

WWW.PANTECHNICON.NET

ISSUE FOUR JUNE 2007

# PANTECHNICON

HORROR + SCIENCE FICTION + FANTASY

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW  
JOHN JARROLD

FOUR BRAND-NEW STORIES BY  
MARTIN WILLOUGHBY  
ANDY FRANKHAM  
DAVID BROOKES  
BETTY MEDEIROS

AND PART FOUR OF  
LONDON CALLING

PLUS  
CLASSIC SCIFI 101 # 2  
AND  
NEW DVD REVIEWS

## GARY RUSSELL

THE SECOND PART OF OUR EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH THE  
SCRIPT EDITOR OF BBC HIT TORCHWOOD

Stranger With My Face  
by Betty Medeiros

# PANTECHNICON

Issue 4 | June 2007



Cover Story: **Stranger with My Face**, page 33

To all you lovely people welcome to the crazy world of Pantehnicon #4.

This issue we continue our talk with Gary Russell, who tells us what it's like writing non-fiction books for cult TV shows and films, as well as the highs and lows of being producer of Doctor Who for eight years.

We also drop in on John Jarrold, one of the leading Literary Agents in the UK, and find out some of the pitfalls to getting your work published.

On top of that we have our usual round up of five stories, reviews and an introduction to another obscure piece of science fiction.

If you enjoy all this, and wish to meet our new authors, as well as talk to Gary Russell about his work, please drop by our forum at: [www.pantehnicon.net](http://www.pantehnicon.net)

Andy Frankham & Trudi Topham, May 2007

Editors: Andy Frankham & Trudi Topham  
Assistant Editors: Rhys Elliott & Jon Cooper  
Cover: Tom Webster  
Website: Trudi Topham  
PDF: Andy Frankham

Contributors: *David Brookes, Andy Frankham, John Jarrold, Paul Kane, Betty Medeiros, Sean Parker, Gary Russell, Trudi Topham, Martin Willoughby*

[www.pantehnicon.net](http://www.pantehnicon.net)

## CONTENTS

### Stories

- I Weep for Them** 03  
Lost and alone, one man feels the pain of abandonment.
- Off Flesh** 07  
A business trip goes awry when one man falls for another.
- Krill** 16  
An expedition on one of Jupiter's moons uncovers some unexpected secrets, both personal and scientific.
- Stranger with My Face** 33  
One woman's sanity is put to the test when her reflection takes on a life of its own.
- London Calling, part four** 45  
Just how far is Strathclyde willing to go to protect Her Majesty's secrets? Part four of our ongoing Fantasy series by Trudi Topham.

### Article

- Classic Science Fiction 101: #2** 05  
Sean Parker continues to look at the more obscure classics. This issue: 'The Sheep Look Up' by John Brunner.

### Interviews

- Gary Russell** 36  
Second of two-parts, Gary talks to Andy Frankham about his eight years with Big Finish Productions, writing non-fiction, and just what he's doing at BBC Wales.
- John Jarrold** 41  
One of the UK's leading Literary Agents talks to Trudi Topham about the pitfalls and successes of getting published.

### Reviews & Previews

- Genre DVDs** 30  
Hannibal Rising; Are You Scared?; Wrestlemaniac.
- Stardust Preview** 26  
Exclusive preview of the new fantasy epic based on Neil Gaiman's bestselling novel.

With thanks to: *Neil Gaiman, Paramount Pictures, Gary Russell, John Jarrold and Michael Marshall Smith*

**All material © 2007 Pantehnicon Publishing & Respective Authors. All rights reserved.**

## I WEEP FOR THEM

By MARTIN WILLOUGHBY

**P**ain comes in many forms. Sometimes it shows, sometimes it doesn't. People react to it in different ways; they feel it according to their own unique personalities.

There are those who can suffer every blow or cut, feel every wound, yet find the strength to carry on. But when they are hurt emotionally, they disintegrate.

There are some at the other extreme that can absorb mental or emotional torture and rise unscathed from the furnace. But at the first hint of physical hurt they collapse so deeply they never recover. Most of us feel our torment in between these two extremes.

Me? I've always known I was not able to bear much physically. But I prided myself on a deeply ingrained ability to ride out the severest emotional trauma. I have faced mental and emotional horrors and survived intact. I suffered experiences as a child that few will ever know and lived to have a normal life. But I'm no longer sure of that.

I've been abandoned. I'm alone on a beautiful world. The deep blue sky and lush greenery of this temperate world, the sweet dampness of the morning help to make this an unspoilt paradise. The gentle sounds of distant animals searching for a mate, the sweet smells of an almost permanent spring, the freshness of falling rain give a sense of freedom to any that live here.

But there is no one to share it with. Not anymore.

The house that I've built on my world is no longer a home. It is nothing more than an empty shell to keep me warm in the winter and cool in the summer. I walk around the outside sometimes and run my fingers across the stone and the wood. It's beginning to show signs of weathering now. A decade of wind, rain and sun are starting to leave their mark.

Inside I sit and stare at our handiwork. The rug our children made sits restfully in front of the fire. The furniture I built with the help of the robot gleefully gives up the signs left by young children.

In each room there are signs of life, of a family who loved it. The notches on the bedroom doors made as the children grew, the haphazard paintwork in their rooms as they tried to decorate

them on their own. The food stains on the wooden kitchen floor where a family cooked together.

She left me last year. Took the children too. And the robot. She left while I slept, taking our ship to who knows where. I awoke too late to stop her and watched them leave. She left me with no means of leaving myself, or of contacting anyone else in nearby systems. So I sit here alone, waiting for something, anything.

I feel my hurt deeply and have no one to share it with. Despite my years of experience of suffering I do not, it seems, have the depth of strength needed to survive alone and I don't know how long I have left.

Maybe it's different this time. I was never alone before. In the past there were other children who knew and understood my life, other children I could share it with. We supported each other, became friends and lovers and partners. We had each other. Until two of us left for a far away world.

Why did I come here? Why pick a lonely planet far from home to live on? I didn't. I followed my partner's desires, seeking to please her. I ignored my instincts and moved to this paradise to escape the race, to make a new life far away from our shared past.

I found peace here. We had children and we had a life. But nothing was ever good enough for her. Nothing was perfect.

I built this house with the help of our robot, though it took me several years. I built a room for each new child. I built a nursery, a playroom, and a conservatory. At each step the robot instructed me and did the work I could not do.

I built a road into the forest and a cart to haul trees and rocks. I built a small smithy to fashion iron tools, a pottery, a cold store and a small solar power generator.

I planted fields of fruit and vegetables, orchards that are only now bearing fruit. I've learnt to herd animals and understand the planet. All of this I did for her and my children. Now she has taken them away, she has taken my life.

'It's not perfect,' she would say. 'Nothing ever is,' I would answer. 'We can only get near perfection, not achieve it,' I would add. It was never enough.

She would cry herself to sleep some nights, or sleep in another room. Eventually I slept elsewhere so she could sleep in comfort.

I fell asleep to the sounds of birds and insects and woke to the tears of a woman who could never be satisfied. Nothing was ever enough for her. She who was always reaching for something else to fulfil her

needs. She who could not leave her past and her suffering behind.

I found fulfilment on this world, and escaped my past. I found it in building this house, planting the fields and orchard. I found it mostly in my children's unconditional love. I never found it with her.

Now she's gone and taken all she thinks she needs. But it will not be enough. Nothing ever will. She will find another world and maybe another man. She will raise our children in her image. Will they grow up equally dissatisfied with life? Will they ever come and find me?

It is my one hope. I long for them and it is sometimes all that I see in my mind. But there are days when it isn't enough.

At night I look into the sky at the stars and the three moons. I stare at the closest moon every night and, using the telescope I built, look into the large crater near the North Pole. I study the crash site of a ship and I wonder to whom it belonged and who died there.

I think about the people who came to my world and died on the moon the same night my partner left. It couldn't be her and my children. I know it isn't. I have one hope.

The moon is full tonight and there are no clouds in the black sky. The stars shine more brightly through the unpolluted atmosphere of this world. I keep my eye to the telescope, stare at the crater and, as I do every night, I weep for the brief pain those strangers felt as they died: and for mine.

## CLASSIC SCIENCE FICTION 101 #2

### By SEAN PARKER

THE SHEEP LOOK UP by JOHN BRUNNER

#### THE AUTHOR

'Brunner was an angry man, angry at injustice and cynicism...' - Joe Haldeman

**J**ohn Kilian Houston Brunner was born on 24th September 1934 in Oxfordshire, England. Mainly known for his work in the field of SF, he also wrote several thrillers, some poetry and several horror stories. Sadly, the majority of his work is now out of print.

His first novel, *GALACTIC STORM*, published under the pseudonym Gill Hunt, appeared in 1951 when Brunner was just seventeen years old. The first novel he chose to publicly acknowledge as his own work saw print two years later.

There followed a period of years during which Brunner wrote only sporadically due to other commitments. He was a member of the Royal Air Force between 1953 and 1955, after which he worked full time at a publishing house. This silence came to an impressive end when Brunner penned twenty seven novels (both as Kevin Woodcolt, and under his own name) between 1959 and 1965. These were mainly published by Ace Books, an American publisher famous, amongst other things, for their 'Ace Double' books, which featured two short novels by two different authors, each side of the outer cover being solely devoted to one of them. In such a manner, several of Brunner's novels first saw print alongside the early work of Philip K Dick.

Up to this point, Brunner was known for his 'space operas', a sub-genre where much of his work fitted quite snugly, and for many this is the work for which he was to be remembered. 1968 saw the publication of *STAND ON ZANZIBAR* which was very different indeed.

It was the first of four dystopian novels which appeared over the next seven years. Each was



written in the same distinctive, and very effective, style, with a large cast of characters (especially true of *STAND ON ZANZIBAR*, which won a Hugo award in 1968, and *THE SHEEP LOOK UP*) and a mass of other material such as advertising blurbs, television interview transcripts, newspaper articles, computer printouts and poetry. *THE JAGGED ORBIT*, also set in a world gone horribly wrong, won a British SF Award in 1971, and *THE SHOCKWAVE RIDER* is of interest due to the fact that in it Brunner predicted the abuses, crimes and viruses that are rife on the internet today (though written in 1973!).

Despite the critical acclaim, these novels (and all his other work) failed to make it possible for Brunner to make a reasonable living from his writing, something he was fairly vocal about. His wife, Marjorie, died in 1986. She had always had a big hand in managing Brunner's business affairs, and, after her death, Brunner's manner when dealing with these things himself may have played a part in his difficulty in getting published (although the fact that his output had slowed considerably was also certainly a factor). He re-married in 1991, by which time his health was already deteriorating.

In 1995, John Brunner suffered a stroke at a Science Fiction convention in Glasgow, and died the following day. At the awards ceremony taking place at the convention, author Robert Silverberg suggested that Brunner would probably have wanted a last round of applause rather than a minutes silence. The standing ovation that followed lasted four minutes.

#### THE NOVEL

**T**here is no bright side. Not in the world of *THE SHEEP LOOK UP* anyway. First published in 1972, this is a novel that takes as its starting point the ecological problems of the world of that time, and pushes the consequences to their logical conclusions. The results are not pleasant.

*THE SHEEP LOOK UP* has been called an ecological horror story, and the cap fits. But along with the devastating composite picture it presents of a planet on its last legs, it is also an extremely incident-packed page turner. Much of the background is of a world similar to that in *STAND ON ZANZIBAR*, which many see as Brunner's masterpiece, but, although *SHEEP* is the shorter and more straightforward of the two works, I find it to be the more powerful.

The plot is woven together from many, many different strands. Characters go about their everyday business in an America where oxygen is sold \$25 a blast

and drinking water directly from a tap is likely to knock you off your feet for a while. The rest of the world isn't doing too well, either. The Mediterranean ocean has died, polluted to the point where it can no longer sustain life. Insects have mutated to the point where no insecticides are effective against them (not even the black market ones, which anyone can get hold of despite supposedly stringent bans).

A poisoned (deliberately or accidentally) batch of relief food sent by a United States charity causes chaos both in Africa, where it produces insanity and violence amongst those unfortunate enough to eat it, and for the charity that produce and ship the food. The destruction of further batches of the possibly contaminated foodstuff causes more problems when a staged incineration of the offending article surprisingly brings out a youth movement who feel that causing themselves to becoming violent lunatics is a valid option in an increasingly hellish world.

The United States is ruled by an ignorant mouthpiece, martial law is frequently declared, only the brave or the foolhardy fly due to the terrorist threat(s), stockpiles of chemical weapons make unwelcome reappearances and an ecological pressure group is thought to be a danger to society. Known as 'Trainites', after the author of the books that brought the movement into being, they are behind violent attacks on property or people as well as attempts to live a better life amidst the cesspit the world has become - a varied bunch united by name only. Austin Train himself has vanished, wanting nothing to do with his 'followers', violent or otherwise. Unfortunately for him, though, it looks like the time has come for him to step back into the public eye.

Incidents and characters pass with a dizzying rapidity, mixed up with factual elements (the book is copyrighted to Brunner Fact and Fiction), all tenuously tied together by the events caused by the return of Train, and the lengths those in power, and other interested parties, will go to silence him.

The novel offers no solution to the problems that have led to the terrible mess the characters inhabit. Well, maybe one, and that solution might just give *some* of the world a chance to regenerate and rebuild. Unfortunately this solution may also

have led to SHEEP being looked down upon by American publishers at the time. But since it is at the climax of the book, I'll say no more about it.

Although a lot of the subject matter could make the whole affair seem too preachy, this is certainly not the case. Angry - certainly, cynical - definitely, but it never falls into the black and white, good guys versus the bad guys scenario which would have diminished its power dramatically. Everyone is human, all sides are at fault (although some are more at fault than others) and, realistically, most groups involved are looking after their own interests first and foremost.

\*

**T**HE SHEEP LOOK UP has passed the test of time remarkably well. It still has the power to shock, and to get the old grey cells working. When I first encountered it, it had a similar effect on me as did DOCTOR RAT by William Kotwinkle (another '70s novel, an incredibly vicious satire set in an animal research laboratory), both these books (amongst others) changed the way that I look at the world. Today, THE SHEEP LOOK UP can still knock the socks off any possibly more worthy book with similar themes.

Above all, it is a cracking read, which is the most important thing for a novel to be. It is a great apocalyptic novel, and a gloomily entertaining roller-coaster ride into oblivion. Worth seeking out.

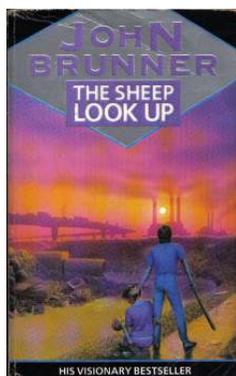
#### OTHER RECOMMENDED SF NOVELS BY JOHN BRUNNER

Stand on Zanzibar (1968)

The Jagged Orbit (1969)

The Shockwave Rider (1973)

The Stone that Never Came Down (1973)



## OFF FLESH

By ANDY FRANKHAM

**T**ravel, they say, broadens the mind. It's a truism if ever there was one. But what they fail to tell you is that it can scare the living crap out of you, too, at times. I travel a lot. Visit a lot of places, stay at a lot of hotels. I've been to some crappy hotels, some really luxurious ones, too. But never been to one like The Cliff's Edge in Torquay. It was a business meeting, pretty tedious stuff, really, nothing for you to worry about. But the crux of it is that I sell outboard motors. Let's be honest, you're not reading this little tale to find out the intricate workings of outboard motors, and you certainly are not interested in the minutiae of a business meeting between rival companies that sell outboard motors. So, I'll skip all that, and get to the juicy centre of the story.

Things started going weird on the Saturday after we'd all arrived. The actual meetings weren't to begin until the Monday, which left us the whole weekend to pal around and get to know each other. You know, chill in the sauna the way half naked men seem to like to do, play tennis in the convenient courts located beside the hotel, or just go for a stroll into the nearest little town. Personally I wanted to sit in the dining room all day and look out for Manuel. Well, you would, wouldn't you?

No such luck there, mind. No sign of an ineffectual Spanish waiter at The Cliff's Edge, and the manager of the place was a very polite and outgoing guy, too.

I'd just had breakfast, scrambled eggs on lightly buttered toast and a couple of glasses of milk. As they say, breakfast is the most important meal of the day. And it's something I hold to – indeed I can often be found bitching at people who don't start their day with some food inside them. This all comes about from my brief spell of being a regular attendee at my local gym. I'd not say I was unfit, but I wasn't at my peak either. One of the first things my Personal Trainer said to me was that I needed to eat breakfast regularly. It amazed me that he knew I didn't. He went on to point out that I always looked tired when I got to the gym; I pointed out that was because I often had long days selling stuff to people. He wouldn't have any of it. He assured me that I started out the day tired. And, yep, he was right there. Lack of breakfast, you see. Apparently – heck, not sure why I say *apparently* like it's open to debate,

it isn't, I've checked – having some food in the morning kick starts your metabolism, which has been resting for the last few hours while you've been sleeping. If you don't have some sustenance running through you, allowing your body to metabolise the food, then your entire body will continue on the go-slow all day. Fact. And thus my Personal Trainer was right, and ever since I made a point of eating once I was awake. Even if I was in a rush, I'd make sure I at least had a muesli bar.

So, feeling very much awake and raring to go, I came out of the dining room just in time to catch Mr Padalecki entering the lobby. He was dressed in his tennis whites, so no prize for guessing where he'd been. Bit of a fitness fanatic, really, which came as a bit of mystery to me seeing as he didn't eat breakfast. Something told me that Mr Padalecki, who had a few years on me, would not be around on this little world of ours for longer than I. Still, he seemed a nice enough chap. Like me he had arrived a few days early, so we had the chance to get to know each other a little bit more than the others. I still think of him as Mr Padalecki, even though by Saturday morning we were already on first name terms. Mark of respect, I suppose. It's a thing, as my niece would have said.

'Hey there, Sam,' I said to him.

'Alright, ----,' he said to me, with a wide smile, and after a failed attempt to juggle his tennis racket and bag gave up on the offering to shake my hand. I laughed and asked him if he fancied a meander into town later. We both shared an interest in antiques, and I'd noticed a little shop on the drive here. Mr Padalecki said he'd be more than happy to accompany me once he'd had a shower. No problem, I could find something to occupy me while he was getting rid of all that manly sweat.

I watched him walk away, my eyes lingering on his pert ass beneath his white shorts, and only turned away when he entered the lift. I glanced around the lobby, hoping no one had noticed where my eyes had looked. Not that I'm in denial or anything, it's just there was something about him that I couldn't resist. And yes, it's true; I'm a married man. So sue me.

So, there I was, not much of anything to do except wait. Once I was certain no one was paying me any attention, and why should they, my eyes returned to the lift. Going up, of course. Mr Padalecki was on the first floor, so I guessed he wouldn't be too long. I turned away, intending to find something to occupy me, but before I could come up with anything even remotely interesting there was the ding of a bell and the sliding noise of metal on metal as the lift doors

reopened. I turned around. Maybe Mr Padalecki had left something in the courts.

It wasn't him. A couple emerged from the lift, so caught up in their own world they were totally unaware of this casually dressed thirty-something man watching them. I suspect they were having an affair... only people in the midst of a clandestine affair would be so wrapped up in each other.

For a moment I was puzzled. Surely there had not been enough time for the lift to reach the first floor? I dismissed this. Not like I wasn't in a world of my own for a while there. More time could certainly have passed than I realised.

Once again I turned away from the lift.

