

Reconvene

Programme Book



the 50th British Eastercon April 1st - 5th 1999



Reconvene has been brought to you by a dedicated team of volunteers, without whom none of you would be here this weekend.

We'd like to thank, in no particular order:

Committee & Credits

<i>Chairman</i>	<i>Steve Davies</i>
<i>Secretary</i>	<i>Paul Dormer</i>
<i>Treasurer</i>	<i>Roger Burton West</i>
<i>Programme</i>	<i>Gwen Funnell & Peter Wareham</i>
<i>Guest Liaison</i>	<i>Sue Edwards</i>
<i>Dealers Room</i>	<i>Mark Plummer</i>
<i>Operations</i>	<i>Gary Stratmann</i>
<i>Cybersybil</i>	<i>Mychelle Lovelace</i>
<i>Publications</i>	<i>Tom Abba</i>
<i>Membership & Hotel Liaison</i>	<i>Chris Bell</i>

and our guests:

*Peter S Beagle,
Jeff Noon,
John Clute,
Tom Holt*

& guest artist (and cover artist for this, and all previous Reconvene publications):

Ron Tiner

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Welcome to Reconvene, the 50th Eastercon.

Chairman's Report

For those of you who don't know what to expect, I can reassure you that there is nothing in here that needs to be read at the convention. For that, you need to go to the 'Read Me' which you will also find in your registration pack.

I hope that you enjoy Reconvene, we have spent over three years on it and have put in a great deal of effort leading up these few days. We're particularly pleased with our Guests of Honour, Peter Beagle, John Clute and Jeff Noon, who you will find pieces about later in this Programme Book. We also have our other guests, Tom Holt, Ron Tiner and VJ Bowen (TAFF delegate). Please talk to them, buy them a beer and so on. Last but far from least, there is the programme itself on which we have laboured long in the hope of making this an Eastercon to remember.

We have also made some changes in how we're using the Adelphi. Some of these have been due to pressure from the hotel, some because of the fire which burned out a couple of rooms earlier this year and some because we hope they'll

make life easier for you. If there are unexpected problems, please let me apologise in advance.

Not long ago, some friends presented me with a T-shirt depicting 'The Tomb of the Unknown Worrier.' "We saw this and immediately thought of you," they said. I can't imagine why. Well, OK, someone has to stand around saying "What if they aren't all having a good time? What if something's gone terribly wrong and they're sitting there being miserable about it? What if?." Well, if you've got a problem, please come and talk to me or to any other member of the committee. We'll try and do something about it. I can't guarantee we'll be able to fix it, but we'll have a go.

So, why are you here? At Reconvene, that is, assuming you didn't leave opening this until after you got home. When it comes down to it, most people come to conventions to have a good time with their friends and enjoy the company of people who like the same things as them. So I hope that you're having fun and that we'll see you again next year.

Steve Davies

Steve Davies (Chairman)

Having been unexpectedly whisked into existence as the imaginary friend of a small girl in Chicopee Falls, Massachusetts, Steve

Your Committee

attended his first convention in 1978, published his first fanzine in 1980 and was on his first con committee in 1986. He finds this all a little bit horrifying. His usual role on committees is chief worrier, a position that he seems to have a natural affinity for: and he agreed to work on a committee with Chris Bell so as to give him something to worry about. A noted moose-wrestler and dachshund-trainer, the latter being the more strenuous and demanding hobby, Steve has also spent several years investigating the Macaroni Electrical Company, owing to a typographical error in an investigative fanzine in 1983. He is interested in computers, books, fanzines and cooking, often managing to combine all four in the fanzine PLOKTA which he co-edits and which is available for trade, beer or interesting letters. He is currently standing for GUFF and is the UK agent for San Francisco in 2002, in addition to being Reconvene's chairman. He hopes to have a free weekend sometime before 2003.

Paul Dormer (Secretary)

Born into a family of teapot-spout fitters in the industrial north-west, Paul has suffered a meteoric rise to prominence in science fiction fandom, as a result of which he has been cut out of his Great Uncle Meleager's will and cannot now expect to inherit the seventy-fourth part share in the family business to which he would otherwise have been entitled. First inducted into fandom in 1974, whilst working in the same building as Colin Fine and Martin Easterbrook, Paul went to his first fannish event when Isaac Asimov visited the Globe pub. His first convention was Novacon 6, his first Eastercon in 1977, and the Worldcon in Brighton in 1979 sparked off an interest in travel. He's missed just one Worldcon since, and has also made it to conventions in various parts of Europe. He's worked his way up from gopher at Novacon 10



via sub-committee level at Seacon 84 and, committee at Contrivance to Worldcon Division Head at Intersection, after which the poor sap thought he'd rest for a few years before doing any more conrunning. Then he went out for dinner with this group of people at a small con in Cambridge in 1997... Sucker!

Roger Burton West (Treasurer)

Roger arrived in fandom by accident while looking for something else (he can't now remember what). Since one of his degree courses taught him how to cheat spot cheating in accounts, he was an obvious candidate for the post of Treasurer for Reconvene: for which reason Chris Bell utterly forbade him to volunteer for the post, a fiendish policy which was instantly successful. He has threatened to put the convention on his credit card, re-register it in the Bahamas and declare it an importer of Moldovan machine tools for tax purposes. In his secret identity, he is a computer-wrangler for a certain infernally-named ISP. The only Hogo winner on the committee (Chris Bell also has one, but she stole it), his hobbies include things that go "bang", drilling holes in unsuspecting walls, and feeding his computer zoo.



Gary Stratmann

In his avatar as Gary Stratmann, (his twenty-seventh human incarnation since the beginning of the world) Haryashathamuni, the ancient Vedic god of disconcertingly loud noises, enjoys a worldwide following among the superstitious and easily-convinced, with temples as far afield as Seattle, Adelaide and Murmansk. When not being human, Haryashathamuni likes to relax by putting his feet up and watching the stalactite races on TV, an indulgence severely curtailed by his duties as Ops manager for the Reconvene committee. According to the Book of Reinaugurations, the principal devotional text of his cult for over five thousand years, Haryashathamuni first became involved in fandom when explosions engineered by Hugh Mascetti drew themselves to his attention by throwing him across a quadrangle at his university.



Gwen Funnell (Programme)

Gwen Funnell lives in Hove, where she listens to the tranquil murmur of the sea on the shingle whilst engraving small but perfectly-formed monograms on bottles, having graduated in 1986 from putting notes into bottles -- she hates writing letters. She also hates making phone calls, so it's a complete mystery why she agreed to work on Programme, a section of con-running that requires a great deal of activity in both areas. She thinks she agreed because Peter didn't talk her out of it; because Chris Bell is very persuasive and gives wonderful hugs; and because she is a control freak who loves organising things. After Seacon (1979), and the Worldcon in 1981 she discovered British conventions at Channelcon and went to six more that year. She now manages a more restrained four or five each year, and can occasionally be seen doing the background work on a programme item, while Peter Wareham does all the hard work running it.

Peter Wareham (Programme)

His first contact with fandom was the Cambridge University Science Fiction Society, which also brought him his first taste of fannish committees, and how to get onto them: as one of the four regulars at the pub meetings, he became treasurer when the outgoing committee graduated. On leaving Cambridge, he founded the St. Albans SF group, Staffen (now, sadly, no more), because he missed the company of fans and suffered from explosion-deprivation. This introduced him to 1/2r Cruttenden, who in turn introduced him to conventions. At a subsequent Novacon, Tim Illingworth "persuaded" him to volunteer as a gopher, from which it was but a short step to the committee of Camcon (onto which he was conscripted while on holiday in America), then the committee of Contrivance '89 (onto which he and Gwen were conscripted while they were both on holiday in America). After Contrivance, Peter retired from con-running, and reverted to the less arduous pursuit of organising convention games and quizzes, for which he reaps the glory by fronting them, while Gwen does all the hard work behind the scenes. When Chris Bell asked them to run Programme for Reconvene, they should have been safe (they weren't in America at the time) but saying "no, no, no, no, never, never, no, oh well all right then" was probably a mistake.



Tom Abba

(Publications and Art Show)

It may come as a surprise to many to learn that Tom Abba is still only twelve years old. He attributes his rather more mature (and rugged) appearance to long nights of Horlicks-drinking and domino-playing on the mean esplanades of Grimsby, his native town (and do we mean native. Oh boy). Rescued by a United Nations snatch squad in 1992, he was relocated to art college in Bristol, whence he made a short foray in 1993 to go to a filk convention in Weston-super-Mare. On arrival at Pentatonic, he was slightly surprised to find that he was on the convention committee, and spent much of the rest of the convention as the DCM. This was his introduction to fandom and to the heady delights of conrunning. Wearing improbable hats came naturally, and in his capacity as an artist he was irresponsible for the Bear in a Box. His ambition (when the demands of Publications and the Art Show at Reconvene allow him some spare time again) is to breed a strain of left-hand spiral wheelks.



Chris Bell

(Membership and Hotel Liaison)

We cannot comment on reports that Chris Bell has the imperial blood of the Habsburgs and the Esterhazys coursing through her veins: pending the result of the appeal, it would be improper to speculate as to how it got there. Suffice it to say that Chris is the only member of your committee who sleeps upside down, hanging from the curtain rail. Chris first got involved in fandom in 44BC, as guest liaison officer at that year's IdesCon (it should be noted that the tragic outcome of Cinna the Poet's signing session was not solely her responsibility) and has been rife ever since. Perhaps her greatest contribution to fandom was stealing the Adelphi Hotel from Byzantium in 1453, only hours before the city's capture and destruction by the Turks. When asked about her philosophy of hotel liaison, Chris says that she likes to think of the relationship between hotel and convention as parallel to that between kidnapper and victim, although she is reluctant to specify who is which.



Sue Edwards (Guest Liaison)

One of only 3,178,367,449,319 women ever to achieve a black belt in Iachi-do, the ancient Welsh art of self-offense, Sue Edwards was born on the fifth moon of Delta Triangulis VI and abducted by space-faring Druids, who brought her to Earth with the intention of sacrificing her in a game of gin rummy. Fortunately she escaped and made her way to Cambridge where she quickly won friends and attracted the notice of the local newspaper by her remarkable shape-changing abilities, before being recruited by the English crown as an agent provocateur. In this capacity she has successfully infiltrated the Reconvene committee as Guest Liaison officer. At the time of writing, she hasn't been found out yet.



Mychelle Lovelace (Communications Cybersybil)

Once memorably described as 'a bewitching fusion of Catherine de Pisan, Podkayne Fries, Radclyffe Hall and the irritating blonde sidekick from "Xena"', Mychelle Lovelace was a professional snowflake enameller with her own thriving business in Reno, Nevada when she attended her first con (Arisia 92); following which she abandoned her hereditary claim to the bishopric of Arles, gave all her possessions to the rich and needy and set off on a spiritual pilgrimage in search of the lost guava & praline ice cream of the Incas. Seven years later, after recovering from almost total amnesia and finding herself on the wrong side of the Atlantic, she immediately joined the Reconvene committee as its Cybersybil (a position for which her intimate relations with a computer uniquely fitted her) in the hope of borrowing money from Roger Burton-West and setting up a plant for assimilating teddy bears into the Borg collective. Her hobbies include renovating old military aircraft, petit point and collecting Rasputin memorabilia.



Eastercon is a fairly loose term, by which is meant the British National SF Convention. This loose terminology would imply that it cannot legitimately be held in the Channel Islands or Northern Ireland, but the politics of terminology are beyond the scope of this document. I have followed Rob Hansen's listing in general, only making changes where I have documentary proof

Eastercon - The British National Science Fiction Convention

to back them up. For example, Rob lists 1952 as Loncon, but I have the 1952 Programme Book which makes no such reference, and the 1949 Programme Book which is called Loncon. I've followed Rob in calling the 1953 convention Coroncon, though I'm reasonably convinced from the Programme Book and other documents I have that this convention was not called that at the time. I've also added some Guests where the documents I have make this clear, and added all committee members, again where the documentary proof exists. The committee members are those listed in the Programme Book or similar at-con or post-con publication as being on the committee. Corrections and additions are welcome.

Guests, especially in early years, are a complicated issue. One in particular I'd like to mention. At the 1944 Eastercon, Professor A M Low was intended to be the Guest Speaker, as per the Programme Book, but he was unable to attend due to other commitments. I felt he was still qualified to be listed.

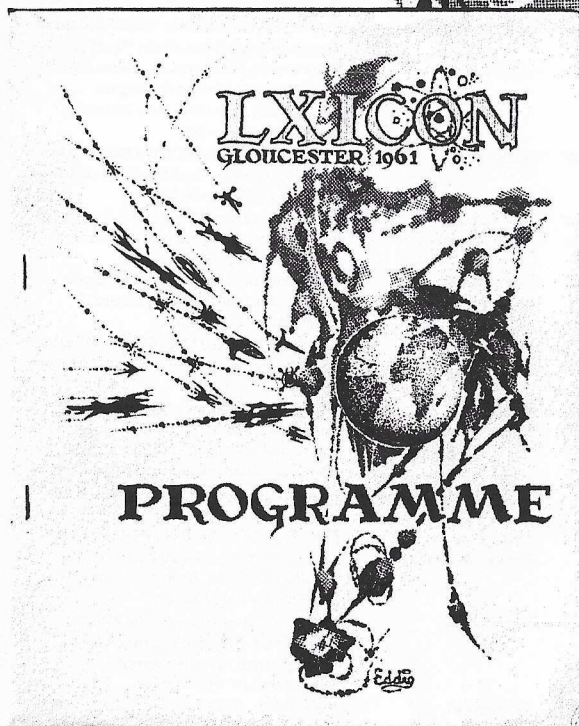
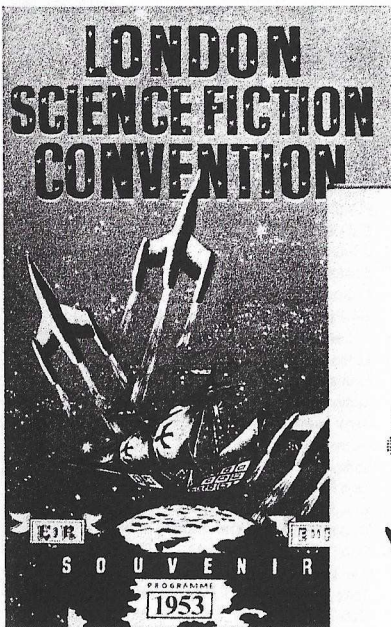
This page would not exist without Rob Hansen's assistance, and I have accepted his numbering system as it stands. I would also like to quote his introduction to his revision of the list, produced for the 1989 Eastercon, Contrivance:

"The current series of British National conventions is traditionally numbered from the 1948 Whitcon. It was, however, not until 1955 that the national con was held over Easter rather than Whit, and the name 'Eastercon' came to be applied to the series. The earlier 1944 convention is not considered to be an 'Eastercon' in that sense."

"Previous convention lists have not shown a national convention in 1957. Recent research has, however, revealed that one took place, which necessitates a certain amount of renumbering. Fortunately, a case can be made for not counting Festiventon, in 1951, as a national convention. It was planned as an international convntion, to tie in with the Festival of Britain, and was, indeed, more international than many Worldcons of the time. It had attendees from as far away as the USA, Canada and Australia, as well as several European countries. With these adjustments, the 1971 convention can still be called Eastercon 22, and Contrivance remains the 40th British National SF Convention."

