

# everywhere

## GEOFF RYMAN

*Science fiction is sometimes criticized for concentrating too much on the dystopian and the apocalyptic, on the bleak pessimistic future, on how awful things are going to be in the years ahead, but occasionally a story set in a viable-feeling Utopian future does see print—a future that seems like it might actually come to pass, with luck, one that gives us hope that living in the 21st century and beyond might not be so bad after all—although usually, as in the brilliant little story that follows, to the people who actually live in that future, it's not Utopia at all, just everyday life: nothing special, no big deal, just the way things are. Which, of course, is the way Utopias feel to those lucky enough to live inside them . . .*

*Born in Canada, Geoff Ryman now lives in England. He made his first sale in 1976, to New Worlds, but it was not until 1984, when he made his first appearance in Interzone (the magazine where almost all of his published short fiction has appeared) with his brilliant novella “The Unconquered Country” that he first attracted any serious attention. “The Unconquered Country,” one of the best novellas of the decade, had a stunning impact on the science fiction scene of the day, and almost overnight established Ryman as one of the most accomplished writers of his generation, winning him both the British Science Fiction Award and the World Fantasy Award; it was later published in a book version, The Unconquered Country: A Life History. His output has been sparse since then, by the high-production standards of the genre, but extremely distinguished, with his novel The Child Garden: A Low Comedy winning both the prestigious Arthur C. Clarke Award and the John W. Campbell Memorial Award. His other novels include The Warrior Who Carried Life, the critically acclaimed mainstream novel Was, and a collection of four of his novellas, Unconquered Countries. His most recent book is the underground cult classic 253, the “print remix” of an “interactive hypertext novel” that in its original form ran on-line on Ryman’s home page of [www.ryman-novel.com](http://www.ryman-novel.com); call it what you will, novel or print remix, 253 recently won the Philip K. Dick Award. Ryman’s stories have appeared in our Twelfth and Thirteenth Annual Collections.*

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hen we knew Granddad was going to die, we took him to see the Angel of the North.

When he got there, he said: It's all different. There were none of these oaks all around if-then, he said, Look at the size of them! The last time I saw this, he says to me, I was no older than you are now, and it was brand new, and we couldn't make out if we liked it or not.

We took him, the whole lot of us, on the tram from Blaydon. We made a day of it. All of Dad's exes and their exes and some of their kids and me Aunties and their exes and their kids. It wasn't that happy a group to tell you the truth. But Granddad loved seeing us all in one place.

He was going a bit soft by then. He couldn't tell what the time was anymore and his words came out wrong. The Mums made us sit on his lap. He kept calling me by my dad's name. His breath smelt funny but I didn't mind, not too much. He told me about how things used to be in Blaydon.

They used to have a gang in the Dene called Pedro's Gang. They drank some-thing called Woodpecker and broke people's windows and they left empty tins of pop in the woods. If you were little you weren't allowed out cos everyone's Mum was so fearful and all. Granddad once saw twelve young lads go over and hit an old woman and take her things. One night his brother got drunk and put his fist through a window, and he went to the hospital, and he had to wait hours before they saw him and that was terrible.

I thought it sounded exciting meself. But I didn't say so because Granddad wanted me to know how much better things are now.

He says to me, like: the trouble was, Landlubber, we were just kids, but we all thought the future would be terrible. We all thought the world was going to burn up, and that everyone would get poorer and poorer, and the crime worse.

He told me that lots of people had no work. I don't really understand how anyone could have nothing to do. But then I've never got me head around what money used to be either.

Or why they built that Angel. It's not even that big, and it was old and covered in rust. It didn't look like an Angel to me at all, the wings were so big and square. Granddad said, no, it looks like an airplane, that's what airplanes looked like back then. It's meant to go rusty, it's the Industrial Spirit of the North.

I didn't know what he was on about. I asked Dad why the Angel was so important and he kept explaining it had a soul, but couldn't say how. The church choir showed up and started singing hymns. Then it started to rain. It was a wonderful day out.

I went back into the tram and asked me watch about the Angel.

This is my watch, here, see? It's dead good isn't it, it's got all sorts on it. It takes photographs and all. Here, look, this is the picture it took of Granddad by the Angel. It's the last picture I got of him. You can talk to people on it. And it keeps thinking of fun things for you to do.

**Why not explain to the interviewer why the Angel of the North is important?**

Duh. Usually they're fun.

