton Wilson writes about that quite a bit.

WG: I think Dick was a marvelous writer, but he was totally bughouse. I think the guy was crazy and had been for a long time. I'm sure he was a wonderful man to hang around with, and he was a remarkable writer, but I tend to back Kim Stanley Robinson's hypothesis that Dick's *VALIS* experience—when the pink beam of light came down and hit him, and he started receiving information—was the first stroke in the series that finally killed him. There's a marvelous book called *The Man Who Mistook His Wife For A Hat*, by Oliver Sacks, which is where I got a lot of the more peculiar states in *Mona Lisa Overdrive*, like Korsakov's Syndrome and a couple of other things.

I don't believe *anybody* has been contacted by *anything*. [laughs] I think people do *have* these experiences, but that's something *else*. I think people have contactee experiences, but they don't meet little green men. I think it's something more primal, having to do with mass psychology. . . .

GD: Neurological.

WG: Yeah . . . something neuro-sociological. It's always seemed to me that those are religious experiences. Well, some people would call them religious experiences. But when I

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look at the contactee material, I see watered-down images from the semiotics of science fiction. That's where it's *coming* from. I think that's where flying saucers came from, too—from science fiction imagery, which was very apropos to what was happening. To an extent, I believe what Kihn—a character in “The Gernsback Continuum” [a William Gibson short story, 1981]—tells the narrator about “semiotic ghosts.” I put that forth seriously. I think that if *I* ever had one of those experiences I would assume I'd experienced a psychotic state. [laughs] It might mean something to *me*, but . . .

GD: I'm sure there would be some who would say that *Neuromancer* condones drug use. Do you disagree?

WG: I don't think it condones it. It's very *problematic* for the characters. These people are presented as *drug addicts* and it causes them *trouble*. I think it's *realistic*. If I had envisioned a future *without* drug use, how would I *explain* it? How could I rationalize it?

GD: What do you think about legalizing marijuana?

WG: History suggests that you can't suppress drugs the way we're trying to suppress marijuana and cocaine. I don't think you can suppress them by prohibition. It just creates situations of incredible corruption. You know cocaine is like . . . *sugar*. If it weren't *illegal*, a pound of coke would cost about as much as a pound of sugar. The only reason it's that valuable is that it's illegal.

When I was younger, I believed that by decriminalizing these things we could get rid of the criminal structure which surrounds them. But as I got a bit older, I [realized] it stands to reason that the people who have become mega-billionaires out of the illegality of these substances will not willingly permit these substances to be decriminalized. Now, I can't imagine a world where they would decriminalize even marijuana. This is the number one cash crop in the state of California! And everybody knows it.

GD: You write a lot about a post-literate society.

WG: I think we're almost there.

GD: Books are kind of curiosities, antiques.

WG: You know, when you buy a piece of software or a computer, they give you this great big instruction book. They don't call it an instruction book; they call it the *documentation*. If they called it an instruction book, nobody would buy the software. But a book is absolutely . . . this elegant, elegant mechanism for transferring information. It's easy to carry. You can reproduce it in any number of ways. But the documentation on the book consists of having to learn to *read*. So it requires an enormous initial output of energy. Your parents have to start training you to do this before you can even start to make your own decisions about it.

I think that *that's* where the most dangerous information will always reside—in books. In the long term, the most

Soon to be a Major Motion Picture . . . ?

William Gibson has been involved with Hollywood almost continuously since the term *cyberpunk* first aroused outsider (non-sf) interest in his work [for the sordid details surrounding the *Neuromancer* film project, see John Shirley's feature article in the first volume of *Journal Wired*, Winter/89]. Since then, he has written or co-authored several screenplays and remains actively involved in the industry.

Gibson's screenplay for *Alien III* was completed and turned in, but is probably not being used. The film is currently shooting in London, directed by Vincent Ward.

The film version of "Burning Chrome" *maybe* shot from Gibson's script, and James Cameron is expected to direct it when he finishes *Terminator II*.

His collaboration with John Shirley, an adaptation of the short story "New Rose Hotel," is still in pre-production at Ed Pressman's studio. Kathryn Bigelow had been slated to direct, but has since left the project.

Robert Longo has optioned "Johnny Mnemonic," and there is some too-early-to-specify involvement with Twentieth Century Fox, but nothing official has yet taken place.

valuable information will remain in print.

GD: So you're not wary about your books not being read?

WG: There will be people reading books. In a post-literate world, people will have to accept what they receive from the generators of media as being authentic. In ten years, you'll be able to go into novelty shops in Manhattan [where] they'll zap you with a laser, push a few buttons, and give you a videotape of yourself in the Humphrey Bogart role in *The Maltese Falcon*. And it will be *digitally* indistinguishable from the original. The digitization of photography and music has *already* quite literally created a world in which people can fake any conversation or any photograph, to an extent that cannot be detected. Even the fakers cannot detect another guy's fake. They can work so far back into the structure of the artifact that

Most interesting of all, perhaps, is a treatment Gibson has recently co-authored with Jack Womack (author of *Ambient, Terraplane, and Heathern*) for an original story idea, tentatively titled *Citadel of Death*. Done with Soviet film director Rashid Nugmanov, it is envisioned as a "Soviet *Bladerunner*," and would be a joint USSR / US production to be filmed on location in Leningrad. The story involves gangs operating about twenty years in the future (with dialogue composed mostly of pigeon English argot, an inversion of the Russian loan words in the slang spoken in *A Clockwork Orange*) and would contain many elements of Russian contemporary society that are largely unknown to the West. One of these revelations concerns the Soviet equivalent of American televangelism: faith-healing via mesmerization broadcast to Soviet televisions, something which is not only a commonplace of daily life there, but is widely accepted as valid! Intentionally comic, *Citadel* promises to be the first "Soviet martial arts sci-fi film" ever made. While far from certain (the trans-national financing alone could postpone the project indefinitely), the film has a real possibility of being made. . . .

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no existing technology can prove its been falsified. In a world where that kind of technology is commonplace, I think history might turn into some kind of cream cheese—if you're just watching tv and watching movies and listening to music.

They've got interesting artifacts like that already. That Clint Eastwood movie, *Bird*—they actually took Charlie Parker off a record, and digitally extracted him (which I find an eerie thing) and brought in a bunch of guys to play along with him for a soundtrack version. But it's *Bird* playing the horn. That kind of tinkering with reality is wonderfully spooky.