Early Conventions

Name	Location	Year	Date	Guest	Committee
Midvention	Leeds	1937	?	?	R R Johnson, Don Houston, Art Williams, A W Gardner, Ralph E Orme, J Michael Rosenblum, Tom Hughes, Art Busby Walter Gillings
	London	1938	?	?	
	London	1939	?	?	
	Leicester	1943	Easter	None	
Eastercon	London	1944	Easter	Professor A M Low	

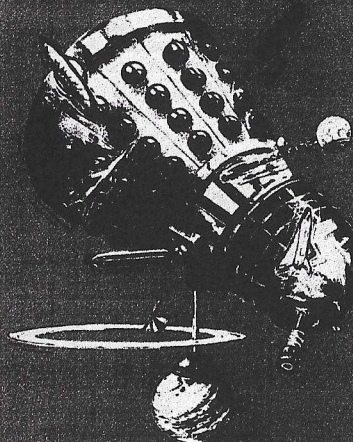


Eastercons

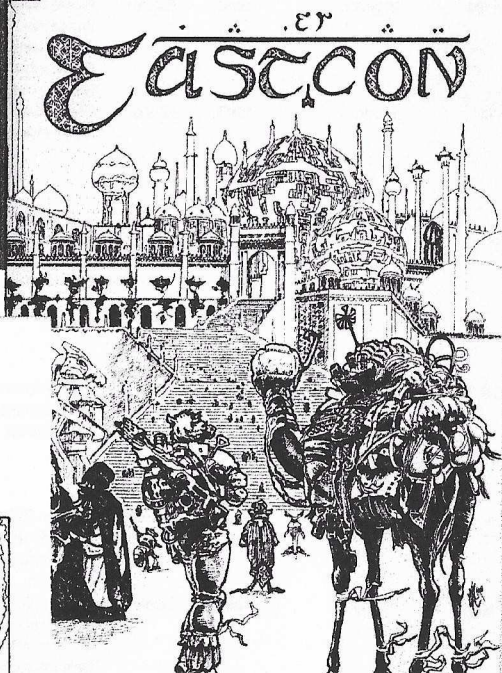
Name	Location	Year	Date	Guests	Committee
Whitcon	London	1948	Whit	A Bertram Chandler	Wally Gillings, John Newman
Loncon	London	1949	Easter	None	Mr Gillings and others
Festiventon	London	1951	Whit	Forrest & Wendayne Ackerman, Lyell Crane	E J Carnell, Charles Duncombe A Vincent Clarke, Miss A Lovett F E Arnold, James Rattigan, H Ken Bulmer, Fred Brown, Ted Tubb E J Carnell, C Duncombe, F Arnold J Rattigan
London SF Con	London	1952	Whit	None	Fred Brown and others
Coroncon	London	1953	Whit	None	Unknown
Supermancon	Manchester	1954	Whit	John Russell Fearn	Bill Panter, Danny Cowen, Joe Ayres
Cytricon	Kettering	1955	Easter	None	Al Lee, Stuart Mackenzie Vince & Joy Clark
Cytricon II	Kettering	1956	Easter	None	Unknown
Cytricon III	Kettering	1957	Easter	Unknown	Unknown
Cytricon IV	Kettering	1958	Easter	Unknown	Unknown
Brumcon	Birmingham	1959	Easter	Kenneth F Slater	Terry Jeeves, Bob Richardson, Ron Bennett Norman Shorrocks
London	London	1960	Easter	E J 'Ted' Carnell	Unknown Don Ford
LXIcon	Gloucester	1961	Easter	Kingsley Amis	Eric Jones, Keith Freeman, Tony Walsh Bob Parkinson, Ethel Lindsay Ron Bennett, Phil Rogers
Ronvention	Harrogate	1962	Easter	Tom Boardman	Ken Slater, Pauline Jackson, Dave Barber
Bullcon	Peterborough	1963	Easter	Edmund Crispin	Tony Walsh, Ethel Lindsay, George Locke
Repetercon	Peterborough	1964	Easter	Ted Tubb	Ken Cheslin, Roger G Peyton, Mike Higgs Charlie Winstone
Brumcon II	Birmingham	1965	Easter	Harry Harrison	Dave S Barber, Ken F Slater, Steve Oakey Phil Rogers, Archie Mercer, Beryl Mercer Tony and Simone Walsh, Archie and Beryl Mercer, Graham Boak, Brian Hampton
Yarcon	Yarmouth	1966	Easter	Ron Whiting	Harry Nadler, Bill Burns, Eric Bentcliffe Brian Marshall, Charles Partington Dave Britton, Tom Holt, Tony Edwards Colin Britch, Peter Day, E C Tubb, Kenneth Bulmer, Anne Keylock Gerry Webb, John Brunner, Daphne Sewell Jean Muggoch, Derek Stokes
Briscon	Bristol	1967	Easter	John Brunner	George Hay, Derek Stokes, Bill Burns Vernon Brown, Roger Peyton, Bob Rickard Anne McCaffrey Peter Weston
Thirdmancon	Buxton	1968	Easter	Ken Bulmer	Tony Edwards, Harry Nadler, Bill Burns Chuck Partington, Norman Shorrocks Dave Britton, Eddie Jones
Galactic Fair	Oxford	1969	Easter	Judith Merrill	Gerald Bishop, Ken Cheslin, Brian Robinson Mike and Pat Meara, Fred Hemmings, Terry Jeeves
Scicon '70	London	1970	Easter	James Blish	Ian Maule, Ian Williams, Rob Jackson
Eastercon 22	Worcester	1971	Easter	Ethel Lindsay	Peter Bell, Irene Bell
Chessmancon	Chester	1972	Easter	Larry Niven	John Brosnan, Graham Charnock, Pat Charnock, Christine Edwards, Malcolm Edwards, Robert Holdstock, Leroy Kettle John Piggott, Peter Roberts
OMPAcon	Bristol	1973	Easter	Samuel R Delany	Pete Presford, Brian Robinson, Kevin Hall John Mottershead, Harry Nadler Charles Partington, Anita Presford Roy Sharpe, Paul Skelton
Tynecon	Newcastle	1974	Easter	Bob Shaw Peter Weston	Pauline E Dungeate, Laurence Miller, Dave Upton, Mike Brown, Rog Peyton
Seacon	Coventry	1975	Easter	Harry Harrison	Marsha Jones, Greg Pickersgill Simone Walsh, Chris Walton
Mancon 5	Manchester	1976	Easter	Peter Roberts Robert Silverberg	Kevin Smith, Dave Langford, Martin Hoare, Liese Hoare, Dermot Dobson, Stan Eling Keith Oborn, Ian Maule, Eve & John Harvey
Eastercon '77	Coventry	1977	Easter	John Bush	
Skycon	Heathrow	1978	Easter	Roy Kettle Robert Sheckley	

the 50th British Eastercon April 1st - 5th 1999

SEACON



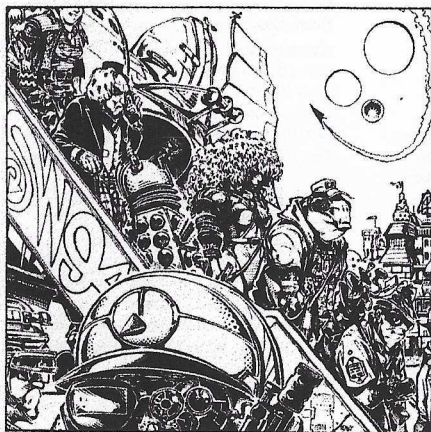
Eastercon



Sou'Wester

THE 45TH BRITISH EASTER CONVENTION

Adelphi Hotel, Liverpool 1st-4th April 1994



Yorcon	York	1979	Easter	Graham & Pat Charnock Richard Cowper	Mike Dickinson, David Pringle Alan Dorey, Ian Williams, Carol Gregory Kate Jeary, D West, Paul & Jan Matthews Bob Shaw, Gerry Gilling, Hal Rollason The Cat, Neil Craig, Mike Molloy Dave Ellis, Jimmy Robertson, John Dean Martin Hoare, John Mooney David Pringle, Graham James, Alan Dorey Simon Ounsley, Kate Jeary, John Colick
Albacon	Glasgow	1980	Easter	Jim Barker Colin Kapp	
Yorcon II	Leeds	1981	Easter	Tom Disch Dave Langford Ian Watson	
Channelcon	Brighton	1982	Easter	Angela Carter John Sladek	Chris Atkinson, Jim Barker, Pat Charnock Eve Harvey, Coral Jackson, Rob Jackson Paul Kincaid, Janice Maule
Albacon II	Glasgow	1983	Easter	Marion Zimmer Bradley Avedon Carol James White	John Allardice, Henry Balen, Jim Barker Iain Dickson, Dave Ellis, Martin Hoare Bob Jewett, Chris O'Kane, Doug McCallum Mick Molloy, Frances Jane Nelson Joan Paterson, Bruce Saville, Ian Sorensen Arnold Aiken, John & Marjorie Brunner Chris Donaldson, Alan Dorey Rochelle Dorey, John Fairey, Colin Fine Ye Gerbish, Martin Hoares, Chris Hughes Jan Huxley, Pauline Morgan, Paul Oldroyd Jan Annis, Jim Darroch, Alan Dorey Rochelle Dorey, Christine Donaldson Alan Ferguson, Mike Ford, Graham James Kate Jeary, Paul Oldroyd, Simon Ounsley Anne Page, Simon Polley, Jimmy Robertson Sue Simpson, Linda Strickler James Jim Campbell, Madeleine Campbell Joyce Craig, Neil Craig, Oscar Dalgleish Vince Docherty, Cuddles, Iain Dickson Dave Ellis, Kevin Henwood, Bob Jewett Duncan Lunan, Bruce McDonald Mark Meenan, Mike Molloy, Chris O'Kane Ian Sorensen
Seacon '84	Brighton	1984	Easter	Pierre Barbet Waldemar Kummig Josef Nesvadba Christopher Priest Roger Zelazny Greg Benford Linda Pickersgill	
Yorcon III	Leeds	1985	Easter		
Albacon III	Glasgow	1986	Easter	Joe Haldeman John Jarold Clive Barker Pete Lyon	
BECCON '87	Birmingham	1987	Easter	Chris Atkinson Keith Roberts Jane Gaskell	Brian Ameringen, Simon Beresford KIM Campbell, Jonathon Cowie 1/2r Cruttenden, Richard Edwards Tim Illingworth, Caroline Mullan Bernard Peek, Roger Perkins, John Stewart Pete Tyers, Kathy Westhead, Mike Westhead Michael Abbott, David Brown, Pat Brown Colin Fine, Steve Linton, Karen Naylor Gytha North, Joan Paterson, , Tibs Richard Rampant, Alison Scott, Mike Scott Gwen Funnell, Peter Wareham Roger Perkins, Steve Bull, Tim Illingworth Rob Meade, Christina Lake, Steve Davies Paul Dormer, Chris Cooper, Martin Hoare
Follycon	Liverpool	1988	Easter	Gordon Dickson Gwyneth Jones Greg Pickersgill Len Wein	
Contrivance	Jersey	1989	Easter	Avedon Carol Rob Hansen M John Harrison Don Lawrence Anne McCaffrey	
Eastcon	Liverpool	1990	Easter	Iain Banks Anne Page, SMS	Lisanne Norman, Martin Easterbrook James Steel, Chris O'Shea II Stuart Andrews, Helen McCarthy Ken Slater, KIM Campbell, Hugh Mascetti John Fairey, KIM Campbell, Paul Oldroyd Mark Meenan, Ian Sorensen Amanda Baker, John Bray, Dave Clements Dave Cooper, Alice Lawson, Steve Lawson Anne Page, Rhodri James
Speculation	Glasgow	1991	Easter	Rob Holdstock	
Illumination	Blackpool	1992	Easter	Geoff Ryman Paul McAuley Pam Wells	

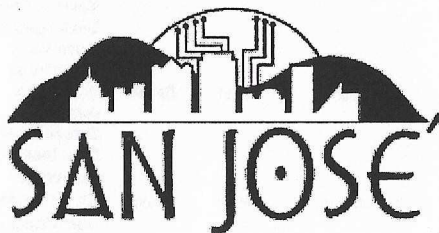
Helicon	Jersey	1993	Easter	John Brunner George R R Martin Karel Thole Larry van der Putte	Tim Illingworth, Steve Davies, Rob Meades Mike Westhead, Eddie Cochrane Chris Cooper, Martin Easterbrook Martin Hoare, John Richards Kathy Westhead, Mark Young Marcus Streets, Rhodri James, Ben Brown Chris Bell, Gary Stratmann, Sue Edwards David V Barrett
Sou'Wester	Liverpool	1994	Easter	Diane Duane Neil Gaiman Barbara Hambly Peter Morwood Thog the Mighty	
Confabulation	London	1995	Easter	Lois McMaster Bujold Roger Robinson Bob Shaw	Alison Scott, Mike Scott, Sue Mason Giulia de Cesare, Steve Davies
Evolution	Heathrow	1996	Easter	Jack Cohen Colin Greenland Paul Kincaid Maureen Kincaid Speller Tim Illingworth Bryan Talbot Vernor Tingie	Bridget Hardcastle, Pat McMurray Mark Charsley, Mary Branscombe Simon Bisson, Mike Westhead
Intervention	Liverpool	1997	Easter	Brian Aldiss Jon Bing Octavia Butler Dave Langford Pete Wright	Janet Barron, Keith Coslett, Andy Croft Steve Green, Geoff Hill, Heidi Lyshol Pat McMurray, Val Phillips, Phil Plumbly John Richards, Anne-Marie Wright,
Intuition	Manchester	1998	Easter	Ian McDonald Martin Tudor Connie Willis	Fran Dowd, Maureen Kincaid Speller David Cooper, Steve Lawson, Kathy Taylor Amanda Baker, Clair Brialey, Alice Lawson Fiona Anderson
ReConvene	Liverpool	1999	Easter	Peter S Beagle John Clute Jeff Noon Tom Holt Ron Tiner Thog the Mighty	Steve Davies, Gary Stratmann, Paul Dormer Tom Abba, Sue Edwards, Gwen Funnell Peter Wareham, Mychelle Lovelace Chris Bell, Roger Burton West
2Kon	Glasgow	2000	Easter	Guy Gavriel Kay Katherine Kurtz Deborah Turner-Harris Dr John Salthouse Bob Harris	Andrew Adams, Cuddles, KIM Campbell Nik Whitehead, Mad Elf, Sparks Pat McMurray, Gytha North

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AGENTS OUTSIDE UK (make cheques payable to agent)

USA (p-s membership A\$25)

San Francisco in 2002
P.O. Box 61363

Sunnyvale, CA 94088
info@sf2002.sfsfc.org

Australia (p-s membership A\$25)

Terry Frost
5 Temple St.

West Brunswick VIC 3055
hlector@netspace.net.au

Canada (p-s membership C\$25)

John Mansfield
333 Lipton St.

Winnipeg MB R2G 2H2
pgh@mail.pangea.ca

Pre-opposing memberships: 2.5 x p-s price

Friend of the Bid: 5 x p-s price

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San Francisco in 2002

San Jose in 2002

Two Bids for the Price of One!

This is the background on our new bidding arrangement. Although we have a tentative agreement with the San Francisco Marriott, there are elements of the agreement which, if the Marriott insists upon them, would make it economically unfeasible to use them. We still hope to use the Marriott, but because of these potential problems we have taken the unusual step of planning for two backup convention possibilities. The first is an alternate San Francisco bid using other, smaller hotels. The second is running the convention in San Jose, also in smaller, but less expensive, hotels. These are the best choices we can provide and we want you to help us decide how best to serve you.

Our first backup option is:

San Francisco

Convention Center/Hotels

These are the other hotels within a 500-meter (about 1500 foot) radius of the San Francisco Moscone Center:

Argent (former ANA)

Sheraton Palace

W (a new hotel chain from the Starwood group)

In addition, there are other nearby hotels, too numerous to list.

Nearby Attractions

San Francisco's Moscone Convention Center is part of the Yerba Buena Gardens development, including:

Sony Metreon Entertainment Complex

<http://www.metreon.com/>

Museum of Modern Art

<http://www.sfmoma.org/>

Center for the Arts

<http://www.yerbabuenaarts.org/>

Moscone Rooftop Center

<http://www.moscone.com/rooftop.htm>

Our second backup option is:

San Jose

Convention Center/Hotels

The San Jose Convention & Visitors' Bureau has presented us with an extremely attractive offer, including sleeping room rates in the \$95-\$120 range, about two-thirds of the room rates we would expect to pay in San Francisco. Hotels would include these hotels within 400 meters (about 1300 feet) of the San Jose McEnery Convention Center:

San Jose Fairmont Hotel

San Jose Hilton and Towers

Hyatt Sainte Claire

Park Center Crowne Plaza

And other hotels in the area.

About half of the over 2000 hotel rooms available to us are within easy walking distance; the rest are accessible via the light rail system that stops in front of the convention center and runs 24 hours a day.

Nearby Attractions

San Jose McEnery Convention Center is part of the San Jose Downtown Redevelopment Area, including:

The Tech Museum of Innovation

<http://www.thetech.org/>

Children's Discovery Museum

<http://www.cdm.org/>

The San Jose Museum of Art

<http://www.sjmusart.org/>

Other local sites of interest include:

The California Trolley and Railway Corp.

<http://www.ctrc.org/>

The Rosicrucian Egyptian Museum

<http://www.rosicrucian.org/mus-plan/0-museum.html>

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SF'02 p-s	x £12	
Seattle		
cross-grade	x £6	
SF'02 other	x	
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Peter Beagle is my friend. He has been my friend for over twenty years.

Mr Peter Beagle

Friends are good things to have.

Saying nice things about people is a pleasant avocation. Most pleasing of all is being handed the task of saying nice things about friends . . .

Peter was born and raised on the Upper West Side of Manhattan by an immigrant family of Russian Jews. Two of his uncles were popular and noted modernist painters. After a mediocre high school career, Peter won a scholarship for creative writing and went off to college.

Those are the unembellished raw facts; they tell you nothing about where the magic in his work comes from.

Maybe this will help.

I first met Peter more than twenty ago, at a writers' conference in Los Altos Hills, California. Of course I didn't know it was Peter, as I stood near the campus swimming pool on that hot summer's day, eaveswatching a man who looked like a bearded Jewish magician converse with a shaggy mongrel.

"I talk to dogs, you know," the magician said, when he noticed my presence. "And they answer me." Addressing, I suspect, the skepticism on my face, he said, "Look, I'll prove it. I'll tell the dog to jump in the pool, swim across, get out at the other side, and then walk around the pool back here." He turned to the dog. "What's your name?"

"So you've trained your dog," I said. "Terrific."

"This isn't my dog. I've never seen it

before in my life."

The dog obeyed, I became a believer, and Peter S. Beagle - bearded magician and converser with dogs - and I have been friends ever since. Peter swears that he doesn't remember this encounter.

