

# SIMULACRUM

THE MAGAZINE OF SPECULATIVE TRANSFORMATION

ISSUE 11



**LISA GOLDSTEIN**

**ARTWORK BY PIOTR CIESLINSKI**

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# DARK CITIES

# UNDERGROUND

"Brimms with good ideas." THE NEW YORK TIMES



LISA GOLDSTEIN

# THE EDITOR'S DESK



It's the middle of yet another year? Can you believe that? I know it's probably—*probably*—an old wives' tale, but it does seem that time goes by quicker the older you get. Wait: did I just inadvertently tell everyone that I'm getting older. Damn it.

I'm happy to say that we've got another marvelous issue lined up for you. For those of you familiar with Lisa Goldstein's award-winning work, you'll find her short story *Split Light* a treat, as well as the accompanying interview.

I'm also pleased as punch to feature some Australian work in this issue as well—a big Trans-Tasmanian hello!

As yet another Harry Potter hits the shelves amidst much fanfare, I have to say that seeing young kids—even teenagers—all over the world take to a book like some take to an X-Box just warms the proverbial cockles of my heart. Yet, is it a good thing for them to read only books by one particular author?

I know, I know, before you get all uppity and dangerous—there are plenty of kids reading more than just the works of J.K. Rowling. Thank god. My concern is that the talents of our prospective writers of the future are being marginalized by what they read. Or *lack of* what they read. Ask many a kid who Lewis Carroll or L. Frank Baum is and they'll look at you as if you just told them that Disco is cool. Which it is, by the way. Of course, everyone knows who J.R.R Tolkien is because there was a movie. Three, in fact.

So parents, please, I urge you, take your toddlers to the library! Harry's fine, but just remember: there are even better wizards out there. Tell your kids. And for god's sake—if you meet anyone who wants to join in this silly notion of burning books, a good, hard thwack upside the head works wonders.

Okay, that's the end of the Moaning Editor bit, piffle. Forget about that now and dig into the issue with gusto. Great stories, interviews, recommended books (see what Marianne de Pierres has to say about the third Parrish Plessis installment, *Crash Deluxe*) and fabulous artwork. 'Nuff said.

-- Lynne Jamneck

# SPLIT LIGHT

**LISA GOLDSTEIN**

There isn't really much behind "Split Light," just that I read something about Shabbatai Zevi a very long time ago and thought he would make a great subject for a story. I tried him out in one story as a minor plot point, but he was too demanding and required his own story. I wanted a story that hadn't been published anywhere else before for my collection, *Travellers in Magic*, so I used this one, because I thought that it was so strange, so unclassifiable, that no magazine editor would possibly buy it. After it was published, though, Gardner Dozois picked it for his Best of the Year anthology, which shows you how much I know about editors.



SHABBETAI ZEVI (1626-1676), the central figure of the largest and most momentous messianic movement in Jewish history subsequent to the destruction of the Temple ...

*Encyclopedia Judaica*

He sits in a prison in Constantinople. The room is dark, his mind a perfect blank, the slate on which his visions are written. He waits.

He sees the moon. The moon spins like a coin through the blue night sky. The moon splinters and falls to earth. Its light is the shattered soul of Adam, dispersed since the fall. All over the earth the shards are falling; he sees each one, and knows where it comes to rest.

He alone can bind the shards together. He will leave this prison, become king. He will wear the circled walls of Jerusalem as a crown. All the world will be his.

His name is Shabbetai Zevi. "Shabbetai" for the Sabbath, the seventh day, the day of rest. The seventh letter in the Hebrew alphabet is zayin. In England they call the Holy Land "Zion." He is the Holy Land, the center of the world. If he is in Constantinople, then Constantinople is the center of the world.

He has never been to England, but he has seen it in his visions. He has ranged through the world in his visions, has seen the past and fragments of the future. But he does not know what will happen to him in this prison.

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When he thinks of his prison the shards of light grow faint and disappear. The darkness returns. He feels the weight of the stone building above him; it is as heavy as the crown he felt a moment ago. He gives in to despair.



A year ago, he thinks, he was the most important man in the world. Although he is a Jew in a Moslem prison he gives the past year its Christian date: it was 1665. It was a date of portent; some Christians believe that 1666 will be the year of the second coming of Christ. Even among the Christians he has his supporters.

But it was to the Jews, to his own people, that he preached. As a child he had seen the evidence of God in the world, the fiery jewels hidden in gutters and trash heaps; he could not understand why no one else had noticed them, why his brother had beaten him and called him a liar. As a young man he had felt his soul kindle into light as he prayed. He had understood that he was born to heal the world, to collect the broken shards of light, to turn mourning into joy.

When he was in his twenties he began the mystical study of Kabbalah. He read, with growing excitement, about the light of God, how it had been scattered and hidden throughout the world at Adam's fall, held captive by the evil that resulted from that fall. The Jews, according to the Kabbalist Isaac Luria, had been cast across the world like sand, like sparks, and in their dispersal they symbolized the broken fate of God.

One morning while he was at prayer he saw the black letters in his prayer book dance like flame and translate themselves into the unpronounceable Name of God. He understood everything at that moment, saw the correct pronunciation of the Name, knew that he could restore all the broken parts of the world by simply saying the Name aloud.

He spoke. His followers say he rose into midair. He does not remember; he rarely remembers what he says or does in his religious trances. He knows that he was shunned in his town of Smyrna, that the people there began to think him a lunatic or a fool.

Despite their intolerance he grew to understand more and more. He saw that he was meant to bring about an end to history, and that with the coming of the end all things were to be allowed. He ate pork. He worked on the Sabbath, the day of rest, the day that he was named for or that was named for him.

Finally the townspeople could stand it no longer and banished him. He blessed them all before he went, "in the name of God who allows the forbidden."

As he left the town of his birth, though, the melancholy that had plagued him all his life came upon him again. He wandered through Greece and Thrace, and ended finally in Constantinople. In Constantinople he saw a vision of the black prison, the

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dungeon in which he would be immured, and in his fear the knowledge that had sustained him for so long vanished. God was lost in the world, broken into so many shards no one could discover him.

In his frantic search for God he celebrated the festivals of Passover, Shavuot and Sukkot all in one week. He was exiled again and resumed his wandering, traveling from Constantinople to Rhodes to Cairo.

In Cairo he dreamed he was a bridegroom, about to take as his bride the holy city of Jerusalem. The next day the woman Sarah came, unattended, to Cairo.



The door to his prison opens and a guard comes in, the one named Kasim. "Stand up!" Kasim says.

Shabbetai stands. "Come with me," Kasim says.

Shabbetai follows. The guard takes him through the dungeon and out into Constantinople. It is day; the sun striking the domes and minarets of the city nearly blinds him.

Kasim leads him through the crowded streets, saying nothing. They pass covered bazaars and slave markets, coffee houses and sherbet shops. A caravan of camels forces them to stop.

When they continue on Shabbetai turns to study his guard. Suddenly he sees to the heart of the other man, understands everything. He knows that Kasim is under orders to transfer him to the fortress at Gallipoli, that the sultan himself has given him this order before leaving to fight the Venetians on Crete. "How goes the war, brother?" Shabbetai asks.

Kasim jerks as if he has been shot. He hurries on toward the wharf, saying nothing.

At the harbor Kasim hands Shabbetai to another man and goes quickly back to the city. Shabbetai is stowed in the dark hold of a ship, amid sour-smelling hides and strong spices and ripe oranges. Above him he hears someone shout, and he feels the ship creak and separate from the wharf and head out into the Sea of Marmara.

Darkness again, he thinks. He is a piece of God, hidden from the world. It is only by going down into the darkness of the fallen world that he can find the other fragments, missing since the Creation. Everything has been ordained, even this trip from Constantinople to Gallipoli.

Visions of the world around him encroach upon the darkness. He sees Pierre de Fermat, a mathematician, lying dead in France; a book is open on the table in which he has written, "I have discovered a truly remarkable proof which this margin is too small to contain." He sees Rembrandt adding a stroke of bright gold to a painting

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he calls "The Jewish Bride." He sees a great fire destroy London; a killing wind blows the red and orange flames down to the Thames.

He is blinded again, this times by the vast intrushing light of the world. He closes his eyes, a spark of light among many millions of others, and rocks to the motion of the ship.



Sarah's arrival in Cairo two years ago caused a great deal of consternation. No one could remember seeing a woman traveling by herself. She stood alone on the dock, a slight figure with long red hair tumbling from her kerchief, gazing around her as if at Adam's Eden.

Finally someone ran for the chief rabbi. He gave the order to have her brought to his house, and summoned all the elders as well.

"Who are you?" he asked. "Why are you traveling alone in such a dangerous part of the world?"

"I'm an orphan," Sarah said. "But I was raised in a great castle by a Polish nobleman. I had one servant just to pare my nails, and another to brush my hair a hundred times before I went to bed."

None of the elders answered her, but each one wore an identical expression of doubt. Why would a Polish nobleman raise a Jewish orphan? And what on earth was she doing in Cairo?

Only Shabbetai saw her true nature; only he knew that what the elders suspected was true. He had been the nobleman's mistress, passed among his circle of friends when he grew tired of her. The prophet Hosea married a prostitute, he thought. "I will be your husband," he said. "If you will have me."

He knew as he spoke that she would marry him, and his heart rejoiced.

They held the wedding at night and out of doors. The sky was dark blue silk, buttoned by a moon of old ivory. Stars without number shone.

After the ceremony the elders came to congratulate him. For Sarah's sake he pretended not to see the doubt in their eyes. "I cannot tell you how happy I am tonight," he said.

When they left he brought her to his house and led her to the bedroom, not bothering to light the candles. He lay on the bed and drew her to him. Her hair was tangled; perhaps she never brushed it.

They lay together for a long time. "Shall I undress?" she asked finally. Her breath was warm on his face.

"The angels sang at my birth," he said. "I have never told anyone this. Only you."



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She ran her fingers through her hair, then moved to lift her dress. He held her tightly. "We must be like the angels," he said. "Like the moon. We must be pure."

"I don't understand."

"I cannot fall into sin. If I am stained like Adam I will not be able to do the work for which I was sent here."

"The—work?"

"I was born to heal the world," he said.

The moon appeared before him in the darkened room. Its sliver-white light cast everything in shadow.

The moon began to spin. No, he thought. He watched as it shattered and plummeted to earth, saw the scattered fragments hide themselves in darkness.

He cried aloud. He felt the great sadness of the world, and the doubt he had struggled with all his life returned.

"It's broken," he said. "It can never be repaired. I'll never be able to join all the pieces together."

Sarah kissed him lightly on the cheek. "Let us join together, then," she said. "Let two people stand for the entire world."

"No—"

"I heard you tell your followers that everything is permitted. Why are we not permitted to come together as husband and wife?"

"I can't," he said simply. "I have never been able to."

He expected scorn, or pity. But her expression did not change. She held him in her arms, and eventually he drifted off to sleep.



With Sarah at his side he was able to begin the mission for which he was born. Together they traveled toward Jerusalem, stopping so that he could preach along the way.

He spoke in rough huts consecrated only by the presence of ten men joined by prayer. He spoke in ancient synagogues, with lamps of twisted silver casting a wavering light on the golden letters etched into the walls. Sometimes he stood at a plain wooden table, watched by unlettered rustics who knew nothing of the mysteries of Kabbalah; sometimes he preached from an altar of faded white and gold.

His message was the same wherever they went. He was the Messiah, appointed by God. He proclaimed an end to fast days; he promised women that he would set them free from the curse of Eve. He would take the crown from the Turkish sultan without war, he said, and he would make the sultan his servant.

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The lost ten tribes of Israel had been found, he told the people who gathered to hear him. They were marching slowly as sleepwalkers toward the Sahara desert, uncertain of the way or of their purpose, waiting for him to unite them.

When he reached Jerusalem he circled the walls seven times on horseback, like a king. Once inside the city he won over many of the rabbis and elders. Letters were sent out to the scattered Jewish communities all over the world, to England, Holland and Italy, proclaiming that the long time of waiting was over; the Messiah had come.

A great storm shook the world. Families sold their belongings and traveled toward Jerusalem. Others set out with nothing, trusting in God to provide for them. Letters begging for more news were sent back to Jerusalem, dated from "the first year of the renewal of the prophecy and the kingdom." Shabbetai signed the answering letters "the firstborn son of God," and even "I am the Lord your God Shabbetai Zevi," and such was the fervor of the people that very few of them were shocked.



The boat docks at Gallipoli and Shabbetai is taken to the fortress there. Once inside he sees that he has been given a large and well-lit suite of rooms, and he understands that his followers have succeeded in bribing the officials.

The guards leave him and lock the door. However comfortable his rooms are, he is still in a prison cell. He paces for several minutes, studying the silver lamps and deep carpets and polished tables and chairs. Mosaics on the wall, fragments of red, green and black, repeat over and over in a complex pattern.

He sits on the plump mattress and puts his head in his hands. His head throbs. With each pulse, it seems, the lamps in the room dim, grow darker, until, finally, they go out.

He is a letter of light. He is the seventh letter, the zayin. Every person alive is a letter, and together they make up the book of the world, all things past, present and to come.

He thinks he can read the book, can know the future of the world. But as he looks on the book's pages turn; the letters form and reshape. Futures branch off before him.

He watches as children are born, as some die, as others grow to adulthood. Some stay in their villages, farm their land, sit by their hearths with their families surrounding them. Others disperse across the world and begin new lives.

The sight disturbs him; he does not know why. A page turns and he sees ranks of soldiers riding to wars, and men and women lying dead in the streets of plague. Kingdoms fall to sword and gun and cannon.

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Great wars consume the world. The letters twist and sharpen, become pointed wire. He sees millions of people herded beyond the wire, watches as they go toward their deaths.

The light grown brighter. He wants to close his eyes, to look away, but he cannot. He watches as men learn the secrets of the light, as they break it open and release the life concealed within it. A shining cloud flares above a city, and thousands more die.

No, he thinks. But the light shines out again, and this time it seems to comfort him. Here is the end of history that he has promised his followers. Here is the end of everything, the world cleansed, made anew.

The great book closes, and the light goes out.



In Jerusalem he preached to hundreds of people. They filled the synagogue, dressed in their best clothes, the men on his right hand and the women on his left. Children played and shouted in the aisles.

He spoke of rebuilding the temple, of finding the builder's stone lost since the time of Solomon. As he looked out over his audience he saw Sarah stand and leave the congregation. One of his followers left as well, a man named Aaron.

He stopped, the words he had been about to speak dying before they left his mouth. For a moment he could not go on. The people stirred in their seats.

He hurried to an end. After the service he ran quickly to the house the rabbis had given him. Sarah was already there.

"What were you doing here?" he asked.

"What do you mean?" she said. Her expression was innocent, unalarmed.

"I saw you leave with Aaron."

"With Aaron? I left to come home. I didn't feel well."

"You were a whore in Poland, weren't you?" he asked harshly. "Was there a single man in the country you didn't sleep with?"

"I was a nobleman's daughter," she said. Her voice was calm. He could not see her heart; she held as many mysteries as the Kabbalah.

"A nobleman's—" he said. "You were his mistress. And what did you do with Aaron? What did you do with all of them, all of my followers?"

"I told you—"

"Don't lie to me!"

"Listen. Listen to me. I did nothing. I have not known a man since I came to Cairo."

"Then you admit that in Poland—"

"Quiet. Yes. Yes, I was his mistress."

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"And Aaron? You want him, don't you? You whore -- you want them all, every man you have ever known."

"Listen," she said angrily. "You know nothing of women, nothing at all. I was his mistress in Poland, yes. But I did not enjoy it—I did it because I was an orphan, and hungry, and I needed to eat. I hated it when he came to me, but I managed to hide my feelings. I had to, or I would have starved."

