

HELIOTROPE

THE SPECULATIVE FICTION MAGAZINE

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Author Bios

Brendan Connell was born in Santa Fe, New Mexico, in 1970. He has had fiction published in numerous magazines, literary journals and anthologies, including McSweeney's, Adbusters, Nonymous, Leviathan 3 (The Ministry of Whimsy 2002), Album Zutique (The Ministry of Whimsy 2003) and Strange Tales (Tartarus Press 2003). His first novel, *The Translation of Father Torturo*, was published by Prime Books in 2005; his novella *Dr. Black and the Guerrillia* was published by Graftisk Press the same year.

Tina Connolly works as a face painter in Portland, OR. She has a cat who is often a pigeon and a husband who is rarely a bear. Her stories and poems have appeared in *Strange Horizons*, *Son and Foe*, and *Ideomancer*. She wrote the first draft of *Moon at Clarion West* 2006 and then had a long conversation with Nalo Hopkinson about putting squids on mantelpieces.

Jeffrey Ford is the author of the novels *The Physiognomy*, *The Portrait of Mrs. Charbuque*, *The Cosmology of the Wider World* and *The Girl in the Glass*. His two short story collection from Golden Gryphon Press are: *The Fantasy Writer's Assistant* and *The Empire of Ice Cream*. He has a new novel, *The Shadow Year*, and a new story collection, *The Night Whiskey*, coming out in 08 from Morrow/Harper Collins. Ford teaches Writing and Literature at Brookdale Community College in New Jersey.

Theodora Goss was born in Hungary and spent her childhood in various European countries before her family moved to the United States. Although she grew up on the classics of English literature, her writing has been influenced by an Eastern European literary tradition in which the boundaries between realism and the fantastic are often ambiguous. She lives in Boston, where she is completing a PhD in English literature. Her short story collection *In the Forest of Forgetting*, which includes World Fantasy Award nominee "The Wings of Meister Wilhelm" and Nebula Award nominee "Pip and the Fairies," was published in 2006. *Interfictions*, a short story anthology she co-edited with Delia Sherman, was published in 2007. Her short stories and poems have been reprinted in a number of Year's Best anthologies, including Year's Best Fantasy, The Year's Best Fantasy and Horror, and The Year's Best Science Fiction and Fantasy for Teens. Visit her website at www.theodoragoss.com.

Michael Moorcock is a highly respected author who has won many awards over his prolific career. The author of many literary novels and stories in practically every genre, he has won and been short-listed for the Nebula, World Fantasy, Hugo, August Derleth, Booker, Whitbread, Guardian Fiction Prize, and others. His novella *Behold the Man* won the Nebula Award. Currently he resides in Texas with his wife, Linda.

Visit Michael Moorcock online at www.multiverse.org.

Rob Vagle lives in Eugene, Oregon. He's been published previously in *Realms of Fantasy*, *Polyphony* 5, and *Strange New Worlds* 10.

Jeff VanderMeer is a columnist for the Amazon book blog and has his own blog at <http://www.jeffvandermeer.com>. His latest novel is *Shriek: An Afterword*, and he is currently a guest editor for *Best American Fantasy*.

Artist Bio

Noah Barrett

Born and raised in the post industrial brown fields of Connecticut. The only son of a nurse and an auto mechanic.

Schooled in illustration Noah has worked in commercial art and graphics for over a decade providing illustrations and design to newspapers, comic books and Magazines world wide.

As well as illustrating "If I Were Just a Little Taller." by E. Anderson and contributing to C. Harts "How to Draw Comic Book Superheros and Villians" He has recently resumed freelancing and producing fine art .

He lives in Western Massachusetts with his wife and three children.

<http://www.boundlessgallery.com/artist/3815.art>

http://www.saatchi-gallery.co.uk/yourgallery/artist_profile/Noah+Barrett/41066.html

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Dreaming Metropolis

Editorial by Jay Tomio

The third issue of Heliotrope brings the first editorial and in our opinion the best issue yet. It wasn't easy as we were publishing as we were struggling with our identity; foolhardy to some, but me and Damon both agree this is how we both work best. In an industry - a world - full of talkers we are comfortable with active stakes. Everybody dreams, but we wake up and attempt to make additions to our reality.

Heliotrope isn't just about dreams. It's about memories. A discussion at the Fantasybookspot.com forums was the origin of the first non-fiction feature I added to the issue. We were talking about what columns we could add to FBS and a pitch was thrown out to do something like the Shadow Cabinet. We loved the concept, we all thought it important, and had what was not a small amount of reverence for the original, but we were never able to work that out but when considering Heliotrope I knew of someone who certainly could - the author of the original piece, Jeff VanderMeer. Jeff has been on the frontline in the war of finding quality fiction, his shelf full of gems that are both unique in content, and unique in that they aren't on more shelves. The latter is a crime The Shadow Cabinet will see it righted.

I'm not an original thinker. I thought one Jeff was good - two Jeff's must be better. Heliotrope is a short fiction market and I wanted a feature that highlighted "the writer's writers". What stories are ingrained in the conscious of other writers? Jeffrey Ford once had the same thought I think, as he had his own Virtual Anthology feature that shared his thoughts on such stories. I wanted to tweak this a bit though, and thus made it into a regular feature that will have a new writer adding chapters with each issue. A solid premise I thought, but it would not have happened unless I could obtain the blessing of Mr. Ford and I was delighted that not only did he offer it - he also would kick off the feature for us. I'm not sure if we could have done much better, or more apt I'm not sure anybody could have done much better.

I mentioned that both of the above features mentioned existed in some form prior to Heliotrope. In a chat I had with author/poet Anna Tambour I mentioned to her what I missed. We have lost many sites and columns in our little corner of the net from Emerald City to Dislocated Fictions, and they have been replaced by what are at best poor shadows or outright charlatans, be it fans, or rather loud authors whose claim to authority is one - even if well received - book or story in many cases nobody read years ago. The Atlantis of these sites was Fantastic Metropolis. The site is almost two years past its last update and is still relevant. From Rossi's madness, to top notch recommendations, hell even reading a Christmas editorial from six years ago is more informative than the bulk of today's breaking opinion. Going through the archives you see a who's who of today's talent and I am simply delighted to be lucky enough to be the old man fishing, the first to see three survivors of the fallen continent and the first to hear their stories. I want to send a profound thanks to the creative participants and the creators of Fantastic Metropolis, your city exists in fragments of recommended reads inhabiting numerous book cases. The Shadow Cabinet and the Virtual Anthology were not born in Heliotrope, but hopefully they will continue in the spirit and the tradition of Fantastic Metropolis.

I did say three survivors.

The third piece is from Michael Moorcock. The man needs no introduction, so I won't offer one. I had prior contact with the first two writers, but my query to Moorcock for Heliotrope would be the first time I communicated with him. Before I did this I asked Gabe Chouinard about approachability factor. I have interviewed several authors, but for some reason approaching Moorcock was different and I must admit being intimidated, fearing a reply entitled Helio-pooh (which I would have framed). What Gabe told me was spot on. Not only did I get a reply, but before I knew it I had a piece, soon after a revised piece - the man is a writer. Out of all the authors I ever dealt with this was the one who really handled business. It surprised me a little when pondering his statures, but it was juvenile thinking on part - that's why he has stature.

One of my growing guilty pleasures with Heliotrope is my collection of poetry. I am not a natural fan of poetry, but as Helio grows my fondness for it does as well. Because I'm not somebody who collects poetry books, those poetry I am exposed to is that which inhabits various anthologies or books I also read. For this reason this may be the toughest spot in the magazine to obtain. These are my all-stars my dream team, and the lovely Theodora Goss is the next in the line-up.

Excluding the mountain of rejections, the fiction was the easiest part to fill in this issue. The Connell piece reminded me of an eccentric and discredited story that didn't have the time to join its mates in a prior anthology. I had Brian Lindenmuth on this issue as a co-editor and the other two choices were very early entries during the submission process, both came back with Brian with a thumbs up and a third was one we both enjoyed as well. We basically had the same three stories in mind and these were what were the two we favored out of the group. Robe Vagle, Tina Connolly, and Brendan Connell are the heart of the issue and ultimately it is their talents we will be judged upon. I remain unworried.

Heliotrope, much like FBS is not anchored to one genre or mode of storytelling. We have some exclusive previews for you. For the comic book fan we have a preview of Ape Entertainment's Fablewood and by the time you read this a review should be available at Fantasybookspot.com, We need to thank Brian, as due to his efforts we are proud to present an excerpt from a Ken Bruen novel and Damon puts the final touches on the issue by getting us a look at TIm Eldred's Grease Monkey II.

It is our goal to make Heliotrope a quarterly patron of storytelling and opinion. We will crash and burn before we settle for stagnate comfort. Dreams not acted upon are dreams wasted. Proust once said, "If a little dreaming is dangerous, the cure for it is not to dream less but to dream more, to dream all the time."

In this issue we have some of the most dangerous.

- Jay Tomio

Moon at the Starry Diner

by Tina Connolly

Air like a mushroom. Dense. Pocketed with holes, moments where Jem could breathe normally. She filled her lungs, drinking in the new atmosphere, dazzled by the blue-black sky. Starlight like diamonds, winking around her feet.

The clouds were spongy. Jem's calf muscles already stung from the exertion. Her toes were pinched in her sleek calfskin boots - they were made for walking from the subway to the office along firm level sidewalk. Not cloud-hopping.

"It's freaking gorgeous," she said. Jem was not a complainer.

She turned to look back at her companion, to see how he'd changed. It was almost a game, to guess if Moon would fit into the new surroundings. Perhaps he would be a comet, or a constellation.

He was a bear.

Moon made a handsome bear - symmetrical and golden-brown, not terribly large. He had beady black eyes that looked startlingly like Moon's human ones - or at least, the human ones he'd worn when she'd met him. He scratched at his side with claws so dark she could only pick them out by their glints. "Ursa Minor, what?" he said in a grumble. "No, go on."

Jem waded through cloud back to Moon and tucked her bare arm under his furry one. It was tickly and warm. She wanted to snuggle all the way under his paw, but she didn't quite dare. Moon in his last incarnation as a skyhook had been quite prickly. "You have fish breath," she informed him. "Did that come with the change?"

"Oughta ask someone who knows, right?" said Moon. "The last thing I had to eat was two changes ago, when I was a Volvo, and that was diesel. Should diesel smell like fish?"

Jem shrugged.

Moon's furry belly rumbled. He shook Jem's arm loose to rub it with both paws. "Now you've done it," he said. He tilted his muzzle sideways, listening to his new body. "Fish, I think. Honeybees. Small to medium-size vertebrates. Twigs."

"There's a diner up ahead," said Jem. She took Moon's shoulder and pointed him at it. It was silver and rounded, an optimistic trailer with windows of moonlight and blinding stars for wheels. A red neon sign sprung from the roof, glowed: The Starry Diner.

"Suspiciously convenient," said Moon. "Shall we?"

He tucked her arm back under his own and for a moment they were two lovers playing tourists, ready to crash a locals bar and laugh.

But only for a moment.

Jem opened the door for Moon and his claws clicked on metal as he entered. The diner was half full, noisy with echoing voices and the clatter of fork on plate. She threaded her way past a three-headed dog drinking coffee to the first empty booth.

Moon was lagging behind, peering into the back corner of the diner, his body alert. "Be right back."

"You have to use the little bears' room?" said Jem.

Moon ignored all jibes about his nature. His golden brown body lurched between the checkerboard of tables. His hips knocked against the tentacles of a giant pink squid, against the elbows of a man in a white cowboy hat. His shoulders tensed with the effort of controlling his new form.

Moon disappeared into the back and Jem sighed and leaned back against the gold vinyl booth. She spread her fingers along the shiny table. Maybe this clash would be restful. Maybe Horace would pick a more subtle battle. She could use some calm time with Moon, even in this form.

There was a tabletop jukebox on the inner wall of the booth. "I love a bear," Jem told it, and she put a quarter in for The Teddy Bears' Picnic.



"What's that, honey?" The robot waitress rolled to a halt at the booth. A keyboard extended from her midsection.

"I love a bear," repeated Jem. She toyed with her paper napkin. "Except sometimes he's a Volvo, or a Venus Flytrap, or a shed. How can anyone love a shed? He wasn't even waterproof."

"I loved a programmer once," the waitress said. Her metal fingers clinked softly on her lips. "Love is funny. Seizes you in the grey space between off and on; sets your circuits to misfiring. You want coffee?"

"Two, please," said Jem. "And toast, and two sunny-side up eggs. Plus a packet of hon-

ey and something fishy for the bear.”

“Ding ding,” said the waitress, cocking her finger at Jem. She rolled off.

Moon lurched back. He was studying the other patrons as he returned, and it made him bang smack into an older man with plastic glasses and knock him from his shiny gold stool. There was a rumble of apology as he lifted the man back up onto the seat, ripping his brown button-down in the process.

She wondered what he would be like without his work; if an unchanging Moon could ever be a domesticated Moon. “I’m not a complainer, you know,” she informed him as he returned.

The bear squeezed into the booth. “I think there’s trouble over in the corner.” He peered down at the dented silverware. He tried to pick up his fork with one paw. Then two.

“Already? Can’t we even eat first?”

Moon jerked his furry head towards his left shoulder. “The guy in the white cowboy hat? I think that’s Horace. I think this time he’s planned a shoot-out.”

Jem looked at the cowboy. He was tall and rangy and his hair curled in a blond mullet down the back of his neck. “I don’t know,” she said. “It doesn’t look like Horace to me.”

“He changes, you know he changes.” Moon finally managed to scoop the fork onto one paw. He cupped his paw around it and carefully turned his forelimb over, but the metal slipped on his pads, and the fork spun out and clattered on the table. “Dolgonnit,” said Moon. “Why don’t I get to pick what I am? Horace does.”

“Maybe because you’re the fighter,” said Jem. “The reactionary. Maybe if you chose the battles...” Behind Moon, the cowboy was already standing, gesturing with his coffee mug.

The fork clattered again. “No, it doesn’t work like that. That’s just not how things are. I can’t explain it. Oh, good, fish.”

The robot waitress set down a plate of trout and a pot of honey in front of Moon. Then Jem’s plate, and in the center of the shiny table she set an industrial-size mixing bowl of warm water. A finger bowl for the bear. “I’ll just clear this away,” she said, and scooped the fork and knife from underneath Moon’s paws. She winked at Jem. “Anything else?”

“We’re good, thanks,” said Jem. She tried not to look at the cowboy, or at the squid, who was now waving the man’s hat in one pink tentacle.

Moon fell on his fish, spearing it with one claw and tearing chunks off with his teeth. Foam formed around his muzzle. Bits of trout flecked the scalloped placemats.

Jem swirled her toast through her egg. “I’m not getting any younger.”

“You’re not getting any older, either. Are you going to eat that?”

“No, I know that. But my world is - they’re slipping further away from me as I stay still. Soon I won’t be able to fit back in with anyone I once knew.” Egg yolk covered her plate. “Do you think you’ll ever get to stop fighting, Moon? Defeat Horace for good?”

The black eyes shone wild. “I feel as though I’m closer to getting the bastard. That could be an illusion. Do you want to go home?”

Jem searched for hurt in the furry face. It wasn’t so much the strange features that were the problem, as it was Moon himself. Even as a Volvo, she’d been able to tell when he was cranky, or not quite so cranky. But hurt - never.

“Why is there always one who moves and one who follows? Why do I have to be the

girl?”

“What?” He was onto the honey now - scooping the honey with one paw from the pot to his mouth. Behind him, the giant pink squid and cowboy were facing off; the cowboy braced and tugging on his hat, the squid sprawled on top of his shiny table, waving a butter knife.

“God, not again,” said Jem.

“Where?” said Moon. He turned, honey pooling from his paws.

“Can’t we even eat one meal in peace?”

The squid had one tentacle wrapped around the cowboy’s neck now. The diner was clearing out around them; the three-headed dog scampered out the door, followed by a ballerina and a giant spider. The cowboy was turning purple. The robot waitress rolled up behind him and poured coffee on the squid’s tentacle. Even across the diner, Jem heard it sizzle. The blistered tentacle fell free of the cowboy’s neck and the squid’s other tentacles started writhing in response. One grabbed the waitress before she could roll free.

“How do you know which side you’re on?”

“Eh,” said Moon. “Good question.”

Another giant spider sidled out the front door. The cowboy backed up, reaching for his gun, and the squid reached for chairs.

Moon rose from the booth to examine the fight and Jem half stood, ready for retreat.

“Just an old-style brawl, this time. Must be why I’m a bear.” Moon furrowed his brow and his black eyes disappeared in fur. “Seems too simple for Horace...”

A chrome-and-gold barstool sailed over Jem’s head and crashed through the starlit window. Her hand skidded in eggs as she ducked, and her plate flipped onto her pants.

Behind Moon, the giant squid loomed. The captured waitress was banging on it with her keyboard. The squid raised bloated tentacles and one snaked around Moon’s belly.

“Fight it is,” agreed Moon. “Anti-Squid.” He ripped the tentacle’s suckers from his stomach, and turning, slashed streaks of gore from the squid’s pink body. Ammonia cut through the air. A shot cracked glasses. Jem backed away.

There had been other fights that were nicer, subtler. When she’d met Moon, he’d been a defense attorney; Horace his opponent, and that fight had lasted for eight months. Plenty of time to fall in love with an illusion.

Moon’s claws carved through the tentacle that held the waitress, dropping her to the ground with a crash. But in the distraction, the cowboy’s attention had turned to the cash register. He was scooping out bills into his hat. The waitress hollered and rolled after him. The squid squeezed Moon.

It was a tedious fight; like the gladiator sequence, or the car crash as a Volvo. Jem always had to patch him up in the end. And it wasn’t really that she was tired of that as much as it was all very different than she’d thought when she fell in love with a stoop-shouldered idealist with weary hands and eyes that shone fire.

The waitress yelled, her keyboard walloping the cowboy, and then yelled again; a funny scream, cut off at its height. Jem looked at the waitress and the cowboy, and it took her a full ten seconds to realize that neither of them were moving. The robot waitress had her keyboard extended for another good smack; the cowboy was cowering behind his white hat. Bills were falling, or had fallen from his hat – they hung in the air. They were frozen.

Moon and the squid were frozen, too. The squid had Moon off the ground and a coffee cup with a flying splash of coffee hung motionless above Jem and Moon's booth.

There was total silence in the little diner.

Total stillness, too. Jem was the only moving body. There was one stabbing moment of panic as she wondered if everything in the world had frozen but her; part of the rules that she still didn't understand. Perhaps some balance had been tipped and she would now spend eternity in a diner, eating lemon meringue pie and crying in her coffee cup and dusting the frozen Moon.

But then a voice behind her spoke. A voice with a mouthful of food. "You dislike our fighting, don't you?" Horace.

"What did you do to them?" Moon's jaws were open in a growl, or cry.

"Ah, now that's, that's a fallacy." A swallowing sound and the words cleared. "I did nothing to them; I merely sped us up."

Jem turned away from Moon to stare at the man on the barstool. He was utterly unlike any previous incarnation she'd seen him in. He looked like the slovenly regular of a small-town cafeteria; his shoulders were hunched and his plastic glasses were smudged. One hand held greasy toast. And yet she was used to men changing on her. She just saw him as Horace. Moon's antithesis. "I told Moon you weren't the cowboy," she said.

"You're sharp," he said. "But ya know, you don't need me to tell you that."

"Please. Tell me what I could possibly need you for." She pulled a chair between them and clasped the back of it with her hands. If she looked at Horace, she couldn't see Moon's rigid face. Her grip hid the tremble in her fingers.

"To be the one who smoothes things over, ya know? End our fighting. Get Moon all to yourself."

"And how would that work?"

Horace spread one hand. "Walk away with him. Tell him to never finish this fight."

Jem's knuckles whitened on the chair.

"Logically, ya know, if he stops fighting me, he'll stop changing," said Horace. "Now look, I'll show you how it could be. Picture an island, the shape of a crescent moon."

He pointed at the tabletop jukebox back in Jem's booth and snapped his fingers at it, a dry, whispery snap. Kokomo began to play. "The sand is whiter than stardust. No, it is stardust, burnished by the thousand tails of a thousand blinding comets. On one tip of the crescent a thousand palm trees sway, and from their branches fall round green coconuts. Okay. Do you like coconuts?"

"No."

"Then when you crack the coconuts, out flows not coconut milk, no, not coconut milk, but rum. And the coconut meat is..."

"Pineapple." It came out in a whisper.