Before I left the campus that Sunday, I had purchased copies of two of Peter's books, *A Fine and Private Place* and *The Last Unicorn*. Those dog-eared, well-read copies have gone with me on every journey. So, in many ways, has Peter himself. I call him when I want to hear a good joke; I call him when I want to talk about music; and I call him when I want to hear anecdotes about writers and writing, monsters, hopes and fears.

On top of that, we have worked together for the past four or five years on several projects. What I have come to understand and appreciate during this period is that he is a man rarely angered unless justice has not been properly served.

In summary, Peter Beagle has a wife he adores, children of both sexes, and a rich life outside of writing. He could have been a musician, a professor, an actor, even a rabbi, had his leanings been in that direction.

His store of knowledge about music, books, writing and writers is inexhaustible. He has a quote for everything, generally both obscure and unforgettable, he loves to laugh and he is, above all things, a bard. A storyteller. I think that if a law were passed making storytelling illegal, Peter would become a criminal.

Janet Berliner



Publications:

Novels: A Fine and Private Place. New York: Viking, 1960

The Last Unicorn. New York: Viking, 1968

The Folk Of The Air. New York: Del Rey, 1986

The Innkeeper's Song. New York: NAL/Roc, 1993

The Unicorn Sonata. Atlanta: Turner Publications, 1996

Friends In The Night. New York: NAL/Roc, 1999 (forthcoming)

Short fiction:

Short fiction from 1957 to 1996, too numerous to mention

Collected fiction:

The Fantasy Worlds of Peter S. Beagle. New York: Viking, 1978

Giant Bones. New York: NAL/Roc, 1997

The Rhinoceros Who Quoted Nietzsche And Other Odd Acquaintances. San Francisco: Tachyon, 1997

As editor: (with Janet Berlner)

Peter Beagle's Immortal Unicorn. New York: Harper/Prism, 1995

Non-fiction Books:

I See By My Outfit. New York: Viking, 1965

The California Feeling. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1969. (With Michael Bry, photographer; additional photographs by Ansel Adams and others)

American Denim: A New Folk Art New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1975. (Photographs by Baron Wolman and the Denim Artists)

The Lady and Her Tiger (with Pat Derby). New York: E.P. Dutton, 1976

The Garden of Earthly Delights. New York: Viking, 1982

In The Presence Of Elephants (with Pat Derby). Santa Barbara: Capra Press, 1995

Filmscripts (produced)

A Tale Of Egypt (animated; Golden Films, 1996)

Camelot (animated; Golden Films, 1996)

Sarek (episode of "Star Trek: The Next Generation, Paramount, 1990)

A Whale Of A Tale (animated; pilot for TV series "The Little Mermaid; Disney, 1992)

The Last Unicorn (animated; ITC Films, 1982)

The Lord Of The Rings (animated; United Artists, 1978)

The Greatest Thing That Almost Happened (CBS-TV, 1977)

The Dove (E.M.I., 1974)

The Zoo (episode of "Apple's Way," CBS, 1973)

I was born in 1957, in a place called Droylsden, a little town some eight miles outside of Manchester. Definitely not the sort of place to

Mr Jeff Noon

grow up artistic, unless a) you don't mind getting beaten up and b) you've got serious plans of escape.

I suppose I led a classic writer's childhood, in the sense that I retreated into myself, built my own inner world, threw away the key. I was always messing about with paint and beat-up old tape recorders, making things out of rubbish, making entire worlds out of next to nothing! I had this talent for painting, and I was lucky enough to be encouraged at it. I was introduced to the work of Picasso and Dali and other such crazed luminaries at a ridiculously early age.

I don't think I actually came back out of this inner kingdom till well past puberty, when I first started to realise I might have something that other people would enjoy. I started to write, get into bands, hang out with the few other lonely souls on the edge. I joined a group of people called Stand and Deliver who would go round pubs in the area, putting on little shows - music, comedy, poetry etc. This is when I first got hold of the mad idea of actually being serious about writing. I studied Painting and Drama at Manchester University, but only after a number of years of just bumming around, working at various things, getting involved with the Fringe Theatre scene in Manchester, trying to find a way to break through.

A few weeks after leaving college I came up with the idea for a play about the Falklands, which I called Woundinns. I heard that the Royal Exchange Theatre were holding a playwriting competition sponsored by Mobil, so I bashed out a first draft, sent it in. I remember it was my birthday - this would be

my 28th birthday - when the man from the theatre came round to tell me I'd won! The Royal Exchange put the play on and even made me their writer in residence. So that was it, I thought I was a playwright. Only to find myself struggling for the next few years, desperately trying to come up with a second play that somebody, anybody! would perform. It never happened, and I started to despair, and to think that I wasn't a writer after all.

With no money and no prospects, I took a job at Waterstone's Bookshop in Manchester. This was meant to be a stopgap until I got myself back on track. As is so often the case, I ended up working there for five years. Five years of being surrounded by books. The funny thing is, I never really thought that much about writing one myself. Until one day, when the Assistant Manager (who was starting his own publishing company) came up to me on the shopfloor, and asked me to have a go at writing a novel.

So I went home that night, turned on the bargain-basement word processor and starting writing: "Mandy came out of the all-night Vurt-U-Want, clutching a bag of goodies." And the company became Ringpull Press, and the book became Vurt, and the next thing I know it had won the Arthur C. Clarke Award.

Since then I've written three more novels - Pollen, Automated Alice and Nymphomation - a collection of avant PUID stories called Pixel Juice, and a few articles here and there. I'm currently working on a novel about the Manchester music scene from 1957 to 2002, and a series of more experimental works. I have a thousand ideas, a few of them actually quite good, and a fierce desire to write.

I guess all those years of living inside my own head finally paid off.

Jeff Noon

Bibliography

Playscripts

Woundings (Oberon Books) 1986

Novels & Collections

Vurt (Ringpull Press) 1993

Pollen (Fourth Estate) 1995

AutomatedAlice (Transworld) 1996

Nymphomation (Transworld) 1997

Pixel Juice (Transworld) 1998

Short Stories

Remixing the Future (Dubchester Kiss) - City Life, July 27 1994

Ultra Kid and Catgirl - GQ, March 1995

Artificially Induced Dub Syndrome - Techno Pagan (Pulp Faction), 1995

The Call of the Weird - The Big Issue, Dec 19 1995

Tweedles - The Guardian, Dec 27 1996

The Shoppers - Waterstone's Diary, 1997

Before it Disappears - Raise, May 1997

DJNA - Disco Biscuits (Sceptre), 1997

Blurbs - Random Factor (Pulp Faction), 1997

Solace - The Big Issue, Aug 4 1997

Latitude 52 - Intoxication (Serpent's Tail), 1998

Homo Karaoke - City Life, Sept 8 1998

Plays

Woundings - The Royal Exchange Theatre, Manchester, 1986; RADA, 1987; Leicester Polytechnic, 1988

What Canadians do, if they are wise or lucky, is make hay of exile. After all,

Mr John Clute

it is their birthright. I was lucky. I was born in 1940 in Toronto, and grew up in various of the provinces brought arbitrarily together in 1867 (and later) to make a "nation." In truth, Canada is a quilt of quasi-independent satrapies fused at the edges to create a series of regions, each of them internally exiled from all the others. To live in Canada is to be a paraphrase of the sort; a native of nought. The Canadians who grow up with the exile's longing for a homeland tend to leave early, like *The Band*. The intensity of their buying into their new home calibrates the intensity of exile, of course.

So - after childhood training in Toronto, Vancouver, Winnipeg, Toronto, Montreal and Toronto again - I got south to Chicago, and then New York; and - after an ice-floe sojourn back in Toronto, which had the one virtue of giving me the chance to get together with Judith Clute - got finally to London in 1968.

Which is a description of the ideal critic's coign of vantage: three homelands, none of them home.

I don't think there is a lot more "biography," over and above the tangle of the living one does, which is always fun for friends. I published a science fiction poem in *Triquarterly* in December 1959, but drifted away from poetry. I have published reviews of sf and other stuff in magazines and papers since 1960, with some continuity: *New Worlds* from 1966 till it stopped; the *Toronto Globe & Mail* from 1966/67 to 1998, though with a 31 year break; *F&SF* from the early 1970s until Ed Ferman got tired of me; the *Washington Post* from 1980; *Interzone* from the beginning; and so on.

The books are in the checklist. There are three central strands: novels (one in 1977, one in 1999); encyclopedias from 1975; criticism, put into volume form in 1988 and 1996. They are the loot of exile.

I'm glad I got here.

John Clute

Selected Bibliography

- 1965 ***The Aspen Poetry Handbill.***
Aspen, Colorado: The Aspen School of Contemporary Art, 1965.
Portfolio. Editor. Ltd to 200 copies (fewer printed).
- 1977 ***The Disinheriting Party.***
London: Allison & Busby, 1977. Novel
- 1979 ***The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction.***
London: Granada, 1979. As: *The Science Fiction Encyclopedia.*
Garden City, New Jersey, 1979: Doubleday & Company. Encyclopedia.
Associate Editor (General Editor: Peter Nicholls).
- 1985 ***Interzone: the 1st Anthology.***
London: J M Dent & Sons Ltd, 1985. New York: St Martin's Press,
1986. Anthology. Co-Editor. (Other co-editors: Colin Greenland, David Pringle).
- 1987 ***Interzone: the 2nd Anthology: New Science Fiction and Fantasy Writing.***
London: Simon & Schuster, 1987. New York: St Martin's Press,
1988. Anthology. Co-Editor. (Other co-editors: Simon Ounsley, David Pringle).
- 1988 ***Strokes: Essays and Reviews 1966-1986***
Seattle: Serconia Press, 1988. Non-Fiction Collection.
Interzone: the 3rd Anthology: New Science Fiction and Fantasy Writing
London: Simon & Schuster, 1988. Anthology. Co-Editor. (Other
co-editors: Simon Ounsley, David Pringle).
- 1989 ***Interzone: the 4th Anthology: New Science Fiction and Fantasy Writing***
London: Simon & Schuster, 1989. Anthology. Co-Editor. (Other
co-editors: Simon Ounsley, David Pringle).
- 1991 ***Interzone: the 5th Anthology: New Science Fiction and Fantasy Writing***
London: New English Library, 1991. Anthology. Co-Editor. (Other
co-editors: Lee Montgomerie, David Pringle).
- 1993 ***The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction***
London: Orbit (Little Brown), 1993. New York: St Martin's Press,
1993. Encyclopedia. Co-Editor with Peter Nicholls.
- 1995 ***Science Fiction: The Illustrated Encyclopedia***
London: Dorling Kindersley, 1995. New York: DK Inc, 1995. Companion.
- 1996 ***Look at the Evidence: Essays and Reviews***
New York: Serconia Press, dated 1995 but 1996. Liverpool:
Liverpool University Press, dated 1995 but 1996. Non-Fiction Collection.
- 1997 ***The Encyclopedia of Fantasy***
London: Orbit (Little Brown), 1997. New York: St Martin's Press,
1997. Encyclopedia. Co-Editor with John Grant.
- 1999 ***The Book of End Times*** forthcoming New York: HarperCollins. Non-fiction.
Applesed forthcoming London: Little Brown. Novel.

When I first met Tom Holt, he wasn't wearing a beard for the first time. Nobody seemed to

Mr Tom Holt

notice except me, but because I had only just been introduced, I didn't like to remark on the matter. So I sat beside him, discovering he had the most agile mind of anyone I'd ever met.

This he put down frankly to having once been a fiendish lawyer (but I think you need a fiendish mind to begin with for that). He can be unbelievably funny from a standing start and what is more he can make up comic verse without even apparently having to think, and it is the kind of verse most people would spend hours polishing and then not have it as good as he does. As for his books, he never seems to stop having ideas for those. His head, bearded or not, is like an active volcano. He is also very nice and very kind. He looks mordant and he is, but he has been very good to me on a number of occasions.

But his most remarkable attribute is the gift of invisibility. I discovered this that same beardless evening when I was looking for him, together with four other people, to buy him half a pint (he is a very moderate drinker) and he was nowhere to be seen and not in his hotel room. After several hours search, we gave up and sat down. And Tom suddenly emerged from thin air just beside us, saying, 'What's the

matter? I've been sitting here all evening.' And assured us he had been in a place we'd searched repeatedly. But he had gone invisible because he is never happy when people want to put him on a pedestal and treat him as the Famous Author. If you want to talk to Tom, you have to treat him as simply another person. I have never seen him so miserable as the time when he had to give several public speeches and then sit on the high table for a banquet. This was a time when he couldn't vanish, because he was always wanted for something.

I think invisibility is essential to Tom if he is to write. He lives in Chard in Somerset, where nobody can find him because he is quite often in a shed somewhere constructing chainmail. When he discovered that Chard means 'a hard, stony place,' he was delighted.

Obviously nobody would look for him in a place like that. Invisibility means a lot to him. The trouble was, he is so good at it that it had spread that night to his absent beard. Eventually he was forced to say, 'Hasn't anyone noticed I've shaved my beard off?' And nobody had - except me, and I hadn't liked to say.

Diana Wynne Jones - Bristol, 1999

First and briefly, Ron's career: he's been drawing professionally for twenty-wibble years, for comics, including Hellblazer, and as an illustrator. (Beg him to show you the sketches for his illustrations of Rosemary Sutcliff's *The Eagle of the Ninth*, or for *The Thirty-Nine Steps* by Buchan, which are in his most recent sketch-book. I trust this man to draw the people I like in books.) He's also a pretty competent wordsmith, and apart from working as a Contributing Editor on *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy* with Messrs Johns Clute and Grant, and working with John Grant to produce *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy and Science Fiction Art Techniques*, he's got out a really *helpful* book for aspiring artists, *Figure drawing Without A Model* (1992, but you may be lucky and find a copy: it's available in Japanese.... I think that's what he said, anyhow). It's almost impossible to write a bibliography for an artist: Ron's illustrations are in so many books that listing them would leave no room for anything else in the Programme Book. (Rather like trying to list all John Clute's work and where it appeared, now I come to think of it.)

More to the point, as well as being a first-rate artist Ron's a first-rate man to have

Mr Ron Tiner

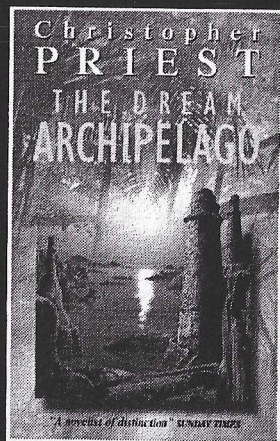
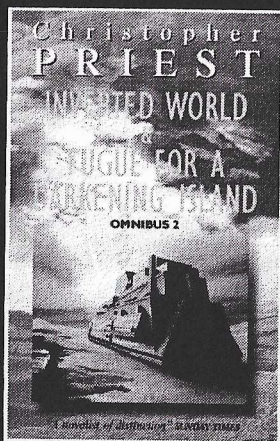
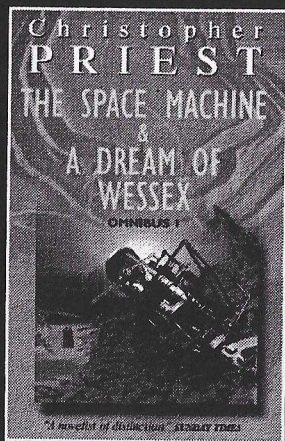
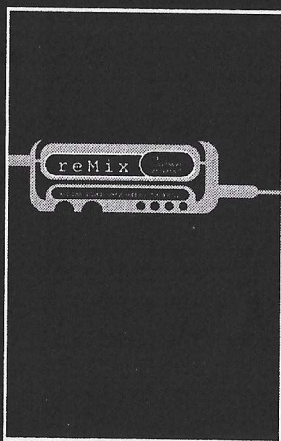
around: a good friend, a good drinking companion, a good conversationalist. You may gather that I like him really rather a lot.... It's almost impossibly difficult to write about him, as a result: this is the severalth attempt I've made, and it always comes out sounding fulsome or embarrassing and has to be scrapped. All I can really do is to suggest that if you want to test the truth of my words, you should find Ron and sit around near him for a bit. I think that you'll agree with me; and I think that once you've listened to him for a bit you'll understand why we wanted to have him as a guest at Reconvene.

The only thing which you may find disconcerting is that he's quite likely to be sketching as he talks, so you may find that your particular way of emphasising a point has been captured in pencil when you were least expecting it. My suggestion would be that if that happens, you beg him for a photocopy.