I think the technological experience that's impressed me the most over the last five or six years has been listening to Billie Holiday digitally remastered on CD. Until I *heard* that, I never *really* understood what people were talking about when they raved about her. I just nodded and smiled and said, "Yes, Billie Holiday—she's great." I'd heard the records a hundred times, but on CD I could actually *hear* her. Or maybe I *couldn't*. It's an interesting philosophical problem. The Billie Holiday you hear when you listen to a digitally remastered CD is like looking at one of those incredibly clear photographs of the surface of Mars that you know has been computer-enhanced to come closer to whatever [some] mathematical program has told them it might look like. It gets very strange. Reality recedes—or becomes more ambivalent—the more technology you introduce into your life. Reality becomes multiplex.

GD: In your books you have people having sex via computer?

WG: Somebody said that. But nobody actually . . . I can't remember. Nobody has sex with a computer.

GD: The biggest indication I got was from Jaylene Slide.

When Bobby Newmark pops in unexpectedly, she says, about her computer-graphic living room, "This is where I entertain people." And then she says, "Honey, we don't do *anything* in LA without jacking-in."

WG: Well, that's possible. Yeah, that's true. I guess I was suggesting that. Lew Shiner has said, "Some people are

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scared of computers, but Gibson is having sex with them!” And I’ve had lots of people come up and say in interviews [adopting a scornful tone], “Do you have sex with computers?” I say, “No, no!” I don’t know. If things continue going the way they’re going that might be the way people do it.

GD: People *are* doing it, exchanging sexual text, talking back and forth over computer networks.

WG: But that’s not as interesting as those group telephone, party-line services. They’re really a big deal—I don’t know if they have them here [in Denver]. In Los Angeles, you can get *fifty* horny teenagers [laughs] talking to each other on one line. It’s amazing!

GD: In your books you have “puppets.” Prostitutes who are not really *there*. [They’re almost disembodied, their own personalities suppressed at the time, while customers rent their bodies by the hour or whatever. They don’t actually experience it and when they are restored they don’t remember anything.]

WG: I’d done something with that in “Burning Chrome” and used it in the book. That’s where prostitution’s *at*, anyway. You don’t need the machine—that’s what it’s like! It’s *alienated labor*.

GD: It seemed improbable when I first read it, because of AIDS and all that. I notice that in the third book—

Gregory Daurer is a freelance writer whose work has appeared in *Omni*, *Magical Blend*, and elsewhere. A musician as well, he has written extensively about reggae and other world music. See page 139 of this volume for his interview with William Burroughs.



William Gibson on his new novel with Bruce Sterling:

The Difference Engine

It's set in London around the 1850s in a world where Charles Babbage is able to get funding to build his analytical engines and perfects a kind of giant steam-drive computer—which the Brits then use to cybernetically jack up the Industrial Revolution. So, the Industrial Revolution sets off with an even more hideous jolt of future shock than it in fact did. Although it is pretty hard to beat what actually happened in those days. Consequently, *this* world—the United States in particular—never happened. You wind up with New England being filled with a bunch of rowdy

Protestant kooks—and the Republic of California, the Republic of Texas, and the Confederacy as British client-states sustained by British railway technology and steam cybernetics.

Heavier-than-air flight is developed very early by the Royal Society. The way they get to it is they bring back a giant Pteranodon fossil from a Texas paleontological expedition and use computer modeling to figure out how the thing flew.

It sounds funny, it sounds cute, but I think the overall effect . . . the thing I think it'll be closest to in the end is [Terry Gilliam's] film *Brazil*.

WG: That's because the book's dated! *Neuromancer* is dated!

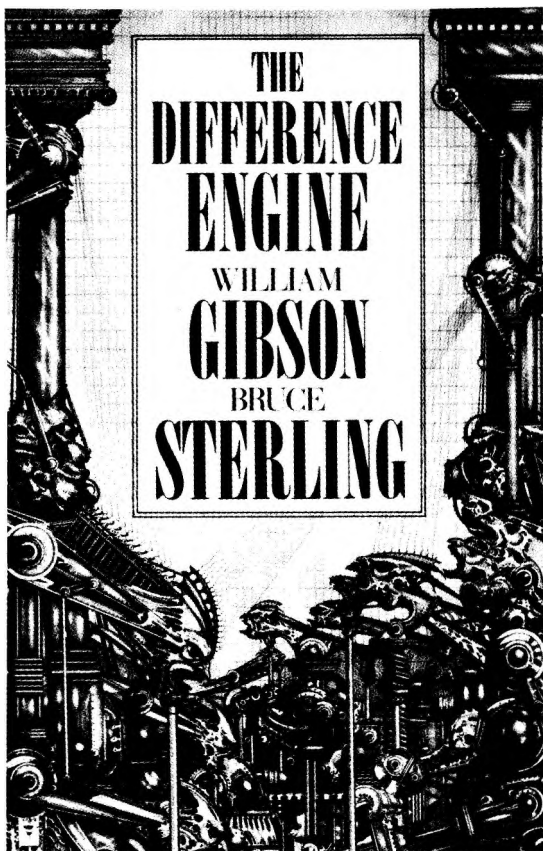
That stuff's all been dated by AIDS, by the greenhouse effect, by the decay of the ozone layer. [That's] exactly right—in *Mona Lisa Overdrive* I put in that one weak little line about *bloodwork*.

GD: What most interests you about yourself?

WG: What a question; let's see. [long pause] My continuing ability to absorb input, I think. My age interests me.

I'm at a point where I can remember relatively far back, fairly clearly. I can remember when television sets didn't exist, at

They have credit cards made out of tin. It's like we've paralleled a lot of things. They get all this stuff early: department stores, credit cards, and police intelligence computers. And very monolithic, repressive regimes using computer technology to keep people under.



least not at my house. I can remember the first wooden television set being brought in and it was the size of a medium-sized refrigerator with a screen the size of a dinner plate. I can remember a lot of things. I'm just starting to access that part of myself in a way I never did before. I'm trying to remember what it was like when we were told that Sputnik was up, and how people responded to that. Because I was *there*, and I was really conscious of it. I was running around being a smug little science fiction freak, saying, "I *knew* it would happen! Doesn't freak *me* out!"

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GD: What do you see yourself doing in twenty years?

WG: Sitting on the back porch, drinking beer, and watching satellites or something. I don't know. It's easier to think of bad scenarios. The worst scenario would be, in twenty years, if I'm sitting there writing *Cyberspace #19*. Which is one of the reasons I've said I'm not going to do any more books in that sequence. I don't want to turn into one of those rubber stamp guys.

GD: I find that hard to believe. Are you *sure* you're not going to write a sequel, sometime?