"Ah, but I haven't described the pineapple plantation. There's a hundred acres of pineapple, ya know, and a hundred burnished men in short shorts to pick it. We'll make the coconut meat be hash or," and he waved his toast, "something like that. And at the top of the highest mountain -"

"It sounds lovely," said Jem. She lifted one hand, put it right back on the chair. "But

wouldn't Moon still be a bear?"

Horace scratched his thin hair. "There exists that possibility. I can't change Moon, ya know. I can't make him do anything."

"I feel that," Jem admitted.

"And you must admit being a bear is a better life than being a shed or a proper noun," he said, waving the last bite of toast at her. "I could always make you a bear, and those pineapples into salmon." He licked margarine from his fingers. "There's been a couple times I've wanted to acquaint you with this opportunity, ya know, only Moon was something impossible. You wouldn't really enjoy spending eternity with a leaky shed."

"But if Moon goes into hibernation, you win, don't you? Not a truce, not a smoothing over. You win."

Horace pulled his plastic glasses from his nose and wiped them with his stained napkin. "Well, what's 'win', really?" he said. "These little skirmishes we have – they're kind of, they're kind of futile, ya know? Moon wins, I win...neither of us really gets anything done. Think of spending your life never accomplishing anything." He put his glasses back on and smiled a wrinkled smile at her. "There are days I'd like to have a companion too, ya know. I'd like to have that island with, with the rum coconuts, and the short-skirted harem." He crumpled the dirty napkin in his hand and tucked it under the empty plate. "Maybe I'm offering you what I can't have."

Jem curled and uncurled her fingers on the chair, staring at Horace's plate, seeing Horace's island. Seeing Moon's torn face. A salmon hatchery, an island paradise - but no, what Horace was really offering her - giving her - was knowledge.

Horace thought she had the power to convince Moon.

She could take Moon away from the flat tires and the squid marks, the scimitar wounds, the endless fighting. And oh, Horace would give her an island if she did.

But could her Moon really fit into that vision of island bliss? By the end of the first day he'd be banging around, trying to find something to fix.

And Jem? What vision did she fit into?

The moons of Horace's glasses reflected starlight at her. He half-smiled, grey eyebrows raised, a puppy expecting to be told no. The Girl from Ipanema started on the jukebox.

"No," said Jem.

For a moment, Horace looked so disappointed that she felt sorry for him. Then he looked down at his watch. "Well, then," he said. "I guess that's all the time you've got."

She was watching Horace, and then he was gone, and only his plastic glasses remained. They hung in the air after he was gone. She reached out to touch them – but as she did, they fell, and then a bottle came whizzing by her, and then a shot, and then a packet of creamer.

The island music was subsumed by the thumps and crashes of the struggle. Moon was growling and the robot waitress was yelling, "Don't touch the till!" again and again. The cowboy was down now, crawling on hands and knees for the door.

But Moon, her Moon, was still entangled in the air, and so Jem grabbed the first two things to hand and headed into their fight.

A tentacle swiped at her ankle. She jumped and pitched into the giant squid's body, instinctively throwing the first thing she'd grabbed at its eyes. It turned out to be the honey pot,

and the sticky smear of honey did seem to confuse it, because there was a sharp intake of air behind her as Moon wrested free.

Moon growled and tore, separating the tentacle from the body. The squid keened. Jem found that the other thing she'd grabbed was a fork, and she jabbed at its body, releasing puncture wounds of gore and ammonia. At its center seemed the safest place to be; it couldn't curl its tentacles back to get her. Or maybe that was because Moon had torn off another one, and then another, and then the squid spasmed, its last tentacle flailing. It crashed through a table and lay there, shuddering.

All Jem's muscles felt hot and tight and her hand painfully gripped her slimy fork. She shivered, and then she was coughing, gasping for clean air and a new environment, and Moon gently pushed her away from the dying squid.

It seemed to take a long time for her breathing to slow. There was a water pitcher on the counter near where Horace had sat, and she drank from it with shaking fingers. It was mostly ice hitting her nose and then a packet of creamer. She fished that out and looked at it with astonishment.

The robot waitress rolled toward her, the cowboy's hat clutched in one hand and her eyes whirling. "More coffee?" she said. "More coffee? More coffee?" She banged at her head with a metal fist. "Must reboot," she said, rolling away and banging. "Must reboot. More coffee? More coffee."

There was a final squeal from the squid. Moon shuffled back to her, a tentacle falling from one paw. One shoulder dragged. He looked as though he'd been digging through garbage; he had crumbled bacon in his fur. Coffee aroma steamed from him, then a sharper reek - he was slimy with squid juice. Jem's pants were covered in more squid and egg and her boots were soaked with creamer. Miraculously, the bowl at their booth still had an inch of warm water in it, and Jem attempted to wipe the squid from Moon.

It was mostly a lost cause. Moon let her try, though, and was perfectly still while she wiped his belly with a paper napkin. On the other end of the booth, The Girl from Ipanema finally finished and Bing Crosby began in on Sing Me a Song of the Islands.

She looked up at Moon and found him looking at her. He was really very handsome for a bear. Jem threw the slimy napkin to the floor.

"Please?" said Jem. "One dance?"

In the trashed diner, Moon pulled her out onto the floor and into a waltz.

One paw stepped hard on her boot, a claw tugged at the ruined leather. There was a rumble of embarrassment from his furry chest. "Remember, it's not how well the bear dances," said Moon.

Jem leaned into him then, and he lifted her till her feet rested on his hind paws. He whirled her around tables, through streams of coffee and squid, the cold starlight pouring through the windows and Bing singing to them alone.

The last bars of the orchestra faded and Jem opened her eyes. They were back outside in the spongy clouds, but the diner was gone. The air was chill and the light was blue.

In Jem's arms was a fish.

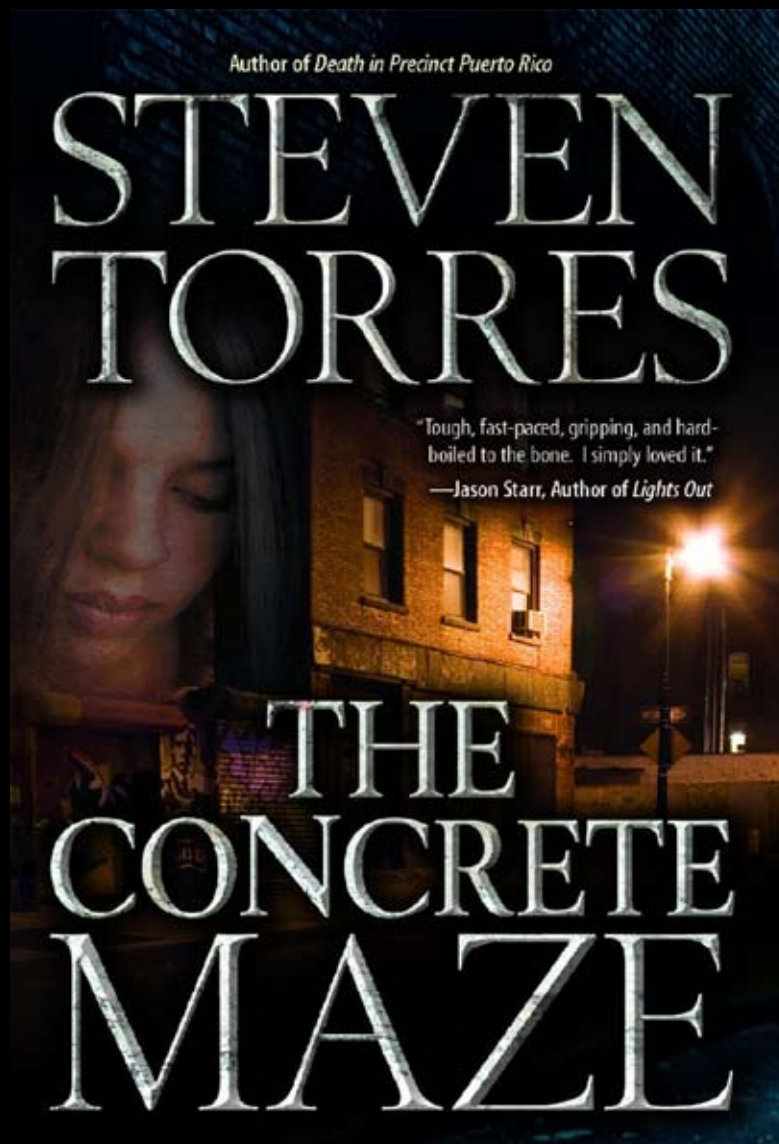
It looked down at its silver body, rolling one round eye. Moon's deep voice came out of cold fishy lips. "At least we'll likely get to go swimming, right?" he said. "A bear in a diner is

one thing, but a fish in a diner – that would just be silly.”

A laugh trembled on Jem’s lips. Moon’s tail flopped salt spray in her face and she cradled the fish close, pulling her shirt hem around it. Everything stank of egg and brine. “We’ll go to an island where a thousand palm trees sway.”

“Something wrong?” said the fish. “You look funny.”

“No,” said Jem. She brushed at the wet in her eyes. “I love the moon, that’s all. I love the clever, frustrating, vigilant moon.”



He Angles, She Refracts

by Rob Vagle

In the mirror above her bed, Evy had no reflection.

She sat up and the silk sheet slipped away from her breasts, exposing her skin to the cool, air-conditioned apartment. A mirror along each wall left no room for windows, and in each mirror a reflection moved. One Evy smiled at her, one winked, and another one waved. The golden tan, sinuous curves, and locks of blond hair--all bedroom reflections accounted for. Except for the mirror above where rose petals dotted an empty bed with wrinkled sheets and strewn pillows. It looked like the aftermath of lovemaking and then it dawned on her. While she slept someone had been up there with her reflection making love.

She kicked away the sheet, swung her legs over the edge of the bed and sat staring at her reflection in the wall. The reflection blew her a kiss.

When her mother had taught her to love herself she told Evy reflections could fall out of love. "Beware of the seducers," she had said. "They don't adore themselves, but adore the images of others. Lose your images and you'll lose yourself."

She never believed such people existed. At least not until now.

Her reflection frowned, waiting for Evy to blow her a kiss back. Evy only smiled. She stood and walked across the plush purple carpet and out of the bedroom, fearing other reflections would be gone.

Down the hallway from her bedroom a mirror ran the length of each wall. This was her favorite spot. One mirror reflected off the other so when she walked down this hallway a whole line of her stretched out from each side. She was the center of this chain, a line-up without end. A line-up without a missing reflection.

In the kitchen the mirror table, counter top, and all electric appliances held her reflection. In the living room all the walls held her image.

When she looked down at the end table next to the leather couch, no face looked back at her from the mirrored surface.

She turned away.

She didn't want to believe it. Two reflections missing. She felt as though two of her limbs had been cut off. She wondered how many more might be gone.

The doorbell buzzed and she walked to the door, staring at the mirror there. Her reflection ran a hand over bare skin from hip to thigh.

She punched the intercom button. "Yes."

"Service," replied a woman.

Evy opened the door. A short woman with a round face stood in the hallway. She wore the baby-blue colored uniform all servers wore. In her arms she carried a stack of food boxes. Without looking at her the server walked across the living room, and the walls didn't hold her reflection. Evy felt ignored by the server and that she noticed this surprised her. Usually she was too occupied with staring at her reflections to notice the server and it never occurred to

her the server ignored her too.

She wondered if she might become a server if she lost all her reflections. She had heard most servers were born without them.

She peeked in the kitchen doorway and watched the server work. The woman was smiling. Evy wondered how anyone could be happy without reflections, even if they were born that way. How did she keep her face so clean and put that apple-red lipstick on so neatly?

The server deposited the empty boxes in the trash compactor and turned and caught Evy staring at her. "What are you looking at?" she asked.

Evy turned away and pretended nothing was wrong, staring at her reflection as she should have been doing.

The server walked to the door and left the apartment.

Evy realized she had so many other reflections to fawn over and she was ignoring them. She walked towards the bedroom and midway down the hallway something caught her eye. She moved closer to the mirror and looked along the line of reflected Evys. Far down the line she saw a vacant space between two reflections. Further down there was another space, a spot perfect for an image of her. Further still, another. The chain was broken, segmented, and falling apart.

She ran to her bedroom. The mirrors along every wall and on the ceiling held nothing except for a vacant room. Her skin prickled with goose bumps. Cold wind seemed to be blowing from every mirror and Evy found the blazing red rose petals in the mirror above her bed repulsive and a reminder of things spinning quickly out of control.

There had to be someplace to go for this problem, but mother had only given the warning and didn't get into the details because that would have been time away from her reflections.

Evy grabbed a silk robe and rushed out of the bedroom. She stopped again to look at her reflections in the hallway, the robe draped over her forearm. A moment ago only a handful of her reflections were gone and now every other one was gone. Beginning with an empty space to her left and to her right, the spaces alternated down the length of the chain. Too many empty spaces left nothing for the remaining reflections to hang onto. The nearest reflection looked scared. Evy felt the same way.

She ran to the kitchen and then to the living room and when she noticed no mirror held her reflection she covered her mouth with her hand.

Evy ran back to the hallway and found the two mirrors empty of her. Those mirrors held a vast empty space. Her reflections had to be in there somewhere. She wanted to break through the glass surface and run searching for an image to love.

The doorbell buzzed, a constant irritating noise from someone on the outside who didn't know when to let up on the buzzer.

She went to the intercom, punched a button, and shouted, "Stop that!"

The buzzing stopped and a male voice said, "My dear Evy, I have the most beautiful thing you have ever seen."

She put on the robe and opened the door. A short, bald man wore a brown corduroy jacket over a white jump suit. The man smiled and pointed at his sunglasses. The mirror lenses reflected an empty doorway. "Look here," he said, "isn't this the most beautiful person you've ever seen?"

Evy, feeling threatened, backed into the apartment.

The man frowned and looked at the door next to her. His reflection was there but not hers. Then he looked back at her and cocked his head. "Oh, I'm sorry. Where's your reflection?"

She swung the door to shut out this freak with glasses that reflected nothing of her. The man stopped the door with an extended hand.

"I know where you can find your reflections, Evy," he said.

"What have you done with me? What have you done with every single one of me?" she asked.

He offered his bone-white hand. She backed away. He was one of the seducers.

The man smiled. "My name is Jimmy," he said. "You don't need your reflections to show how beautiful you are. I'm the one who can shower you with praise, touch you where you want to be touched, love you the way you should be loved."

She threw her hands to her face and covered her eyes. "This can't be happening to me," she said. "I don't want anyone else. I just want me. Me, me, me!"

His breath smelled of peppermint and she knew he stood very close. He pried her hands away from her face and said, "Look into my eyes."

She squeezed her eyes shut like a petulant child. This man held nothing for her. She wanted to look into her own eyes.

He spoke again, "Evy, you really are a goddess and if you open your eyes you will see."

She opened them. And she had to look down at him. From the glossy pupils of his onyx eyes two reflections looked back at her. She pressed her hands against her mouth and squealed.

"There you are, Evy," Jimmy said, each word sending a whiff of peppermint at her. "Isn't that who you're looking for?"

"Oh, good me," she said and rested her hands on his chest. "Oh, good me."

Jimmy looked down at her hands, taking away her reflections. One corner of his mouth curled up in a smile.

"Oh!" She lifted his chin to look at herself again.

Her heart raced, she felt giddy, and she grasped at his corduroy jacket. All she wanted now was more--she wanted to see the full length of her reflection and she wanted to see it now.

"Oh, beautiful," she said, her breath quickening.

Jimmy stepped back and replaced the glasses over his eyes. "You want more?"

"Oh, yes," she said. "Take those off."

She reached for the glasses and Jimmy stepped back into the corridor. He gestured for her to follow.

"I can't go out there," she said, thinking of all the mirrors out there. "I'm not--decent!"

"I will give you more of you, all the multiplicities, all in full length. Come with me, Evy, let me take you to the garden of you."

As Jimmy drove, she noticed the world.

Every building was a cube shaped mirror, three to each block. She wondered how she ever found her way around with one building indistinguishable from the next. She hoped to catch a glimpse of herself in the mirror-walls of these buildings, but each one held disappointment.

People on the sidewalk gazed at their images as they walked. They barely acknowledged each other and they never noticed the servers walking among them.

She saw a man without a reflection, but he wasn't dressed like a server. He had blond hair to his shoulders and his expanse of chest bulged out of his black satin robe. She made eye contact with him and she stared at him, turning around in her seat to watch him watching her as the distance between them increased.

"We're here," Jimmy said as he stopped the car.

They stepped out and Jimmy led her to the entrance. Tall double doors, each with a warped mirror stretched Jimmy's reflection into a long and narrow line. She stopped, her feet incapable of another step.

"All of them are in there?" she asked.

Jimmy pulled a ring of keys out of his pocket. He looked at her over the rim of his glasses. "Every single one. I know you're jealous that they all came to me, but that doesn't mean we all can't live together."

As he inserted the key into the lock she wondered if her images could ever love her again and she wondered if she could really take them back. Then the words of her mother came back to her: Lose your images to him and he'll have you too.

"Ready? Let's go in."

"No," she said. "Can you just bring me some of my reflections? I'm sure some of them want to stare back at me. I mean, really, look at yourself. Who would want you?"

"All right, Evy, one moment." Jimmy opened one door wide enough for him to slip through. He returned in a moment with a plastic bucket filled with marbles and shoved the bucket at her.

"There," he said. "If you don't want to come in, you can take these reflections with you."

She moaned. Those weren't just marbles. They were mirrors. Dozens of tiny faces stared back at her. At first she didn't think those faces were hers. The balls made the faces grotesque like Jimmy's reflection in the door. She recognized her hair, her eyes, but her nose was squashed like a pig's and her face was bent back and narrow.

"Evy, now you can take those and get on with your life or you can come in here and see the beautiful images of you. Take something less or come in for something more. Are you willing to settle for skewed images--oh, so ugly--in little mirror balls?"

"They look so frightened," she said. Their mouths were big black holes as their lips moved, trying to tell her something.

"Go on, Evy. Leave. I'll be in here surrounded by beauty." Jimmy tucked his glasses away in his jacket and stepped inside.

"Wait! You can't leave them like this. You can't leave me like this."

"This is your last chance," Jimmy said. "Leave here or come inside and head for the light."

She ran past him, her bare feet thumping against concrete. A spot of light shone on the floor in the middle of the room. She jumped inside the light and twirled around to look for Jimmy. The piece of floor she stood on began to rise and she bent her knees slightly to keep her balance. She set the pail down at her feet and looked up as she moved closer to the light.

When the platform stopped rising she saw movements in the shadows. Before she could figure out what she was seeing, light flooded the room. Mirrors came at her from the walls,

up from the floor, down from the ceiling. The ones above her and below her tilted to capture her image within phosphorescent frames. She plastered her hands to her chest and twirled around gazing at each reflection.

The room had changed as if she were inside a ball lined with mirrors.

"There they are, Evy," Jimmy said, his voice coming from somewhere. "Aren't they beautiful?"

She loved the way the light stuck to her skin and got tangled in her hair. Each reflection smiled at her and winked back when she winked.

"Oh, Jimmy," she said, "when can I take them home?"

The lowest ring of mirrors below her pedestal dropped down and swung away, exposing Jimmy standing on the floor. "I'm not getting through to you, am I? This is their home now. They want to stay."

Stay? All of her reflections nodded their heads.

Jimmy stepped onto a platform. He pulled out a hand-sized black box from a side pocket of his coat and pressed a button that raised him to her level.

He stepped from his platform to hers and draped an arm around her shoulders. His touch made her shiver and she would have moved away but she was afraid of falling off the platform. Her reflections weren't alone anymore. In every mirror a Jimmy had an arm around an Evy. Although she shrank from his touch, every one of her reflections pressed their bodies against him. Their hands moved across his chest and belly. Some kissed Jimmy on the head.

"You're home, Evy," he whispered in her ear. "There's enough room for all of you."

She turned to him and said, "How could they love anyone but me?"

"I'll love you, Evy," he said.

"No," she said.

"Look! They love me."

"I don't want you. I want them. Only them."

He gripped her tighter. "Evy . . ."

"No!" she cried and pushed him away.

Jimmy stumbled back, his heels slipping over the edge of the platform. He waved his arms in circles, teetering for balance.

"Evy!" And he fell.

He cursed when he landed with a thud. She peered down. Jimmy rolled on the floor, writhing in pain.