\*

**T**ime passed, as it is want to do. At first I wasn't sure how much, since I got caught up in conversation with another hotel guest. It was a bizarre conversation, one in which I spent most of the time nodding and making the occasional agreeable sound, since I barely had a chance to get a word in. This guest, a young lady called Elisa, rambled on about the patterns in life. To be honest I had no idea what she was getting at, since all these patterns she saw were way beyond me. I sometimes think it take a special person to discover the secret patterns of life, other times I just think these people are barking. Elisa was one of the latter, I think, since almost every pattern of hers tended to drift back to the Knights Templar, and somehow they all linked in with song lyrics from R. E. M. and Alanis Morissette, who seemingly talked about the 'original Templar'. She was, I would say politely, totally out there.

Still, if nothing else, it helped me pass the time while I waited for Mr Padalecki. Eventually, I managed to excuse myself, which I did by cunningly introducing her to the wonders of outboard motors. A topic guaranteed to bore the living crap out of anyone, except yours truly. There is only so much deep and meaningful conversation the mind can take before midday, and mine had a full quota already, especially when said deep and meaningful meant nothing to the mind that was forced to take it in. The worst aspect was that, knowing my brain, I'd continue to go back to the fine points of the conversation time and again throughout the day. Like I needed serious thoughts!

So, off she trotted and I returned to the lobby and to the total lack of Mr Padalecki. I

checked my watch. A whole hour had passed with change. I looked around, hoping that Mr Padalecki was elsewhere in the lobby, perhaps in conversation with someone a little more interesting than Elisa. He wasn't. Which puzzled me, cause I honestly couldn't believe he'd have passed me outside without saying a word. We had, after all, spent several hours talking the night before and seemed to be kindred spirits. What was I to do? First thing that came to mind was to see if he'd fallen asleep in his room. It made a certain sense; he could have been more tired from his tennis than he looked.

I walked up to the lift and pressed the call button. And waited. Chewing my lips, trying not to appear anxious or impatient, I watched the indicator above the lift as the light told me it had moved from floor four to floor three. Should be with me in a minute. Or not. Up to fifth, and top, floor. I raised an eyebrow. It stayed at five for a fair while. Finally the light went out again, signalling the lift's descent.

I glanced around the lobby, hoping that no one noticed that I was practically hopping from foot to foot like some school boy about to visit a friend he'd not seen in a long time. Or, perhaps, even visiting Santa.

Looking back, I suppose I did kind of feel like that, too. A feeling I'd not had in a long, long time. And never since.

The light on the indicator never did come back on. I assumed the light had simply broken; either that or the lift had got stuck between floors. Either way, I couldn't wait any more. The stairs were now my only option.

\*

**N**arrow corridors. Hate them, don't you? Hotels have this thing about them. Never quite understood why. After all, looking at The Cliff's Edge from outside it looked frackin' huge, and yet inside there seemed to be no space at all. Makes me wonder where it all goes, cause neither the rooms nor the corridors take up much space. As I made my way down the corridor to Mr Padalecki's room I wished that Doctor Who was real. He could show hotels a thing or two about spatial awareness.

Room 73 was before me. I raised a hand to knock, and for a few worrying moments it remained in mid air, barely an inch from the door. A large part of me wanted to knock, like some previously unknown desire was driving me to see Mr Padalecki in the privacy of his room regardless of what he was doing.

But there was a more cautious part of my brain attempting to hold me back. It was telling me to leave him alone, that this guy was grabbing a few winks after a tiring work out on the tennis courts. And then there was that tiny part of me screaming, telling me to back off, to leave the man alone. And just what the hell did I think I was doing anyway? I had a wife at home!

The cautious part lost, and so did that tiniest scream. My fist rapped on the door. Once, twice. Pause.

There was no answer. I assumed Mr Padalecki was a deep sleeper, so I knocked again, this time a little harder. Still nothing. A third attempt, I decided, then I would go and... well, I didn't know what I would do. But a third attempt was going to be last. This time I added my voice to my efforts.

'Hello, Sam, you ok in there?'

My heart skipped a beat, certain I had heard something move inside the room. 'Hello?' I called again. This time there was nothing.

Head lowered, I turned and began the long walk back to the lift. It was only twenty feet away, but those twenty feet felt like the furthest distance I had ever walked. By the time I was three feet from the lift I heard the creak of metal on metal, and saw the doors slide open. I stopped, hoping to god that Mr Padalecki was going to walk out of there.

Nothing. No Mr Padalecki, no no one. I tenderly approached the lift and looked inside. There wasn't anybody waiting in there. I stepped to enter, deciding I couldn't be arsed to walk back down the stairs, or maybe I could retire to my own room. Wait for a while, then try Mr Padalecki's room again. But as my shoe landed on the minute gap between corridor and lift I stopped.

My breath caught. For a startlingly long second I couldn't breathe at all. It was if the lift had started to close in around me, about to gobble me up like a Sunday roast. My hands rushed to my throat in a mad desire to open an emergency hole to let the air through. But as soon my fingers brushed the skin of my throat the air returned. I staggered back, and fell against the wall.

The lift doors closed. My eyes climbed to the indicator above. No light, no sign that it had been on the first floor at all.

\*

People were lined up in a queue at the reception desk. Judging by the look of them they were all here for the forthcoming conference. You could always tell people who sold outboard motors. Grey people in grey suits. Much like me, really. As I stood there my life flashed before my eyes. It didn't last long at all. A mediocre life as a child, with my father drumming into me the need to be a stable husband, my extremely exciting college business studies course, my marriage to Katie, and our subsequent stable but very dull life together. We never did anything interesting; when I wasn't at work we'd sit at home, watch TV, eat, sleep, and then go back to work the next day. When was the last time we had a holiday? Four years ago, and that was our honeymoon.

A grey man in a grey suit living a grey life.

But Mr Padalecki was different. He hadn't arrived at the hotel in a grey suit. He'd arrived in baggy jeans, a nice tight t-shirt and sunglasses. He didn't carry a suitcase, either. His conference papers were in a trendy off the shoulder bag. It wasn't until I'd got talking to him the previous night that I realised he was one of us, and that he was actually older than me. He could easily have been mistaken for twenty-five.

My eyes skittered to the lift, and my mind returned the worrying absence of Mr Padalecki. I needed to speak to the manager. Since leaving the first floor my mind had been over things several times, and I was now absolutely certain that I had heard a sound in Mr Padalecki's room. The sound of falling.

I didn't want to draw attention to myself, though. Thus I waited, watching as one by one my fellows signed in and picked up their room keys. An interesting insight into the tedium of being a receptionist at a hotel. I could see that the young woman behind the desk was forcing the smile more each time she turned to the next guest. It was good, in a way, to know that it wasn't only my job that was tedious. I felt an affinity with the woman, and was sure we'd meet on common ground over the disappearance of Mr Padalecki. Hopefully it would amount to nothing, a simple case of Mr Padalecki falling asleep and then falling off his bed in surprise at the loudness of my knock. One way or another, for the woman it would be a change from the humdrum of manning the reception desk.

Hang the manager. He probably had a hundred and one things to do anyway. The receptionist needed some spark.

I approached the desk, barely registering the lift doors slide open as I moved within four feet of

them. Had I paid more attention I might have realised that there was no way they should have opened, since only seconds ago the last of the grey suits had entered the lift for his own floor.

I smiled at the receptionist, whose name was Meg according to her badge, and asked, 'Could you tell me if Mr Padalecki has gone out? We were supposed to meet in the lobby but I think I might have missed him.'

She asked me wait one moment while she checked the keys hanging behind her. Hotel rules didn't permit the taking of keys off the premises. As long as you remained in the grounds it was fine, but if you were going beyond you had to return the key to reception. A security measure, probably something to do with fire regulations.

'His key isn't here, which means he's either in his room or on the grounds somewhere.' Meg smiled at me. Her practiced smile.

'Ah.' I paused a moment, wondering if what I had to say next would come out right. 'Well the thing is, I checked on his room a short while ago. You see, when I last saw him he had just returned from playing tennis.'

The sign of recognition came to her face. 'Oh yes, I remember. I saw the two of you talking. You watched him enter the lift, didn't you?' She asked the question with a very innocent voice, but I could tell by the glint in her eyes that she was trying to imply something.

I chose to ignore that. 'Anyway, I checked his room and there was no answer.'

'Did you take the lift?'

'Pardon me?'

'The lift. Did you take the lift to first floor?'

Again her voice was quite innocent, but her eyes narrowed. Somewhere in the back of my mind a small bell of alarm rang. Foolishly I ignored it. I needed this woman's help to find out what had happened to Mr Padalecki. 'No, I took the stairs. The lift was... erm, busy.'

Meg smiled knowingly. 'Then maybe you missed him? He might have taken the lift down here while you took the stairs.'

'He might have, yes. But two things make me think otherwise.'

'Oh yes?'

'Yes. One, if he had returned to the lobby at any time you would have noticed, since you clearly pay *close* attention to your guests' movements when they're down here. And two, I heard a sound when I knocked his door.'

'Oh.'

This little revelation seemed to shut her up for a moment. I watched her reaction, and it occurred to me that I was never going to connect with Meg. Despite the equal tedium of our jobs we had nothing in common. She looked at me as though she was the keeper of particular secret that I had no right to whatsoever.

'Maybe we should check together?'

This time it was my turn to narrow the eyes. The offer of help came a little too quickly for my liking. But how could I turn down such help? I needed to know what had happened to Mr Padalecki.

'That would be... ideal,' I said, once I had decided on the most innocuous word I could think of.

She reached under the desk to retrieve something. I couldn't see what it was, since by the time she returned to an upright position she had deposited it into the back pocket of her skirt. She joined me on the other side of the desk and I motioned her to lead the way. Although she was a good foot shorter than me, and a much smaller build, I still didn't like the idea of her walking behind me. Let alone beside me. I followed her towards the lift.

'I'd rather we took the stairs, actually,' I said just as she pressed a thumb against the call button.

'It's only a lift,' Meg said with a small laugh. 'Do you have claustrophobia?'

I shook my head. 'No, it's not that.'

'What is it, then?'

How could I explain to her? There was something very wrong about this lift. I had no idea what – at the time – but I instinctively knew something was up. Another of the conclusions I had drawn between the time I left the first floor and returned to the lobby. But as I looked at Meg more closely I came to the realisation that she probably had a good idea anyway.

The lift doors opened. Meg waved me in. I eyed her, wondering if I should let her know that I knew something was wrong with this picture. No, not yet. No need to play my hand. Once I saw inside Mr Padalecki's room, sure. But not before then.

'Very well,' I conceded and walked over to the lift. We stepped inside at the same time. I looked around. It was a normal lift, nothing special about it. Just a typical metal box lit from above, with the floor and emergency buttons to the left of the doors. I smiled. Perhaps I was being a little paranoid after all. Someone probably just pressed the buttons before leaving the lift, hence why it opened when no one called it.

The door began to close and I started to settle into that comfortable reasoning. Just then, at the worst possible moment, Meg decided to slip out of the lift. I dashed forward, but wasn't quick enough to prevent the doors from meeting in the middle. I stabbed at the door-open button but there was no response.

I span around, shocked by the abrupt movement of the lift. It was going down. I swallowed hard, doing my best to control my breathing. There was no lower ground floor or basement button, and yet I was most certainly going down.

I closed my eyes. My gym instructor had shown me some meditation techniques, and I just prayed they would be enough to calm me as the metal box and I descended to god knows where.

\*

**E**ventually the lift came to rest. I say eventually as it felt like I was in the box for a long time. It's very possible I wasn't, but my senses were surely playing tricks on me. My distinct uneasiness about the lift was affecting my senses. As I neared my unwanted destination I could have sworn I could smell burning... Not the fumes of a simple fire, rather the same smell you got when you accidentally burned the hair on your fingers when lighting a stove with matches.

With my nostrils full of that smell, my heart started thumping harder as the doors slid open. Whatever was coming next was something to be dreaded, and I surely did. I pulled back, pressing myself against the far wall of the lift as much as was possible. I wanted to get a good look at what was beyond the doors before I committed myself to stepping outside. I had already convinced myself that whether I pressed the ground floor button or not, the lift would not be returning me to terra firma.

What I saw was, I suppose, a cave. Maybe my senses had not been deceiving me after all, since it now seemed that the lift had descended all the way down through the cliff. I sniffed. Mixed in with the smell of burning was a hint of salt. I must have been at the bottom, in a cave near the sea.

I crossed the lift and pressed a button. Just in case. As expected the doors did not close, instead they remained resolutely open. I took a deep breath, and almost gagged with the taste of the burning. The longer I was exposed to the air of the cave, the more

intense the burning became. The cave was saturated in it.

Having no other real choice I stepped out of the lift. It was a cave alright, but whether it was natural or fashioned by human hands I could not tell. Not really my field of expertise. I sold outboard motors, for god's sake, and I was seriously out of my depth.

Nonetheless I continued on. I had to find out what had happened to Mr Padalecki, and I just knew the answer lay further into this cave. I had taken several steps when I heard the unmistakable sound of the lift doors closing, amplified by the echoing void of the cave that surrounded me. I span on my heel, intending to dive into the lift before the doors could meet, but I was too far away. I hadn't realised I'd walked so far, but I had, and I'd need to be Superman to cross the distance between me and the lift in time. Feeling as useless as a screen door on a sub, I watched as the doors sealed my fate.

It was just me and the cave now. And the burning.

\*

**I**t didn't take me too long to find the source of the acrid smell. Whoever was behind all this, and I had my suspicions thanks to Meg's manoeuvring me into the lift, clearly didn't want their... what? Trophies? I wasn't sure. But whatever they liked to call the poor people in the cave, the perpetrators didn't like to walk too far.

Several people were chained to the walls, their arms and legs spread eagle, heads slumped. It was hard to tell if they were alive or dead from my position at the mouth of this little cavern; hard enough to keep looking at them, what with the way they had been skinned. One of them had no skin at all; all that could be seen was the muscles that usually lay undisturbed and protected by the outer layer. There was something incredibly gross and wrong about seeing a body of pure muscle like this. Seeing someone in a naked and vulnerable state was one thing, as the other bodies were, but to see someone stripped to the muscle... I fought the urge to vomit. It was a battle I knew I'd soon lose, but in the meantime out of respect I continued to fight it.

The other people hung to the walls were in various states of being skinned. Whole strips of skin were missing, some across the chest, others along the arms, legs and torso. One unfortunate man had been castrated, too. I winced, my hand gripping my own

privates involuntarily. Although I'd never had anything done to my own personals other than circumcision when I was a kid, I could well imagine how it must have felt to have it cut off. I suppose any man would, wouldn't they?

Nearby, on a large metal table, lay several cutting implements. Knives and saws of varying shape and size. I was surprised to see how clean they were, and then my eyes alighted on the sanitising and disinfecting solutions that also stood on the table. At least the people responsible showed some good sense.

What was I saying? Good sense? How could they possibly justify what had been done to the men on the walls. And yes, it occurred to me then that there were only men in this cavern. No women at all. For a moment I pondered on the idea that perhaps the women were in another cavern. But I soon dismissed that idea. Deep down I just *knew* it was only men who were the victims here.

I approached the table to get a better look at what was on there. I treaded carefully, and quietly. Not sure if any of the men were still alive, I didn't want to cause them further pain by shocking them into movement with any sudden noise.

My heart sank further when I noticed the lack of any anaesthetic on the table. Clean these bastards may have been, but they clearly had no qualms about causing the men pain.

'Who...?' Cough. 'Who are you?'

A simple but very obvious question. I turned from the table, and my mouth fell open. It's one of those things people often say they do in shock, become something of a cliché in fact, but it's true. My mouth really did drop open. Seeing the men hang there, skin torn to shreds, was one thing, but to have one actually speaking to me was another. My eyes drifted to the shuddering rise and fall of his tattered chest. I lifted my gaze onto the man's face, and was hit by the sheer pain etched there. Totally understandable, of course, but I never knew you could really *feel* someone else's pain the way I could then.

I told him my name, not that it was of much use to him. I wondered what I could do for him.

'Are you with them?'

'No,' I replied in a whisper, the anger and disgust bubbling in my tone. 'They trapped me down here.' I looked around. 'Although I have no idea why,' I added, not bothering to hide the fear that had ridden up in me.

The man coughed. 'Divine retribution... That's what they'll call it.'

I approached him, and reached up for the manacles around his wrists. 'Let me get you out of this.'

'No.' He coughed again; this time it came out all ragged, and was followed by a dribble of blood. I reached into my trousers pocket and retrieved my hankie. I dabbed the blood from the side of his mouth, and he smiled at me. It hit me that this was probably the first sign of human compassion he had felt in a long while. My eyes watered at the overbearing sadness of it all. 'Please... kill me.'

I pulled back, a spasm of shock shaking me. I shook my head. I couldn't kill a person. No matter what. I just didn't have it in me.

'Please. Before they come back and finish... this.'

'Look,' I said, a sudden urgency gripping me, 'I came here to find a friend. I'm sure they've brought him here. Is there another cavern like this?'

'Kill me.'

I looked back at the mouth of the cavern. He was sure they were going to return, and that only made me certain, too. I had to find Mr Padalecki before they returned. I sniffed. The smell of salt was stronger now, so I couldn't have been too far from the sea. This meant there had to be another exit from these caves. If I could find Mr Padalecki, then we could...

'It's too late.'

My attention snapped back to man, and my heart was stopped by the look of pure horror on his face. 'What do you...?'

I didn't need to finish my question. I heard the lift doors open a short distance away.

'I have to go.' I reached up a hand and wiped a further dribble of blood off the man's chin. 'I'm sorry.'

With one final look of apology I turned to leave him to his certain death. That brief moment of humanity was going to cost me, since it had given them enough time to reach the mouth of the cavern. A small group of them stood there, completely blocking the only way deeper into the caves. My only escape route.

I recognised them all. Meg the receptionist, the man who kept the tennis courts in order, the waiting staff from the dining room, the chef, and at the head of the small group the manager himself. Each of them was smiling, and the sheer delight in those smiles made my skin squirm.

'Hello, Mr Jensen,' the manager said. 'So nice of you to join us.'

\*

I admit I screamed. Not because of what I saw, so much as because I knew what was coming my way next. They manacled me to the wall, right next to the man I had spoken to. He'd not said a single word since they had entered; he didn't even look my way once during the whole time that they forced me against the wall and ferociously stripped me naked. But I watched him, as Meg carefully sliced a long strip of skin off him, from the left shoulder right down to his waist. He didn't scream, I think he had got so used to it now that he couldn't scream any more. Although the pain he felt was clearly written all over his face. I did scream, however.

Once Meg had finished she held the skin aloft like a trophy. Then, and I have to confess I could not remove my eyes from the spectacle; she put one end in her mouth and started chewing. The old keeper of the courts came over to her laughing, and she nodded at him. My stomach turned as he took the other end of the strip of skin into his own mouth, and together that continued chewing as if the skin was a long piece of spaghetti being eaten by two lovers.

'Why?' I asked.

'Infidelity, Mr Jensen.'

'What? I've never...' A flash of memory; watching the tight ass of Mr Padalecki in his tennis shorts. I swallowed, as the manager nodded. 'But... I didn't do anything.'

'No, but you would have. And now Mr Padalecki will be saved the displeasure of taking part in your infidelity.'

I looked around; checking one last time to make sure Mr Padalecki was not hanging on the wall. 'Where is he?'

'Safe in his room. Meg tells me it was you who almost disturbed me returning him there.'

I was too stupefied to respond to that. So the manager carried on.

'He shall awake in his room, believing he fell asleep after a tiring bout of tennis. He'll have no memory of his brief trip down here.' The manager nodded at the chef. 'Dean here makes the most amazing and potent amnesia pills. Mr Padalecki had to be brought down here to arouse your curiosity. We knew you'd want to know how he could get in a lift one second, and then not be in it the next. But, he is safe now. The lure worked.'

'Congratulations,' I said, trying to sound braver than I felt. 'But he'll be expecting me to meet him.'

'Yes, until Meg explains that you left earlier without any word as to why.'

'Others will miss me. My wife...'

'Will receive a letter from you explaining that you had an affair with another man, and how you could not handle the guilt and so she shall never hear from you again.'