Chris Bell

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Here, Now, and in the Future

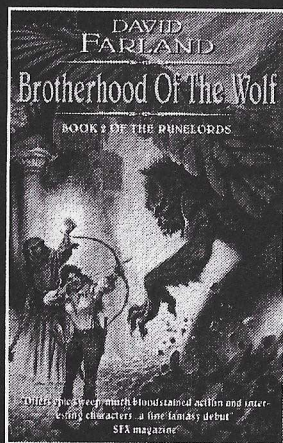
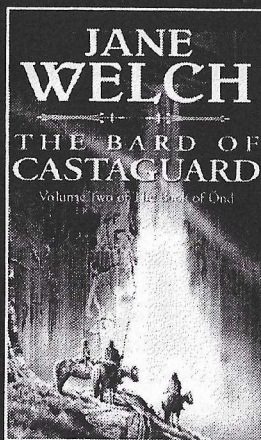
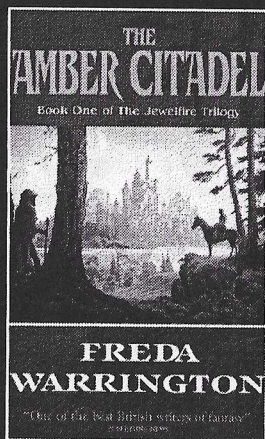


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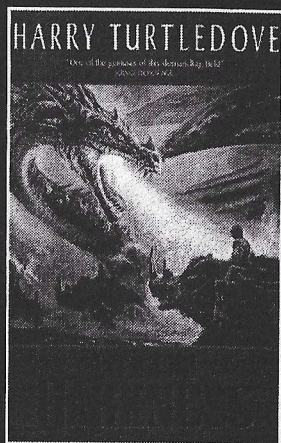
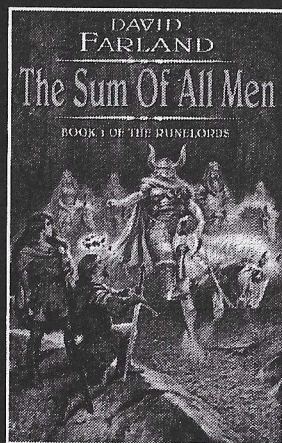
<http://www.earthlight.co.uk>

EARTHLIGHT

Here, Now, and in the Future



Trade Paperback



Trade Paperback



EARTHLIGHT

<http://www.earthlight.co.uk>

Born in Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1943, Robin Williamson has been described variously in the press as 'Celtic Kerouac', 'Cultural

output of recordings and tours, regularly visiting US, Canadian and European Festivals and venues. He is internationally respected

Mr Robin Williamson

as a celtic performer, songwriter, author, story-teller,

Guardian' and "the closest thing to a celtic bard you are ever likely to hear".

authority on Celtic Legend, harper and multi-instrumentalist.

Shooting to international fame in the 60's, as founding member of the now-legendary Incredible String Band, the band which inspired the whole hippy generation, Williamson is the acknowledged pioneer of the concept of World Music - The term 'Global Village' was first coined by a New York Times journalist to describe a 'String Band' gig. Williamson's songwriting has been cited as seminal or influential by such notaries as Bob Dylan, John Lennon and Robert PLant. He has been so noted more recently by the Eurythmics and the Pet Shop Boys. The Incredible String Band was one of the few British bands to be invited and appear at the famous Woodstock Festival.

Since 1980 he has been one of the primary figures of the Story Telling revival in Europe and the USA. He has, in the last 35 years, been nominated for several Grammy Awards, has won 'Celtic Record of the Year' from the Tower Records chain, has come second to Ravi Shankar in a 'Frets Magazine' readers' poll, and has composed music for a number of films, TV series and major theatrical productions, including work on the George Lucas film 'Willow'. His discography and bibliography is extensive, his solo performances are of consistent quality and content, and draw from his large varied repertoire of Story and Song, with more than a splash of humour. He appeals to a very wide variety of people of all ages.

Since 1975, after the demise of the String Band, Williamson has continued a prolific

Velma 'Vijay' Bowen - FGOH

When you hear that this year's TAFF winner, Velma 'Vijay' Bowen, sings with a rock band, models leatherwear, acts (she was a "gratuitous lesbian vampire" in the movie *The Ironbound Vampire*), has been set on fire for Italian television, and included broccoli in her wedding bouquet, it should come as no surprise to learn that she found fandom in equally unconventional fashion, literally running into it by walking through a meeting of the New York SF group NY*SFS in Washington Square Park in 1981 while on her way to dance classes.

member of eleven and running two which, even at minimum activity levels, is a lot of writing to produce on a regular schedule! She attended her first convention in 1981 and has since attended around fifty or so and worked on several of them in various capacities. Reconvene will be her first UK convention. Having written for various fanzines and also been periodically active on rec.arts.sf.fandom, Vijay is an all round fan and also a lot of fun, a fine ambassador for US fandom at this, UK fandom's premier annual event.

Joining her first apa while still in high school, Vijay has been in around twenty five over the years and was at one point a

Let's make her welcome and so continue the tradition of TAFF, of forging links of fannish friendship across the Atlantic.

The Richard Evans Award

This is the first year that this award in memory of Richard Evans will be made.

Awards - In no particular order

For all those that knew him it is appropriate that the award should be announced at this year's Eastercon, an event which he usually enjoyed very much, particularly when it was in Liverpool.

Richard died very unexpectedly in May 1996 at the tragically young age of 46. He was a talented and much loved Publisher who was Editorial Director of Gollancz's SF list at the time of his death. Throughout his career he had been associated with genre publishing, particularly SF, in which he believed passionately and it was for this reason that our group of friends and colleagues got together to found this award for genre fiction. Because Richard always believed in encouraging talent despite the vagaries of the market, we felt it should be aimed at an author's work over a period of time, and at one who has contributed significantly to the genre without necessarily obtaining significant reward. We hope this year's award will be the beginning of an annual event.

T-shirts in aid of the Fund will be on sale in the Dealers room

1999 BSFA Awards Shortlist

Best Novel

- To Hold Infinity - John Meaney
- The Cassini Division - Ken MacLeod
- The Extremes - Christopher Priest
- Inversions - Iain M. Banks
- Queen City Jazz - Kathleen Ann Goonan

Best Short Fiction

- The First Annual Performance Arts Festival at the Slaughter Rock Battlefield - Thomas M. Disch (Interzone 131)
- La Cenerentola - Gwyneth Jones (Interzone 136)
- Shift Change - Timons Esaias (Interzone 137)
- The Day Before They Came - Mary Soon Lee (Interzone 133)
- Vulpheous - Eric Brown (Interzone 129)

Best Artwork

- The Gardens of Saturn - Dominic Harman (cover Interzone 137)
- Front Cover Focus 34 - Colin Odell
- Back Cover Focus 34 - Colin Odell
- Jedella Ghost - Dominic Harman (cover Interzone 135)
- Lord Prestimion - Jim Burns (cover Interzone 138)

Paper Tiger Art Award

Collins & Brown, proprietors of the Paper Tiger imprint, are funding the second annual Paper Tiger Art Award, consisting of a cheque for £100 and a framed certificate. This award is given to the creator of the piece of artwork which is, in the opinion of the judges,

the best on show in the Art Exhibition; last year's winner was Fred Gambino for *Brightness Reef*. The award is administered by Paul Barnett, Commissioning Editor of Paper Tiger. The judges are Brian Ameringen, Tom Holt and Graham Higgins.

Convention Charity

Reconvene has chosen to lend its support to Sightsavers International. The charity is committed to providing treatment, prevention, education and rehabilitation save sight and change lives across the world. Reconvene will be making a donation to the charity, and hope that you might support their work yourselves.



Please speak to the committee for further details.

Mornington Crescent Rules

There has been considerable unnecessary debate as to whether this year's tournament should be played as the last or as the penultimate Pascal games of the millenium. Since we shall not be playing Pascal rules but instead bearing in mind the date of the Orthodox Easter, and because it is actually the third Tournament of the new millenium anyway, the adjudicators have ruled all such debate out of court, and will be grateful if this matter is not mentioned again.

Since we are not playing Pascal rules, the optional straddle will be in place, as will Rule 17, except after a transpontine shuffle. All other play will be in accordance with general London Pub regulations, and in the event of a dispute the adjudicating committee will be entirely arbitrary.

Thank you for your attention; and please, remember to mind the gap.

Kenneth Bell

Let us consider an imaginary dance record called "Space for the Bass", by a non-existent group called Somakoma. "Space for the Bass" begins with a single musical element, as waves

culturally genetic) template laid down by Bach and Mozart, and even earlier composers. In fact, what the techno kids are

Space for the Bass - Jeff Noon

of electronic ambience flood from the grooves. From there, other instruments are added, various melodic strands and rhythmical ideas are introduced, until the first climax is reached. The music then drops away, as we move into the "breakdown" episode. This is a partial return to the more sparse patterning of the opening moments, designed to build up the dancers' adrenaline levels. This time however, only the bass can be heard, as chanted vocals urge "All the people in the house, give it up some! Leave some space for the bass, space for the bass, space for the bass!" The music now starts to build once more, albeit at a much more frantic pace, until the final climax is reached. After this, we return to the initial atmosphere; waves of noise, which fade slowly as the piece of music comes to an end. In creating the tune "Space for the Bass", Somakoma have followed exactly the rules of their chosen musical genre. Not all bands are as slavish as they are, but even so the vast majority of dance records — be they techno, house, trance, garage, swing, or drum-and-bass — adhere to some variation of the rules. Basically, they all tend to employ the following narrative structure: sparse opening — development, leading to climax — breakdown — further development leading to final climax — sparse ending.

In this short article I will propose an underlying reason why this sequence is used, and then compare the dance music genre with the world of writing, both in general, and specifically to the Science Fiction genre.

Upon first discovering dance music, I naturally presumed that the artists involved in creating the records were simply following the (by now

doing is far more utilitarian than that, far more necessary, and quite obvious once grasped. I'm only surprised it took me so long to work it out. Having done so, all I can now experience (as a writer ~ are feelings of the most intense jealousy.)

Here is the reason for the structure: Dance music only really exists when played live at a club or a rave. The DJ controls the atmosphere, choosing which records to play and in which order. Each new record is mixed into the preceding one, and then mixed out into the next tune. It becomes a long chain of music. Of course, tremendous skill is required of the DJ, but the music itself must play its part: each record must have a beginning, and an ending, that are suitable for being conjoined into the mix. So the musicians top and tail their constructions with these nebulous "points of entry", as I call them, in order that their record can be easily mixed into a DJ's programme. Sometimes, the DJ will use the midpoint breakdown to segue into the next tune.

Basically, at these~three points—the beginning, the breakdown, and the ending—the piece of music loses its identifying qualities of melody and harmony. It becomes a simple, universal noise. The beginning of the next record will also have a corresponding universal feel to it; therefore the two records can be easily played at the same time. The points of entry mix together, often causing a delightful tension as the two atmospheres intermingle.

In a sense, there's only one infinitely long piece of dance music; the musicians are simply giving the latest episode to the DJs, saying, "Here you are, mate, slot this into the chain." It's a shared creativity, a global community dedicated to the art of making people move their funky butts. No other medium or genre in history, as far as I can tell, has ever been so devoted to this idea of continuous, mutual

creativity.

This, I believe, is why so much dance music is 'Faceless', i.e. that we don't really have a sense of the people behind the art, what they look like, what their personal beliefs are, or even in many cases what their real names are. Compare this to the world of pop music with its overblown stars and rampant egos. Compare this shared creativity also, with the closed-off world of writing, and the reasons for my feelings of jealousy will become apparent.

All books tend to be finished products, complete and separate from all other books. Of course there are these things called sequels, and even more strangely, prequels. Sometimes, very occasionally, a sequel may well be written by a different writer than the original book. But this hardly compares to the vast array of dance records that fit together so easily. And consider, that each dance record tends not to be a sequel; that is, it will usually employ a different tune, different instrumentation, a different "feel" entirely from the records on each side of it in the chain. Only the deliberate, built-in points of entry allow the differing musical ideas to flow together.

Books, on the other hand, just don't have these points of entry. They are closed systems, bound rigidly by their covers. Which tends to cause writers to become solitary figures, struggling with individual works of art.

Is there a way to transpose the shared creativity of the dance scene to the world of writing? Can we break down the barriers that separate each novel, each story, from all the others? Can we start to work together, for instance by remixing each other's stories? Can we create dub versions of wordplay? Allow our work to be sampled by other writers (without rushing to the lawyers)? Leave our own textual points of entry? Even mentioning these ideas seems faintly ridiculous, because this image has built up of the writer as the isolated creator.

It would require a severe giving up of ego, to make the process more open. An end to saying, "This is my work, my vision! Hands off!"

I often suffer from feelings of intense

loneliness when writing, entirely to do with being so bound up in this single creation, this single story that will be launched upon the world as a self-contained object, subject only to its own rules and effects. Surely, at least some of the time, it would be good to feel that our work was entering into a chain of other works, creating what may be called a Community of Words.

Well, this is a Science Fiction Convention; so let us therefore consider a hypothetical (and highly unlikely) situation; a world in which the writing and reading of books enjoys the same popularity amongst the young as listening and dancing to music does. Let us consider a world where crowds of people gather each weekend to hear "Story Jockeys" read or perform from novels and short stories. Let us imagine these SJs building a collection of different stories, all about different subjects, and all by different writers, into one long sequence of continuous reading. Obviously, this could easily be done already, if the stories were carefully chosen, but what I'm proposing here, is a world where any story at all could be easily brought into the mix. What would have to happen to the stories, or more precisely, what would writers have to do to their stories, in order for this to happen?

~ Well, one thing we can do is allow that the creators of dance music have perfected the techniques of shared creativity by now, and that we can borrow the narrative structure they use. Now let us imagine that I'm writing a story at this very moment, one designed to be added to the chain of stories. I need to give it a opening which can easily mix with the end of any other story. The question is this: what are the literary techniques I can use to create this feeling of universality? Should I use single words, repeated phrases, common expressions, nonsensical passages? Whichever I decide upon, they will lead into the body of the story itself, the standard narrative. This will reach a certain point, a moment of suspense perhaps, and then the text will start to break down, to lose its meaning.

The reader should be excited by this passage, because it constantly teases and threatens to become the story once again. However, another story by a different writer may well be mixed in at this point, in which case the first story will remain unfinished, perhaps to be continued at another point in the evening. Usually however the story finds itself again, building along more traditional lines until the ending is reached. The sense will then start to fade away, to turn once again into the nebulous phrases of the opening motif. Before this final passage is completed, the next story in the chain will slowly take over.

I cannot in this article go into the details of the textual devices used in this new type of storytelling. I'm currently working in collaboration with other writers, on a number of what I call metamorphiction projects, which will explore just this area. The works are, shall we say, currently "enjoying" the process of experimentation. I'm merely stating the case here that examination of other artistic genres entirely can lead to surprising ideas being formed. It may well be that the Science Fiction genre is better suited than other kinds of writing to this proposed expression, simply because it deals in certain shared ideas or tropes, e.g. alien invasion, robots going haywire, journeys through cyberspace, spaceships landing on other planets, the taking over of the human body by intrusive technology. Perhaps these can be seen as suitable points of entry, where other stories can be added to the mix.

Certainly, I do believe it time that SF more actively engaged with contemporary life; not only with the objects of the modern world but also, and more importantly, with its processes. In the same way that Philip K Dick mirrored the processes of psychedelic rock in his words, and the way that William Gibson found a literary analogue for the technological fluidity of new wave music, we need now to explore the ways in which the intricate rhythms of present-day musicians speak to us.

I talk here only of music; there are plenty of other modern-day

"processes" we could transform into text.

Channel-hopping for instance, or even mail shopping. However, we should consider the intimate connections that SF and popular music have enjoyed at certain points in history. Jimi Hendrix for instance would often include science-fictional imagery in his lyrics; at the same time, it is easy to find experimental stories written in the Sixties that utilise the stoned rhythms of Are You Experienced? or Purple Haze. Of current musicians, it could be said that a dance artist like the Aphex Twin uses the sampler in the same way that Hendrix "used" the electric guitar, ie to liberate intense emotions from the technology. Why then are there so few contemporary writers willing to create textual equivalents to the way in which the Aphex Twin plays? Are we scared that the blessed story will disappear in the mix? Well, that is one of the practical considerations we must confront. Perhaps there are new forms of storytelling to uncover, ones eminently suitable for the portrayal of life in the next century. And if Science Fiction can't walk this dangerous, exciting edge between technology and emotion, well then, which genre can?

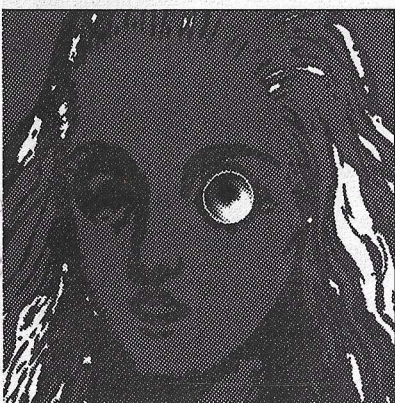
The ideas I've discussed in this essay describe only a single level of interaction. One of the pleasures of listening to a DJ mix cd, is that very often the pieces of music are in remixed form anyway, and on top of that the DJ is playing with the turntables' cross-faders, and scratching at the vinyl. Add to the mix all the various samples of other records that we may be able to pick up on. It is almost impossible to filter out the original version of the tune. This is entirely appropriate to the way in which we live our lives nowadays; moving through layer after layer of meaning, completely at ease with the complex and slippery nature of the post modern experience. Perhaps one day soon, and here I think the Internet and the electronic book will come into play, we will experience a similar "groove of unknowing" in reading a story?

So come on, all the writers in the house! Give it up some! Leave some space for the bass!