She looked at the mirrors. Jimmy still remained next to each of her reflections. None of them rejected Jimmy. Her reflections shook their heads and scowled at her. She never knew how ugly she looked with a scowl on her face. She picked up the pail and with her free hand she grabbed a handful of balls and flung them out at the mirrors.

Cracks stretched across the glass of several mirrors and shards of mirror slipped off the walls within the frames and fell away, shattering against the mirrors below. She grabbed another handful of balls and turned, glancing at all her reflections holding up their hands and shaking their heads. She grunted and threw some balls above her and continued to turn, throwing more balls in every direction. Below her, Jimmy cried out as glass crashed around him. She continued to spin around, growing dizzy, intoxicated by the violence and the rage

she felt beating in her chest.

She flung the last of the balls and threw the empty pail after them. She dropped to her knees and gripped the edge of the platform so hard that her knuckles turned white. The pail clunked against empty frames on its way down. Shattered glass falling to the floor faded like the letup of rain. The dizziness continued and she closed her eyes wishing it to stop.

Jimmy's sobs faded away as if he had left the room.

Silence.

She still wouldn't open her eyes.

Not until she felt and heard the hum of the machinery. Over the edge of the platform, the floor came at her. She let go of the edge and sat there with her legs under her.

"Now we'll never get them back," someone said.

She turned and rose to her feet. A man stood inside the entryway beside a control panel, but it wasn't Jimmy. This was the man she had made eye contact with on the street, the man with the long blond hair.

She touched her forehead and staggered to the door, barely aware of how the glass melted under her feet. She had never seen a broken mirror before. The man moved directly into her path. She walked right into him and her hands slapped against his chest.

"He took my reflections too," he said. "What are we going to do without them?"

She walked around him toward the daylight slanting in from the doorway.

"Help me," he called to her.

She stared at the sidewalk as she walked, seeing the feet of strangers passing by. She never looked at the walls. They made her feel invisible.

The man behind her shouted again. "Stop!"

Two pairs of feet, both clad in black leather boots, stopped in front of her and a hand reached out and grabbed hers. She looked up, startled, and held her breath. Two women holding hands stood before her and she recognized the one who held her hand as her server.

She looked away and attempted to walk around the women, but she gripped her hand hard and pulled Evy down close to her face.

Evy stared at the sky as the server whispered, "I know you recognize me. It's really not all bad, you know, not having a reflection. When someone takes away your reflection they can only take away what you see. They can't take away what others see."

She looked at the server. This woman probably never had a reflection in her life and what did she know about it? The woman turned and walked away with her friend before Evy could say anything.

Someone touched her shoulder and she turned around and looked at the man who was following her. A smudge of dirt streaked his right cheek.

"Please. You're alone now. I'm alone and . . ." He tilted his head and said, "Your hair is a mess." For some reason under his gaze she didn't feel invisible.

She crossed her arms. "Well, your face is streaked with dirt."

"Where?" He touched his left cheek.

"Here," she said and reached out and wiped the dirt away from his right cheek. She licked her fingers and applied moisture to get rid of the last of it. Stubble on his face moved under her fingertips.

“There,” she said and stood back to look at him. His skin was as golden as hers and with a shave the man would be perfect, but to look at someone else in this way seemed so wrong.

She turned and walked away.

“Wait!” he shouted. “Can I brush your hair?”

She looked back. The man pulled a brush out the side pocket of his robe and she realized she was smiling.

The man did another head tilt. “You’re so much more beautiful when you smile.”

She thought the head tilt was adorable, but she didn’t say anything. Not yet. First, she would allow him to brush her hair and tell her how beautiful she was.



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Red-Haired Man in a Sweater

by Brendan Connell

From the Private Papers of Dr. Black

(The following case was related by Professor Kaltenbach, of Bonn, Germany)

Mr. X. Eyes neuropathic. Skin creamy, grey, marked with purple blotches. Patient highly intellectual, of refined manners, though clearly afflicted with moral degeneracy. He believes himself to have been painted by Lucian Freud. When questioned about the logical ramifications of this absurd theory he becomes surly, stubbornly obstinate, revealing a lack of proper breeding in the process. He claims to be worth 1.2 million pounds sterling. Though Dr. Heuzé (*Archives de l'Anthropologie bizarre*, 1894, vol viii) mentions the case of a man who believed himself to be made of porcelain, I do not believe another case quite like that which I am presenting you with has yet been recorded. The following interesting document is a statement from the patient himself:

I have never been a fool and that might very well be the reason why I have always suffered so much. A fool accepts his position with a shrug of the shoulders and manages to enjoy his life all the same. A philosopher—I am not ashamed to call myself one—has no choice but to plumb the depths of his being, to dissect it like some ambitious anatomist would a corpse. How frightening

then to find that the great ocean before you is nothing more than a teacup, and realize that your own personality is canvas-thin.

But is not personality something developed in childhood? A man without uncle or aunt, father or mother, brother or sister—whose past is nothing more than a palette;—where could such a man have gained a personality? A painted man, unlike one issued from a womb, is born completely matured—a maturity both stunted and pure, narrow and as disappointingly profound as some cosmic syllable muttered between yawns. The odd thing about being a painting is this: one has only one unalterable mood. A normal man is sometimes happy, sometimes sad. One day he opens his mouth like a horse and neighs in delight at some silly joke; the next his lips droop and copious liquid flows from his eyes. I on the other hand am always the same. The blasé expression you see today was there yesterday and, no matter what might happen, will be there tomorrow. I have a single emotion: melancholy boredom. Yes, this weariness you see is a constant and to calculate its numerical value would be as complicated and fruitless as calculating the atomic depth of a glass of schnapps.

I have had women fall in love with me. I don't know why, as I am certainly not handsome. But I have never fallen in love with a woman. You can love a painting, but do not expect it to return the emotion. Whether others are in possession of a soul, I cannot say. But I am certain that I myself do not have one. A sickly ego: yes. Masterpieces after all are nothing more than an ego dressed in paints or plaster or sometimes paper—the meagre glorification of the artist's will. Women have loved me, I suppose, in the mad hope of gaining some self-esteem. Nothing doing. I am symbolic of hopelessness and there is nothing jolly about me.

When Freud painted me, he used his brush like a weapon. The impasto was not terribly thick, but I believe if one looks closely the brush strokes can still be seen.

He gave me a distinctive physiognomy. My nose is small, somewhat snub, not altogether unlike that of a suck-

ling pig. I have a thick neck. My chin is clefted. My lower lip is thin, my upper fat, making me appear almost beaked. And yet I am not ugly, almost handsome, in a way that only sentimentalists and libertines could understand. I am clothed drably in a grey sweater and a pair of loose, dark green corduroy trousers; but am thankful for these garments, for they protect me from being the lemon-fleshed nude I would otherwise have been.

I am not a portrait, but rather a conglomeration of many people—a sort of patched together puzzle—a real product of the studio. My eyes are those of Erasmus, my hands Pope Paul III. My body parts are lifted from great paintings of the past, and studies of obtuse modern day models—a baker, a financier, then a youth paid to strip naked and show his skin to my maker.

I don't like to refer to myself as a work of modern art, for the only thing abstract about me is my mentality, the only thing conceptual my grim absurdity.

The incidents in my life are numerous, and probably not uninteresting from a scientific or sadistic point of view.

My first owner was an English gentleman whose name I can no longer remember. His flat stank horribly of cats, of which he had two—lounging balls of fur which for him I imagine took the place of wife, children, prostitute and lover.

I told the fellow that I found the animals vile, but he did not listen. He repulsed me, treated me like an insensible object and I sacrificed the warm comfort of his filth for the sidewalk, which my feet sought out instinctively as two orphans would a tureen of motherly love.

This trillion-faceted world will always provide a corner for a man willing to play the part of a machine. I worked as a factory hand, living in obscurity, earning just enough to pay for shelter, a few crusts of bread and an occasional piece of meat. The truth is that such occupations are the last refuge of genius—a quality which has long since fled the haunts of the rich who, in their sleek luxury, have become too lazy to form an original thought or emotion. Was not a Van Gough once found in a chicken coop?

That manufactory in North London, that landmark of the city's industrial heritage whose high brick walls were decorated with broken glass, had colouring as sombre as a piece by Millet. A huge chimney poured out black smoke. Workmen, mostly foreigners, Asians and Eastern Europeans, moved about with sluggish fortitude, their brows contracted, twisted in resignation—these men impaling themselves on their meaningless fates like ancient Roman soldiers on the cold spears of the Alamanni. Occasionally one of these nameless men, one of these heroes of the age of petroleum, would get sucked in by a machine, turned into a great lump of ground flesh—spat out in bloody gobs that a bow-legged janitor would collect while grumbling.

I lived according to the clock. Lunch break at twelve on the dot. Visit to the pub at exactly a quarter to seven. A jacket potato beneath a coagulation of melted cheese. The squeak of female voices. Stagger back to my little flat.

One Saturday, after letting my lips extract a pint of Old Familiar from the depths of a chilly pub, I wandered, from Regent's Park to St. James's, kicking a can and then a pebble and then a stick that lay in my path. I crossed over Westminster Bridge and let my feet make their way along the embankment. I gazed about me with suitable abstraction, soon however finding myself called back from reverie by the unpleasant yelping of a quite young water spaniel which my feet had decided to kick along in the same way they had the objects previously mentioned.

I scrutinized my feet and the dog, finding in their mutual revolutions a vague sense of oneness with the universe around me. The wind did not stir. The world only quivered. I knelt down, examined the animal more closely and

found that it was something like a piece by George Stubbs. I put out my hand and it treated it with affection, massaging my fingertips with a tiny little pink tongue, wet and soft as the tail of a goldfish.

It was without a collar; undoubtedly without an owner. I put it in the crook of arm and took it home with me.

Though I do not dislike dogs, I cannot stand their barking—an unpleasant form of assertiveness, an inappropriate reaction to the frustration of their primary needs—and I much prefer the singing of birds. I considered having the animal de-barked, having its laryngeal tissue extracted from its throat. But what a lot of trouble, that cruel surgery of convenience! And then I recalled the words of Kant when he stated that birds do not instinctively know how to sing but learn to do so. I went to the British Library and took out the works of Conradi and Portmann as well as Witchell's *The Evolution of Bird Song, with Observations on the Influence of Heredity and Imitation*.

I saw clearly the path that lay before me. I purchased recordings and visited aviaries.

First I taught Tikvah (so I named the spaniel) the one-note songs, those of the laughing gull, red-breasted nuthatch and ruffed grouse. The creature adapted himself to these so well that it was but a short time before we had advanced to the two-note calls of the prothonotary warbler, soft as the stroke of a sable brush, and then the delightful call of the whiskered tern. Finally we arrived at the three note songs: the eastern wood pee-wee, the ruby-crowned kinglet and the post-copulatory call of the winter wren, all of which Tikvah gained a remarkable proficiency in imitating.

My concern with the animal's education however distracted me from my work and it was not long before I found myself terminated. After lavishing my supervisor with epithets in fleshy ochre and azo yellow, as offensive as they were colourful, I returned to my humble flat, my spirits, naturally low, untainted by the occurrence. But fate, like a skilled boxer, often strikes with double fists. My flat had been broken into and I had been robbed of my few meaningless possessions. The dog, Tikvah, was also missing. I celebrated the disaster with three too many aperitifs, slept poorly that night and was roused from my bed late the next morning by the pale disk of the sun groaning at my window.

Days succeeded each other, marked by threats of eviction, meals of potatoes and peas and general unpleasantness.

On one of these day I was at the Bow Road tube station, waiting for a train.

There were very few people there, not more than half a dozen, and one of these was a chubby little man, immaculately dressed and fondling the handle of a black umbrella. It was clear that I interested him, for he passed me and repassed me several times, casting on me a look at once embarrassed and keen, like certain dogs who wish for attention, but are afraid of being beaten.

The man continued to eye me with curiosity, and then, flourishing his umbrella like some agitated, out of practice D'Artagnan, finally approached. "Excuse me, but do you mind if I—"

"Yes?"

"Are you by any chance an, um, Lucian Freud?"

I shrugged my shoulders. "And if I were?"

"Oh, don't think this is the curiosity of a nosey-parker. I am a professional."

He handed me his card.

Leo Krayl

Dealer in fine Pictures

consultations and evaluations

“So are you evaluating me then?” I asked, lacing my words with the appropriate hint of bitterness.

“Why my friend,” he murmured, “I only wished to ascertain . . .”

“Oh yes,” I broke in. “I am a Freud. Does the fact amuse you? Do I inspire you? Do you wish to look for meaning for your undoubtedly insipid life in the dreary shades of my face?”

The man seemed to enjoy this insult, for his face brightened. He obviously considered it as a sign of intimacy and it became instantly clear to me that he was one of those types who become deeply attached to their tormentors.

“It seems rather astounding to find you here in this filthy place,” he continued. “Surely I might be able to help you.”

“Maybe I don’t want help.”

“But it is not merely about what you want,” he said eagerly. “You are a masterpiece, and as such have certain obligations. It is an injustice to have your presence hidden away, without anyone being able to appreciate you. Is it a buyer you lack? Well, I could find a hundred. —Your facial expression is delightfully underplayed!” he suddenly broke out. “Delightfully underplayed—yet mysteriously suggestive.”

“You professionals,” I sneered, “always manage to sugar-coat misery.”

He looked distraught. “I certainly have no desire to misrepresent you—but after all, you must see for yourself that art is subject to various interpretations. Sometimes the viewer has a deeper insight into the work than the artist himself, how much more so the picture. And——”

I let him distribute his words in the air as a magnolia tree might its flower petals in the month of June, indirectly aware that the former were cosmically purposeless. If I had been created a man of vigour, I might have struck him; if a man of ignorance I might have lapped up his words like a starving cat at a dish of milk. As it was I hung in the void, like an icicle, fragily cold, hangs from the eave of a lonely house in Siberia.

I had already missed my train twice. I decided not to miss it a third time.

“I must go,” I said.

“I feel nervous about leaving you here like this. I feel that I might not ever see you again.”

“I don’t guarantee that you will.”

“I have a mind to drag you home with me.”

“Don’t do that. One of us might get damaged.”

He pursed his lips together. “Yes. There is always a risk of damage. But I will not say goodbye, but simply see you again!”

A few days passed during which I drank a good deal more than usual, letting myself drift from disreputable pub to pub like a ghost from room to room in some great crumbling mansion on a hill. I swallowed little absinthes the colour of pond scum, strong glossy ales, and martinis as clear as the water of a Norwegian brook. I let myself be lashed by the laughter of young harlots. I made merry. And soon my wallet was empty of everything but that thin rectangle of card-stock paper.

I decided to call on him. After all, from a strictly physical point of view, my situation was miserable. Happiness was never an option. But the possibility of having physical comfort appealed to me.

The little man was quite delighted to see me, and rubbed his hands together with such avidity that it would not have surprised me if flames had burst forth from them. He guided me through an incongruous forest of antiques, poured me the stiffest of drinks and stuffed an enormous V-shaped cigar between my teeth, murmuring the platitudes of his profession.

His place was full of quadros, for the most part inferior stuff, though there were a few pieces of slight interest: an Emil Nolde which kept making the most awful faces; a Nitsch, a great emasculating splash of blood; an Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, a woman whose face was the most repulsive shade of green and whose whispered innuendoes could not fail but to entice.

Krayl grabbed me by the sleeve and placed me in a Henry IV chair.

“Ah, you will not regret having come to see me,” he murmured. “I have clients—clients—clients who would be delighted to have an opportunity of doing you a good turn. Yes, it will be easy to find a buyer for a painting like you, one that can be smelt, touched, tasted—for people like that sort of thing you know.”

I nodded my head and told him to do as he pleased, my only stipulation being that I wanted a private situation. I did not want to be in some museum, on public exhibition, having to watch day in and day out children picking their noses in front of me and men dressed in visors and shorts shoving their near-sighted eyes against my chest.

“Ah, of course,” he said. “I would not dream of doing you such a disservice. . . . But wait;—I know just the people for you! Only last month they were asking about a Freud. . . . A very prestigious—a very comfortable collection.”

Krayl found a place for me in the collection of one Hanspeter Liniger, of Berlin, at what advantage to himself I never learned.

The Linigers lived in a house designed by Richard Neutra, a blend of art, landscape and practical comfort decorated with a small collection of paintings of only slightly less importance than myself. There were a few pieces by Motherwell and a rather interesting, though diminutive, piece by Mr. Richard Tuttle. He had a nice assortment of lunette shaped pen and inks by Francesco Salviati, all done with a brown wash and heightened with white. In the library there was a Monet—a pond on which a few water lilies rested rather sadly.

I was treated with the utmost respect—more respect than I desired, and was allowed to dine en famille. When they had guests over, I was shown off, and became the subject of a thousand opaque remarks;—such remarks as are designed to make the speaker sound intelligent without actually having to make use of that latter resource: the theoretical frill which they haul out by the yard and throw around like confetti.

“A real comment on the fate of man in an age of social disintegration,” said one man.

“Absolutely chthonic.”

“The eerie lack of depth in the volumetrical treatment leaves one . . .”

“Dazzled.”

“Almost sea-sick.”

“But there are several independent themes at work at once here . . .”

I believe they found my acrid solemnity charming—just as certain geographical locations, Death Valley, the Sahara and such, are, for their very bareness and lack of vegetation, considered beautiful. And the rich love nothing better than to contemplate life’s ugliness from the comfortable depths of their cushions, just as ancient Egyptian pharaohs would, while eating pickled pearls and listening to the strains of the harp, watch their slaves flogged and their impertinent toadies beheaded.

But this sort of bigoted laziness appealed to me.

I lounged around the place, yawned a great deal, slithered about the liquor cabinet, emptying bottles of old Scotch and sampling odd liquors. I was a sort of mascot—a slab of dreary colour to be dragged out in front of dinner guests and pondered over in one’s leisure moments. Unfortunately the rich have many of those—leisure moments.

Mr. Liniger would often fling himself down on the couch and gaze at me from behind the huge knot of his necktie with the weary eyes of a pampered imbecile. It is amazing how many unhappy millionaires there are in the world and, if it were not for the fact that the rich deserved to be despised, I might very well feel some slight measure of pity for them. As it was, I supplied the man with an abundance of poisonous council, sought to show him the nakedness of his soul, which was like a soft, white-skinned gobbet of flesh cast in a whirlwind of glistening black thorns, twice as sharp as hypodermic needles.

He gurgled under my care, like a baby being fed pabulum.

“I always used to consider myself a happy man,” he said.

“It is always better to know the truth.”

“I suppose so . . .”

“You first have to realise how wretched you are in order to be able to weigh life’s options intelligently.”

“Life’s options? But—And—will I ever find . . . true happiness?”

“It is doubtful. You are far too dishonest with yourself. And happiness, truly speaking, is one of those things

which neither exist nor does not exist, nor both exists and does not exist.”

And off he would go, to get lost in crowds of suited men, like a drop of water cast in the sea.

The wife, Sigrid was her name, would often come milling around me, with thermodynamic inference, her robust hips grazing me, her lips, like great wads of raw beef, twisting themselves into an obscene mockery of a smile. She was a dog-eared maiden addicted to Veronal, one of those women who, though they are as carnal as veal, make a pretence of being mystical. She dressed herself in loose, light materialled pastel dresses, such as are worn at séances and intimate outdoor August grills and glanced through books on theosophy, murmuring corrupted phrases of ancient wisdom with the same complacency that politicians speak of freedom and democracy while flagellating cities with million-dollar bombs and drowning third-world nations beneath the thick brown gel of poverty.

Sigrid would parade herself naked before me and, when her husband was not at home, you can be sure her advances were anything but subtle. On occasion, from sheer boredom, I complied with her wishes, making myself ill with the over-ripe, let us say rotten, fruit of her passion which combined, farcically, the pungent aroma of the sewer with the music of a thick-tongued heathen being flayed alive.

Somewhere in that tangle of limbs which resembled the capering of some eight-legged insect crushed by a boot heel, a flower was born. Its stem curved dizzyingly upward, its petals, the colour of lamp black, gave out a stench like rotting flesh. Its pistils, uncompromisingly sharp, were as ready to strike as the fangs of an agitated viper.

“I want to have your child,” she murmured in the depths of the night.

“But you have had one . . . with your legitimate spouse.”

“Oh . . . oh . . . !”

Indeed, some nineteen years previous, a worm had already crawled out of the Pandora’s box of her womb.

