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Spintrian

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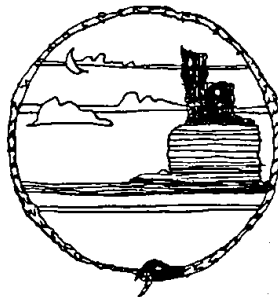
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Introduction

Hello again, and welcome to *Spintrian 3*. *Spintrian* and the Speculative Fiction Society have been getting more attention than ever, from both local media and the Canadian sf scene. I'd like to thank Helen Yum of the Communications office at the U of R for helping me with getting the attention of the media, and Rob Runte, publisher of the excellent *NCF Guide to Canadian Science Fiction and Fandom* for spreading our name all over Canada (although our name was misspelled and we've been getting all these letters addressed to *Spintrain*). And you'll notice that *Spintrian* now sports an ISSN number on the front cover, obtained for us by Selina Coward of the U of R Archives. *Spintrian 2* got a lot wider circulation both inside and outside Regina (with a number of rural Saskatchewan subscriptions, which pleases me to no end); Charles de Lint even called it "a fine little 'zine."

It is with red face that I announce a boo-boo I made in last issue's interview with Judith Merril. In an endnote I stated Gary K. Wolfe's claim that Merril was the first person to use the term "New Wave" to describe a literary movement in the sf field that started in the 1960's. Nick Ruddick pointed out to me and to Wolfe that Christopher Priest wrote an article entitled "New Wave—Prozines" in the March, 1965 issue of *Zenith Speculation*, which to Dr. Ruddick's knowledge is the first use of the term as applied to sf anywhere. My thanks to Dr. Ruddick for setting the facts straight (or at least straighter) and my apologies to Ms. Merril for printing the wrong ones.

Well, it's about time for a con in Regina. We've decided to put on our own con on the weekend of August 23-25, 1991. Spider Robinson won't be the Guest of Honour, much to his regret and ours. But while the search for a GoH and a venue continue (the Ramada Renaissance is looking awful nice), you can help us pick a name. Here's what we've got so far:

OurCon	Condiment
FalCon	SaskCon
PrairieCon	Converge
Convent	Convirgins
Constable	SilliCon
DroughtCon	Concrete
FlatCon	QueenCon
GopherCon	H. P Lovecon
Combine	Consarn It
RegCon	Contrive
Conpost	CanCon
Conflamme	ZenCon
Concussion	Con-Vention
Conniption	GeneriCon
GumboCon	

Tell us which one(s) you like, or add your own!

by Dave Panchyk

Well, that's that. I hope you enjoy this issue of *Spintrian*.

P. S. I promise there'll be more fiction next issue.

How Not to Write an Editorial

by Drew "Hip Comfy" Quick

I take pen in hand and examine my surroundings. It is a dark and stormy night. I'm grasped in the clutches of cliché ennui. Suddenly, the realization hits me—I must evoke immediate fascination in our readers for our new ish. I grasp myself by my mental bootstraps, give a heave, and promptly faint dead away from this unnatural manoeuvre. Presently, I gather myself and think thick thoughts as to the important points to be essayed in my editorial.

"We need lots more contributors," I muse while keeping an eagle eye out for a vengeful Dave for whom I had promised a finished editorial for several weeks, "and not just short stories, but articles, book reviews, gossip, cartoons, story art, cover art and even doodles for filler." The pressure is starting to get to me and I threaten to swoon again. Grimly, I fix my concentration on the task at hand.

"We need people to purchase subscriptions to *Spintrian* by the hordes!" I exclaimed. This was so blatantly obvious, I thought with a slur, that it verged on subtlety. I could couch the terms of a subscription in baffling options and legalese and make the magazine a lucrative buck!

So far so good, but what else could I chip in so that my editorial didn't seem a cursive note? I could bemoan the proliferation of series that allow one good novel to be diluted into an unwieldy five volumes that cost the same as a Kentucky Fried Chicken franchise. This, however, would be unfair to those writers, like Eddings and Donaldson, who flower in the format that is measured by the linear foot. As well, I could subtly denigrate those folks who consider low budget (or high budget, for that matter) media camp as being the pinnacle of speculative fiction excellence. [Editor's Note: This wouldn't be a quiet slash at Astroboy, would it, Drew?] These ideas and more pop into my sluggish noggin with desparate speed as I see layout time for the magazine fast approaching.

"I'll never be able to finish an editorial in the miniscule time allotted me," I cry in anguish. I glance out the window and see that it is still a dark and stormy night. I prepare to face the towering wrath of a declaiming Dave and slip into a quaking reverie.

Like unto a blinding flash of light, an idea bashes me on the melon. Emblazoned on my mind's eye are the words "Fake It." My problems are at an end.

SFS News 'N' Stuff

by Dave Panchyk

The SFS library now contains close to 300 items, greatly expanded lately by a number of large donations. Charlene Mudford gave us a number of fantasy hardbacks and some paperbacks, including an Ellison anthology that contains the first publication of "A Boy and His Dog;" Margaret Bessai donated over 50 paperbacks, many of them classics and hard-to-find anthologies; Sharman Horwood gave the SFS a collection of *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* running pretty much complete from 1976 to 1980, with some issues from years previous to 1976. The donation of old pulps I mentioned last issue was actually made by Andrew Quick, and not by his father as I had reported. Sorry, Drew!

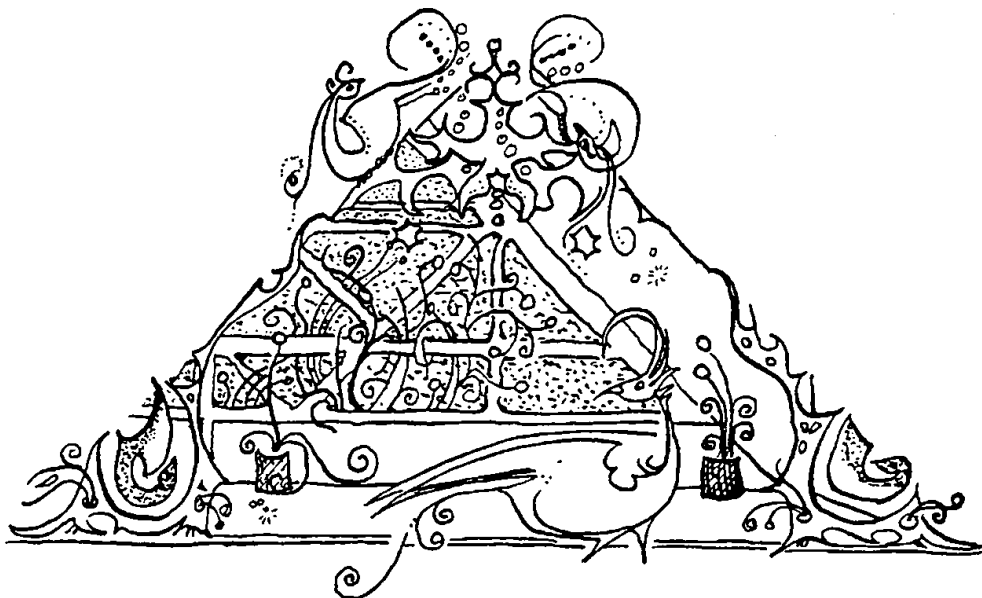
U of R prof Bernie Selinger's book, *LeGuin and Identity in Contemporary Fiction*, is available now at the U of R Main Library, helping to round out and expand the library's excellent collection of sf secondary materials.

*Tesseract*s, the anthology of Canadian sf edited by Judith Merrill, is now available in affordable paperback format. And Porcepic Books is looking for submissions for the third *Tesseract*s anthology—the deadline is October 31. Send submissions to SF Editor, Porcepic Books, 4252 Commerce Circle, Victoria, B. C., V8Z 4M2. Contact either Porcepic Books or the SFS for more information.

Spider Robinson passed on the rumour that owing to a peculiarity of American copyright law, any time a deceased author's copyright comes up for renewal, all contracts relating to said work become void, and must be renegotiated. As a result, the next edition of Heinlein's *Red Planet* will contain a great deal of new wordage cut from the previous version, the next edition of *The Puppet Masters* will have new wordage and a different ending, and the next edition of *Stranger in a Strange Land* will have an additional 50,000 words (yes, that's four zeroes behind the five). Sez Robinson: "I've been saying for a year that they'd never keep the Admiral in the ground!"

Everybody's reminded that CBC radio has an sf program, *Vanishing Point*. It plays on Sunday nights at 10:30 on AM, Monday nights at 11:10 on FM.

September 8, 1989 is the target date for the SFS wine 'n' cheese/beer 'n' pizza. The idea is to make it A Toast to the Dead, saluting those sf writers who have passed away in the last couple of years.



AN INTERVIEW WITH GENE WOLFE

by Dave Panchyk
transcribed by Linda Grass



Gene Wolfe is one of the most versatile speculative fiction writers I know. Both his fantasy and science fiction have won major awards, and seeing Wolfe in person and hearing him speak drives home just how good a storyteller he is. I found myself spellbound listening to his stories about working on a newspaper in a manufacturing plant — certainly the kind of thing that would be deadly boring if related by almost anyone else.

I was fortunate enough to snag him for an interview in May '88, at Keycon 5 in Winnipeg. The hour, unfortunately, was late, which resulted in some disjointed syntax and uncompleted sentences on both our parts (though, I'll confess, much more on mine than on Mr. Wolfe's). I've edited our interview down so that everything makes sense, without (I hope) losing anything important.

DP: It's dark imagery that I really liked about the *Book of the New Sun*.

GW: So did I, frankly. So did I. What I was saying in the interview about Jurgen being the guy who stabs the ruler in the back, which is the opening scene in the book, and I like to deal with those people. I think they're a lot more interesting than the guy with the white hat because we know

that he's going to do conventionally good thing. The rest of us may do the conventionally good thing or the unconventionally good thing, which is often even better, or some perfectly some abhorable thing or just flunk out on the whole thing. And it's all these potentials.

DP: Yes, that's the thing. Severian isn't a white hat nor is he the greyish black hat of Moorcock's Elric, who's got a conscience, has pangs of guilt and emotion, but he's still hacking and slaying around him. Severian is the first sort of self-aware anti-hero almost. It's like his memory makes him different.

GW: Well, very much so. Yes. He's a man who's completely unable to escape his past. Severian tries to do what is right but because of his background and his rather narrow technical education, he has very strange ideas sometimes of what is right. You've read Huck Finn. Everybody's read Huck Finn ...

DP: Actually, I haven't.

GW: Okay, there's a great scene in which Huckleberry Finn and Nigger Jim, who is a slave, run away on the raft. Nigger Jim's wife has been sold someplace and he wants to get off to a free country from which he can maybe earn enough money to buy her back and buy his children back. And Huck Finn is trying to get away from an alcoholic father who beats him. And so they're on the raft floating down the Mississippi, probably the most famous locale in American literature or U.S. literature, and Huck Finn goes through this great crisis of conscience.

He says: this black man belongs to a man who wants him back and he is stealing himself. That's theft. And this man is worth at least \$500, and I'm helping him do it, and I have to do the decent Christian thing and take him back to the man that owns him if I possibly can. And he agonizes about this quite a bit and finally he cashed in his lot with the devil. He says to hell with it, I'm not going to take him back. I don't care what they say, I'm not going to do it. You know, he's opted for sin. He's joined the forces of evil.