**Take the train to Newcastle and walk along the river until you see on the hill where people keep their homing pigeons. Muck out the cages for readies.**

It's useful when you're a bit short, it comes up with ideas to make some dosh.

It's really clever. It takes all the stuff that goes on around here and stirs it around and comes up with something new. Here, listen:

**The laws of evolution have been applied to fun. New generations of ideas are generated and eliminated at such a speed that evolution works in real time. It's survival of the funnest and you decide.**

They evolve machines too. Have you seen our new little airplanes? They've run the designs through thousands of generations, and they got better and faster and smarter.

The vicar bought the whole church choir airplanes they can wear. The wings are really good, they look just like bird's wings with pinions sticking

out like this. Oh! I really want one of them. You can turn somersaults in them. People build them in their sheds for spare readies, I could get one now if I had the dosh.

Every Sunday as long as it isn't raining, you can see the church choir take off in formation. Little old ladies in leotards and blue jeans and these big embroidered Mexican hats. They rev up and take off and start to sing the Muslim call to prayer. They echo all over the show. Then they cut their engines and spiral up on the updraft. That's when they start up on Nearer My God to Thee.

Every Sunday, Granddad and I used to walk up Shibbon Road to the Dene. It's so high up there that we could look down on top of them. He never got over it. Once he laughed so hard he fell down, and just lay there on the grass. We just lay on our backs and looked up at the choir, they just kept going up like they were kites.

When the Travellers come to Blaydon, they join in. Their wagons are pulled by horses and have calliopes built into the front, so on Sundays, when the choir goes up, the calliopes start up, so you got organ music all over the show as well. Me Dad calls Blaydon a sound sandwich. He says it's all the hills.

The Travellers like our acoustics, so they come here a lot. They got all sorts to trade. They got these bacteria that eat rubbish, and they hatch new machines, like smart door keys that only work for the right people. They make their own beer, but you got to be a bit careful how much you drink.

Granddad and I used to take some sarnies and our sleeping bags and kip with them. The Travellers go everywhere, so they sit around the fire and tell about all sorts going on, not just in England but France and Italia. One girl, her Mum let her go with them for a whole summer. She went to Prague and saw all these Buddhist monks from Thailand. They were Travellers and all.

Granddad used to tell the Travellers his stories too. When he was young he went to Mexico. India. The lot. You could in them days. He even went to Egypt, my Granddad. He used to tell the Travellers the same stories, over and over, but they never seemed to notice. Like, when he was in Egypt he tried to rent this boat to take him onto the Delta, and he couldn't figure why it was so expensive, and when he got on it, he found he'd rented a car ferry all to himself by mistake. He had the whole thing to himself. The noise of the engines scared off the birds which was the only reason he'd

wanted the boat.

So, Granddad was something of a Traveller himself. He went everywhere.

There's all sorts to do around Blaydon. We got dolphins in the municipal swim-ming pool.

We dug it ourselves, in the Haughs just down there by the river. It's tidal, our river. Did you know? It had dolphins anyway, but our pool lured them in. They like the people and the facilities, like the video conferencing. They like video conferencing, do dolphins. They like being fed and all.

My Dad and I help make the food. We grind up fish heads on a Saturday at Safeways. It smells rotten to me, but then I'm not an aquatic mammal, am I? That's how we earned the readies to buy me my watch. You get everyone along grinding fish heads, everybody takes turns. Then you get to go to the swimming.

Sick people get first crack at swimming with the dolphins. When Granddad was sick, he'd take me with him. There'd be all this steam coming off the water like in a vampire movie. The dolphins always knew who wasn't right, what was wrong with them. Mrs. Grathby had trouble with her joints, they always used to be gentle with her, just nudge her along with their noses like. But Granddad, there was one he called Liam. Liam always used to jump up and land real hard right next to him, splash him all over and Granddad would push him away, laughing like, you know? He loved Liam. They were pals.

**Have a major water-fight on all floors of the Grand Hotel in Newcastle.**

Hear that? It just keeps doing that until something takes your fancy.

**Hire Dad the giant bunny rabbit costume again and make him wear it.**

We did that once before. It was dead fun. I think it knows Dad's a bit down since Granddad.

**Call your friend Heidi and ask her to swap clothes with you and pretend to be each other for a day.**

Aw Jeez! Me sister's been wearing me watch again! It's not fair! It

mucks it up, it's supposed to know what I like, not her and that flipping Heidi. And she's got her own computer, it's loads better than mine, it looks like a shirt and has ear-phones, so no one else can hear it. It's not fair! People just come clod-hopping through. You don't get to keep nothing.