Their son was an anaemic-looking individual with shoulder-length black hair which he kept parted in the middle and an outstretched, extremely thin nose which barely seemed to suffice to supply his meagre brain with oxygen. One could have eaten soup from the hollows of his cheeks and, when he opened his mouth, his long front teeth, attached to purplish gums, reminded one unpleasantly of the bits of fat around a piece of raw sirloin. That he had no friends was not surprising, for he was a thoroughly repulsive creature who did nothing all day but warm the couch with his meagre bottom, occasionally float to the piano to let his wiredrawn fingers slither over the keys like so many blind earth-worms.

He would often come and moon around me, the lonely disks of his eyes suffused with petrified amberish tears.

“While other lads are off sniffing glue, gambling away their father’s money, and visiting hookers, what are you doing? You seem, like a clam, to be incapable of both good and evil. I would call you a vegetable, but even carrots grow.”

“I play the piano.”

“My dear boy, you do it with such utter passivity that it would be more apt to say the piano plays you. Your music manages to be both radically annoying and infinitely boring,—a rare accomplishment indeed!”

“But what should I do?”

“Get drunk,” I said, stirring the whisky in my glass with my little finger.

“But alcohol usually makes me vomit.”

“Another irony.”

“If I could fall in love,” he said shyly.

“As you are clearly incapable of feeling lust, the ability to love is as far away from you as the planet Neptune.”

“Oh!”

I lighted a cigarette.

“Yes, you might tour the entire solar system and still not find a woman unambitious enough to fall in love with you—the most misshaped of human satellites—a mere lump of coal floating in space. Essentially you are the equivalent of a mould. As far as human-beings go, you are a nullity. If there was a war in progress, I would suggest you go and become cannon-fodder. As it is . . .” I paused significantly.

“As it is?” the young man gurgled.

“As it is, you might as well just go and kill yourself,” I said, picking a bit of tobacco from my tongue. “You can be quite sure the world will go on just the same without you. After all, you have no friends, your parents are certainly not fond of you. For my part, I can honestly say it would cause me no other emotion than the slightest tinge of relief;—for truly these little philosophical conversations of ours are on the tedious side!”

“But what if I want to live?” he murmured. I saw an amberish globule lodged on the tip of his lower left eyelid.

“Want to live? Why you know very well that you don’t want to live! If you wanted to live, you would be living right now instead of clinging to the rug like a mollusc. If you want to come stumbling in here begging for advice, the least you could do is be courteous enough to take it!”

His bottom lip quivered pitifully, like a half crushed caterpillar, and then he began to gnaw on it as if he wanted to put it out of its misery.

With spasmodic movements, idiot inspiration, he bounced towards the liquor cabinet, a few words dripping from his mouth like slobber:

“Drink . . . man . . . hopefully . . .”

His fingers, wilted weeds, wrapped themselves around a bottle of Château Lascombes—vintage of ’34 I believe. He discovered the cork-screw and tried to open it, but managed in doing so to drive the majority of the cork inside the bottle.

“We . . . drink . . .”

“No thank you. That wine soaked cork is all yours.”

I went to the liquor cabinet and refreshed my whisky. When I turned around he was gone, as was the wine bottle.

Later that evening he was discovered floating in the Monet, as green as the water-lilies around him. We fished him out and he threw up on a 16th century Armenian Kazak rug.

“I tried to . . . drown myself. . . . But . . . wouldn’t sink.”

“The cork,” I murmured, gazing meditatively at his pale face in its pool of vomit, the latter studded with a few undigested Veronal tablets.

This incident naturally livened things up a bit, and I believe that young man did well to follow my advice—though the results, due to the weakness of his mental facilities, were nothing more than a rather absurd fiasco. His inept attempt at suicide impressed his parents far more than it did myself; and their offspring, their coward, threw all the blame for his action on myself.

Liniger stormed through the house, howling out invectives to his concubine.

“This painting is cruel! We must get rid of it!”

“But you can’t Hans!”

“Can’t be damned! It has made a cuckold of me, almost killed my son. Under the auction hammer it goes!”

“I don’t know what you are talking about.”

“Come now my dear lady, do you think I am so blind as not to see the paint chips between the sheets? Do you think that I am not aware of the aroma you take on—like that of a dirty sheep—whenever you are in its presence?”

The man’s fire was impressive. I was on the verge of admiring his spirit; and if it were not for the fact that he was an utter fool, I might have applauded.

Singrid of course saw where her interest lay. Whatever prohibited sympathies she might have entertained for me, she was not about to stick her neck out for a lost cause, to sacrifice the security of her matrimony for the grudging caresses of a scrap of paint-clotted canvas.

And so, with rather remarkable haste, I was removed, sent back to England. I lounged about a warehouse for a while and then, at precisely eleven o’clock in the morning of a particularly hot day in July, was put to auction by Messrs. Sotheby & Co. at their large galleries, 34 & 35, New Bond Street, W.1.

I felt like something of a celebrity on the auctioneer’s platform as I gazed over the lake of silent craniums before me. The bidding, at first slow, picked up its pace. The sobriety of the conductor of this public sale’s Oxford accent began to show hints of agitation, which soon enough he crushed with his mallet. I was purchased by a consortium of Japanese businessmen for a large sum and crated off to Tokyo, where I was managed with the most delicate attention. Small, subtle hands sheathed in white cotton gloves escorted me, placed me in the board room of an office building—the apex of a mountain of glass amongst a bizarre menagerie of similar constructions.

My patrons would come in, bowing stiffly to each other, wearing identical dark-grey suits and commence fenc-

ing with words whose meaning I did not understand, but whose deadly sharpness was obvious. They treated me with rigorous cordiality, but more with that which befitted a large investment than a great work of art. Though on occasion these gentlemen went out, enjoyed nights on the town compounded of steak-house suppers, karaoke bars and upper-class brothels, never once did they invite me to join them. They were obviously afraid that I would be damaged.

I spent my time looking out over the Tokyo landscape, the cliff-like buildings rising up on all sides, in the distance the harbour with ferries slowly gliding over its glassy surface. The melancholy and stiff luxury of my surroundings made me feel like a grey cloud hanging over an orchard in heavy bloom.

The office secretary, a Miss Kiyonaga, would sometimes come in and dust me. Her neck was the brilliant white of freshly fallen snow and her hair fell against its nape like the wing of a raven. In a soft voice reminiscent of an October wind stripping the last leaves off a cherry tree she would speak of her sorrows. She was the mistress of one of the chairmen who was married with five children. She loved him desperately, but the fragrant blossom of her emotion was always kept in check by his vigorous loyalty to social mores and his spite for the very looseness in her which he enjoyed.

“You should break with him,” I said.

“I can’t, no more than you can change the colour of your face.”

“So our situations are similar.”

“Yes. We could run away together.”

“And what would we do?”

“I would work for you—try very hard to make you happy.”

“That is impossible.”

“Yes, in this floating world . . .”

One day I was taken and put, with a few other paintings in the company’s collection, in a small museum in Sekino. Though, as I have previously stated, I despise that sort of thing, it was better that it was done in Japan than elsewhere, for in that country the people stood humbly before me, whispering to one another in the most reverential undertones as if they stood before the image of some dragon god, bringer of wind and rain.

I fed off their whispers, their muffled speech, as an overly pampered dog might goose liver.

Human beings have a tendency to offer up their admiration to the most unfitting subjects. That I inspired these people with sadness, disgust and fear, I have no doubt—but they cherished these emotions, inhaling the misery that pervaded my person as if it were some exquisite perfume, scenting their sleeves with it like apricot blossoms. And yet their admiration was not folly, for I fully comprehend it, and consider myself one of the finest paintings ever painted in England—which is understandably a bit of an odd statement, something akin to saying ‘the largest lake in the Sahara’ or something of the sort, considering that the entire history of England has only produced two great painters: Francis Bacon and Lucian Freud—and the latter, my creator, was after all born in Germany.

In any case, the inhabitants of the city, as well as others who travelled from distances, admired the chill of my

incongruity for several weeks. And then, during the night, I was stolen, rolled into a sheaf and tucked under the arm of an able thief. When I awoke the next morning, I found myself surrounded by a group of shirtless men, their arms and chests heavily tattooed. Later I found out they were, the Black Flowers, a sub-gang of the notorious Kabuki-mono.

“You will stay under our protection until you are told otherwise,” a man with a great u-shaped mouth told me. “If you disobey this injunction, I will be obliged to cut you to bits.”

There was a certain charm in being abducted by the yakuza and, as I afterwards found out, the whole scheme had been instigated by the very businessmen who bought me in the first place. For, realising that they could never resell me for the exorbitant sum which they had paid, and finding themselves in financial difficulties, they decided to have me stolen and thereby collect on the insurance.

For a number of weeks I was kept locked up in a room decorated with nothing but tatami mats, my chief amusement being to play cho ka han ka with my jailors while drinking a steady stream of saké. The life however was not unpleasant. I ate ayu, caught in the traditional manner by trained cormorants, and composed allusive verses with a ball-point pen on the walls of my chamber. This is called adapting oneself to circumstances. One steps slowly when there is no place to arrive. One needs leisure to properly appreciate the tedium of being.

The hours passed like a mountain stream in springtime.

Days disappeared like dust before the wind.

And it was with some regret that, after several weeks of this existence, I received the news that I was to be set at liberty. I was slapped on the back, joked with, blindfolded, and taken for a ride in a comfortable vehicle.

After driving around for several hours, the car stopped. I was gently pushed out the door. I felt my hand grasped. The blindfold was removed. A large black car sped away into the night, leaving me standing, a solitary figure against a backdrop of deserted docklands. I pushed my hands in my pockets and felt a wad of yen—money I had won at dice. I looked over the water, which expanded before me like the endless pulsating skin of some universal deity. Somewhere out there, over oceans, on the other side of Asia, was Europe, the land of spiritless vice and jagged etiquette where a population sedated by faux democracy and cheap manufactured goods, babbling about history while they treat that watchword as a toilet, chain themselves together in that self-imposed slavery called capitalism. That was where I belonged; just as a maggot belongs in a dog’s corpse.

I was in no way tempted to throw myself at the feet of the authorities. I had had enough of living off the crumbs of the rich. I purchased an airline ticket and went back—to England. The small stock of money I had was soon dissipated in dissolute behaviour and I was once again forced to live by my wits—a commodity which the going rate is far less than that of any precious metal and can, in truth, often be bought for less than petrol.

I rented a room from an elderly French woman with an unpleasant relish for sentimental conversation and a large orange cat. The room was extraordinarily narrow; the cat monstrously fat. I seem to have come full circle, for the aroma of earlier times found me again and the creature clawed at my trousers with as little respect for art as an aborigine for the flavour of a white truffle.

At night Miss Baisieux (such was the woman’s name) would cook over-sauced meats and open inexpensive bottles of Beaujolais, treating me with a motherly care that bordered on the incestuous. She told me about her numerous love affairs—with Sardinian fishermen, disconsolate priests, fetishists and Middle-Eastern royalty. In the over-heated atmosphere of her confessions the heavy French cooking churned in my stomach; the cat rubbed against my leg; I felt like vomiting—but washed down the sensation with another glass of wine. Then

I would make my way to my room, lay down on the child-sized mattress provided for me and let my thoughts stumble over the vanity of human existence, nations sinking, festal bacchanal blazes red like quinacridone rose, as my mind soon became invaded by dreams of black paintings, like those of Francisco Goya y Lucientes. From the depths of my subconscious poured visions of strange Sabbaths, in Vandyke brown, done in broad, surreal strokes; cackling music flowed over me like a cold, rippling stream, as I merged with the void.

It was late one morning at Primrose Hill. I stood and looked over the city, which lay smoking before me like some infernal battleground—a place where the conquered outnumber the conquerors by more than a thousand to one. A child came up and began to play in front of me with his mum. I turned and walked down. . . . There was a bench. I sat and lighted a cigarette.

I could hear a ruby-crowned kinglet call nearby—a series of whistles, short clear notes, and a rapid warbling of agitated mixed notes. At first I thought nothing of it, but then it occurred to me that London was hardly the habitat of that little bird whose range is confined almost exclusively to the pine forests of the Americas.

I looked up, expecting to catch sight of a fugitive from some nearby aviary, but was amazed to see a dog perched in the branch of a tree. It was Tikvah. I called his name. He leaped down and licked my hand and I, a being without mother, father or family, welcomed him with what tepid warmth was at my disposal.

I took him home with me. Miss Baisieux was hardly pleased with the new housemate.

“The room is for a single man,” she said.

“I am a single man.”

“No pets my friend.”

“But you have a cat.”

“Precisely. This dog of yours puts him in jeopardy. . . . Come, dinner is served.”

I walked into the dining room and was met by a plate of *pâté de lapin* with cornichons. Morbidly I went about my task as a soldier shoulders his rifle and advances into the hail of enemy fire. She prattled away, her foot occasionally, in all innocence, drifting over to mine. My eyes examined, beneath the thick layer of iridescent make-up spread over her face, trembling folds of skin reminiscent of the rugged untamed scenery of Australia or North America—vast canyons and desolate wastes.

A faint but pleasant piping came from the other room where Tikvah rested.

“Un oiseau!”

“A dog madame, a dog.”

By the time the cheese was served I felt thoroughly nauseous. . . . Miss Baisieux chattered away. Tikvah no longer whistled. . . . The cat came in and rubbed against my leg. I pushed it away; looked down. It had a bloody bit of fur in its mouth.

I rose from table . . . stalked solemnly into the living room.

The dog’s bones, to which red flesh still clung, lay scattered on the floor. My lips pressed tightly together, I pon-

dered the scene, then, with a shrug of my shoulders went to bed. Undoubtedly the cat had had a better supper than I.

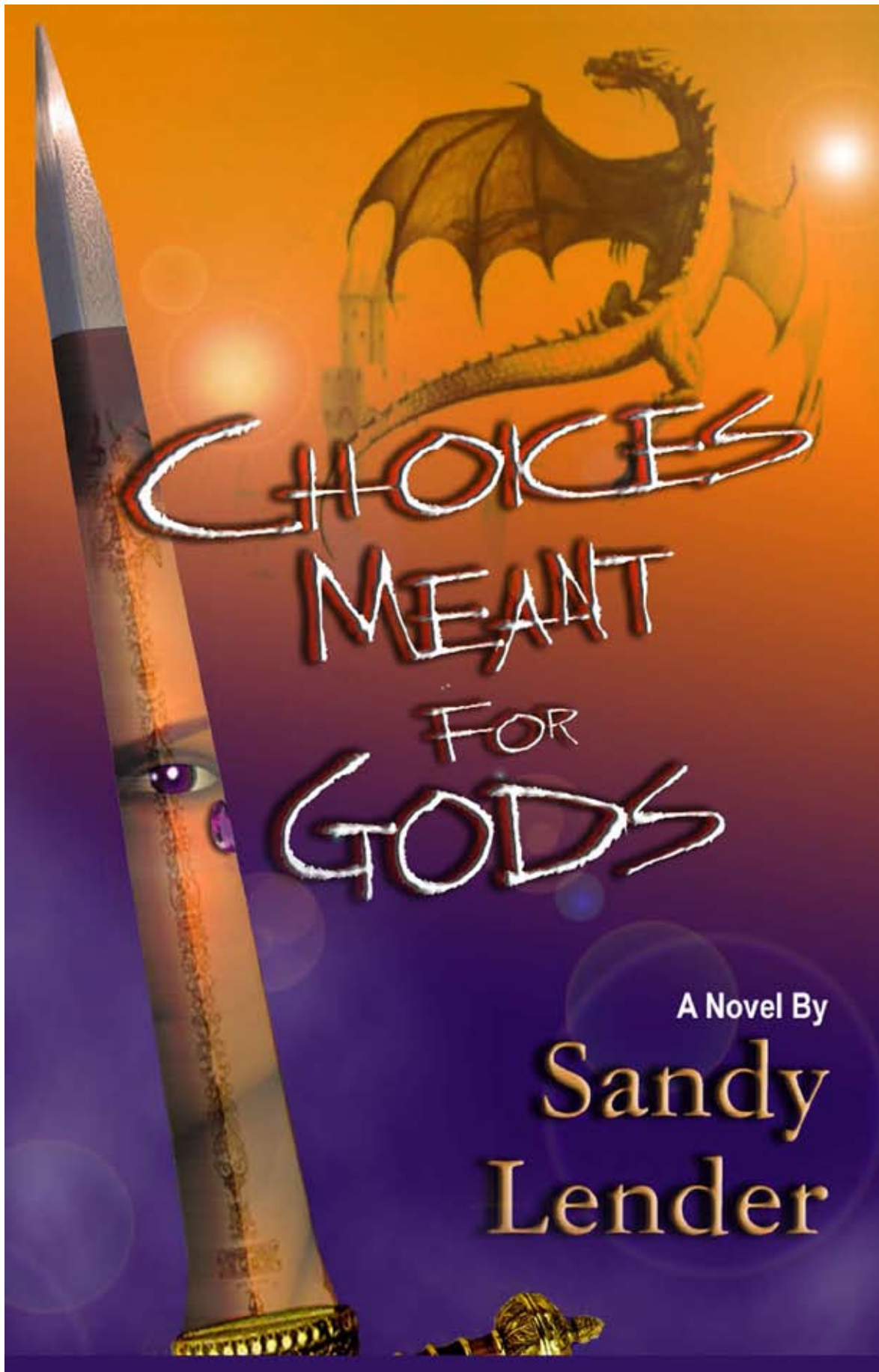
In this bizarre serial of past, present and future I have haunted all the most depressing corners of Europe: small German towns where people's lips hang down to their knees, the industrial quarters of Northern Italian cities where the sky is blotted out by atrocious architecture and spirals of grey smoke. I am attracted by dark alleys where the smell of urine is so strong that it can be seen and neighbourhoods where the women's voices sound like the shrieks of the damned.

A few crumpled up bills, filthy as used hygienic paper, suffice for my maintenance—and such documents can be earned easily, in a hundred different clandestine or perceptible ways. How many odd jobs I have had! A taxidermists assistant, a part-time procurer, a waiter at a Hungarian restaurant, a vendor of smut! Currently I am employed part-time by the post office. It is a night job. From 11 pm until 3 in the morning I sort mail.

I am what you would call a forgotten masterpiece. People pass me by without realising my true worth—and if I allude to it myself they think me bombastic, crazy. I am perfectly aware that I drink far too much and a cigarette, like a smoking icicle, eternally hangs from my mouth. I am a man with a canvas heart—a man painted with a certain amount of impatience, cast on the world by the brutal hand of genius and now doomed to wander its dirty boulevards like a rather blasé ghost.

But so be it. It is depressing, but the world after all is nothing more than a voluminous void, smeared on with a palette knife—a strange, grey, voluminous void. Others, as they grow old, find their skin gradually begin to web with wrinkles. I on the other hand find some of my paint cracking. I am gradually becoming endowed with a slight patina—a slight changing of hue—a patina of nausea and profound ennui.





SOME DAYS, I JUST WANT THE DRAGON TO WIN.