DP: It's almost like that with Severian. He not so much rationalizes, he just does. And he's, again, a product of his past and his training and he seems often the coldly, rational person, but still he is a person.

GW: Much like, if you read the Sherlock Holmes stories real fast when you're young and naive, you see that Sherlock Holmes is a completely cold and rational person. If you read them again more slowly when you've done a little more living, you realize that this is all a mask, and he is a man who is gripped by the most intense emotions and he is fighting it off by saying, I am a thinking machine; these things cannot manipulate me as a puppet, because he is racked by pride, frustrated love, all of these things. He meets the one woman, the one woman that he's really crazy about. beautiful and has a marvellous intellect and everything, and she's a criminal.

DP: Didn't she outwit him? Yes. The Torturers' Guild, the colour that's darker than black, the city that's been lost to time and forgets its own past, things like the dueling with the avens, the flowers instead of the swords, it's that that really gives the flavour, and I don't think without Severian's memory we have that because basically everything's built brick by brick.

You were saying what should happen with fantasy is something totally new being done with it and I think that's what you've done. I mean, it's being compared with what Mervyn Peake's *Gormenghast*.

GW: *Gormenghast*. Yes, *Gormenghast*, which is terrific.

DP: And it's a bit more ponderous to read.

GW: It's got some very bad bits in it, to be perfectly honest. The school stuff is really bad, but overall, a tremendous book.

DP: There's something to be said about the language you used in it. It's more complex but it's not alienated. It's not calling a rabbit a snep.

GW: No, it's not making up new stuff. It's finding old and impressive words that can be used where I needed them, and sometimes I went bananas trying to find one. You know, sure, in some cases I would remember, "catapract." This is a term from the Byzantyne empire for a soldier who wore complete armour. Byzantyne have cavalrymen which is what he was.

I had read enough history that bang, boy, there it is; that's just what we need here. But there were other times when I said, boy we need a really obscure, difficult, beautiful word that we can throw in here, and I have no idea what that word is going to be. And I had to start looking. And I looked a whole lot.

DP: I think the dictionary provided all the perfect words that fit in, again, with the imagery. Just a word like "lictor," that sort of

GW: That term is strictly a Latin term, and 'it's the man who ties.' But that's ... can I tell you a little bit where this comes from?

DP: Sure.

GW: The Latin system of justice, each judge was the boss of his own little police force. He had these men. And they went out and if they found somebody who was a law-breaker, in their opinion, they took him in and accused him before their superior, the judge who tried him. And the chief of these policemen, the magistrate's boss, was called the lictor because when they caught the man, he was the one who bound his hands behind his back.

DP: You said that people were doing books on *The Book of the New Sun*, John Klute and?

GW: John Klute is doing one and I don't know, I've been racking my brain for who's doing the other one. You were the one that asked me if I'd ever gone to the International Conference for the Fantastic in the Arts.

Somebody in connection with that because there was a college professor from Rhodes University, in South Africa who came by to talk to me after the conference was over this year. And he was going to work with these people and get an article that he'd written, a glossary from *The Book of the New Sun*, into their book. But I can't remember who it was he was working with, but somebody was going after a critical book.

DP: I think it's just a testament to how much it's captured the imagination.

How did you get the idea for Severian, the torturer?

GW: Well it really had a pretty simple beginning. I decided to write a book about a torturer, and the reason that I decided that was that I went to a panel on costuming at some science fiction convention. And it occurred to me that nobody had ever done one of my characters as a masquerade costume, as far as I knew. So I didn't like that, and I thought, well, what have I got that would be good, and I realized I didn't have anything that would be that good.

So I listened to these costumers who were all expert people, Sandra and people of her skill, and I thought, well, I'll write a torturer: black cape, black trousers, bare chest, black boots — all this is stuff that you can get anyplace — mask, which helps if you're silly looking, sword, because all costumers love swords. Here he is. Here is this torturer. Okay, I'll do a story about him, and as I told you, I was going to a little novelette for a book, and then I'll have a character that can be done as a masquerade costume.

And I started thinking, well, where did he come from, you know? How did he get to be this? Did he walk into an employment office and they said we need a torturer or what was it? And I came up with this rationale for a self-perpetuating guild of torturers. It would take the children, the small children of their victims, the small male children as their victims, and train them as their own replacements. And once I had done that, I saw that what I wanted to do was not start with the man but start with the boy, and show that, and it all went out from that.

I love to do it as a first person narrative, and I wanted to do it with lots and lots of detail and my original scheme was that after he became a master of the guild, he would write his memoirs. And what in turn happened was, he would start as an apprentice, he would become a journeyman torturer, he would disgrace himself as he did by permitting Thecla to kill herself, he would be exiled, he would gain power over the guild, come back and force them to accept him as a master torturer, and then he would write this account of how he did it.

So I thought, well, when you do this, when a man is talking about things that are 5, 10, 15, 20 years in his background, it's going to seem awfully hokey if he can describe all this detail unless he has an eidetic memory. So he has that eidetic memory, and indeed, that eidetic memory is going to compel him to set down his story. He's got all this past stored.

You've read *Funes Memorios* by Jorge Luis Borges, I'm sure, which is a story about a man with eidetic memory. He's possessed by it in a somewhat different way, but the same thing applies.

So here we are, and I started writing the story and I got, you know, up to novelette and everyone said, are you started, so I said well it's a novel. And I wrote another novel and again I had hardly started with it so I said, it's a trilogy. Trilogy it's going to be. And I wrote it as a trilogy except that the last book was about 50 percent longer than either of the first two. The first two were about the same. And so I decided that I would cut the last book in two and build up the two parts.

And I really like the "loyal to the group of 17" story about as well as anything I've ever done, but all those stories were put in there with the idea of adding meat to the stew because there were more guests than we originally expected.

DP: I haven't read *The Urth of the New Sun* yet. What now for Severian? Do we start including the cacogens in a larger role, or?

GW: *The Urth of the New Sun* starts towards a spaceship which is going to take Severian outside of our universe, which is Briah, and into the next higher universe which is Yesod.

DP: Oh, I see, some Kaballah.

GW: Yes. Yes, that stuff is all stolen out of the Kaballah. And he will be tried supposedly by the Hierocramates, the tough people of the day, and they will determine whether or not Urth deserves a new sun. And if it does, it will be given a white hole which will go into the core of the present sun as an actual astrological body, and reverse the collapse of the star which takes its place in the earth's solar system.

And he goes there and has a whole 150 pages or so of adventures aboard the ship, and he finally gets to Yesod and he has adventures there, and then he succeeds — I'll ruin the story for you, yes he succeeds — and he is told that he will be put aboard the ship that had brought him there and it will return him to Urth, which it does. But it returns him to an Urth that is far in the past of the time in which he grew up, his normal time, and he discovers and the reader discovers, that he is in fact the conciliator, the now semi-legendary figure. And of course, eventually he gets returned to his own time.

DP: That's a lot to tie into the one book.

GW: It's a thick book. What's necessary is you have to move this astral body, the white hole, from the limits of the universe to the Sol, the sun of our solar system. And you can't do that by magic. This is a real astral body and it has to go. And so what they do is put him back at a time far enough that when he gets up to the time that he remembers, the body will be about to erupt. See how it all works out.

You know the thing with Snoopy, where he's writing the novel?

DP: Yes.

GW: And he says: "The king's profligacy was bankrupting the country. A pirate ship appeared upon the horizon. A shot rang out." And he looks over at the reader and he says, "In the last chapter, I'm going to tie all this together."

DP: So is *Urth of the New Sun* going to be the last? I mean certainly there weren't any loose ends really to be tied up?

GW: Well, that depends on who you talk to. Here's how this whole book came about. When I turned in the *Citadel of the Autarch* to David Hartwell as my editor, David said, Gene, you did not bring *The New Sun*. You promised that in the book, that it's an implied promise in the book that the loose end will be brought in, and he said, well you didn't do it. And I said, it's not an implied promise in the book. What the book is about, which is what Severian tells you in Chapter 1 of *The Shadow of the Torturer*, he says, I'm going to tell you how I, the ragged apprentice torturer boy, ended up as the autarch of the commonwealth. That's what I'm writing, and that's what he's written. As the end of *The Citadel of the Autarch*, he is sitting at the damn desk writing this account of what he did. And the fabled arrival of the *New Sun* is one of those things, you know.

And David said, no, I think that you ought to add an extra chapter in which he brings the new sun. And I said, you know, that's an awful lot to put in one chapter, David. And so we agreed, if I would write a fifth book, it would deal with that. And he would publish the fourth book, *The Citadel of the Autarch*, the way I wrote it, without demanding the changes.

So I set out to write the fifth book, and I got it about half-finished and the whole terrible thing with Pocket Books blew up. This would be about mid-1983 when Pocket Books, which had at that time the best fantasy science fiction program in the world, said, we're going out of that business; we're not going to do that anymore.

They fired David Hartwell, who as the head of their science fiction department; John Douglas, who was his assistant jumped over to Avon Books; they kept Don Meaningpanich, who was a junior editor in the department to kind of finish up and close things out; and they said that the Scott Meredith literary agency was going to be packager for them. Scott Meredith would buy science fiction novels. He would deliver the packaged novels to Pocket which would publish them and would pay him a fee for doing this.

Well this is as blatant a conflict of interest as anybody has ever tried to put over because Scott-Meredith was supposedly representing clients to a publisher. Now he was going to really be the publisher. He was going to say: okay you're my client, so I'm going to buy your novel, *Spacebusters*, and I'm going to take 10 percent of what I pay you for that and I'm going to package it; I'm going to deliver it to Pocket Books, and I'm going to take my fee from Pocket Books.

And the Science-Fiction Writers of America and the independent literary agents of America said, if you put this thing in operation, we're taking you to court. As soon as the thing starts, we're going to file suit. And, at this point, these idiots, frankly, got some lawyers to look at it, and they said, you're going to be wiped out. There's no way you're going to win this. This is clear conflict of interest.

It's like, if you decide to sue me for something that I have done and a lawyer says okay, I'll represent both of you. That'll cut the cost. Okay? I'll be David's lawyer and handle it from his end, and I'll be your lawyer, Gene, and I'll defend you. You can't do that under law. You're going to jail for trying this sort of thing.

So what happened then was that they said well we're going to out of science fiction business altogether, and they set up Baen books. Baen at that time was the science-fiction editor of Ace and — no, actually he was the science-fiction editor of Tor,— and let him start his own little publishing company and we will distribute the books but we won't publish any more science fiction.

So David Hartwell, who is probably the best science-fiction editor in the world, he has that reputation here, was now working for Tor Books, and he came in and offered me a two-book contract, the two books to be *Free Live Free* and *The Urth of the New Sun*. He knew I had the contract. So I said fine, and I signed the contract. Everything was happy and he went back to New York and was talking to people about how he'd done the contract. Word of it got out.

My agent got a call from Pocket Books, said this novelist is under option to us, i.e., you can't do that. We're going to take you to court. And we said, you no longer publish science-fiction; you said that. And they said, we don't care. This novel is under option to us, and you know, we have the right to go back into the field if we want. You cannot sell this novel to anyone else.