Look this is all I had to do to get this watch!

**Grind fishfood on 3.11, 16.11, 20.12 and every Sunday until 3.3**  
**Clean pavements three Sundays**  
**Deliver four sweaters for Step Mum**  
**Help Dad with joinery for telecoms outstation**  
**Wire up Mrs Grathby for video immersion**  
**Attend school from April 10th to 31 July inclusive**

I did even more than that. At least I got some over. I'm saving up for a pair of cars.

Me and me mates love using the cars. I borrow me Dad's pair. You wear them like shoes and they're smart. It's great fun on a Sunday. We all go whizzin down Lucy Street together, which is this great big hill, but the shoes won't let you go too fast or crash into anything. We all meet up, whizz around in the mall in great big serpent. You can pre-program all the cars together, so you all break up and then all at once come back together, to make shapes and all.

Granddad loved those cars. He hated his stick, so he'd go shooting off in my Dad's pair, ducking and weaving, and shouting back to me, Come on, Landlubber, keep up! I was a bit scared in them days, but he kept up at me til I joined in. He'd get into those long lines, and we'd shoot off the end of them, both of us. He'd hold me up.

He helped me make me lantern and all. Have you seen our lanterns, all along the mall? They look good when the phosphors go on at night. All the faces on them are real people, you know. You know the ink on them's made of these tiny chips with legs? Dad's seen them through a microscope, he says they look like synchronized swimmers.

I got one with my face on it. I was bit younger then so I have this really naff crew cut. Granddad helped me make it. It tells jokes. I'm not very good at making jokes up, but Granddad had this old joke book. At least I made the effort.

Let's see, what else. There's loads around here. We got the sandbox in front of the old mall. Everybody has a go at that, making things. When

King William died all his fans in wheelchairs patted together a picture of him in sand. Then it rained. But it was a good picture.

Our sandbox is a bit different. It's got mostly real sand. There's only one corner of it computer dust. It's all right for kids and that or people who don't want to do things themselves. I mean when we were little we had the dust make this great big 3D sign Happy Birthday Granddad Piper. He thought it was wonderful because if you were his age and grew up with PCs and that, it must be wonderful, just to think of something and have it made.

I don't like pictures, they're too easy. Me, I like to get stuck in. If I go to the sandbox to make something, I want to come back with sand under me fingernails. Me Dad's the same. When Newcastle won the cup, me and me mates made this big Newcastle crest out of real sand. Then we had a sandfight. It took me a week to get the sand out of me hair. I got loads of mates now, but I didn't used to.

Granddad was me mate for a while. I guess I was his pet project. I always was a bit quiet, and a little bit left out, and also I got into a bit of trouble from time to time. He got me out of myself.

You know I was telling you about the Angel? When I went back into that tram I sat and listened to the rain on the roof. It was dead quiet and there was nobody around, so I could be meself. So I asked me watch. OK then. What is this Angel? And it told me the story of how the Angel of the North got a soul.

There was this prisoner in Hull jail for thieving cos he run out of readies cos he never did nothing. It was all his fault really, he says so himself. He drank and cheated his friends and all that and did nothing with all his education.

He just sat alone in his cell. First off, he was angry at the police for catching him, and then he was angry with himself for getting caught and doing it and all of that. Sounds lovely, doesn't he? Depressing isn't the word.

Then he got this idea, to give the Angel a soul.

It goes like this. There are 11 dimensions, but we only see three of them and time, and the others are what was left over after the Big Bang. They're too small to see but they're everywhere at the same time, and we live in them too, but we don't know it. There's no time there, so once something happens, it's like a pho-tograph, you can't change it.

So what the prisoner of Hull said that means is that everything we do gets laid down in the other dimensions like train tracks. It's like a story, and it doesn't end until we die, and that does the job for us. That's our soul, that story.

So what the prisoner in Hull does, is work in the prison, get some readies and pay to have a client put inside the Angel's head.

And all the other computers that keep track of everyone's jobs or the questions they asked, or just what they're doing, that all gets uploaded to the Angel.

Blaydon's there. It's got all of us, grinding fish heads. Every time someone makes tea or gets married from Carlisle to Ulverton from Newcastle to Derby, that gets run through the Angel. And that Angel is laying down the story of the North.

My watch told me that, sitting in that tram.