The Witch

by Theodora Goss

*Sometimes in the morning, the mist curled into the corners
Of the house like a cat, and Grimalkin, she would cry,
come to me, my Grimalkin. She would gather
the mist to her, and stroke it, and it would settle
in her lap, and lick itself.*

*Sometimes, she wove
cobwebs and out of the cloth, thin, gray, luminescent,
she would cut the pattern for a dress. But for what purpose?
Where could she wear it? Where could she go, except
to the pond, where she would kneel and dip her fingers
into the water, and stir, and out would jump
a trout, thick, silver, luminescent, and splashing
water onto her dress, whose hem was already
soaked and covered with mud.*

*She would make it speak,
recite Shakespearean sonnets, sing old songs,
before she put it into the pot. Witches
are lonely, but also hungry, and practical
in their impracticality. She had learned
how from her mother, the old witch, now dead
if witches are ever entirely dead, which is doubtful.*

*She never wondered who her father had been,
a peasant gathering wood, perhaps a hunter,
perhaps even a prince, on his way to the
country
where a princess had been promised for
dispatching
a dragon or something similar, and had seen
a light through the trees, and found her
mother waiting,
and perhaps gone on the next morning, and
perhaps not.*

*Her mother had built the house by the edge of
the pond,
out of gray stone and branches of white birch,
birds' nests and moss, and spit to hold it
together.
That is how witches build what they call
houses.
What they are not: sturdy, comfortable.
What they are: cold.*

There was still a row of bottles

*in the cupboard, holding martens' eyes, dried frogs,
robins' eggs, random feathers, balls of string,
oak galls. She had forgotten what they were for.
From the rafters hung a fox's skeleton.*

*Once, village girls had come to visit her mother
for charms to attract the schoolmaster's attention,
make their rivals' hair fall out, abortions.*

*Afterward, they would say, Did you see her? Standing
by the door? In her ragged dress, with her tangled hair,
I tell you, she creeps me out. But they stopped coming
after the old witch disappeared and her daughter
was left alone. Sometimes she would remember
the smell of the bread in their pockets, the clink of coins,
their dresses covered with embroidery,
their whispering, and look at her reflection
in the pond, floating on the water like a ghost.*

*Sometimes she made the frogs at the edge of the pond,
calling to one another, speak to her.
"Pretty one," they would say, "in your spider silk,
in your birchbark shoes, like a princess lost in the woods,
kiss us." But she knew that was not her story.*

*Sometimes she would make the birds perch on her fingers
and sing to her: warblers, thrushes, chickadees,
and sing to them out of tune, then break their necks
and roast them.*

*Sometimes she would gather the stones
that had fallen from her house, and think of making
a dog, a stone dog. Then, she would forget.
It was the forgetting that made her what she was,
her mother's daughter. Witches never remember
important things: that fire burns, and that bottles*

*labeled poison are not to be drunk. Witches
are always doing what they should not, dancing
at midnight with the Gentleman, kicking their skirts
over the tops of their stockings, kissing frogs
they know perfectly well won't turn into princes.*

*She makes no magic. Although the stories won't tell you,
witches are magic. They do not need the props
of a magician, the costumes or the cards,
the scarves, the rabbits. They came down from the moon
originally, and it still calls to them,
so they go out at night, when the moon is shining,
and make no magic, but magic happens around them.*

*Sometimes at night she would look up at the moon
and call Mother? Mother? but never got an answer.*

*I want you to imagine: her ragged dress,
her hair like cobwebs, her luminescent eyes,
mad as all witches are, stirring the pond
like a cauldron (witches need no cauldrons, whatever
the stories tell you) while above her the clouds
are roiling and a storm is about to gather.*



The Anatomy of “Sleep”

by Jeffrey Ford

I remember the first time I came across *The Melancholy of Anatomy* on the shelf in a local bookstore. The cover showed twin severed child heads, cheeks and necks webbed in meandering red veins. One head had fallen, and one was falling through the dark. On the spine were a couple of eyeballs staring out at me. Then I opened it and read some of the titles of the stories – “Blood,” “Phlegm,” “Cancer,” “Sperm.” Right off the bat, it all seemed a little too messy for me. I put the book back on the shelf. Later that day I realized that the title was a switch on Robert Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy*. I had a copy of that old tome – a big fat paperback. I’d read quite a bit of it here and there. It wasn’t the kind of book I could read straight through, but it was excellent can reading. Burton’s book is a wild collage of the medical and social history of Melancholy. There are stories, long passages from the ancient Greek and Roman philosophers and historians, and an array of remedies for the affliction. It’s a treatise of sorts, a collection of short stories, a medical text, a gallery of quotations out of history, witty and teeming with a kind of tamped down Medieval Bestiary metaphor. Burton spent a thousand pages presenting the evidence and the journey is entertaining in all kinds of ways. After reading extensively from it, I’m convinced that Metaphor, itself, is at the heart of Melancholy.

I looked at the Jackson book on a few more trips to the store but didn’t buy it. Then it happened that I did a reading in New York at a Barnes and Noble for *The Thackery T. Lamshead Guide to Eccentric and Discredited Diseases*. It was a good time. There were a lot of writers there and we each read a little. One of the readers was Shelley Jackson, but I never put her name together with the collection I’d looked at in the store at home. Somebody at that reading told me that Jackson had this project going where she wrote a story but kept it secret. The only people who would get to read it are those who might agree to have one word of the story tattooed on their body somewhere. Only when every word of the story had been tattooed would the story be revealed and only to those who participated. There were so many wonderful implications to this enterprise – the word made flesh, the secret story, how story can make a community -- the thought of it enchanted me. When Jackson was introduced and her brief bio was read, I learned that she was the author of *The Melancholy of Anatomy*. Before the reading broke up, I found a copy in the store, bought it, and asked her to sign it.

On the train back to Jersey, I opened the book and looked at the inscription printed in black ink – To Jeff, with slow secret emissions. That cracked me up. It was a good indication of what was to come. The book is neither messy nor dreary. There’s a strong, understated, sense of humor and Humor running through it. Sometimes it comes to the fore like in the story “Dildo,” where the dildo is written up like an entry in a Medieval Bestiary complete with quotes from the ancients – both a physical creature and the

embodiment of metaphor. Other stories, each with a title indicating some process, fluid, or organ of the human body, are dream-like in their beauty, horror, weirdness, and joy. Like fairy tales or Science Fantasies set on planets with rivers of blood. The writing is smooth, readily accessible, and highly imaginative. The book has a profound sense of life to it, literally and figuratively. I could go on at length about the book as a whole, but I have to pick a story from it and move on. In my most humble opinion, I believe this book will be highly regarded far into the future. It's thoroughly modern, but has many of the same techniques and concerns as Dante's *Divine Comedy* or Ovid's *Metamorphosis*.

The individual story I choose from it is "Sleep." It begins...

Sleep is falling. The crumbs run in drifts down the street, collecting in the gutters.

Sleep falls every day at noon here, with soothing regularity. Sometimes it melts on the way down, and falls as golden rain, or in cold weather, golden sleet, but mostly our siesta is warm and dry. The occasional sleep storm is cozy and harmless: a war waged with croutons and dinner rolls. Once, years ago, when the children were young, we woke to find we were slept in: I opened the front door and the living room filled with gold. We had a sleepball fight around the sofa, which my wife won – she was always fierce in defense of her own. The drifts blew away by evening, but our house was gilded until the next rain, and the shrubs were like torches.

The narrator goes on to give a surreal disquisition about Sleep and focuses primarily on the phenomenon of the sleep substitute. Every sleeper makes a sleep substitute, crafts one out of the stuff of sleep, and this substitute will stand in for an individual at times when they're not up to waking life – taking tests, showing up for appointments they'd rather miss. The reader is warned that one must be careful with the substitute for if it's used to fake a suicide or stand against a bully and something dreadful happens to it, one must persevere through life all on one's own. Substitutes can go on to have lives of their own and a substitute can marry another substitute with a 50% chance of them having a real child.

At the same time the reader learns the finer points of these sleep crafted seconds, woven into the beautiful prose is another story of this airline that travels to different countries of sleep and attains high places where only certain individuals get to go. At times planes will return with no passengers on board, and the pilot will attest that all his charges got out way up above in an exotic fantasy land of cloud castles – a seemingly better place.

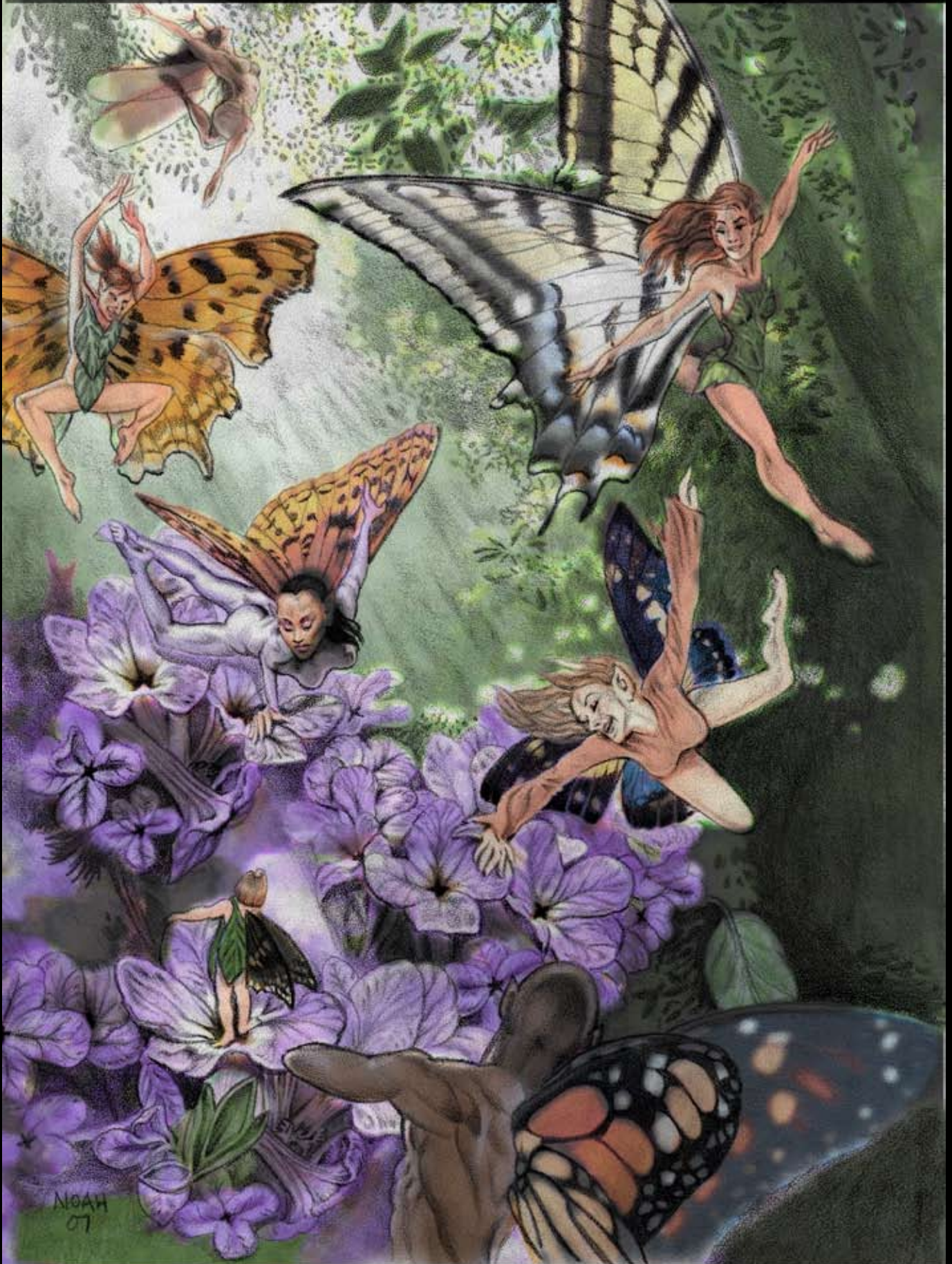
All of this transpires in the most verbally and imagistically (is this a word?) enchanting language, and the reader might wonder, "What am I reading here?" "Is this a prose poem or just some haphazard compilation of juxtapositions of idea and imagery?" But late in the piece the reader learns that the narrator had once been a pilot for the airline and that his wife, sleeping in bed beside him, is really a sleep substitute. His real wife has left him long ago, and this fact throws the reader back to the opening paragraphs

and the line that when first read seems to darken momentarily the dream like scene of the sleepball fight – “she was always fierce in defense of her own.” When these revelations come, the reader realizes that yes, “Sleep” is not just a grab bag of beautiful writing, or a prose poem, it’s a bona-fide short story in the classic sense. Aristotle’s main ingredient for drama was catharsis or change, and the ingenious construction of “Sleep” bears this out. There is another change as well, for Jackson’s writing infects the imagination and brands an indelible change in the reader’s perception as to what Story can be.

I’ve seen fictional constructions like this before -- for instance in the work of Stephen Millhauser – essay-like stories, but they never achieve the palpable sense of life that “Sleep” attains. I attribute this to the writing in Jackson’s work, both incredibly controlled and totally fluid. With each surreal image there’s a choice to be made, and the choosing here seems authentic, a product of the subconscious, carrying an inherent validity. The choices don’t feel labored or intellectualized, but they are always startling and yet make perfect sense like the believable reality of a dream that causes one to cry out in the night. Whether this is a result of artifice, born of an intense practice of revision, or if it’s the product of an intuitive and blind reliance on the subconscious, or somehow both, I can’t tell. It doesn’t matter really as it makes for a wonderful reading experience.

In any event, don’t let my awkward machinations about this piece put you off. The Melancholy of Anatomy and all its stories are one of the great contemporary reading experiences for lovers of the fantastic. You might want to also check out Jackson’s new novel, Half-Life. In addition she is an accomplished artist, having done book covers and illustrated children’s books. Here’s a link to her website: <http://www.ineradicablestain.com/>





Plus ça change ?

by Michael Moorcock

*'For all its reputation as a hotbed of cultural advance,
the Sixties was no great sponsor of fiction.'*

-- Jonathon Green, *Preface to the 1997 Edition of Groupie* by Jennie Fabian and Johnny Byrne.

I WONDER IF the above astonishingly daft opinion is a prevailing received notion today? Green, who was briefly editor of FRENZ underground newspaper, seemed, with co-editor Rosie Boycott, rather more focussed on which smart clubs would offer him contact with the most famous rock and roll faces, actually shared type-setters and distributors with NEW WORLDS, and indeed published work by me, Harrison, Delany and others, which was actually commissioned by Jon Trux, an editor who became the central character of Harrison's *The Centauri Device*. Certainly Green, had he not been so distracted, would have been able to read in this period work by Ballard, Zoline, Disch, Sladek, M.J.Harrison, myself and others published a couple or doors down from his Portobello Road offices. All expanded the boundaries of contemporary fiction and developed new techniques.

Apart from William Burroughs, who did much of his best work in the sixties and began publishing books like *The Naked Lunch* for the first time in England and America (previously they had appeared in Paris from Olympia Press), the decade saw work by Pynchon (*V* and *The Crying of Lot 49*). Ballard (*The Atrocity Exhibition* and *Crash* in its earliest form) and Donald Barthelme (*Come Back Dr Caligari*, *Unspeakable Practices*, *Unnatural Acts*, *Snow White*). Alexander Trocchi published both *Young Adam* and *Cain's Book*. Hubert Selby gave us *Last Exit to Brooklyn*. Gaddis had already published *The Recognitions* and was working on his second novel. William Gass's *In the Heart of the Country* and *Willie Masters'*; *Lonesome Wife* and Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* came out. Garcia Marquez published *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Although writing mostly screenplays in this period, Terry Southern saw the appearance of *Red Dirt*, *Marijuana*. Kurt Vonnegut published *Slaughterhouse 5*. We had Joseph Heller's *Catch-22*, Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mocking Bird*, Vidal's *Myra Breckenridge* and Capote's *In Cold Blood*. De Beauvoir gave us, among others, *Les Belles Images*. We had Philip K. Dick's *The Man in the High Castle*, *Pnin* and *Pale Fire* by Nabokov, Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint*. Doris Lessing published *The Golden Notebook*, Joanna Russ published her first book *Picnic on Paradise*, Günter Grass published *Dog Years*. Elsewhere the likes of B.S.Johnson, Anna Kavan, Ursula K. Le Guin, John Fowles, Giuseppe di Lampedusa, Samuel Beckett, John Banville were all producing work, most of which was an advance on their previous fiction and much of which was decidedly experimental. The likes of Borges and Vian first began to appear in English in that period.

The sixties and early seventies were, in fact, a very rich time for fiction, an exciting time to be writing it, with publishers willing to back experiment. Much of it had already begun to incorporate the tropes of science fiction into conventional realism. The early post-modern experiment of the sixties gave us the mature work of the seventies. A lot of this experiment, in my view, saw print because the economics of publishing in those days allowed a greater risk and therefore made a greater variety of fiction available to the public. Since the 1980s, we seem to have witnessed a diminution of widely-published influential experiment and novelty in fiction, though the conventions of the most obvious elements of so-called postmodernism have been incorporated into something very close to a new genre while the reading public appears to have developed somewhat conservative expectations, including a taste for the likes of Ian MacEwan, whose novels hold no surprises and are deeply reassuring to the middle-brow reader. The tone of fiction and movies until about 1980 was more confrontational and far likelier to take a risk, than at present.

Though certain techniques borrowed from commercial science fiction and fantasy, have been employed in the mainstream, they have primarily worked to supply a spark of life to existing popular forms as, for instance, magic was introduced to the old-fashioned English school story to give us Harry Potter. I believe that

the success of *The Lord of the Rings* is symptomatic of middle-brow conservatism in reading. Fundamentally, such books, with, say, Martin Amis's current output, are generic, quite as rigid in what they can say or try to say as the popular generic work of Ian Rankin or Iain Banks. Indeed, apart from Iain Sinclair, fewer and fewer technically ambitious novelists are published in the UK mainstream and even those associated with innovation seem to have fallen back on self-imitation. Only in America do a few ambitious novelists such as Roth, DeLillo, Eggers and Chabon continue to offer work questioning middle-brow assumptions and finding a broad readership but even in America is a tendency to return to safer and more predictable forms. If, as I believe, the medium is the message, this means that in conventional publishing we see little in the way of innovative ideas or analysis and are forced increasingly to search through the internet to find small print publishers, POD publishers and those publishing direct to the web, few of whom can afford to pay an author a reasonable advance.

In 1964, when *NEW WORLDS* began running under my editorship and Ballard had written our first guest editorial about William Burroughs and what his work meant, Stephen Spender was declaring that the Modern Movement was dead (cf *The Struggle of the Moderns*).

Of course, the corpse of Modernism – a kind of pseudo-Modernism -- though no longer sparked with the vitality which gave us James, Ford, Lawrence, Pound, Eliot and Mann, among others, was still walking and talking and, because it now had the familiarity of established genre, worked to comfort the same reading public who bought country house murder mysteries, historical romances and westerns, but it offered little to writers, including a few remaining real Modernists, and readers who wanted something which confronted and illuminated the world they experienced.

At the time of the rise of the Modern Movement, certain Edwardians, like Wells or Bennett, continued to use the tropes of the Victorians but sharpened them up with style influenced by the New Journalism and looked with keener eyes at parts of the world previously overlooked by most major novelists. Wells, of course also introduced a new kind of subject matter married to an older form of realism. Similarly, contemporary novelists offer new wrinkles on the old realist formulae – Indian family sagas rather than Welsh family sagas, for instance – just as detective writers come up with disabled detectives or ancient world detectives or minority detectives and so on. This is mainly the work of those who have been trained or enculturated to work in existing modes and can only continue to work by finding novel methods of telling the same stories in the same way. All that changed are the superficial background props.

Genre dictates the direction of a story, can distort certain kinds of observation and without doubt dilute the power of new experience. The very best fiction always transcends genre. That was the reason why the likes of Ballard and myself, later joined by Aldiss, Brunner, Disch and the rest, felt the need not merely to bring some of the virtues of Modernism to sf, not only to improve the ambition of style and language, but to invent fresh personal conventions which would not distort what we wanted to say. These conventions were of course inspired by those we found in popular fiction, especially science fiction, but modified to suit our intentions. This process – some of which involved fairly radical experiment – became tagged as the sf 'New Wave'. We didn't apply the tag ourselves, of course, any more than a mixed bag of fashionable British writers like Kingsley Amis, John Osborne, John Braine, Alan Sillitoe and Colin Wilson referred to themselves as the Angry Young Men.

We had no prescriptions and no plans to take the bread from the mouths of the genre writers who were still doing great work using the conventions to their own brilliant purposes, but we were answering the demands of personal experience.

Out of this broad movement emerged a kind of fiction which some called post-modernist and others called 'magic realism' but which is now so thoroughly absorbed into the culture it is familiar and requires no identifying name. In recent years many of our finest literary novelists have made use of science fiction's best conventions. Alternate world fiction, familiar in the sf magazines from the eighties on proved one of the most useful devices after Philip K. Dick's *The Man in the High Castle* won the Hugo and was published in the UK by Penguin Books who had recently acquired several feisty new editors like Tony Godwin and Giles Gordon (who later became a *NEW WORLDS* regular). Tom Maschler of Cape, encouraged by me and others, began publishing Dick as a literary novelist, while Kingsley Amis gave us *The Alteration*, inspired by Keith Roberts's *Pavane*. In the U.S. Nabokov offered us *Ada*, while Kurt Vonnegut was one of the first American writers regularly to

make idiosyncratic use of sf tropes. Margaret Atwood, Philip Roth, Thomas Pynchon, Don DeLillo and Michael Chabon are just a few of the ambitious and original literary novelists to have no difficulty finding readers who are perfectly comfortable with their alternate history stories.

While all this is encouraging to those of us who in the sixties joined the pop artists like Paolozzi, Hamilton and Warhol in an effort to re-unite 'high' and popular art in all forms of creative expression and attempted to bring new scientific ideas into the sphere of literature, there are still concerns that the majority of this recent work, excellent as it is, does not exactly advance the range of methods open to us – methods indicated by William Burroughs, Ballard (in his condensed novels collected as *The Atrocity Exhibition*) or even Pynchon (who has admittedly been himself inclined to borrow and synthesise rather than offer new methods).