"But you wanted me. On our wedding night, you said—"

"Yes. You are the only man who has ever made me feel safe."

A great pity moved him. He felt awed at the depths to which her life had driven her, the sins she had been forced to take upon herself. Could she be telling the truth? But why would she stay with him, a man of no use to her or any other woman?

"You lied to your nobleman," he said carefully. "Are you lying to me now?"

"No," she said.

He believed her. He felt free, released from the jealousy that had bound him. "You may have Aaron, you know," he said.

"What?"

"You may have Aaron, or any man you want."

"I don't—haven't you heard me at all? I don't want Aaron."

"I understand everything now. You were a test, but through the help of God I have passed it. With the coming of the kingdom of God all things are allowed. Nothing is forbidden. You may have any man, any woman, any one of God's creatures."

"I am not a test! I am a woman, your wife! You are the only man I want!"

He did not understand why she had become angry. His own anger had gone. He left the house calmly.

From Jerusalem he traveled with his followers to Smyrna, the place where he was born. There are those who say that he was banished from Jerusalem too, that the rabbis there declared him guilty of blasphemy. He does not remember. He remembers only the sweetness of returning to his birthplace in triumph.

Thousands of men and women turned out to greet him as he rode through the city gates. Men on the walls lifted ram's horns to their lips and sounded notes of welcome. People crowded the streets, cheering and singing loudly; they raised their children to their shoulders and pointed him out as he went past.

He nodded to the right and left as he rode. A man left the assembly and stepped out in front of the procession.

Shabbetai's horse reared. "Careful, my lord!" Nathan said, hurrying to his side. Nathan was one of the many who had joined him in Jerusalem, who had heard Shabbetai's message and given up all his worldly goods.

But Shabbetai had recognized the fat, worried-looking man, and he reined in his horse. "This is my brother Joseph," he said. "A merchant."

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To his surprise Joseph bowed to him. "Welcome, my lord," he said. "We hear great things of you."

Shabbetai laughed. When they were children he had told Joseph about his visions, and Joseph had beaten him for lying. Seeing his brother bent before him was more pleasing than Shabbetai could have imagined. "Rise, my friend," he said.

In the days that followed the city became one great festival. Business came to a standstill as people danced in the streets, recited psalms to one another when they met, fell into prophetic trances proclaiming the kingdom of God.

Only Sarah did not join in the city's riot. He urged her to take a lover, as so many people in the city were doing, but she refused. When he called for an end to fast days she became the only one in the city to keep the old customs.

Despite her actions he felt more strongly than ever that he was traveling down the right road, that he was close to the fulfillment of his mission. He excommunicated those who refused to believe in him. He sang love songs during prayer, and explained to the congregation the mystical meaning behind the words of the song. He distributed the kingdoms of the earth among his followers.

His newly-made kings urged him to take the crown intended for him, to announce the date of his entrance into Constantinople. He delayed, remembering the evil vision of the dark prison.

But in his euphoria he began to see another vision, one in which he took the crown from the sultan. He understood that history would be split at Constantinople, would travel down one of two diverging paths. He began to make arrangements to sail.

Two days before they were to leave Sarah came to him. "I'm not going with you," she said.

"What do you mean?" he asked. "I will be king, ruler of the world, and you will be at my side, my queen. This is what I have worked for all these years. How can you give that up?"

"I don't want to be queen."

"You don't—why not?"

"I don't feel safe with you any longer. I don't like the things you ask me to do."

"What things?"

"What things? How can you ask me that when you tell me to lie with every one of your followers? You're like the nobleman, passing me around when you get tired of me."

"I did nothing. It was you who lusted after Aaron."

"I didn't—"

"And others too," he said, remembering the glances she had given men in the congregation. She *had* pitied him, and hated him too, just as he had always thought. "Do you think I didn't notice?"

"I've done nothing," she said. "I—"

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"I won't grant you a divorce, you know."

"Of course not. If we're married you still own me, even if I'm not there. That dream you told me about, where you took Jerusalem as your bride -- you want to master Jerusalem, make her bow to your will. You want to control the entire world. But have you ever thought about how you will govern once you have the sultan's crown? You want to be ruler of the earth, but what kind of ruler will you be?"

"What do you know about statecraft, about policy? I have been ordained by God to be king. And you—you have been chosen to be queen."

"No," she said. "I have not."

She turned to leave. "I excommunicate you!" he said, shouting after her. "I call upon God to witness my words—you are excommunicated!"

She continued walking as if she did not hear him.

He watched her go. Perhaps it was just as well that she was leaving. He had known for a long time that she could not grasp the vastness of the task he had been given; she had never studied Kabbalah, or had visions of the light of God. His work in the world was far more important than her private feelings, or his.

He and his followers set sail on December 30, 1665. Word of his departure had gone before him. His boat was intercepted in the Sea of Marmara, and he was brought ashore in chains.



He sits in his prison in Gallipoli and waits for the light. He has not had a vision in many days; perhaps, he thinks, they have left him. He wonders if they have been consumed by the great fires he has seen in the future.

What had gone wrong? He and his followers had been so certain; he had seen the signs, read all the portents. He was destined to be the ruler of the world.

He puts his head in his hands and laughs harshly. Ruler of the world! And instead he sits in prison, waiting to be killed or released at the whim of the Turkish sultan.

The light of God is broken, dispersed throughout the world. And like the light his own mind is broken, splitting.

There is a knock on the door, and Nathan enters. "How did you find me?" Shabbetai asks.

Nathan appears surprised. "Don't you know?" he asks.

Shabbetai says nothing.

"I bribed a great many people to get you here," Nathan says. "Are you comfortable?"

"I—yes. Quite comfortable."

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"The sultan has returned from Crete," Nathan says. "There are rumors that he will want to see you."

"When?"

"I don't know. Soon, I think. He is alarmed by the support you have among the people of Turkey." Nathan pauses and then goes on. "Some of your followers are worried. They don't believe that we can hold out against the combined armies of the sultan."

"Tell them not to fear," Shabbetai says. He is surprised at how confident he sounds. But there is no reason to worry Nathan and the others, and perhaps the visions will return. "Tell them that God watches over me."

Nathan nods, satisfied.



A few days later Shabbetai is taken by guards from Gallipoli to Adrianople. They pass through the city and come to a strong high wall. Men look down at them from the watchtowers.

Soldiers with plumed helmets stand at the wall's gate. The soldiers nod to them and motion them through. Beyond the gate is a courtyard filled with fountains and cypress trees and green plots of grass where gazelles feed.

They turn left, and come to a door guarded by soldiers. They enter through this door and are shown before the sultan and his council.

"Do you claim to be the Messiah?" a councilor asks Shabbetai.

"No," he says.

"What?" the councilor says, astonished.

"No. Perhaps I was the Messiah once. But the light has left me—I see no more and no less than other people."

The sultan moves his hand. The councilor nods to him and turns toward Shabbetai. "I see," he says. "You understand that we cannot just take your word for this. We cannot say, Very well, you may go now. Your followers outside are waiting for you -- you have become a very dangerous man."

"We are prepared to offer you a choice," the sultan says. "Either convert to Islam or be put to death immediately."

The light returns, filling the room. Shabbetai gasps; he had begun to think it lost forever. The light breaks. Two paths branch off before him.

On one path he accepts death. His followers, stunned, sit in mourning for him for the required seven days. Then Nathan pronounces him a martyr, and others proclaim that he has ascended to heaven.

His following grows. Miracles are seen, and attested to by others. An army forms; they attack the Turks. A long and bloody war follows. The sultan, the man

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sitting so smugly before him, is killed by one of his own people, a convert to what is starting to be called Sabbatarianism.

After a decade the Turks surrender, worn out by the fighting against the Sabbatarians on one side and the Venetians on the other. Shabbetai's followers take Constantinople; Hagia Sophia, once a church and then a mosque, is converted a third time by the victorious army.

The Sabbatarians consolidate their power, and spread across Europe and Asia. First hundreds and then thousands of heretics are put to death. Holy wars flare. Men hungry for power come to Constantinople and are given positions in the hierarchy of the new religion.

Finally, using the terrifying tools of the far future, the Sabbatarians set out to kill everyone who is not a believer. The broken light that Shabbetai saw in his vision shines across the sky as city after city is laid waste. Poisons cover the earth. At the end only a few thousand people are left alive.

Shabbetai turns his gaze away from the destruction and looks down the other path. Here he becomes a convert to Islam; he changes his name to Aziz Mehmed Effendi. The sultan, pleased at his decision, grants him a royal pension of 150 piasters a day.

His followers are shocked, but they soon invent reasons for his apostasy. Nathan explains that the conversion was necessary, that the Messiah must lose himself in darkness in order to find all the shards of God hidden in the world.

Over the years his followers begin to lose hope. Sarah dies in 1674. Two years later he himself dies. Several groups of Sabbatarians continue to meet in secret; one group even survives to the mid-twentieth century.

He turns back to the first path. Once again he is drawn to the vision of annihilation. An end to breeding and living and dying, an end to the mad ceaseless activity that covers the earth. Perhaps this is what God requires of him.

He remembers Sarah, her desire to lie with him. She thought him powerless; very well, he will show her something of power. Flame will consume her descendants, all the children he had been unable to give her.

The moon spins before him, fragments into a thousand pieces. He understands that his vision is not an allegory but real, that people will become so strong they can destroy the moon.

His head pounds. He is not powerless at all. He is the most powerful man in the world. All the people he has seen in his travels, the bakers and learned men and farmers and housewives and bandits, all of them depend for their lives on his next word.

He thinks of Sarah again, her tangled hair, her breath warm on his cheek. If he lets the world live all her children will be his, although she will not know it. Every person in the world will be his child. He can choose life, for himself and for everyone; he can do what he was chosen to do and heal the world.



# SIMULACRUM

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The light blazes and dies. He looks up at the sultan and his men and says, calmly, "I will choose Islam."

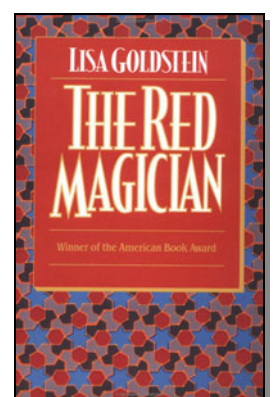
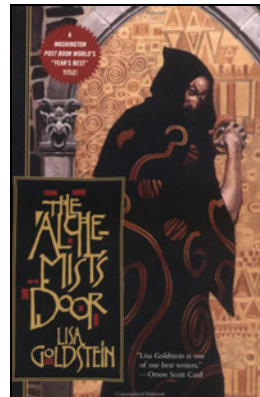
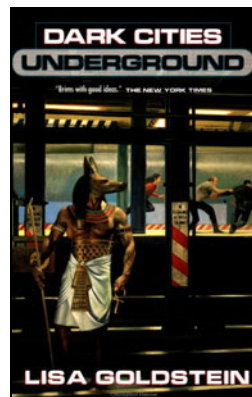
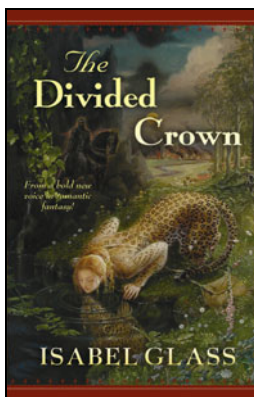
## THE END

Lisa Goldstein has published ten novels, the latest being DAUGHTER OF EXILE (as by Isabel Glass) from Tor Books. Her novel THE RED MAGICIAN won the American Book Award for Best Paperback. She has also published a short story collection, TRAVELLERS IN MAGIC (Tor Books, December, 1994), and numerous short stories. Her novels and short stories have been finalists for the Hugo, Nebula and World Fantasy awards. She lives in Oakland, California, with her husband and their cute dog Spark.

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## BOOKS BY THE AUTHOR – AVAILABLE AT AMAZON.COM



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# REVISION IS MURDER

**SHANE JIRAIYA CUMMINGS**

*Revision is Murder* was written at a time of inundation. I was struggling with editing and revising bucketloads of stories and feeling the pressure to complete my first novel. I had also been selected for the Clarion South workshop at the time. While struggling with these writing-related endeavours, this story popped out, almost fully formed. I consider it my 'writerly conceit' piece—a metaphor for the swirling chaos in my head. It's also a nod to the ponderings of many writers out there who wonder where their stories and ideas come from and, more importantly, what happens to the discarded words and ideas.



I'd written many short stories, trying to break into the writing scene, but it was with this particular manuscript that I had a special affinity. It was my first, my masterpiece—the great unpublished novel.

Wedged between a dozen coffees and three am, I struggled to focus. My eyes blurred as I banged away at the keyboard. Words and whole sentences formed almost unbidden, pouring from me with abandon—the product of trained hands running on automatic. The blurring intensified, forcing me to squint at the letters floating in pixelated clusters across the screen. As I typed, a whirl of colours filled my peripheral vision. Too tired to care, I continued typing. Chapter seventeen was drawing to a close, and the protagonist was headed for a cliff-hanger. The colours swirled and danced in my field of vision but never swam close enough to cloud my view of the screen.

Rounding off a page, my eyes committed their betrayal, whirling the spectrum of light and haze into a tunnel. Only the words on the screen existed, everything else was swallowed by the luminous fog. Within moments, even the white document background dropped away, disappearing into the depths of the screen and the abyss beyond. The words and letters were left hanging like baby spiders clinging to the smoky monitor glass.

I tapped away, flooding the glass with more black characters. I typed like a madman, the sentences forming from fragments only half-conceived in my fogged mind. Even as I continued to create, the individual letters were sucked from the glass,

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hurtling into the blurry abyss that had engulfed the rest of the computer screen. One at a time at first, then in clumps. As the letters were drawn away, so too was my focus. In my weariness, I succumbed to that same black hole. It sucked my consciousness into a place beyond thought or reason, turning everything dark.

I snapped my eyes open again, pulling myself upright in my chair. The screen was there, as were my typing fingers, still performing admirably under their own steam. But filling the screen was a collage of the manuscript and a world beyond.

Blinking couldn't dispel the illusion, nor the fogging rainbows still swimming in the halo obscuring the study.

In the world within my screen, animated letters floated in a luminous void. An abstract realm of subtle consciousness, where angles and points, letters and numbers, coexisted in embryonic forms of life. Metallic clouds of gas undulated, gently propelling the fleshy letters through the dense atmosphere. In the distance, noises penetrated the void, akin to the rise and fall of a whale's song.

Through my seventeen-inch window into this abstract plane, waves of empathy radiated into my core. Contentment, an innate peace with the universe, saturated my being.

I watched through blurry eyes as more of the letters I created, bunched into words, sprang into being on my screen. Simultaneously, a fleshy simulacrum appeared amid the coppery-gold cloud. With my skewed perspective, and tiny viewing frame, I had no idea whether these newborn incarnations were twelve pixels in size, or mile-wide monoliths.

I typed and typed, lost to the joy of creating these inert life-forms. It was rapturous—my fingers hammered out line after line of prose, outlining the peril of the protagonist, while the souls of the letters appeared in the reality beyond, breaking apart from their parent word and floating unfettered, soaking in the glow, and radiating contentment.

As my rational mind intruded, my hand drifted to the delete key to correct a misspelled word of my character's plight. Three letters were all I corrected, but the outcry from beyond nearly shattered my eardrums. The dirge, so much like a distressed whale, was heartbreaking. The newly birthed letters, the ones I deleted, faded from a rosy-flesh colour to a sullen grey. An instant later they disintegrated to ash, their carcasses diffusing into a steely cloud.

I froze.

Beyond the line of words on my manuscript, the rise and fall of the alien whale-song haunted the void every few seconds. My gut was hollow as realisation dawned on me. This was the sound of dying letters.