So I had to set the damn thing aside for like, 18 months or two years, or something like that, half-finished, write another novel, which was *Soldier of the Mist*, to fulfil my contract with Tor. See we scratched out ... we put a player later to be named, you know, how they do it in baseball? Said a novel later to be titled in there. So I wrote another novel, gave it to them, and finally when I had that out of the way, I was able to take *Urth of the New Sun* out of my safe, which is where I'd been keeping the manuscript and finish it off, and of course we had to send it to damn Pocket Books, and say here it is, now you have 90 days to exercise your option or not. And they kept it for about 60 days and said, we're not going to exercise the option, and sent it back, and I sold it to Tor.

You know, I guess all businesses are crazy. All of them I've ever been concerned with are crazy. But I've never known of another case when a company had a top line in the world and said, we not going to make that product, or, we don't like it. And this is what Pocket Books did.

DP: Strange. This Scott Meredith business, that's.....

GW: Well, you know, it was blatantly illegal way of doing things. Maybe in some country in Africa or South America, you could have gotten away with that, but you couldn't in the U.S. or Canada or Britain or France or Germany or any place like that. They all have laws against this kind of thing because it's a licence to steal.

DP: So — last question — did *The Book of the New Sun*, *Soldier in the Mist* sort of pigeon-hole you in some people's eyes, like, publishers?

GW: Oh sure.

DP: I noticed in *Liavek*, you know, here you are and you know, you're publishing the year's best fantasy stories and they want you to do this story for *Liavek*. You don't think it will restrict your chances of expanding out again?

GW: It always does. It always does. People want to pigeon-hole you. The industry wants to pigeon-hole. Actors get exactly the same damn thing. You know, they only way to avoid it is not to act or not to write anything. If I had written a mystery, I would have been pigeon-holed in that. And if I had written a realistic or descriptive fiction, as we sometimes call it, mainstream, whatever you want to call it, I would be pigeon-holed as being that.

If I think of something that I think is going to be a very good story, and I don't have anything I'm working on at the moment, then I write that, and I try and sell it. You know, send it to my agent. Say, here Virginia, try and sell it.

DP: You are a full-time writer?

GW: Yes. I worked for *Plant Engineering*, which I talked about a little bit there, for 11 years, and had a terrible time making myself quit. I was working for a man I liked. I had worked for him most of the 11 years; I worked 10 out of the 11 years for Leo Spector, and he was our editor, the top guy on the editorial side, and I had an office just about as big as this room, with a walnut desk in it, secretary, and a bookcase, and I pulled a 250, I think, dollar a month, no questions asked, expense account.

You know, if I decided I had to fly to New York, I went out to O'Hare and got a ticket, or actually I got a ticket from a travel agency there, caught a flight to New York, went and checked in a hotel. Pursued the story that I thought I should pursue, and came back. And if I had overspent the expense account, that just meant that I had less money next month.

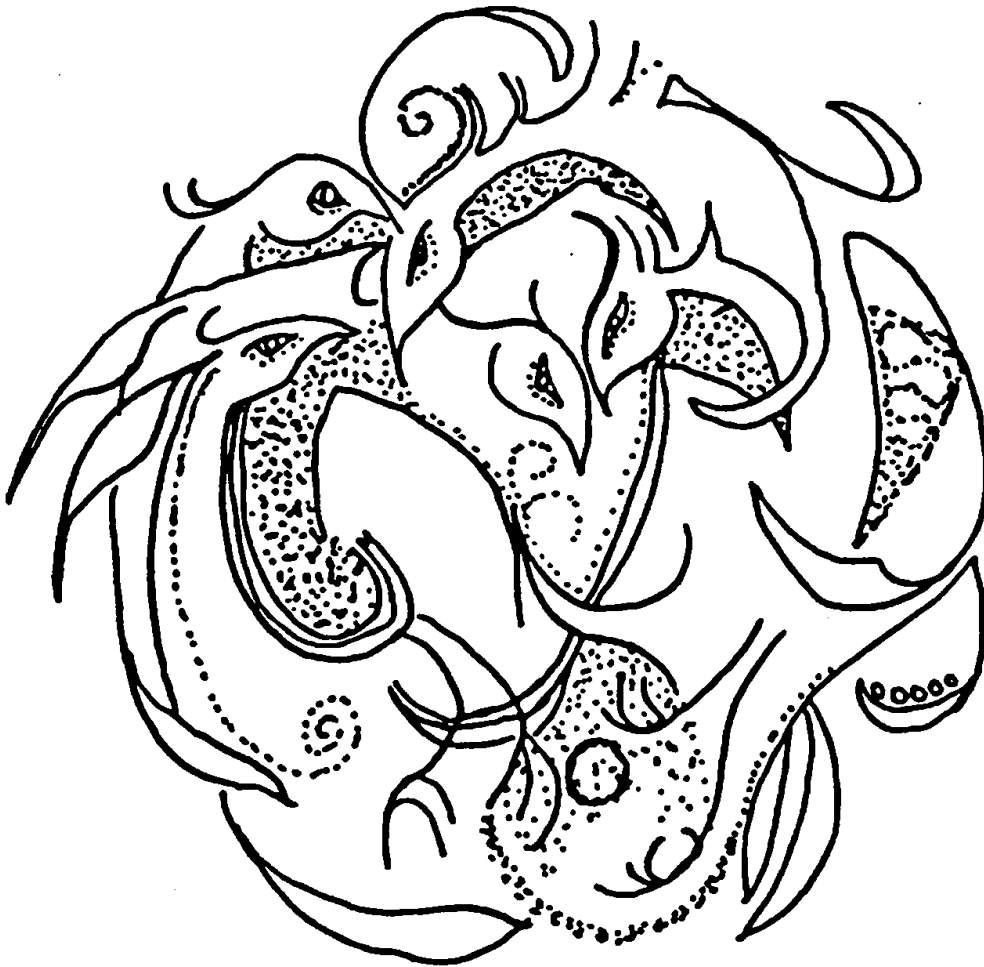
And it was a damned hard job to quit. I was, frankly, being badly overpaid. I know that we had — what was it? — eight senior editors, I guess on the book. I was one of those senior editors, and I had reason to believe that I was probably one of the highest paid of those senior editors. Another editor found a copy of salary schedules, which was supposed to be very secret, and he found one that had been ... somebody had been trying to Xerox for some meeting, and had gotten a bad Xerox. It was legible but not good enough and they had thrown it away. And he pulled it out of the wastebasket. And he wouldn't show it to me but he told

me I was making a lot more money than he was, and he was a good editor in the company. And it was damn tough to go in and say thank you for taking me on'; I've had a swell time at this job'; I'm overpaid, and I'm quitting. It wasn't easy.

And it was a job that I could get into. I came in at 8:30 in the morning. By lunch I had done all the work that I needed to do for them, and after lunch, I could sit around at the office and read *Fortune*, and *Business Week*, and answer the phone if somebody called in with a question or something. If we had trouble in layout or something, the layout person would come in and say, you know, we need a two-line kill on this, then I would go back to reading *Fortune* or whatever. Write letters to fanzines, write my agent about the writing I was doing and so on.

And I realized after I'd been there maybe nine ... eight, nine years, that what I had here really was a profitable but really very time-consuming hobby of what was supposed to be my full-time job: being the senior editor on *Financeering* magazine. And I waffled around and waffled around for about a year longer than I should've, and finally I went and said, well I want to write my books, and I'm quitting. And what they did actually was say, you're not quitting; you're retiring. And they gave me the gold watch and the dinner. There's the gold watch, inscription on the back.

DP: As Judith Merrill says, "Less well paid, but more honest."



MAX '89

From Days into Night

by Annette Elvers

The insane laughter
the one I call the troll
the pain the tear the frustration
the knife in the kitchen drawer
fruit of the night
her on.
Dashing madly
almost caught
the troll-
She awakes screaming
From her nightmare the troll smiles,
In the gloom of the room
the ticking noise of a
Even over the distant rumbling
Curled into a ball
the armadillo rolled
and bumped to an ill-lit spot before the gnome
He described his method of locomotion
to his grim-faced audience
with his scratchy green pen
PUBLIC TRANSPORT!
SUBWAYS!
The abashed armadillo
Just in time-
There was one last check

The troll. Shrivelled like a darkling
taunting, goading, leading
Running, faster, farther...
Turning helpless
into the face of the mocking laughter
-tripping lightly over fallen logs and under branches
-he follows
Running, panting
moisture beading, running down her absent face
leaping, hurtling, reaching
and heads for the knife
in the kitchen drawer
victorious.
(which bathed the armadillo in eery light)
metro-gnome
could be heard
like a warm, brown orange
off the desk where he sat
who only checked off another box on his paper
shouted the gnome
-louder than the now-close rumbling
as the meek armadillo finished
and made another check in the column
for non-users of the metro
curled up in shame
and rolled through the back door
to sit in the gutter
for the de-railed locomotive
hit the tiny house
then the ticking noise stopped

A Tale of Modern Infestation

by Dirck de Lint

It happened that in the early Autumn Peter Fitzroy came to the hamlet of Bairnkirk, which lies a few miles north of the Scottish border, between Hawick and Jedburgh, near Bedrule. His presence there had a twofold purpose; primarily, it was a convalescence from a rather nasty motor accident, but it also provided Peter with the opportunity to investigate a few pet theories regarding anthropology, in connection with small rural towns. Of the healing, such things go on at their own pace regardless of circumstances, and no more will be said. Of the second purpose, a man headed for a vacation, even an extended one, will over-estimate his actual motivation once the vacation begins, and it will not be of consequence either.

Peter had taken the Boyle Cottage, which was in fact not a cottage but a large Tudor style house on a corner at the edge of town, which had once been owned by a lesser member of the peerage. Its location was such that there was only one neighbouring house, immediately beside The Cottage, which an older couple from New England had converted to a Bed-and-Breakfast, as is fashionable these days. The house had apparently been contemporary with The Cottage, since the side of The Cottage facing it was completely without windows.

Peter moved in over a week, spending the time waiting for moving vans either hobbling about town on a cane, or when this became too tiring, sitting in the drawing room of the house next door, where he was staying while his house was put in shape. The Americans were pleasant enough, and the time was largely filled with amiable arguments over, among other things, the worth of the American constitution and the lack of a real English one, the need for gun control (about which Peter felt that it was a waste of time, the Americans that it was the only way to keep civilization from crumbling), and who had the more peculiar accent (each side alternated defending their native tongue and claiming it was more bizarre by far, with occasional agreement that the local inhabitants won hands down).

At the end of his first week in town, Peter finally moved into The Cottage. The local luminaries dropped around and welcomed him in, totally devastating his small supply of liquor. Each person complimented him on the marvelous job he'd done restoring the old Cottage, knowing full well he'd hired a specialist to do the job for him. The only exception to this friendly hypocrisy was the Vicar, who needed some work done on the vicarage and asked the name of the firm that had done the job for Peter.

That night, Peter heard sounds that in a newer place he would have attributed to settling of the walls. However, in a well-aged house, it must be either winds or rodents. Since it was a still night, Peter had to assume the latter. He decided it was mice, which he could deal with, and eventually got to sleep.

The next day, he buttonholed one of the neighbours. "Mrs. Frank, have you had any trouble with mice?"

Mrs. Frank smiled at him in the way people will when they are unsure they've heard a question correctly. In the foregoing week, Peter had been asked to call her Brenda, but he couldn't quite manage the familiarity the Americans found so easy to acquire. "Mice? No, we ha'n't had mice. Why?"