Indeed, we've recently been through a period of restoration and reconsideration rather than a period of experiment and I think there are real economic and social reasons why this is so. While mainstream publishers have become more open to publishing synthetic work, including fantasy and science fiction, they have become less interested in encouraging or supporting experiment. Always somewhat cautious, not to say feeble, about publishing new work, they are further discouraged by booksellers' increasing reluctance to put genuinely idiosyncratic fiction on their shelves. They are perfectly happy to stock hundreds of copies of bestsellers, like Susannah Clarke or Michael Chabon (both of whom are admittedly of a very high quality) but offer no space at all to writers like Steve Aylett, Stuart Hall, Samit Basu, Sebastian Doubinsky, Zoran Zivkovic and scores of others who are not using so many familiar tropes from either sf or literary fiction. What's more, these corporate booksellers dictate increasingly to publishers what they can and can't publish if they wish to stay in business.

To promote a new book in the years when I first began my career, publishers had only to find booksellers as ready as they were to give a new author a chance. When in the late sixties the new publisher Clive Allison of Allison and Busby began his list with my *Behold the Man* he persuaded the major booksellers as well as major reviewers to give the book a chance, with the result that it sold very well as a non-genre title. This experience was familiar to every dynamic new publisher, whether they were independent (and most of course were) and newly established or whether they worked for the larger forms like Gollancz, Cape or Secker and Warburg. When independent risk-taking John Calder (or in the States, say, Grove Press) published Beckett or Burroughs he could count on at least a few allies in the book trade.

With the abolition of the Net Book Agreement and other regulatory systems which a number of us resisted since we could see what would happen in a totally deregulated market, booksellers began discounting titles. The larger the bookselling chain, the larger their discount. This almost immediately caused the demise of a large number of independent booksellers, very few of which now exist in the English-speaking world. Often the discounts, on popular bestsellers as a rule, were loss leaders in the same way supermarkets offered brand-named sugar below cost. These practices put more and more power into the hands of corporate booksellers (who bought up those shops which survived), and into the hands of supermarkets who began stocking the latest Jackie Collins or Thomas Harris, so that, as the booksellers felt forced to behave more like grocery chains. Their stock was floated on the market (with the consequence that stockholders demanded bigger and bigger profits) and the individual taste of managers and assistants was actively discouraged.

Bit by bit through the nineties the booksellers began to assume the power once wielded by the Victorian private libraries in England and America when Mudies, for instance, could demand that books be published in multiple (usually three) volumes because subscribers had to pay to take out individual volumes, not whole novels. Thus the majority of Victorian novelists were forced to produce what George Eliot called 'the middle volume', essentially the section which trod water between the beginning and the end of a book. Dickens was the first literary writer to resist the power of the libraries by publishing in what was considered the vulgar method of shilling serial parts (though noting his success the stately Thackeray, who had advised him against it, soon followed his example) but generally through the major part of the 19th century the working novelist was forced to bow to the rule of Mudies and Bentley, the publisher who supplied most of Mudies' stock and dominated the age. Publishers were even told how to price their books at 10/6d (half a guinea) a volume, which put, say, *Middlemarch* or *Jude the Obscure* well outside the pocket of the average reader.

In 1895, encouraged by the increasing power of the free public library system, a few brave, mostly new, publishers decided to break Bentleys and Mudies' stranglehold and publish six shilling single volume nov-

els, making them cheaper for the public libraries to buy, enabling the publisher to print and distribute and sell through bookshops to a middle-class reader who could afford them. The cheaper editions soon followed at 3/6d and eventually a shilling or even sixpence. Mudies had to adapt to this revolution or go under and Bentley had soon disappeared completely.

Among those first 'six shilling' novels published in 1895 were Conrad's *Almayer's Folly*, Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* and H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine*. Within a year the three volume novel had all but disappeared and James, Hardy, Meredith and others all began to see their work appear in single volumes. The revolution was swift, popular and profitable. There followed what many see as the golden age of publishing from the eighteen nineties through to the nineteen thirties, which coincided almost to the day with the golden age of Modernism, with publication of Lord Jim, Ford's *The Good Soldier* and late James like *The Golden Bowl*, soon to be followed by Proust, Joyce, Pound, Eliot, Kafka, Woolf, Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Faulkner and all the great names of the movement who were by no means celebrated immediately. A glance at John Gross's selection from *THE TIMES LITERARY SUPPLEMENT*, *The Modern Movement*, will show that reputations were not always as assured as they seem today.

Thus the problem of how to promote Modern Movement authors in a market still dominated by generic Victorian writers like Ouida or Anthony Hope was solved with the help of enthusiastic booksellers and public libraries. I read all my favourite moderns initially from the public library – Firbank, Mann, Huxley, Waugh, Eliot – while I indulged my taste for popular writers like Wodehouse, Edgar Rice Burroughs and Clarence E. Mulford by taking out their work at tuppence a week from our still thriving commercial circulating libraries, both independent and attached to chains like Boots or W.H. Smith. When my second hardcover novel, *Stormbringer*, was published I was asked to cut it because the economics were such that they had to sell a book at 12/6d to make it attractive to the circulating libraries. As the economics of publishing and bookselling changed, as the paperback gradually took over from the borrowed hardback, we began to see intimations of our present predicament with the end of the commercial circulating library and public libraries increasingly stocking the big best-sellers which previously they had seen little point in purchasing for their borrowers. Publishers who had depended upon the library trade, which would frequently take several thousand copies of any title, found themselves going out of business or needing to amalgamate with other firms.

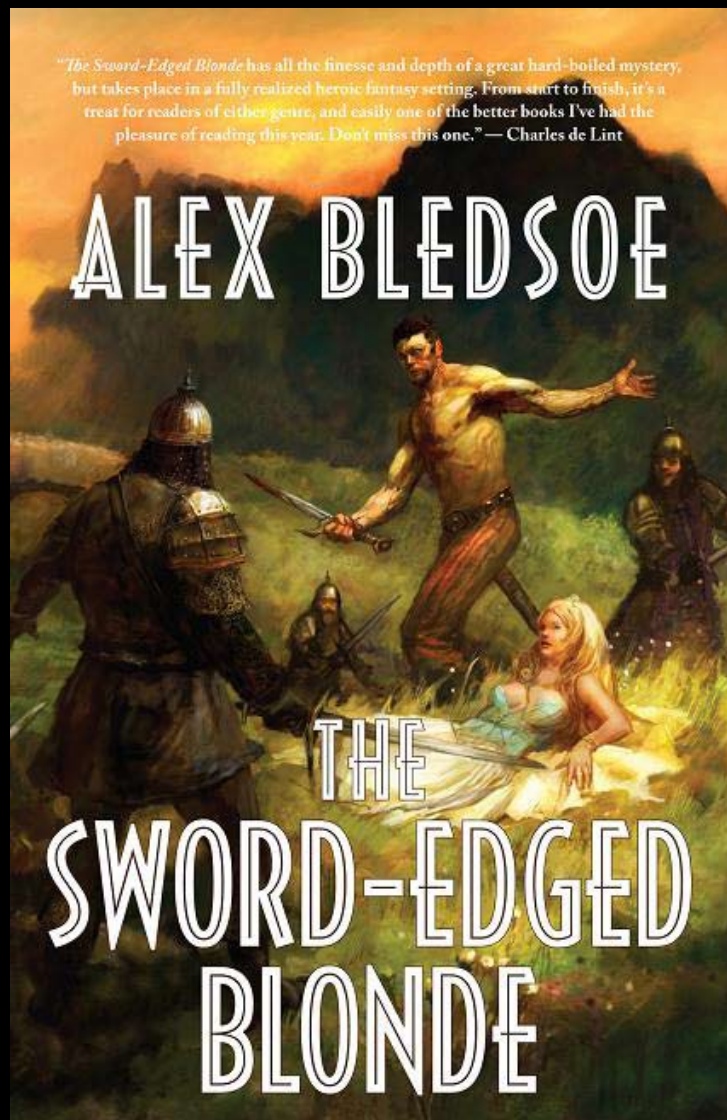
We find ourselves today in a somewhat similar situation, though it's more expensive to buy new genre books and harder to find the cutting edge writers who stimulate us. How do we break the power of Waterstones or Barnes and Noble, who take the lion's share of profits and take the fewest risks? In 1970 the normal discount to publishers was 33%, considered pretty hefty at the time, and sometimes a little less (say 25%). In 2007 publishers frequently demand and get 55%. This means, as Allan Massie pointed out in a recent piece in *The Spectator* (if you don't follow his thoughtful 'Life and Letters' column I recommend you try it), that the bookseller gets the lion's share of the profit while taking the lowest risk and putting in the least work. The writer, of course, gets the smallest share.

Given that this situation is antithetical to the publishing of good, risk-taking books, how are we to break that power and reverse the situation, paying the writer a fairer share for his investment and the bookseller a smaller (though equally fair) share. The answer, of course, is clear to those of us who have worked for online publishers for some years, especially those who have paid authors for their work or been paid.

With retail outlets for POD publishers, where a reader can physically browse and order books if they are not yet ready to visit virtual bookstores, we should be able to offer a wider selection of books and magazines than ever before and, by cutting out middlemen, sell them at a cheaper price which will nonetheless ensure that the one who makes the largest investment in time and energy will receive the highest reward. The more aggressively and enthusiastically electronic publishing promotes its wares, the more it challenges the conglomerates and offers the public a greater number of genuinely experimental titles. All this makes for a far healthier literary life.

It seems to me that authors as well as publishers will have to take the same risks Dickens took when he published his books as cheap part-works, the same risks authors took when they let their books be published at six shillings, instead of £1.10.6d, the same risks some of us took when we ignored the posher literary magazines of our day and preferred to see our work appear in vulgar newstand magazines with exotic and brightly coloured

covers. At present POD and other electronic publishing are considered by literary journalists and others to be an inferior form of delivering fiction to readers, on a par with vanity publishing. This can only change rapidly if we make it change. In my view we should not merely be seeking new markets for existing forms of fiction, such as the short story. We should be seeking personal forms of expression taking risks equal to those of electronic publishers who present us with the means of reaching a growing popular public. It would make sense that among the first publications to achieve this revolution, and seriously threaten the power of the bookselling and publishing corporations, should be those with their roots in the genre which got its first start as an independent form when Hugo Gernsback, using his own money and the cheap and popular medium of the pulp magazine, launched AMAZING STORIES some eighty years ago.



The Shadow Cabinet

by Jeff Vandermeer

INSTALLMENT #1: JOHN CALVIN BATCHELOR'S *THE BIRTH OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF ANTARCTICA* AND BRIAN MCNAUGHTON'S *THE THRONE OF BONES*

Shadow Cabinets are the great equalizers, the great communicators. It is only within the dark confines of a Shadow Cabinet, like certain Cabinets of Curiosities, that books and authors with little in common find themselves shoved up against one another, under glass. Like the eccentric elements in photographs by Rosalind Purcell, juxtapositions create their own classifications.

Thus, the subjects of this first column: two books, two authors, who traveled in completely different circles, and yet wound up in the same place: John Calvin Batchelor and his *The Birth of the People's Republic of Antarctica* (1983) and Brian McNaughton and his *The Throne of Bones* (1997). The former is a devastating but ultimately compassionate examination of the savage brutality of human nature. The latter is a dark fantasy story cycle set in Seelura, a place that while uniquely its own also evokes Robert E. Howard and classic-era *Weird Tales*. Both constitute exceptional accomplishment, and both are now largely forgotten. Already.

I am Grim Fiddle. My mother, Lamba, first spied me in her magic hand-mirror late in the evening of the spring equinox of 1973. She was dancing by herself at the time, in the rear of a shabby beer hall called The Mickey Mouse Club, located in the foreign quarter of Stockholm, the capital of the Kingdom of Sweden. She was midway between the music box and the bank of telephone booths. She was not under the influence of any drug, though my maternal grandfather was a Lutheran preacher. There is no further explanation of Lamba's vision forthcoming. Mother was Norse sibyl. - The opening paragraph of *The Birth of the People's Republic of Antarctica*

A product of the 1960s and 1970s, John Calvin Batchelor had what many writers would consider a very good career. Between 1981 and 1994, he had eight novels published from prestige publishers like Henry Holt. Almost all of these books received some kind of critical acclaim and coverage. However, around the mid-1990s, Batchelor fell off the map, only to reappear as a radio host in New York City after 2000.

The truth is, Batchelor could be uneven. I always preferred his more exotic work to the American stuff like *Gordon Liddy Is My Muse*. He could be too derivative of Thomas Pynchon. He could be difficult in a frivolous way. But at his best, he deserved better than he got. Batchelor's work has a fierce intelligence, a deep and abiding interest in the issues of the contemporary world, and an incisive view of the individual's place in that world. He took chances, sometimes leaping off the edge of the world. He could tell a cracking good story, too, supported by a quirky and rich and brave imagination. (For all I know, he still possesses these qualities, but

his books are out of print and he hasn't published anything new for over a decade. According to Wikipedia, however, he is working on a new set of novels.)

The Birth of the People's Republic of Antarctica is, in my opinion, his best novel. I remember the first time I read it, picked up randomly because I liked the title. As I began to read, I realized I had something unique in my hands, something that was about to blow the top of my head off. Beleaguered freighters full of plague victims set adrift by governments unwilling to deal with sick refugees, fated to roam the seas? A future of religious war and conflict over limited resources? A man named Skallagrim Strider, larger than life and outside of the law, who leads these refugees to a new life in a free republic in Antarctica? And all of this recounted by an observer both uncanny in his observations and a fool.

The very act of writing *The Birth* was, to my mind, audacity of the first order, showing the kind of nerve you wish you'd see more often. Further, in retooling parts of the myth of Beowulf, Batchelor had created a mythic resonance that made the whole thing seem timeless--even as it didn't need that, was as timely then as it now in its warnings and its revelations.

Parts of this novel, merciless in its execution and intent, made me cry. Parts of it reminded me of John Brunner's *Stand on Zanzibar*. Parts of it were literally like nothing I'd ever read before. Batchelor's observations on the frailty, cruelty, futility, and bravery of human life horrified me and moved me. Somehow, he managed to use summary more often than scene and get away with it (something that influenced me in writing *Shriek: An Afterword*), juxtaposed scenes both terrifying and funny, and never let the reader or his characters off the hook.

But, honestly, I don't think I can put it any better than whoever wrote the description on the back cover of the trade paperback edition: "Batchelor has written a stunning lament about the beastliness in man and the violence in nature, about the darkness of hope abandoned and the blood-price of hope regained. It is a bewitching work of profound and prophetic vision."

And now forgotten, at a time when it is most relevant, when many other fictions I read seem childlike in comparison.

Even if they were not immediately eaten by their mothers, the offspring of ghouls would be short-lived, for they are typically formless things that seem less the product of parturition than pathology. It therefore roused great envy among the mining community when one of their number gave birth to a perfectly formed baby boy; who would have looked rosy, had anyone been so perverse as to light a lamp in the dank niche where he was born. - the opening of "The Ghoul's Child" from *The Throne of Bones*

Brian McNaughton achieved his greatness after a lifetime of anonymity and toiling in the trenches of the horror field. McNaughton first started publishing horror in the 1960s, at a time when there was no recognizable horror field as such. The only big authors working in horror were people like Robert Bloch. McNaughton got by with a newspaper day job and writing pulpy mass market paperbacks. Then, when things got worse, in the 1970s, he wrote, as he put it, "a lot of books with the word 'Satan' in the title." He also wrote for men's magazines.

When he reappeared in the early 1990s, McNaughton was only about a decade away



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from his own death. At this point, he was working full-time jobs in factories, unable to find a publisher for his work. He had stopped writing.

Then, for some reason, he started writing again. This time, though, something was different, or at least seems different from my perspective. He had a vision, and he appeared to be writing solely for himself. He sold his first new stories of Seemura to magazines in the now-resurgent horror field, places like Terminal Fright, TEKELI-LI, and Weird Book. The Seemura stories had the look and feel of odd adult swords-and-sorcery tales. They had an originality and seriousness to them that bypassed the easy wit of Fritz Leiber's Fafhrd & The Grey Mouser series. McNaughton was Old School, in some cases seemingly Old Testament. He was Clark Ashton Smith without the pretty. He was Lovecraft exiled to a foreign, murderous land. The pulp roots from whence McNaughton came provided the grit and grime for these stories, enhancing their verisimilitude. Visceral and extreme, they could be moody, atmospheric, and touching. Necromancers and sorcerer kings, shamen and lovely princesses--all of these elements should have seemed familiar, and yet in McNaughton's hands they became exotic, fundamentally strange, and original again.

When McNaughton's collection of the Seemura stories, *The Throne of Bones*, appeared in 1997, it received acclaim in the horror field, even won the World Fantasy Award. And then came a trade paperback edition. And then that went out of print. And then a second collection, not as good as *Throne*. And then McNaughton died, and now, except among some hardcore horror fans, no one remembers McNaughton, or his one remarkable book.

Two writers. One child of the literary mainstream, with pedigree, the other a pulp author for much of his life, touched by sudden vision, sudden clarity. Both now silent. Both now part of the Shadow Cabinet.

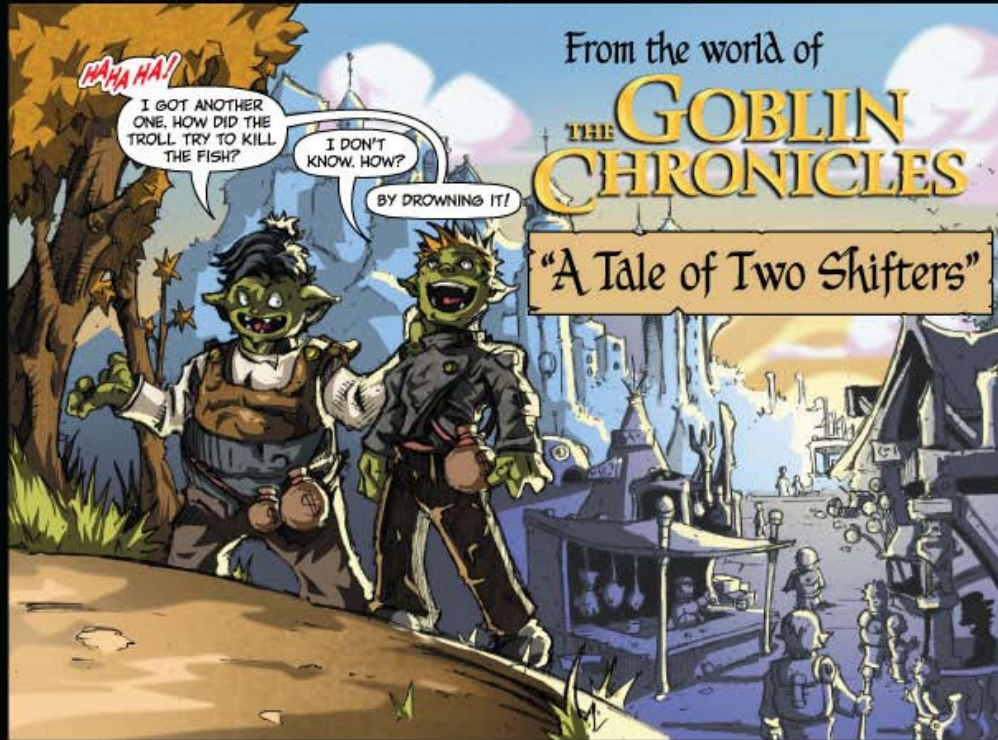
There was a time in the mid-1980s when Batchelor was golden. There was a time in the mid-1990s when McNaughton had a modicum of fame and attention. At both times, for both men, to readers and reviewers, it must have seemed as if they were fated to advance from strength to strength. This did not happen. Instead, one died and the other stopped writing.

Who now writing will join the Shadow Cabinet of the future? Who will write something so powerful that it so colonizes the minds of certain readers that they will care enough to remember it in print?

Some answers next time, from within...the Shadow Cabinet.



PREVIEW: Fablewood Anthology



CREATED & WRITTEN BY: TROY DYE & TOM KELESIDES
ART: COLLIN FOGEL COLORS: DUSTIN EVANS LETTERS: JASON ARTHUR



PLEASE DON'T KILL US!

I'M TOO YOUNG TO DIE!



YOU HURT KROG'S FEELINGS. BUT KROG'S FEELINGS HURT LESS IF YOU GIVE HIM ALL YOUR GOLD. GOBLINES HURT LESS, TOO.