WG: No. I hope not. Look at what happened to Conan Doyle. You see, if I do that the danger is *getting stuck*. And if I *don't* do it, I'm constantly in a position where I have to take artistic risks, which is really very healthy to do. So, if I can get to the point where people say, "Oh, it's a *William Gibson* book—I'll buy it," that's one thing. But if they're coming to it saying, "Oh, it's a book with *Molly* in it," that's another thing. That's not a healthy thing to be involved in, not at all. . . .

fiction

Paul Di Filippo

MOLOCH

1

The car was a '73 Marauder the color of dried blood, and showed all its age. Its driver's-side door was unopenably buckled by some ancient impact, revealing the harsh metal beneath the cosmetic paint. The rust pitting the steel corrugations nearly matched the paint, as if nature had sought to hide the damage in a kind of protective mimicry. The car's hood was partially sprung, its trunk secured with clothesline.

The sound of its big motor as the car ascended slowly up Mount Tophet, in western Pennsylvania, was a deep but sickly roar, like thunder heard by a man in a fever. The car seemed to have muffler problems as well as engine troubles.

The car was alone on the road. The sky overhead was a seamless, variegated grey, like felted lint from a dryer-vent.

Inside the car on the rear seat, riding backwards, strapped into a child-carrier which was in turn held down by a seatbelt, was a male infant. He wore a blue acrylic sweater, cap and leggings, and white booties. The cushioned pad of his carrier was patterned with anthropomorphic cartoon sun-faces, each smiling in a corona of

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spikes. Regarding the landscape he left swiftly behind, the infant rode placidly, apathetically, like a small bored commuter.

Andrew Stiles was driving, his wife Dawn beside him. Each wore jeans. The extra material inside Dawn's pants legs at the hem had been let down without restitching, and was now coming unraveled. Andy wore a grey hooded sweatshirt; Dawn a patchwork rabbit-fur coat.

Andy's brown hair was longish, and brushed the hood of his garment. His beard was adolescently sparse. Dawn used no makeup, and her skin was clear.

"Look at that sky," said Dawn. "Something's going to happen."

Andy said nothing. The concentration he exhibited while driving was immense. Dawn tried a different topic.

"Do you think your parents will mind? I mean, we never even called. I know I'd mind if some relative just dropped in and said they were staying for a few weeks. Although maybe it's different when it's your son. It's hard to imagine Peter really grown up, so I can't say. He's too new to me yet. Don't he feel too new to you too, Andy?"

Dawn smiled timidly at the unintentional string of assonant syllables. She turned to look back over the seat at the baby, then swivelled back to her husband.

"I mean," she continued, "it ain't like we got a choice. When you can't pay the rent, you got to move on. We got to live somewhere till you find a job. It's no fault of yours you got fired, nor of mine that I got to stay home with Peter. Your folks will understand that, won't they, Andy?"

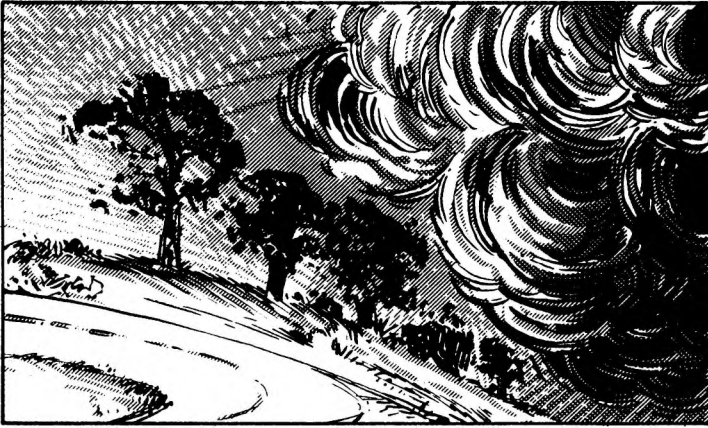
"Do you know what it is, Dawn?"

"What what is?"

"That sky."

Dawn ducked her head to peer intently at the sky through the windshield. "Some storm brewing, I guess."

Andy shook his head. His knuckles on the wheel were bloodless, the color of quartz. "No, it ain't no storm. That sky is too empty. There ain't nothing behind it, Dawn. No stars, no sun, no



moon, no weather. That sky is the sky of hell. Plain and simple, it's the sky of the devil's kingdom. Somehow we took a wrong turn. I been thinking it for some time now. We're lost, Dawn. We are trammelled in Satan's snares. This ain't Mount Tophet. We are in hell."

"Andy, please, don't start talking that way again. Not now—"

"It's right for you to be scared, Dawn. There's plenty to be scared of in this world. But you done good to notice what happened. When you mentioned the sky, I knew my feelings was right. There's no point in trying to hide what you noticed. Maybe it's not too late. Maybe we can get away. If we just drive fast enough—"

The car had reached the summit of Mount Tophet. Off to Dawn's side, far below beyond an unrailed edge, the land spread away in forested chaotic acres broken by the infrequent incongruous geometric insults of civilization, all illumined by a dull stoic light which seemed to have no source.

Beginning its descent, the car entered the first switchback. Andy pressed the accelerator to the floor.

Dawn was forced back into her seat by gravity's deific hand.

Andy's arms were braced straight and rigid, locked at the elbows. "Hold tight, Dawn. This is the only way out."

The car swayed back and forth between lanes, its cranky

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steering linkage fighting commands, its engine running fit to burst. Veering far to the right, its front tire bit gravel, seemed at times almost to hang suspended, spinning uselessly, and clipped runty saplings and weeds. Veering to the left, its front fender scraped crumbling escarpments.

Entering the first curve, the car barely slowed. It smashed a headlight on the rockface, which went by in a blur, before rebounding.

Dawn screamed. The baby began to cry.

Andy said nothing. He seemed barely conscious of the road, his eyes fixed on the sky.

The speed of the car seemed a manifestation of Andy's will, an impulse which flowed out of him, down his rigid arms and into the vehicle.

Dawn shut her eyes and crumpled to the seat. This did not stop the car. The baby's carrier jerked back and forth, fighting the restraint of the seatbelt like a wild thing caught in a trap.

Andy said, "Dear Lord, I'm listening, just tell me what to do. We're weak, but we can serve." It was not apparent if he received an answer.

The child wailed, Dawn sobbed, brakes squealed.

Eventually they reached the end of the steep and treacherous road, having encountered no other cars, nor plunged over a precipice.

Andy stopped the car in the middle of the road, slewed across the yellow line. He crawled over Dawn to get out on her side. He stood on the pavement, feet spread, arms raised up.