"Oh, I thought I heard some last night. No fear, the pantry's quite secure. I'm sure they'll move on soon enough."

"Don't be too sure of that," Mrs. Frank said. "Cold weathah's comin' on, mice'll be lookin' fah place to stay. Call an exterminatah's what I'd do."

Peter grimaced. "I hardly think it will come to that. Can't abide cruelty to animals, and I'm sure I can afford to support a few mice for the winter. A good day to you, Mrs. Frank."

She nodded, and Peter went on his way to do some shopping. He picked up some millet sprays intended for budgerigars, there being nothing meant for mice or hamsters at the grocer's.

Bright and early the next morning, Peter got up and went to the cellar, where he'd laid one of the millet sprays on a saucer. All that remained was the central stalk and a few stray seeds.

"Well, well. Little mice with big appetites, hm?" he said to the empty cellar. He mounted the stairs feeling the warm glow of having done good to small furry creatures. This feeling vanished when he came into the kitchen again.

When walking through the kitchen before, he had had his back to the cupboard where he'd put the rest of the millet. Coming up the stairs, he saw that the door had been opened. The whole cellophane bag of millet was empty as the dish in the cellar.

On his walk that afternoon, Peter stopped in at the local library. He found the librarian changing newspapers on the sticks in the reading room.

"Mr. Connery, I need some help. Have you any books on rodents, particularly domestic types?"

Mr. Connery shushed him and showed him to a book that suited his purpose. The book, while not specifically mentioning it, inferred that it was well beyond a mouse's powers to unlatch the sort of spring-bolt on the cupboard. It made a similar inference that a rat would be quite capable of the task. Peter began to review his stand on animal rights; mice are cute, rats carry plague.

"Mr. Connery, do you know of any good exterminators in the area?"

Mr. Connery had given him a number of a man in Hawick. The exterminator promised he'd be around before noon the next day. With that assurance, Peter made his way to bed after carefully placing chairs and other weights in front of the cupboard doors.

A little after midnight, Peter awoke. He heard something in his sleep that had caused him to stir, and as he lay semi-conscious in bed, he heard it again. It was the sound that a stage actor would make to get the attention of another player.

Psst.

Peter sat upright. He stared at the door to the hallway, which he had carefully latched before retiring. The room was a montage of shadows, what light there was coming from the post-war streetlamp some distance away.

Psst.

Peter reached for the lamp beside his bed. As he did, there came seemingly from inside the room,

Psst.

He froze. He couldn't make out any movement inside the room, but knew his night vision was so poor it really didn't exist. Rather than switch on the light, he decided on the childhood option; under the covers in faith that whoever was there didn't want to wake him. Twice, once inside and once outside the room,

Psst. Psst.

Isn't this nice, Peter thought. A nice rural town, with nice rural vicious thieves, carrying no doubt nice rural hatchets and shotguns. He could hear noises from the rest of the house that convinced him he'd find the house empty.

Psst.

The next morning, Peter found all the cushions off the chairs and sofa, and a box of corn flakes gone from the kitchen. He dressed quickly and went to the pub down the road. There, he got a cup of tea and sat where he could see if the exterminator arrived. In the far corner, the morning chat show on BBC nattered quietly, and two of the permanent curmudgeons argued with it and each other, often drowning out the sound of the television.

"I tell ya, Jamie, it's a cryin' shame that the coppers hae revolvers now."

"Nae, ye auld fool, na all of 'em hae the goons. It's just a few of them, isn't it, Molly?" Molly ducked into the back room to stay neutral. "A flyin' squad, tha's whut it is."

"Ye talk grand. There's the poor boy, shot dead right on the box, an' here sit ye sayin' 'ooh, it's just a few of 'em ha guns.'"

"He had a rifle, ye daft auld bugger. Ye want the lads to go after a man with a huge rifle with a few coshes, now?"

This continued through the morning. Molly stayed in the back as much as possible, and since Peter was an extraterrestrial in the view of the old men they didn't ask his opinion on anything. It was close to twelve o'clock when the exterminator's van pulled up. Peter left quickly to catch the man before he left.

"Good morning," Peter called as the exterminator came back down the walk from The Cottage.

"Goo' day, sur. Might ye know where the owner is?" the man replied, pointing with his thumb over his shoulder at The Cottage.

"I am, I'm the one who called. Peter Fitzroy." He stuck out his left hand, the other resting on his cane. The exterminator put out his hand without the usual hesitation. "Montgomery McClure, household pest eliminator." He smiled an elfin grin of someone who enjoyed what he did so much it could keep him young beyond his years.

"Good to meet you, Mr. McClure. I fear I have rats in the house. They've been popping open the kitchen cupboards and taking my cereals. I think one was even in my bedroom last night."

"Well, sur, I can say without fear that your rats will be gone by this time tomorrow." He opened the side of the van and pulled out several large metal boxes with two holes in them. "I fill these traps with poison. The rat comes in from either end of this tunnul, gets scooped into the holding section, panics a bit, then eats the poison and dies. Each trap can take about ten'a the little monsters."

"All right, they seem to base themselves in the basement. I'll show you the way."

After the traps were in place, Peter offered McClure a cup of tea. As they sat in the kitchen, waiting for the tea to brew, Peter took the opportunity to quiz McClure on rats.

"Do rats usually throw furniture about?"

McClure looked at him oddly. "How do you mean, sur?"

"Well...do they throw the cushions around?"

"Oh, yes, sur. I've seen them reduce a settee to rags getting floof fur their nests."

Peter shook his head. "No, they didn't tear it up, they just tossed it around. Cushions everywhere."

McClure frowned, an elegant gesture of sweeping thin eyebrows and fine forehead lines. "Now, that's something else. I don't think I've ever hurd of rats doin' that. Most unusual."

Peter nodded. "I see. Hm. Ah, do rats do anything other than squeak, when they make noise?"

"Oh, that they do, sur. They squeal, and they chitter, and I have heard that they rattle."

"Do they go psst?"

McClure smiled as if he had missed some kind of joke. "Do they what?"

"Go psst? As in, 'psst, mate, want a hot watch?'"

McClure frowned again. "Well, well, well, that's new." The frown deepened. "No, it isn't. I don't think you've got rats at all...let's go back downstairs for a moment, sur."

Peter followed McClure down the stairs. He watched as McClure looked carefully around the stone floor of the cellar. After some minutes he said "ah-ha."

Peter moved beside him. McClure took a torch from one of the many pockets of his coveralls. It was one of the new ones, with a high-power bulb and twist-head switch. He turned it on and pointed the beam down in front of his feet. A cobblestone that must have weighed at least five pounds had been knocked out of the floor, and a hole almost a foot across with smooth sides fell away below the level of the floor.

"What the Devil is this?" Peter asked, gape-mouthed.

"I think that tea should be ready, sur. I've a wee story for you."

"It was some years ago, sur, when I was apprenticing to old Daffyd Evans in the south. We got a call much like yours; rats about. It was a grand country manor house, it was, but I don't recall the name of the Squire.

"Anyway, we went about setting traps and poison, and old Evans spots a hole, just like yours, in a corner of the wine cellar. He calls me down, and asks the Squire down, to have a look, which is how I know what it is you've got.

"The Squire, I'm afraid, was not a very reasonable man. Evans said, 'Squire, the worst thing to do is leave the traps in,' and the Squire starts calling him all sorts of things and threatens suit and such, so Evans leaves the traps in.

"As it turns out, Evans was right. The Manor burnt to the ground that very night, and the Squire with it."

"But what is it?" Peter pleaded.

"Well, sur, you got dragons."

It was almost an hour before McClure convinced Peter he wasn't totally mad. In the end, Peter agreed to have the traps taken out. "But what do I do about them?"

McClure scratched his head, then put an expansive smile on that was as elegant as his frown. "I don't have the faintest idea, sur. I'll canvas my fellow pest control operators and see what they say. I'll try to get back to you before the week is out."

Peter felt trapped. He looked up and down the road, trying to see a way clear. "A week? By God, they were in my room last night. What do I do for a week?"

McClure kept his smile in place. "What I would do, sur, is go on feeding them. Old Evans seemed to think that they were pretty much harmless unless you started in trying to do them in. What I would do, sur, is try to make friends. Gud

day to you." With that, McClure climbed into his van and drove off, leaving Peter standing at the roadside, feeling very lost.

Peter decided to take McClure at his word, and laid a mutton joint on a baking tin in the kitchen at dusk, then retired to the living room to build a fire and watch some television.

It was during Dallas that he heard movement in the kitchen. The baking tin was bent, and wobbled when put on a flat surface. Peter heard it wobbling back and forth, making sounds like a child's clicker. Peter made an effort not to turn and stare into the kitchen. He focused himself on the television, switching it over to the local late news.

He lost the focus when the psst came from just over his right shoulder. He froze; the last thing he wanted to do was to startle a potentially dangerous animal. There was a snuffling near his ear, hot breath directly against his neck. Psst.

An answering psst came from beneath the arm chair. At least two of them, then, Peter thought. Just stay very still. He twisted his eyes over as far as he could manage, trying to see whatever was sitting behind him. His heart was pounding hard enough to move his shirt, and there was a thin gloss of sweat on his face.

Psst again, and then Peter could see movement. A single bird-foot came forward, hovered over his shoulder, opened twice in a tentative manner, then settled weightlessly onto his shoulder. He closed his eyes. Something tickled his ankle.

Weight was put on the foot on his shoulder, and the claws bit him, two in front and two at the back. A second foot grabbed on, and the thing on his shoulder opened and closed its grip, three times with each foot. It psst right in his ear.

"Don't eat me." Despite his fear, Peter felt silly saying something like that. "Shoo." He still didn't move. The weight pushed off and thumped to the floor beside the chair. His ankle was tickled again.

Psst. Psst. Psst. Once to the left, once to the right, once from near his feet. Three now. The sound of claws on wood. The one on the left was moving in front of him.

Slowly, he opened his eyes. McClure had been right. The thing that stood in front of him, staring with an expression of crocodilic good humour, was unquestionably a dragon, although it was less than three feet long. It stood on two feet, much like a bird's, with two opposing toes on each pointing straight backwards. It had a long body, covered with scales; not the round sort of scales as a fish would have, but the tapering sort of a snake. The scales were iridescent in the light from the fire, giving off peacock colours.

Its forelimbs were like bat wings only in so far as they seemed to be modified walking limbs. The mechanics, even of the folded wings, seemed far more intricate.

At the end of the slender neck, a large head like that of a cayman foreshortened; long, slim snout, needle teeth, the jaw reaching back to beneath the skull itself. It had a high, peaked head. The eyes were huge, and their binocular setting gave the beast a look of intelligence.

As Peter and the dragon exchanged stares, it raised a frill that ran the length of its back. Then, it yawned expansively, letting a long split tongue curl in the air. The jaws snapped shut, the frill went down and the dragon turned its scrutiny from Peter to the television. Some sort of local talent program

As Peter and the dragon exchanged stares, it raised a frill that ran the length of its back. Then, it yawned expansively, letting a long split tongue curl in the air. The jaws snapped shut, the frill went down and the dragon turned its scrutiny from Peter to the television. Some sort of local talent program was on, and children were tap-dancing to tinny music. The dragon started weaving side to side in time with the music.