Then everyone else starts coming back in, but not Dad and Granddad, so I go out to fetch them.

The clouds were all pulled down in shreds. It looked like the cotton candy that Dad makes at fetes. The sky was full of the church choir in their little airplanes. For just a second, it looked like a Mother Angel, with all her little ones.

I found Dad standing alone with Granddad. I thought it was rain on my Dad's face, but it wasn't. He was looking at Granddad, all bent and twisted, facing into the wind.

We got to go Dad, I said.

And he said, In a minute son. Granddad was looking up at the planes and smiling.

And I said it's raining Dad. But they weren't going to come in. So I looked at the Angel and all this rust running off it in red streaks onto the concrete. So I asked, if it's an Angel of the North, then why is it facing south?

And Granddad says, Because it's holding out its arms in welcome.



He didn't want to go.

We got him back into the tram, and back home, and he started to wheeze a bit, so me Step Mum put him to bed and about eight o'clock she goes in to swab his teeth with vanilla, and she comes out and says to Dad, I think he's stopped breathing.

So I go in, and I can see, no he's still breathing. I can hear it. And his tongue flicks, like he's trying to say something. But Dad comes in, and they all start to cry and carry on. And the neighbours all come in, yah, yah, yah, and I keep saying, it's not true, look, he's still breathing. What do they have to come into it for, it's not their Granddad, is it?

No one was paying any attention to the likes of me, were they? So I just take off. There's this old bridge you're not allowed on. It's got trees growing out of it. The floor's gone, and you have to walk along the top of the barricades. You fall off, you go straight into the river, but it's a good dodge into Newcastle.

So I just went and stood there for a bit, looking down on the river. Me Granddad used to take me sailing. We'd push off from the Haughs, and shoot out under this bridge, I could see where we were practically. And we'd go all the way down the Tyne and out to sea. He used to take me out to where the dolphins were. You'd see Liam come up. He was still wearing his computer, Liam, like a crown.

So I'm standing on the bridge, and me watch says: go down to the swimming pool, and go and tell Liam that Granddad's dead.

It's a bit like a dog I guess. You got to show one dog the dead body of the other or it will pine.

So I went down to the pool, but it's late and raining and there's nobody there, and I start to call him, like: Liam! Li-am! But he wasn't there.

So me watch says: he's wearing his computer: give him a call on his mobile.

So me watch goes bleep bleep bleep, and there's a crackle and suddenly I hear a whoosh and crickle, and there's all these cold green waves on the face of my watch, and I say Liam? Liam, this is me, remember me, Liam? My Granddad's dead Liam. I thought you might need to know.

But what is he, just a dolphin right, I don't know what it meant. How's he supposed to know who I am. You all right then, Liam? Catching lots of fish are you? So I hung up.

And I stand there, and the rain's really bucketing down, and I don't want to go home. Talking to yourself. It's the first sign, you know.

And suddenly me watch starts up again, and it's talking to me with Granddad's voice. You wanna hear what it said? Here. Hear.

**Hello there, Landlubber. How are ya? This is your old Granddad. It's a dead clever world we live in, isn't it? They've rigged this thing up here, so that I can put this in your watch for when you need it.**

**Listen, me old son. You mustn't grieve, you know. Things are different now. They know how it works. We used to think we had a little man in our heads who watched everything on a screen and when you died he went to heaven not you. Now, they know, there's no little man, there's no screen. There's just a brain putting everything together. And what we do is ask ourselves: what do we think about next? What do we do next?**

**You know all about those dimension things, don't you? Well I got a name for them. I call them Everywhere. Cos they are. And I want you to know, that I'm Everywhere now.**

**That's how we live forever in heaven these days. And it's true, me old son. You think of me still travelling around Mexico before I met your Mamby. Think of me in India. Think of me learning all about readies to keep up with you lot. Think of me on me boat, sailing out to sea. Remember that day I took you sailing out beyond the Tyne mouth? It's still there, Landlubber.**

**You know, all the evil in the world, all the sadness comes from not having a good answer to that question: what do I do next? You just keep thinking of good things to do, lad. You'll be all right. We'll all be all right. I wanted you to know that.**

I got me footie on Saturdays, Granddad. Then I'm thinking I'll start up school again. They got a sailing club now. I thought I'd join it, Granddad, thought I'd take them out to where you showed me the dolphins. I'll tell them about Every-where.

Did you know, Granddad?

They're making a new kind of watch. It's going to show us  
Everywhere, too.

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