Despite the constant radiating contentment, I tore my eyes from the screen and wiped a hand across my brow. The sweat collected there was ice cold. Although the blur persisted, a legacy of the late hour, I could read my watch well enough to know four am was approaching.

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The euphoric feeling faded, replaced by emptiness. Refocussing my concentration, I saw the bizarre realm of living letters was gone. Instead, only the last page of my manuscript filled the screen. Most of it was riddled with typos.

I squinted hard at the screen, hoping for the dazzle of colours to return, or the hint of a cloud to show through. Instead, nothing.

Composing myself with deep breaths, I tried pushing the vision from my thoughts and concentrated instead on finishing the chapter before going to bed.

I started in on the typos, but with every correction—every deletion—the haunting call of the letters echoed through my mind. I couldn't do it.

Afraid to even turn off the computer, I sought refuge from the madness in sleep. While I slept, the screen purred and flickered in the darkness. Even in slumber, the metallic clouds, the bloated shapes of letters and numbers, and a haunting scream, played through the landscape of my dreams.

The next morning I returned to the manuscript, still bleary-eyed, but again, couldn't bring myself to correct the mistakes. I soon turned to thinking of all the corrections I'd made in the novel, and then in the dozens of short stories I'd written. I paled when I remember trashing the original versions of chapters three and four. Nearly nine thousand words. Murdered.

After much soul searching, and guilt, I backed up every story of mine onto disks, and locked them away in my study draw.

Since that night, I've never written another story. Not another word. Knowing the consequences, it's just too painful to make a mistake. My computer sits dormant, with my entire writing career dormant within.

I've now turned my hand to art-abstract art. With the indecipherable smattering of paint on canvas, I'll never be in danger of erasing my work, ever again. The thought gives me comfort as I'm painting, imagining myself floating through a steel-brass cloud, feeling at one with the universe.

Never again will I have to endure the mournful call of letters lamenting the loss their kind.

## THE END

Shane Jiraiya Cummings is a West Australian writer of dark fiction, a graduate of Clarion South 2005, and a member of the Horror Writers Association. His short fiction credits include *Aurealis*, *The Book of Dark Wisdom*, *Borderlands*, and a number of anthologies and other publications. As an editor, he is involved in the anthologies, *Shadow Box*, *Tales from the Sunburnt Realm*, and *Robots and Time*, as well as *Shadowed Realms* magazine.

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Shane's current projects include the *Harbinger* series of supernatural thriller novels, and the short story collections, *In the Heart of Midnight*, *Shards*, *Beasts of the Southern Shore*, and *The Adventures of Yamabushi Kaidan*.

His website is <http://www.jiraiya.com.au>

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# RISE

**MARK HOWARD JONES**

The idea behind the story—that's tricky... It's about loss and the various forms it can take. I just sat down at my keyboard one day and there it was. Having lost several people who were close to me fairly recently, I suppose it was waiting to be written. Putting it in a science-fiction context gave me just enough distance to make it possible.



Something leaking somewhere. Bloodbile trickling can be heard. I can feel it as a minute twitch somewhere down inside. One of the tubes has come loose.

Inevitable.

The black scarbrain tremor repeats and repeats, a bright tic ticking within. The white and white and white of the tiles is cooling and sinking; I can fall back into it as I make one more effort to move my teeth around the thick hard tubes and swallow the reservoir of saliva pooling at the back of my throat. Down to drown; I can't go that way. Too soon yet.

The scrape of my teeth against the metal clip holding the tubes together sends a shiver, sensuous and chill, through my boneblocked skull. Feelings of smoothness over hardness meld with the tang and burn of metal snaking over my tongue.

Nausea battles its way into my gut, twisting me to one side against the taut restraints, as a code is thumbed into the keypad in the adjoining room. I want to speak, to object or plead, but can't fight the snake of tubing in my throat, blocking me in.

No point expecting much. My presence here is required for one thing only. The bright edge of a steel dish glints back at me as I roll my liquid-filled eyes round. Is the door opening yet? Anytime now. She'll be here soon.

My eyesight pixilates with the shock. Light flooding in; down from up there, in from the sides. I can fell my stomach move. Meager contents roil. Sacs distend. I retch, pointlessly. Again. Again. The restraints creak, biting me back.

My innards settle into a less tortured rhythm. New drains have been opened; tiny pumps brought into play. This has happened before. I feel myself plateau. Steady.

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Slicksweat skin is cooled as microfans in the ceiling click on. Breezing away the bacteria that covers me. Some brief relief. A prisoner's privilege.

The soft hiss. The door opens. She is here. Bright, white, clean. Her mask hides all but her eyes, deep and rich. Spray-clean silicon hair disappears beneath the scalpel-hard edges of her helmet. My skin prickles as she places long, latex-covered fingers on my upper arm and squeezes the bruised mass.

She looks at me coldly, unfolding her plastic-covered wings slightly in reflex. It must be uncomfortable for her trapped in her white garments.

Her eyes trace their way around the clean room, taking in the containers and vats that contain what used to be inside me. Some of the contents have suffered abuse. Most of it instigated by her. Yet her eyes contain compassion. I can see that. But maybe not for me. Certainly for herself. Dead wings are such a weight.

Behind her eyes maybe she dreams of arcing with grace and speed through a swollen amniotic sky. She has said several times that I am part of the solution. I think she is wrong. I have no wings and a fear of flight itself. I have no womb and birth has always terrified me. Still she sifts through my living remains.

Her fingers. I remember them. Latex lengths rolling over a sticky fluid. My fluid. Blood, sebum, bile, semen mixed. Staring at it as it slid between her fingers. As if it was a secret elixir.

Now. They slide inside my rib cage. A new sensation. Wet black silk sweeping across the bottom of my remaining lung. Something breaking up, clogging my windpipe for a second.

Her digits pluck softly inside me. An intercostal intermezzo. Her hand emerges slick with mucus, pus, lubricants. Her grey eyes find mine. Pity. Contempt.

A soft thud. The door closes. I try to sleep. Impossible. Instead I wonder how it happened. Love. How can love erase the power to fly? Our love was good. From opposite sides of the conflict. But a new thing. Never known before. It had no power to wither.



Grey eyes. Despair. Today there is little light in them. Her gestures seem clumsy. The microfans insect away above her. Breeze brushing her on descent. The scent of loss. Failure and resignation. An end is near.

A new attack must be imminent. Robbing her of her only chance. Anger. She must strike out. No following orders now.

After her uses, I will be cut away. Discarded. Her promises have all been empty. There has been no love, only use; no cherishing, only indiscriminate sale, pre-packed for the hungry populace.

# SIMULACRUM

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Following my crash. The squadron's escape. Then new love. Illegal. Unprecedented. A love that mutilated. Such a price for her. Earthbound forever. Her sentence is gravity's victory.

Handed over by her military for these experiments. Into her hands. The answer inside me. She demanded this of me. As a prisoner I cannot refuse. No rights. No power. No chance.

But she has not found it. No answer. So obvious. So foolish. She had not listened; I had no secret. Only pain. Killmekillmekillmekillmenow pain.

Blood and pain and pain. Pain will not let her fly again.

Compassion. One last act. Her wings tremble beneath their protective clothing. A booming crash. A fibre bomb on target? Time dashes away. She prepares. Too late for her escape. The enemy has succeeded. I am one of them, she knows. But there is no victory.

Black filaments crawl everywhere. Invading and erasing. Prising the door off its hinges. Filling the air; eating away space. She has not long. Compassion. One last act. The keypad thumbed; evoking a pharmacy of freedom. Levels rise. Meters flick.

The microfans gutter out. Black filaments everywhere. Invading. Erasing. Choking. Framing her silhouette in the last of the light. Darkness becomes. The light eaten away; space eaten away.

Meters flick. Levels rise. I can feel myself rising. The restraints seem to have been released as I rise without anything holding me down, pulling me back. Rising from pain and prison. Rising away from her. Rising through birth; rising into flight.

## THE END

Mark Howard Jones lives in Cardiff, the capital of Wales (and worryingly close to England). He has had stories published in print and online magazines and anthologies on both sides of the Atlantic. His new chapbook 'Night Country' is available from ProjectPulp.com. A previous collection, 'Unknown Pleasures' (with *Punktown* author Jeffrey Thomas), was published in the US by Dream People Publications in 2003


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# COLD ASH

**DENNIS SJOLIE**

*Cold Ash* is a portion of a cycle of stories dealing with fallen angels and ruthless gunslingers in a post-apocalyptic and surrealistic "western" landscape. Based upon Arthurian Legend, ancient Chinese lore, and Christian prophecy, these violent stories present a dark time peopled by grim characters.



When we talk about Kettering the Killer and his *less-than-human* in later years, our story never alters. We do not embellish. Truth is a collective whole. When one of us recalls how the wind wailed, how the iron sky spat icy shards, biting skin, hissing at windows, we see the moment. When another reminds us how white-gray light crouched outside the windows of Old Hezik's saloon and mimicked the shade of Yolanda's veils, her pale skin hidden like winter sun illuminating gun-metal storm clouds, we nod. When yet another recites how Yolanda's flesh peeked rosy-pink beneath veils cupping her breasts, we sigh and see again Yolanda's hair, burned-red in cascading jubilation at her shoulders, tumbling between shoulder blades to the slits in her veil, allowing the protrusion of wings. Our eyes widen at the impossibility. Wings rising like narrow tombstones, like twin tablets of law. Great, white-gray wings folded in graceful joints more than two feet above her head.

Old Hezik, if the mood catches him, whispers of the veils allowing a blur of rust-colored perfection, a secret glistening between moonlight thighs. Burnished-gold coins flashing from watery depths. Names it the color of prayer. Vows even now he would dine upon the cold ash of Yolanda's womanhood and count himself fulfilled.

None then dared more than dream. Dream of her cream-smooth flesh. Her sloe eyes, glowing green beneath curved eyebrows. Her forehead and nose, a carved ivory masterpiece. Her voice, a siren-song melody, a sigh of night breeze hushing restless jack pine. Dream of her magic scent, a breath of fertile earth in a high forest glade between mountain escarpments.

None dared more than dream, for Kettering the Killer owned her, this *less-than-human*, this fair angel-girl. Owned her flesh and blood. Owned her very life. Gave it to her and made it hers. For this, they say, she loved him fiercely, as dangerously as

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he loved her. We said perhaps he owned her soul. But we didn't know. We only guessed.

Old Hezik claimed to know Kettering in the early, bitter years. Before Kettering became *The Killer* of legend. Before Kettering deserted himself as his fame spread, alcohol promising to snuff him sooner than another gunfighter's bullet. "Went to the mines, Kettering did," Old Hezik said, "to purge mind and body of filth and liquor. The farther the mine, the better. The deeper the shaft, the sweeter. Found that angel-girl in the scrapped crater of some desolate, God-deserted ore pit. Found her weaving at her loom, as her kind is wont to do."

Not everyone agreed. "Won her at cards," Rankid said from his battered, splintered upright piano, shrugging at Old Hezik. "Won her part by part, they said. All night long. Come sun-up, he owned all of her, 'cept the little finger on her left hand. Got tired of playing then, maybe just got too drunk, so Kettering drew his blade. Struck off her finger quicker'n you can say *Jack Cat*. 'Rest of her is mine, free and clear,' he said and tossed the finger to the previous owner, who looked at it, laughed, picked it up off the table, and popped it in his mouth, chewing down bone and all. 'Sweet little piece,' he said. That's what I heard." Sometimes Rankid told the story the other way around. Said it was the old owner who drew the blade and struck off the finger. Right before Kettering wrenched the knife away from him. Guted him like a big catfish on the card table. Either story could be true. Or neither. People like Kettering don't distill easily. Their myth and magic is cast tight. Fact mingles with legend in odd half-truths and omissions that weave and spin, like Yolanda at her loom, weaving veils, and Kettering's shirts, and magic none might suspect.

Billowy white, like tendrils of mist haunting murky-wooded high country, Kettering's shirts floated in ripples and creases, trimmed with pearl-white buttons, three at each cuff, eight spaced in double phalanx from collar bone to belly, where shirt disappeared into pants as black as an undertaker's top hat. A wide leather belt, black, with two buckles, girded his narrow waist like a satin sash. Below it, two other belts crisscrossed low on his abdomen. Sleek black belts, studded with brass cartridges, and bearing two revolvers – .44's – each at mid-thigh. Kettering's brushing revolver handles. Always.

White shirts and black pants. Pale skin and black hair. All a paradox, we said. Each an irony. He was good and evil, savior and executioner, saint and demon. Depending on the story or the storyteller. In those days, he was journeying into age. Forty, we guessed. Probably more. The wavy-black hair framing his face, the black moustache grown past the corners of his mouth, edging his chin, shot through with gray. And when he strode into Old Hezik's saloon—a once-upon-a-time ramshackle mystery smothered by jack pine on a forgotten trail climbing into the high country, a heathen mill where we lied and confessed and drank and fought and laughed and cursed and prayed—angel-girl in tow, Rankid, at an out of tune, warped, and gun-shot piano, played "Dreaming." Kettering's favorite. "Every year the days coming

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faster....” Kettering sometimes mouthed, and we’d see him gaze at the less-than-human, the angel-girl, for it’s said her kind know no age. They live two hundred years, maybe more, then become sleet riding heavy skies above unseen mountain passes, become hoarfrost dressing pine boughs and underbrush in solitary mountain forests.

We looked sparingly at Kettering’s face, but knew each feature as surely as we knew his fame. Knew muscle tugged the corners of his mouth. Knew deep creases spider-webbed the corners of his eyes. A crease for every man he killed, some said. Knew the thin line of his lips. The hollow cleft on each cheek. Mostly, we knew his dull-pitted, lusterless eyes, unmoving and unblinking. Viper’s eyes. Focused and deadly. All-seeing and waiting.

A bottle of whiskey and a glass for Kettering. A cup of boiling water laced with honey, milk and cinnamon for Yolanda. Drinks whisked from bar to table by Old Hezik himself. From the stare in Kettering’s eyes, we guessed he peered into the future, privy to some second sight. The angel-girl watched Kettering, perhaps reading the future reflected in his eyes as she poured whiskey and pressed the glass into his curled fingers. She would not drink until he did.

Moments passed always the same. Kettering and the angel-girl silent at their table. Old Hezik scurrying with drinks. Rankid playing “Dreaming” at the wounded piano. Kettering gazing into the future until *they* came. One by one. Sometimes together. Some old. Some young. Some bent, or fat, or half-lame. Some tall, and straight, and swaggering. They drew up chairs and played cards, Kettering staring at the numbers and figures fanned out in his hand. The angel-girl watched him stare. Moments and hours mounting like the dirty bills crossing the table.

Two weeks, it was the same. A month. Kettering in a halo of fame as thick as the smoke circling his head from his brown-papered cigarettes. The angel-girl mute at his side. As mute as Kettering’s legend. Waiting and watching. Ever present. Like the eye of God. No one challenged him. No one upset the flow of moments. Enough to say they’d sat at the table with Kittering the Killer and his less-then-human. Enough to say they’d gambled with him. Say they’d won a hand or two, stolen a glance into his eyes, and lost their money: cash delivered up as offering for privilege of the story. No need for more. Until the day the sky froze iron-gray and spewed snow like the remains of a less-than-human driven on shrieking wind.

He came with the blizzard. Weather-beaten hat pulled down against his brow, hiding gray visage. Face as frozen as the sky. As pale as Yolanda’s veils. A face waxen and dead. What the hat could not bury the broad, the risen collar of his winter coat did. A high-country coat rigor mortis stiff. Frozen hairs the color of ginger mud. Still, we spied pieces of his face and knew it for one we’d not seen. Not in these forsaken mountain passes where one might see anything.