Another had curled up, or more properly coiled, on the hearth. It was looking at him also, its eyes reflecting red in the firelight. The one beneath the chair slithered out, and hopped onto his leg. Its claws dug into his thigh, and he flinched. The dragon recoiled, then slowly leaned forward until the tip of its nose was under his chin. It sniffed at him.

A fourth came in from the kitchen, carrying the bone from the mutton. It pigeon-toed its way to in front of the fire, coiled beside the other, and bit through the bone with a crack.

The one on his leg gave up the close inspection, and was staring straight into his face. Its cat-slit pupils were open wide and commanded his attention. He felt himself falling asleep, and was helpless to do anything about it. How wonderful, he thought. Now they're going to eat me.

Peter awoke about eight the next morning. The morning chat show was doing a piece on new fashions and was using raucous music to assist the anorexic models in their display. He reached out and turned off the television. It seemed to him he'd left it on another channel the night before.

"One hell of a dream," he mumbled to himself. Dragons indeed. He staggered out of the chair, his bad leg all the worse for its night's rest in a poor position. Taking up his cane, he clumped to the bathroom and turned on the light, put the shower on cold to rinse out the tub, and went to the linen cupboard for a towel. He came back to find a dragon flapping in the spray from the shower head. He shouted and startled it.

The frill came up, and the dragon pulled its head back, jaws open, in the attitude of an angry swan. Peter realized he was between it and the door, and stepped back quickly. The dragon hustled down the hall toward the kitchen, leaving a damp trail. Peter shot the bolt on the bathroom door before

taking his shower. When he finished, he found both bottles of milk missing from the fridge.

After getting dressed, Peter took his car to Jedburgh and spent several hours in the library, checking on dragons. Unfortunately, everything on the subject was found in either the 'fiction' or 'mythology' section. In what sources there were, there was a rough consensus that a house full of dragons is a bad idea.

At home, Peter threw a pot roast and several soup-bones into the basement, pushed the door closed, and set the table and two chairs against it. He arranged his chair in the front room so that he could watch the television and the cellar door. The door occupied most of his attention, and he neither watched television nor read his book with enough focus to make either enjoyable. At eleven o'clock, there being no action at the kitchen door, Peter went to bed. He was very sure to pull the door to latch.

Peter's sleep that night was troubled by dreams of St. George as a failure. He was finally awakened by a shaft of sunlight striking him upon the eyelid. He rolled onto his stomach, dislodging a build-up of comforter from his feet. He did a sloppy push-up and maneuvered his legs off the bed. Then he opened his eyes.

The dragons were distributed around the room, glowing turquoise in the early light, all staring at him. One was sitting on the bed; it was probably that which he had thought was a wad of bed-clothes. He pushed himself back against the wall at the head of the bed. The one on the bed took a step toward him. The window through which the sun was streaming was too small to crawl through even if it were open, and a gauntlet of dragons lay between him and the door. The telephone was in the hall.

It slowly dawned on Peter that if the dragons had meant him harm, they'd certainly not have waited for him to wake up. Knowing he had nothing to lose, he extended his left hand, palm up, towards the dragon on the bed. The dragon stepped forward, extended its neck and played its forked tongue over the surface of his palm. It inched forward some more and sniffed the base of his thumb. All the while, it kept its eyes locked with Peter's.

Peter decided it was time to press things. He tilted his hand upward, stretched out his hand, and brushed it against the neck of the dragon. The dragon did not flinch as he stroked a couple of inches just above its shoulder, but hopped off the bed when his fingers slipped off it. Its siblings followed it, the last in line watching Peter the whole time, its head turned owl-wise.

Peter looked at his fingers for almost a minute, recalling the feel of dragonskin. It was dry, smooth and soft, like a snake, but very warm. He dressed quickly and stumbled into the kitchen.

The blockade he'd put up the night before had been pushed aside, and the door gaped open about ten inches. He

dismantled the barrier, switched on the lights, and went downstairs. All the soup-bones were cracked to splinters and the roast and the dragons were gone.

Two days later, McClure the Exterminator telephoned Peter. Peter barely remembered the man.

"I've been talking to my confreres; not many of them have dealt with the things, but there are two schools of thought. One group favours moving out, and the other figures the only real way of getting rid of the things is outfit yourself like a knight and go after 'em. I think if you try that, you really shud find the main entrance to the cave. If there is one, that is. I could be...."

Peter interrupted him. "That won't be necessary, Mr. McClure. As you suggested, I've made friends. Last night I think I finally won them over. They like being scratched on top of the head, by the way, a lot like a cat."

There was a short pause at the other end of the line. "Well, well, how very extraordinary. I shud like to drop in now and again to have a look at the wee things, if you don't mind, sur. If I might come around tonight...."

"I don't see anything wrong with that at all. Thank you for your concern, Mr. McClure."

"You're quite welcome, sur. Good day." The connection broke, and Peter hung up. He put on his mac and headed out to the hardware shop. He'd just noticed that the bolt on the back door was bent out of shape, and two of the stubby screws holding it to the door had come out.

McClure sat nervously regarding the clutch of dragons on the floor between him and Peter. The dragons regarded him in a similar manner. "Intimidating for their size, aren't they?"

Peter nodded. "They are. Very strong, too. Between the four of them, they managed to push the kitchen table out from in front of the door." He reached down and tickled one on the head. It rolled its eyes behind a couple of sets of eyelids and purred.

"You've been feeding them, then?" McClure leaned forward, elbows on knees. Two dragons mirrored his lean, stretching their necks. Peter nodded.

"Yes. It's a good thing I've got plenty of money. Two joints a day, they take."

McClure leaned back and pressed his thumbs into his eyes. The two dragons pulled back and looked at each other, making small clicking noises. "Have you considered, sur, that they are likely to get bigger, and thus, hungrier?"

"Hm. I'm hoping that a book I read was right saying it takes them very a long time to mature. Unfortunately, it was a handbook for a game. They're quite obviously warm-blooded, and warm-blooded things mature very quickly.

"I hope, sur, they don't get too hungry."

The dragons found their way into the world a week later. Peter had decided it was the responsible thing to do to record his observation of the dragons. He was staggering back from the stationers, minus his walking stick, carrying a large notebook, pen, and ink in a brown paper sack, when Mrs. Frank popped up from behind the chill-browned hedge.

"Lo, Peter."

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Frank. What are you up to?"

"Cleaning up from the blow. Terrible last night, wa'n't it? All those people killed down south."

Peter nodded. "I'm glad I was out of London. I recognized my street on the telly this morning. Simply awful. Between that and the earthquake in California, it makes you wonder if your evangelists aren't right abut the end being near."

She waved a hand in dismissal. "Ahn't my evangelists. See you lost yah stick...AH!" Mrs. Frank's eyes bugged out, and she pointed a finger over Peter's shoulder. He whirled to see a dragon peeking over the fence. It ducked down almost as he turned, then three dragon heads came up. Peter hurried as best he could into the narrow space between the houses and herded the dragons into the back door. They waddled into the basement, apparently without resentment. Peter closed the basement and back doors, hurried out the front.

Mr. Frank was standing over his wife looking lost. He looked up at Peter with a pleading look. "Oh, dear," Peter said. "I fear your wife has had a fright on my account. Let's get her inside and I'll try to explain it."

Mr Frank wasn't inclined to believe the explanation, but with his wife's emphatic confirmation of 'something scaly' wandering about next door, he came to accept it. Peter asked them not to spread it around, and got willing agreement.

The first entry in Peter's notebook reads thus:

"They got out again today. I came home from the butcher and found them hopping about the back yard. They are larger than when I first saw them a fortnight ago, and I suppose it's getting on time for them to test out their wings.

'They seem happy enough for me to shoo them inside, but it's obvious they've worked out the thumb latches. This implies they've enough intelligence to use their opposed digits, and have a little more dexterity than birds; the latches are rather small and fiddly.

'Hopefully, they aren't going to go beyond the yard. It's a good thing I'm at the edge of town.'

It became obvious at least one of the dragons had tried its wings a few days later. Beside the bottle of milk which had been delivered long before dawn was a freshly killed hare. Its neck was broken, and there were four large puncture wounds in its body. It looked as if a very large raptor had done it in. Peter made the connection quickly.

Later, he learned a decommissioned sheep dog had disappeared, and the local cats were unusually nervous.

Peter finally called the locksmith to put key locks in place of the thumb latches. The hole in the basement floor was several inches further across.

It was approaching Armistice Day when disaster struck. He forgot to lock the front door when he went to the store. He was halfway home when one of the old pubsters, obviously on a break from his station at the pub, stopped on the middle of the road, staring almost straight overhead, and said to whoever was in hearing range, "Ooh, loo' a' that!"

Peter looked, and saw a dragon doing a slow circle over the very center of town. If it had been higher, and if it didn't reflect metallic blue, it might have been taken for a gull; its wings were long and tapered, not at all bat-like. He scanned up and down the street. There was about a dozen people staring up at the gliding dragon. One old bar-fly might not be believed, he reasoned, but all those people couldn't be ignored. He went home to wait for what might come to pass.

That night in the notebook he wrote: 'Watched a dragon land today. They aren't very good at it - rather like an albatross, skidding on its belly, I suppose take-off is similar.'

'The wings are much further across than I'd thought they could be — at least five times body length. They must be very thin skin, and extraordinarily strong for that.'

The caller he'd been expecting came to the door the next morning. As he undid the lock, he saw the diced cape band hovering in the high window on the door. As he pulled the door open, he said, "Good morning, Constable."

"Good morning, sir," replied the constable, in a studied neutral accent of officialdom. "May I come in?"

"Certainly. May I offer you tea, Constable Northcote?" Peter knew the names of the whole of the Bairnkirk constabulary, for they numbered only six, two for each shift. He'd made a point to meet each when he arrived in town.

"Ta." He came into the hall, ducking under supporting beams as he followed Peter down the hall. He was almost a full foot over minimum height, and was broad enough for it not to seem abnormal.

As Peter poured tea, Northcote said, "Did you see that little display over town yesterday, Mr. Fitzroy?"

Peter decided to 'play dumb', as they said on the American shoot-'em-up's. "Which was that?"

Northcote took off his hat, took a sip of tea. "Lovely tea, sir. I'm not sure how to answer your question, Mr. Fitzroy. No-one is exactly sure what it is they saw, but they are all quite sure they saw it land in the field behind your house."

Come clean, he thought. "Well, constable, I have a little trouble with it myself. I...ah, I see I need't explain." A dragon had waddled up the stairs, and was sniffing the peak

of Northcote's cap, which sat on his lap. Northcote jumped. So did the dragon.

"Christ almighty," Northcote said in an overawed low voice. "What is it?"

"It's just what it looks like, as far as I know. They came with the house."

Northcote gaped at him. "They?" The dragon was sniffing his boot, and clicking at its reflection.

"I've seen four at any one time. I don't think there's more."

"But... it... it's a dragon, for God's sake! Dragons eat people!"

"They've not eaten me, Constable." Peter reached down and put his hand out. The dragon nuzzled at it. "They haven't eaten anyone else yet, I don't think."

"There's laws, Mr. Fitzroy. Keeping dangerous animals, after all...."

"Constable, I'm not keeping them. They're like mice. I'm just trying to keep them out of trouble. I've had an exterminator in about it, he says there's nothing more to do about it."