My mouth worked to speak, but I could not find the words.

'You will be missed for a while, but you will soon just become another statistic. One of a million who can't handle their lives and so sink into the underbelly of this wonderful nation of ours. Some times someone will pass a tramp on the street and think they recognise him as you, but they'll ignore that as stupid. You'll soon be forgotten.'

I looked at the man beside me, who now seemed to be unconscious. Knocked out by the pain, no doubt.

'Yes, you will be like these.' The manager indicated his staff. 'We are the avenging angels, seeking divine retribution for the infidelity of man. We have these conferences to seek out those who wish to pervert the sanctity of life. Those who would sleep with others when bound by wedlock, those who climb to their present positions in life by nefarious means. We gather them in, and consume the sin off their flesh.'

Meg and the old man had finished their bizarre meal. The manager walked over to Meg and licked the remaining blood off her lips. He looked back at me and winked. 'You shall make an excellent feast indeed. Your sin is one of desire, and that reeks throughout your body.' He placed an arm around Meg and guided her out of the small cavern. 'We shall return for you.'

And they shall. Of that I have no doubt.

Check out Andy Frankham's new Doctor Who short story, published this month by Big Finish Books in the anthology, *SHORT TRIPS: SNAPSHOTS*, edited by Joseph Lidster. To order a copy visit [www.doctorwho.co.uk](http://www.doctorwho.co.uk)

## STARDUST PREVIEW

By PAUL KANE

Picture the scene: Sunday 3rd June 2007, a private screening room at Paramount Pictures' office in Golden Square, London. A bearded ('I'll have you know *The Guardian* called it a disreputable beardlet!') Neil Gaiman introduces the long-awaited film version of his bestselling fantasy book STARDUST. It's an almost finished cut. Some of the music has been slotted in from other sources, he tells us, like LORD OF THE RINGS, DRACULA and EDWARD SCISSORHANDS – though you'd have to be a real film nut to spot the joins. The lights dim, and suddenly you're aware that something very special is about to greet your eyes...

\*

From the first moment Sir Ian McKellen begins his narration, informing us about a letter sent to an astronomer that is dismissed as pure fantasy, to the fairytale ending that won't see a dry eye left in the house, STARDUST enchants you and doesn't loosen its grip. It's a story of love, honour, coming of age and sowing what you reap. It's by turns funny (you'd know just *how* funny if you'd heard Lenny Henry laughing from behind you in all the right places), thrilling, magical – in more ways than one – and probably the most perfect family film in years. It's also – in Neil's own words – the only British fantasy movie at the moment that's not set in a public school...



For those who don't know the story, Tristan Thorn (Charlie Cox) lives in the sleepy 19th Century village of Wall; which just happens to border the land of Faerie. Your average bumbling teen, he's besotted with the beautiful Victoria (Sienna Miller) and promises to do anything for her if she'll be his true love. At that precise moment, a star falls from the heavens, dislodged by an enchanted amulet that belongs to a dying king (a great cameo by Peter

O'Toole). Tristan promises to bring back the star and give it to Victoria – but what he doesn't realise is that now it's landed on Earth, it's taken human form and is called Yvaine (Claire Danes with blonde hair, now looking remarkably like Gwyneth Paltrow). Not having much success getting past the old guard (David Kelly – remember him from ROBIN'S NEST and more recently WAKING NED?), Tristan uses a magical candle left to him by his mother (Kate Magowan), who is held prisoner on the other side of the great wall, leaving Tristan's father (Nathaniel Parker) pining for her. Thus begins an epic journey that makes Frodo's trek look like a walk in the meadows.

On the way home Tristan and Yvaine encounter a unicorn, sky pirates who harness lightning and are led by Captain Shakespeare (an hilarious performance by Robert De Niro that will be talked about for years to come), a goatman (the fast show's Mark Williams), a smartmouthed trader (Ricky Gervais



in fine form), a witch out to take the star's heart and share it with her sisters (Michelle Pfeiffer's best role since Catwoman, here playing on the Eastwick connection), and the king's sons after the amulet – not all of whom are alive. If Tristan can just get Yvaine to Victoria he can have everything

he's ever wanted... but what if he's changed his mind along the way? And what if, when Yvaine crosses into Wall, she reverts to being simply stardust?

\*

I can honestly say, hand on heart, that I loved this movie. Matthew Vaughn (the director) and Jane Goldman (who co-wrote the screenplay with Vaughn) did an excellent job of bringing the novel to the screen, adding touches that will captivate audiences. The climax is probably the most original I've seen in a long time, and leaves the recent shenanigans of Johnny Depp and co. dead in the water. The main difference is that there's a human story behind it all, an emotional depth that's often lacking in fantasy fare. I defy anyone to come away from the

film and not have a favourite scene or line that will stay with them. The acting is universally top-notch, with Cox and Danes sparking off each other nicely, and the special effects are spellbinding – if you’ll pardon the pun (look out for the bit where Michelle Pfeiffer raises an imaginary inn out of nothing). In addition, the landscapes, sets and costume design are all breathtaking, perfectly capturing the look of the Charles Vess illustrations from the book. The only thing I would have liked to have seen was the talking tree from the novel, based on Neil’s good friend Tori Amos, but if she wasn’t available to record the lines it wouldn’t have been the same anyway.

While MIRRORMASK was written by Neil, visually it belonged to long-time collaborator Dave McKean. STARDUST, however, is pure Gaiman and hopefully will be the start of many successful adaptations of his work for the big screen. I really can’t recommend it highly enough. If it’s a great time at the flix you’re after you’ll get yourself to your local cinema when this comes out on general release.

**STARDUST is on general release, summer 2007.**

<http://www.shadow-writer.co.uk>

All images are © 2007 Paramount Pictures

## KRILL

By DAVID BROOKES

Earth could be seen as a star just behind the red pinprick of Mars. If the sun was shining just right, as it currently was, then the glare from the gigantic bulk of Jupiter was minimised; the planet hung dark and near invisible above, almost close enough to touch, dizzyingly huge; and there was Earth, just another star, but if you knew where to look and how to angle your scope, there it was. Home.

Leuk Adams tried to ignore Jupiter as best he could. It was a challenge to be sure, attempting to give the cold shoulder to something over 140 thousand kilometres in diameter, which was close and large enough to always be visible no matter where on its little moon one stood. Even here, in Europa's cold, thin atmosphere, with the gulf of space between them, Leuk still got the impression that the breeze blowing through his sparse, damp hair was a throw-off from the Big J itself, whipped up during one of its massive, century-long storms, and cast through the vacuum all the way over there.

Leuk was fishing in Europa's water. The moon, entirely ice on its surface, was a near-perfect sphere of water. As far as the team had discovered, its core was quite possibly liquid as well, but – astonishingly for an ice moon – made of molten rock rather than water. There was quite possibly not a single lump of stone anywhere on or inside it.

But there was plenty of water, in which Leuk fished. The rod was made of titanium, and was five metres long; its line was steel cable a centimetre thick. Anything less would be frozen to a state so brittle that it would snap as soon as the old man pulled to retrieve his catch. His brown, paper-skinned hands clung to the titanium, protected from the cold by the thermal webbing he wore like a wire-boned catsuit beneath his coats. Its power source, clipped to his belt, also bled electricity into the energy field that protected him, invisibly, from the harmful atmosphere. Nanites worked ceaselessly to bring oxygen in from outside the field, passing the molecules down the line into Leuk's mouth and lungs.

The thermal webbing, being new, was itchy. His old skin hadn't grown accustomed to it yet; it was why he was outside, making it work overtime so that

he could properly break the thing in. Once he had done, it would function perfectly for another ten years. It was the third time he'd worn new thermal webbing since his arrival on Europa.

Nothing biting, he thought. Of course, there was nothing in these oceans that he hadn't put there himself.

The balmy, peaceful morning was broken by whooping and hollering from behind. The operations centre – the building where the small science team ate, slept and everything else – was buried deep down in the ice. Its elevator let the team out just behind where Leuk now sat; today it was letting out Chris and Waldo, the team's bright young pair of promising minds.

'Boo-ya!' cried Chris, flinging an object onto the ice and stamping on it.

Waldo did the same, yelling in glee. He hefted a large sledgehammer high above his head, and brought it down sharply on the object.

The two lads had just received their new webbing. The wire bones were hollow, micro-fibrous conduits for a crystal-based fluid that began life as a solid mineral. When the webbing arrived, it was filled with the solid crystal, and completely stiff; only when the crystal was broken did it release its slow-burning heat, melting itself into liquid and providing a decade's worth of heat at a steady thirty degrees Celsius – just enough to keep warm.

The boys had just been told the fantastic news that the best way to break the solid crystal was to take it outside and smash it with something heavy.

They're enjoying themselves, Leuk said to himself. Let them.

Chris gave it four or five heavy blows before he heard the first definite *crunch*, and then lifted up the webbing and shook it. It flopped in the air, thoroughly broken. His friend and colleague watched and shivered as Chris put it on, feet first and then stretching it up to his neck. The sleeves were narrow and sticky, but he got his hands through and clapped them together. He was warm almost instantly, and laughed as the bitterness of the European air evaporated from his bloodstream.

Waldo was following suit. His real name – William – had been replaced by the unofficial moniker long ago due to his love for a pair of mechanical arms he wore to augment his own. The waldoes – bulky, stainless steel gloves that fastened around the back of his shoulders – were a tool so useful during manned excavations that he had elected to wear them continually after the first month. The left arm was a wrench-shaped claw equipped with a retractable shovel

thumb and standard grasping/clamping capabilities. He used it to dig and pick up his pints. The right arm was an intricate thicket of manipulators, hand-shaped with each finger able to unfold and become two, and each of those able to do the same ... The manufacturer's guarantee had promised that the lasers, lamps and drills would work perfectly for the first forty years after purchase – after that there was a minor risk of the delicate manipulators developing fractures.

William 'Waldo' Mitchell ordered his artificial arms to scrunch his webbing like a paper towel, and then carefully dressed himself. He revelled in the renewed warmth the catsuit granted him.

'Enjoying the morning, Mr A?' Chris called over, performing his warm-up routine barefoot on the ice.

'I am fishing,' Leuk said simply, and smiled his wrinkly smile.

'Not many fish over here,' Waldo commented, pulling on a pair of regular trousers over his webbing. 'Not much at all, 'cept what we brought.'

'I am not fishing for sponges or coral, Master Mitchell. I am fishing for fish.'

The boys looked at each other. Leuk knew as well as they did that there were no fish in the deep, freezing European ocean. The team had been stationed here fifty years previously to determine just that, and had quickly surmised that there was nothing living down there. They had scanned, searched and excavated every crack and cavern on the soft, slushy seabed – and unless there was something out there could withstand the pressure of ninety billion tons and a thousand degrees, there was nothing beneath that slush either. No animal life, marine or otherwise; no flora of any kind. The oceans were wholly barren.

'Heads up, anyhow,' Chris said, scratching his face. He lost the two smallest fingers on his right hand to frostbite not too long ago. It was an episode that was rarely talked about; the team, out of respect for Chris' pride and his startling intelligence, never mentioned the incident or his fingers when he was around.

'Expedition this afternoon at one gee-em-tee. We're sending another probe down under the Pwyll crater – takin' the hummer. Karlson says you're to come along too.'

Leuk nodded in acknowledgement. It had been over three weeks since the last probe had been

pushed under the ice, and the US mandate stated that the oceans were to be scanned for life periodically on a monthly basis. The best the team expected was a stray amoeba or – dare they hope? – a multi-cellular organism. They had, of course, found nothing but silt and compressed chunks of sodium chloride.

\*

‘Krill,’ said Karlson’s pale face on the screen. ‘I’m in Hydroponics.’

The face disappeared, leaving Leuk staring at a grey rectangle on the lobby wall, at the entrance to the operations centre. The centre was embedded nine kilometres beneath the ice, fingered through the moon’s crust like a meerkat’s estate, tunnels and walkways and round, bulbous annexes pushing beneath the surface through the ice’s natural cracks and passageways. As the pressure beneath the freezing sea swelled and shrank in its natural cycle, the ice above was flexed into sheets and splinters, forming sharp channels and wormholes kilometres long. The centre’s components had been dropped through from the surface and assembled piece by piece, developing like fat inside arteries.

It had been Karlson who had sponsored the centre in its initial stages. The man’s massively lucrative business empire had provided funds for the equipment, the space travel expenses, the crew, the research costs ... Leuk had often wondered why the man himself had demanded that he come along on the expedition. When the whole project was estimated to last another forty years minimum, with the option for a return trip only once a decade, Leuk found Karlson’s insistence in the matter strange, if not downright suspicious.

As the old man made his way towards the Hydroponics laboratory, the speakers mounted on the ceiling announced fortnight-old news headlines, beamed directly from Earth by radio:

‘AUSTRIAN DIPLOMAT ASSASSINATED OVER KOPECK ALLEGATIONS: HIGH SENATOR THOMAS WOLDHEIM WAS SHOT TO DEATH LAST NIGHT – THE PERPETRATOR OF THE ATTACK IS UNKNOWN, BUT AUSTRIAN POLICE OFFICIALS BELIEVE IT TO BE CONNECTED TO THE RECENT REVELATION THAT IT WAS AN AUSTRIAN CIVILIAN WHO BOMBED THE BRITISH HEADQUARTERS OF—’

He stopped walking just outside of the residential quarters. A woman with shoulder-length,

tightly braided hair greeted him, clasping one of his hands in both of hers. It was Doctor Branard.

'Hello, Leuk,' she said, giving him one of her best, indifferent smiles. 'Has the great Director Karlson summoned you?'

'That's right.'

'Be warned: he's in one of his moods.'

Imogene Branard was a tan, warm-faced woman of twenty-seven, and had been for the past six years. She had designed the 'age retardant enhancers' that suspended her youth, working as part of a small group of medications specialists in Toronto. Her sharp mind, which had won her numerous qualifications across several fields, had stumbled across the radiation-based enhancement therapy during a project focussing on the treatment of severe burns. Although her face and body remained unlined and moderately toned, Leuk had always felt that he could see her age through her expressionless mask of a face, in her eyes and the way she moved. Her body and mind would wither with time like anyone else's, and Branard knew it; that she would look good during this internal degeneration was a small consolation. The woman appeared vibrant, warm and content, but her motives for running the scientific operation on Europa were rooted in her own self-desire to create a legacy for herself. It made her appear cold.

'I'd give him a few minutes,' she advised, stroking a braid behind her ear. Her eyebrows were lowered in a scowl. 'Maybe you could look over the notes for today's expedition. Mitchell should have told you that you were coming along.'

He nodded, but ignored her advice. By the time the sound of her heels had echoed into silence, he proceeded to Hydroponics and met with Karlson as agreed.

The air of the lab was steamy, making for light-headed breathing. Leuk walked between aisles of green foliage, the chloroplast-swollen leaves of water-grown plants. Hundreds of tiny cuttings were being specially reared for the Artic environment, and left to grow within transparent plasti-plex containers, their white roots pressed against invisible barriers. Leuk had known from the beginning that flora grown in such ways would be stunted, and destined for quick decay on Europa's unsympathetic surface. He had never said anything, even to Doctor Branard, who was the green-fingered mother of the command centre.

'Krill,' Karlson said, his voice coming from somewhere behind the thick veil of steam. He

stepped into view, his hands in his pockets, and repeated his favourite nickname for Leuk. 'Krill, you took your time.'

'I ran into the doctor.'

'We spoke,' said Karlson, gesturing to the far wall. There was a pair of ruptured plasti-plex trays lying in pieces on the floor: the result of one of the frequently violent 'conversations' between the centre's founder and its leader.

Doctor Branard and he had a curious relationship, one minute tearing out each others' throats, the next holed up in one of the residential quarters for nights. Once, Leuk had found Karlson outside, on the ice. His ass cheeks had been frozen to the ground, his protective energy field switched off.

'Help me up,' he'd ordered.

'What are you doing?'

'Help me up. Have you seen that bitch Branard? Where is she? Careful, my cheeks are stuck!'

'I haven't seen her,' Leuk had said.

'When you do, tell her that's the last time. Clever bitch did this on purpose, got me down here like a prick, glued to the ice.' The skin came free with a rip. 'I should've known. She never goes on top.'

It had been one of the many amusing incidents involving Karlson, ones which Leuk's conscience prevented him from talking about. Each one had served to reduce Karlson's credibility with Leuk, and it made the man's violent mood swings seem a little less frightening.

'You wanted to see me,' Leuk said, touching one of the plants.

'I did. I understand you've been informed about our visit to the Pwyll crater this afternoon.'

Leuk gave the affirmative.

'I just wanted to let you know that I don't approve of your being there.'

Karlson's face dripped with sweat and moisture from the air. His pale face, which was also a stark contrast to the blacker-than-black slick of hair, wore its usual expression of calm world-weariness. Leuk drank in the disapproval without a word; he was used to it.

'To be fair, you don't really have a place on this team, do you? Let's be honest, the both of us. We already have four great minds on this rock,' he said, referring to himself, Branard, and the two youths, 'and it's not as though you're heavy with qualifications now, is it? If I was to be brutally truthful – and I am being, here – I'd say you were only tossed into the mix here just to add a touch of colour.'

It was a backhanded allusion to Leuk's Inuit ethnicity, and Leuk knew it. He'd been born and raised on the tundra in Quebec, but he wasn't sheltered and he wasn't stupid. He had been fully aware of the world's intolerance for the physiologically different when he'd first fallen into the urban net of Canada, and later North America. It was one of society's maladies that had never quite been cured; only treated until the symptoms diminished. And now, the purist philosophies of Karlson and his vast enterprise were rearing their ugly heads.

'Of course,' the entrepreneur continued, 'you've been here much longer than I have. You know the surrounding area at a radius of twenty miles.'

'Thirty,' Leuk corrected.

'Of course,' Karlson conceded. 'Thirty mile radius. You've got a map of Pwyll in your head to the standard of most satellite images. It's no wonder that Branard wants you on this excavation.'

Leuk looked up sharply. "Excavation"? I thought this was a standard expedition.'

Karlson pursed his lips, making Leuk smile inwardly. Even the figurehead of a massive international business empire – a man whose first language is rhetoric – lets slip sometimes.

'We're going to make another core of the ice,' Karlson explained reluctantly. 'The last one we did was only three hundred metres. I want us to reach five this time.'

'We nearly had a cave-in when we hit three hundred metres. The ice is too fractured to drill that deeply, not from the surface.'

'That's why we're going to the impact crater,' said Karlson. 'The crust there is riddled with prefabricated holes and tunnels. We're going spelunking. And then we're going to dig until we hit water.'

Leuk almost choked. The ice at the Pwyll crater, where a meteor had hit the moon sometime in its recent past, was thinner than in most places. The shallow pool where Leuk had fished that morning was overflow from the ocean through twenty kilometres of almost-solid ice; the ocean itself was almost completely inaccessible, safe within its shell, and although the team had been there over three decades – its members changing from time to time due to disinterest, semi-madness or, in one case, death – they had only managed to aquaform the moon via molecular displacement.

That was the centre's primary goal – to establish a liveable foundation for a larger human colony on Europa – but so far it had, in the eyes of the general public at least, failed. Minor displacement bolts through the ice, in which energy fields ripped microscopic organic matter apart and fed it through the crust's system of cracks until it hit the ocean floor, had managed to plant a few sea sponges and coral clusters, but little else. The scientific community knew that this was a massive achievement; it also knew that the centre's true objective – forced upon it by none other than the Karlson business empire, which threatened the withdrawal of funds – was to discover and, if possible, capture, clone and export any native life form.

It was distressing for Leuk to imagine the team forcing open that much unstable ice just to 'hit wet', as it was often put by Chris Abnett, their youngest colleague. There was little to gain and much to lose by such ambition.