He slouched at the bar, broad back to us, entombed in the rough risen hackles of the coat, maybe buffalo robe, maybe wolf-skin. His gloved fingers worked—flexing

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and straightening—squeezing away frostbite or death as his head bowed prayer-like under his hat's low brim.

“Whiskey—” he rasped like a benediction over Armageddon's bloody field and gazed at the liquor bottles arranged like a shrine behind the bar. Dark, sleek bottles candlelit from Old Hezik's chandeliers.

Old Hezik poured and the stranger tossed it down, like one taking communion. “Again,” he said, placing the glass on the bar. Flexing fingers. Gazing down the bar's length to the ice-crystaled, leaded windows and the darkening afternoon beyond Old Hezik's pot bellied stove and yellow lamplight lanterns.

Old Hezik poured again. And it begins as it always begins. Timeless and unchanging.

The stranger brings the whiskey to his lips. Throws back the amber liquid with a jerk of his head. Starts his turn. Slow at first, then swift, a whirlwind, whiskey glass in hand. His great coat flies out around him, rides the air together with the empty whiskey glass hanging now in space, tumbling end over end, flashing light.

Kettering, on his feet, guns clear of studded holsters, hisses rage. Shirt floating about him in white-pleated billows. Clouds in paradise.

The whiskey glass tumbles. The hand that held it filled with a wooden pistol grip. The coat of risen hair hackles sputters with magic, clearing a path for an explosion of lightning and thunder and sulfur. Then a second explosion. A third and a fourth. Each spews the stink of damnation and rings circles of chaos in the air. Blue-gray smoke tints the amber lamplight. Hands bearing the cold weight of revolvers drop. The whiskey glass hits colorless floorboards and makes small music rolling across fitted spans of worn wood.

The angel-girl lifts her hands to Kettering. Her wings spasm and half-unfold in jerky starts. The coat of frozen hair hackles falls and hangs heavy about the figure beneath, matted hairs pissing ice water onto the floor. “Leave him,” he says to the angel-girl.

“Whiskey—” Kettering says in a voice as deep as the outside wind, loud in the ringing hush of Old Hezik's saloon. Louder than we can hear. Louder than we can bear. Rankid strikes the beginning chords to “Dreaming.” Plays the introductory run of notes.

The angel girl pours what whiskey remains from the overturned bottle into Kettering's up- righted glass and presses the drink into his curled fingers—

“Leave him.”

—helps him raise the glass to his lips—

“Leave him!”

And a single red raindrop splashes the golden whiskey. Snakes down the golden liquid. Then a second raindrop. A third. Kettering's hand trembles, sloshes whiskey and blood, pink-gold firelight, over the rim of the glass. Still, he raises the drink to his lips, the corners of his mouth jerking, tugged by invisible cords.

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We watch him swallow the whiskey. Watch his eyes stare through the fur-coated figure, motionless at the bar, and focus on that place in the future. His hand, unfamiliar with error, falters. His glass tumbles. Rolls in the air. Shatters at his feet. We watch the puckered hole, low on his neck, just above the left collarbone. Watch it open and close like a frothy little mouth, spitting an issue of blood in heartbeat rhythm. Watch the blood dye the perfect white shirt collar. Soak the smooth, even weave. Watch a second blood-seep a hand's length lower: a sprawling red ooze like over-ripe strawberries pressing shirt pleats sodden-flat against Kettering's chest and belly.

He sits down heavily, the wooden chair offering abrupt groan. His head tips back against the wall. Arms flail then hang. Fingers curl and reach. Lips bubble frothy-red across a quivering chin. But his eyes remain alive. Focused. And we listen to Rankid's fingers, motionless against dirty, broken ivory. Listen to the slow tick of Kettering's pierced heart for a half-dozen beats before we understand it is Old Hezik's pendulum clock we hear.

The angel-girl, pale as a winter moon, murmurs to Kettering with a voice of water trickling over mossy rock in a tongue we do not understand. Speaks until the figure at the bar paces forward in a fury of storm and darkness. "Leave him!" She peers with eyes bespeaking pain and loss and bewilderment. When the figure turns back to the bar and growls, "Whiskey!" Old Hezik stands pouring.

Kettering's fingers twitch. Half-movements. "Index fingers squeezing triggers," someone says, "firing final shots." Even in death, Kettering's eyes remain on his secret place, his less-than-human angel-girl beside him. Old Hezik brings her a cup of boiling water thick with honey and milk and cinnamon. The drink, untouched, cools and becomes cold on the card-littered, blood-splattered table, for she will not drink before Kettering, himself cooling. Becoming cold.

When we retell the story, we speak of churchyard silence in Old Hezik's saloon. The shrieking wind driving down the last shards of twilight, ushering in full night. Splinters from the screaming sky fell like frozen manna on roof tops and trails. Crested like storm-tossed waves over steps and porches. Drifted as white as Kettering, drained of blood and sitting among us, his face alabaster beauty. Fine-sculpted porcelain. Sinless and calm in the hands of death. We speak of the angel-girl at his side, silent. His legend, too, beside him, silent and waiting. Preparing to clothe him now in myth. We speak of the fur-coated figure at the bar, tossing back whiskey after whiskey from Old Hezik until his thirst stood slacked. Recall how he turned, scowling, open-mouthed, snarling in half-whispers between clenched teeth telling sober rage. He skewered us with smoldering, rabid eyes that some say shone yellow-green, lit like a mad dog's eyes, piercing the gloom beneath his weathered hat.

"No one touches him," the coated figure said and hooked a long, steady, graveyard finger at Kettering's reposing corpse. "No one moves him, covers him, or limes him. No one does anything. He sits where he sits."

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Eyeing each of us, his right hand brushed the coat back from his low-slung gun. He stepped forward slowly, deliberately, stood over the angel girl and tilted back his head, revealing a crude insult of features. A scared, welt-fissured mask for a face. Snake-like mouth breaking open, sending a thick, dark tongue to loll at burn-scared, scaly lips. He seized the angel-girl's chin and jaw, his massive fingers a stain at her milky neck, drawing her face away from Kettering, pulling her upward in an unyielding clutch. She allowed herself drawn to his will. Allowed herself pulled to her feet. Offering no cry or resistance as he pushed her forward among tables and chairs to the rough stairway leading to rooms Old Hezik let above the saloon.

We turned from the grim truth when he urged her onto the first step. Heard her wings flutter. Felt their breath touch us. But only for an instant. Some say she accepted her fate then, or gained control of her panic. Her wings stilled, pressed into layers of gossamer, and folded along the smooth curve of her back. When we stole our next glances, she did not meet them, but kept her eyes on Kettering, searching his face and form as if expecting him to rise and exact horrible vengeance, none of us guiltless. She glided from our sight, taking each step with the sleek, fluid motion of a ghost floating upon a dream.

The stranger fixed us each with a wild, corpse-like glare, noting our features, maybe casting black sorcery to disarm or bind us. Many of us stood together at Old Hezik's saloon, but we were not enough. We felt his intentions. Suffered his threats as a firebrand to our foreheads. Then he was gone up the stairs, shedding a trail of muddy droplets from his high-country coat. We looked to Kettering for salvation, but he offered nothing, grown content with death and the blossoming crimson wells beneath his dripping fingertips.

Rankid introduced the opening chords to "Watchful Tower," music swelling and throbbing with our events—abrupt death, threatening intimidation from rage both outside and in, unchallenged violence upstairs—for Rankid coaxed more than music from his instrument. He played life and death in musical scales. Flurries of notes. That night, Rankid played Kettering's congealed blood and rigor mortis joints in counterpoint to Yolanda's shredded veils and violated flesh. That night, Rankid played truth and accusation.

Old Hezik poured mugs of beer and shot glasses of whiskey. We poured down what he poured out until we could recover from our shame. Until someone, Blue Parsons, broke our half-dozen bleating conversations to proclaim, "He's faster than death."

"Like lightning on the road to Damascus," Old Hezik said above brown and amber whiskey bottles and ebony-wood beer taps.

"Who is he?" we asked, for Old Hezik and some of the drifters either knew or had heard tell of everyone wandering the high country passes. But Old Hezik shook his head like everyone. "Wouldn't want to say. Not yet, I wouldn't."

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“Might be Neitheich,” someone said, and a handful of voices echoed the name.

“Neitheich—” Maybe. Neitheich could still have the speed. The resolve. The whiskey-sodden fortitude to face off against Kettering the Killer. Maybe. But Old Hezik shook his head, eyes steady on the bar as he poured more whiskey. “Heard a story about Neitheich’s mount stumbling on an ice ridge beyond Chadwith, up in the white forever. The shadow-folk found him half froze, so the story goes. Nailed him up on an old barn wall. Built a fire to thaw him out.”

“No—” we shook our heads. Not Neitheich. Not done in by shadow-folk.

“When the fire brought him ‘round,” Old Hezik said, “he tore his right arm free, nails wedged in bone. The Yao, overcome with hunger haste and joy to cook him, forgot the revolvers in his holsters. But Neitheich didn’t forget, nails or no. Ablaze he was by then. Every Yao bare-assed, frolicking and fornicating in the snow, minds and bellies set to gorge on human flesh. Dropped every one of them, Neitheich did. Shot each in the head. Bullet has to go to the head. Favored the last round for himself.”

“No—” we shook our heads again. Not Neitheich. Not barbequed like a side of beef.

“Man who told me held the charred revolver. Neitheich’s carvings on its ebony handle,” Old Hezik said and scowled. “I didn’t breathe a word ‘cause I don’t believe a fucking thing. But you check the revolver tucked in Kettering’s right boot. You’ll see charring. If you know Neitheich’s pistol carvings, you’ll know it for Neitheich’s weapon.”

Blue Parsons said when the weather cleared, we ought to ride up into the high country above Chadwith and clear out those shadow-folk once and forever, if now they were bold enough to barbeque the likes of Neitheich. Such talk ran the better part of the night, but always we knew Kettering was there, in our midst, and always our eyes pulled back to him and the empty chair at his side. Blunt accusation that if we lacked the resolve to go upstairs and end the violation there, we surely lacked the resolve to saddle up and ride into the white forever above Chadwith.

Who saw her first? Kettering’s less-then-human. A swirl of cloud beneath a full frosty moon. First light hours away when she descended the rough stairs. Steps faltering. Veils in shreds and tatters. Flesh and fabric stained the same purple-red crusted beneath her nose, at the corners of her mouth, and at the edge of her left eye. Bruises on her cheeks, throat, and shoulders the color of pulsing veins below paper-transparent skin. Her wings crossed one another awkwardly above her head, satin-like, feather-formed spires of skin twisted and deformed, jerking in little spasms like the tick once at the corner of Kettering’s lips.

Mesmerized by her grace and beauty, mesmerized by the cruelty wrought upon her, we gazed in wander, overwhelmed by splendor and horror. For an instant, she bore the wounding of our eyes, then unfurled iron-white wings like great battle flags, her gentle-breathed groan mingling with the crack-snap of small broken bones, until the wings loomed above her, engulfed and enfolded her, cocooning her in velvet-

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webbed magic. We watched gap-mouthed. Imagined how when Kettering loved her she must have consumed them both in her supernatural angelic covering.

She walked through us, floorboards whispering beneath her delicate step, to her chair beside Kettering. She cradled herself in the broken power of her wings, eyes alive with otherworldly glow, animal eyes in firelight, peering at the dead Kettering. Then, opening bruised lips, she began fragile strains of song. A sigh lost in prayer. A mother's song to her absent child. A lover's song to her lost love. She swayed as she sang, and we wished we had the fortitude or the courage to hold her. But none came forward. We each bled silently, alone, from the cut she opened in our hearts.

As night continued, Yolanda's song grew sweeter. The words, unknown, spilled out in her tongue, but we listened in rapture to her voice, sometimes the murmur of spring rain, sometimes the curse of ice-driven winds. Sometimes we guessed the song must wake Kettering. Call him to walk, despite death, to the upper room where his angel-girl's tormentor slept. Call him to draw revolvers in blood-smear, rigor mortised fingers. But death's grip is forever tight. Kettering did not stir no matter how we sought a jerking fingertip. A fluttering eyelash.

In that hour when night slinks off into slate-gray shadow, we understood. Truth awakened among us like the light stealing into Old Hezik's saloon. We shared the secret with our eyes. Yolanda's lament was a prayer, a supplication, that she might bear Kettering in her arms and soar to mountainous heights, both of them pure and white, unstained and unhindered. Pasted to the ice-shattered sky, the pain of their lives blotted into the eternal heavens.

Her song ended when the windows shone gray-white, reflecting slate sky. Ended with the heavy footfall of her tormentor on the stairs. Our eyes pressed upon Yolanda in her silence. Pressed upon Kettering. Searched one another's faces in our waiting.

Shrouded in risen-hair coat, an unnatural cross between man and animal, he lumbered down the stairs, fingers of his right hand still squeezing something unseen. Flexing and relaxing in counter-rhythm to the cadence of his step. And we wondered how he could be so deadly fast and so unwieldy graceless at the same time, moving with the finesse of a plow horse. Studying and scrutinizing us from beneath his shadowy hat, he read our fear and weak resolve and smirked as he strode among us, pacing to the table where Kettering and his angel-girl lingered.

He stood before them a long while in moments twisting and turning, blurred and dream-like, spinning and spiraling in that stretch of time. But we know what we saw. How he reached to the back of his gunbelt. Eased aside the hair-matted coat. Drew his knife. Broad-bladed. Razor sharp. Murderous. And we saw the two red-blue holes puncturing the coarse homespun fabric of his shirt. Red-blue holes at that place where his heart should lie. But no sooner did we see bullet holes than the coat hid them, our eyes gapping in stupefied rage as he sliced Kettering's cold, blood-



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sodden chest and withdrew, on knife point, a carved piece of Kettering's liver, gray and purple, smeared with the black jelly of congealed blood.

"Whiskey!" he called from clenched teeth, chewing the word together with the liver piece. Old Hezik, from behind the bar, brought amber liquid in a deep, nearly opaque bottle.

What happened next happened fast. But unfolded in layers. Seconds stretched, unmoving in time. The soul-piercing melody from Yolanda's throat. The snapping, shivered-bone yawn of her wings. Reaching. Unfurling to full span around Kettering and his killer. Closing as she cradled the lifeless Kettering at her breast, enfolded him in moonlight arms while her tormentor spat rancor and slashed with honed steel at the wings entombing him.

Old Hezik, close to Yolanda, poured for both lover and tormentor. Washed all three in throaty, gurgling spills. And Yolanda's song rose louder than the snarls of the man-beast, determining the knife useless, struggling for revolver.

Perhaps the flame sparked like a flint strike from Yolanda's eyes. Or perhaps the flame sprang from Old Hezik's tinder box. We do not all agree. But the flame came and drank deeply of Yolanda, settling around her as if she were a fine-trimmed wick, becoming her, consuming her with those she bore. Her song never faltered. Continued even as she became delicate iron-white ash. And the smoke of her rose sweet. Incense from alters beyond the scope of our imagining. And when her wings cracked open and vomited a smoldering, hair-matted issue of charred flesh convulsing in silent shrieks, her ethereal song spun in the sweet-smoke air as she stood, transformed to marbled, petrified ash, bearing Kettering still in ashen arms, the two of them swaddled in ashen wings. In perfect beauty.

We looked at them a long while as our moments cleared and settled. Rankid played "Dreaming," and we drank our whiskey and understood he would never play that song again. Then, although we said nothing, we knew from one another's eyes that we would ride into the high country, up beyond Chadwith, up into the white forever.