"It's a miracle!" he shouted. "Lookit that sky! We did it! We out-raced hell!"

Dawn forced herself to stop crying. She sat up and looked out.

"Andy," she said, sniffing, "that sky ain't changed at all."

2

“Andy,” Dawn said, “you got to take the boys out. They are driving me right up the wall.”

Andy lay on the couch, staring up at the ceiling. It was a false ceiling, dirty grey acoustical tiles suspended below older hidden plaster. The acoustical tiles seemed to hold an infinity of tiny pits, each horrible in its circular perfection. Andy was trying to count them. His lips moved.

In one corner of the room the tiles were stained a dingy yellow, like an old bandage on a leaking wound, where the upstairs neighbors’ overflowing toilet had leaked through. Andy was saving those for last.

Andy’s booted feet rested on one arm of the couch. Over the months they had worn the fabric away, revealing dirty white stuffing that was surely nothing natural.

“Andy,” said Dawn, “are you listening to me?”

“I’m listening.”

“Will you take the kids off my hands for a few minutes then? Supper needs fixing.”

Andy turned his head away from the tiles. Dawn stood in the kitchen doorway. Peter, three years old, was holding one corner of her stained apron. Simon sat in a swing suspended from four wobbly aluminum legs. The swing had a small wind-up motor which propelled it back and forth like a metronome. It made a monotonous ratcheting click which neither Andy nor Dawn heard anymore. Simon’s bare feet brushed the matted pile of the rust-colored rug in two parallel tracks.

“All right,” said Andy, “get ’em dressed. I’ll take ’em to the park.”

Dawn dressed the boys in light jackets for the seasonable April afternoon. She shod Simon and stuffed him into a collapsible

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stroller. Andy had swung his feet to the floor and stood up. Peter had transferred himself from Dawn's apron to his father's shirttail, which hung outside the man's trousers, a pair of green work pants.

Dawn saw the trio to the door. She seemed to remember something then.

"Did you take your medicine today, honey?"

"Yeah."

"That's good. You can't forget now, not one day. That's what the doctor said."

"You been telling me that for six months now."

"Well, it don't hurt. And Andy—"

"Yeah?"

"While you're walking with the boys, will you think some more about getting a job? Your benefits are gonna run out soon, and even if they wasn't, it might do you good to be working. You know, meet some people, make some friends . . ."

"I'll think about it."

"Good." Dawn kissed him on the cheek. Andy left with the boys. Dawn watched him as he bumped the baby's stroller down three front stairs—rather roughly—and set off down the cracked walk.

There was one steelmill left in the town, out of the many that had once offered employment. It was enough to fill the place with a seeming infinity of soot and cinders, piles of clinkers and ash. When there wasn't a strike, there was a layoff. Surprisingly, they were actually now hiring. Andy thought about applying. It seemed like an impossible chore, a task for Superman. But then again, since that day when he and Dawn had out-raced hell, on through the long stay in the hospital, right up to the present, so did any little chore, from getting up in the morning to tying his shoes to brushing his teeth at night.

Maybe he would do it. Lord willing, he'd try. It might make Dawn happy. He wanted her to be happy. But she had to realize that sometimes it just wasn't possible, here in this vale of tears. . . .

The park was half an acre with a duck pond, a few vandalized benches and a children's playground where the swings either hung

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suspended uselessly from one chain only, or were wrapped around the crossbar in inextricable snarls of rusty links.

Andy wheeled Simon in his carriage to the edge of the pond. He brought it to a stop and removed his grip on the handle. The carriage began to inch forward, and Andy realized the ground sloped away, down to the water. He halted the carriage and set the brakes. The carriage stayed put. Peter bent clumsily down for a pebble, which he shied at the ducks who had already swum over, anticipating bread. Andy did not attempt to stop his son when he reached for another stone, and another after that.

The grass was very green. The trees were very green. The shrubs and hedges were very green. The color began to hurt Andy's eyes after a while. It was too aggressive. He sat down and closed his eyes.

After some time, he felt Peter by his side. The child must have wandered off before returning, because Andy could not remember feeling him standing there before. Andy opened his eyes.

Peter said, "Daddy, come look at what I found."

Andy got up and let Peter lead him to the base of an oak.

The squirrel must have died during the harsh winter and remained buried under the snows. With the coming of spring, it had begun to decay. The corpse lay on its back, split open. Some sort of scavenger had cleaned most of the meat and organs from it, and it was little more than a furred shell. It was missing its tail and a leg. Ants crawled among its ribs. The squirrel's small teeth were exposed in a rictus, and were amazingly white.

"What's the matter with it?" asked Peter.

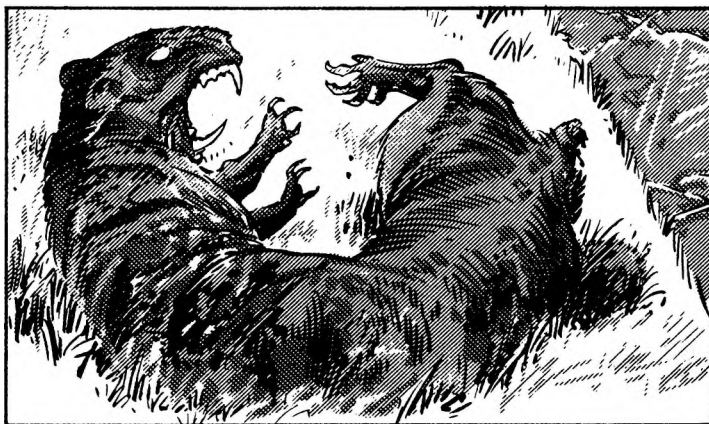
"Nothing's the matter. It's just dead, Petey. It come to all of us, sooner or later, death does. It's the way the good Lord made life work. Look at it up close. Go ahead. Don't be afraid."

Peter obediently squatted and stared.

"Now touch it."

Peter extended a pudgy finger. An ant in its single-minded travels immediately crawled onto this bridge from dead squirrel to living boy. Peter jerked his hand away.

Andy grabbed the boy's wrist and brought it back into contact



with the small corpse. “No, I said touch it.”

Peter tried to jerk away. Andy squeezed the back of the child’s neck with his other hand and immobilized him.

As he held the boy’s hand there, a steady stream of ants followed the first, vanishing up the boy’s jacket sleeve.

3

The union rep tapped Andy on the shoulder while he was waiting for the blow to end.

“Let Jerry watch it and come with me,” he shouted in Andy’s ear.