Northcote slumped in the chair. He was two-fold defeated by the situation. He grew up a farmer's son, and his father's basic pragmatism had clung to him. He had enough imagination to enforce the letter of the law only when necessary, and the spirit of the law otherwise, but no more. Dragons, along with giants and wizards, were a load of superfluous bumf weak people dropped on their children. They didn't make wet marks on your boots with their nose. "I'll have to report this, you understand."

"I suppose you will. Just don't call Fleet Street, hm?"

Northcote put his hat on and stood slowly. "No fear, sir. I've no interest in a discharge for drunkenness on duty. I may have to bring the sergeant in from Jedburgh to show him."

Peter showed Northcote to the door and agreed to receive the sergeant later if necessary. It proved to be so.

The Franks, even after the overflight, kept their silence. However, the people who had seen the flight, and those who had seen the landing, had not promised to keep quiet, and did not. People started regarding Peter with a jaundiced eye when he did his walks. There never failed to be a few loiterers on the street across from The Cottage, and they were only cleared away when Northcote was on duty. The other constables only stood and stared with the rest of the crowd. The snow fell and drove off all but a few of the hardy local neds, who had taken to wearing the slogan 'Dragonslayers' on their jackets.

Despite the local notoriety of the dragons, the story never left Bairnkirk. It is a peculiar inclination of small towns to keep dirty laundry undercover, even if the whole town knows anyway. Since Bairnkirk was an isolated community

to begin with, and more so in the dark months, it was easy to keep such a secret.

'It has just occurred to me,' Peter wrote on the last day of November, 'that although I've seen a lot of food go down the dragons, I've not seen anything come out.' He put his pen down and leaned forward to examine one of the dragons which was stretched on the hearth. 'There doesn't appear to be what on birds is so euphemistically called a vent, tho' it's rather hard to tell with the scales. I'm no biologist; I can't guess at the workings of their metabolism. They're almost double the size they were when I first saw them.'

The deep cold of winter let up exactly one week before Christmas. The dragons had been content to stay inside during the bitter cold, but when the snow turned to slush, they began to make assaults on the door. Peter tried to keep them in, as a few of the self-named Dragonslayers still floated about the neighbourhood. However, as they became more insistent, it became clear to him that he should be under no illusions; they were great big animals with great big teeth, and he shouldn't assume their hitherto gentle nature would stand for too much thwarting. Eventually, he turned his back and let them do for themselves.

"Oy, Tam. Loo' a' there." Chopper (Billy Dalkieth to his mother) pointed at the dark between The Cottage and the Frank's house. Tam Hunter followed Chopper's direction, and saw movement in the shadows. While Saturday nights in Bairnkirk didn't offer much diversion, Tam questioned being bored with snow in his boots.

"D'ye s'ppose he's let the wee beasties out for a romp, then?"

"Coo be, Tam. Got the thing?"

"Aye. Ne'r wi'out, ye know that. Stand fast."

Chopper cupped his hands around his mouth. At the end of the block, Constable Cooper did a turn on his heel and headed out of sight. "Hey, Fitzroy, ye be lettin' yer monsters out te eat our babes?"

As the words left his mouth, a dragon hopped up on the fence directly opposite. Its eyes reflected bright red from the distant streetlamp. Chopper and Tam let their mouths drop slack.

"By goom, it's the real thing. Wot de we do?" Tam was transfixed by the glowing red eyes. Chopper stooped, snatched up a rock, and hurled it at the points of light. There was a soft smack, a hiss, and the dragon toppled off the fence.

"Ye got 'em, Chopper!" Tam clapped Chopper on the back, and they both smiled broadly. Each had stepped into the street, intent on surveying their handiwork when the fence exploded.

One of the dragons stood on the far side of the fence, breathing fire. The blast was white for two feet beyond its nose, spreading and modulating to orange and finally to red, trailing off in dirty smoke across the street. It lasted a full ten seconds, then shut off, leaving a green blotch on Tam's retina. Chopper was rolling in slush, trying to put out his left side.

"Chopper!" Tam shouted. Chopper stopped rolling, lay on his back, and moaned softly. From up the street, there came the sound of boots on pavement as Cooper charged down towards the scene. Tam reached under his long jacket for The Thing.

When he heard the story, Tam had taken a brief drive south with a couple of the lads. In Willingdon, there is a shop that sells reproductions of medieval weapons. It was here that Tam had, at the urging of his friends, bought a cheap crossbow.

He fumbled the weapon up, pointed the arrow just below the glowing eyes, and squeezed the lever. The crossbow clanked, rather than twanged, and there came a high prolonged scream, a single tone taken from a fingernail on a chalkboard. It went on for half a minute, then there was silence.

Cooper had arrived beside Tam. Peter had gotten to the door just as the bolt left the bow. They were all still, paralysed by the screech. Peter saw the smoking hole in the fence and the shape of dragon lying just within, the fletches of an arrow pointing upwards from it. Tam dropped the bow in the street; only one quarrel had come with it.

"What the hell have you done?" Peter cried at the people in the street. The Franks were standing in the doorway of their house now, and some others up the street had come down their paths to gawk. Cooper was calling for an ambulance on his personal radio, and shouted at the Franks to bring a blanket to cover Chopper.

Tam and Peter moved towards the fallen dragon, Peter bringing the torch he kept by the door. Its beam reflected off the body of the dragon, iridescent blue-green. When Tam saw the creature in the light, he started to cry.

"Oh, God, Mister, I'm sorry. But 'e burnt Chopper. I...oh God...." He reached for the dragon, and another hissed and snapped at him. He stumbled to his feet and ran off. Peter picked up the body, forgetting lore of poisonous blood, and took it through the house to the kitchen. The other three trailed along, and stood gathered around the fourth. One had a large cut on its head from Chopper's stone, and vivid red blood oozed from it.

It was fifteen minutes later that the ambulance from Hawick arrived to pick up Chopper. Cooper had been joined by Northcote and they kept any sort of crowd from gathering. When the ambulance left, Peter approached Northcote.

"How's the boy?"

Northcote glared at him. "It's extensive, but it's not a deep burn. What happened here?"

"I don't know. They went out, and I suppose the boys started harrasing them. I don't have any control over them, you know."

Northcote looked down at Peter. He lowered his voice a tone. "They'll have to be destroyed."

"The one that did it is dead. The others could have joined in and didn't. If you want to try and kill them, you can try, but I would warn you that they will probably try to protect themselves." He looked over at the smoldering hole in the fence. "They seem to be good at it."

Northcote bent, gathered a great fist-full of Peter's shirt, and lifted. "I will get a court order for their destruction first thing monday, and I will get an asbestos suit from the fire brigade if I must. You cannot harbour dangerous beasts like those, Mr. Fitzroy." He let go and Peter dropped to the street. Northcote turned and loomed off up the street. Cooper said, "Look, sir, I hain't seen Northcote like tat ever, an' I known him twelve year. If you want to see those monsters live, you'd best do to get 'em out of the country. Me, I agree with Northcote: I'll be here helping him when he gets the order. Please lock your doors when you go in, will you?" He moved off after Northcote.

"The door was locked," Peter said, just loud enough for Cooper to hear him. Cooper ignored him.

The shortest single entry in the notebook is this: 'Dragons eat their dead.'

The Monday following Northcote's threat, Peter got up to find that the dragons were assembled in his bedroom once again. They were by this time larger than golden eagles, and could look onto the bed standing on the floor. Peter sat on the edge of the bed, and the dragons laid their heads on his knees, purring. Peter scratched them behind the tympanic membranes for several minutes, when they all strolled out of the room. Peter followed them to the back door, which they had opened.

The dragons paraded out to the snowy field and, one after another, spread their huge wings and took off. Peter was utterly mystified. He followed their flight as long as he could, watching them propel themselves very quickly northward. When they were out of sight, he went in and got dressed.

Very shortly, there came a knock on his front door. It was McClure. "I just hurd that they hurt a lad," he said, almost forcing his way in. "What the devil happened?"

Peter had almost finished explaining when a second knock came. When he opened the door, he was confronted by Northcote and Cooper, both dressed in silver fire fighter's clothes, each with a long shotgun in the crook of his arm. Northcote took a piece of paper from beneath the suit. "This

is a writ, giving us power to enter these premises and destroy the dangerous animals herein." He pressed the paper against Peter's chest, forcing him back into the hall.

"They've left, Constable. You can search around if you like, their hole is in the basement." The police officers stomped through the house for half an hour, while Peter finished telling McClure about the incident two nights previous. Northcote gave an insincere apology as he and Cooper left.

"Loads of clods," McClure whispered to the closing door. He turned to Peter. "Well, where are they hid, then?"

"They actually have left. Flew off this morning. They came into my room and had sort of a farewell scene. I think they've gone for good."

"Oh, dear." A look of vast sorrow passed over McClure's face. "I rather liked the little things. How big had they got?" Peter held his hands out like a fisherman describing a near-catch. "My, my, my. That shud be interesting come spring when the lambs start coming."

McClure and Peter said goodbye, and McClure left, looking skyward as he walked to his van. Peter went to the sitting room to write about the departure of the dragons in his notebook. The book was gone from the desk drawer where he kept it. He remembered hearing the police banging around while he and McClure chatted in the kitchen. "The bastards." He charged out to the hall, reaching for the telephone.

He'd dialed the first digit when he spotted the book, leaning against the television. He put down the phone, and stepped into the living room. Picking up the book, he thumbed through to the last page with writing on it. There, below his last note, was someone else's writing, in a very neat hand, in a sort of copperplate style.

Peter -

Thank you for the trouble you have put yourself through. We are sorry for any trouble we may have caused. For your kindness, please accept what you find in the biscuit tin. We shall visit again.

How very odd, Peter thought. It's unlikely Northcote or Cooper wrote it. He put down the book and went to the kitchen. He took the biscuit tin down from the cupboard. It was remarkably heavy. Inside, he found it was half full of gold coins. Three different Caesars stared up at him from their backs. On a whim, he stepped out the back door and looked up. From the north, several long V formations like flights of geese drifted overhead. From one group, three small dashes separated out and did wing-overs, glinting sharp turquoise in the late morning sun. Peter stood in the yard and watched until they dropped below the horizon.

It should, he thought, make for an interesting New Year.



Reviews

by Pat Wilson and Dave Panchyk

I hate to say it, but the space left over for reviewing all the great books that have come out in the last bunch of months is limited. We'll keep 'em short, which means we can't go into the depth of analysis we'd like.

Urth of the New Sun by Gene Wolfe

by Dave Panchyk

This book is the interesting capstone to Wolfe's four-part series about the torturer Severian, *The Book of the New Sun*. Regrettably it was a long time after reading all four books that I started this one, but I can't remember any of the other four being as dense in style. Wolfe has gone far beyond the bounds of the fantasy tradition of simply relating a tale. We get the whole story from the point of view of Severian, as in the other four, but in *Urth of the New Sun* it's that much more evident that the events as they are related are filtered through the perceptions of one man. Severian doesn't stop to explain anything we as readers don't know; he is merely relating the events as he saw them, partly for posterity and partly for the unspecified "you" (the reader) who may or may not ever find Severian's manuscript.

This book is huge in scope, encompassing the death and birth of a world, and it is also labyrinthine (in the sense it reminds one of Jorge Luis Borges's writing). I would recommend this book highly to those who have already finished *The Book of the New Sun*.