'We've already scanned the entire ocean,' Leuk pointed out unnecessarily.

'It's not the same as seeing it,' Karlson countered. 'Besides which, the scans aren't one hundred percent accurate. We could have missed something.'

Leuk didn't have to remind himself that they'd missed nothing. The scans were accurate to above ninety-nine percent, and had been repeated many times over the preceding few decades. The improvement in technology had not yielded any new information, and Leuk was positive that it never would. On top of which, the scans hadn't even been compromised by the crust's layer: by changing frequencies they could look right through it as if it wasn't there, in the same way an X-ray sees through flesh.

Karlson sifted through the leaves of one of the moisture-rich plants. He peered calmly at the water droplets on his fingers, before sucking them dry. As he lowered his head, Leuk caught a flash of yellow light from the man's scalp – the metal headset Karlson wore so that he could contact his senior staff no matter where he was on Earth, or otherwise. It punched subspace molecules in very particular – and private – patterns, transmitting a type of vibratory Morse code beneath space to similar instruments back home. They translated his thoughts and sifted through the meaningless mental clutter, screening the mess for orders and updates before sending it to the relevant parties.

Karlson wasn't aware of the extent of Leuk's knowledge on the matter. Leuk had casually gleaned all the information regarding the outfit's generous benefactor from other team members long ago, including the disturbing facts about his corporation's senior staff: every one of them, all two hundred or so individuals around the globe, had agreed to a minor procedure involving the implantation of Karlson's cloned brain tissue and a certain degree of genetic modification. It meant that on the top floor of every Karlson Enterprises headquarters, there was a little bit of Richard Karlson II waiting to receive pseudo-psychic orders from their wonderful Director. It upset Leuk to know that any man, in the pursuit of personal growth, could spread himself so thin.

'I wanted to tell you in person,' Karlson said, rubbing his moist fingers together, 'that you're coming along too this time. If Branard insists you come along then I want to see that you're worth the money I'm spending up here. Wrap up warm, okay?'

Leuk pressed his lips together. 'Okay,' he said.

\*

**W**aldo Mitchell had come prepared. His mechanical arms had been modified specifically for the trip. For now, they clung to the side of the hovercraft just for safety's sake, like everyone else. However, should the need arise, they would segment, reconfigure and unfurl into scoops, lasers, drills, and any other excavation equipment Leuk could think of.

It was fascinating watching the young man at work. His self-designed manipulators were at the pinnacle of the technological mountain, even way out here. Ten years ago, the blond, muscular youth had opted to climb aboard a shuttle and rocket over to one of Jupiter's more interesting moons. The tools had been state of the art then. Somehow, even without further stepping-stones laid down by Earth's foremost scientists, he had still managed to create and modify instruments to increasingly modern specifications. Leuk wouldn't have been surprised if the boy returned home at the end of his contract – in another ten years' time, permitting the usual extenuating circumstances outlined in the agreement – and found the place scientifically boring and behind the times.

Beside him, jolting in his seat by the craft's uneven passage over the ice, sat Chris, who was absently holding one hand in the other, where his

fingers used to be. With every journey across the ice he displayed the same uninhibited anxiety. Everybody noticed, especially Doctor Branard, who was attuned to such things. Scientifically cold though she may be, the good doctor was a woman in body and mind, and a mother at heart. She had a child waiting back home, who would be a decade older by the time she returned on the next shuttle when her contract expired. She saw Chris' discomfort and resisted the urge to reach out and embrace him. It would have been the human thing to do, but scientists and doctors have never been fully human, not on the outside where it counts, where a professional manner takes front seat to empathy, and where the empirical side of the brain was beefier and a colder shade of grey.

Waldo touched Chris' arm with his flesh-and-blood fingers, the titanium shovel folded back against his wrist. Chris didn't respond outwardly, but a mildly uncomfortable smile flickered on his face to show that he was grateful for the concern. Waldo had always looked after Chris, from the moment they'd taken the shuttle together and Chris had gotten fiercely travel sick. Waldo had been there as the boy knelt, throwing up, holding back his unfashionably long hair, his glasses high on his head.

Chris was one of the other members of the team who still called Leuk Krill, on account of his being the most insignificant member of the team – Karlson's words, not Chris'. It was a cruel nickname and one that had already stuck before Chris and Waldo had arrived. Unfortunately, despite Chris' genius, his capacity for unwitting faux pas was staggeringly high. Waldo steered him through the worst of it, and only Doctor Branard ever took offence.

Branard and Karlson, the senior two members in this team of five, sat on opposite ends of the hovercraft. Branard was at the helm, reinforcing as always her position as leader of the centre. Karlson sat at the back with his arms folded, looking for all the world like a child in a strop, having to make do as mere owner and beneficiary of the entire operation.

Karlson resented Branard's superiority. The two had resorted to shouting matches on occasion, out of sight of the others (of course) but always within earshot. Leuk could have been swimming in the depths with several kilometres of frozen landmass between him and them, and still would have been in earshot. Branard's tactic was to put him in his place as quickly and as loudly as possible, throwing even the most irrelevant or dishonest insult in the hope of touching a nerve and compelling Karlson to silence. The man himself often adopted an infuriating veneer of calm and

reason, subtly chipping away at the doctor's confidence and patience. Leuk would have employed neither tactic; but then, he was only Krill after all. Even Branard called him Krill when she wasn't thinking.

A tremor rattled the hovercraft. The corrugated flap of the air cushion beneath the seats rippled as it struggled to adjust to the unexpected vibrations, listing slightly. Waldo and Leuk leant back to avoid slipping out of their safety webbing as Chris, tilting backwards with the angle of the craft, gripped tightly to the edge of his seat.

'What the fuck is this?' Karlson snapped, hunkering slightly at the stern. His voice rattled with the quivering vehicle.

'Having some trouble,' Branard called over her shoulder. Leuk saw her hands, tightly gripping the steering column as she struggled to regain control of the craft. 'Hold tight!' she called.

The craft hit something on its starboard side, and the centre of gravity shifted upwards until the thing was at ninety degrees. Chris, his hair whipping painfully about his face, reached for a safe purchase as he found himself almost on his back, his skull ten inches away from the rushing ice; something click-snapped through the air and glittering metal appendages clipped onto Chris' shirt. A dozen reflective fingers unfolded from Waldo's arm and secured a place in the material that kept Chris warm.

Waldo smiled down at his colleague, arm outstretched and manipulators clamped safely to his best friend. Chris managed a breathless grin and held tightly onto Waldo's powerful arm.

The craft was turning in a fast arc, scraping unhealthily against the jagged ground. A sound like thunder filled Leuk's ears, and in a sudden updraft of air came a torrent of fresh, blue water. It launched forty feet upwards and then crested, crashing down beside the craft and drenching them with frosty spume. The ice was rupturing; it cracked again, and there was that sound of thunder beneath them, and water spilled out of the chasm and launched in a geyser, sending a fine azure mist over the ice that began to freeze almost instantly.

The hovercraft, controlled by Branard's merely adequate skills, aquaplaned as it thumped back into place, horizontal once more, yet still out of control, with a clutch of frightened, confused people lying slackly inside. Twin wings of sparkling water rose and seemed to twist as the craft spun around in a dizzying helix. The geyser, now twenty metres behind them and blotting out the distant, crushed-ice

sculptures of the mountain range to the South, frothed with jets of white. Somewhere within the tails and folds of rushing water Leuk caught a glimpse of a dark shape, perhaps a trick of the light cast from the sunlight thrown from the massive face of Jupiter; the shape writhed, wormlike amidst the blue-white sprays, and vanished.

The geyser began to settle, and the overflowing water became lumpy with slush, rocking the craft as it slipped beneath its air cushion. The crew relaxed their grips as the craft slowed and scudded across the ice; the noise of the rupturing water died quickly down, and all became silent again.

'What,' said Branard, 'the *hell* ... just happened?'

\*

**T**he air was thick. Karlson sat on the side of the exhausted hovercraft, throwing vibratory signals through subspace. He was letting his others know what had happened, alerting both the custodians of his business empire and the military founders of the European enterprise of the development:

Something had happened on this God forsaken chunk of ice, and it might mean something big.

'Tidal currents,' Chris was saying. 'Convection bringing a sudden draught of water to the surface, hitting a weakened section of the crust.'

'That's unlikely,' Waldo pointed out. He was refastening a panel in the craft's dash after inspecting it for damage. 'We've been looking at this place for two centuries and there's not been anything as ... violent as that.'

'But we know that there's a regular overflow that seeps up and restores the ice. That's why there are so few craters. And all these scars on the surface.'

'You're talking about a surge in the core of the moon,' Branard said, dismissing the notion. She spoke almost with disdain. 'Why would there be an influx in the core temperature? And why would the ice be weak enough to rupture, when it's several kilometres thick all round? And how come we, or the former members of this team, have been here fifty years and never seen anything like this?'

'All right,' Chris murmured, 'I was only thinking aloud.'

Leuk peered across the flat terrain of the ice. It reminded him tremendously of his junior years in Quebec, on the tundra where life was all fish and seal blubber, sunrise and snowfall. He didn't miss the simple life – he was a scientist, after all, and American

trained – but he missed having a true home, and his heart ached to see his two grandchildren again, whom he had not spoken to or seen in the thirty years he'd been at the centre.

Jupiter loomed, a dominating presence watching over them with a gigantic, stormy eye.

'There's no use in being so aggressive,' Karlson was saying to Branard, half-concentrating.

'I'm not being aggressive about anything. We're all trying to get to the bottom of this – and you aren't helping, sitting there sending your reports.'

'There's more to this centre than aquaforming.'

'And there's less to you than you like to think there is,' she replied sharply. She was testing the yoke on the craft, and its air cushion swelled and sank on each side, tilting them all momentarily.

Karlson turned. He had been surveying the landscape with a mild curiosity, reassessing the familiar environs. Something had changed, he thought, to have allowed the water to burst forth like that.

He opened his mouth to speak, but Waldo cut in.

'Doctor, come over here please.'

'What's the matter?'

Chris, slumped against the side of the hover, glanced at her and attempted a smile, but his situation wouldn't allow it; his body was trembling violently. His lips, pressed together into a shallow M shape, were quickly transposing from pink to a blotchy bruise-colour.

'The spray got under his suit,' Waldo explained levelly. He turned to the doctor. 'But that's only a guess.'

Branard took Chris' hand and pressed it between both her palms. The skin felt thick and taught.

'Freezing,' she said, and proceeded to examine Chris' pupils.

'It's not the spray.'

Both the doctor and Waldo faced Leuk. 'Then what is it?'

'It's the webbing itself. The solution hasn't broken properly. Look.'

The veins in the thermal webbing were lumpy and strained. The rubber-plastic compound was stretched and aneurismal. Chunks of undissolved crystal were making the suit embolic.

We've got to get him back to the centre,' Waldo said. 'Come on.'

'Wait a second – we're on an expedition here,' Branard snapped, but even before she had completed the sentence she knew that it was the wrong thing to say, that the man was more important than the mandate, and that her conscience wouldn't permit taking the youth any further. She relented almost instantly.

'All right, let's turn around,' she said. 'There's thermofoil in the compartment beneath Karlson. Karlson, get up.'

'I don't need telling,' he told her patiently.

'No, I mean get out of the craft. You're carrying on.'

'I hope, with all my heart and for the sake of this enterprise, that you're joking.'

'I'm not.'

Branard's face was stolid enough to convince them all. Waldo was looking up as he unfolded the foil blanket, in order to gauge the reaction of the others; clearly, Leuk thought, he didn't agree with the leader's decision either.

'Imogene,' Karlson said, systematically checking his webbing with a barely restrained rage, 'I understand that this is your last month with the centre. And I also understand that, at least to your eyes, this venture has achieved nothing but the most basic of our objectives. But I will not—' here he looked up, and his blue eyes seemed to flash, 'will *not* obey ridiculous orders such as that after this fucking *ill* portent.'

Chris emitted a weak-willed cheer.

Branard attempted to stare Karlson down, but he wasn't to be cowed.

'Shall I draw attention to your neuroses?' he asked. His voice, had Leuk been listening with his eyes closed, portrayed a person with unflinching self-control. Karlson's hands, however, were curled into fists and quivering.

'I could mention that obsession with your personal legacy, if you like. Explain to the others, although they already know, I'm sure, about how you—'

'I could give you an order as commander of this 'venture',' Branard snapped. 'Which I am. Right now. And I could also *draw attention* to the fact that while ever you're transmitting with that headset of yours, anything that passes through your mind will be included along with the rest of your mental waste. So, as far as our government overseers are concerned, if you *don't* go where I tell you, it'll amount to a court martial offence and you'll probably be put to trail, and likely lose all control over your business assets.'

Leuk restrained a smile; he felt a massive 'so there' hanging on the cold breeze that blew around them all. Branard had Karlson's number, and he knew it. The thickness in the air dropped almost immediately as Karlson grudgingly relinquished the connection he had with his colleagues.

'God help you, Imogene,' he said lowly. He was already tightening the minute straps on his thermal webbing and yanking another foil blanket out of the compartment. Branard ignored the threat.

'We need to get moving,' said Waldo. He looked pale, kneeling over Chris' supine form. With the manipulators folded back, he could clasp his friend's hands in his own without the titanium appendages getting in the way.

Chris didn't look well. The discolouration of his lips had now spread to his skin; his face was a pallid grey-yellow, the moisture drawn in by his body in order to protect itself from the biting winds. He, like everyone else, wore an energy field that followed every contour of his body, and was sophisticated enough to even dip into his pores. It was this piece of technology - astonishing by Earth standards, but something the centre's team had lived with since their arrival half a century ago - that was keeping him alive, shielding him not only from the damaging air and radiation but now from the balmy temperatures. Even so, without the warm embrace of the thermal webbing, it was not enough.

'Come on,' Waldo urged.

'You're coming with me,' Karlson said sharply. 'You as well, Krill.'

'I'm going back with Chris,' Waldo told him.

He stood up; although being one of the most intelligent and compassionate men Leuk had ever met, he was also young, brash and - at times - overconfident. Waldo took two strides towards Karlson and stood so that their chests were almost touching, favouring a physical threat over an intellectual joust.

Karlson stared at him for a moment, but didn't back down. He said; 'I won't be bullied. I paid for everything from your bed to your food, for the paper you wipe your ass with. I fund this entire operation, and I say that you're coming with me. Doctor Branard is not the only one with a stake in this excavation. One injured man isn't worth delaying a delicate operation.'

'So I take it this thing's all set up then, is it? All the equipment, all the plans and safety measures—'

'Have been taken care of. Just because today was the first you've heard of this doesn't mean the idea just popped into my head in the shower this morning.'

Waldo looked at Branard. The commander was the only one of them, apart from Karlson, who demanded to be alerted to any new plans, who would know in advance of the other staff. 'Is this true?'

She nodded.

'And am I needed there?'

'We need someone to take care of the hardware out there,' she admitted quietly. 'Don't worry, William. I'll take good care of Chris. And I'm taking the craft, so we won't be having any problems.'

\*

**T**hree men crossed the Arctic plains on foot. A compass/altimeter in Waldo's arm-mounted wrist display showed them the direction, leading them further across the white plain and towards the Pwyll crater.

The landscape idled by. The land looked bluer than the sky. A flat, uninteresting horizon was broken only by the occasional points of distant mountains, pale incisors beneath the vast, revolving body of Jupiter. The planet's dozen layers of atmosphere moved at independent speeds, caught in strata of wind too fast to be home to anything but the gasses the mass was made of.

Leuk thumped his old fist against his thermal webbing. It was a trick he taught the others when they'd arrived, to stir up the liquid compound so that it would produce more heat. It was one of those things one couldn't quite measure, whether or not it worked. It probably did not, but if the mind said that your body was warmer ...

'I'm getting tired of this,' Karlson said, pulling his feet through two feet of fresh slush. It rarely snowed on Europa; the atmosphere merely churned up loose ice and deposited it somewhere else. Karlson continued. 'All this shit that bitch keeps dealing out. Like she owns the place.'

'Without order ...' Waldo said, wisely. In lieu of a leader the place wouldn't last long, not when the only place for disgruntled staff to sulk was a white plateau at less than 260 degrees below.

'Fuck order.'

'I'm only saying. You can't expect to bully her into letting you do what you want. Besides, I bet you got enough of that back home.'

‘Watch your mouth,’ snapped Karlson, his eyes fixed straight ahead. ‘I can arrange for your shuttle to crash on the trip home, you know.’

Waldo shot him a look. It was the sort of glance that would have cut a red line down the cheek of anyone else, but Karlson wasn’t easily intimidated. He was not physically impressive – especially compared to Waldo’s youthful bulk – although he radiated good health. It wasn’t surprising; he could buy everything from manicures and plastic surgery to genetic modification and bone reconfiguration. He shared that inexhaustible wealth with his senior staff, who had already undergone similar treatment to allow the safe transplant of Karlson’s cloned brain tissue, and although they retained a certain sense of individual self, they were all essentially Karlson. They had his money, his privileges, his looks. A lot of them were reputed to have adopted his tastes and mannerisms.

Karlson was transmitting again. Leuk felt that peculiar thickening of the air and the distinct cloy at the back of his mind that he always had when Karlson was sharing his thoughts. Since the accident during the first leg of the journey he had been transmitting almost non-stop.

He didn’t attempt to respond to Waldo’s disapproving glare. He was far too busy formulating plans, and most likely using his others to sharpen his wit in preparation for the final assault on Doctor Branard, when he would remove her from power altogether. Whether or not Karlson actually had that much clout in the scientific and military fields, Leuk didn’t know. But it was a possibility.

Leuk looked back to his time on Earth. It had been a long, exhausting period. He was the best marine biologist on the planet at one stage, and had won prizes and awards, and once – like Karlson – owned his own enterprise. It had been short-lived, soon enveloped by larger corporate edifices and taken out of his hands. He was old, now. He had been middle-aged when he’d left for Europa. Now he was frail and fatigued and he no longer trusted the technology that was supposed to be keeping him alive. The energy fields were meant to protect his organics from the harsh radiation that was blowing over the surface of the moon, but he often felt distrustful of the fact, looking at how the people here had deteriorated during their stay. Maybe the radiation was leaking in. Maybe, faster than the natural rate, they were all dying.

Back home he had children and grandchildren. The latter had been reduced to one,

an angry son who had returned to Quebec after learning of his heritage, and blamed Leuk for forcing him to confront the evils of the supposedly civilized world. The wife of Leuk’s son had been murdered by drug users for the contents of a purse.

The grandchildren were Leuk’s world. Forget the soft, white landscape of Quebec and Canada. Forget anything but their vigour and zeal and seemingly innate defences against the many temptations among which they lived. The two youngsters, a boy and a girl, lived with their father as Inuit. Their rapidly westernised habitat was swamped by the unlawful overspill from the US, the victim of dealers and whore managers and spokespeople for every other vice one could think of. Leuk despaired for their world, but he loved them for their resilience. He longed to see the twins again, who were now fully grown adults, who (probably) had families of their own, and who (hopefully) missed their favourite grandfather, who last time they met had bought them Happy Meals with milkshakes.

They were in sight of the crater. It had no lip, and was invisible from the ground; only when they were within a mile could they see that part of the surface was missing – a huge, circular depression in the ice. It was half a mile deep, and had once been deeper. Most likely it was the result of a meteorite impact, one of the few pieces of evidence that Europa had ever encountered any such objects. Most meteorites punched into the ice and sprung water, which rose to the surface and repaired the damage, leaving nothing but a silver, glasslike scar.

At the centre of the depression was amassed a mess of excavation equipment, the detritus from an attempt that had been aborted earlier in the year. The drill had punctured only so far before causing instability within the crater that had reached dangerous levels; the plug had been pulled, and the equipment covered, strapped up and left there with a minimal energy field protecting it from the worst of the weather.