Andy turned away from the huge dark furnace, out of whose open top refulgent light gushed, born of 330 tons of molten metal, and followed the rep across the busy mill floor and into an office. The rep sat down behind an empty desk with a green rubberized top and indicated that Andy should sit too. Andy did.

Andy wore thick brown Carhartt coveralls, work boots and gloves. From a breast-pocket, held by an alligator clip, hung his photo-identity badge. In the photograph, Andy looked baffled and bewildered.

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Andy's face as he sat uneasily in the chair was blackened with soot. His hair was mussed. He wore protective goggles over his eyes. Removing one glove now, he lifted the goggles atop his head and waited for the rep to speak.

"Listen, Stiles, your probation period is almost over, and I gotta make some kinda report."

Andy nodded, but said nothing.

"Now, you're a decent worker. You punch in on time, you don't miss no days, and you pull your weight. But as far as sociability goes, getting along with your co-workers—Well, hell, you just don't."

Andy continued to sit mute, staring at his hands in his lap. They looked funny, one gloved, one ungloved. The ungloved one was plainly his, but the gloved one seemed to belong to someone—to something—else.

"Like now for instance. Just look at you. You can't even talk to me. It gives some guys the creeps. And then there's the other thing."

Andy looked up from the puzzle of his hands. "What other thing?"

The rep seemed embarrassed. "What your co-workers claim. That you, uh, talk to it."

"To what?"

"To the furnace."

Andy looked back into his lap and mumbled something.

"What?" demanded the rep. "What's that? If you got something to tell me, tell me."

Still with bent neck, Andy said, "It started talking first."

"Oh, shit," said the rep wearily.

There was mutual silence for a full minute. Then Andy spoke.

"I didn't believe it myself at first, you know. I wasn't, like, looking for something like this to happen. But the universe is weird, Mister Ptackek, it really is. The Lord filled it with marvels and wonders, for our edification. And if He chooses to make the furnace talk to me—for I surely believe it's His doing—then I ain't got no choice but to listen, and to answer when I'm asked a

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question. Do I now? Have a choice?"

"Kid, you got bad chemicals, I know that. Are you still following your doctor's orders?"

"You sound like my wife."

"Yeah, yeah, but are you?"

"Sure."

"Let me see 'em."

Andy fished inside a pocket, took out his prescription bottle and exhibited it to the rep.

"Okay. Put 'em away."

Andy did so.

"Now listen up close. You know it's impossible for the furnace to be talking to you, don't you?"

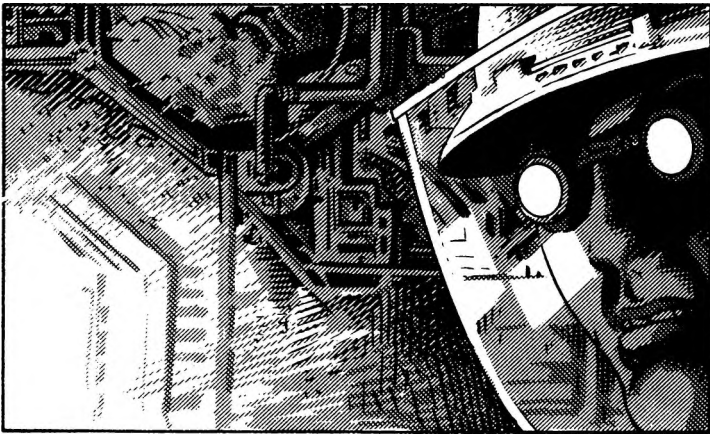
"The Lord spoke to Moses out of a burning bush . . ."

"That was then, for Christ's sake, in prehistoric times. This is now. Jesus Christ, I'm a good Catholic myself, but the Lord don't make no more personal appearances nowadays. Maybe the Virgin, once in while, but not God Hisself."

The rep paused for thought. "It ain't the Virgin, is it?"

"No, I don't think so . . ."

The rep seemed disappointed at this foreclosure. "I should just give you your notice now, Stiles. But I know you got a family, and I don't feel like training someone new. So I'm giving you one



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more shot. You got a week left before I gotta make my report. If I don't hear no more about this crazy stuff, we'll just forget you ever done it."

The rep stood. Andy stood. The rep conducted him to the door. On the point of stepping out, the rep said, "And Stiles—maybe you should see your priest about this too. It couldn't hurt."

"I don't have one."

"Well, find one then."

Andy went back to his post and relieved Jerry. The twenty-minute blow was just ending, completing the forty-five minute cycle. The water-cooled oxygen-lance was withdrawn, prior to the tilting of the furnace and the decanting of the molten steel through a tap hole in the top of the furnace.

As the liquid metal began to flow, the furnace spoke. Its voice was as supple, rich and thick as the river of smelted ore.

"You did not listen to Ptakcek, did you, Andrew?"

The thing that startled Andy most was that the furnace knew the rep's name. It was the first time it had exhibited such knowledge. Looking to left and right, Andy whispered, "No, I didn't."

"Good. He is ignorant, an idolater. It is wrong to heed such men."

"I won't," Andy said. "I won't, Moloch. I promise."

4

The house of the Very Reverend Wade Demure sat in a hollow down by the tracks. It was a three-story structure clad in asphalt siding which simulated bricks. Porches scabbed to each level sagged dangerously, seeming to compress the columns that held them up almost beyond their tensile strength.

The structure sat on a lot full of used car-parts. Engines and transmissions, air filters and wheel rims, brake shoes and mufflers, axles and batteries, all were threaded with weeds, goldenrod poking through machined casings, Queen Anne's lace dancing above spark plugs scattered like dragon's teeth.

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Every Wednesday night there was a mid-week assembly of the Reverend's small and eclectic congregation. The members of the informal church met in Reverend Demure's parlor. The parlor was furnished with a dozen chairs, no two of which were alike. Straight-backed and cane-bottomed, sag-cushioned with threadbare armrests. Wooden folding chairs stencilled with the names of previous institutional owners, aluminum dinette chairs with ripped padded seats. In their variety, the chairs mimicked the parishioners.