AS EASY AS PIXIEBERRY PIE.



MONEYMONEY-MONEYMONEY!



CONK

YEOUCH!

BOY, HOW MANY TIMES DO I HAVE TO TELL YOU NOT TO CUT IT SO CLOSE?



YOU'RE TOO YOUNG TO BE KEEPIN' TROLL FORM FOR THAT LENGTH OF TIME. THE STRAIN COULD'VE FORCED YOU TO CHANGE BACK TO NORMAL. AND THEN THOSE GOBLINS WOULD'VE CLOBBERED YA!

I CAN'T SHIFT LIKE I USED TO, YA KNOW. I'M NOT SURE IF I COULD'VE HELPED YOU. ODDS ARE WE'D BOTH BE IN TROUBLE THEN!



SORRY, GRAMPS.

I LIKE YOUR SPIRIT, BOY, BUT DON'T WASTE YOUR ENERGY ON CHUMP CHANGE. SAVE IT FOR THE GRAND GOBLIN MARKET IN PUDDLEFOOT. THAT'S WHERE THE REAL LOOT IS!



NOW LET'S GET INTO CHARACTER AND DO SOME PROPER SNEAK-THIEVING.

AH, YES. LIVING SO CLOSE TO THE BORDER OF THE GOBLIN KINGDOM DOES HAVE ITS ADVANTAGES.



THANKS FOR TAKING ME, GRAMPS. I HAVEN'T HAD THIS MUCH FUN SINCE WE BURGLERD CLAN BLUEBEAR'S STOREHOUSE LAST SUMMER. THOSE TROLLS NEVER KNEW WHAT HIT 'EM.

HUSH, BOY. TROUBLE'S A BREWIN'.





NO ONE WANTS TO HAND HIM OVER, EH?

SERGEANT, RANDOMLY PICK A FEW PEOPLE OUT OF THE CROWD TO TAKE THE ESCAPEE'S PLACE.



FOUND HIM!



NICE TRY, FARMER FLYN.

YOU DIRTY LITTLE SNITCH!

HEY, GUY! BETTER YOU THAN ME!



THAT'S IT, BOY! THAT'S OUR MARK...THE TAX WAGON.

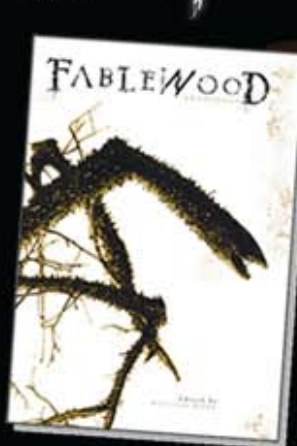
THAT BIG FAT JUICY WAGON IS FULL OF LOOT! AND BEST OF ALL, THEY'LL BLAME THE GOBLINS FOR THE CRIME.

I LIKE THE WAY YOU THINK, GRAMPS. BIG!

FOR MORE CHECK OUT THE...

FABLEWOOD

ANTHOLOGY



WWW.FABLEWOODCOMIC.COM - WWW.APEENTERTAINMENT.COM

WWW.ARCHONCOMICS.COM

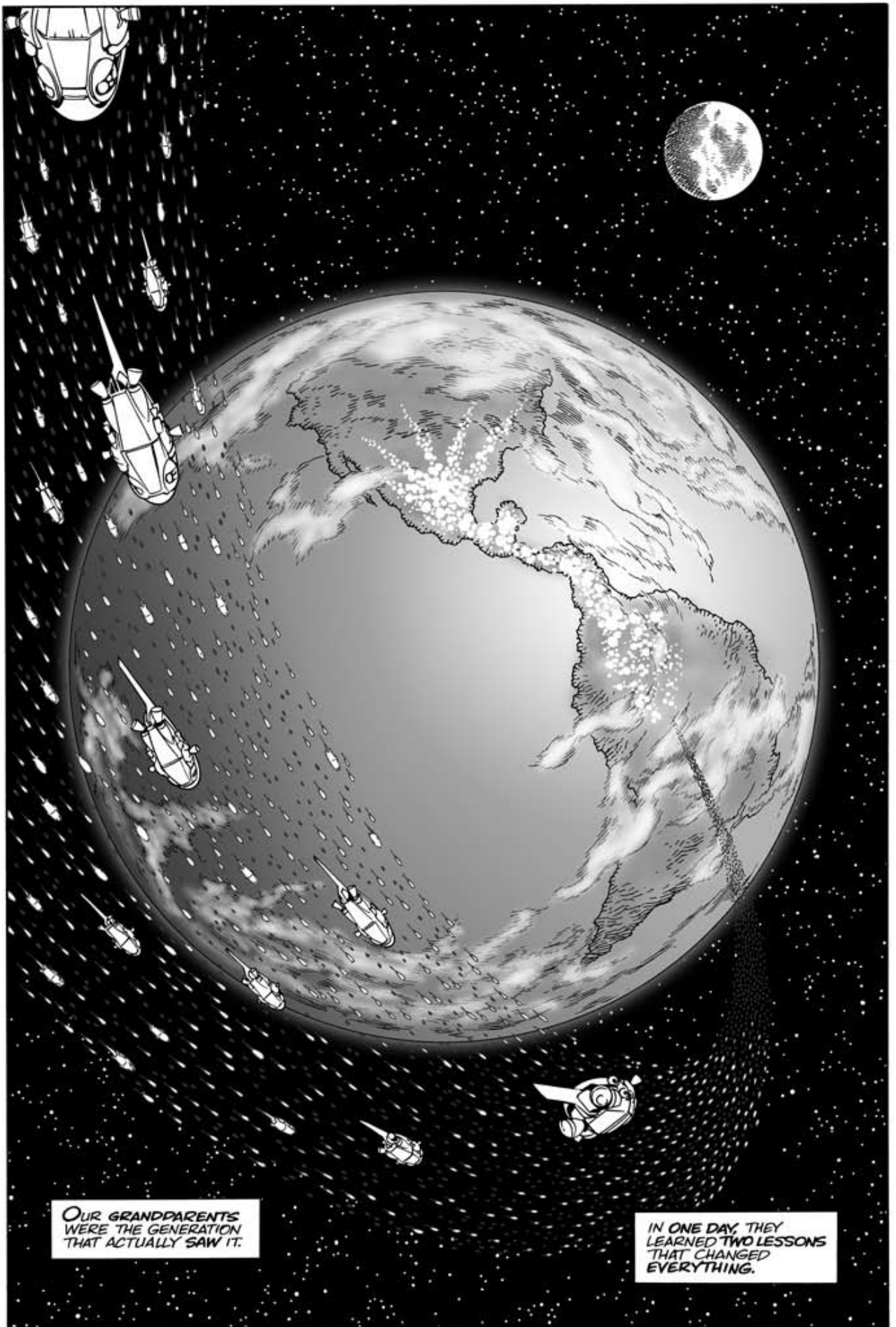
PREVIEW: Grease Monkey Book 2: A Tale of Two Species by Tim Eldred

Sometimes it still surprises even ME that there's a book one. The concept for Grease Monkey has been with me for a pretty long time (15 years as I write these words) and the published version has been around for 10 percent of that (1.5 years) so I have to occasionally remind myself that it's not entirely mine any more. When a twisted string of causality finally resulted in it getting published in a handsome hardcover edition from Tor Books in summer 2006, it was like watching my child go off into the world to make friends and influence people I would probably never meet. If you're one of those people, I hope it was a good experience for you. If you haven't yet become acquainted, you can remedy this any time over at www.greasemonkeybook.com.

The story for Book 2 has been with me for about half of those 15 years mentioned above. I had delusions about turning Grease Monkey into an animated feature film once the first book got off the launch pad, but I also had to confront the idea that if it were to be optioned by a movie studio the first thing on their agenda would be to tear it to bits. Having seen a few movies and read a few books in my day, I thought I had come up with something that didn't need to be "improved" upon by some overpaid executive. So even as I wrote my movie script there was a nagging voice in the back of my head saying, "do it yourself, stupid!"

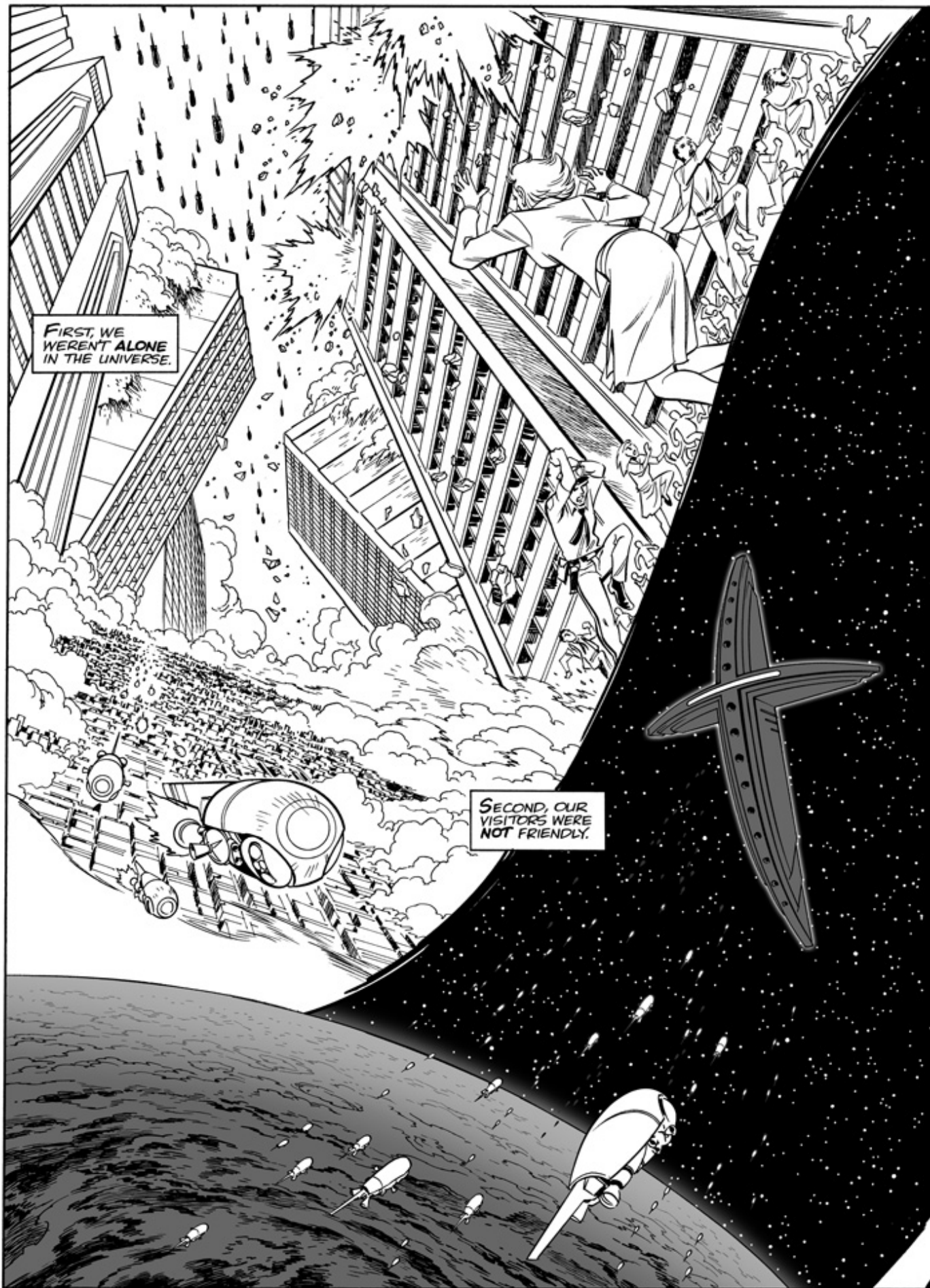
I actually did turn the first act into an animated mini-movie (which you can also find at the website) and I thought about continuing on from there to make the whole thing that way. But even that much effort wouldn't bullet-proof it against tampering. All it takes is one middle-manager to invent a problem and you're back to square one. It's a shame that it has to be that way. When we look back over history we can see centuries of classic stories that did just fine without having to be "re-imagined" or "focused-grouped" or "beta-tested." In fact, if all those things had been around before the 20th century, we might not have gotten classic literature at all. Just a lot of mediocrity. Fortunately, the movie game isn't the only one in town.

In the face of all this, I decided the script would do just as well as the basis for a graphic novel and started drawing it. So here's the first chunk of Grease Monkey Book 2. The whole thing is going to take a year or two to finish, with new pages will be uploaded to the website every 60 days. If it all works out, there will be a paper version at the end. In the meantime, I hope it will make lots of friends.



OUR GRANDPARENTS
WERE THE GENERATION
THAT ACTUALLY SAW IT.

IN ONE DAY, THEY
LEARNED TWO LESSONS
THAT CHANGED
EVERYTHING.

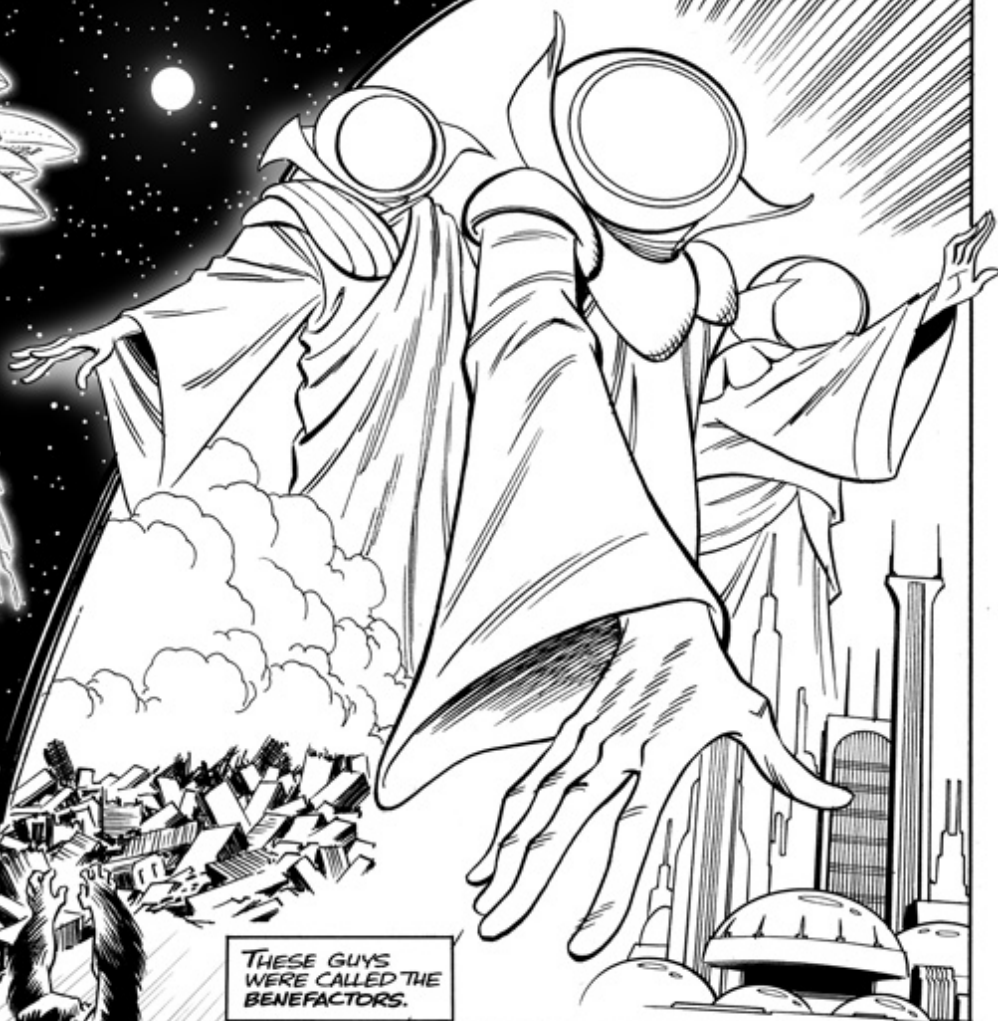


FIRST, WE
WERENT ALONE
IN THE UNIVERSE.

SECOND, OUR
VISITORS WERE
NOT FRIENDLY.



FORTUNATELY, THEY WEREN'T THE ONLY ONES OUT THERE.



THESE GUYS WERE CALLED THE BENEFACTORS.

THEY CAME TO HELP US RECOVER FROM THE INVASION, JUST AS THEY HAD HELPED OTHER PLANETS BEFORE US.



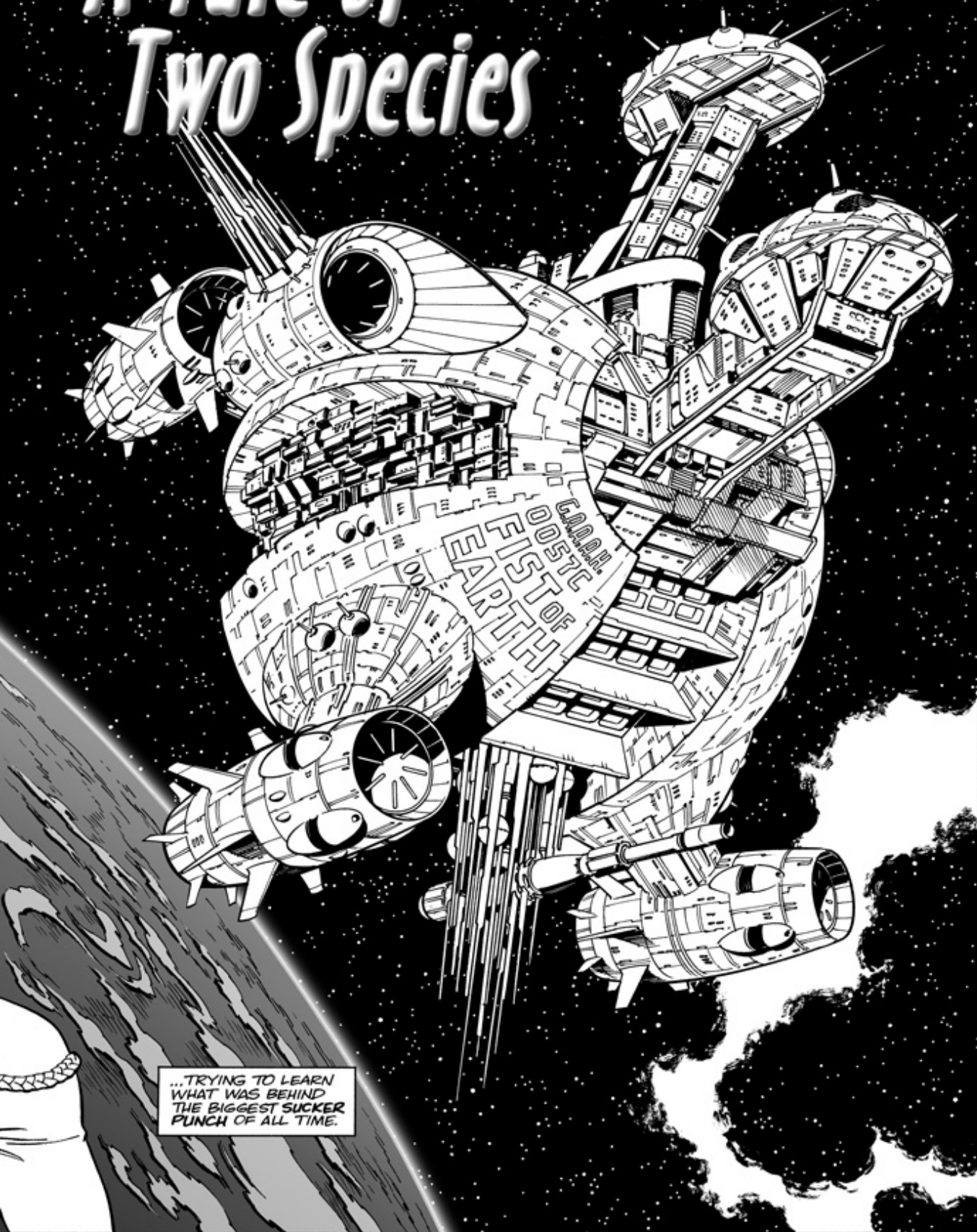
THAT'S WHEN IT GOT REAL INTERESTING ON PLANET EARTH.



(START THE HEROIC
THEME MUSIC HERE...)

TWO GENERATIONS
LATER, AND HERE
WE ALL ARE. (THAT'S
ME ON THE LEFT...)