Leuk, Karlson and Waldo approached the downward slope. It rolled away from them, concave and slippery, reflecting the grey-white sky. Leuk pressed a button and his boots extended two-inch spikes. The others did the same, and they descended.

As they entered the crater, they could see and hear a water geyser, spurting lethargically about halfway to the horizon.

‘Two in one day,’ said Waldo. He was mainly concentrating on his descent, walking almost sideways on the steep decline.

'Just keep moving,' Karlson replied. The air around him was thrumming. It was beginning to make Leuk feel ill in his stomach.

Leuk tried to think of home. The descent into the crater unsettled him; it was probably the result of the unpleasant memories associated with the place. The last time they had been here, Chris had suffered his 'incident' ... No doubt Waldo was thinking about that, too.

Leuk rubbed his arms. He was beginning to feel cold. Being away from the warmth of the vehicle for this long was making his webbing redundant. Any longer out here and his body would lose more heat than the webbing was providing, and *then* he'd be in trouble.

Only two more weeks until the shuttle was due.

Pwyll rumbled. Leuk's boots slipped, and the grips tore chips of ice loose and sent them skidding down the faultless slope. Karlson looked up, disturbed from whatever message he was accessing through his hidden headset. Waldo, who had been mid-step, wobbled on his left leg and fell backwards; his boot was embedded in the ice and didn't break free, and the sharp sound of ligament popping around bone filled Leuk's ears. The worst kind of sprain was the kind you could hear.

Waldo yelped and tugged his grip spikes free of the ground, and rubbed the joint with his gloved hands. The straps on his boots were fastened tight around his ankle and calf, and so the sprain was minor but painful. He gritted his teeth.

'What the hell's going on with this place?'

'Nothing we can't deal with,' muttered Karlson. 'Get a hustle on. We need to get that equipment started up if we want to sleep warm tonight.'

The equipment was mechanic, and pathetic. It seemed like a joke to expect something that operated on electronic hydraulics and a system of pistons and pulleys to work properly out here, even under the protective dome of an energy shield. The thing broke down more often than it was used, which was why Waldo earned as high a wage as the rest of them.

'Oh my god,' he said, pulling back the tarpaulin and taking a look at the equipment's innards. 'I thought we fixed the arms before we left last time.'

Karlson began accessing the control consoles. 'It's your job to fix things. You tell me what we did.'

'We missed something,' Waldo muttered. He slid a box of tools towards him and began adjusting his manipulators. 'This might take a while.'

'How long?'

'Half an hour.'

'Wonderful.' Karlson unrolled some touchscreens that had been left in warm storage. He fixed them to the consoles and began playing a simple computer game that Chris had stowed in with the software before his arrival. The console beeped as he played, and then something broke from the rear of the metal cabinet, and the immediate site around the old excavation pit ruptured into splinters, and a fast, cold spray drenched the three team members.

Something dark and tall wavered beside the machines. It was wet and muscular, eel-like and half-invisible from within the spray. It lurched against the equipment and rended the support struts that fixed them into the ice. Tubing and long, foot-wide screws bent at right angles with an animalistic squeal. The thing – a living creature, Leuk knew, something living amongst them, alive and perhaps thinking, certainly reacting, like an insect reacts to stimuli but has no cognitive functions; like a mouse chased by an owl, ducking into the first dark, damp place it finds without thought or reason. Instinctive and, Leuk was sure, not in the least bit malign, merely subsisting within the frozen crust of the gas giant's moon.

The thing's weight compacted frozen water droplets into the icecrust, and it left behind a smooth, mirror-like arc that reflected the grey sky and the rushing spume. The dark mass swept towards Waldo like a wide, black tongue, missing him by a foot as he kicked himself back and out of harm's way.

The frozen rim of the excavation hole crunched as the thing shifted its weight, forcing itself forwards and further out from the centre of the crater. It seized, then thrashed, shattering polished sheets of ice and landing with a fierce crash on top of the console Karlson had been playing with. The console burst apart, spilling circuits and cables like guts, and when the tongue dragged itself backwards it pulled the wreckage with it for a few feet, scattering the various components amidst fragments of metal and plastic.

Karlson was fumbling with a weapon that they carried routinely with the standard emergency equipment. They had never had need for it before, and it clicked as Karlson pulled the trigger; it was unloaded and useless.

The thing lashed towards Karlson, missing him by an inch and throwing him bodily off the ground with the force of its impact. Then it curled, looking

more and more like a gruesome tongue, and scooped Karlson down towards the pit.

Waldo was quicker to act than Leuk. He lunged forwards and slid down the incline, using his energy field as a friction-free sled. Spinning, he caught the heel of his own boot against the fractured ground and dug in, grinding to a halt immediately beside the geyser and its occupant, grabbing hold of Karlson's jacket.

The fabric wasn't holding.

'Cut your field,' Waldo yelled, 'I can't get a grip!'

Karlson nodded frantically, and a minute flash of light around his body signalled the dissipation of the energy field. Waldo made to get a better grip on Karlson's arm, but something held him back, an image in his mind's eye, and Leuk saw it in the foreground of his imagination as a true memory, the horror behind what the team called the incident.

Last time they have visited Pwyll, the equipment hadn't held out. It shook the ice-formed foundations of the ground beneath them and caused a cave-in around the machinery; that time, Chris had been the one to fall, young Chris with his hair tied back in a style so out of fashion it embarrassed even Leuk, and his glasses hanging to his face by his ear, and Waldo reaching out instinctively to take hold of his friend's hand, misjudging the strength of his titanium manipulators, and cleanly severing Chris' two smallest fingers, the ones he told everyone that had been claimed by the cold. Blood froze on the ice.

Now, Waldo hesitated, and Karlson screamed, and Waldo shucked his guilt and his painful worry and reached out, twelve pencil-thin manipulators curling hard and cold around Karlson's outstretched hand as the long, black creature disappeared down into the pit. Waldo pulled Karlson up and swung him onto the ice, in time for the ground to give way beneath him.

\*

**K**arlson twisted in the silence. Leuk heard his breath as well as saw it; he hadn't switched his field back on yet, and the thermal webbing was struggling to keep up with his rapidly-falling body temperature. Karlson was peering down the pit, his hands and knees flat against the cold ground. His mind and flesh were in shock, his joints frozen. Blood dripped from inside his sleeve where Waldo's sharp manipulators had punctured his skin.

Leuk approached the hole with a chill in him. He'd never witnessed death before, not in all of his long years. It was, he thought numbly, a loss of equilibrium; he'd never seen a person being born, either. The notion, which came unbidden to his mind, stuck around and confused him as he neared the pit, the epicentre of the deep crater.

Karlson rolled over onto his back. His white fingers were clutching his stomach, and blood ran along them in slow, crystallising rivulets. 'Fucking Krill,' he gurgled, like it was Leuk's fault that he was hurting.

Leuk looked down the pit. He wondered if Waldo was down there, somewhere between here and where the crust turned to liquid about twenty kilometres down, hanging onto the tunnel wall with his metal hands, a few dozen drills and picks embedded there so that one day, after hours of tortuous climbing, he might resurface.

There was darkness down the pit, and little more. The light reached about ten feet down, filtering through the semi-transparent ice in rays of blue and lagoon-green. And below that: an infinitude of shadow that kept going until it hit wet.

\*

**H**e tugged the headset free of Karlson's hair. 'What are you doing?' Karlson murmured. He feebly lifted a hand, which Leuk gently pushed away.

'I am not hurting you,' said Leuk. 'I am just borrowing this for a while.'

That, he knew without thinking, was a lie. By the time he returned to Karlson, the man would be long dead. The microcells that powered his energy field had been shattered; Leuk could see yellow-white froth fizzing out of his webbing. Normally they would be protected by the field itself, but having switched it off in order to be saved he had only made himself more vulnerable. There was nothing Leuk could do; the thermal webbing would do its job for two hours, perhaps more, but without the energy field not only would Karlson's body and blood freeze irreparably, but the radiation from Jupiter and its moon would poison him.

'Leave that alone,' Karlson grunted. 'It's attuned to me. You can't speak to anybody back home.'

'I'm sure that you have already done that, sir,' said Leuk, deactivating his field. He placed the thin headset on his own skull and then reactivated his microcells. The headset was a poor fit.

‘Call that cow Branard.’

‘I’ll try to hail her,’ he promised, and clipped the radio to his belt.

‘Where do you think you’re going?’ Karlson snapped, attempting to sit up. He gasped as pain flared up in his side. Leuk guessed that his ribs were broken. The worst-case scenario was that he had internal bleeding – that thing had hit him spectacularly hard.

‘Over there,’ Leuk replied. He pointed towards the horizon, where the orange-brown circle of Jupiter filled the sky.

‘Any chance at *all* you could stop being fucking stupid and throw me that foil? And I don’t see you using that radio.’

‘I’ll call on the way. I must get going.’

‘Hey!’ Karlson screamed after him. ‘Hey! Get back here, you old faggot, I’m still talking to you. Hey!’

\*

**T**he wind had just become audible. It never blew hard on Europa, and was certainly never abrasive enough to grate the ice or sift the snow. The ice fragments crunched underfoot, compacting beneath Leuk’s little form.

Little. Large. They were, as everyone knew, relative; if the ocean was a metaphor for the operations centre and all its crew, then Leuk really was Krill – he was small fry. On Europa, he was even smaller. Against the shifting rings of Jupiter’s surface, that ever-moving tapestry against which even the moon looked insubstantial, he was smaller still.

Karlson, Leuk had surmised, wanted to be large. He was a man whose duplicated brain matter occupied the skulls of hundreds of genetically modified subordinates. They had unwound and re-stitched their blood-coding to become akin to him, so that they could think, act and, essentially, *be* him. This was Karlson’s way of being everywhere at the same time. He had become more than a man; he was Legion. He was larger than one life. The modifications were primarily for the purposes of the subspace communication; the likeness of thought patterns made receiving and decoding their exchanges substantially easier. Of course, *substantially* Karlson was spread very thin. He was less than a man because of it, his ultimate goal unravelling the more he worked towards accomplishing it.

The headset was cold against Leuk’s scalp. Inside Karlson’s field it would have been protected from the freezing temperatures, but between taking it from Karlson and admitting it into his own field, it had been blast-chilled. Now its copper tendrils hurt hit his head and behind his ears.

\*

**H**e travelled. Ahead lay the landmark he had been picturing in his mind’s eye since the crash of the hovercraft. It was a modest mountain formed by two huge tectonic plates pushing against one another. The ice on the surface was unbroken, the movement taking place far below with the movements of water urged into motion by the rise and fall of temperatures within the moon’s liquid mantle. The plates had ground together, pushing the dense, compacted ice against itself until it rose into a humble mountain that was perpetually growing, and doing so at such a relaxed pace that it had enough time to refreeze itself solid. Even with the impurities of the water, the mountain was semi-translucent, like a hunk of frosted glass, and light when the sun was behind it shone through, creating the illusion of a vast ice sculpture created around a huge, bright bulb.

He thought about home, and about his grandchildren. He had been aching to see them these last few months. Thirty years was a long time to spend away from one’s family, but when one man is raised as Inuit and another as a Westerner, relationships don’t come easy. He had spoken to them on occasion since he left, and sent them images and FM capture, but it wasn’t the same as sitting with them, painting like they used to when they were young, or teaching them to fish in Quebec, or telling them stories by lamplight as they drifted to sleep. Soon, Leuk told himself, he would see them again. The shuttle would take him home; take them all home except for, perhaps, Karlson, who was back at the crater without protection, his blood turning to ice.

\*

**T**he ice was thin here, frighteningly so. It was like walking over a frozen lake; Leuk had that exciting anxiety over how, at any time, the ice could break and he might go plunging into deathly cold water.

He’d been out this far only once before, during his early years. There wasn’t much for a marine biologist to do on a rock populated only by imported

coral sponges and GM krill. He'd filled his time with exploration and discovered the slopes, which rose like crystalline spikes straight out of the ice. When he had found them, they had been an anomaly, a landmark on an otherwise featureless planet. Now they were even more of an abnormality. The ice was too thin; grooves and scratches deep into the semi-clear ground gave the appearance of purposeful erosion, not from above or from below, but from within.

Nobody had thought enough about Europa. It was an ice moon and it had a liquid outer core, and was perhaps even liquid right in the centre. Where there's water, there could be life. Let's look in the water.

They had found nothing. In thirty years, the team had scoured every pit and gully on the ocean floor and discovered no life. Doctor Branard and Karlson had all but given up on this secondary objective. But they hadn't searched the ice itself, the crust almost twenty kilometres thick. A lot of room for something to exist without being discovered.

Movement from below. Shadows swam in the bitter-cold water beneath Leuk's boots. They were shapes that were long and smooth, and they moved like sand snakes with a coiling, sideways dance. The scientist side of his mind cast them amongst the platyhelminthe family, alongside flatworms; the dark grey creatures that he'd seen rising from the geysers were like worms, like tendrils. They might be large versions of simple, mindless creatures, but they were alive.

He didn't sense any malice. They were not intentionally dangerous. His thoughts turned to Chris, who might die of cold as a result of the crash. He thought of Karlson, whose energy field no longer protected him from the radiation coming from the immense presence of Jupiter.

Leuk peered up at the gas giant and tried to discern whether or not he could actually see those eight-hundred-kilometres-an-hour winds moving.

He touched Karlson's headset, and activated it.

\*

**T**he planet Jupiter radiates twice as much energy as it receives from the Sun. It is a scientific curiosity that has never been fully satisfied; the most logical conclusion is that it has its own source of heat, buried in the probably-liquid core. It was always possible that the heat it exudes is a remainder from its dramatic creation, the fierce

coalition of potent gases twisted by a whirlwind of gravity, pressed into an eternal body that hangs, the largest of nine, alongside the eye of its yellow star.

Previously Leuk had only had a passing interest in the planet. It was beautiful and daunting and deadly, but as far as he was concerned that was nothing astronomically special about it. When he had learned of Jupiter's indefinable heat source, he had become intrigued, and then perhaps obsessed; he sat in his small, heated room in the operations centre, staring out of the window. Most nights the window was a rectangle filled out with gold and crimson bands, glowing in the centre of his vision and at the front of his imagination, a portal into the great depths of a globe of gas, into a mystery as deep as the conduit between eye and soul.

Leuk spoke. The headset converted his thoughts into thumps, and subspace carried half-translated, half-transmuted words and feelings. It propelled brain patterns into the ether below normal space, in all directions.

He was in a tunnel of ice fifty feet each way. The mountain was around and above him, light bouncing off a thousand flat, reflective surfaces like cut glass, a naturally formed hall of mirrors. The ice was shot through with orange light from above, the blue of shallow ocean from below, and the light filtered through in beams across the slow, shifting forms of the creatures.

They had emerged from the ice somewhere out of sight, and were now drifting surreally along the smooth panels of ice that compromised the tunnel walls. Krill walked amongst them, studying their rubbery, seal-like hides, spotted with bristles and patches of scale. Their foremost ends had little pits of mouths ringed with flexible teeth made of cartilage; Krill surmised that they lived off the ice, scraping away and devouring slush, drawing from it oxygen and meagre sustenance. Possibly they fed off the aquaformed portions of the moon's seabed, drawing energy from the alien flora the team had implanted there. Through the rays of light they passed, at one time coloured with Jupiter's reflected light and at another in shadow, half obscured by splinters of ice.

Krill advanced with them, wary of his proximity and mindful of Karlson's unfortunate fate. He could think of no motive for one of the flukes to attack, and was wary of their size and strength, their slick, muscular bulks.

The tunnel funnelled outwards and became a cavern, its translucent walls thinner here. The light was stronger as the refractive walls brought it from the

outside. Above, there was no ceiling; the ice jutted outwards in all directions, but didn't form a complete canopy. There was a jagged gap that provided a view of the gas giant's surface; no sky could be seen, not a star; the stripes and spot were bright, too close, vast and threatening and godlike. Its presence pressed down on Krill like a physical weight; the headset thrummed against the bone beneath his scalp. He sent out words and phrases, and thought of that remarkable, frightening heat cocooned within sheets of violent wind, hidden and inaccessible, and wondered if, perhaps, there was more to the giant than the gaze of its terrible, beautiful eye.

To discover more stories by David Brookes, visit his website at [www.spinninglizard.co.uk](http://www.spinninglizard.co.uk)

## CULT DVD REVIEWS

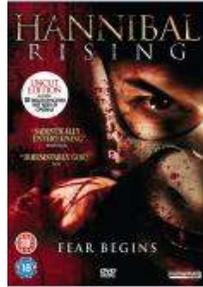
### By PAUL KANE

HANNIBAL RISING.

Directed by Peter Webber.

Starring Gaspard Ulliel, Gong Li, Rhys Ifans.

Momentum, £19.99



Ever since SILENCE OF THE LAMBS netted its Oscar horde, the character of Hannibal Lecter has signalled big box office bucks. HANNIBAL was a neat continuation of the franchise, rectifying Thomas Harris' dire ending in the book, while RED DRAGON did a more accurate job of putting the novel on the screen than MANHUNTER, though some might argue not as stylishly. With the STAR WARS films showing us how that other popular villain of our age, Darth Vader, came to be, it could only then be a matter of time before we were given the origins of everyone's favourite cannibal psychopath. Excitement grew following the announcement that the film was coming out only a couple of months after the release of the book, *Hannibal Rising*, and that Harris himself would be handling the screenplay. But did that excitement turn into resentment at another cash-in, or delight as the innermost workings of this fiendish mind were revealed?

1944, and Russia is being overrun by the Nazis. The Lecter family, who live in Castle Lecter, hide in their hunting lodge in the woods. But things go seriously wrong, as first the young Hannibal's parents are killed, then Grutas (Ifans, playing so against type) and his gang of disreputable Russian turncoats show up cold and hungry, and keep looking at Hannibal's little sister Mischa like she's a prime steak. Flash forward a few years and the teenage Hannibal (Ulliel) is now back at the castle – except it's now an orphanage run by the state. Loathe sticking to the 'pecking order' – he keeps beating up the bullies – the mute Hannibal escapes and heads for the Soviet border. Crossing over, he makes for his Uncle's place in France, only to find that he is dead and has left behind his beautiful bride Lady Murasaki Shikibu (Li).

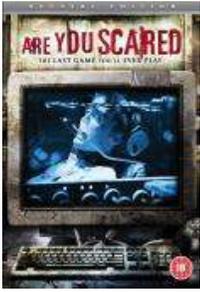
She takes him under her wing, training him in the oriental ways – which includes how to wield a

Katana and worship at the altar of her ancestors – at the same time soothing him as he has nightmares about his time at the lodge. In return Hannibal lops off the head of a local butcher who pesters Lady Murasaki. This brings him to the attention of the police – he'd better get used to it – in the form of Inspector Popil (Dominic West), but when he beats the lie detector they have to let him go. Now training as a medical student, Hannibal pumps himself full of drugs to remember what happened to Mischa all those years ago, and sets out to track down Grutas and the men responsible...

Ulliel took a lot of stick when this movie hit the big screens, purely because he had some big boots to fill. Unkind comparisons to Anthony Hopkins aside – he can't be a young Hopkins, no one could – he does a pretty good job with the part, in my opinion. This is Hannibal at the start of his 'career', and out for revenge: he's raw, a little rough around the edges, but the kernel of the man he'll soon become is still there and develops during the course of the movie. Lending excellent support are Li, Ifans (who is more than a match for Lecter in the evil nutter stakes) and West, while the production values are so good you have to keep reminding yourself you've not travelled back in a time machine fifty odd years.

This DVD version has unseen footage, too, mainly putting back in scenes that were in the book but not the theatrical release – such as a hunting scene with Hannibal and his father, a more detailed build-up of how Grutas and his men came to be where they were at the start, and how Hannibal got into Grutas' villa later on. All are extremely welcome.