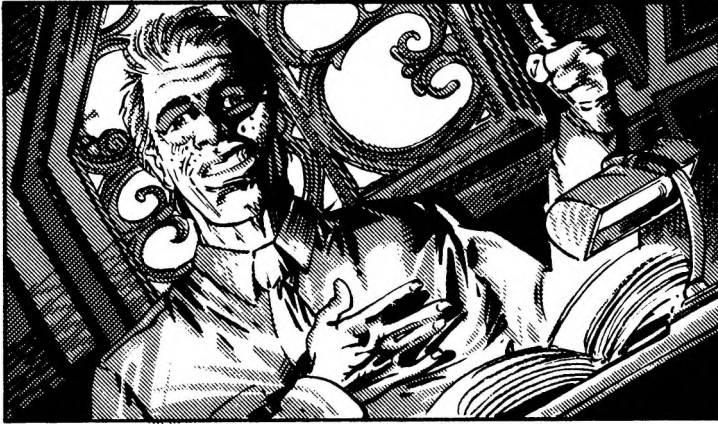
The chairs rested along three walls atop several overlapping carpets which served to hide the worn floorboards, but which were themselves almost as disreputable in their aged condition. In the middle of the room was positioned a long table whose veneer was incised with meaningless scratches.

Andy sat between a fat black woman and a thin neurasthenic fellow. The fat black woman had a face whose left side was collapsed, from surgery, accident or stroke. The eye on that side was missing, gummed permanently shut with an exudation that resembled pine-resin. Her cheek was deeply puckered, as if she were continually biting down on the inward-drawn flesh. Part of her jaw seemed to be missing. The man on Andy's other side carried a big boxy hearing aid in the pocket of his plaid shirt. The cap of the plug in his hairy ear was big as a quarter. A tic twitched at the corner of his mouth like a creature leading an independent existence.

The Reverend stood at the end of the table farthest from his audience. A big Bible was splayed open on the table to aid the Reverend in his interminable sermon, although he seemed not really to need it, so thorough was his mastery of its contents.

Andy was not really listening to the Reverend's words. He was too nervous among these strangers to concentrate. It was his first time at the Reverend's church. He had come to ask one simple question, and now awaited the opportunity. While waiting, he stared at the Reverend.

Demure was a bulky man with a big nose and skin spotted with blackheads. His dark hair was slicked back with pomade



whose scent carried to Andy across the room. He wore a red shirt, a wide white tie with a waffled texture, and a brown suitcoat of some synthetic material. He seemed full to bursting with words, which he had to vent for his health. Andy failed to listen to any of them. They went right through him without registering, like wind through a bed of bullrushes.

At last the Reverend finished. He closed the Bible with a mighty thump and folded his arms across his chest, as if daring any of the congregation to challenge him. None accepted the challenge. The people rose and began to file out, each meekly shaking the Reverend's hand and offering a word or two of praise or agreement.

Andy stood back from the "Amens" and "Praise the Lords"—which seemed to hang around Demure like a cloud—until everyone had left. Only then did he approach the preacher.

"Well, son, did the spirit move you tonight?"

Andy declined to answer. "Reverend Demure, I got a question I'm hoping you can answer for me."

"Shoot."

"Who is Moloch? I been trying to find out for myself outa the Bible, but the way I read it, he seems like two different things. One time, it's like he's God, and other times it's like he's Baalzebub or something."

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Reverend Demure cupped his chin in one hand and his elbow in the other, signifying the ponderous nature of the question. “Well, boy, you have hit upon a conundrum all right. You see, Moloch was the name the ancient Jews invoked when they was preparin’ to sacrifice one of their offspring, immolatin’ the infants upon Tophet Hill, as they continued to do elsewhere right up to the Middle Ages. Now, the word ‘Moloch’ don’t mean no more than ‘king,’ and as such was just another name for Yahweh, Him of the Old Testament. So in one sense, Moloch was the Lord. However, later prophets done renounced Moloch, twistin’ the way they pronounced his name so as to sound like ‘shame,’ and claimin’ he was some heathen god like the Golden Calf. As near as I follow it, the jury’s still out on who was right.”

Andy thought a minute. “So you’re telling me that Moloch is just another name for God.”

“Well now, boy, you wasn’t listenin’ right. I said that was one interpretation of it—”

Andy thrust out his hand with some excitement and the Reverend bemusedly took it. “Thank you, sir, thank you very much. You told me all I need to know.”

5

Since the night when the Reverend Demure had confirmed Moloch’s identity, Andy had found he no longer had to speak aloud for Moloch to hear his reply. Just as Moloch’s voice resonated in his head—and perhaps nowhere else, Andy was sometimes forced to admit—so did Andy’s replies seem to find reception in the sun-hot stomach of Moloch without actual utterance.

This was all to the good. Andy was able to preserve the appearance that he had abandoned his “delusion” while still conversing with the being who called himself Moloch. Andy’s co-workers were less leery of him, and the number of taunts they

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sent his way diminished slightly, although they were never what could be called friendly to Andy.

In addition, Mister Ptakcek was happy. He gave Andy a good report. Dawn was happy too, since she had heard rumors from other wives during the period when Andy was speaking aloud to the furnace, and had worried. Now she was gratified to see that Andy's latest "spell" appeared to be over.

The only one who was not happy was Andy. Neither was he unhappy, however. He was merely puzzled, intrigued, and even somewhat flattered.

Why, out of all humanity, had Moloch chosen to speak to him, Andrew Stiles? It was a question without easy answer. Andy sometimes tried to imagine what, if anything, he had in common with the famous Biblical prophets of yore. Some figures were simply beyond him, he knew. Moses, Saint Paul, Saint John—these were mighty individuals deserving of dealing directly with God. Others, though, seemed rather common folks, not unlike Andy. Lot, Job—these were more his kind, simple working men. Andy supposed that if God had chosen to speak to such men in the past, they he could still choose to do so today.

Whatever the answer, Andy definitely had a lot to think about. And the conversations with Moloch certainly made his shift pass fast.

One day Mister Ptakcek switched his assignment from the basic oxygen furnace—where the already molten ore was further purged of contaminants—to the blast furnace, where the ore was initially melted.

Andy was worried. Moloch had always spoken to him from the basic oxygen furnace. Would he speak from the other as well?

Positioning a wheeled container beneath the outlet from which the worthless slag flowed, Andy jumped when the voice of Moloch rumbled out. The hot air around the furnace seemed to pulse in time with the words.

"You wait upon my presence. That is good."

Andy voiced his reply inside himself. "I wasn't sure you could talk outa this one too."

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“My body is many, and yet one.”

“Are you the whole mill then?” Andy asked.

“I am the mill and the town, the earth and the trees, the sky and the stars. I am everything that ever was or will be.”

“Why didn’t you ever speak to me then, till I come to this mill?”

“You were not ready. And there were barriers. Even now, I find it hard sometimes to talk to you.”

“How come?”

“The medicine you take.”

Andy let the conversation drop then. He was afraid that Moloch would order him to abandon his pills, and he did not know how to refuse.