## THE END


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# HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

## CAT SPARKS

I've long been fascinated by Fortean: UFOs, apparitions—pretty much anything that fits into the categories of 'weird' & 'unexplained'. A friend gave me some ESP and ghost hunting texts—not coffee table books but actual scientific studies outlining the various methods used to collect data and determine the validity of experiments in parapsychology. My reading resulted in *Historical Perspective*.



“Oh come now, don't give me that *trauma of approaching puberty* bullshit,” said Marion. “Ellie was *miles* away from puberty when she saw that ghost. Seven, wasn't she, Henry, darling?” She raised her glass in a mock toast. “Our daughter is a *sensitive!*”

Henry appraised his twelve-year-old daughter sympathetically, but she wasn't watching him. Ellie sat sullenly staring at the tablecloth, arms folded tightly across her chest.

“Well, we know that apparitions are dramatic intrusions of meaningful imagery into consciousness,” said Conchetta.

“Following in the tradition of the Cassata Alla Siciliana—” her friend Gianna added, to the accompanying tinkle and clatter of gold bangles. Gianna wore more than thirty on each wrist. Ellie had spent the entire entree trying to count them.

“Who?” said Henry.

The Italians ignored him, but Marion gestured dismissively and added, “It's a significant case, dear. A young girl.”

“Anyway,” said Gianna, “They have the *facility* at this precious age. My cousin Donnatella, she was most definitely possessed.”

Ellie looked at Henry and rolled her eyes. “Actually, Mum, I was eight and a half, and anyway, it wasn't a proper ghost.” She glanced around the table hopefully, but nobody was listening. She could barely follow the threads of conversation under the persistent racket of Gianna's ridiculous jewellery. “May I be excused?”

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Henry nodded, gesturing at the doorway with his napkin. He tapped his daughter's shoulder as she pushed her chair out from the table.

"Mrs Weeson and that big fat American lady thought that ghost was real enough," he reminded her. Ellie shook her head.

"Not a proper ghost," she insisted. "Mrs Weeson and the fat lady don't know anything."

"But how do you know it wasn't really a ghost? How can you be sure? You were only eight and a half after all."

Ellie shrugged evasively. "Cos it just wasn't is all."

Ellie left the clink and clatter of the dining room and wandered down a long corridor. The red carpet was faded to threads at the edges, held in place with rusty-looking tacks. Adults were so stupid. They drank too much, talked too much and believed in so much crap, she could hardly believe it. Last year it had been *eco tourism*, this year it was *historical perspective*, so that Ellie was now forced to spend her holidays stuck in a mouldy old house in the Blue Mountains. The website boasted that the Henry Lawson Guest House had twenty rooms, but the only other tourists she'd met so far were the weird and noisy Europeans with over-waxed eyebrows that her parents had befriended in the dining room. Why couldn't they have gone to Movie World instead?

"I hate historical perspective," she grumbled out loud, scowling at a bronze statue of a moustachioed man.

Footsteps echoed down the corridor behind her. Probably one of her parents trying to rope her into a game of Canasta, or something else completely boring. Ellie pushed open double oak doors labelled "The Banjo Room" and slipped inside. She ducked under a table just as the lights came on. Luckily the tablecloth reached almost to the floor. She held her breath and listened as the footsteps crossed the room. The tread was slight and unfamiliar. Both her parents had the tendency to stomp. Ellie lifted the fabric and peeped.

A lanky young waiter with a blond pony-tail set down a tray of coffee cups. When he'd finished he left the room through the double oak doors. It's now or never, thought Ellie. She crawled out and scrambled to her feet as quietly as she could, deciding to follow the waiter back to the kitchen. Where there was a kitchen there was the possibility of ice cream with chocolate topping—nuts and wafers too, if she was really lucky. She'd always been adept at conning deserts out of strangers.

Halfway towards the double oak doors, she caught a pungent whiff of charcoal, and the little hairs on the back of her neck stood on end. When Ellie turned around she found herself face-to-face with a genuine apparition.

It was male, translucent and wearing lime green baggy trousers with a short-sleeved chequered shirt. Ellie stood very still, half-frozen with surprise as the ghost strolled past, looking back over its shoulder now and then as if trying to establish its

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bearings. The charcoal smell lingered and the air itself felt strangely heavy, reminding her of the feeling you get before a thunderstorm hits.

The double doors opened with a mighty thump. The waiter burst in balancing a tray of cups. Ellie spun around to face him, her finger pressed tightly against her lips.

“Shhh!”

“Huh?”

But it was too late. When she looked back for the ghost, it was gone.

“Did you see it?”

The waiter set down his cups and saucers beside the coffee percolator.

“The ghost—did you see it? You must have seen it,” she repeated excitedly, irritated with the boy’s slowness and apparent lack of interest. For a moment she thought he was going to say yes, but then she realised that he was concentrating on stacking the cups in a ziggurat formation.

“My cousin Kevin reckons he saw a bunyip once,” he said, glancing up with a smirk.



Joan, the proprietor of the Henry Lawson Guest House, dumped a sizzling batch of fried eggs into the buffet warming tray. “Lime green baggy trousers, you say. This region’s got a real *colourful* history, but lime green trousers don’t exactly sound familiar.”

“Perhaps she saw the ghost of Henry Lawson?” suggested Gianna.

Joan raised an eyebrow knowingly. “Well, between you and me, I don’t reckon that Lawson come round here all that often when he was alive. The boss just named it in his honour, if you get my drift.”

“Well, Ellie definitely saw something. My daughter’s not the sort of child who makes up stories, are you Ellie? Girls her age are extremely sensitive to paranormal phenomena—precognition, psychokinesis, morphogenetic fields, astral travel.”

“Too right,” said Joan. “All them P words—I seen all about it on Ricki Lake. Are you sure yez aren’t all here for the experiments up at the old castle?”

A sudden hush fell over the breakfast room. Even Gianna’s noisy bangles lay still and silent.

“Experiments?” said Conchetta.

Joan nodded at the Italians. “He’s a foreigner too, a count or a prince or something ... Prince Fandango or Montenegro—something like that—doing this study on psychic kids.”

“In a castle?” said Henry. “Out here?”

“Sure,” said Joan. “Longarrie Castle. Some whacko settler shipped it out from England, brick by brick, back in 1867. Shipped out a bunch of architects, too, to put it

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all back together. Forty rooms it's got—and a secret chamber. Guess he coulda shipped the ghosts along with it.”

The women eyed each other for a moment.

“I’ll drive yez all up there for a picnic lunch if you like,” Joan offered. “It's not that far. Twenty-five bucks a head including beer.”

“Deal,” said Marion, speaking for all present. The Italian women nodded in enthusiastic agreement, glancing at their husbands who somehow sensed they were being summoned even though they had their backs to the others. Both men waved a casual count-me-out, absorbed by a Cable TV soccer match.

“Used to have some sorta royals in it, too, long time back,” said Joan. “Distant ones. Second or third cousins removed. Course, no one lives there now.”

“I’ll come with you,” said Henry.

“Bring the camcorder,” said Marion. “And Ellie, bring her too. Its time we had her PSI potential professionally assessed.”

Joan loaded up the four wheel drive and drove them down a dirt road for half an hour out through what seemed to be an endless sea of bush. Ellie scowled at Gianna who took pictures through the window with her digital camera.

“Why don’t you wind the window down,” she said, rolling her eyes.

“They are just digital,” said Gianna, shrugging more violently than intended as the vehicle hit a pothole. “I can wipe the ones that are no good.”

“Not like there’s anything to photograph,” mumbled Ellie. Just green upon green with the occasional blackened tree trunk reminder of the bushfires that swept through the landscape on a regular basis.

Eventually the road dipped downwards and the passengers began to make out different landmarks, the most striking of which was a stone castle on a hill.

“I still can’t believe anyone would build a bloody castle out here in the middle of nowhere,” said Henry. Joan hadn’t been joking. With its thick stone walls, Longarrie Castle wouldn’t have looked out of place on the banks of Loch Ness.

“You say this is privately owned?” asked Gianna.

“Yep,” said Joan. “Gets leased out to film productions a fair bit. Cheaper to film ‘em here than in Scotland, and it's good for local business. My son does a bit of film work, you know.”

“Looks like someone’s filming something here today,” said Henry, shielding his eyes against the glare. He’d pulled a pair of binoculars from his daypack and was trying to hold himself still enough to make out the castle details against the jolting of the vehicle. The castle grounds swarmed with people in white coats. They appeared to be setting up electronic equipment.

“I thought you said this was a scientific investigation,” said Marion, frowning.

“I’ll just set yez down over here,” said Joan, pulling the vehicle into a clearing by the side of a river which had appeared out of nowhere, shaded by overhanging

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willows. "So you can watch without getting in the way. I come up here and watched my son be an extra in that Tom Cruise picture."

Everyone but Ellie got out of the 4-wheel drive. Joan unloaded two picnic hampers and a couple of well-worn tartan blankets from the back.

"Come on, Pet, I'll make you a sandwich," coaxed Henry.

Ellie pouted. "Can't I just go back to the guest house and read a book?"

"You most certainly can't," said Marion, pulling a pair of opera glasses from her handbag. "I wonder if they've started the experiments yet?"

Gianna tucked her camera into her handbag and took out a camcorder which she aimed at the castle, even though they weren't near enough to see any interesting detail yet.

"I'll come and get yez all at four. Got a coachload of Japanese due back at the house any moment. Call us on the cell phone if you're bored before then," said Joan as she climbed inside the vehicle. Ellie rolled her eyes and slid down off the back seat as Joan revved up the engine.

Occasional gusts of wind blew snatches of airborne conversation from the castle and in the group's general direction.

"... have to hook up the random number generator test device to an external power source ... secure vantage points for the infra red gear ... independent psychometry testing . . . sensitive ..."

Henry spread the blankets and lifted the lid of the nearest hamper. "Hey, one of these is an esky. Anyone fancy a beer?"

Marion crossed her arms. "This won't do at all. We need to be closer. I can't see anything from back here."

Conchetta tugged a bottle of Chardonnay from the esky. "Why don't you go and take a closer look? They're all so busy. Probably wouldn't even notice you."

"Good idea" said Henry. "Come on, Ellie, want to see a castle up close?"

"Nope", scowled Ellie.

"Sure you do," said Henry. "Aren't you curious to meet a real prince? He could probably do with some help from a real ghostbuster."

"Don't call me that, Dad—I told you—"

"She's right, Henry, the correct term is *sensitive*," Said Marion.

Ellie sighed theatrically and trailed by her parents as they stomped through the bush in the direction of the castle. Longgarrie was further away than it looked, and the terrain rougher, but the party made it to the front gate with a minimum of scratches down their arms. Two uniformed security men guarded the castle entrance. Before Marion had a chance to speak, the nearest one hustled her inside.

"Gotta go register with Angie, Ma'am" he said. "Straight through these front gates and turn left."

"Oh! Well, fine then, we will," said Marion. Once out of the guard's earshot she whispered to Henry, "Not very good security guards, are they?"

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Henry shrugged. "I guess they figure that anyone who can actually find this place is supposed to be here."

The courtyard was teeming with busy-looking people, many of them in lab coats.

"You her agent?" said a tired-looking woman brandishing a clipboard. She wore a large round button on her lapel which said *Hello, my name is Angie*.

"What's your name, honey?" she asked Ellie before Marion had a chance to answer.

"Eleanor Markey, and she's not my agent, she's my Mum."

Angie scanned her list. "OK, Eleanor, you don't seem to be down here. Have you filled in your registration forms yet?"

Ellie looked up at Marion. Marion's full attention was on an imposing figure in a sweeping black greatcoat barking orders at a bunch of technicians a few metres away. "Is that him? The Prince?"

"Oh, yeah," said Angie without looking up, "That's his royal lordship alright. Eleanor, I need you to fill in these forms for me. And don't forget to get your Mum to sign the waiver. Or your agent. Its really important."

"Everyone calls me Ellie. Nobody calls me Eleanor."

"Jesus H, he looks like Count Dracula!" said Marion.

"That ain't the half of it." Angie looked up. "I need Ellie to come with me and—"

"Fine," nodded Marion. "Off you go, sweetheart."

Marion brushed the creases from her skirt and patted her hair in place. She marched across the courtyard over to the prince. "Gertrude Schmeidler, I suppose," she said.

The prince stared back at Marion coldly, as if she were a bug that had coursed across his shoe.

"I'm talking about the method. The Gertrude Schmeidler method." Marion rested her hand upon her hip in a sudden, swift motion. "Don't tell me you've never heard of it."

"Ya, of course ve are usink Schmeidler," he said casually, eyeing Marion as if she were still some sort of bug, only a rare and interesting species. "Ve are usink many methods, many pieces of waluable equipment. Some new vays too, very new, wery precise."

"Excuse me," said a painfully thin woman in a business suit as she cut across their conversation. "I faxed this list of dietary requirements across last week but it appears your people never received it. The twins are *extraordinarily* allergic. A whiff of gluten or dairy sends them into either a fit of sneezing or brings them out in hives. And when they're sneezing or scratching they lose all *ceptability* to the realms beyond. Know what I'm saying, your highness? Completely deaf and dumb to the spirit guides. Might as well be sitting on the sofa with a Playstation."

Henry stared at the woman in the suit. "Spirit guides?"

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“Ya, ya, Angie vill you come and see to this,” the prince yelled in the general direction of where Marion and Henry had left their daughter filling out forms.

“Spirit guides?”

“Sure. What—yours don’t have spirit guides?” She fished around in her handbag as Henry stared at her blankly. She handed him a business card and then lit up a cigarette.

The card said *Shanice McQueen, Beyond Agency*, printed in raised silver letters above a website address.

“Beyond what?” asked Henry.

Shanice gestured widely with her hands as she blew out a plume of smoke. “Beyond the ordinary, the mundane ... you know. So how many kids you got on your books?”

“Just the one,” said Henry.

“Wow,” said Shanice, sucking hard on the cigarette. “Must be a pretty awesome kid.”

“Yeah, well, we think so,” said Henry, suddenly aware that he’d lost track of Marion. He smiled politely at Shanice. “Will you excuse me for a moment?”

He couldn’t see Ellie amongst the crowd, but Marion was standing a few metres away, apparently engaged in a heated argument with a theatrical-looking guy in a long coat. Not in the mood for being dragged into the fray as Marion’s backup ammunition, Henry decided it would be a good moment to do some exploring. He thrust his hands into his pockets and strolled casually up the castle’s front stairs. When he determined that no one was paying him any attention, he crossed the threshold and went inside. The cold hit him immediately as his footsteps echoed on the hard stone floor. “Could do with a few tapestries”, he muttered, rubbing his shoulders.

“Scuse me,” said a man in a lab coat pushing a trolley full of monitors. Henry jumped out of the way and followed him down a draughty corridor and into a large room that might have once been a library. The cold stone floor had been chalked into a grid. Henry glanced upwards. Tiny red lights winked down at him from the corners of the ceiling.

“You right there, mate?” said another lab coated individual. He name tag said his name was Nigel.

“Er ... yes, I, um ...” Henry scratched his ear. “They’re cameras, yeah?”

“Cams, mikes, heat and motion sensors, you name it,” Nigel said. “Online 24/7”

“Online?”

“Yeah.” Nigel jacked a plug into the back of a monitor and leaned against the casing. “Longarrie’s been under electronic surveillance for a year now, live feed available on the Internet.”

“Really?” said Henry, scrutinising the ceiling once more. “The setting here’s a little over-dramatic, don’t you think? Wouldn’t you be better off in a laboratory?”



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The other technician stepped into view from behind a bank of machines, shaking his head emphatically. "Nah, mate, Nah, you can't apply conventional experimental controls in the study of PK function. Why would the methodology of physics yield necessarily more genuine results?"

He rested his elbow on a stack of equipment that looked to Henry to be Hi Fi gear.