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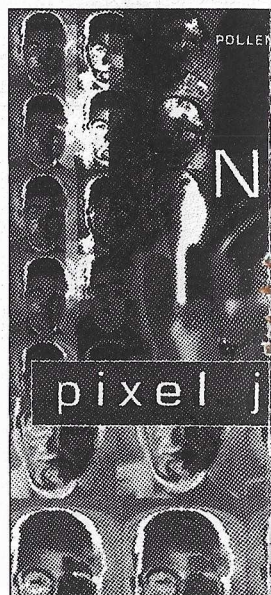
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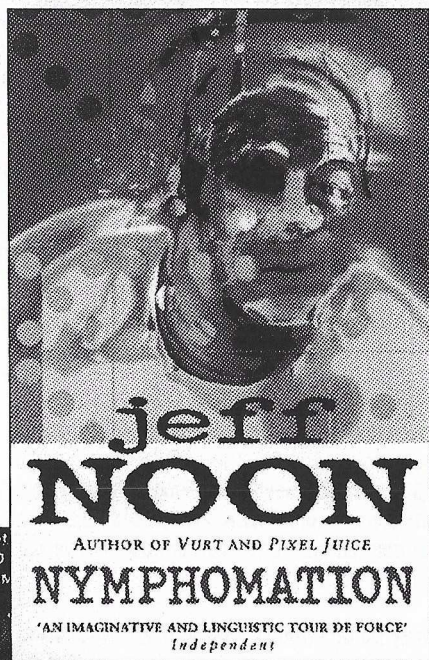
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Kurt Vonnegut to create work that should
make the literary world of newspaper
supplements and late night arts
shows sit up and take notice'

SFX



AUTHORS NOTE: The following tale is a fragment of a re-cently-discovered first-century Roman manuscript, tentatively ascribed to Caius Plinius Secundus, known as Pliny the Elder. It appears to be an addendum to his great Encyclopedia of Natural History, and to have been written shortly before his death in 79 A.D., in the eruption of Mount Vesuvius. How it fell into the present writer's hands is another story entirely, and is no one's business but his own.

The Naga - Peter S Beagle

Let us begin with a creature of which report has reached us only from those half-mythical lands beyond the Indus, where dwell many dragons and unicorns as well. The naga is described by such traders as travel between India and the Roman provinces of Meso-potamia as being a great serpent with seven heads, like the beast known to us as the hydra. Leaving aside the history of Hercules' conquest of the Lernaean Hydra, authorities have related numerous encounters with these animals off the coasts of Greece and Britain. The hydra has between seven and ten heads, like dog's heads; these are generally depicted as growing at the ends of prodigiously muscular necks or arms, and they do not devour the prey they seize but drag it to a central head, much larger, which then tears it apart with a beak like that of a monstrous African parrot. Further, it is said that these heads and necks, cut in two, do grow again: on the instant, according to the Greek writers, but their capacity both for lying and credulity surpasses all bounds that one might reasonably impose on other peoples. Nevertheless, of the hydra's actual existence there can be little doubt - I have myself spoken with sailors who had lost comrades to the voracity of these beasts, and who, in vengeance, would boil one alive and devour it themselves whenever they should capture one. I am advised that the taste of the hydra is quite similar to that of the boots of which soldiers often make soup in desert extremities. The flavor is not easily forgotten.

But the naga is plainly another nature of being from the hydra, whatever their superficial resemblances. Such accounts as I have received indicate that the folk of India and the lands beyond generally revere this creature, indeed considering it almost as a god, yet at the same time somehow lower than the human. The contradictions do not end here, for though the bite of the naga is reputedly poisonous to all that lives, only certain individuals are regarded as

physically dangerous to man. (Indeed, there appears to be no agreement among my sources as to the usual prey of the naga: several authorities even suggest that the beast does not eat at all, but lives on the milk of the wild elephant, which it herds and protects as we do cattle.) Water is the naga's element: they are believed to have the power to bring rain, or to withhold it, and consequently must be propitiated with sacrifices and other offerings, and treated with constant respect. As do dragons here, they guard great hoards of treasure in deep lairs; but much unlike the dragons we know, the nagas reportedly construct underground palaces of immense richness and beauty, dwelling there in the manner of kings and queens in this world. Yet it is said that they are often restless, pining for something they cannot have, and then they leave their mansions and stir forth into the rivers and brooks of India. The philosophers of that region say that they are seeking enlightenment - there are sects in Rome who would assure us that they hunger for a human soul. I have no opinion in this matter.

It may be of some interest to those who have served the Emperor in Britain to know that a creature similar to the naga is rumored to exist in the far northern marches of that island, where it is worshipped as a bringer of fertility, perhaps because it sleeps out the winter months underground, emerging on the first day of spring. But whether or not these serpents amass treasure in the same manner as the nagas, and as to how many heads they have, I know not.

All nagas are said to possess a priceless jewel, located either in the forehead or the throat, which is the source of their great power. They are, like the elephant, of a religious and even reverential nature,

frequently keeping up shrines to the gods of India and making rich offerings of the same sort as they themselves receive. In addition, there are accounts of naga kings presenting their bodies as couches for the gods, spreading their hoods to keep off the rain and sun. Whether or not these tales are true, that they should be credited at all certainly indicates the regard in which the nagas are held in these lands.

A further puzzling contradiction concerning the naga is the general understanding that the female serpent - referred to as a nagini - is capable of assuming the human shape, while this is not so for the male of the species. In this counterfeit form, the nagini is frequently of remarkable beauty, and it is said that there are royal families who trace their descent from the marriage of a mortal prince with a nagini. Regarding this matter, the following tale was related directly to me by a trader in silks and dyestuffs who has traveled widely both in India and in the neighboring realm to the east, called by its folk Kambuja. I will repeat it in the manner of his telling, as well as I am able.

In Kambuja, a little way from the palace of the kings, there stands to this day a tower sheathed completely in gold, as is often the style of royalty in those parts. This tower was built very long ago by a young king, as soon as he rose to power, to serve as apartments for himself and his queen when he should marry. But in the arrogance of his youth, he was impatient and impossible to please: this maiden was too plain, that one too dull; this one pretty enough but too quick-tongued, and this other was an unsuitable match for family reasons, and smelled of dried fish to boot. Consequently, his first youth passed in the solitude of majesty, which - as I am often advised - can surely be no substitute for the companionship and loving wisdom of a true wife, whether queen or bondservant. And the king was ever more lonely, though he would not say so, and ill-tempered because of this; and while he was not cruel or capricious in his ways, still he ruled in a listless fashion, doing little of evil and no good, having no heart for either. And the golden tower went untenanted, year on year, save for spiders

and small owls raising their own families in the topmost spire.

Now (said the trader), this king was much in the habit of walking disguised among his people in the warm twilight of the streets and the marketplace. He fancied that he gained some knowledge of their true daily lives thereby, which was not at all so: first, because there was no least urchin but recognized him on sight, however wearily cunning his incognito; and secondly, because he had no real desire for such understanding. Nevertheless, he kept his custom faithfully enough, and one evening a beggar woman with a dirty and ignorant face approached him on his meanderings and inquired in a vulgar dialect, "Your pardon, master potter" (for so he was dressed) - but what is the nature of that shiny thing there?" And she pointed toward the golden tower that the king had designed for his happiness so long ago.

Now the king was apparently not without humor, albeit of a bleak and comfortless sort. He replied courteously to the beggar woman, saying, "That is a museum consecrated to the memory of one who never lived, and I am no potter but its very guardian. Would you care to satisfy your curiosity? for we welcome visitors, the tower and I." The beggar woman assented readily, and the king took her by the hand and led her, first through the gardens that he had planted with his own hands, and then through the great shining door to which he always carried the key, though it had never turned in the lock until that day.

From room to room and spire to spire the king led the beggar woman, conversing with her all the time in grave mockery of his own past dreams. "Here is where he would have dined, this man who never was, and in this room he would have sat with his wife and his friends to hear musicians play. And this place was to have been for his wife's women, and this for children to sleep - as though the unborn could father children." But when they came to the royal bedchamber, the king drew back from the door and would not go in, but said harshly, "There are serpents here, and plague, come away."

But the beggar woman stepped boldly past him and into the bedchamber with the air of one who has been long away from a place, yet remembers it well. The king called to her in anger, and when she turned he saw (said the trader) that she was no creeping beggar but a great queen, clad in robes and jewels far richer than any he possessed himself. And she said to him, "I am a nagini, come from my palace and my estates far under the earth, for love and pity of you. From this evening forward, neither you nor I shall sleep elsewhere but in this tower ever again." And the king embraced her, for she was of such royal loveliness that he could do no other; and besides, he had been much alone.

Presently, some degree of order having returned to their joy, the king began to speak of their wedding, of festivals to last for months, and of how they would rule and keep their court together. But the nagini said, "Beloved, we are twice wed already: once when I first saw your face, and again when we first held one another in our arms. As for counselors and armies and decrees, that is all your daytime world and none of mine. My own realm, my own folk, need my care and governance as much as yours need you. But in our night world we will care for each other here, and how can our dutiful days but be happy, with night always to come?"

The king was not content with this, for he wished to present his people with their long-awaited queen, and to have her by his side at every moment of every day. He said to her, "I can see that we shall come to no good end. You will tire of journeying constantly between two worlds and forget me for some naga lord, compared to whom I shall seem as a sweeper, a date-seller. And I, in my sorrow, will turn to a street-singer, a common courtesan, or - worse - a woman of the court, and be more lonely and more strange than ever for having loved you. Is this the gift that you have come all this long way to bring me?"

At that, the nagini's long, beautiful eyes flashed, and she caught the king by his wrists, saying, "Never speak to me of jealousy and betrayal, even in jest. My folk are faithful through all their lives - can you say the same of yours? And I will tell you this, my

own lord, my one - should night ever come to this tower and not bring you with it, it will not be morning before a terrible catastrophe befalls your kingdom. If even once you fail to meet me here, nothing will save Kambuja from my wrath. That is how we are, we nagas."

"And if you do not come to me each night," said the king simply, "I shall die." Then the nagini's eyes filled with tears, and she put her arms about him, saying, "Why do we vex each other with talk of what will never happen? We are home together at last, my friend, my husband." And of their happiness in the golden tower there is no further need to speak, save to add that the spiders and serpents and owls were all gone from there by morning.

Thus it was that the king of Kambuja took a nagini as his queen, even though she came to him only in darkness, and only in the golden tower. He told no one of this, as she bade him; but since he abandoned all matters of state, all show and ceremony, as soon as the sun set, to hurry alone to the tower, rumors that he met a woman there every night spread swiftly through all the country. The curious followed him as closely and as far as they dared; and there were even those who waited all night outside the tower in hopes of spying out the king's secret mistress as she came and went. But none ever saw even the shadow of the nagini - only the king, walking slowly back into the day, calm and pensive, his face shining with the last light of the moon.

In time, however, such gossip and fascination gave way to wonder at the change in the king. For he ruled more and more with a passionate awareness of his people's real existence, as though he had awakened to see them for the first time, in all their human innocence and wickedness and suffering. From caring about nothing but his own bitter loneliness, he now began to work at bettering their lot as intensely as they themselves worked merely to survive. There was no one in the realm who could not see and speak freely to him: no condemned criminal, overtaxed merchant,

beaten servant or daughter sold into marriage who could not appeal and be heard. Such zealous concern bewildered many who were accustomed to other sorts of rulers, and a half-mocking saying grew up in the land: "By night we have a queen, but by day we have at least five kings." Yet slowly his people came to return their king's love, if not to comprehend it, and it came also to be said that if justice existed nowhere else in the entire universe, still it had been invented in Kambuja.

The reason for this change, as the king himself well knew, were twofold: first, that he was happy for the first time in his life and wished to see others happy; second, that it seemed to him that the harder he worked, the faster the day sped its course, carrying him to nightfall and his nagini queen. In its turn, as she had told him, the joy that he took in their love, made even their hours apart joyous by reflection, as the sun, long since set, yet brightens our nights through the good offices of the moon. So it is that one learns to treasure, without confusing them, day and night and twilight alike, with all that they contain.

The years passed swiftly, being made up of days and nights as they are. The king never spent a night away from the golden tower - which meant, among many other things, that during his reign Kambuja never went to war - and the nagini was always there when he arrived to greet him by the secret name that the priests had given him as a child, the name that no one else knew. In return she had told him her naga name (and laughed fondly at his attempts to speak it correctly), but she refused ever to let him see her in her true shape, as she went among her own folk. "What I am with you is what I am most truly," she said to him (according to the sworn word of my trader.) "We nagas are forever passing between water and earth, earth and air, between one form and another, one world and another, this desire and that, this dream and that. Here in our tower I am as you know me, neither more nor less; and what shape you put on when you sit and give judgment on life and death, I do not ask to see. Here we are both as free as though

you were not a king and I were not a naga. Let it remain so, my dear one."

The king answered, "It shall be as you say, but you should know that there are many who whisper that their night queen is indeed a naga. The land has grown too bounteous, the rainfall is too perfect, too reliable - who but a naga could command such precise good fortune? Most of my people have believed for years that you are the true ruler of Kambuja, whatever else you may be. In truth, I find it hard to disagree with them."

"I have never told you how to govern your country," the nagini answered him. "You needed no instruction from me to be a king."

"You think not?" he asked her then. "But I was no king at all until you came to me, and my people know that as well as I. Perhaps you never taught me to build a road or a granary, to devise a just tax or keep my land's borders free of enemies, but without you I would never have cared that I could do such things. Once Kambuja was only to be endured because it contained our golden tower; now, by little and little, the tower has grown to take in all Kambuja, and all my people have come inside with us, precious as ourselves. This is your doing, and this is why you rule here, by day as well as night."

At times he would say to her, "Long ago, when I told you that I would die if you ever failed to meet me here, your face changed and I knew that I had spoken more truth than I meant. I know now - so wise has loving made me - that one night you will not come, and I will die indeed, and for that I care nothing. I have known you. I have lived." But the nagini would never let him speak further, weeping and promising him that such a night would never be, and then the king would comfort her until morning. So they were together, and the years passed.

The king grew old with the nagini as he had been young with her, joyously and without fear. But those most near to him grew old too, and died or retired from the court, and there emerged a rabble of young soldiers and courtiers who grumbled increasingly loudly that the king had provided

no heir to the throne, and that the realm would be torn to pieces by his squabbling cousins at his death. They complained further that he was in such thrall to his nagini, or his sorceress, or his leopard-woman (for the belief in such shape-changers is a common one in Kambuja) that he took little care for the glory and renown of the kingdom, so that Kambua had become a byword for well-fed timidity among other nations. And if none of this was true, still it is well-known that long tranquility makes many restless, ready to follow anyone who promises tumultuous change for its own sake. It has happened so even in Rome.

Several attempted to warn the king that such was the case at his court, but he paid no heed, preferring to believe that all around him were as serene as he. Thus, when a drowey noon hour abruptly shattered into blood and shouting and the clanging of swords, and even when he found himself with his back to his own throne-room door, fighting for his life, the king was not prepared. If the best third of his army, made up of his strongest veterans, had not remained loyal, the battle would have been over in those first few minutes, and there would be no more than this to my trader's story. But the king's forces held on doggedly, and then rallied, and by mid-afternoon were on the attack; so that as the sun began to set the insurrection had dwindled to a few pockets of a few desperate rebels who fought like madmen, knowing that no surrender would be accepted. It was in combat with one such that the king of Kambuja received his mortal wound.

He did not know that it was mortal. He knew only that night was falling, and that there were yet men standing between him and the golden tower, men who had screamed all afternoon that they would kill him first and then his leopard-woman, his serpentwoman, the monster who had for so long rotted the fiber of the realm. So he struck them down with all his remaining strength, and then he turned, halfnaked, covered with blood, and limped away from battle toward the tower. If men barred his way, he killed them; but he fell often, and each time he was slower to rise, which made him angry. The tower seemed to grow no closer, and he knew that he should be with his nagini by now.

He would never have reached the tower, but for the valor of a very young officer, far younger than boys in Rome have ever been permitted to enter the Emperor's service. This boy's commander, whose personal charge was the safety of the king, had been slain early in the rebellion, and the boy had appointed himself the king's shield in his stead, following the king through all the dusty turmoil of battle and ever fighting at his side or his back. Now he ran forward to raise the king and support him, all but carrying him toward that distant door through which he had led a beggar woman so long ago. None of either side came near them as they struggled through the twilight: none dared.

By the time they at last attained the tower door, the boy knew that the king was dying. He had no strength to turn the key in the lock, nor could he even speak, save with his eyes, to order the boy to do it; yet once they were within, he pulled himself to his feet and climbed the stairs like any eager young man hastening to his beloved. The boy trailed behind, frightened of this place of his parents' nursery stories, this high darkness rustling with demon queens. Yet care for his king overcame all such terrors, and he was once again at the old man's side when they stood on the bedchamber threshold with the door swinging open before them.

The nagini was not there. The boy hurried to light the torches on the walls, and saw that the chamber was barren of everything but shadows; shadows and the least, least smell of jasmine and sandalwood. Behind him, the king said clearly, "She has not come." The boy was not quick enough to catch him when he fell. His eyes were open when the boy lifted him in his arms, and he pointed toward the bed without speaking. When the boy had set him there, and bound his many wounds as best he could, the king beckoned him close and whispered, "Watch the night. Watch with me." It was no plea, but a command.