Another time, Andy was telling Moloch about the day he and Dawn had out-raced hell.

“How do you know you truly succeeded?” asked Moloch.

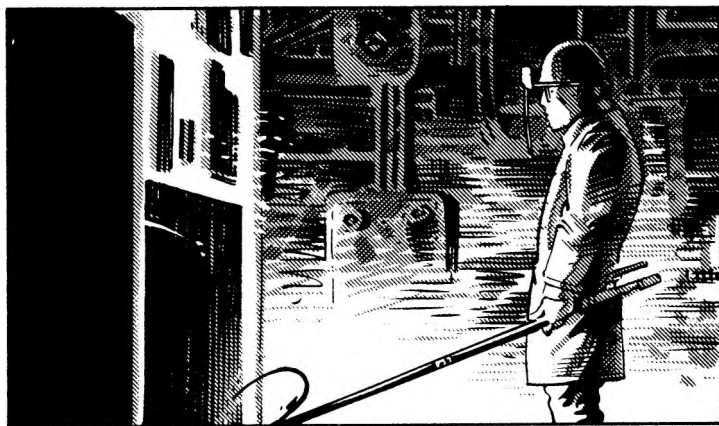
“Cuz the sky. It changed—”

“Did it, though? Your wife said it did not.”

Andy had not told Moloch anything about that comment of Dawn’s. Yet he knew, just as he had known Mister Ptakcek’s name. . . .

“You’re telling me I might still be in hell then? How can I be sure I’m not? How can a man be sure of anything in this world?”

“There is one way to determine if this is hell or not.”



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“What is it?” asked Andy suspiciously.

“In hell, no one has free will. They must do what they are told. If you exercise your birthright as a being made in my image, if you show initiative, do something unexpected—only then will you be sure this is not hell.”

“What could I do? What would be enough to prove it?”

“Do not look to me for orders,” said Moloch sternly. “Simply following my commands would prove nothing. I could be Satan in disguise.”

“I don’t want no orders. Just gimme some suggestions.”

“All right. If you sincerely wish me to.”

“I do.”

“Do not listen to your wife or Mister Ptakcek.”

“Okay.”

“Do not take your pills.”

“Oh, Jesus Christ, Moloch, I don’t—”

“Do you wish to live in hell?”

“All right, ‘don’t take my pills.’ What else?”

“Bring me your sons.”

6

The car was a '78 Thunderbird, in fair shape. Andy and Dawn had come up in the world since he got the job at the mill.

It was a Sunday. The car was alone on the road. The sky overhead was a seamless, variegated grey, like felted lint from a dryer-vent.

The car passed through the center of town, heading west on Highway 61, away from the mill. About a mile beyond the last house, it made a U-turn and headed back. It detoured through the hollow where the Reverend Wade Demure kept church. Sounds of ragged singing issued from within the asphalt-clad tenement, a dimly joyful noise that sought to rise heavenward but only filled

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the hollow like clammy fog. The woman with the disease-wracked face contributed a recognizable gargle.

The car navigated through residential streets, uphill and down, wandering aimlessly. Like a dog chained to a stake, however, its movements were bounded by a central pull, an almost gravitic force at the heart of its existence: the mill.

Simon and Peter were in the back seat. Peter sat on a little bolster apparatus of molded plastic. Simon still used the infant carrier that had once been his brother's. The passage of time, the friction of its two passengers, had worn the smiling faces off the multiple suns, restoring them once more to a frightful primeval obscurity. Both boys were carefully belted to keep them safe from accidental injury.

Dawn said, "Let's be getting home, Andy. It's almost lunchtime, and the boys must be hungry. We had enough of a holiday drive." Dawn turned and hung one arm over the seat. "Ain't that so, boys?"

The boys said nothing. They seemed stupefied, bemused, almost drugged.

Andy's grip on the wheel was tetanus-tight. "Just one more stop, Dawn. I want to show the boys where their daddy works."

"Aw, honey, they ain't old enough to appreciate the mill. 'Specially little Simon." Dawn reached over the seat to adjust Simon in the carrier. Her position was awkward, and she succeeded only in pushing Simon's bonnet down over his eyes, so that his backward view of the objects they flew from—the landscape which seemed almost to push them away, to hurl itself in retreat from the car—was cut off.

Andy did not reply, but simply drove on.

The vast parking lot of the mill was empty, save for the lone car of the security guard, who, sitting bored in his gateside booth, waved the Stiles family through when Andy explained what he was about.

Andy parked the Thunderbird near the main door of the mill.

Dawn said, "Aw, Andy, why you stopping? The boys can see the mill good enough from here. Can't you, boys?"

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Andy did not reply to Dawn because he did not hear her. Moloch was speaking to him. This was unique. Moloch had never spoken to him outside the mill before. It must be because he had stopped taking his pills.

“You have brought your sons to me, Andrew. This is good. You exhibit strength of will. You are almost assured of learning a very important truth: your whereabouts. But you are not quite done. You must bring the boys inside, to see me.”

“What about Dawn?”

“She cannot come.”

“What’ll I tell her?”

“You must decide.”

Andy levered open his door. He stepped out and opened the rear door on his side. He unbuckled Peter and pulled him out. Then, leaning in, he removed Simon from his carrier.

“Andy,” said Dawn, “what’s going on?”

“I got to take the boys inside for just a minute.”

“I don’t know, Andy. Is that smart? It could be dangerous in there for a child. . . .”

“Everything’s shut down. Ain’t nothing that can hurt them.”

“Oh, all right,” said Dawn. “One minute.” She moved to get out.

“No, honey, just me and the boys. It’s—it’s personal. Man to man. I want to show them what they got to look forward to when they grow up.”

Dawn settled back into her seat. “Of all the silly notions,” she said, although she seemed rather pleased. “I hope our boys’ll be doing better than working in a mill—”

Carrying Simon, holding Peter’s hand, Andy walked to the main door of the mill. It was locked.

“The side entrance is unsecured,” said Moloch.

Andy went to it. Moloch had spoken true.

Once inside, Andy locked the door. He walked to the basic oxygen furnace where Moloch had first spoken to him. It was cold.

“You are a good and loyal listener,” said Moloch. “Give me the boys.”

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Andy knew it was much too late to argue. He activated the motors of the cold furnace, which whined like animals whose legs were pinioned in traps. The pear-shaped vessel tilted to a point where Andy could just reach its lip.

“Put the boys in.”

Andy lifted first Peter, then Simon, dropping them both in, where they rolled to the canted bottom. They were curiously mute, almost sedated.