Different from any of the other Lecter films that have gone before, and all the better for it, this does indeed provide valuable insight into what made him the way he is, though what will really drive you mad is trying to work out whether he would have been a killer regardless of the tragedy that befell him. The only thing it didn't show was how he developed that taste for Chianti...



## ARE YOU SCARED?

Directed by Andy Hurst.

Starring Alethea Kutscher, Carlee Avers, Brad Ashten, Soren Bowie.

Revolver Entertainment £12.99

**I**n this day and age of BIG BROTHER, I'M A CELEBRITY GET ME OUT OF HERE, and HELL'S KITCHEN, it was only a matter of time before someone took the idea to its logical conclusion – though some might say the legendary Nigel Kneale was way ahead of the game with THE YEAR OF THE SEX OLYMPICS in the 1960s. ARE YOU SCARED? is the latest movie to do something with this voyeuristic obsession, combining such popular US fare as FEAR FACTOR with the gross out 'in yer face' horror of HOSTEL and the SAW series.

We begin with a blonde model trapped in what looks like a warehouse. It transpires that she's agreed to play a game on camera which, if she wins, will get her a top modelling contract. She begins to suspect all is not well when she realises she's chained up, with an electronic 'dog collar' around her neck that could blow her head off. All she has to do to win is press the red button, lying across a room scattered with broken glass. Easy, eh? I won't go into details about the twist, but it is actually quite an effective shock to kick off the ride.

The obligatory grizzled, streetwise cop and FBI Criminal Profiler Caia Coley (both of whom just happen to be stunningly beautiful) are soon on the trail of the lunatic who's been setting up these shows. 'He's trying to teach them a lesson – a merciful death's better than a life in pain,' Coley's Agent Wilkins states back at HQ.

And he's certainly teaching a group of random teens that lesson, as they wake up in yet another abandoned place with no idea how they got there. Oh, wait a minute, that's right, they all sent in a video to apply for the show – stupidly telling the guy what their biggest fears were. D'oh! Not surprisingly, they all face that fear with the lure of big bucks as the prize, manipulated by the 'Shadow Man', an horrifically scarred figure who sits in front of a bank of TVs NASA would be proud of, watching everything that transpires. One guy, Jason, has to stop an explosion with a key – which for some reason he didn't notice had been surgically implanted in his

stomach, in spite of the blood and big cut going across his abdomen.

A brother and sister team, Dylan and Cherie, are given the choice of saving themselves or letting the other one get a drill bit in the face, in a scene that seems to go on forever but is, admittedly, very tense. Meanwhile Brandon tackles his fear of the dark, though this is nothing compared with his fear of a room full of tripwires and poised shot-guns. Little wonder, then, that it's the main female protagonist Kelly (Kutscher) who manages to get out and find the TV bank, teaming up with Laura (Avers) to try and defeat The Shadow Man. There's the inevitable twist, and a 'will the cops get there in time?' sub-plot, but the ending won't come as too much of a surprise to anyone familiar with the genre.

Let's get the negatives out of the way first. This movie is derivative of so many others that have gone before it. I mentioned SAW, and this reference should be apparent right away from the voice of the 'Shadow Man' which sounds almost exactly like Jigsaw – so much so that you expect a tricycle-peddling doll to come around the corner at any moment. The gore is an attempt to 'out gross' HOSTEL and the like, and to be fair it doesn't do a half-bad job – though whether anything could ever top Eli Roth's 'Eyegasm' scene ever again is debatable. And the situation is straight out of CUBE: strangers waking up, having no idea why they've been brought together, stumbling into booby traps like a bunch of Warner Brothers cartoons...

All this said, ARE YOU SCARED? isn't claiming to be anything but a cheap thrills shocker for the Friday night DVD market, and on this level you could do much worse. The acting ranges from okay to fairly bad, but the way in which the characters meet their doom does, at least, have an air of originality about it.

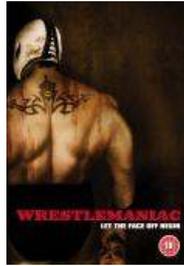
You might be scared watching this, but I doubt it. Best just to get some drinks in and sit and watch it with your mates, laughing at how unbelievably silly it all is.

## WRESTLEMANIAC.

Directed by Jesse Baget.

Starring Rey Misterio Sr, Irwin Keyes, Adam Huss.

Revolver Entertainment, £12.99



**T**hey say there's nothing new under the sun. But when I received this DVD for review, I realised how very wrong they were. As a premise, the idea of a superhuman Mexican wrestler, who may or may not be a ghost and/or a zombie, stalking people in a remote cross border town, rates among the most original I've ever come across – though in the wake of Jack Black's *NACHO LIBRE*, it shouldn't come as too much of a surprise. Like *I BOUGHT A VAMPIRE MOTORCYCLE*, the question then remains whether audiences would swallow it: seeing the movie as quirky, or just downright stupid. But, I guess, a lot of that comes down to how the direction is handled at the end of the day.

The movie starts with a bunch of twenty-somethings rattling into the wilds of Mexico in a van – think *TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE*, but hotter. Except their aim is to film a porno movie there, or at least that's Alfonse's (Huss) intention – with himself lined up to do all the 'action' scenes, apparently. With him are Jimbo (Zack Bennett), who owns the van, overweight Steve (Jeremy Radin), who is referred to as 'Fats' and handles the video camera, plus three aspiring porno actresses: the appropriately-named Debbie (Margaret Scarborough), Dallas (Leyla Milani) and Daisy (Catherine Wreford).

They wind up in the middle of 'fucking nowhere' according to a random stranger, who also tells them that they're not too far away from *Le Sangre de Dios*. It's a name Steve, who conveniently has Mexican family, has heard about – the dwelling place of a supposedly long-dead Wrestler called El Mascarado, who it was rumoured was genetically engineered to win the Olympics in the early 60s (I swear I am not making this up). Now, so the legend goes, his spirit – or perhaps him, we never really find out – hangs around in the hopes of bumping off anyone who comes calling. Naturally, the wise cracking Alfonse, who is kind of funny at first but does soon become irritating, wants to film there, so the van pulls in and promptly packs up.

This leaves the group alone to get picked off one by one by the masked wrestler, whose favourite way of killing is to pull off people's faces – a homage to when Mexican wrestlers humiliate their defeated opponents by ripping off their masks. Only Steve seems willing to go up against him in the ring, but can even he bring the giant down?

*WRESTLEMANIAC* is a film that doesn't really know what it wants to be – stalk and slash (or slam down in this case), tongue-in-cheek comedy in the *SHAUN OF THE DEAD* mould, or completely off the wall. This gives the movie quite a schizophrenic feel and a meandering direction. The acting isn't too dreadful, with Radin coming across the best I think, although the three women do seem to have been stuck in there because they can only perform certain feats – like Milani's talent for pulling her legs so wide apart she can hide from El Mascarado by squashing herself into a cupboard. But you could say that, I suppose, about any given slasher movie.

I found that the story of El Mascarado was so vague and undefined, little more than a device to get a masked wrestler on screen as soon as possible causing mayhem, that it's hard to give much of a toss about his motivations. Also, it's pretty difficult to buy the fact that the film-makers just happened to find this place by accident, and that going over a stone in the road causes them to become stranded – and by the same token that fiddling about in the engine gets the heap going again; surely it would have made more sense to have had a flat tyre?

I did like some of the stalking scenes, however, and the nice touch of having the wrestling ring walls covered with the bloody, skinned faces of all El Mascarado's victims. But to cut away just as Steve is about to take him on was pretty unforgivable really – it's one thing to leave things to viewers' imagination, it's quite another to waste potentially the biggest fight scene of the flick (or was that down to money?).

It might go down as one of those movies that acquire cult status purely for its originality, but it's never going to be one of my all-time faves. Also, if you come away after hearing the music and don't think of Speedy Gonzales, I'd be very, very surprised...

## STRANGER WITH MY FACE

By BETTY MEDEIROS

The alarm clock started buzzing at the obscene time of six thirty. Groggy, I slammed the snooze button and rolled over in bed. There was no way I was getting up that early on a Saturday morning. Half an hour later, just as I was having an extremely pleasant dream about Sawyer from *Lost*, the alarm blared again.

'Damn it,' I said aloud. *Come on, get up. You can't fall back asleep now.* The words popped into my mind almost of their own volition.

Completely awake now, I rose and walked into the bathroom. After I washed and dressed, I gazed at my reflection. I thought I looked pretty good, especially that early.

'Not bad, Tina, could be a lot better,' my image chimed back at me.

I froze, staring at my face for a few seconds. I didn't move my mouth and say those words, I wasn't even thinking them. Yet my reflection had spoken. Maybe I was still dreaming and I wasn't fully awake after all? I didn't want to think I was crazy.

'Nope, not crazy, but definitely in need of my assistance.'

'Oh really?' I found myself answering back.

'Yeah, really. I'm your personal image consultant, Tina dear.'

'What are you, my conscience, telling me to eat my vegetables?'

'Vegetables give you gas.'

I rolled my eyes. 'Right... Well, it's been nice chatting with you, but I'm either going to wake up any moment now or I'm going to have breakfast. Bye.'

I jogged into the kitchen leaving that strange alter ego in the mirror. By the time I had finished eating I was convinced I had imagined the whole thing. I rushed out of my apartment to my ancient Volkswagen beetle, being extra careful to avoid stepping on the cracks in the sidewalk. No more bad luck for me, thank you. I patted my rabbit's foot dangling from the rear-view mirror and started my car.

'If you're going to Macy's, buy that red dress you were eyeing last week. What's three hundred dollars?' the face in the mirror urged me.

'A fortune.' I peered back into the rear-view mirror, but the reflection only smiled. A funny

feeling went through me; I would never buy a dress for that much money, not on my measly salary. The image gazing back at me wasn't me at all. I took a deep breath, saying, 'You're a figment of my imagination. Reflections don't talk back on their own. So stop it, now!'

It seemed to work, the face I saw gazing back at me was mine. No voice in my ears provoking me. As I drove to the Taunton Galleria Mall I resolved to forget what I thought I'd seen in the mirror. Everybody has bad days.

\*

6 Tina?

I was about to leave the galleria when I heard someone call me. Slowly, I turned around to see my old friend Denise Lima walking toward me. I smiled. 'It's great to see you again, Denise. When did you get back?'

'Steve and I came back last month to be near my mother,' she explained. 'Listen, do you have time for a coffee? We could catch up a bit.'

'Sure.'

We sat down in the food court and talked for awhile, about everything. As we finished our croissants and coffee, Denise said, 'I'm going back to Macy's to try on a great red dress that's on sale. Do you want to come with me?'

The funny feeling in my stomach returned, but now it was churning. 'The dress that was on sale for three hundred dollars?'

Denise smiled. 'Yep. Still expensive, but that colour is simply gorgeous.'

I shook my head. Coincidence or not, I wasn't going anywhere near that red dress in Macy's. 'Sorry, Denise, but I've got to be going now. I'll call you soon.'

'Oh. Okay then. Get you later,' Denise said, disappointed.

I stood up and turned toward the exit furthest from us. Yep, another superstition.

\*

The moment I sat in my car, I cranked up the volume on my radio loud enough to drown out a small nuclear explosion. It wasn't easy, but I managed to avoid using the car's mirrors the whole drive home. Though I did give myself a wicked stiff neck in the process.

\*

**P**ace and quiet. A warm, burgeoning silence welcomed me back to my apartment. I sat down on the sofa, closed my eyes, thinking of nothing. As I rubbed my neck and relaxed, I began to feel a little silly over my overreaction to what must have been a little daydreaming. So I imagined my own face in the mirror talking back to me. It wasn't real, nothing bad happened except a very weird coincidence with Denise. A little bad luck, perhaps, probably because Isis, my neighbour's black cat, had crossed my path two days ago. It was ridiculous to try to avoid any mirrors. I was calm and fully awake now; I wasn't likely to imagine that again.

I got up and entered my bedroom, intending to sit before my dresser mirror and prove to myself I had nothing to fear. The phone rang just then and as I turned away I saw an odd gleam reflecting in the mirror, but because the sun was shining directly into my room, I didn't give it another thought.

'Hi, babe,' Dave said in that way that makes my knees weak. 'I called you earlier but you were out already.'

'I was at the mall. I'm glad you called back, sweetie.'

'Are you?' He chuckled softly. 'Change of plans for later, Tina. How'd you like to drive up to Boston to see *Cats* tonight?'

'Would I!' I answered in a rush. At last, I was finally going to see *Cats*. I was already excited.

'Thought so,' he said, the smile still in his voice. 'We can go out after *Cats* for a late meal. I'll pick you up around six.'

'Wonderful, I can hardly wait. Love you, Davie.'

'Me too, babe. See you later.'

As I hung up the phone I realised I was grinning like a lovesick adolescent. It wasn't until I turned around that it occurred to me that I had nothing new to wear to the theatre. I flung open my closet, looking at all my choices. After a moment, I picked out a blue silk blouse and black pants. Without thinking I held the blouse in front of me before the closet mirror.

'You're not wearing that, are you?'

I flinched. 'No, this isn't happening. I wasn't thinking that.'

'You should be thinking about that red dress that got away,' the mirror image said. 'What a shame Denise bought it instead. She looks horrible in red, really.'

'Too late now.' I didn't want to reply to that other me in the mirror, but somehow I did.

'Is it?' the mirror asked. 'Wouldn't it be a pity if Denise had an accident on the way home? It'd serve her right for stealing something that should be yours.'

'What do you mean?' I paused, staring at the reflection. There was a sharp, cruel glint in the brown eyes that peered back at me. I was now absolutely certain it wasn't my imagination. Never in a million years would I wish somebody harm over a stupid dress.

'Who are you?' I asked, trying to keep a quiver out of my voice.

'Finally! Of course I'm not some little persona you dreamed up, Tina, darling.' The reflection paused, then smiled. 'Call me Anita. I'm everything you aren't. Ambitious, powerful.'

I scowled. 'What do you want?'

'Acceptance. I want to help you. Would that really be so hard?'

*Very*, I thought instantly.

Quickly, I sought refuge in the living room before she could notice the fear inside me. Anita wanted acceptance. Why? To have free rein over my thoughts, to subvert me somehow? Her words were insidious, hurtful. Then I remembered what she said about Denise. A moment later I was dialling Denise's cell phone number. Eight rings, I was about to hang up when I heard a distant hello.

'May I speak to Denise? It's her friend, Tina.'

'This is Steve. Denise can't come to the phone.' He sounded preoccupied.

'Will you tell her I called to say hi?'

He paused and I heard voices in the background. 'I'm at the hospital, Tina. Denise had a car accident driving home.'

'Oh no.' I felt sick. 'Was she hurt badly?'

'She's in surgery now. I have to go. Bye.'

I swallowed hard, my heart pounding. Anita predicted Denise's accident. Did she cause it, too?

This was scaring me, Anita was worse than hurtful, she was evil. I sat still, shivering. Maybe I should call Dave. But what could he do, even if he believed me at all? No, I didn't want him anywhere near Anita. I had to handle this myself and I didn't have much time till Dave arrived to pick me up.

\*

6 You're back. I thought you were avoiding me, Tina, like you did earlier in your car. That was rude of you.'

'I'm not hiding in my own apartment.'

'No reason to, if we're friends.'

'Big if, Anita,' I said, with false bravado.

The image shrugged. 'Maybe. But you just called me by name, darling. Part of you wants to accept me and all I can do for you.' She licked her lips, waiting.

*You wish*, I almost said, until I noticed her predatory gesture. Instead, I was quiet, letting her speak.

She tilted her head, puzzled. 'Thinking about it? Good, we have time. We'll enjoy the evening in Boston and talk later.'

I almost flinched. We? Of course, Anita was following me around, in every mirror I used. 'I have to finish getting ready,' I said at last, about to leave my bedroom.

'No rush, Dave won't be here for a while.'

I stopped. 'You didn't harm him?'

'Tina, you really should be nicer to me.' She smirked. 'Relax, he's fine. Though he'd be more than fine if you would just let me help.' Anita let out a sigh. 'You'll learn to appreciate me, my dear. You wouldn't want anything to happen to Davie.'

I walked out of my bedroom softly, but inside my mind I was choking in revulsion. I wished I had the courage to shatter every mirror around me. Bad luck be damned, this entire day was a perversion.

Denise in surgery, and this direct warning to be nicer to Anita or else Dave would suffer. I was never going to accept Anita or her help; sooner or later, she'd exact her vengeance on me.

Struggling to remain calm, I didn't move for a while, until I finally glanced at the clock. After five thirty. I had to act normal when Dave arrived. Shaking, I reached for my purse, automatically taking out my make up and opening my compact.

'Tina, you look peaked. Better apply some blush.'

'No, not here too,' I gasped.

'Of course I'm here. You need me, remember?' Anita smiled.

'No!'

'Yes. Admit it, I can teach you to enjoy life, revel in it, take who and what you want without silly rules.' Her voice was no longer soft and appealing, she was angry. 'You little idiot, why are you resisting? Together we could do so much. Accept me!'

'No! Shut up!' I demanded. 'I don't want you controlling me, harming innocent people. Go to hell!'

'You little b—'

I couldn't stand hearing her evil voice any more. Quickly, I grabbed my compact and threw it against the wall as hard as I could. As the shattered slivers of glass scattered across my carpet, I fell on the couch, suddenly exhausted.

For a while I just huddled there, rocking back and forth, waiting for Dave. But he didn't show up. Worried, around seven o'clock I finally got up and started pacing. Dave was always on time for everything. I thought about calling his cell phone, but I was too afraid. I kept hearing Anita's warning, 'You wouldn't want anything to happen to Davie....' When my phone finally did ring, I ran into the bedroom to answer it. My hand clasped the receiver, but I did not pick it up.

Anita was staring at me in the dresser mirror. 'Aren't you going to answer the phone?'

My voice was shaking. 'It's about Davie, isn't it?'

Anita grinned, her eyes glittering like diamonds. 'Pick it up, my dear. I dare you.'

## MORE CONVERSATION... With Gary Russell

We return to the second part of our exclusive interview with GARY RUSSELL, as he talks about his eight years with Big Finish Productions, writing non-fiction books, working with the BBC, and sheds a bit of light on what's coming his way during the next year or so.

Do you find it more difficult to write for the audio medium, or prose?

**D**ifficult doesn't come into it, it's just a different medium. A different *structure*, a different *discipline*, there's no comparison. And this is a big problem I have with people who think that Person A, who wrote a brilliant DOCTOR WHO novel, can by default write a great audio script, or great comic strip, or a great TV episode. All of these things have different structures, and every one has strengths and weaknesses. And, frankly, writing prose is the easiest of the lot. Writing prose ain't difficult, but writing a script that works on a particular medium like audio, or a comic strip, that's a skill and not everyone can do it. Too many people assume, 'oh that person wrote a great DOCTOR WHO novel, let's get him to write an audio script'. No, it doesn't work that way.

You have to find the people that genuinely can do it all. Like Paul Cornell; he can write any of them. He's a technically brilliant writer, tells a good story, too, and he's got everything possible going for him. He can cross mediums. Possibly audio was his weakest medium when he started, but he grew into it very quickly. There are other writers, like Steve Lyons and Alan Barnes, who I think could pretty much write across any medium right from the word go.

I'm not sure that I could sit anyone else down and say, 'write me an audio, write me a novel, write me a comic strip'. Those three people, I think, can do it with one armed tied behind their back. People I could leave in a room and know that when I came back they'd have done any of those things.

Another medium that people think is easy, and isn't, is short story writing. Some people can write an 80,000 word novel, but ask them to write a 5 – 6,000 word short story and they're flummoxed.

Vice versa, some of those who can write a cracking short story will be lost with 60,000 words. They'll get to ten and they're like, 'that's it, I'm done'.