So the boy sat all through the night on the great bed where the king and queen of Kambuja had slept in happiness for so

long, and he never knew when the king died. He fought to stay awake as hard as he had fought the king's enemies that day, but he was weary and wounded himself, and he dozed and woke and dozed again. The last time he roused, it was because all the torches had gone out at once, with a sound like a ship's sails cracking in the breeze, and because he heard another sound, heavy and slow, some cold, rough burden being dragged over cold stone. In the last moonlight he saw her: the vast body filling the room like greenish-black smoke, the seven cobra heads swaying as one, and a flickering about her, as though she were shimmering between two worlds at a speed his eyes could not understand. She was close enough to the bed for him to see that she too bore fresh, bleeding wounds (he said later that her blood was as bright as the sun, and hurt his eyes.) When he hurled himself away, rolling and scrambling into a corner, the nagini never looked at him.

She bowed her seven heads over the king as he lay, and her burning blood fell and mingled with his blood.

"My people tried to keep me from you," she said. The boy could not tell whether all the heads spoke, or only one; he said that her voice was full of other voices, like a chord of music. The nagini said, "They told me that today was the day appointed for your death, fixed in the atoms of the universe since the beginning of time, and so it was, and I have always known this, as you knew. But I could not turn away and let it be so, fated or not, and I fought them and came here. He who hides in the shadows will sing that you and I never once failed each other, neither in life nor in death."

Then she called the king by a name that the boy did not recognize, and she took him up onto the coils of her body, as the folk of these parts believe that a naga named Muchalinda supports this world and those to come. Nor did she leave the bedchamber by the door, but passed slowly into darkness, vanishing with no more trace

than the scent of jasmine and sandalwood, and the fading music of all her voices. And what became of her, and of the remains of the king of Kambuja, is not known.

Now I find this story open to some question - there is more evidence to be offered for the existence of nagas than proof positive that they do not exist; but of their commerce with men much may safely be doubted. But I set it down even so, in honor of that boy who waited until sunrise in that silent golden tower before he dared walk out among the clamor of kites and the moans of the grieving to tell the people of Kambuja that their king was dead and gone. One of his descendants it was - or so he swore - who told me the tale.

And if there is any sort of message or metaphor in it, perhaps it is that sorrow and hunger, pity and love, run far deeper in the world than we imagine. They are the underground rivers that the nagas forever traverse; they are the rain that renews us when the right respect has been paid, whether to the nagas or to one another. And if there are no gods, nor any other worlds than this, if there is no such thing as enlightenment or a soul, still there remain those four rivers - sorrow and hunger, pity and love. We humans can survive for terribly long and long without food, without shelter or clothing or medicine, but it is a fact that we will die very soon if the rain does not come.

KathKirtt and SammSabaoth and Vipassana are Made Minds (ie, AIs). They normally communicate through commlinks. All non-acoustic dialogue is signalled by an initial dash. Acoustic dialogue is between normal quotes. A sigillum is what one might call a "rough clone" model of a human being; it looks like a caricature of the human who happens to be "riding" it. Freer, who owns the <Wounded Oar> has decided to land on the mysterious Station Klavier, which he has been tricked into approaching.

Appleseed - John Clute

At ten thousand kilometres, something happened. The self-generated glow that had illuminated Station Klavier softly from within suddenly sharpened. Like a magic lantern in the heart of the interstellar dark, the station shone bright orange.

It was grinning.

--O Great, murmured Freer, Pumpkin. I never gave up, you know.

--Hush, hummed KathKirtt. This is not a retrovirus show.

Something is happening here, and you don't know what it is, Stinky.

--Nor have we ever seen the like (said Kirtt).

--Never have we seen the like (said Kath).

--Before now! (they pealed).

--Guide us down, then, said Freer, and sat in his command cocoon staring in silence as they approached the orange, gnarly world. From this distance, Station Klavier seemed impenetrable. A molten waxy maze of skin curtained its interior from view. Fierce whiskers of hardened skin climbed kilometres high from the surface, baffling the gaze.

As the *Wounded Oar* fell closer, several Arks were visible to the naked eye below them in close orbit, clumsy as bumblebees, reflecting the Hallowe'en glow of the planetoid like tubby moons. Smaller ships zipped here and there, firefly sudden in the new light from within the world. Farther out, two or three wormhole scryers from the intergalactic rim scuttled widdershins,

skidding like waterbugs around the fiery meniscus of orbit, as was their wont and privilege; their mirror probosces and their daddy-long-leg bodies caught the light from below, reflected it blindingly. In a safe distant orbit, far above the *Wounded Oar*, a hive ship loafed, full of its tourist. The *Wounded Oar* toppled on, past the arks and scryers, the solo coffins and candleships and hoi polloi freighters, fell like a loaded bee downwards to the hive.

Closer in, the mottled molten waxy orange surface of Station Klavier became increasingly hard to perceive as a whole, became perplexingly riddled and ruddy, pockmarked, *trompe l'oeil*. It was as though a dozen layers of skin, each skin tattooed with a different map of the territory, were vying for the same patch of surface, jostling the rotundity of the world. Paths and peaks and abysses and hedges fought for lebensraum; cavities swelled jack-in-the-box into groins; guillotines of flaming wax carved rivers down the scalded flanks of spanking-new matterhorns; floes calved into diamond-bright waters which sank into the depths; nacreous mouths pursed around spindles of black diamond ice; eyeholes coughed teeth like fireworks into vacuum. The skin of the planetoid had become an Arcimboldo cuirass, a vast swarming kaleidoscopic cuirass shape it would surely be fatal to intersect. The true Klavier lay somewhere within, impenetrable, occluded from outer darkness by the umbraculae of its skins.

--There's no port here, said Freer finally.

--Shantih, crooned Vipassana in a voice whose pitch was absolute, we are coming in.

Freer held still, he could feel his heart pound.

Then it happened.

They were a hundred kilometres out, and falling still. There was no way in.

Then it opened.

The gold gaudy world-girding net of skins upon skins burst open into bloom, hieroglyph-laden parchments made of world flaming outwards on a hurricane whose source lay deep within.

Klavier lay open, a flower open to the bee.

Flecked with light, the *Wounded Oar* fell nearer.

Freer could see access gaps grinning suddenly through the candy puncheon teeth of the world, shafts of light shining through palimpsests of flaming worldskin starwards, fire-stained cathedrals of light aspiring to the regions where all buildings fish and can never go. Spiked stalagmite spines bloomed into trumpets that shot great whole notes across the sharp horizon in riffs he could not hear, but bones felt. Mouths vaster than Arks, whose pearly teeth were larger than hotels and populous with waving indigenes, opened in unison, barbershop. The skin of Station Klavier had opened its thousand gates.

There was a liquid flash.

Something from deep inside a vast hollow in the world shifted and exploded dozens of kilometres upwards. Suddenly the *Wounded*

Oar was buoyed within a vast chandelier bubble of something like air cascading.

--Pure Predecessor landing rites, chorused KathKirtt, for those of imperial merit. As we know from bootleg benthos data. Before your time, Freer. This is not simulated.

Sensors showed the *Wounded Oar* rocking softly in the bosom of the deep.

--Shit, said Freer.

His earring panted.

--Nix, Stinky, sang KathKirtt. All shall be well.

--All (sang Kath) shall be well.

--All manner of things shall be well (they sang).

--Why?

--Klavier Station (they sang) goes back all the way. It goes back to the light. Look next for faces. Look for faces. You will find them.

The bubble sank downwards into a crystal mouth.

They were inside.

Around them, in the twinkling of an eye, the star-confounding fires became faces, as KathKirtt had foretold, a thousand faces, a thousand thousand. Vast bearded laughing faces fleshed into sight out of luminous parchment that became their skin, glowed, gazed, winked upwards at the stars. Face intersected face, face mirrored face, face knotted into face until all the faces became one hieroglyph of faces gazing upwards, all the faces opened into air. A thousand mouths, larger than any ship, wreathed in holly, began to laugh. Vast oaten chins dangled rune-rich beards of yew kilometres deep into the interstices of inner Klavier, and the deeper these spines of yew extended into Klavier the bigger Klavier 42

became, as in a dream Freer had more than once awoken from weeping. In the dream (the dream always started here) he was a figurine of porcelain in a maze of light, one of whose corridors darkened (time and again) into the fluted coral chambers of a spiral staircase, which was the inside of a cornucopia, and which grew larger the further he climbed, and made the sound of an ocean, and lo! he was peering through the crown of a great Tree, for he had in fact been climbing upside down. Here are the roots of the Tree (a voice said in his ear), once made of time, made now of weather. Help (scoffed the voice) if you can, little marmoset. What big eyes you have! Tell me (said the voice, diminishing into the cackle of a crone) a story.

--Once upon a time, murmured the shipmind to their charge, a very small boy fell into a very long sleep.

Freer's bones shook of their own accord.

The *Wounded Oar* descended into greater darknesses, finer light; navigated around dense knots, vaster than Arks, where eleven spinal tongues of yew joined in rosetti gossipings and made a shaft which spun; slid downwards, guided by tendrils of iron-hard odorous yew downwards. The shadow of a vast bee darkened the ship, then lifted. They passed deeper. Drenched in hieroglyphs, the interlaced yew spines of the deep interior of Klavier gave off an umbral Christmas glow. The light within the world seemed resinous.

There was a soft jolt, and a thrumming through the ship, Herms trembled, toggles glowed their alerts, the Handfast throbbed on its dais. It felt as though some portal in the knot had opened inwards at the sesame of the yew and docked the *Wounded Oar* within some antechamber next to the engine of the world.

There was no movement.

The silence they sat in was like an odour.

--What is happening to us? said Freer.

--We have docked, sang KathKirtt. We have docked in a Predecessor cathedral called Klavier Station. We have been accorded the full panoply of an imperial welcome.

--As though we were Kings of Orient Are (hummed Kath).

--We are absolutely here, crooned reverently the Made Mind of absolute location.

--Why, said Freer. Why us?

--Not us, sang KathKirtt. You.

--Fuck that. And "Are," said Freer, is a verb. We, who happen to be these Three Kings of Orient, Are getting close to Christ, Kath.

The bee-eye net of monitors around Freer's command cocoon had expanded, joined together into a single seamless gaze facing everywhere, so that he now stood like a polished figurine in the middle of a Glass Island in the middle of the world. The *Wounded Oar* had inserted itself like a seed or bead of sap into a knothole or crater whose seamed enclosing walls protruded from a great intricately inscribed spine of yew, which continued to descend in crazed channels, winding around an abyssal central shaft, which itself curved grandly out of sight beneath his feet, between his toes, spiraling downwards to a gold mosaic netting kilometres below that marked (a voice said in his ear) the beginning of core country, where the Predecessor throne room, which lay at the heart of any Predecessor cathedral like Klavier, might be found (KathKirtt continued to murmur). Somewhere deep within Klavier (they were sure), there would be found an amber

room of modest size, its walls bedizened with images of a race whose gaze was smoothly abrupt, whose gem-hung necks turned sharply in what may have been a formal dance on floors whose mosaic tiles were a map of the galaxy ten trillion Heartbeats ago. There would be eleven dancers dancing. From the centre of the room rises a throne in the shape of a rune, and by the throne a stone, and in the stone a sword.

The walls of the abyss were webbed with veins that ran in every direction, nurturing the spines that wound down from above. Through enamelled portals in the walls of the abyss could be seen blazing corridors, so large a ship could enter them; they curved out of sight around the curve of the world, and laughing faces gazed back through the peepholes; a great gold lynx eye winked. Above him, a maze of intertwining yew arched upwards, joined with its fellows into a porous mosaic of root and leaf; it was, perhaps, the bottom of the roof of the world; naves and cupolas pocked it, as as though he were gazing upwards at the ceilings of a hundred cathedrals. Through great apertures far above light shone, green as sun-shot leaves, apple-green.

He blinked.

His perspective reversed suddenly. He saw that the cathedrals were innards. They were the inside of the surface. They were the innards of a the uncouncted face-masks whose populous eyeholes gazed, like pilchards in a star-gazey pie, through the waxy outer skins of Station Klavier, at the stars.

The doorbell rang.

--I did not know we had a doorbell, said Freer, turning away at last from

the thunder of all that was visible in the window that wrapped him.

--We do now. Somebody wished to ring it.

--So answer the door.

--It is done.

His retinal helpdesk showed that a sigillum had already made entry, and was now climbing the lacquered spiral passage upwards into command country, which opened for it.

It came inside.

It wore the aspect of the pianist, and his tin pot. Except for a scanty cache-sex, and the multicoloured pack hoisted over its back, it was stark naked. It wore no tithe sigil. It was extremely dirty.

Being a sigillum, it maintained eye contact with Freer.

"Greetings," said the sigillum in the pianist's clipped archaic drawl. "Welcome to Natchez Trace hostelry, Station Klavier. Welcome, noble Made Minds KathKirtt, Uncle Sam, Vipassana; welcome, homo sapiens Stinky Freer; welcome, though you slumber deep, Transitus Tessera Mamselle Cunning Earth Link; welcome, sweet nanos of the masks and Book; welcome, firm but tiny Sniffer, so I say. Etc, etc. I speak for my rider, who is not at this moment able to ride. Our name is Johnny Appleseed."

John Clute

In the backstreets of a little provincial town in northern Tuscany, the name of which I shall not

traveller had encountered an old man who helped him find his destination, and when he arrived, he was told that the ghost of just such a man was said to haunt that spot. He wrote a

The Muse - Ron Tiner

tell you, there is a small square, known as *La Piazza delle Muse*, The Piazza of the Muses. Only one building overlooks the square, an ancient stone structure with one tiny, barred window high up above the ground. The other three sides of the square are flanked by the backs of houses that face the other way. But dominating the piazza, there is a fountain, decorated with a magnificent marble sculpture of the nine muses, each one bearing a lyre or a flute, a scroll or a celestial globe, to signify the art or science that is her province. The carving is said to be hundreds of years old, and yet there remains in the faces and figures of these beautiful young women a delicacy that the centuries have left intact. At the very top of the group there is the lovely figure of Calliope, the muse of all writers. There is a legend concerning this figure; not many people believe it, but it is said that, at midnight of the summer solstice, Calliope becomes living flesh and blood for a little while, and descends from her lofty position to walk the earth, and anyone who sees and touches her during those fleeting moments is gifted with a wonderful eloquence and is enabled to write stories of remarkable imaginative power.

When Cyrus Grimshaw heard this legend, *he* believed it. He had dedicated his life to writing short stories, but despite great hopes and a consuming ambition, his efforts had met with scant success. His stories lacked originality. He wrote of a woman who saw a strange thing, but then she woke up and found it was only a dream. Another of his efforts told how a

murder story in which a dead body was found in the library of a country house, and when the police inspector investigated, he deduced that it was the butler who did it. He knew his stories were banal and derivative, but he persisted doggedly, hoping that one day he would have a wonderful idea that would bring him the recognition and praise that he craved. He tried to recount some of the interesting events of his own life, but they became tedious and trivial when he wrote them down. And he fed and nurtured his disappointment by making a collection of his rejection slips from publishers all over the country: a sad little pile of blighted hopes, stained with the occasional tear.

He believed in the legend without a shadow of doubt and didn't waste a moment in wondering whether he should go there or not. He bought a package holiday at Thomas Cook's and, two days before midsummer, flew to Italy with rekindled hope in his heart. On his arrival, he left his luggage at the Hotel Scrivatore and set off immediately in search of the Piazza delle Muse. It took him a long time to find it, but when he did he stood with his back to the ancient stone building with the little window high up, and contemplated the delicately weathered images of the nine daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne. Low down, near the pool into which the waters descended, there were the figures of Thalia and

Melpomene wearing the masks of comedy and tragedy, and beside them, set a little higher, those of Urania and Clio, muses of astronomy and history. Polymnia, of sacred song, stood veiled and pensive to one side, and above her, her older sisters, Terpsicore and Ruterpe, inspirers of dance and lyric song. Then there was Erato, muse of erotic poetry, and higher still, Calliope, eldest of the nine, seemed to gaze down at him with a melancholy as old as time itself. Satisfied that he could find his way back with ease, he returned to his hotel to busy himself with mundane matters and to await impatiently the coming of the summer solstice. Well before the midnight hour he was there again, waiting, in the mild Italian night as the minutes ticked languorously by. A moon like a thin sickle shed a silver light on the fountain, and the quiet hush of the water seemed to waft away his thoughts. At last he heard the doleful sound of a distant bell striking twelve, then another more sonorous one joined it from a different direction, and the two briefly played a wistful duet. As the last chimes died away on the quiet air, he saw the pale body of Calliope become suffused with a gentle warmth, and slowly, very slowly, she began to move. Tentatively at first, she separated herself from the main bulk of the fountain and then, with unhurried poise, she stepped gracefully down, past her immobile sisters, to stand upon the ground. With the same slow, fluid movements she turned her face towards the moonlit pool and languidly dipped her hand in the water, then she made her way, step after elegant step, to the place where Cyrus Grimshaw waited, mesmerized by this breathtaking sight. She stopped before him, her firm, round breasts almost touching his chest and looked up into his face. Lost

in wonder at the delicate beauty of her naked body, he could not move or speak, but stood gazing down at her; the white column of her throat, the fine smoothness of her chin, her moist lips parted as though ready to be kissed. Then he looked into her eyes and saw a deep and ancient sadness in which he yearned to drown and escape from the harsh world that had so cruelly rejected his creative efforts. She leaned up towards him, and as she laced a soft kiss on his mouth he closed his eyes and was overcome with a sense of peace, in which all consciousness of time and place was lost. When at last he opened his eyes again, the goddess had returned to her place above the glistening water. He watched as her movements slowed and ceased. The colour of her flesh faded, becoming white marble once again.