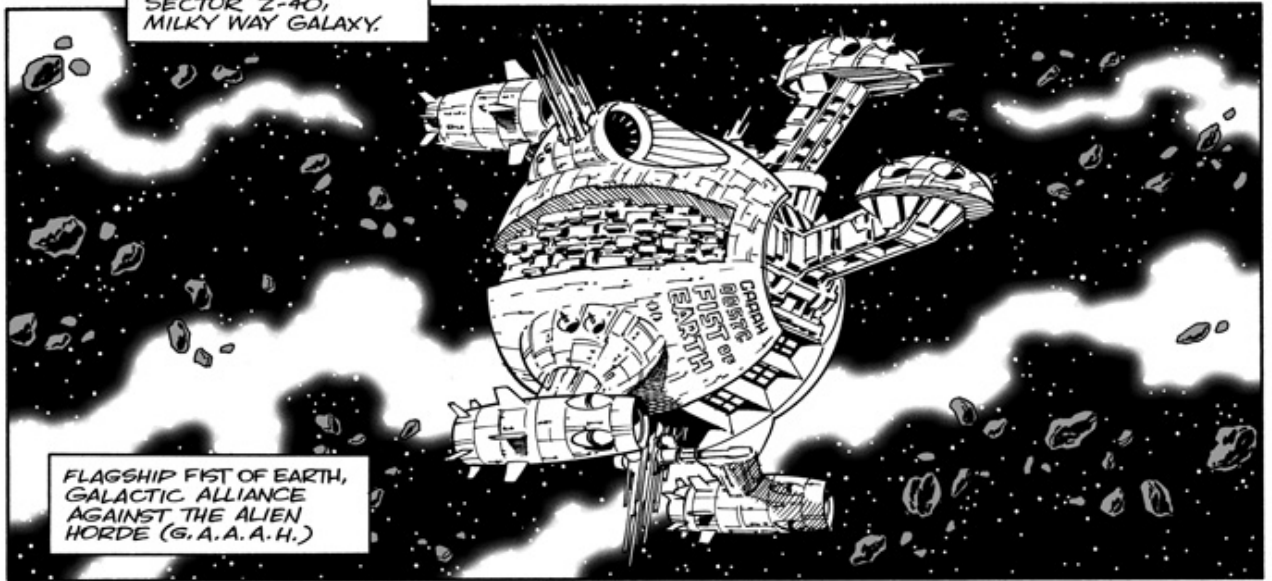
A Tale of Two Species



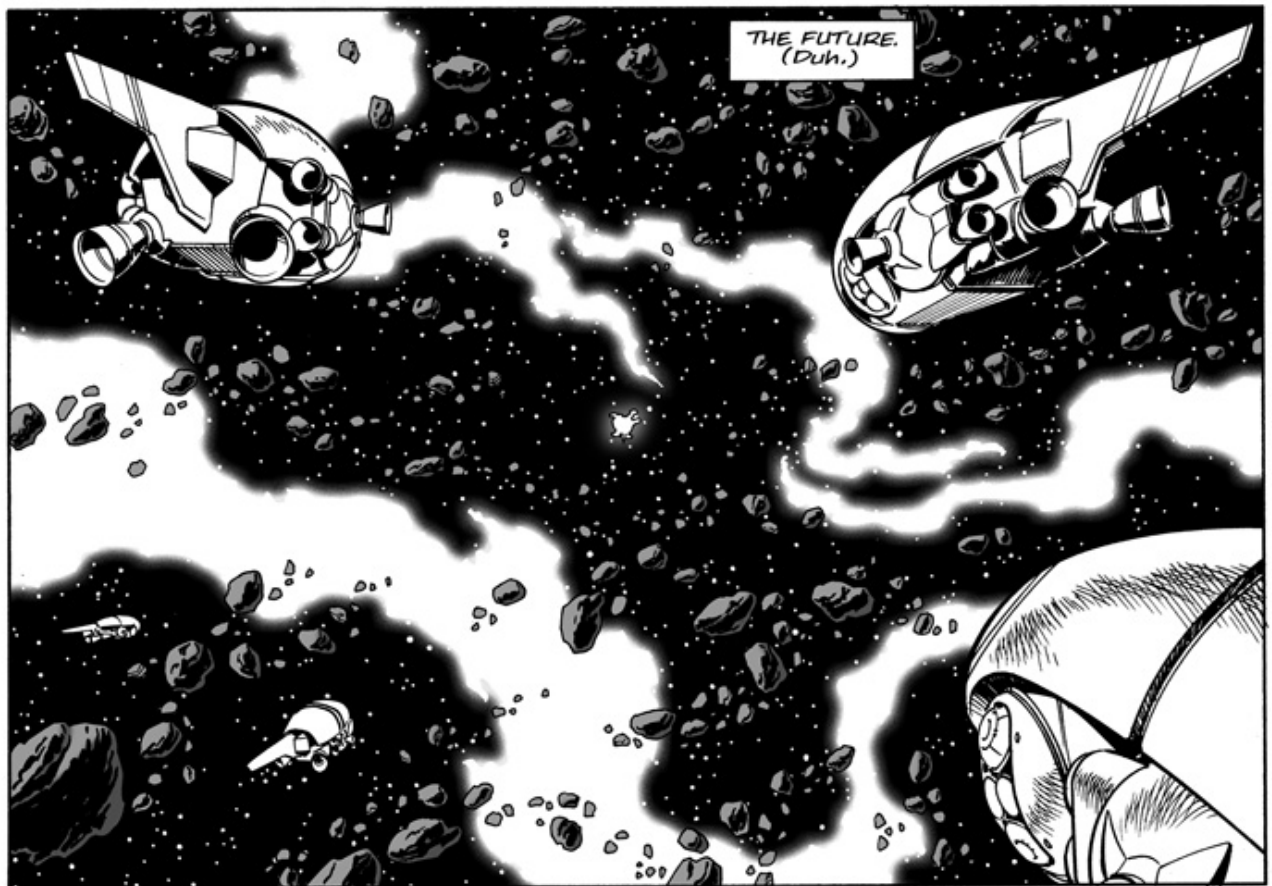
...TRYING TO LEARN
WHAT WAS BEHIND
THE BIGGEST SUCKER
PUNCH OF ALL TIME.



CRETU ASTEROID REEF,
SECTOR Z-40,
MILKY WAY GALAXY.



FLAGSHIP FIST OF EARTH,
GALACTIC ALLIANCE
AGAINST THE ALIEN
HORDE (G.A.A.H.)



THE FUTURE.
(Duh.)





AND WHO KNOWS HOW MANY MORE...

ADMIRAL, I'M READY TO SCRAMBLE ALL OUR SQUADRONS AT YOUR COMMAND!

NOT YET.

THERE'S SOMETHING...

MA'AM?

SCRAMBLE JUST ONE SQUADRON. WE'LL MATCH THEIR CURRENT NUMBER AND SEE IF IT DRAWS OUT MORE OF THEM.

WHO SHALL WE SEND OUT?

IT'S OBVIOUS, COLONEL CRAINE.

SEND OUT BARBARIAN SQUADRON.

BUT...

ADMIRAL, THEY'RE NOT--

OH, YOU OBJECT TO MY CHOICE, COLONEL HENNIKER?

MA'AM...

THAT SQUADRON IS SO... UNDISCIPLINED.

YOU CAN'T PREDICT WHAT THEY'LL TRY TO PULL!





PREVIEW: Once Were Cops

by Ken Bruen

Kurt Browksi, built like a shit brickhouse and just as solid. A cop out of Manhattan

South, he was having a bad day.

Much like most days.

His heritage was East European but contained so many strands, not even his parents knew

for sure it's exact basis

And cared less

They wanted the American Dream

Cash.....and cash.....and yeah, more of same

They didn't get it

Made them mean

Very

His mother was a cleaner and his father had been a construction worker but had settled

into a life of booze, sure beat getting up at 5.00 in the morning

His father beat his mother and they both beat Kurt

Somehow, he, if not survived them, got past them and finished High School, joined the

cops

He wanted to be where you gave payback

That was how he saw the force, emphasis on force. He was certainly East European in

his view of the boys in blue, they had the juice to lean onwho-ever-the-

fuck they wished

And he did

Hard

His early weapon of choice was a K-bar.

Short, heavy and lethal and you could swing it real easy, plus, they rarely saw it coming.

They were watching your holstered gun and wallop, he slid the bar out of his sleeve and

that's all she wrote

His rep was built on it and over the years, he became known as Kebar.

Did he care?

Not so's you'd notice. He didn't do friends, so what the fuck did he care.

Sometimes though, he longed to go have a few brews with the guys, shoot the shit, chill.

He adored country music, that sheer sentimentality was a large part of his nature and he

kept it hidden. His fellow officers, they went to the bar, got a few put away then played

country and western till the early hours

He loved Loretta Young, Ol Hank of course and then Gretchen Peters, Emmylou Harris,

Iris de Ment, Lucinda Williams, they were his guilty pleasures. All that heartache, it was

like they know him

His partners in the prowl car rarely lasted long, he took so many chances, they either got

hurt real fast or transferred

And now, you fucking believe it?

They were giving him some snot nosed kid,

O' Brien, his commanding officer, a Mick, those guys, they still got the top jobs, had

summoned him

Anyone tell you the Micks were a thing of the past in the force.....take a look at
the roll call

You think they were letting that lucrative line of not so equal opportunity slip away.

O'Brien didn't like Kebar, knew the guy was unhinged but he sure got results and like

O'Brien, he adhered to the old idea

"Justice was dispensed in alleys, not courtrooms."

He said to Kebar

"Have a seat."

"I'll stand Sir."

Naturally

O'Brien wondered if the guy ever eased up, said

"Suit yourself."

He took a good look at Kebar

The guy was all muscle, rage and bile

Perfect cop for the times

His face was a mess of broken nose, busted veins (he liked his vodka, straight) a scar
over his left eye, he looked like a pit bull in uniform.

O'Brien said

"Got you a new partner."

Kebar growled

“Don’t need no partner.”

O’Brien smiled

This is where it was good to be chief, flex that muscle, asked

“I ask you what you needed?.....did you hear me do that, yeah, it’s not what you need

mister, it’s what I tell you’re getting, we have a reciprocal arrangement with The Irish

Goverment to take twenty of their’s and twenty of ours go over there

Kebar had heard all this crap before.....yada yada, he sighed, asked

“Who am I getting?”

O’Brien was looking forward to this, opened a file, took out his glasses, all to annoy the

shit of Kebar, pretended to read

“Matt O Shea, did a year on the beat in Galway”

He paused then added

“Galway, that’s in Ireland.”

Kebar would have spit, reined it in a bit, sneered

“A Mick, no disrespect sir but a green horn, gonna have to break his cherry for him?”

O’Brien was delighted, better than he’d hoped, he said

“Actually, he seems a bright kid.”

Kebar was enraged, rasped

“In Ireland, they don’t even carry freaking guns, they’re like

He couldn’t think of a suitable degrading term, settled for

“Rent a cops.”

O’Brien smiled again, he was having a fine morning, said

“I’ll expect you to treat him properly, that’s all, dismissed.”

Outside the office, Kebar spat, a passing cop was going to say something, saw who it was and kept on moving

Kebar went down to the car pool, rage simmering in his belly, leaned against his car, got his flask out, drank deep. A young guy, in sparkling new uniform approached, put out his hand, asked

“Officer Browski?”

Kebar stared at him, the new uniform was blinding, the gun belt neon in it’s newness, the buttons shining on his tunic

He belched, grunted

“Who’s asking?”

The kid still had his hand out, his eyes full of gung ho bullshit, said

‘I’m your new partner, Matt O Shea, they call me.....’

Before he could go any further, Kebar said

“Shut the fuck up, that’s your first lesson, I want to know something, I’ll ask you, can you follow that?”

“Yes sir.”

Sir

Kebar thought it was going to even worse than he’d imagined

He asked

“Can you drive?”

“Of course, I.....”

“Then get in the fucking car, get us out of here.”

Kebar looked at his sheet, the assignments they’d pulled and said

“Head for Brooklyn, can you find that?”

Shea was going to tell him he now lived there but buttoned it, just nodded, thinking

“Holy fook, I get a psycho on me first day.”

They were passing an area of deserted lots, mud on the ground, no signs of habitation and

Kebar said

“Pull up here.”

Shea, nervous, before he could stop himself, went

“Here?”

“Deaf as well?”

He pulled over

Kebar got out, said

“You hear of backup, get out of the fucking car.”

Shea got tangled in his safety belt and harness, all the frigging equipment and it weighted a ton, plus, the uniform, Christ, how hot was it and it itched

Kebar said

“Before the weekend, maybe?”

Shea, finally out, waited and Kebar said

“Go, I’m behind you.”

And for a wild moment, Shea wondered if the mad bastard was going to shoot him? The

other cops had already told him of how Kebar's partners never lasted

Before he could think beyond this, he got an almighty push in the back, sent him sprawling in the mud, covering his brand new blues in crap and dirt.

He rolled round, tempted to go for his piece, Kebar was slugging from a flask, said "Now that's more like it, you don't look like such a freaking virgin, we go into the hood, they see that shiny new blue, we're meat.'

And then he turned back to the car

Shea watched his retreating bulk and hated him with a ferocity of pure intent

As they drove off, Kebar was chuckling and Shea asked

"You going to share the joke?"

Kebar looked at him, said

"First day on the job, you're already a dirty cop."

They did a full day, settling domestics, leaning on dope dealers, cop stuff, some of it wildly exhilarating and most, boring as hell

And Shea, he never attempted to change his uniform or even brush the mud off it

Kebar was impressed, he didn't let on but thought

"Kid has cojones."

Even better, he didn't whine or complain, whatever nasty task Kebar set him and he sure had some beaut's, the kid just went at them, head down, his mouth set in a grim smile

End of the shift, Kebar was tempted to say

"You done good."

Went with

“Early start tomorrow, don’t be late.”

The kid looked out on his feet, asked

“You want to grab a cold one?”

And for a moment, Kebar nearly said yes, then reined it in, said

“I don’t drink with the help.”

Everyone has their Achilles heel, the one area that makes them vulnerable. From Bush to Bono, there is something they don’t want known

Be it pretzels or lack of height

Kebar’s was his sister, Lucia

She has a serious mental handicap and never aged past five, now in her thirties, she still had the face and mind of a five year old

Their parents had been horrified and regarded her as a curse

They had tried to beat it out of her, literally

Now, she was in a very expensive home, where they treated her well, and she seemed if not happy, at least less terrorized

Out on Long Island, it cost a bundle to keep her there

Kebar poured every nickel into her upkeep

He was losing the battle

The thought of her being put into one of the State institutions filled him with dread

She’d been there already, courtesy of her parents and suffered serious setbacks on every

level

Soon as Kebar could, he got her out of there, and into the new home

The freight was killing him, he didn't go to ball games, or buy new clothes,

every damn dime went to her

It wasn't enough

Enter the wiseguys

A particular slice of Sleaze named Morronni, feeling Kebar out and finally putting it to

him

"You need some serious wedge and we can give it to you."

How the fucks knew about Lucia, he didn't even ask, that was their gig, secrets.

He wanted to get his K-bar, ram it down the cocksucker's throat but it was a week when

he couldn't make the payments for Lucia so he asked

"What I gotta do?"

His heart in ribbons, he hated dirty cops with a vengeance and here he was, joining the

ranks of the damned

Morronni smiled, said

"Hey, no big thing, you let us know when the cops are gonna make a bust, whose phones

are tapped, small stuff, you know, nuttin to get in a sweat bout."

Yeah

Lure you in

They did

And progressed

Bigger stuff

The money was on a par

He was able to guarantee six months ahead for Lucia

The proprietor of the home, a sleek suit named Kemmel, said

“Mr Browski, we don’t usually take large sums of money, cheque’s, credit cards, they are the norm.”

Kebar gave him his street look, the one that had serious skels look away, said

“Money is money, you telling me you cant do off the books, you want me to get a sanitation crew out here, give your place the once over.”

No

He took the money

And in a sly tone, asked

“You need a receipt?”

Kebar wasn’t used to being threatened, least not by pricks in suits, unless they were pimps and certainly, never twice.

Kemmel was sitting behind a large mahogany desk, smirk in place, not a single paper on the desk, a framed photo of his shiny wife and shinier kids facing out to the world, proclaiming

“See, I’m a winner.”

Kebar leaned across the desk, deliberately knocking the frame aside, grabbed Kemmel by his tie, pulled him back across the desk, asked

“You like fucking with me, that it?”

Kemmel, who'd never been manhandled in his life, was terrified, he could smell garlic on the cop's breath, he managed to croak

“I think we might have hit a wrong note.”

Kebar put his thumb up against Kemmel's right eye, said

“One tiny push, and you'll see things in a whole different light.”

Then he let him go, stood up, asked

“You were saying?”

Kemmel, struggling for his dignity, adjusting his tie, said

“No problem Mr B, I'll see to your

.....am.....arrangement.....personally.”

Kebar edged the frame with his worn cowboy boots, his one indulgence, bought in the village and custom made, said

“Real nice family, tell you what, I'll drive by, time to time, keep an eye on them, call it a personal arrangement.”

Next day at work, Kebar was leaning against the car, hoping the kid would be late

He wasn't

And the uniform, still mud encased.

Kebar asked

“How'd the roster sergeant like your uniform?”

The kid said

“He gave me a bollicking.”

Kebar liked the term, had a nice ferocity about it, said

“Tore you a new one, did he?”

The kid went

“Tore what?”

Kebar laughed, he was going to have to teach him American as well as everything else,
said

“Asshole, we say, he tore me a new one, means you got reamed.”

If the kid appreciated the lesson, he didn't show it.

Kebar was enjoying himself, it had been a long time since he enjoyed being buddied up.

He turned towards his door when he got an almighty push in the back, jammed him
against the roof and then his arm was twisted up his back, the kids arm round his
windpipe, he heard

“Let me teach you something smartarse, The Guards, no matter what you think of them,
they never forget.....ever.....and you ever push me in the fucking back
again, you better be ready to back it up.”

Then he let go

Kebar was stunned, no one had the balls to come at him like that in a long time and he
debated reaching for his bar then began to laugh, said

“You're a piece of work, you know that, let's roll.”

The days surprises weren't over yet, they answered a call to a domestic, and Kebar said

“Don’t get between the couple, nine times out of ten, you subdue the man, the freaking broad will gut you.”

The kid said

“Believe it or not, we have wife beaters in Ireland.”

Kebar took a quick look at the kid, he was wearing a real serious expression and Kebar asked

“What you’d do, call the priest.’

Without changing his look the kid said

“Often, tis the priest doing the beating.”

Kebar liked that a lot, he was warming all the time to the punk, despite his best efforts.

They got to the scene, and Kebar led the way, His hand on his holster, the door of the apartment was open and a skinny white guy was whacking a woman like his life depended on it

Kebar said

“You want to stop doing that sir?”

He didn’t

Said

“Fuck off pig, family business.”

Kebar shrugged his sleeve, the bar sliding down and he moved forward, missed seeing a side door open and a shotgun pointing out

Two shots nearly deafened him and a body tumbled out, a guy moaning, he’d been hit in the shoulder and leg. Kebar looked at the kid, his smoking gun sill leveled. Kebar moved

to the guy on the floor, kicked the shotgun away, said

“Move and you’re fucking dead.”

The guy who’d been beating on his wife, shouted

“You shot my brother, you cocksucker.”

Kebar took him out with the bar and then the woman started so she joined the bodies on the floor.

The kid still had the gun pointed

Kebar said

“You can put it down now.”

The kid’s eyes were clear and he nodded, said

“Guess we better call it in.”

They did

Kebar moved to the kid, said

“I owe you.”

The kid gave him a look, said

“Just back up, that’s all, what is it you guys say? No biggie.”

The brass arrived and re-assured Shay it was a good shoot and even though Internal Affairs would be talking to him, he had nothing to worry about, they actually clapped him on the back, said

“You did real fine.”

Outside, as they got into the prowl, Kebar said

“Pretty fancy shooting.”

The kid shrugged

“I was aiming for what I figured was his head, need some practice I suppose.”

They got out of there and back to the station house, Kebar broke his rule, asked

“Can I buy you a brew, shit, lots of brews and what that’s stuff you Micks
like.....Jameson?”

Shay stood for a moment, looking at the ground, then

“No thanks, I’m the help.....that’s what you said.....right.”

And he was gone

Kebar felt let down, like he’d failed the kid.

What was for damn sure was, the kid hadn’t failed him.



Thank You