I'm jealous of people who can cross that barrier, and do all that. I don't enjoy writing audio scripts at all, and with the exception of HE JESTS AT SCARS I've never *wanted* to write an audio script. Everything else has been born of necessity. Audio is a medium I love working in, but I'm more than happy to let other people write and I'll script edit it.

Why did you want to write HE JESTS AT SCARS?

**B**ecause originally the *Unbound* series was my idea, in its basic form, which is why HE JESTS is different from the rest of the series, since I wanted to do a series similar to Marvel Comics' *What If?*. So it was like *What if Turlough took the Enlightenment?*, *What if Adric hadn't died?*, *What if the Valeyard had won?*. That went out of the window for obvious reasons; it isn't a good idea and doesn't run very far. They transmuted into what they became when John Ainsworth became the producer, but I did say that I still wanted to do my Valeyard story, and Jason Haigh-Ellery agreed to it, but unfortunately he didn't tell John that. So there were only four *Unbounds* and I came along saying 'oh, I'm meant to be doing one of these', so Jason said that we'd better make it five then. And that's how HE JESTS AT SCARS came about. I was appended on, along with another to make it six. This is why HE JESTS doesn't fit what the series set out to do.

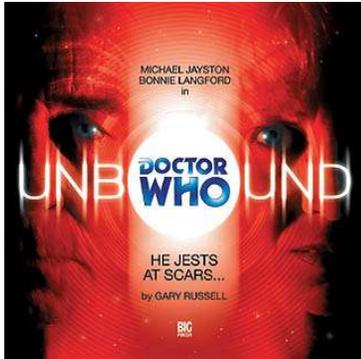
So I played with the idea of *What if the Valeyard had won the Doctor's remaining lives?* And I always knew that what he'd do was bugger it up. He'd go around and destroy everything, because he'd say 'oh, I want to change this' and it would all unravel.

Now people went online moaning about it being full of mad continuity. But it isn't. It had *two* points of continuity, one of which is LOGOPOLIS and other is to do with COLONY IN SPACE and the Doomsday Weapon. Those two things. But everybody's gone about it being full of continuity. It isn't! It's about spiralling back from these important events in the Doctor's life that the Valeyard keeps on changing. I just love the idea that he thinks 'oh shit, that's unravelling, I'll jump in here and cut it off' and so he causes things to unravel more. He had to be one step ahead of himself all the time, and thus goes mad because of it.

He finds this version of himself locked away in Chronopolis for millions of years, a terrified man who's

done all this damage to time and space and is terrified of moving. That final scene I was so proud of. Partly because I was writing it for Bonnie Langford as well as Michael Jayston, cause I know that Bonnie is capable of so much darkness. The idea of Mel with a gun in her hand – brilliant!

But nobody liked it, and I don't think HE JESTS AS SCARS is anything as bad as people make out. I've written a great deal worse than that, I can tell you. People looked at it and decided it was fanwank on audio, but obviously I'm not going to



agree with that! The actual story is very meticulously worked out; if you unpick threads and it all goes wrong, you'll end up standing still thinking, 'I've messed this up, I can't repair it, I'm never moving

again'. What if you therefore spent an eternity scared to even breathe? It's the chaos theory gone mad and nobody else liked it. It was hated by everyone at Big Finish, and I imagine John was just so embarrassed to put it out, Jason and Nick just thought 'what a pile of old crap'. And, you know, when you get no support from people on things like that you do start wondering if maybe they were right. But, with the power of hindsight, I really like it now.

Well, you spent eight years with Big Finish, pretty much since the formation of the company, what made you decide to leave after so long?

Russell T Davies made me an offer I couldn't refuse. It's as simple as that. He said, 'because of what you've done with Big Finish,' and also because they needed someone who knew and understood licensing and branding, they needed someone who could look at the books and the comic strips and make sure they were all in keeping with the current TV series.

Since I'd written THE INSIDE STORY book, Russell knew I was on his wavelength.

I was eight years at Big Finish; I was getting to the end of my tether... I think I could have stayed with Big Finish until story 100 quite happily. I'd planned everything until the end of September 2008, and I knew exactly what I was doing, and I would

have left Big Finish at that point anyway. I'd written out Erimem, I'd written out Hex and Ace, and Charley and C'rizz... You know, I'd done all the plots I wanted to do and had a specific end in mind for each of them. It was all planned to that point, and I had things to kick it forward, there were going to be new companions coming in who'd been all worked out. So that's where I was going and I'd have happily left it at that.

But it all came forward two years, and I had to make a decision. It wasn't really much of a decision to make. Of course what's happened now is brilliant, Nick is not aware of any of my plans so he can take everything in a different direction. And they will go in different directions, I'm sure. I've never sat down with Nick and told him how he has to write everybody out, if indeed he wants to anyway. He may not. It's cool for him. Sometimes I go 'ouch, not what I would have done', but that's irrelevant to Big Finish now, as am I.

So no returns to the Big Finish DOCTOR WHO fold for you?

Well, I'm going to direct the second series of DARK SHADOWS and maybe a TOMORROW PEOPLE or two if asked. I don't want to write or direct anything else on DOCTOR WHO. I don't think Nick or John want me there, and that's understandable.

Now that Big Finish is all behind you, did you have definite goals about what you wished to achieve while with the company? And do you think you've achieved them all? Either personal or professionally...

I just wanted to make something brilliant, and I have no doubt in my mind that I achieved that. Because everyone's shit play is someone else's masterpiece. And that was always a thing with me, like we were talking about before with the books, my job as producer was not to make DOCTOR WHO for me because what would be the point? All the plays would be the same for eight years. It was to make sure there is something for everyone, and being across DOCTOR WHO fandom for so many years you begin to see what all the different things are that people like about DOCTOR WHO. What one group of people hate, and what another like. My job was to make sure there was enough DOCTOR WHO across a year to keep everybody amused at some point. That was my job, and I don't think there's anyone who can say I didn't achieve that.

That's why I'm so proud of it all. Believe me, there are plenty of Big Finish stories out there that I don't like because they are not my idea of DOCTOR WHO, but then my job was not to make DOCTOR WHO I wanted but rather what others wanted. And therefore I'm very proud of what I achieved.

On a personal level I wanted to get Paul McGann, Janet Fielding and Bonnie Langford. And I got all three.

[But you never got Tom Baker...](#)

**W**ell I never wanted him in the first place. From the word go, and Jason will back me up on this, I said 'let's just not bother because I don't think Tom will want to do it, and he'll be more trouble than he's worth'. We pursued Tom quite a lot on and off, and it did indeed end up more trouble than it was worth. From Jason's business point of view I can see how having Tom would have been brilliant. But when Tom did that thing during the Battlefield convention and he made that comment about how we sent him three scripts and they slid off his knee and ended up where they should, which was the bin... We were there, and he knew we were since we were talking to him earlier. I thought, 'I don't want to work with you' because that was a very mean spirited thing to do. It was very funny, and the audience all laughed at it, and I thought 'yeah, and you're making the joke at the hard word and expense of not just me and Jason, but as the expense of Rob Shearman, Paul Magrs and Nick Pegg'.

[Ironically the three scripts in question ended becoming three of the most critically acclaimed of Big Finish's catalogue; namely THE HOLY TERROR, THE STONES OF VENICE and THE SPECTRE OF LANYON MOOR...](#)

**O**f course, and that's the way it goes. He didn't reject them; he didn't even look at them. I know he didn't. And you think, what's the point? Why be unpleasant about something? Why not just be gracious and simply say, 'it's not something I want to do and I wish them all the best, blah, blah', but no he said 'what a load of rubbish' and chucked them in the bin. He said it all funnily, got a laugh from it, at our expense, and that's fine. But at the point I just thought, 'I just don't want to work with you, because I don't think you'll ever

[www.pantehnicon.net](http://www.pantehnicon.net)

put ten percent of what Peter Davison, Colin Baker and Sylvester McCoy put into it'. It was clear he'd never be committed in the way they were.

I know Jason tried again when we did the webcast of SHADA for the BBC, and I thought if anything's going to get Tom onboard it'd be that, because it's Douglas Adams. But he just wasn't interested. I remember Lalla Ward was upset by that, but as it turned out we didn't need him because, oh my god, I think it was possibly Paul McGann's best performance. He took that and really landed it. And Paul and Lalla together is a joy, and the irony is I didn't direct it. I didn't want to. I was quite happy to do the script adaptation.

[Another Big Finish special was the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary story, ZAGREUS, that Gary co-wrote with Alan Barnes. It had a very mixed reception, to say the least, but it did score one point. It featured Jon Pertwee as the Third Doctor some seven years after his death. Was this a conscious smite on Gary's part, a kind of two-finger salute to Tom?](#)

**G**od no! I would never have had Tom Baker in it because it was a celebration of the people who had helped Big Finish, and Tom had done nothing but belittle us. It would have been rude to Peter, Colin and Sylvester. However, having the Jon stuff in it was a case of going 'we can do something on audio that could never be done on video'. You couldn't make a video and insert those pieces in, so let's do it on audio. We had so much help from Ashley, David and the guys who made it. It was just unfortunate that the sound quality was not as good as we thought it was going to be, and we really believed we could do something with it. It's a thing you get a lot on audio where you



get so close to a project and you know what it's about that you think the punters will, too. And you take a step back from it sometimes and you go 'ooh'. I was always quite keen that before a play went out, that if David Darlington edited it his partner Robert Dick would listen to it. If Gareth Jenkins at ERS did it, then Andy Hardwick would listen to it. Steve Foxon I know always got his brother to listen to it. There was always

someone who would sit back and go, 'I don't know what this play's about so I can listen to it and say "I don't know what they're saying there, that's drowned out by music, that effect doesn't work"'. A number of people have said to me, 'I just can't work out what Pertwee is saying', and I sat there going 'it's obvious what he's saying'. And so we went with it. Two years later you go 'ohh, I can't actually remember what those lines of dialogue were, and I can't understand what he's saying, either'. And then there's a part of me that wonders if it matters. It's not central to the plot, and we just used something that was unique, cause those boys were never going to finish that movie, of Pertwee playing the Doctor for the very last time. It's there and I just think it's a nice thing to have done. And to me that sums up ZAGREUS: it was a nice thing to have done.

It wasn't everybody's idea of a 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary story, I totally see that; there wasn't enough of the Doctors as the Doctors, I totally see that; but really and truly after THE SIRENS IN TIME where else do you go with a multi-Doctor story? That was my thing with ZAGREUS, I decided it wasn't going to be a multi-Doctor story, it was going to be a play which had all the cast in it. That's the way to do it. There's a little bit in the middle, and there's a little scene at the end which I think is a really nice scene where all the Doctor's are talking to each other.

I like ZAGREUS, I can see there are things wrong with it, it's very rambling, but you know what, it's a 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary story. What spoilt ZAGREUS for so many people was expectation. And you can never live up to somebody else's expectation. So we had to pull the rug out and say, 'we're not doing what you think we're going to do, we're doing something else and you might not like it', but hey, that's the risk we took. Some people loved it, some didn't. I will say, even today, considering the bad press it has online and everything, it's still the second biggest seller that Big Finish has ever done. It still sells phenomenally well today, even though whenever some online says they want to buy it, someone comes along and tells them it's shit. And that's because I think the online stuff is not actually that relevant.

[And the best seller...?](#)

**T**HE SIRENS OF TIME. Still today they shift thirty to forty copies a month, because it's a multi-Doctor story. Then you go online and see it doesn't have great reviews, although it did

[www.pantehnicon.net](http://www.pantehnicon.net)

when it came out, but people still go and buy it. And that's something important to remember; reviews aren't that essential as the people who write the reviews think they are.

[It's like THE FIVE DOCTORS. Fans often bitch about it, but they still always watch it. Because it's great fun! At the end of the day a multi-Doctor story is a \*Greatest Hits\* and people love greatest hits.](#)

**A**nd that's exactly what ZAGREUS is. And without it we wouldn't have had the GALLIFREY series, so if nothing else ZAGREUS gave us that, and there is nothing I did for Big Finish that I'm prouder of than the three series of GALLIFREY. If someone asked to me put together a top ten of the things I did with Big Finish, then GALLIFREY is probably top. Closely followed by the I, DAVROS mini-series, which was the last thing I produced and directed for the company in terms of WHO.

[It must be quite rewarding for you to see so many of the people you found through Big Finish now working for the new BBC series of DOCTOR WHO.](#)

**W**ell, it's nothing to do with me. I wouldn't want to take credit for that, other than to say Russell T Davies was a huge fan of Big Finish from day one. He certainly knew of Rob Shearman through his Big Finish work, who was very accomplished long before he did a single Big Finish play. DOCTOR WHO fans tend to think Big Finish discovered Rob, but I think he found Big Finish actually. Rob's career is amazing, he's done huge things. Russell's known Paul Cornell's work for years, so Big Finish never had an influence over that.

I tend to think that thematically there are things that Russell may have subconsciously absorbed, I wouldn't go so far as to say borrowed. There are a lot of similarities, with hindsight, between the Ninth Doctor and Rose's relationship on TV and the Eighth Doctor and Charley's relationship in the audios. There are some very clear parallels there, but I don't think for one moment that anyone sat down and said 'let's make this like the Eighth Doctor and Charley'. It doesn't work that way; DOCTOR WHO is osmosis. Russell is borrowing as much of that from his mind as he is from the Third Doctor and Jo, and the Fourth Doctor and Sarah Jane. That's just part of the DOCTOR WHO stuff going around in your head. In much the same way I'm pretty sure that a lot of the stuff I did with Big Finish

was borrowed from somewhere else; Malcolm Hulke, Agatha Christie and Hugh Walters, you know? That's what it's all about.

It's flattering in a way you can look at things and sometimes go 'ah, that's a Big Finish thing, that seed went into your mind in 2001 way before you were even thinking about DOCTOR WHO, and it's been there ever since and has lead somewhere', and that's flattering. I'm less flattered, to be honest, by the thought that DALEK came from JUBILEE. That's a case of there's a brilliant play, let's turn it into an even better TV episode. That's less flattering than being able to spot tiny things and thinking 'I might have contributed a fragment of your idea'. I'd rather have a seed of something than a forty minute drama.

You've written a good ten novels, and almost as many factual books. Which do you find harder to write?

**F**iction! God, I hate it! There's a huge gap between INSTRUMENTS OF DARKNESS and SPIRAL SCRATCH, and there'll be another huge gap before I write any more fiction. I love writing non-fiction. I love the research. I enjoyed doing REGENERATION, my first hardback, and I've really enjoyed doing THE INSIDE STORY – there were moments I didn't enjoy it, but that was nothing to do with the writing, that was because of the ludicrous deadline it was on.

Well, I'd have loved THE INSIDE STORY to be more like REGENERATION, but it was never going to happen; you'd have to wait twenty years and for Russell's version of DOCTOR WHO to be well into the past before you could get into that level. With REGENERATION Philip Segal had everything in a box. Every email, every memo, every thing was there! And he said, 'do what you like with it'. Considering that was only eighteen months after the 1996 TV MOVIE it's quite something, because he was willing for everyone to see every screw up, every argument and every error of judgement, and never once did he say to me, 'take that out, no I don't want to be seen in a negative light'. He was 'let's make it real'. The only thing he was never keen on was me interviewing anybody else.

I interviewed Jo Wright, the producer for the BBC, and I interviewed Geoffrey Sax, the director. Philip was fine with me interviewing Geoffrey, but was less keen on my interviewing Jo. I can see why, because she had a whole different perspective on it, and the book was meant to a making of the TV MOVIE eschewed from his

perspective. It was important to me, since it gave me a lot of background that I wouldn't have otherwise got. I'd have liked to have interviewed Matthew Jacobs, the writer, and I would have liked to have interviewed more of the actors. I'd love to have done a whole proper making of that movie, cause it's fascinating. But it's not what Philip wanted and it wasn't what the publishers wanted. And that's fine.

I'm immensely proud of REGENERATION, I think it's a better written book than THE INSIDE STORY – and that's purely from a sad journalistic, DOCTOR WHO fan point of view, because it's warts and all. THE INSIDE STORY was never going to be warts and all because that's not what people want of a series that's on the air at the moment. They'll want a warts and all later, and they'll get it, but probably not from me.

When you look at other making-of books that come when a TV show or movie is in production they are so anodyne, they are so utterly reprinting the press release and sod all else. And



I think for that THE INSIDE STORY comes out smelling of roses all the way, because, my god, there's some negative stuff in there. I remember Russell saying at one point to somebody at the BBC, 'it didn't happen like this, it certainly isn't my memory of it, but it doesn't matter because it's that person's memory of it, and they think it happened that way and that's what the book is about'. And I think that's quite telling of what kind of person Russell is. He's not a demigod, he's not a control freak in that sense, and that's what made writing that book actually pleasurable. Once I knew that was his attitude on something, I was like 'oh excellent, I'm not worried, I don't have to make everything fit one person's vision', which I kind of had to do to some extent with REGENERATION because it had to come from Phil's POV.

That said, REGENERATION is a more satisfying book because it's about one thing, it's self contained, it's not open ended, it's all there. There's nothing else that needs to be written about the TV MOVIE with the possible exception of, if someone said let's do a special edition of REGENERATION, I would now tie McGann to a chair, I'd talk to Daphne Ashbrook and Eric Roberts, and get a lot more input from other people, and make it much more of a making-of.

I'll tell you another book I'm immensely proud of, which I didn't write, was the Big Finish INSIDE STORY, which Ben Cook wrote. Because I said to Ben right at the beginning, 'this is warts and all, and it is ongoing'. People think I have a huge ego, and I do, but I don't have an ego that I think I don't want you to say things about me. I made sure that every single person who was interviewed in that book could slag me off to the hilt if they felt like it, and Ben will tell you, there isn't a single thing I cut out. There is the occasional thing where I said I want to reply to that, where Jon Blum would go 'blah, blah, blah' and I wanted to put my side to that because ultimately we're publishing the book. But I wasn't going to take anything he said out, or say he was wrong, I'm just going to say 'it happened because'. I think it's a magnificent book, but whether there's going to be second volume I don't know.

Now, you haven't only written DOCTOR WHO books. You wrote the very successful ART OF LORD OF THE RINGS books, too. How did writing those compare to writing such books as REGENERATION and THE INSIDE STORY?

**W**ell they're ART OFs. I know it sounds stupid, but the clue's in the title. The others were text based books, and about the making of something. The ART OF books weren't. I wasn't writing a making of LORD OF THE RINGS book, I was taking people's artwork and interviewing them so I could make captions around it. And that's all it was.

That said, I probably took longer and had more heartache and stress writing a load of captions for artwork than I had in anything else I've ever done in my life. There are a multitude of reasons for that, and I think if I hadn't had so much support from Harper Collins and really two good editors in Chris and David there, I would probably have walked off that project. Because there were all sorts of things against us, and it's not down to people, it's down to situation and timing. Just trying to get everything sorted out, and I had so much support from people that if they hadn't done so, it would have made the books impossible.

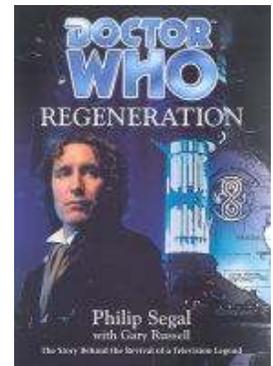
How did you get the gig?

**I** had done REGENERATION for David at Harper Collins, and he's a big DOCTOR WHO fan, he's the publishing director of a certain division at

Harper Collins. So out of the blue he emailed me and said, 'I've just read in DOCTOR WHO MAGAZINE that Virgin have dropped REGENERATION'. The book had been written and for a variety of reasons I won't go into Virgin Publishing passed on it. They let me keep the money, but they didn't want to publish it any more, which I'm not bothered about since they probably wouldn't have done it half as well as Harper Collins did. So David asked me to come in and talk about it, and my brain's going, 'this is Harper Collins!' You know, on the one hand you have Virgin and the other Harper Collins. What do you do? At the time David had emailed me, I'd submitted it to BBC Books, so I told David this. Because between the news coming out in DWM and David contacting me, I had had six weeks to push it somewhere else. I couldn't say anything for sure to David until BBC Books said yes or no. The day before I'd be saying, 'please BBC Books say yes', but now I was saying 'please say no' since I wanted to do it with Harper Collins, which meant it'd be a hardback and neither Virgin nor the BBC would have done it as a hardback.