“Leave the vessel in the charging position, and go to the blast furnace.”

Andy did as he was told.

“Melt some ore.”

Andy moved quickly and efficiently. He knew that once he started the blast furnace, people would soon become alerted to the unwonted activity at the mill. Luckily the furnace caught easily, almost unnaturally so. Cans on a conveyor carried the raw ore to the top of the furnace. Soon Andy had tapped molten metal. This metal was a substance at 2370 degrees Fahrenheit, or 1300 degrees Centigrade. In the basic oxygen furnace, under the inrush of that life-sustaining gas, it would soar to 3000° F, or 1725° C.

There came a banging on the main door. Andy wondered why the watchman didn't just use his keys. Possibly in the confusion no one remembered. Such things happened. Possibly Moloch was preventing them.

At the receptacle that held the boys, Andy stopped with the charge of molten iron.

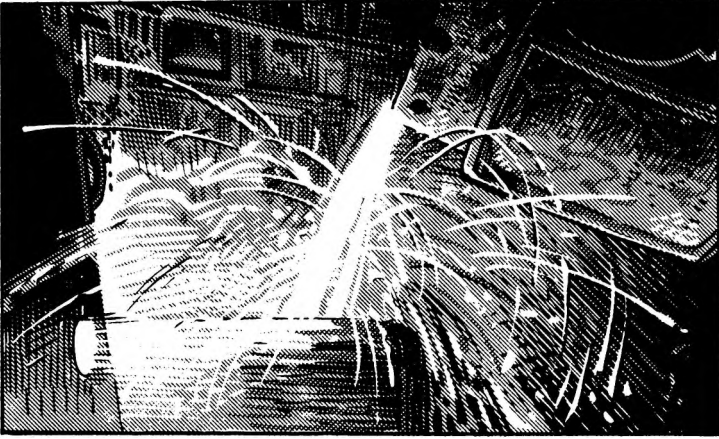
“Now?” he asked, already knowing what Moloch would say.

“Yes.”

Luckily it normally took less than five minutes to charge the furnace, and that was with a much larger draught.

There was no noise from inside the kettle as Andy worked. Only a titanic inrush as of breath when the vessel was full, which Andy knew came from Moloch.

Andy righted the vessel and lowered the oxygen lance. This was a steel tube 50 feet (15 meters) long and 10 inches (25 centimeters) in diameter. It descended like the finger of God.



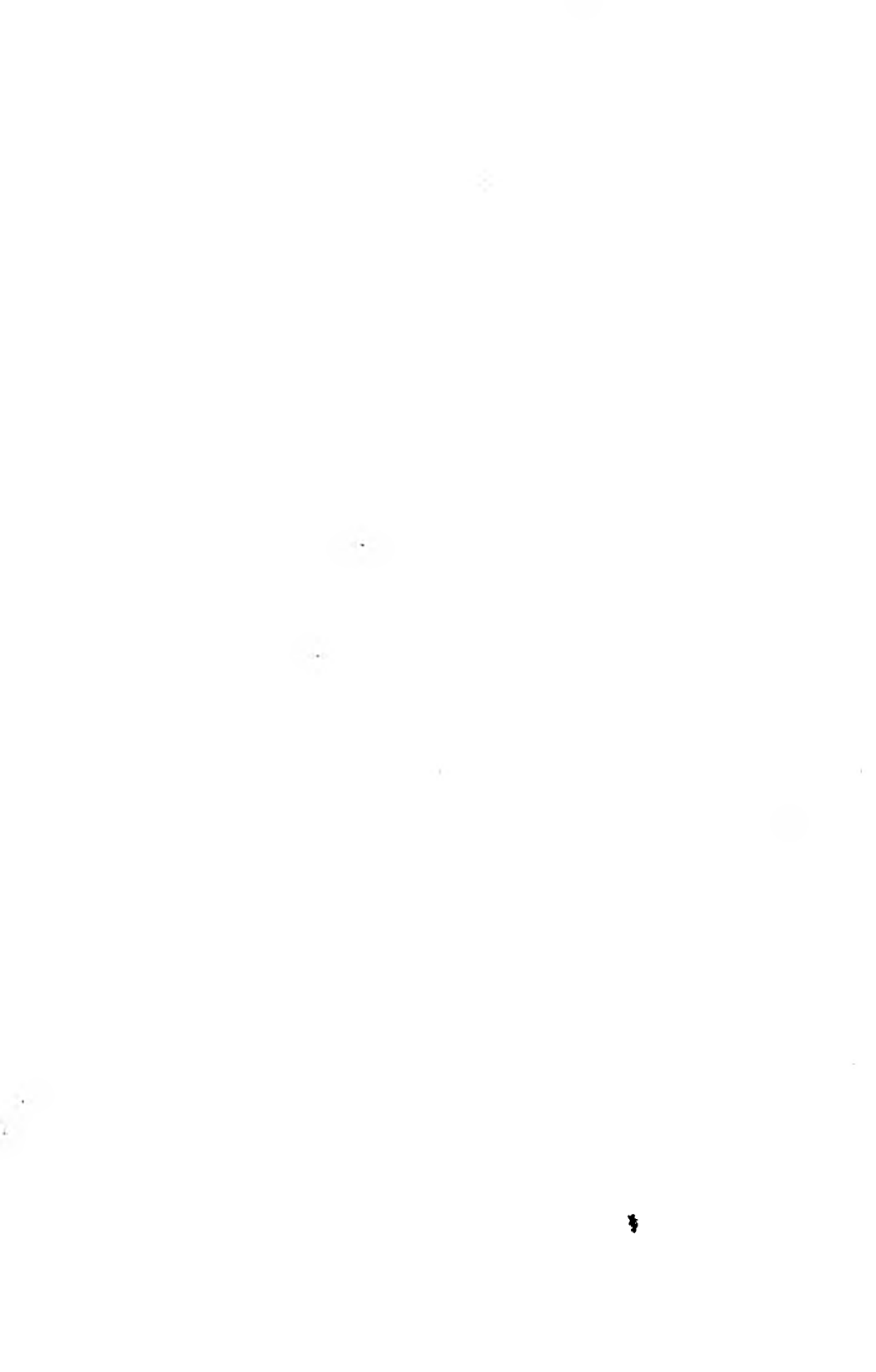
Andy stood watching, listening to the flow of oxygen and to Moloch's keening exultations.

Then Andy felt hands grabbing him.

"Moloch," he called aloud, "Moloch, now I know."

But Moloch did not answer.

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