He could not tell how long he stood, awestruck by the experience he had undergone, but eventually he came to himself once more and walked away. As he did so, a wonderful idea occurred to him and he wrenched pen and notebook from his pocket to jot it down. All that night he worked in a fever of creative excitement, writing a story about the statue of a mermaid that came to life and swam down the high street singing a siren song that caused all the men of the town to come to her in a great throng. And she taught them the wisdom of the seas and the tides and the phases of the moon, and she bewitched them and made them carry her to the seashore and cast her into the deep, but as she hit the water, she turned into a statue again and sank to the bottom and was drowned. On his way home in the aeroplane, he wrote a story about a member of a master race who owned all the planets in the solar system, and who decided to sell the earth as a viable piece of real estate. But the

sitting tenants had vandalised it so badly, cutting own all its trees and covering all its green fields with concrete and squandering all its oil reserves, that no-one would buy it. So he decided to eject the sitting tenants, but they heard about his plans and enlisted the aid of the great god Pan, who played a magic music on his pipes that made the landlord yearn for true love and abandon his moneymaking scheme. When Cyrus Grimshaw got back home, he wrote about the baglady who found Aladdin's lamp in a dustbin. When she tried to rub some of the dirt off it, a dark skinned gentleman in a turban came out of the spout in a cloud of aromatic smoke and asked her to marry him. They settled down in Ponders End and had lots of light brown children and lived rich and happy lives with no visible means of support. He won a prestigious award for his story about a tramp who discovered a road made of pure silver. When the tramp walked down this road he came upon a huge barn called the house of wasted time, where all the idle minutes of peoples lives were stored away in boxes. And the wise old woman in charge of the barn told him that he could buy back all the time in his life that he had wasted by polishing a length of the silver road. And as he polished he began to see himself clearly reflected in the shining surface, and he saw how old he had become and how little he had achieved. So he worked very hard, and was given a huge box and he walked away down the silver road carrying his whole life before him.

The name of Cyrus Grimshaw became famous. Collected editions of his stories sold in hundreds of thousands and glowing reviews of his genius were published in all the literary magazines. His attendance was sought at gatherings of famous and influential people and he was spoken of as a writer of great merit

and influence, the equal of some of the best in the world. He was recognised in the street. He received enthusiastic fan mail and the adulation of millions. And he *loved* it! In fact, although he professed to find it tiresome, he became addicted to the public accolades and admiration of his readers, so that however much praise was heaped upon him, it was never enough. *It was never enough.* He began to dream of returning to the Piazza of the Muses, and gaining an even more powerful imagination. In this way he could become the greatest writer in the English language; nay, in *any* language.. And so it was that, the following year, Cyrus Grimshaw booked another package holiday with Thomas Cook, and just before midsummer, he flew off to Tuscany and deposited his luggage at the Hotel Scrivatore. He went again to the Piazza and at the appointed hour was standing with his back to the great stone buiding with the tiny barred window high up. He looked up at the effigy of Calliope and remembered with a surge of emotion the gossamer kiss that had changed the course of his life. She gazed down at him with the same dreadful ancient sorrow in her lovely stone eyes. Once again, a distant bell began to chime the midnight hour and was joined by another in a sweetly melancholy duet. And as they ceased their chiming, and the sound of the water hushed the silence, the pale figure began to move. Like the repetition of an age-old ritual, she slowly and deliberately descended to the ground, walked towards him and stood with the pink tips of her breasts almost touching his chest. He looked down into her face. Her soft, moist lips were slightly parted but he dared not look into her eyes. This time it must be more than a kiss. This time he must

have everything she had to give. He pressed his mouth hungrily down upon hers, biting her lips and forcing his tongue into her mouth. With one hand he gripped her buttocks and pressed her loins hard against him. With the other, he clasped her soft, firm breast. She made no resistance. She stood passively compliant as his rough hands groped and invaded. And in the pale silver moonlight, to the accompaniment of, the gentle sounds of the fountain, he ravished her. The frenzy in his mind reached fever pitch. He blacked out and fell to the ground. When he came to himself the goddess had returned to her place. Her movements slowed to a stop. Her skin paled again to white. She returned to stone. He scrambled to his feet, but as he did so, an idea thrust itself into his mind. There was a powerful wizard who brought George Washington back to life and sat him on Mount Rushmore. But he slipped off and died of terror, clinging to the gigantic effigy of his own face. He scrabbled for his pencil and notebook, but before he could find them another idea shunted the first one violently aside. There was an estate agent in Slough who made himself a pink paper overcoat from the pages of The Financial Times, and across his back was printed a news item about the rising cost of housing. He found his pencil but other ideas crowded in, clamouring to be heard. There's an artist living in a haunted house in Mevagissy who spends every night painting pictures of the scraping and groaning sounds the ghosts make when they walk about, but in the daytime his paintings are so noisy that he can't get any sleep. There's an overweight jazz singer with a beautiful face who became enamoured of a pair of blue curtains, but the curtains did not return her affection so she pined away singing blue songs and watching blue movies and eating blue camembert cheese.

He clutched at his head to try to slow the mad torrent of ideas that now assailed him. There's a lady in Crouch End who owns a hungry mirror that will only eat glass marbles and corn flakes. There's a tree in the middle of the Gobi desert whose leaves are the pages of a gigantic book on which are printed all the tragic details of the lives of unhappy men and women. There's an unemployed miner in Blackburn who got a telephone call from the devil, offering him the gates of hell to put on the shed in his allotment. The ideas poured into his mind like a mad horde of mischievous black hobgoblins fighting and crashing against the inside of his skull. He tore at his scalp with bloody fingernails, but the torrent of madness raged on and on. There's a short-sighted charcoal burner in Epping Forest who wears a hundred pairs of spectacles but he still can't see the wood for the trees. There's a lorry driver travelling up the M5 who has the entire population of Jupiter imprisoned in an Oxo tin under his driving seat. Cyrus Grimshaw began to scream with terror. He fell to the ground, writhing and tearing at himself, vainly trying to assuage the boiling tumult in his head, and his screams echoed and re-echoed along the narrow streets and alleys and away into the cool Italian night.

In the backstreets of a little provincial town in Northern Tuscany, the name of which I'll tell you if you like, there is a small square called the Piazza of the Muses. Only one building overlooks this square. It is an ancient stone structure with a tiny barred window high above the ground. This building is known as La Casa Matta: The Mad House. There is a rumour about this mad house. Not many people believe it, but it is said that all its inmates are writers.

Captain's Log, deep space exploratory vehicle Zarathustra. Date & Location unknown.

Slade paused and looked back over his shoulder. Far

and building materials as well. Without looking back, he started to walk.

The trees looked for all the world like good old Earth pines, and the smell brought back a flood of childhood memories, most of them to do with getting lost in woods.

Escape From the Planet of the Bears

behind him in the bay, the ship was sinking; only the engine nacelle was still visible through the cloud of swirling steam. He thought about the effect of seawater on a neutronium pulse reactor manifold, and scrambled behind a nearby rock.

Just in time. The ground shook like a laughing jelly, as most of the contents of the bay reared up into the air, hung for a moment and came down again in a hammer-heavy shower, drenching Slade to the skin. He'd been brought up in England, so he didn't mind that particularly; but the thought that the ship was gone for ever hit him so hard that he staggered and sat down hard on some unfamiliar species of jellyfish. (And that was just the coffee machine. Just as well he'd had the wit to jettison the engine cores while they were still in orbit.)

Wherever this was, it had suddenly become home.

Pity about that.

He looked around. Seen from one perspective, it was fortuitous to say the least that he'd contrived to crash-land on a planet that was, at first sight, virtually indistinguishable from Earth. Most planets, he knew for a fact, weren't. Further, he had to admit that pitching on a planet that apparently teemed with organic life was a stroke of luck. The percentages were all against that; statistically, he ought to be either completely submerged in corrosive gases or standing on something that looked like post-industrial Cleveland. Instead - well, it could be a lot worse.

On the other hand...

Well; the ship was gone, and walking home from here wasn't a viable option. It was something that all spacefarers had nightmares about, usually after a late dinner of freeze-dried chicken korma - stranded on an alien world with nothing but an environment suit and an emergency toolkit. There had, of course, been a briefing about just such a set of circumstances at the Academy. He could remember the exact words.

Find a cliff and jump. You'll be better off.

Nothing if not succinct, those Academy briefings. But there didn't appear to be any cliffs in these parts, and besides, he wasn't quite ready to give up.

Captain's log, resumed, he dictated into the portable recorder. Ship lost, am stranded on unknown planet. Rest of crew presumed dead. Unable to salvage anything from ship. Bummer. End log.

The ground rose steadily in front of him, and on the crest of the rise was a wood. Shelter, he thought; probably food

Situated as he was, however, the concept of lost didn't have a whole lot of relevance. He walked for about an hour, idly noticing that the wood seemed remarkably clear of brambles and undergrowth.

As far as he could tell, it extended for at least a hundred acres. But it was unnaturally quiet; no birds sang, nothing moved except the tips of the branches as the soft breeze played around them. No beetles, even. Very strange.

Then he heard a woman scream.

He looked round, trying to gauge the direction; at which point, he saw her. She was human - also tall, young, blonde, dressed only in a few scanty rags. Although she was barefoot, she ran as if she was wearing three-inch heels. Once, she stopped to look over her shoulder; then she screamed again

- 'Eeek,' she said, quite distinctly - and fell over a tree root. Slade sat up on his heels. I could get to like it here, he thought.

Then he heard another sound; still faint and far-away, but woodland acoustics are notoriously tricky. It was like the distant popping of corks.

Way to go, Slade thought; he stood up and hurried toward the woman, noticing as he went that her hair was straight and looked as if she'd just spent three hours in a salon chair. "Excuse me, can I help..." he said, but she stood on one foot staring at him, her mouth open, a total lack of understanding behind her ocean-deep blue eyes.

Hey, Slade thought, maybe this isn't a planet after all. Maybe I just died and went to California.

The popping-corks noise was getting closer now; the woman heard it and went 'Eeek' again. She tried to run, but her ankle was obviously giving her grief. "Here, let me give you a hand," Slade said, but she still didn't seem to understand; and it wasn't just the words, it was as if language itself wasn't something she was familiar with. Not just California, Slade muttered to himself. A couple of specific square miles around Malibu. He suppressed a big grin and started to walk forward -

- Just as a bunch of enormous bears appeared over the lip of a patch of dead ground, no more than twenty-five yards away. They were, to put it mildly, not like any other bears he'd seen before. For one thing, they were big - nine or ten feet tall - and they were standing upright, just like humans. Furthermore, they were

wearing little short, tight red jackets (which reminded Slade of something he'd seen, years ago, but he couldn't quite think what) and they were carrying what looked like...

...Pop-guns. Yes, those little wooden tube things with a plunger in one end that fired corks. Slade stood and stared, rooted to the spot. Some party, even by Californian standards.

Then one of the bears saw him, raised his pop-gun to his shoulder and fired. Maybe he snatched the shot at the last moment; hard to say. At any rate, the cork missed Slade's head by the width of two fingers, whizzed past his ear and hit a tree; which sagged and fell over.

Some cork.

Slade had the wit to duck; just in time, because the other bears were shooting at him now. "Get him!" one of them roared, and three of the monsters lurched toward him, stuffing fresh corks into the muzzles of their weapons as they advanced. Not Malibu, then, Slade thought as he jumped up and started to run. More like LA. A cork hit the ground a foot or so in front of him, spraying him with shredded leaf-mould.

Fortunately, the bears couldn't manoeuvre very well among the trees, and he managed to lose them; or at least they got bored and gave up. When he was sure it was safe (relatively safe), he crept back to a high point overlooking the spot where he'd seen the girl, tucked himself in behind a tree-stump, and looked down.

The sight he saw was amazing; there was a whole mob of humans there now, all dressed in the same sort of rags, some of them screaming (but he couldn't make out any words; and then he remembered that he'd been able to understand the bears). They were being driven steadily inwards by a surrounding ring of the giant bears, who were shouting and firing their pop-guns in the air; others were cracking whips.

They were making the humans climb trees.

What the hell, Slade thought; and he noticed a low, ominous humming noise, like a giant underground generator - except that it seemed to be coming from high up in the treetops. Not a generator. Bees.

The humans had obviously done this before, although (equally obviously) they weren't enjoying it a bit. As they reached the upper branches, great clouds of bees sailed out like fleets of tiny nanowarships, completely enveloping the climbers. Slade could hear the screams, and the occasional thump as one of them lost his grip and fell. The bears didn't seem in the least concerned about that; they were watching the climbers and grinning.

It was a matter of numbers; for every three climbers engulfed by bees, one made it through relatively unscathed to the hives lodged in the high forks; long enough to tear a hive out and drop it to the ground, where it cracked open. Honey, Slade realised. Why am I not surprised?

He didn't stay to watch the end. It wasn't a

pretty sight, and he'd seen enough.

Somehow, by God knows what freak of evolution, on this planet humans were the dumb beasts and bears were the dominant species. Huge great big golden-blond bears, in cute little red jackets.

How long he wandered alone in the forest, he didn't know. Since he had nowhere to go to, moving

about was pointless in any case - not to mention extremely dangerous, if there were any more bear raiding-parties loose. But the thought of keeping still and hiding didn't appeal, somehow - maybe he was still just human enough to retain a trace of hope, like the last smear at the bottom of the honey-jar...

He didn't see the trap until it was too late, by which time the rope had tightened around his ankle, the bent sapling had straightened, and he was hanging upside down in the air. Marvellous, he thought; and then the bushes parted, and two creatures emerged. They were upright, about his own height, bright pink, with perky little ears -

Piglets?

- Except that they were wearing clothes; bizarre outfits, bright red, like body-length nappies. And they were talking, in words he could understand.

"What an extraordinary specimen," one of them said. "Look at the clothes it's wearing."

(Gimme a break, Slade thought)

"And its eyes," said the other one, looking at him with its head slightly on one side. "To look at it, you could almost imagine it was sentient."

The other piglet laughed. "There you go again," it said. "That silly sentimental streak of yours. Come on, I'll lower the rope while you get the tranquilliser ready."

"Hey!" Slade shouted.

The taller piglet stopped. "Extraordinary," it said.

"I've always thought that some of them have the ability to mimic speech," the other one said. "I'm convinced that with a little patient training -"

"You two," Slade yelled. "Get me down out of this thing, will you?"

The two piglets stared at him as if he'd just jumped up out of a cake.

"Amazing," the tall one said.

"I told you, didn't I?" the other one replied. "It's the eyes, you know."

"Will you two quit fooling about and -" Which was as far as he got, before he heard the faint hiss of the tranquilliser, and darkness came up all around him.

He was in a cage.

As cages went, it wasn't so bad. It was high

enough to allow him to stand up straight. There was a large bowl of water in the corner, and plenty of space to walk about. Compared to, say, an apartment in Tokyo it was lavish. But it was a cage, the sort of thing you'd keep a pet animal in. Or (Slade shuddered at the thought) a laboratory specimen.

"Hey!" he yelled.

The cage was in a cave, and the only other occupant was one of those damned bears, which lifted its head and stared at him. "Shuddup," it growled; then it went back to its mindless humming. There was, Slade noticed, a pop-gun lying across its knees.

"Excuse me," he said.

"Shuddup," the bear repeated, scowling. "Who said you could talk, anyways?"

Maybe it was the way it said it; definitely a hint. Something about the idea of a talking human obviously bothered the hell out of the bear. Even over on the other side of the cave, Slade could almost feel the tension.

"Tweep," he said. "Tweep tweep. Eeek."

The bear relaxed a little, looked away and hummed a little louder (tumpy-tum-tum, tumpy-tum-tum, tumpy-tumpy-tumpy-tum-tum; at the back of Slade's mind, a minuscule tendril of memory stirred uneasily) Slade turned his back to the creature and sat perfectly still, studying the construction of the cage. It was made of massive logs crudely but efficiently lashed together with strips of pale yellow rawhide (best not to think about that); without tools -

Tools. He remembered.

The emergency toolkit had gone; the pocket was empty. That was seriously worrying, if the guard bear's attitude to an apparently sentient human was anything to go by. Even if he could somehow explain away a plasma cutter and a sonic wrench as primitive dress accessories, the mere act of explanation wasn't going to make things any better for him.

"Human."

Instinctively he swung round, remembering too late his resolution to act dumb. Oh well; no point now in pretending he couldn't understand.

It was the piglets, the ones who'd snared him.

"You can understand what I'm saying, can't you?" said the tall piglet

"Tweep," Slade replied, but his heart wasn't in it. "Tweep. Eeek?"