"I mean, it's all very well for physics and chemistry, but is experimentation any use in areas like meteorology or the behavioural sciences?"

"Um ..." Henry shifted his weight, distracted by the little lights winking from the ceiling's corners.

"Systemisation, sure, we need it, yes," cut in Nigel, "but I reckon PK should be studied in *real life* contexts, like we got right here. A haunted castle and a bunch of sensitives. Some of these brats see ghosts all the time. Put them together, turn on all the power and Bingo—quantifiable, scientifically measurable results."

Henry nodded thoughtfully. "Quantifiable, eh? Yes I suppose I see. But is Longgarrie Castle actually haunted?"

The technicians looked at each other. "Well, yeah," said Nigel.

"So you've caught a ghost on tape then, have you?" said Henry. "Broadcasted it on the Net?"

"Well ..."

"Not as such."

"Oh," said Henry, "Well, don't let me hold up your work." He waved cheerfully at the cameras and ducked back out into the corridor where he almost tripped over a little girl in a lacy white dress.

"Oh dear, I'm so sorry, sweetie," he said.

The little girl stared up at him coldly. "I've met you before," she said.

"Oh," said Henry, "Really? Are you a friend of Ellie's?"

She shook her head violently from side to side. "In a past life."

Henry's surprise was interrupted by a large woman with a denim skirt and frilly white blouse blustering down the corridor toward them.

"Cindy, dear, I warned you not to go talking to strangers." She put a hand protectively on the girl's shoulder and glared menacingly at Henry. "You never know who they're working for ..."

She bundled the child away before Henry had time to explain.

"Marion must feel right at home here. These people are all whackos," he announced to the empty space in front of him.

Suddenly at the edge of his peripheral vision, Henry spied a middle-aged couple wearing Bermuda shorts and matching t-shirts. Regular tourists. Ordinary folk. He felt immediately comforted by their presence and watched as they strolled along the corridor casually turning to enter the room where the ghost monitoring apparatus

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was set up. As they moved, the air around them shimmered and wavered, creating the illusion of translucence.

"Hey! Wait a minute," shouted Henry, hurrying to follow them. But there was nobody around the corner but the two technicians and their stacks of equipment. "Did you see that tourist couple come in here just now?" he asked.

"Huh? What couple?" said Nigel.

Henry pointed upwards at the cameras. "Are you sure those things recording?" he asked.

"Yup," said Nigel. "24/7."

Henry checked behind the monitor stacks for a splash of Hawaiian shirt, mumbled thanks and hurried back out into the corridor and out the castle's main entrance. The tourists were nowhere to be seen. There was nowhere they could have gone.

Marion, however, was easy to spot amongst the throng at the base of the steps. She appeared to be having some sort of heated exchange with the theatrical guy, Count Dracula. Both of them gesticulated wildly as they spoke. Henry was weighing up the pros and cons of joining her when a scuffle broke out beside them at the foot of the castle steps. Two little girls rolled in the dirt, grabbing fistfuls of each other's hair. Nearby adults rushed toward them but seemed reluctant to intervene.

"Bitch!" screamed one of the girls.

"Slut!" screamed the other.

Two members of the camera crew dove in and pulled them apart, dragging the girls off in separate directions. Henry hurried down the stone steps. "What was all that about?" he asked a lighting technician. She shrugged but Angie, who was standing a few metres away called out in answer. "Don't mind them, they're still arguing about their manifestations."

"Yep," said the technician. "Lourdes and Ruba at it again. Been at it since they got here."

Angie, recognising Henry, added "Don't worry about it. The sensitives hardly ever get into fights. 'Cept those two. There was an apparition manifestation right here yesterday morning. One of 'em swears it was the Virgin Mary, the other says it was Mohamed's daughter, Fatima."

"Uh huh," said Henry. "Haven't seen *my* daughter around here lately, have you?"

Angie had become distracted by someone else before Henry even finished his sentence. He thrust his hands into his pockets and strolled over to where Marion was still talking to the Prince. "Darl, can I have a word with you?" he whispered brusquely.

"I have spent many yearz on zis project," the prince yelled at Marion. "Zey all have such incredible potential ..."

Henry's face reddened. "Marion, I have had enough of these nutbags, and what's more, I don't reckon they could spot a real ghost if it walked right through

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them.” He pulled his cell phone from his pocket. “Where's Ellie? I'm calling Joan for an immediate evacuation.”

The Prince paused, midway through his sentence. He pointed angrily at Henry's phone. “Get ziz ting away from here at once! You are blockink EHF, not to mention ze equipment!”

“Marion, are you coming with me?”

She turned to face her husband. “The Prince has graciously consented to include Ellie in his testing program!” she said. “Like I've always said—”

“Righto”, said Henry, barely containing the anger that neither his wife nor the Prince seemed to notice. He stormed out through the front gates, his phone gripped tightly in his hand, and headed back along the river to the clearing where the picnic rugs were spread. The jangling of metal alerted him to the proximity of Gianna. As he neared the spot he ran into the Italian women, deeply absorbed in conversation.

“Yes, yes, it was the Prince!” exclaimed Gianna. “He went foul of those Ufologists back in the early 90s.”

“And didn't he go to China?”

“Yes, yes, that's right. China, back in the early 80s. Xian, wasn't it? Or Shanghai? Those psychic children put forward by the Chinese – of course the Americans swore they were phonies.”

“If its phoney kids you're looking for, there's a whole bunch of 'em back up there at Crackpot Castle,” said Henry. “You two better not have drunk all the beer.” He pushed between them and climbed through the bush up the hill.

“But the Prince, he was *certain* that some were genuine. I remember it now—it was on the news,” said Conchetta, her voice wafting away on the breeze.

Henry flopped to his knees and pried open the esky lid. The women had consumed all the wine but left the beer. He ripped open a stubby then tried to phone Joan. There was no signal. “That'd be bloody right,” he said out loud.

Henry checked his watch. Joan wasn't due back for three hours. He got to his feet and paced the length of the picnic rugs, sipping from the beer bottle erratically. *Why don't I just hike back to the guest house? All I have to do is follow the road. I could do with a bit of exercise. I'll probably run across Joan on her way back here.* He finished his beer, downed another, slapped together a hasty chicken sandwich from the hamper and headed off down the road. It didn't take him long to regret his decision.

The surrounding bush was completely monotonous. Henry was lost and bored before the hour was up. Here and there the terrain appeared less dense and impenetrable. He decided to leave the road and cut across country to follow the river back to the guest house. After awhile the trees thinned out, and the landscape became almost pleasant, so long as he remembered to keep an eye out for rabbit holes.

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He hadn't been off the bitumen long, and was deeply regretting not bringing the last of the beer along with him when a piercing scream shattered the pleasant bush ambience. Henry glanced around frantically. A man on a horse thundered past, trailing a smell of animal sweat and manure. Henry spun around to find three more horsemen galloping full pelt through the clearing toward a copse of trees. More screams echoed loudly through the branches. Someone was being murdered.

Henry froze, not knowing what to do. The screams continued so broke into a jog behind the riders. He smelt smoke, heard angry men's voices. As he approached the copse, a horseman raised a sword above his head. Below, on the ground, lay the headless torso of a black man.

The screaming continued. Lean black-skinned men, women and children flitted between the tree trunks, trying desperately to dodge the swinging blades of the horsemen.

"Stop!" screamed Henry, staggering forward a few paces. He tripped on the uneven ground and fell flat on his face. Stunned, he rolled onto his back and was momentarily blinded by a bright flash of light. When his eyes adjusted, he found himself staring up at a smiling face. A woman with blond hair and Asiatic eyes leaned over him, carrying a camera. Henry propped himself up on his elbows. The blonde smiled and bowed as she walked away through the trees. She was wearing a silvery halter neck top and a mini skirt, and she was translucent. *I must be fucking dreaming*, Henry thought. "Hey, wait", he called out.

Suddenly the body of a black man crashed to the ground beside him, blood spurting from a large gash in his neck. Henry fainted.



"Well, I don't know what all that was about," said Marion, pouring herself a glass of wine. "Ellie's scores kept coming up negative, which *can't* be right as we know she's got the gift. She witnessed an apparition right here in this guest house! And God knows where my husband's got himself to."

"Isn't that him?" said Gianna, pointing at the front gates.

"Henry, where the devil have you been?" shouted Marion across the grass. "We waited for you for ages at the picnic spot ... You're all dishevelled. You look—"

Henry jogged across the front lawn, up the guest house steps and stumbled onto the patio. His hair was ruffled and his clothes were torn.

Marion frowned. "You look as if you've been dragged through the bush."

"Chased is more like it," said Henry, reaching for the drinks tray. He picked up a pitcher of water and downed it in one long draught, wiping the excess moisture from his lips with his arm. "Call the police," he said. "There's been a massacre!"

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“Massacre?” said the Italians, looking at each other for confirmation of what they’d just heard.

“Dear god, are you sure, Henry?”

Henry’s eyes widened as he put down the pitcher and reached for the nearest bottle of wine. “Jesus, Marion, you don’t mistake something like that when you see it. I was right in the middle of the action. I was practically massacred myself.” He poured himself a glass of claret and tipped it down his throat. “Anybody got a phone? Mine’s gone dead for some reason.”

As the women reached for their handbags, Joan raised a finger to her lips. “Um ... just a minute there, folks. Can you tell us *exactly* what you saw, Henry.”

Henry gulped the last of his claret. “Men on horseback, with swords, axes and rifles. Aborigines getting their heads lopped off. Arms flying through the air. Horsemen gunning them down, cracking their heads open. Blood spurting everywhere. It was horrible.”

Nobody spoke. Henry put the glass down on the table. His hands shook. “There were women, too—and children—all running through the trees and screaming. I saw a baby snatched up from its mother’s arms and hurled onto a campfire. There was blood everywhere.”

Gianna pulled her phone from its pouch and keyed in her pin number. Joan stretched out her hand “Just a minute.” All eyes were on her as she leaned forward in her chair. The wicker creaked. “Henry, what did these horsemen actually look like?”

Henry bit his lip. “White. Scruffy-looking. Beards. Outdoors men. Why? What’s going on?”

“And were the Aborigines carrying spears and wearing animal skins?”

“I think so,” said Henry.

Joan nodded. “No blood on your clothes, is there, Henry?”

Henry checked his sleeves and trousers. “No, but—”

“No, but you’d reckon there oughta be, just like you’d reckon you oughta have been hurt yourself.”

Henry stopped picking at his clothing and looked across at Joan as she settled back in her wicker chair.

“Like I said before, this region’s got a very *colourful* history, and by colourful, I don’t mean something anyone’s proud of. Back in the settlement days, massacring blacks was so popular that nobody even bothered counting up how many was killed.”

Henry blinked, staring at Joan’s face. “You mean ...”

“Yep, I sure do,” she said.

“Excuse me?” said Conchetta,

“There’s no blood on your clothes. There’s no bodies in the bush, although I reckon if you dug down through the leaf litter and topsoil you’d find a few scattered bones, not to mention how many you’d find if you dredged the river or some of the local waterholes 'round here.”

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“Jesus H,” said Marion, raising her fingers to her mouth. “Ghosts.”

Henry shook his head. “No way. It was all very vivid, very clear. I could *smell* their sweat. I could *hear* their screams.”

“You ain’t the first one and you won’t be the last. I never seen it myself, but my first husband did. Walked right on through it, same as you. Shat his daks he was so scared. “Course, that was twenty years back. Nobody’s seen the butchering horsemen up here for ages. Must be all them electric widgets they got going up at the castle, disturbing the ether, magnetic waves and whatnot.”

Henry's shoulders slumped. “What I saw was real,” he said.

“Sure was,” said Joan, “Only it happened a hundred and sixty years ago.”

Henry picked up the bottle of claret and his glass. He flopped into the nearest empty wicker chair and proceeded to finish the rest of the bottle.

Conchetta cleared her throat. “You know, we heard a story when we were travelling through Germany. The battle of Buderich in the mid 1800s was seen again years later by at least fifty people. Army, infantry, cavalry, wagons, all marching in procession across the countryside. Burning houses, black smoke. When the sun went down that day the whole scene disappeared without a trace.”

“Oh yes—the same at Gettysberg,” said Gianna. “There's always sightings of battlefield ghosts. People take pictures, even at night. They have a web page.”

The patio door swung open and the Italian women’s husbands stepped onto the porch. “*Italia ... Italia ... Italia ...*” Catching the sombre mood of the others, they stopped mid-chant. “What’s the matter? You all look like somebody died.”



“All packed?” said Henry.

Ellie nodded.

“Just as well we're leaving today. It's getting a bit crowded 'round here,” he said, nodding towards the swarm of Japanese tourists that had taken over the patio. He carried two large suitcases down the steps and plonked them on the gravel drive. “Room on that step for two, dya think?”

Ellie nodded as she inched a little closer to the left.

“You're disappointed, aren't you,” he asked.

“A bit,” she replied, hugging her knees. “They had all that equipment and everything, but I don't reckon those people at the castle knew what they were doing. I told them I'd already seen a ghost here, but no one would listen.”

Henry nodded sympathetically.

“Hey, Dad, the ghost I saw with the baggy trousers—who do you reckon that was?”

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"I've been thinking about that one, Ellie. I saw a couple of people inside that old castle who were a bit on the translucent side. And then there was the woman in the silver top taking photos while I was flat on my back in the bush. I don't know, Ellie—maybe they were tourists, just like us."

Ellie glanced up sideways at her father. "How come?"

Henry shrugged. "Who's to say that all apparitions are memories from the past? Maybe some of them are from the future, too. Maybe someone invents time travel. Maybe the future gets so crowded that there's nowhere left to go on holidays except for backwards?"

Ellie frowned. "Well, the guy with the green pants kinda looked like a tourist," she said, glancing back up at the Japanese couples on the patio.

They sat in silence for awhile, listening to the cockatoos screeching in the treetops.

"By the way Ellie, I've been meaning to ask you—that ghost you saw when you were eight... why have you always insisted it wasn't real?"

Ellie's face reddened. "I can't remember."

"Yes you can," said Henry, giving her a playful nudge. "What is it you're not telling me?"

Ellie sighed. "Because it wasn't a ghost at all. Just the white window curtain blowing up. The Americans came in and I screamed and said "look at the ghost", and then they started screaming too. Afterwards they were so sure they'd seen it that I didn't know how to tell them. But it was only the curtain, Dad. Honest."

Marion walked out onto the patio to find Henry and Ellie giggling at the bottom of the steps. "What's so funny?" she asked.

## THE END

Cat Sparks is the Manager and Senior Editor of Agog! Press, which has, to date, produced five anthologies of new Australian speculative fiction. She is also a writer, graphic designer, photographer and desktop publisher, with stories and artwork appearing in a selection of magazines and anthologies. In 2004 she was a graduate of the inaugural Clarion South Writers' Workshop in Queensland.

Highlights of her career so far include: winning a trip to Paris in a Bulletin Magazine photography competition; being appointed official photographer for two NSW Premiers; working as dig photographer on three archaeological expeditions to Jordan, and winning seven DITMAR awards including one for Best New Talent in 2002. She was a third place winner in Writers of the Future, 2004, and was awarded the Aurealis Peter McNamara Conveners Award in 2004. She lives in Wollongong, NSW with her partner, author Robert Hood. Web site: <http://www.catsparks.net>

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# THE LOST CARNIVAL

**DONNA TAYLOR BURGESS**



The lost children peer from  
Beneath the dirty skirts  
Of a devil's carousel  
Where dragons run from  
Something we cannot see  
Denim and tender flesh  
Caught in those wooden fangs

Small ghosts of sons stolen  
By six-fingered hands  
And never to be seen again  
Wicked little sideshow daughters  
Sent on short train rides  
Into darkness with cheesy skeletons  
And clowns with grins too wide and  
Way too red  
And stuffed apes that probably are  
Just really hairy old men bent on  
Perversions unimagined

The Scrambler results in broken necks  
And shaken baby syndrome and eyes just starin'

The geek costs a dollar nowadays  
Little boy from up the street, I think  
Gone since, '89  
They used to pay *me* to watch

The Siamese twins are just two angels  
Gone over night to a friend's  
On bikes that never made it there  
They were not born that way  
But reborn out of needle and silk  
And scars where arms used to be.

