



**TERRY DOWLING  
HOMESITE**

# Privateer's Mood

Terry Dowling

Usually the house sang. It was built to make music out of the seven winds that found it on its desert rise. Vents in the walls facing drew them in; three spiral core-shafts tuned them into vortices and descants, threw them across galleries, flung them further than anything the house resembled the ancient breathing caves of the Nullarbor.

Which many said was Cheimarrhos' intention, that his great granite and limestone pylon was nothing less than an inverted structure such as Sumer must have seen, or Ur of the Chaldees, or Teotihuacan of the Toltecs.

Paul Cheimarrhos called his house Balin, and on the day he finally showed me the roof-field there was a stillness on the air, personally, knowing Paul as I did, as an omen of some sort, as if my presence had caused it to be.

And, accordingly, as if unable to bear that terrible quiet, the middle-aged, incredibly vital Three-line tycoon talked about the corridor of Gallery 52, Paul rounded on me yet again, fixed me with his piercing blue gaze.

"When was the last time, Tom?"

"Only the once, Paul, three years ago. You used to come out to the coasts. I was here for the Anderlee hearings, but never."

"The Anderlee thing, yes. I'm sorry." The polite show of regret quickly vanished from his eyes. He was too excited. "The wind is four. The brinraga reaches this far north, and leftovers from the angry red-sky larrikin. I tune them down to gentle house music."

We reached a corner window and looked out on the desert once more, but on a new vista entirely, stretching red and orange.

"We even get spill-off from the sanalatti at this latitude, can you believe it? The experts say it's impossible but I know better when I feel it. Those scatterlings are unmistakable."

We stood looking out on the empty desert and I couldn't help but wonder how he did view my presence. Portentously, not for months.

"Are you familiar with the name Memnon?" he asked.

Knowing Paul Cheimarrhos' interest in antiquities and the ancient Mediterranean civilizations, I welcomed the change of subject.

"One of Alexander's generals?"

But of course Paul had been talking winds. He laughed, throwing back his thick mane of silver hair so it shifted like a mane.

"You are thinking of the general who led the Persian Greeks at Granicus. No, I mean the Colossi of Memnon, Tom. Two statues. I believe they were designed so the sunrise and sunset winds made them sing..."

"Sing?"

"A plaintive hooting song, yes. But that was an accident, nothing more than a freak thing. Others claim the Great Pyramid of Giza."

Some say Djoser's pyramid at Saqqara did the same, that Architect Imhotep was master of the micro-zephyrs, expert in acoustics and does all this. David Tyrren worked with me on it."

I made a sound of acknowledgement to show him I knew what pretty well anyone did, that the great architect had worked out the initial layouts himself. It was his own design, despite the careful elaboration that had made the design a reality.

We were walking again because that filled the silences, turning up into Gallery 55-B, working our way to the final upper gallery. The wind-banks stood and the rows of strange acroteria were laid out like memorial pieces in a graveyard in the sky.

I needed to see that field, to find out if Paul Cheimarrhos had in fact done what David Tyrren suspected, and had - after all. Gallery 55-B was blind, no windows there to show the desert and sky in its twin infinite registers of red and blue, just corridors were aligned and operating.

The whole truncated pyramid of Balin was a wind-trap, a man-made mesa over three hundred metres high, full of cave-entrances and with a 'cemetery' field on its flattened crest. With its canted sides, its cavetto cornice and taurus moulding, it did look like a completed, never given its companion pylon or connecting wall, with no temple precinct at its back.

We turned into the wide transverse apron of Gallery 60, and there it was, laid out before us under the hot blue sky: the sun-drenched ceramic and stone pillars, some elaborately painted, others bone-white and glaring in the sunlight, pierced with fibrile openings. It was exhilarating to see it all at last, and deeply disturbing - for at the very centre was a shallow basin, like a radar dish. I confirmed, Paul Cheimarrhos' great act of sacrilege.

The twenty-six wooden burial poles were ancient, without doubt the undeclared cache stolen from the Vatican collection of black market havens finally incorporated into Balin, perhaps the ultimate purpose of the place, though I quickly put that

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