Mona Lisa Overdrive by William Gibson

by Dave Panchyk

So many people were waiting for this book to come out that the hardback editions disappeared almost as quickly as they were put out on the shelves of bookstores. *Overdrive* finishes off the loose sort-of trilogy (series of three semi-connected books, let's say) that began with *Neuromancer*. It's paced a lot more slowly (and evenly), spends more time on characterization, than either *Neuromancer* or *Count Zero*. In fact, I'd say it's the best of the three, far more reminiscent of (look out, he's going to drop more names!) Thomas Pynchon or J. G. Ballard than either of the earlier works.

There's much less slam-bang action in *Overdrive*, a lot more looking around in terms of the shape the world's in, and more depth of character. This novel marks, I think, the maturation of Gibson as a writer, and it'll be interesting to see what he does in the future. Hopefully it will diverge from the world of *Neuromancer*, because though everyone was glad to see some of the familiar faces from *Count Zero* and *Neuromancer*, most people who have read *Overdrive*

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will be happy to see new places and people put before them by sf's most skilled writer.

Brett, Brian. *The Fungus Garden*.

Thistle-down Press, Saskatoon, 1987.

by Pat Wilson

In his first published work of fiction, B.C. poet Brian Brett examines the conflict between the individual and a highly repressive society with the aid of some familiar SF devices and themes.

His story opens with the hero, a guitar player named John Kit, rebelling against the inevitable totalitarian near-future society through an act of vandalism. After a violent encounter with a robot policeman, he flees into a nearby cave system. He is struck on the head during the pursuit. When he comes to, he continues to run, to discover, eventually, that he has mysteriously shrunk to insect size. He encounters a troop of warrior termites who proceed to transmute him into a termite in what is easily the most vivid and disturbing scene in the book.

He is then informed that he will be trained to replace the gardener/historian of the colony. In the colony, history is recorded through the patterns in the fungus garden.

The novel winds up with a very short section in which Kit has been found by members of the underground resistance only to discover that the resistance fighters are also completely intolerant of individualism.

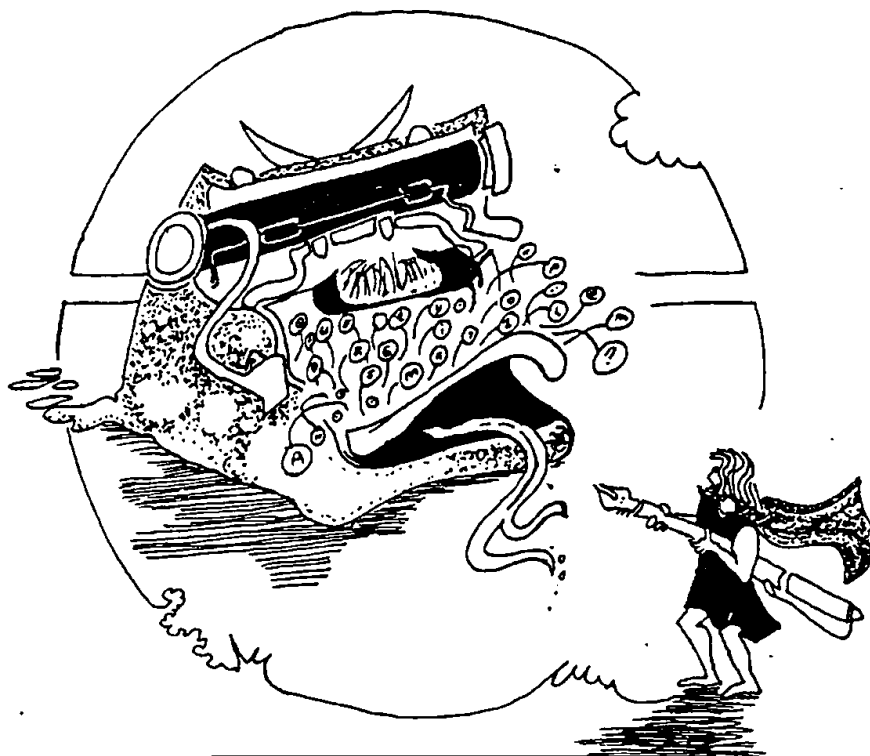
Where most SF works have presented the hive mind as a thoroughly repressive and frightening form of society, in Brett's work it is the only form which is willing to account for the individual (read: artist).

Brett develops extremely vivid characters in the termite colony, which helps to emphasize the impersonality of the human characters. The vividness of the characters can be attributed largely to Brett's dense and vivid use of language — probably the book's greatest virtue. While the story itself is not always as fully developed as I might like, and is probably not for admirers of straight adventure, Brett's flair for extremely visceral and often disturbing images makes the book a hard one to forget.



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Language Themes in Science Fiction



by Kevin Kohan

"This was indeed a godlike science, and I ardently desired to become acquainted with it." Buck Rogers drooling over some new device able to blast him into next week? No, these words are spoken by that archetypal figure of modern fantastic literature, Dr. Frankenstein's monster, and the science he craves to know is language. Acquisition of the language tool allows him to break the barrier of self and communicate with humanity; it also provides him with a framework on which to organize his perceptions of objective reality, and in the process strengthen his mental faculties — he (it?) begins to reason. The connection is clear. Language is thought, consciousness manifested. As we speak or write, we translate our immaterial thoughts into a concrete external form. And more than this, language is also the medium through which thought is created; absent this tool, deductive thinking evaporates. As such, language can be called the science of thought, fundamental to our identity and primary instrument of civilization.

SF has not ignored these issues, taking its cue from Mary Shelley's gothic masterpiece. The development of the Frankenstein monster prefigures the loosely categorized

language themes addressed by a few superior SF artists. I identify three streams:

1) Language as a bridge to the unknown, often considered in the traditional confrontation and communication barrier between alien and man. The concern here is to find the rules that underlie all language and then to penetrate beyond specific tongues to the thought beneath; 2) Language as an index of the progress or decline of human civilization. The communication from one being to another is here less important than what the language of the speaker reveals about the speaker himself. This is a significant metaphor in dystopian fiction where the speaker's impoverished culture and sensibility is reflected in his or her speech; and 3) Language as a indication of the dawn of thought and identity. The great Man/Machine SF theme is here couched in language terms: when the machine begins to truly speak, it edges closer, and may assume, human status.

In the first "stream," Stanislaw Lem's *Solaris* can perhaps serve as a paradigm, though it takes the communication barrier theme to its outer limits. In this novel, the scientists who desperately wish to make contact with the intelligent ocean-planet Solaris never do solve the problem, as the unknown remains unknowable. The scientists are in search

of a language, a means of communicating with this thoroughly alien creature, but are frustrated because of the lack of compatible experiences of reality. The ocean's singularity is incomprehensible to and uncomprehending of the vast plurality of man. The only "contact" that is achieved between the species is, apparently, in the arrival of the phi-creatures, manifestations of suppressed but essential memories of the human crew. And yet their purpose is not decipherable; the meaning of this ocean-language is lost in the translation. On the level of metaphor, Lem here suggests that there is a fundamental barrier between the subconscious mind (the Solaris ocean) and conscious scientific man: this communication is necessarily severed by the very nature of the two sides of thought. The ultimate unknown — man's hidden self — is distant and impenetrable, yet of profound influence.

Arthur C. Clarke's *Childhood's End* uses similar strategies, yet also plays against convention. The language themes arise at three critical points in the narrative. In the opening pages, the arrival of the Overlords is put in clear perspective — their superiority to humanity — by the power of Karellan's (the Overlord "Supervisor for Earth") "perfect ... English":

...the context of the speech was more staggering even than its delivery. By any standards, it was a work of superlative genius, showing a complete and absolute mastery of human affairs.... When Karellen had finished, the nations of Earth knew that their days of precarious sovereignty had ended. (18)

Rather than the typical communication barrier, these aliens assert their authority by manifesting their ease of grasping human concepts. The arrival of the space ships causes awe and fear, but these words end man's "sovereignty." Humanity's first contact with the Overmind (a psychic unity of all post-physical beings) is similarly disconcerting because of its variation on the communication barrier theme. The Overmind first "speaks" through the Ouija-like Talmud board. This method of speech is, in the end, entirely appropriate — a psychic entity using a psychic game — though it is on an almost sub-verbal level. The Talmud spells out a rudimentary message in primitive language form that suggests more than it explains. The third reference to language occurs when Earth children are transformed into pure psychic entities, clearly beyond human speech as they ignore their parents to converse with the Overmind.

At novel's end, with the revelation of the transcendence, the truth of the Overmind's god-like status reveals the thematic pattern to be towards superior though "sub-verbal" language; the inadequacy of the Overlord's "perfect English" is revealed. *Childhood's End* thus uses language to suggest that man's essence lies in his non-verbal, non-scientifically quantified psychic abilities. The unknown future destiny of man in space can only be met with a post-linguistic, purely mental conception of reality.

Ian Watson's *The Embedding* also plays against convention in its handling of the man-alien communication barrier. The novel establishes a parallel between visiting extra-terrestrials and the equally "alien" primitive Indian tribe nestled in the heart of the Amazon jungle. Linguistics is very specifically the focus of these two plot threads: the "Sp' thra" space creatures wish to distill the essence of all earthly language to somehow grasp the "mind-set" of humankind; to speak the human language is to think human thoughts. The end purpose is to transcend this reality by accumulating and assimilating all of the universe's languages, and thus possess at one moment all existing conceptions of reality. With this super-perspective, the Sp' thra wish to "State the Totality" and "stand outside of This-Reality" (157).

These aliens thus recognize that language encodes a particular understanding of the universe. New words, new languages represent entirely new and different thoughts. The Xemohoa tribe also pursue transcendence through language, as they seek to shape reality by speaking in the drug-induced voice of their organic god. These two plot strands are further linked by the narratively central events at the Haddon Institute, where pre-linguistic children subjects are undergoing "embedding" experiments. "Embedding" is Watson's term for the fundamental human ability to create, transfer, and extract meaning from the words and structures of language; it is the "embedded" or innate ability to verbally communicate. At the Institute, attempts are made to stretch this "flexible, creative program of language" (47) by forcing the children to think in terms of artificially designed languages, in the context of highly controlled other-reality environments. It is thus an attempt, like that of the Xemahoa and the Sp' thra, to "probe at the frontiers of [the] mind" and test the limits of reality.

The synthesis of these various plot elements is unsatisfactorily accomplished because Watson relies too heavily on the device of man's brute instinctual drives to eliminate both the aliens and the Xemahoa tribe from the novel's world. But the resolution of the Haddon-experiments line is interesting in its conclusion that humans have a limited capacity to comprehend reality and can only see a finite set of the infinite possible variations, after which only "overload" or insanity can result. The Unknown — other realities as translated into and by consciousness through language — is never fully defeated: the human mind can only grasp what the human tongue can speak.

Even the space-opera, action-romance context has been used to explore language themes. Samuel Delany's *Babel-17* has been called a "dazzling...study in semiotics" for good reason, even with its pulp surroundings. The novel centers on poet Rydra Wong's attempts to decode the alien language called "Babel-17" in order to understand and defend against the mysterious terrorists who have disrupted the interstellar war that has been raging for decades. Like Watson's embedded languages, this alien tongue represents an entirely new consciousness of reality. As Rydra learns this most compact of languages, she finds herself slipping into trances.

in which she is able to use the Babel-17 perspective to penetrate otherwise unsolvable problems. As she says at one point, "when you learn another tongue, you learn the way another people see the world" (22). This new vision emerges from the intellectual power of dense yet more efficient communication. Delany thus gives not the limits of the knowable (as in Watson), but the potential of even greater comprehension. "If there's no word for it, how do you think about it? And, if there isn't the proper form, you don't have the how even if you have the words" (81). But here, the words and the forms are available as well as knowable, and so the thought-reality paradigm expands.