**Donna Taylor Burgess** lives on the South Carolina coast with her husband, two children, eight cats, two dogs, and one very unfriendly opossum. In summer months, she is often spotted in the Atlantic, attempting to stand on a big pink surfboard and look cool. Along with writing, she is also editor and publisher of Naked Snake Press.



# FEATURED INTERVIEW

## LISA GOLDSTEIN

Lisa Goldstein has published ten novels, the latest being *DAUGHTER OF EXILE* (as by Isabel Glass) from Tor Books. Her novel *THE RED MAGICIAN* won the American Book Award for Best Paperback. She has also published a short story collection, *TRAVELLERS IN MAGIC* (Tor Books, December, 1994), and numerous short stories. Her novels and short stories have been finalists for the Hugo, Nebula and World Fantasy awards. She lives in Oakland, California, with her husband and their cute dog Spark.

Her web site is <http://www.brazenhussies.net/goldstein>



**When did you know that you wanted to be a writer? Did a specific incident or time in your life prompt this decision?**

I always wanted to be a writer, ever since I learned how to read—I can't remember a time when I *didn't* want to be a writer. I thought writing books was the coolest thing anyone could possibly do.

**What authors did you like to read as a child? Has your tastes changed much since then?**

Like most kids who read a lot, I read a lot of trash, most of which I've forgotten. Fortunately there were some stand-outs among them, books I really loved. I liked Madeleine L'Engle's books, especially *A Wrinkle in Time*, for the way she portrayed loners and unpopular kids, and for the science fiction (*A Wrinkle in Time* was one of the first science fiction books I read, after the Mushroom Planet books). Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book*, for the way the animals were portrayed so realistically. I loved the language, the way each of the animals had their own way of speaking—if animals could really talk, I thought, this is the way they would sound. There was a book my best friend and I loved, but one that very few people have heard of—*A Wicked Enchantment*, by Margot Benary-Isbert—which showed enchantment and magic in everyday life, something I've written about a lot since. (The people who

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have heard of it have all turned out to be very cool, like Ellen Kushner, who became my first editor in her (very brief) stint at Pocket Books.)

Then when I was around fourteen I discovered *The Lord of the Rings*, and like a lot of my generation I became lost to fantasy for good, almost literally stolen away by the elves.

## **Why the Fantasy genre? What about it is particularly appealing to you?**

The great thing about fantasy is that you can write about literally *anything*. (What you write about has to make some sort of sense, of course, though the sense can be poetic instead of logical.) It's the most liberating form of writing there is.

Another thing I like about fantasy is something I mentioned before, that you can show magic appearing in everyday life. I like the juxtapositions you get when this happens, and the feeling of magic being just another part of life, which is what the best magic realism does.

Lately I've been reading a lot of high fantasy, or epic fantasy, or whatever you want to call it. (High fantasy seems to imply a hierarchy, which I don't like.) It started when I saw the *Lord of the Rings* movies and remembered how strongly these books affected me. I think that part of the reason these books are so powerful is that we need myths, and right now the way myths are passed on is through fantasy. I wondered for a while why so many people who read *The Lord of the Rings* discover it in adolescence, and then go on to read it over and over for a few years. Then I realized that it was sort of a rite of passage, a way of teaching young people how to be in the world. Here are small people (literally) who go out into the world, and who learn what's important—keeping your word, and respecting nature, and accepting people who look different and have different customs, and standing up against what's wrong, no matter how hopeless it looks. This is one of the many reasons the trilogy has been so popular—there don't seem to be enough relevant myths for the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Tolkien said that he was writing a myth for England, but the popularity of the movies has made it a myth for the entire world. Which is a very good thing, I think.

## **Do you have a specific routine according to which you write? Are you strict with yourself when it comes to writing down a certain amount of words each day?**

I try to write every morning I don't go to my day job (in a library). I don't try to write a specific number of words a day, but I do try to stay at my desk at least until noon,

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even if I can't write anything to save my life. Sometimes something shows up if I stay that long. (Maybe the incredible boredom forces me to come up with something.) Sometimes nothing happens, but things resolve themselves the next day, or a few days later.

**How, if in any way, does your environment—the place where you live—influence the way you write?**

Hard to say. I like having my own room to write—I've heard about spouses who write in the same room but I can't imagine doing that. (My husband doesn't write, but you get the idea.) My room looks out on trees with squirrels chasing each other up and down the branches—watching them is another thing I do when I get bored.

**Much of your work deals with history. In terms of research you must travel quite a bit. Has there been a specific trip that stands out amongst others for any given reason?**

I don't actually travel a lot, though I'm always delighted when my books give that impression. A trip to Mexico did inspire the story "Tourists," and then other stories, and finally a novel called *Tourists*, but it wasn't Mexico itself that did it but the general feeling of the strangeness of other countries, of having to live in a place where nothing is familiar, not the currency or the language or the food or the customs. (I got the idea after waking up on a bus going from Cancun to Merida—I had a moment of profound disorientation, not knowing where on earth I was or what I was doing there.) And I did go to England to research *Strange Devices of the Sun and Moon*, but of course very little survived from the sixteenth century and in the end I had to do all my own imagining. What stands out from that trip is walking around the old city of London, and realizing just how small it was, something like a mile and a half square. (Also the Mrs. Field's cookie store where a part of the wall once stood, coming just when I needed the sugar rush to go on walking.)

**Which of your books were the most difficult to research, to date?**

I sort of went overboard researching *Strange Devices*—I wanted to know *everything* about London in the sixteenth century, even though less than half of what I learned made it to the book itself. I wouldn't say it was difficult, but it was pretty obsessive, and I don't think I'd do anything like it again. My editor on that book, David Hartwell, told me he thought he had an ancestor named Abraham Hartwell who'd lived in London at that time, and for some reason it seemed like a natural thing to research him—he turned out to have translated a Portuguese book about a voyage to Africa, and I spent a day in the rare book room at U.C. Berkeley reading an actual book from

the sixteenth century about people who stand seven feet tall, and people who replace their teeth with metal. It was all fascinating, but of course none of it showed up in the book.

Then when I got the idea for *The Alchemist's Door* I thought it would be easy— hey, I know all about the sixteenth century. What I didn't realize was that I didn't know about Prague in the sixteenth century, so there was all that research to do again (though I wasn't quite as nuts this time).

**Do you think that, your books being so different from one another, is really a bad thing in terms of your writing career?**

I do, yes. People who like one kind of book might not like another, and I probably lose some readers along the way. If someone was just starting out and was more interested in commercial success than in getting satisfaction out of writing, I would tell them to write in pretty much the same genre throughout their career. My problem is that I get bored writing the same thing over and over again.

**What can you tell us about your latest book, *The Divided Crown*?**

*The Divided Crown* is in the same world as the first Isabel Glass novel, but it's set fourteen years later and only has a few of the same characters. This is what I was referring to when I said I might be able to write a trilogy—I do have an idea for a third book, but I want to take a break before I write it.

**Being the daughter of two Jewish concentration camp survivors, how has that history influenced themes and issues in your work?**

I was thinking about this after 9/11, because you kept hearing news people saying that the United States lost its innocence. What I think they meant was that people now know that terrible things can happen, that nothing they do can make them completely safe. It seemed to me that I always knew this, and that my parents, and my parents' friends, always knew this. I suppose the idea that terrible things happen no matter what we do is there somewhere in my books.

After a while this idea of the US losing its innocence started to bother me, because it isn't even entirely true. People who have been to war, or who immigrated from places like Bosnia or Cambodia, or who live in inner cities know what it's like not to be safe. What's the news people are saying, I suppose, is that the middle and upper classes lost their innocence.

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Another thing I write about is freedom and tyranny, even in a fantasy setting. (Maybe especially in a fantasy setting, because it's possible to say things there that you can't say in realistic fiction.) My father used to tell me stories about living in Nazi Germany (he and his family left for Holland in 1935), and they impressed on me how fragile freedom is, and how easily it's lost. It's disturbing that not too many people are worried by things like the Patriot Act, or the prisoners who haven't gotten due process in Guantanamo.

## **What about the matter of a trilogy...**

Well, that's an interesting question. I might be about to commit a trilogy soon, though that wasn't my intent starting out. I mentioned that my interest in fantasy was rekindled by the *Lord of the Rings* movies. I wrote a fantasy novel, and my editor, Beth Meacham, thought that it was so different from my other books that I should put it out under a pseudonym. Then I wrote another book in the same world. I'm really resisting writing a third one, but I keep getting these ideas ...

The pseudonym is Isabel Glass (Isabel for Point Isabel, a dog park my dog and I love), and the books are *Daughter of Exile* and *The Divided Crown*. One of the reasons Beth wanted to market them under a pseudonym was to get the chain book stores to take more than they usually would—they keep computer listings of how well each author does, and they've decided that they will only order a specific number of books for Lisa Goldstein. The first book came out last year, though, and the second one will be out in July, so I decided that it's okay to tell people what the pseudonym is.

As I said, when I saw the movies I remembered what it was that I'd loved about high fantasy. I wanted to write something ambitious that reached back to the roots of the genre—myths, folktales, stories of people coming into power and responsibility. I also wanted to write something in the language of fantasy. I get very annoyed by books that use modern-day terms in the middle of a very non-modern setting, or use archaic terms wrong—this is the sort of thing that jolts me right out of the world of the book. It's important to remember that Tolkien was a linguist. (Words I've seen used this way include “lifestyle,” “subconscious,” and “psychology.” I've also seen “forelock” used when the author clearly meant “fetlock” —a horse was in mud up to its forelock, which is an interesting picture.) A fantasy, which deals with epic events, should have an epic language to match. I don't know if I succeeded in any of this, but Patricia McKillip (an author I admire tremendously) called the first one “an intriguing and fast-paced journey,” which made me very happy.

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**Do you get struck by sudden inspiration in which you write large chunks—even a whole story?**

I've never written an entire story at once, but I do get inspired to keep writing, sometimes going for hours at a time. It's nice when that happens.

**Ever had an idea that seemed impossible to put to paper?**

Lots of them. A lot of ideas start out seeming terrific, then fade away when I can't figure out how to get where I want to go, or when they turn into vapid clichés. I've started more novels than I want to think about that I had to abandon, though fortunately I usually realize they won't work out fairly soon. I recently realized that I start a novel thinking, "Well, I've written novels before—I know how to do it," when the fact is that each novel is different, and each one requires learning how to do new things.

Nothing I've ever written has turned out as terrific as I imagined it would when I started, though some things have come close.

**Why do you think is fantasy literature of interest to socialists?**

I suppose because with fantasy it's possible to imagine a world that's different from this one. Though I think some of it is far too conservative, looking back to an idealized Middle Ages instead of trying to come up with something new.

**How do you feel about the current state of the Fantasy genre? Where do you see it going in the next couple of years?**

As I said, I've been reading high fantasy lately, and it seems to me that there's a lot of really bad stuff out there. (A lot of good stuff, too, but unfortunately not as much.) I already vented about how badly written some of it is. There are also books that have a far too modern sensibility, where people talk as if they lived in the present, and where, no matter how fantastic the world is, their concerns are those of the present. And there are books that don't seem to have a real underpinning, where the author hasn't done the work of making the world real. (The fantasy genre was spoiled by Tolkien, I guess, who spent about twenty years thinking about his world before writing *The Lord of the Rings*. I don't expect this much thought, but something more than what I see in some of these books.)

I don't see any of this going away soon, unfortunately, because most readers don't seem to care about this. Oddly, I don't mind bad writing in science fiction or mysteries—it's only because I care so much about fantasy that this bothers me.

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Outside of high fantasy a lot of good things are happening, though. People like China Mieville and Elizabeth Hand and Kelly Link are coming up with the most amazing things. There isn't the conservatism here that you see in high fantasy sometimes. Fantasy by its nature is almost limitless, and you can see these people and others taking advantage of that.

## **Do you entertain any thoughts about writing material in other genres?**

Not really. I once tried to write a mystery, but I was so excited by the cool twist I'd thought of that I wanted to get to that part immediately and skip all the boring part in between. I think fantasy and science fiction have enough to keep me going for a long time.

## **What are you currently working on?**

I'm still being Isabel Glass, at least for a while longer, so I'm working on another fantasy novel. After that I'd like to write some short stories, and maybe a Lisa Goldstein book, probably a contemporary fantasy.

## **Read any good books lately?**

Well, I vented about how bad some fantasy novels are, so I guess I should mention some writers who I think do it right. I'll read anything by Ursula Le Guin and Patricia McKillip. And not a book that I've read recently, but one I'm anxiously waiting for—I just heard that the next book in George R.R. Martin's series is coming out soon. That series is a truly amazing achievement—I can't imagine how he keeps all the characters and places and plotlines consistent, and how he keeps the plot fresh and engaging. It's like someone juggling a hundred balls in the air at once.

## **Have any of your books ever been optioned for the silver screen? Any one in particular that you think would make a great movie?**

*The Red Magician* was optioned for a while. That's the one I'd like to see made into a movie—I think it's visual enough, and the setting is interesting enough, that it would work really well.

## **Tell us something about Lisa Goldstein no-one knows...**

I'm an absolute dog nut. I'm surprised there aren't more dogs in my work. I keep trying to fit my own dog in, and for some reason it never works out.

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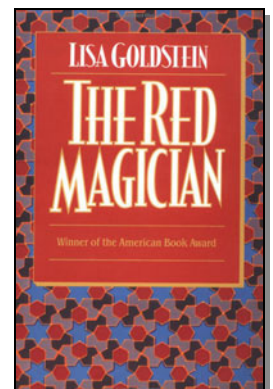
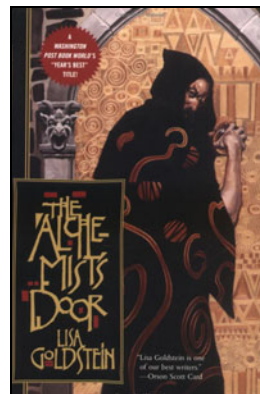
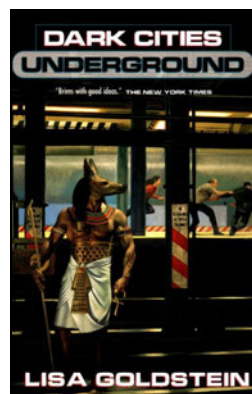
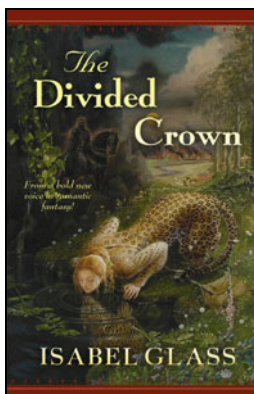
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## Your advice to the aspiring writer:

Read a lot, and study how other writers do what they do, especially writers you admire. (Of course with some writers, really good ones, you'll never be able to figure it out, and it will drive you crazy. John Crowley is one of those for me.) Write a lot. Work hard at writing—it isn't easy. Listen to people on buses and in restaurants and in movie theaters before the movie starts, to learn what real dialog sounds like. (Do this subtly, of course—you don't want anyone saying "What are you staring at?") Give the reader a reason to keep reading—a sympathetic character, or an exciting plot, or a new way of looking at or understanding something. Write about something that excites you—this doesn't mean "Write about what you know," because if everyone did that there would never be any fantasy or science fiction, but you should know the facts of what you're writing about. Be open to rewriting. (I know that some writers, Robert Heinlein for example, don't believe in rewriting, but I think rewriting is a good thing—not everyone is going to write something perfect the first time out.) If you're unsure about what you've written, show it to someone sympathetic, or look for a writing workshop to join, and be open to constructive criticism. And despite everything I've said, try to have some fun writing—it will come across in what you write.