The piglet frowned. "Human?"

Slade reached a decision. The thought that he might be able to communicate, something he felt a desperate need to do, outweighed the warnings his instincts were yelling at him.

"Tweep," he said, nodding sideways in the direction of the

guard. "Tweep tweep."

"What? Oh." The piglet nodded, its eyes full of wonder. "You there," it called out. "Why don't you take a long lunch? We can look after the specimen."

"Got my orders," the bear's voice growled.

"Well, I'm giving you some more." The piglet's tone of voice spoke volumes about social hierarchies; a command, but Slade could feel the apprehension. Obviously the piglets were nominally higher rank, but still afraid of the bears. "Go and get something to eat, take a stroll, whatever. We'll be fine."

Slade didn't look round, but he could hear the thump-thump-thump of the bear's heavy paws. "It's all right," the piglet said, "he's gone. Well, you really are an exceptional specimen, human. In all my years in the profession -"

"Slade. My name is Slade."

The piglet thought about that. "That's not very cute," it said.

Slade felt as if he'd just been hit over the head with a fish. "Cute?" herepeated.

"Cute," the piglet said. "You do know what cute means, don't you?" it continued, and its tone of voice suggested that it was dealing with a concept that was vital; perhaps even holy.

"Yeah, I know what cute means," Slade replied. "You're cute," he added, with a slight shudder. "Even the goddamn bears are cute. You make it sound like it's important."

The piglets looked at each other. They were - shocked.

"It's all right," said the short one, after a long moment of silence.

"It's only a human., I don't suppose it really understands what it's saying."

"You're right. But you -" The piglet was scowling at him. "Don't you ever say anything like that again, do you hear? It's going to be hard enough to keep you alive as it is, a talking human and all. It's all right with us, we're scientists, but if you suddenly start blaspheming where other people can hear you -"

Slade nodded. "Sorry," he said. "You see -" (How to put it?) "You see, I'm not actually from round here. I'm -"

"I knew it," the other piglet interrupted excitedly. "Of course, it's from the Outlands. That's right, isn't it, human? From across the great desert? There is another country out there, and that's where you're from."

Shit, Slade thought. "In a manner of speaking," he said. "Look, guys, do you think you could possibly see your way to -?"

The piglets were staring at each other. "I know it's a terrible risk," said the tall one, "but we

can't keep this to ourselves,"

"But what if the bears - ?"

"I don't care," the tall one interrupted. "Don't you see? It's living proof, there really is life outside the valley; and once they see it for themselves, with their own eyes -"

The short piglet nodded, as if reaching a truly momentous, split-the-atom decision. "You're right," it said, "of course. We'll have to tell Professor Eeyore."

The old grey donkey stared at him through the bars, and he winced as if he'd been burned. The sheer malevolence of its unwavering stare reminded him uncomfortably of his ex-wife's lawyer.

"Remarkable," it said at last. "Who else have you told about this?"

"Nobody." The piglets couldn't bear to look the donkey in the eye. Slade could see their point. There was something extremely disconcerting about the creature; misery fermenting into insanity. Something about the name, too... It belonged somewhere back in time, along with the smell of the pine needles.

"And have you tested it yet?" The donkey's voice was low, almost feverish. "Does it float?"

The piglets looked at each other. "Actually, professor," they said, "no, we haven't. We were more interested, actually, in this possible missing-link aspect; you know, the great desert, the possibility of there being somewhere else..."

They tailed off. The donkey's stare seemed to soak up words like absorbent kitchen towel.

"So you haven't tested it," the donkey said slowly. "Well, we'd better do it now, then, hadn't we? Of course it's too much to expect that anybody else would think of a perfectly obvious thing like that."

There was terror in the piglets' eyes. "But Professor -"

"Now."

"Yes, Professor."

Slade watched anxiously as they unlocked the cage door. "What's he talking about, do I float?" he asked, but they shushed him.

"Just don't say anything, all right?" whispered the short piglet. "It's going to be all right. Potentially," it added. "I mean, who knows? Maybe you do float, at that."

Somehow those weren't the most reassuring words Slade had ever heard in his life; but it wasn't the time to argue the point. If they were opening the cage, he was getting out; and once they were outside the cave, if he couldn't give two piglets and a broken-down old donkey the slip, then he wasn't the man he thought he was.

(Although he wasn't sure about that. In fact, he wasn't sure he ever had been...)

The daylight nearly blinded him; and while he was still dazzled, he heard bear voices. "Chief," one of them grunted,

"You." No question about it, there was no hint of reservation or fear in the donkey's voice when he spoke to the bears. "Arrest these two. They're blasphemers and abominators. And put a set of chains on that human; I don't want it getting away."

There was nothing Slade could do. Should've known better, he rebuked himself, as the manacles snapped shut around his ankles and neck. Nothing I could've done, anyhow.

The bears marched him through what he took to be some kind of settlement; at any rate, there were strange, rickety structures up in the branches, and some of the trees had little (cute little) painted wooden doors let into them. The clearing was crowded with animals; mostly bears, some lounging around aimlessly, others squatting on the ground with their muzzles buried in jars. Here and there he noticed a handful of rabbits - huge rabbits, with hoes and forks over their shoulders, talking at the tops of their high, folksy voices. At one point, he and his convoy were nearly trampled underfoot by something stripy and incredibly fast; but Slade didn't even want to think about what that might be.

It was a long, silent march, out of the forest into the encircling mountains beyond. The donkey led the way, setting a pace that the rest of the party were hard pressed to match. Both piglets radiated misery and doom, the bears were sullen and Slade knew better by now than to say anything. All in all, he hadn't been on a hike this depressing since his childhood holidays in Wales.

After climbing for an hour up a steep, rocky trail, they came to a deep gorge, at the bottom of which a river bounced and hissed through high, jagged rocks. A rope bridge spanned the gorge, threadbare and crazy. The donkey stopped.

"Now we'll see," it said.

Even the bears looked nervous. "We going across that, chief?" one of them grunted.

The donkey grinned. "Only about half way," it replied.

It was at that point that the penny dropped in Slade's mind. It dropped down uncounted years, freefalling from generation to generation, from a time so far away as to be completely alien - more so than the talking donkey or the bears in red jackets who chased humans up trees. Slade was well aware that he didn't have a clue what it meant. It was like unearthing some incredibly ancient artefact whose purpose had been lost and could never be worked out from first principles. All he had was a word.

"Poohsticks," he said.

The donkey slowly lifted its head. "I was right, then," it said slowly. "It's true. You're the spawn of the Child. Do you understand what that means?" he

asked of the two piglets, who huddled in quivering terror against the rock face behind them. "No, of course you don't. You call yourselves scientists, you conjured up such pretty dreams of a land far away across the burning sands; an enchanted place where a boy and his bear are forever playing." That was completely lost on the piglets - and Slade too, of course - but the donkey didn't seem particularly bothered. "A talking human, you thought," the donkey went on, its eyes fixed on the white spray lashing the rocks below, "how wonderful. Perhaps one day all humans can be taught to talk, and then they can take their place in a universal brotherhood of sentient species. Idiots," the donkey sighed. "Oh, you sneer at them" (with a nod toward the guards) "when you know they're not looking, you call them bears of very little brain and repeat the ancient slanders you learned at your grandfathers' trotters; but no bear ever dreamed of consorting with the spawn of the Child, or turning his back on Cute. Which is why I say," he added, his black button eyes suddenly lit with fury, "Cute may forgive you, but I never will."

"Excuse me," said Slade.

The donkey turned (a process involving a six-stage manoeuvre in the cramped confines of the bridgehead) "Well?"

"Sorry to be a pest," Slade said, "but would you mind explaining all that? You see, I haven't got a clue what you're talking about."

The donkey stared at him, then started to laugh. "You know," it said, "I think I almost believe you. Now wouldn't that be a fine irony; for the spawn of the Child to have forgotten the Story. It's too good to be true, of course. And besides, you've already proved that you know the Word."

"You mean poohsticks? Hey, I don't know why I even said that, really -"

"It's in your blood," the donkey replied solemnly. "You are what you are. But tell me, do you really not know the Story?"

Once long ago (said the donkey), before the river gouged out the valley, even, there was another human who talked, just like you do. He was only a cub, a Child; but not only did the animals who lived in the wood spare him, they accepted him as one of their own, an equal. I know it's almost impossible to believe (the donkey added, as the bears made hostile noises) but that's what the Story said. The Child talked; and not only that, the animals listened to what he said, because he taught them the word of Cute.

He and no other.

It was the Child who first dressed up the bear in his smart red jacket, ordained for the piglet that absolutely ridiculous outfit that you all wear today. He laid down that the Tigger shall bounce and the Rabbit shall upbraid him for it. He decided that the mother should be Kanga and the baby Roo. Everything we are, even the bear's love of honey and humming, we had from him. He was our god. He gave us the Cute.

Because of him (the donkey went on) everything we say,

do and are is just ever so slightly wrong. Because of him, the owl can't spell its own name. Why? Because of him, we believe that the north pole is a piece of wood stuck in the ground - we know perfectly well what the north pole really is, but even so, we must believe or else die the hideous death of the heretic. Why? Because of him, we have to sit on chairs that don't fit us at tables that aren't suited for our anatomy; we have to wear clothes we don't need, and eat food that slowly poisons us - have you any idea (the donkey almost howled) how painful it is to eat nothing but thistles? - and live all our lives in some kind of hideous mockery, all because of what he taught us; the Cute. That was the Child, the talking human. And that (concluded the donkey, staring at Slade with such raw hatred that he covered his face with his hands and looked away) is why humans must never be allowed to talk again -

"Unless," it went on, its voice suddenly soft, "they float."

Slade uncovered his eyes. "Excuse me?" he said.

The donkey's sigh came right up from its fetlocks. "It was written," it said simply. "There was a time when the Child grew angry with the first donkey and hurled it from the bridge into the great chasm. But when the donkey hit the river, it didn't sink; instead it floated on its back under the bridge with its feet sticking up in the air, and the Child looked upon the face of the waters, and behold, it was very cute. So the Child spared the donkey, the first of my line; and ever since we have vowed that if ever the spawn of the Child comes into our hooves we would show it the same mercy, no more and no less."

"All right," Slade replied, glancing down at the deep pool directly under the bridge and thinking of the flotation control modules built into his environment suit. "I don't have a problem with that. Okay, how do we do this? Do you want me to jump, or would you rather push? Either way's cool with me, it's entirely up to -"

"No!" broke in the taller piglet. "We can't let you do this. It's a sentient creature, Professor; it has a mind, possibly even a soul. For all we know, all the humans have souls. You can't -"

"It's all right, really," Slade tried to say. "I honestly don't mind. In fact -"

"Blasphemer!" The donkey pawed at the rocky track with its paws. "How can you say such things? Can't you see this abomination for what it is?"

"It's not an abomination!" shouted the smaller piglet. "It's - dammit, I think it's cute! I mean," it added, as the other animals, including the other piglet, stared at it in dumbstruck horror, "look at its dear little face. And its funny little crinkly pink paws. And the adorable way its sweet little nose turns up at the end..."

"Enough!" The donkey was beside itself with fury now. "I won't hear another word of this. Bears, throw that - that animal off the bridge."

"No!"

"Oh, not you as well," groaned the donkey, as the taller piglet stationed itself between the bears and its diminutive colleague. "That one too, then. Both of them. In your own time," it added irritably, as the bears hesitated. "Go on, that's an order."

The bears were looking at the donkey. "But Chief..." one of them said.

"Well? What?"

"You can't throw piglets off cliffs, chief. It ain't right."

"Piglets is cute too," the other bear pointed out. "Ac'shly, piglets is reely cute."

"Could I just mention here that I really don't mind - ?" Slade tried to say; but they weren't listening.

The donkey was lashing its tail, which came loose. Quickly, a bear pinned it back on. "I think they's cute too," it mumbled.

"Listen to yourselves!" howled the donkey. "You heard what it said, the abominations it uttered. How can something like that be suffered to live? Off the cliff with it, right now, unless you two want to go the same way."

"How'd it be," Slade persisted, "if I jumped and the rest of you stayed here? That way -"

With a turn of speed Slade would never have thought it capable of, the donkey charged. With the first heady impetus of its charge it butted the tall piglet backwards over the bridgehead stay. With a chilling eeee! it wavered and fell.

"Oh my God," howled its fellow, "you killed Piglet. You ba-"

The donkey charged again; but the piglet took precisely one step to the left, allowing the donkey to pass neatly under the rope and over the edge. Just as it was about to vanish from sight, however, it lashed out with its tail, entangled the other piglet's leg, and dragged it off the ledge. The two animals fell together, their screams mingling into one cry of terror and abruptly ceasing. The two bears, meanwhile, hurtled themselves against the rope and leaned over, either making a last vain effort to catch them or getting a grandstand view - the outcome was the same, whatever their motivation; the bridge buckled and twisted under their considerable weight, and they slid under the rope and down into the chasm. A second later, Slade heard the splash.

He waited for the bridge to stop swaying; then he edged his way on to it and looked out over the other side, watching as the current swept the five animals away towards the grinding ferocity of the rapids. They were, he couldn't help noticing, all bobbing along on their backs with their paws in the air. They looked -

- Kinda cute.

He could have walked for a week, three weeks, three months; he neither knew nor cared. When

he was hungry, there were nuts and berries.

When he was thirsty, even in the middle of the great desert, he found convenient water-holes and oases, complete with modular palm-trees of regulation height and shade diameter. He wasn't in the least surprised.

Beyond the desert was another country. He found talking animals there too, different in some respects but basically similar; all of them cuddly and furry, all of them cute. Beyond that country was another country, and another beyond that, all slightly different, all pretty much the same. He passed through a country where the animals sang as well as talked - there was a panther and a bear and a snake and lots of extremely irritating monkeys, and none of them were particularly pleased to see him. When at last he reached the sea, he met talking dolphins and talking whales and even a talking crab, which he managed to tread on before it got too painfully on his nerves. Everywhere he went, every damn thing talked, except the humans; and they were all dumb. Really, really dumb. And that, too, figured.

One day, months or years later, he walked along a beach in the brightsunlight. He was alone; not a talking seagull or chatty killer whale in sight. As the sun rose higher, he looked around for somewhere to shelter from the heat, and happened to notice a small, round knoll sticking out of the side of the cliff. It was pleasantly cool under the lee of the mound, and Slade lay on his back for a couple of hours, his eyes closed. He drifted into a doze, until the sun moved down the sky and the slight change in temperature suggested to him that it was time to move on.

He opened his eyes; and for the first time noticed a shape. Why it attracted his attention he wasn't quite sure; it was little more than a vague, almost fractal suggestion of familiarity, but once he'd noticed it, somehow he couldn't pass on without investigating further. Picking up a piece of driftwood, he began to pick away at the loose sand. After a while he stopped and stared, then began shovelling madly, as if his life depended on it.

An hour later he stood in front of what he'd uncovered, the driftwood forgotten in his hand. It was a statue; a huge black plastic representation of a highly stylised mouse's head, with round ears and eyes and nose, a perky, toothy grin on its curved lips.

Thousands of years fell away, as if they'd never been.

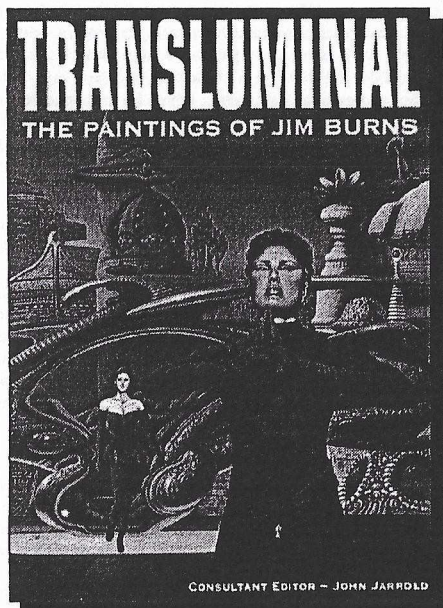
Slade sank to his knees and began to sob uncontrollably. At last, he slumped forward, covering up the shattered plaque, on which he'd seen the words Welcome to the United States of Disn-

"You fools!" Slade shouted to the unheeding sky. "You did it. You finally did it!"

He lay on his face in the sand, weeping like a child; while above his head, the great plastic mouse smiled its implacable smile.

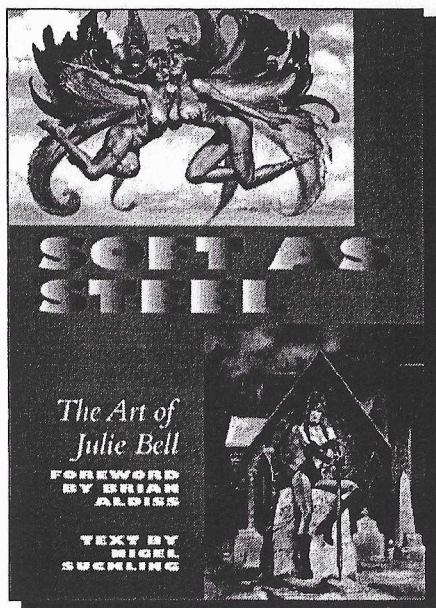
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