Blood Music's language themes form the basis for Greg Bear's grand metaphor for the relationship between the information theory conception of reality and entropy's "prediction" of increasing randomness in any closed system. The device is the emergence of new, super-conscious, intelligent cells — the noocytes — that represent the next stage in evolution's violent and abrupt stagger forward towards an even more efficient information processor. The noocytes are superior because they more efficiently transmit, receive, understand and retain information. Their "communication system" is a variation on the mitosis process of cell division with the added ingredient of conscious design. They have surpassed the precarious forms of spoken communication to the pure, direct transmission of information without intermediaries. The cells use words to speak to their human hosts, and originally prove their consciousness by moving from the "blood music" to verbal language, but they approach or attack their unknown universe — the macroverse — with the observational power of their mitosis language. The en-celled human personalities seem more constrained by their old ties with verbal speech. Their thoughts and fantasies are created on old-language models, and so are left in the essentially regressive playground-like heaven to pointlessly revise memories from the past. The noocytes, with their immense powers of observation and information retention, can communicate with the objectively real fabric of existence. Humanity ends up talking to itself.

The second major stream of language themes in SF — language as an index of cultural and intellectual sophistication — appears in H. G. Wells' truly landmark work, *The Time Machine*. The Time Traveller's journey into the far distant future places him in a human society biologically split by an economically influenced evolutionary process into two distinct species: the surface dwelling Eloi, and the subterranean, predatory Morlocks. Wells' purpose here is to project a dark future from the contemporary fact of the "two nations" division of the rich and the poor. The result is a vastly decayed civilization of "ruinous splendour" (46) where the comparatively superior Eloi are still only at "the intellectual level of ... five year old children" (42). This realization first comes to the Traveller from his being asked a question by an Eloi — its language reveals its intellect.

Wells specifically indicates the Eloi's mental decay by describing their language as primitive in both vocabulary and structure:

their language was excessively simple — almost exclusively composed of concrete substantives and verbs. There seemed to be few, if any, abstract terms, or little use of figurative language. Their sentences were usually simple and of two words, and I failed to convey or understand any but the simplest propositions. (56)

The passivity of the Eloi (or the idle rich) has led to a laziness of thought and so a decline in linguistic sophistication. Without "figurative speech," they exist in a world of mere subject and action, nouns and verbs, us and them, safety and fear. Wells' framing device of the Traveller recounting his tale aloud to his colleagues, underlines the contrast between the Eloi's future sub-verbal culture and this pre-decay 19th century world of vibrant communication.

George Orwell's dystopian nightmare *1984* is vitally concerned with the corruption of language and the powerful implications of a vocabulary manipulated by those with a political agenda. In the totalitarian society of 1984 Oceania, the Ingsoc government has introduced "Newspeak," their revision of standard English ("Oldspeak"), with the aim of paring down the old language into a collection of rigidly precise, one-dimensional words with a standardized and simplistic set of structures. The final goal is a slim dictionary of the bare minimum words necessary for a crude, functional communication, stripped of all color and the liberty of connotation (much like the Eloi's primitive noun-verb speech). The result is that criminal or revolutionary subversion against the state becomes "literally unthinkable" (241): "Newspeak was designed not to extend but to diminish the range of thought" (242). Big Brother's absolute control reaches to the very soul of society by stealing its thoughts through the destruction of its language. Its "one word — one meaning" vocabulary suggests a scientifically or mathematically precise language that is ripe for corruption as shades of meaning are lost and those in power can shift the word-meaning nexus and erase whole concepts.

Winston Smith's struggle for independent thought is played out in linguistic terms. He writes in his hidden diary, while the omnipresent "telescreen" sends out its word-assault, that "Freedom is the freedom to say that two plus two make four. If that is granted, all else follows" (68). It is not merely to know truth, but to speak it that constitutes real freedom. Without that act of externalization and communication, the internal truth can fade and die. Smith's final defeat is driven home by his acceptance of Big Brother's language. He writes, "Two and Two Make Five" and "Freedom is Slavery," and so allows his words to lose all truth and become political fictions. True language becomes "thoughtcrime."

The SF films of director Stanley Kubrick, particularly *2001: A Space Odyssey* and *A Clockwork Orange*, play heavily on these themes. In the dystopian work *A Clockwork Orange*, based on the Anthony Burgess 1962 novel, Kubrick brilliantly evokes a near-future society of repressed and oppressive social consciousness against which Alex, the exuberant, violent, yet rudely alive primal force struggles to find a life of independent thought. Alex's narration and dialogue displays his bastardized English-Slavic slang language called "Nadsat" that is in sharp contrast to the stale speeches of his parents or the dry clichés of the prison chaplain. After several violent outings with his "droogs," the amoral Alex is captured and sent to prison where he becomes the first subject of the "Ludovico Technique," a Skinnerian mental conditioning that tries to turn Alex into a moral robot: he learns to act "morally" by yielding to programmed instinctual responses. Alex's final return to his pre-experiment intellectual freedom — even if it means the reemergence of utterly disruptive, immoral activity — is a triumph of will over the Big-Brother-like thought control that the experiment represents. Alex regains his personal language at film's end, and so his identity as well, and thus defies the uniformity of this society in decline.

Kubrick's *2001* will be useful in my discussion of the third stream of language themes, but it also has many subtle suggestions of the linguistic — and therefore cultural — stagnation of humanity that exists prior to the quantum evolutionary leap that is achieved by film's end. Kubrick's narrative method itself reaches beyond mainstream's usual "literary" technique, suggesting that the old forms are no longer adequate or appropriate for the cinema; in this film Kubrick finds a uniquely cinematic language. The film's story unfolds with a bare minimum of verbal exposition through dialogue or narration and instead relies on visual associations and connectives to pull the story through its truly vast plot-time scale. This language demands that the audience decode visual rather than verbal information. The earliest example of this is the justly famous jump-cut from the human bone turned tool/weapon, to the higher order tool of the bone-shaped space craft floating delicately through space. This purely cinematic statement speaks volumes in a single moment of silent film time about the sociological and psychological significance of man's presence in space. Kubrick's restrained tone and classically balanced narrative structure transcends the limitations of the verbally dependent Hollywood mainstream. (Hitchcock referred derisively to such "bookish" films as "pictures of people talking.")

The film's details echo these themes. In the "Dawn of Man" sequence, the prehistoric men, upon the inspiration and instigation of the alien monolith, discover the concept of the tool by turning a common object (human bone) into a device with which to manipulate and control their environment. After the jump-cut, we are in Floyd's 21st century world of technological wonders, but which is also in need of an evolutionary leap, this time beyond language.

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The failure of language to allow transcendence is suggested by its stagnation or decline in Floyd's present time. The film makes this point in these ways: the bare fact of the film's sparsity of dialogue; the banality of any conversation that is used, from the chatter about the "sandwiches" as Floyd and crew approach the moon and the monolith's mystery, to the remarkably out-of-place happy birthday greetings sent to Poole on the *Discovery*; Floyd's verbal sparring with the Russian diplomats disguised as friendly conversation; and the meeting of bureaucrats to confirm the use of the "cover story" to hide the real story of the monolith's presence on the moon, language thus reduced to an instrument of concealment rather than revelation. There is an "absolute need for secrecy," Floyd tells his politely nodding colleagues.

Most significantly, the HAL 9000 computer is perhaps the film's most memorable "character," and can serve as a first comment on the third language stream in SF, language as an indication of consciousness and identity. During the "Mission to Jupiter" section of the film, astronauts Bowman and Poole listen mutely to a prerecorded interview that contains the following exchange:

Poole: ". . . you quickly learn to think of [Hal] as just another person."

Interviewer: "Do you believe that Hal has genuine emotions?"

Bowman: "Well, he acts like he has genuine emotions; of course he's programmed that way to make it easier for us to talk to him. But as to whether or not he has real feelings is something I don't think anyone can truthfully answer."

The interviewer's question embodies an important concern of SF: at what point does an intelligent, speaking entity achieve the ability to feel, and is that ability a somehow necessary element of "consciousness" and "identity." Hal's "birth" occurs at the moment he is first able to sing the simple child's song "Daisy," thus indicating that independent control of language is a necessary and perhaps sufficient index of consciousness — Hal clearly goes through a human-like maturing process from these simple songs to his polished speech aboard the *Discovery*. But Hal's human programming also causes him to lose his machine purity. The twin 9000 computer at mission control possesses the same intellect, but not this extra "human factor" given to Hal in order to provide companionship to the astronauts. Therefore, the twin remains accurate and detects the flaw in Hal's prediction of a communication transmitter's breakdown. Hal is no longer a machine; yet he does not wish to be a man, so subject to error:

Bowman: "How would you account for this discrepancy between you and the twin 9000?"

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Hal: "... it can only be attributable to human error. This sort of thing has cropped up before, and it has always been attributable to human error."

Hal's final destruction is set in his "brain" center, where Bowman removes "memory" chips, thereby erasing Hal's identity. His decline is charted by the decay of his language, as his pleas for Bowman to cease regress to the final wind-down of the song he learned at birth. His voice silenced, Hal's consciousness also drifts away, his mere mechanical abilities remaining. Yet the computer's oddly affecting desire for life suggests that Hal is indeed the most "human" thing aboard the Discovery; our tools exceed us. But Bowman's transformation into the Star-Child is an evolution into a next level of consciousness, unavailable to language-based intellects (similar to co-author Clarke's *Childhood's End*).

Several SF short stories use the language index in attempting to differentiate humanity from machines, and thereby find the essence of humanity. In Abraham Merrit's "The Last Poet and the Robots," the Robots have become a threat by achieving a limited consciousness, but are soundly "put in their place" by Narodny the poet, who accuses, "Robots — are there any of you who could poetize?" (260). Narodny's own poetry is a post-linguistic mixture of colors and sounds, expressing a sort of advanced consciousness of refined emotion and perception. As in 2001, language creates a self-awareness, but of an ultimately limited potential. Narodny and Bowman are able to transcend this level by moving beyond language.

Unlike 2001, Roger Zelazny in "For a Breath I Tarry" stresses the importance of human physiology to the creation of truly human consciousness. The story is a starkly constructed parable about a computer, Frost, that wishes to know "the Nature of Man" (435). He fails to find a true understanding because of the limitations of his strictly logic-based thought patterns. Frost reads the "Library of Man," but only succeeds in accumulating data without the underlying, sub-logic set of connotations humans associate to such data. He cannot appreciate a poem because his logic does not admit emotion. Only in the vivid context of confused, mathematically inexpressible and unmeasurable, physical sensations does Frost find human consciousness and the beauty of poetry. Zelazny therefore arrives at a similar conclusion to that of Kubrick and Clarke, but from an opposite approach. All agree that man's essence is somehow bound up in his irrational side, but Zelazny uses language as a metaphor of true humanity (Frost in his new flesh finally understands man's library), while the others suggest that language is, in the end, only restricting.

While this short survey can hardly offer an exhaustive statement about language themes in SF, its prominent use in such seminal works in the field should indicate its importance and potential. SF is, after all, the language of the scientific age.

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