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## BOOKS BY THE AUTHOR – AVAILABLE AT AMAZON.COM



OR VISIT THE AUTHOR'S WEB SITE AT:

[HTTP://WWW.BRAZENHUSSIES.NET/GOLDSTEIN](http://www.brazenhussies.net/goldstein)



# FEATURED ARTIST

**PIOTR CIESLINSKI**

## Vital Stats

**Age:** 26

**Country:** Poland

**On The Web:** <http://cieslinski.epilogue.net>

**Medium:** Digital

**Training:** Design & Graphic on Academy of Art in Lodz

**Influences:** All around me and many artists. As for work as an illustrator—D.McKean and G.Brom.



**How long have you been working as a professional illustrator?**

It all started about 5 years ago when I discovered Photoshop. I began with some photomontages from scanned drawings and photos (at that time I didn't even know what tablet was), and then I sent them to the one and only Polish RPG magazine. They say "ok, you can make a cover for us", and that's how it started. There were some covers for magazines, RPG and others. In the meantime I bought my wacom tablet. But I think my "professional" work started with first book cover about two years ago.

**Do you prefer working in traditional mediums like oils as opposed to computer art?**

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Usually I don't have the room and time for traditional means—and not much experience either. I like to draw in mixed media from time to time, but only for myself—things like my intellectual states or something. Usually they are made with something white on black paper, and end their life in some dark corner of my room. I wish I had the time for traditional painting. All my commissions are digital. Why? Clear, fast, ready to print.

**What are some of your favorite Fantasy\SF things—movies, books, conventions, TV? What could they be doing better...?**

My favorites are still changing, like I do, but I have some classics that will always remain a strong influence. There is *The Hobbit*, *Conan the Barbarian* and *Willow* for Fantasy; *Neuromancer*, *Forever War*, *Star Wars*, *Blade Runner*, Lynch's *Dune* and *GITS* for SF; *Mad Max* and *Fallout* for postapocalyptic, and so on. (I mixed movies, books and games titles as you can see).



# SIMULACRUM

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What could they be doing better? Maybe it will sound strange compared to my digital media work, but they could go back to analog special effects in the movies instead giving us these non-mood 3D effects, or... try harder with digital. I don't mean to say that digital effects are always without mood, but mostly, they are. Just look at the Lynch's *Dune*, or *Blade Runner* and compare their feeling with, for example, the second episode of *Star Wars*... Both first movies have soul and mood in FX. The last one is...colorful? :>. Of course it is only my opinion.

## **Tell us about your creative process—where do you find inspiration and ideas for a new drawing?**

Everywhere. Mostly in music. I listen to many different styles, and the music makes me see pictures in my head (sounds mad, doesn't it? :>). But sometimes I'm inspired by a photo, piece of art, movie, situation, or even tea fuzzles or the sound of opened doors. Once I had a dream where someone showed me his picture, and I thought "man, this is great composition—I wish I could have such idea before this guy got it". I woke up and realized that it is my idea now—strange way of inspiration, but it is like that sometimes. That's for the pictures that I could do for myself if I have time for it. I should write them down, because there are too many, and 90% is usually forgotten.

As for the pictures that should be made as a commission, I must take the inspiration from the book itself. Usually I have some ideas for a picture right away while reading a book.



## **How would you describe your work—thematically, and in terms of style?**

I think I don't have an exact and done style yet, and I'm not working on the pictures with a "I must have a style" sentence running thru my head :>. Anyway, it will come by itself while working on the pictures. For this moment I only put some of my "inside moods" in the picture, nothing more :>. Thematically it depends on the book that illustration is for.

# SIMULACRUM

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**Would you encourage other artists who want to illustrate professionally to make a career out of it?**

I think I haven't made a big career as an illustrator yet, so I can't tell from experience with a big "E" in front of it. And I will not name myself an "artist"—it is a big word for me. Like once Z.Beksinski said "man is not an artist—man could be one from time to time" (free translation :>).

I think becoming a professional illustrator is a very good way to make a living out of the pleasure of drawing and painting. Of course man must have some visual education as well in the workshop of the special tool he chooses—or talent the size of Mount Everest instead:>.

As for the "draw, draw, draw" ideology of some artists, I have an anecdote (don't get me wrong, I don't say such attitude is a bad thing). Once I was crying on the shoulder of my friend while visiting an internet gallery of one of the best digital illustrators: "Look at it! I think he must be drawing all the time! I'm drawing only when I have to. I'll never draw like him!" My friend looked at me and said "But he will never drink as much beer as you do", so the conversation ended in the pub. The lesson is: always something for...something.



**Is there a favorite sketch or painting among your work that holds special significance for you?**

I think it depends on the day—sometimes one is special for me, other time another one.

**Do you have any interesting projects in the pipeline you'd like to tell us about?**

Book covers and typographic/layout designs for a company I'm working for, as it was until now.

If I'll have some free time, I will do some installations for my living space—for example I planned some strange lamp designs, big photo-collages and so. After all, in the first place I'm a designer. A freaky one, but still... Besides, if I get some free time I'll make some pictures for myself, in my own mood—but even

the oldest Indians don't know when it will be.

# SIMULACRUM

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**Would you want to branch out in fields such as television or film animation one day?**

Some time ago I wanted to buy myself a camera and make some short form projects—short stories, TV spot-like movies, video clips. I've got a lot of ideas. But I realized I can't grab five crows by their tails at the same time, so I'd rather stay with design and my pictures. As for animation—I'm not interested.

**Where do you see Science Fiction and Fantasy art going—is there concern than the traditional ways of illustrating will completely fall prey to digital mediums?**

I don't think so. For me it is like music. There is old classic music, very complicated, with traditional instruments (traditional media); there is music like rock, with traditional instruments mixed with new electronic (mixed media); and there is new electronic music, made only with computers, samples, mixers (digital). I think all media types will coexist and mix with each other like it has been up until now.

**What do you want to achieve with your art in the future?**

I want to be good enough to get bigger and complicated commissions, and never be good enough for myself and improve my workshop until the end :>.

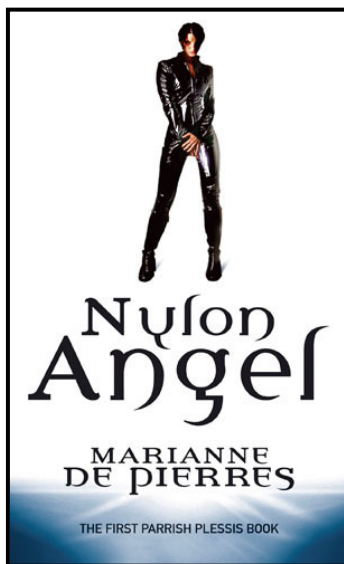
I wish I could have a free will to design books in all visual aspects—not only cover art and title typography, but also the shape of it, cover material, interior typography, promotional stuff like posters and so on. To visualize the entire mood of the book. I hope it will come to fruition some time in the near future.

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**VISIT PIOTR CIESLINSKI'S ONLINE GALLERY AT:  
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# FEATURED BOOKS

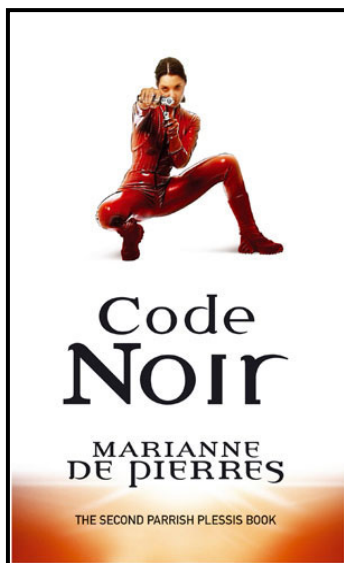
## THE PARRISH PLESSIS TRILOGY BY MARIANNE DE PIERRES Third volume, *Crash Deluxe*, released in June 2005



### NYLON ANGEL

Publisher: Orbit (January 15, 2004)

Move over Mad Max—Oz has a new heroine! Marianne de Pierres introduces us to kick-ass, all-around bad girl Parrish Plessis. In a future where the rich live beyond the safety of a giant fortress-wall and everyone else can go to hell, Parrish Plessis has learnt some useful survival tactics. Like don't cross Jamon Mondo—unless you want to be dead by morning. But Parrish is sick of doing what she's told. She's tooled up, jacked full of stim, and tonight she's going to take her chance. (Text refers to mass market paperback)



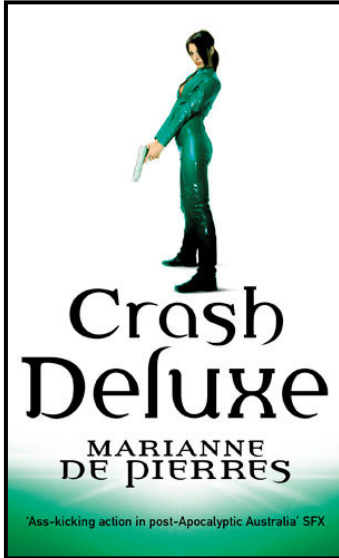
### CODE NOIR

Publisher: Time Warner Books UK (June 30, 2004)

The Tert war is over and Parrish Plessis has landed a big share of the spoils. Not bad for a girl with a price on her head and an uncanny ability to attract trouble. Problem is, power and territory mean responsibilities. And obligations. Like the small matter of her blood debt to the shadowy and dangerous Cabal Coomera. They need Parrish for a little rescue mission—one that will take her into the heart of tekno-darkness, the slum town of Dis. In return they'll let her keep on living.

Assuming she survives.

(Text refers to mass market paperback)



## **CRASH DELUXE**

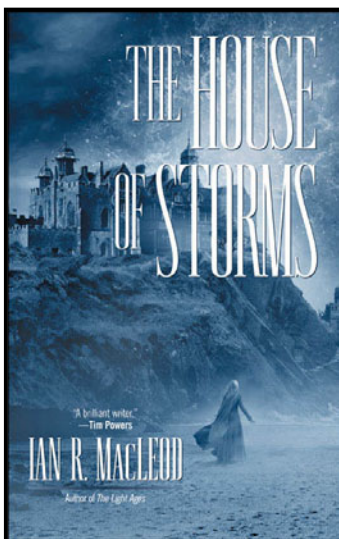
Publisher: Orbit (June 2005)

Parrish Plessis, sometime coup leader, paid assassin and ex-bodyguard, is finding life tough. Betrayed by the enigmatic Loyl Daac, and still under blood debt to the deadly Cabal Coomera, Parrish is trying to hold together the little empire she's inherited in the Tert, live up to the expectations of the many strays and waifs she's accumulated, and attempt to flush the high-tech parasite from her system before she becomes something so much less than human.

Not an ideal lifestyle, Parrish would be the first to admit, but she can make everything alright again if she can manage just one little task. Bring down the media.

Just another day for Parrish Plessis...

**Marianne de Pierres on *Crash Deluxe*:** "*Crash Deluxe* was written at a difficult time. My son had been very ill and the book was my refuge from my troubles. It was a challenge to take Parrish back out of the Tert and meet new characters while retaining touch with the familiars. However, it was the only way she could begin to make proper sense of the morass she'd found herself in. I particularly enjoyed writing the vreal (virtual reality) segments of this book, and Parrish's antics as an *amorato*—a courtesan."



## **THE HOUSE OF STORMS**

Ian R. MacLeod

Publisher: Ace Books (May 1, 2005)

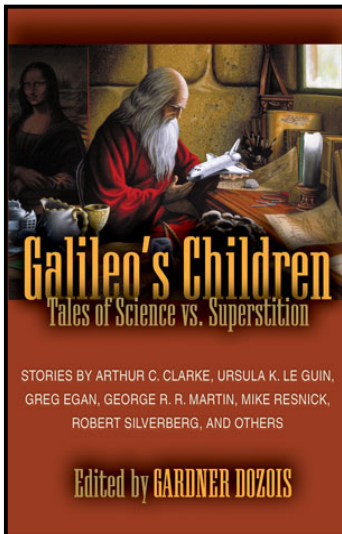
In a desperate bid to save Ralph, her only son from consumption, Alice Meynell, the Greatgrandmistress of the Telegraphers' Guild, has made a bargain with her former lover—a changeling in the land of Einfeld, a man now changed terribly by magic, to do whatever is necessary to cure him.

Once healthy, Ralph is torn between his obligation to lead the guild and his love for a servant girl. But his mother has already chosen her son's destiny. And she will see him achieve it even if it means bringing the Age of Light to an end.

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A somewhat sequel to *The Light Ages*, this is yet another stellar alternate history tale from author Ian R. MacLeod.



## Galileo's Children: Tales of Science Vs Superstition

Edited by Gardner Dozois

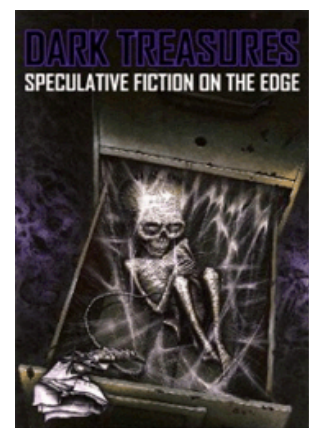
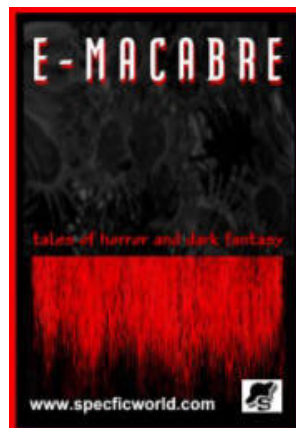
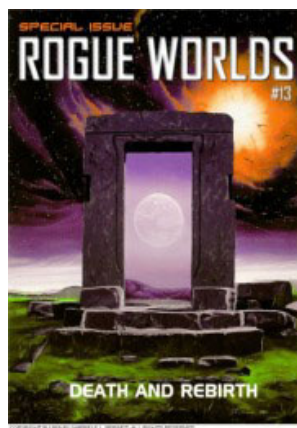
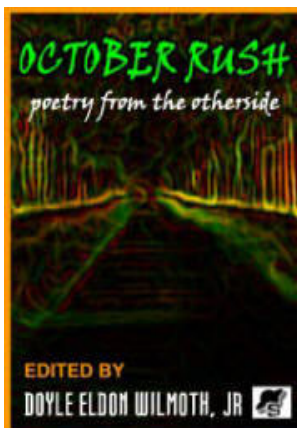
Publisher: Pyr (August 5, 2005)

Magic, religion, sorcery and science: whichever of these you choose as foundation for a belief or argument, they are all represented in the latest short fiction collection from respected SF Editor Gardner Dozois, who was editor of *Asimov's Science Fiction* magazine for almost twenty years, and is still the editor of the annual anthology series *The Year's Best Science Fiction*. Dozois has won an unprecedented fifteen Hugo Awards as the Year's Best Editor, and an equal number of Locus Awards, not to mention two Nebulas for his own writing.

The latest anthology edited by Dozois contains work from such SF luminaries as Ursula K. LeGuin, George R.R. Martin, Arthur C. Clarke, James Tiptree Jr. and Mike Resnick. The only drawback of this collection is that the stories are all reprints. That said, they are reprints of the finest kind, and the anthology is an excellent addition to any SF collection.

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