Ben Dunn at the BBC was very upfront with me about it, very honest, and said 'we just don't think it will be a seller, we will do it as a trade paperback, no pictures, just straight text', and I told him he'd given me the greatest opt out in the world. I said to him, 'you really don't want to publish it, do you, Ben?' and he said 'no, not really', so I asked if I could take it elsewhere. As long as they had a license, Ben was ok with it.

So, David wanted to do REGENERATION, gave me carte blanche, and I told him it was written and half designed by Gary Gillat. I asked for a new cover since the Virgin one stank (Gary didn't do that – but he did do the Harpers one – hooray!), and David said yes. I went back to Gary and said, 'you know what I wanted to do with the cover that Virgin wouldn't let me, you know, drawing of the TARDIS blended into actual set,' and Gary went 'thank god for that, here's one I did earlier'. And we had a cover. So we delivered the whole thing in about three weeks. Harper Collins loved it, published it, and it did really well for them in hardback. They were very very happy and I got invited to the Harper Collins Christmas party for freelancers. And there's nothing I like less than a Christmas party. David phoned me up one day, since I



hadn't replied, and I explained to him that I only really knew him and I didn't want to go to a big party with all these people I didn't know. I'd just get bored, and David would have got bored with me tagging along. David didn't want to go, either, and offered to take me out the theatre instead as a thank you.

We went to see *THE HOBBIT*, which was a theatre production in Central London at the time. David's job at Harper Collins is what I once unkindly called 'looking after the corpses'. He's in charge of Agatha Christie, JRR Tolkien and CS Lewis. They're his three things, and he finds new and exciting ways to market dead people. So I wasn't that surprised when he suggested *THE HOBBIT*, and Christ, it was terrible! It really was a bad production, and I'm sorry Roy Marsden because I'm sure you directed it beautifully, but the night I saw it it was dismal. At the end we're sitting there and David asked me what I thought of it. So I told him, 'you know *LORD OF THE RINGS* and me, not really my cup of tea'. Then he went on to tell me the reason he had brought me to the theatre, reminding me that they were making movies of the trilogy at that time. So my brain is going, 'Gary, you've just committed professional suicide'. He told me he was looking for someone to do *ART OF* books, and asked me what I thought. And I said, 'actually that fires my buttons completely, because it's art' and I immediately knew what that was going to look like. I told him I'd love to them, and he mentioned there would be some drawbacks. I'd have to go to New Zealand!



#### Not much of a drawback!

**N**ow I had no idea what I was looking at, all I knew is 'I like that, it's a pretty picture, I want to use that', which is exactly what David wanted me to do. David's concern was that if he sent down a *LORD OF THE RINGS* expert they'd go in and say something like 'show me what you're doing with the Balrog' and they'll go 'that's not a Balrog, oh that one looks closest to a Balrog, so we'll have that one'. I didn't even know what the word Balrog meant!

The original plan was that I'd go out once and do all three films. Not a hope! So I had to go out every year.

And that's how it came about. They wanted someone who knew nothing about *LORD OF THE RINGS*. That made it a good gig for me, cause everyone down there immediately went 'you have no preconceptions, you're judging it on our work and not on how you think it should be'. The drawback was that only once did Harper Collins ever ask me to do any kind of promotion, and I went to a literary festival. I was surrounded by people who were experts on *LORD OF THE RINGS*, and I knew nothing. So I'm saying stuff like 'I don't know what any of you are talking about, I don't even know what a Balrog is. It's a big fiery thing that goes grrr!' And instead of thinking that was a witty and charming thing to say, they thought it was sacrilege. How dare someone have such an opportunity with *LORDS OF THE RINGS* when they don't even care! Someone who's doing it because it's an art book, and not because it's *LORD OF THE RINGS*. I think, as a result, that's why Harper Collins never asked me to do anything else. If you look it up in Amazon and things, it gets slated! Because the fans don't like the fact that I was given a magnificent opportunity and I don't like *LORD OF THE RINGS*. In fact it would have been a far worse series of books if I had been a fan, I would have been too biased.

I'm hated by *DOCTOR WHO* fans and *LORD OF THE RINGS* fans! I can't win. And I won't even go into what Matt Groening thinks of me writing a *SIMPSONS* book.

#### You can't say that and expect to not carry on...

**T**hey tried to stop Virgin publishing it. They didn't approve of unofficial books, which I always thought was quite ironic that Matt Groening, who's quite happy to slag off and take the piss and break every copyright law under the sun, and yet when you want to do a book about his series... Down come the lawyers!

Now, the *FRASIER* book I did... I took my name off the *SIMPSONS* one, and used a pseudonym which I kept for the *FRASIER* book. And I hate myself for that because I am very proud of that *FRASIER* book, and three members of the production office emailed me saying they had copies of the book on their shelves. 'We don't approve of unofficial books, but this is great and we use it every day.' I thought that was really lovely.

I think it's fair to say you have a deep love of cult shows. Which of these would you have loved to have got involved in, had you the chance?

**N**ot a cult show as such, but one thing Jon Miller and I put to Virgin was a guide to the X-MEN. I really wanted to do a really good guide book to the comics, a detailed issue by issue guide, and how everything crossed over, all the characters. It would have been a brilliant book, but unfortunately Virgin looked into it and the first thing that came up was 'we're Marvel Comics, you do an unofficial book about us and we will sue your arse off'. So it got dropped. Jon and I did a proposal, and it would have been great; I'd still love to do something like that.

I'd love to write books about comics. I love Marvel Comics. I don't read DC or anything else, but I'm a complete Marvel junkie. I'd love to write comics. If someone said to me 'would you like to do FANTASTIC FOUR, would you like to do THE AVENGERS?' Christ, I'd kill to do those! If I have one unfulfilled writing ambition, it's to write for Marvel Comics.

So, what is in store for Gary Russell?

**I**'m employed by the BBC, I'm a script editor on TORCHWOOD and DOCTOR WHO, mainly on TORCHWOOD at the moment. I'm peripherally involved with the brand side, I'm the person who approves all the fiction. So people who are writing books, comics, Big Finish audios, all that sort of stuff has to now come pass me. I'm involved in every aspect of that whole world, that goes on here in Cardiff. I couldn't be happier – pig in shit!

I've been commissioned to write next year's big hardback for the BBC, which is an encyclopaedia of the new series. And my god, being me it's gonna be anal. And also being me, on the first review someone will find something I've missed out, and I will crucify myself. I'm hopefully going to be doing an INSIDE STORY style book for TORCHWOOD, but that's a while off yet.

I'm not involved with the DOCTOR WHO novels, apart from approving them for BBC Cardiff, but I'm the editor of the TORCHWOOD novels, working with Mathew at Ebury Press who commissions them. I'll sit down with him say 'we should have this person, and this is the story they should write', and so he and I have been planning

what we're going to do with them for the next couple of years, if they do any more.

I'm writing a short story for Joe Lidster, which should be due out in June, but let's say July to be on the safe side. Mathew has asked me if I'd consider writing a TORCHWOOD novel at some point, and I'd love to, but I just don't have the time. So I've got no fiction coming up at all, once this short story's out of the way.

However, if someone asked me to do a graphic novel for DOCTOR WHO or TORCHWOOD, I'd jump at it. I just want to write comics now. There's no challenge in writing an 80,000 word prose novel, but there is a challenge in writing a comic.

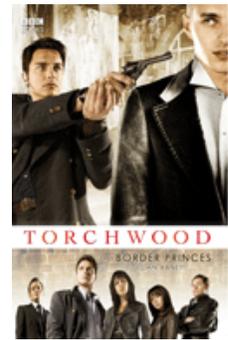
I'd also love to do a DEEP SPACE NINE novel. When I saw they started releasing books with Kira in charge, I thought that's a cool idea. Because again I love writing for women characters, don't know if I do it well, but I love writing for them.

To wrap up then; how do you find living in Cardiff?

**I** love it, and I don't just say that cause I'm here. When I was down researching THE INSIDE STORY and I had to come to Cardiff, I immediately thought 'this is a good city'. This is a city that's fun to be in. When Russell and Julie offered me the job, my first thought was 'I've got to leave London and I'll have to move to Cardiff', and my immediate second thought was 'and that's not going to be a problem'. Because I'd just liked what I'd seen of the city.

Since moving here I've seen even more of it and if I had to find fault with Cardiff, I would say there are certain frustrations I have. One, there's no decent record shops, and sorry Spillers but, you know, you're not it. Two, the idea of late night shopping in Cardiff is half past six! Again it's being spoilt in London, knowing that I can walk around town at ten o'clock at night and find a HMV or a Waterstone's open. And I'm amazed that in a city like Cardiff, when you consider what a big business centre it is, it closes so early.

Beyond that, beautiful city, beautiful people, great atmosphere. I have yet, and I've walked around a lot of it now, to feel threatened anywhere. There are places that people have told me to avoid, and it's usually the day after I've walked through it. There are places in London I'd not walk around, but here, it's great! I'm gonna get mugged walking home, now that I've said that! (Editor's note: Gary got home safely.) I'm



not even alarmed when you walk into the station on rugby day and people are blaring those horns!

Saturday night in Cardiff is great, and I love the fact that they block off St Mary's Street because they know it's gonna be loud and full of rowdy drunk people. But, you know, there's nothing aggressive, there's nothing spiteful or unfriendly even when people in Cardiff are drunk.

As someone who doesn't come from here, I've come to Cardiff and just think what an amazing city. And I'm not in a hurry to leave!

Most of Gary Russell's books and audio plays mentioned in this interview are still available to buy from the usual high street and online stores; including his final piece of fiction for a while, in the Big Finish Books anthology *SHORT TRIPS: SNAPSHOTS* at [www.doctorwho.co.uk](http://www.doctorwho.co.uk)

All cover images remain © of their respective publishers

## LONDON CALLING, part four

### By TRUDI TOPHAM

‘They’re taking it pretty well.’ Baxter sounded like a proud father showing off his baby’s first solid bowel movement. He was perched on the windowsill, his arms folded across his chest. Down in the street below were people behaving as the exact antithesis to a riot. He wondered maybe if they just hadn’t heard the news yet.

Nicholson shrugged. ‘You know the English. They’ll whinge about it all in private, but in public they’ll pretend nothing’s going on. Half of them are probably convincing themselves the Yanks are pulling our legs.’

The Sarge made a grunting, wordless sound, then looked Nicholson’s way. ‘I know the English. They made themselves cups of tea in Tube stations and town halls while their cities were being bombed into dust. They’re made of stronger stuff than you think they are.’

Nicholson turned away and his hands slipped back into his pockets. ‘You’re a soldier. It helps you fight when you’ve idealised the people you’re doing it for.’

‘They’ll surprise you, Nicholson.’

\*

Scotland Yard had become a media circus, but only, Strathclyde supposed, because the media didn’t know where the actual Paras were located. He’d watched a few minutes of the news channels crowding around outside the famous rotating sign then switched off in boredom. How many times were the public really going to want to hear ‘I don’t know’ said with helpless resignation by a low-level police spokesperson who should’ve knocked off shift an hour ago?

Otto fidgeted. Baxter and Nicholson had delivered the kid then departed as ordered, and now Strathclyde was left with a teenager in ill-fitting clothes who seemed to want to be anywhere but here. As the screens flicked off, the boy shrank further into his seat.

‘You want to take some leave?’ Strathclyde leaned back in his chair and laced his fingers together, carefully arranging his body and face to look concerned yet casual.

That got his attention. The shapeshifter looked up. ‘Leave? Sir?’

Strathclyde gave a curt nod. ‘Of course. You’ve had a traumatic experience. Take two weeks, then let Baxter know if you need any more.’

As he’d hoped, the notion of having to talk to Baxter about wanting time off for emotional needs appeared to have just the right effect on Savage, who shook his head with fervour. ‘I’m all right, sir.’

‘You’re certain?’

‘Yeah.’

‘Good lad. Still, I’ll schedule you in for some counselling sessions. Can’t be too careful’

It took Savage a moment, then he said; ‘Thank you, sir.’

‘You’re welcome. The health and wellbeing of all my staff is of primary concern to me. Now, go get some rest.’

Otto slinked from his office and Strathclyde leaned forward, tapping the intercom. ‘Michael, have the Operation Apollo documentation distributed to I-Section and D-Section by five.’

‘Yes, sir.’

\*

Baxter had read the Operation Apollo documentation, and he didn’t like it. The orders bore an uncomfortable resemblance to having to knife your best mate in the kidneys after finding out he’d slept with your missus. Even Nicholson had gone quiet after reading them, and that guy was callous as they came.

They were on different flights, using false IDs, and were flying in to Toronto airport. Canada was far easier to enter than the USA. They wouldn’t be fingerprinted, photographed, or interrogated; they’d just have their ID checked over by a cheerful Canadian who liked the opportunity to chat to people.

From there they’d have to cross the border on foot. That meant going inland a thousand or so miles to get away from the more patrolled routes, then stumbling around in the dark for an age. Baxter had every hope that Neena had packed some decent footwear rather than the silly heels she kept wearing. He wouldn’t find out for seven hours yet.

They had no weapons with them. They were flying on commercial airlines. They’d have to get by on their abilities and training alone, and perhaps the occasional table leg or statuette.

Baxter had raised concern that if the UK were doing this, the USA could well be doing the same to

them, and that perhaps the Irregulars were needed in London, but he'd been assured that a quick strike was the only way.

Not that an eight hour flight was quick, by any stretch of the imagination.

\*

**P**earson International Airport was a huge, glossy building filled with artistic arrangements of glass walls and cheesy little tourist shops that sold maple syrup, Canadian flags, and toy moose wearing RCMP dress uniform. Neena's gaze had drifted toward a Tim Horton's café that displayed a range of cakey seductions which almost pulled her entirely off-course, and she'd dithered a moment, trying to convince herself that she really needed a coffee and that spectacularly chocolatey lump of calories. She'd never seen such a thing of beauty.

Someone behind her had given an asthmatic cough, and it was enough to make her feel guilty and move on. She knew she'd be the last to arrive, so every second she spent gazing wistfully at desserts was a delay to the mission.

She'd passed through Immigration with ease. The officer she spoke to had been pleasant, and enthusiastically impressed upon her his belief that she had to visit the Rogers Centre, even if only for the retracting roof.

They were all gathering in a Downtown hotel. None of them had been told the actual nature of the mission, but Neena didn't like travelling light. She had a rucksack with some essentials and nothing else. Her half-read book had been abandoned on the plane because she just didn't have the room to carry it around with her. And now that she was in a taxi approaching the city she had a sinking feeling gnawing away at her insides.

Here was normality. As they rounded a wide arc on the expressway the CN tower came into view, and the whole thing looked so peaceful. She and her colleagues didn't belong here.

She had the terrible feeling that she was going to be asked to do something she might not be able to.

\*

'Operation Apollo,' said Nicholson as he passed the slim manilla folders around, 'is going to be swift, precise, and over without the Americans

ever realising what's happened.'

Otto flipped through his folder. It contained a stack of photographs of some guy he didn't know, so presumably that's whose face he was going to wear at some point.

'Oh my god.' Neena dropped her folder onto the table and stared at Baxter. 'You want us to go into the White House?'

Baxter grimaced. 'Yeah.'

Otto narrowed his eyes and looked between his boss and Nicholson. 'What exactly are we going to do?'

Nicholson gazed directly at Otto, and Otto swore he felt his bladder giving way. 'We're going to make this problem go away.'

And in a comfortable little three-star hotel in Downtown Toronto, the most audacious plan Otto had ever heard of was outlined.

\*

**C**rossing the border had been easy. Baxter's speed made him near-invisible to the naked eye, and once he was over, the one person who might've spotted the rest of them found himself beset by an angry beaver.

They'd separated after that, making their own way toward Washington D.C. Neena was travelling via New York City. Otto, disguised already as a tourist he'd seen in Chicago, was letting the train take the strain. Nicholson was using an internal flight, and McGregor had rented a car with cash and was driving the whole way.

Baxter was alone, using a mixture of taxis, trains, and rental cars to get him where he was going. He'd be the most recognisable member the two teams, so should he be spotted he wanted to be as far away from the rest of them as possible.

He hoped it wouldn't come down to him acting as a decoy. The SOE wanted this to be a covert mission, and if he was caught anywhere near the White House when something funny was going down there could be a massive international incident. He'd probably get accused of having all kinds of powers and spend the rest of his life in detention awaiting trial while the law struggled to catch up with the idea of Parahumans.

He'd never been to America before. Something about being handled as a criminal on entry to a country put him off going there, and when he did take leave, he preferred to spend it somewhere remote reading books and whittling driftwood. There was also

something sinister about a military which drummed individuality and thought out of its personnel. It made him itch.

Now that he was physically here, he had to admit it wasn't all that bad. People were, for the most part, quite friendly and nice. None of them wanted to shoot him, although a suspicious amount of them did seem to have guns in their cars. Some of the cities he passed through looked a bit, well, Brixton, and even those that made an effort still held an air of seventies tackiness, but he couldn't hold that against them. One man had accused him of being 'unpatriotic' for wearing a Union Jack t-shirt, and he'd had to point out that patriotism was a love for one's own country, not purely for America, but there were Daily Mail readers back home so he wasn't quite ready to believe the USA had more idiots per capita than the UK.

He checked his watch. He'd been circling D.C. for an hour or so, waiting for the right time to head into the capital. This was the crucial step. Between now and meeting up with Neena he could be caught on any surveillance camera hidden anywhere in the city. That's why he was making damn sure he spent as little time in the heart of D.C. as humanly possible.

Time was up, or as close to up as he was willing to let things get, and he took the next right.

Capitol Hill was half an hour away.

\*

**N**eena didn't feel ready. She'd been in D.C. for three hours and was wearing a sharp suit that she'd had to purchase on arrival. Everything else had been dumped. All she had was her ID and her purse. She was now, as far as anyone around her was concerned, an American citizen.

She couldn't pull off the accent for shit, mind you. She was doing her damndest to communicate only in nods, smiles, and wordless noises. So far this had left her hovering uncertainly in doorways or public toilets to avoid having to talk to people.

The cameras were her job, and she'd been manipulating them wherever she went to subtly alter the images they captured. The simplest were those with swivelling mounts, as she could just direct them to tilt away from her as she passed. Those in fixed positions were more of a creative challenge. Sometimes she could get by with looking away from them as she crossed their field of view, but others she

had to consciously tinker with to alter the signals and change the way she was represented visually. Worse, she had to make sure that each camera that recorded her saw the same not-hers face lest their mission ever draw some kind of investigation. A woman with a changing face would be just as suspicious as images of Neena herself.

She couldn't shake the feeling that breaking into a country's administrative centre and forcibly changing the way people thought was unethical.

\*

**T**ogether they looked... Otto had to settle for the word 'elite'. Five of them, all in dark suits, some in shades that looked like the Federal Government had issued them, with transparent wires curling behind their ears. The identity he'd been given to assume was that of a Secret Service agent, someone with the face and ID to go just about anywhere in the White House. Some bloke called Smolensky who'd worked there for five years. His impersonation would have to fool colleagues who had known Smolensky since before Otto reached the age of consent, so no pressure there then.

The Sarge looked like he was as comfortable in a suit as he would be with piles, whereas for Nicholson this was how he dressed most of the time. McGregor seemed okay, although Otto noted that she'd gone for trousers rather than a skirt, and Neena was, for an old bird, pretty hot.

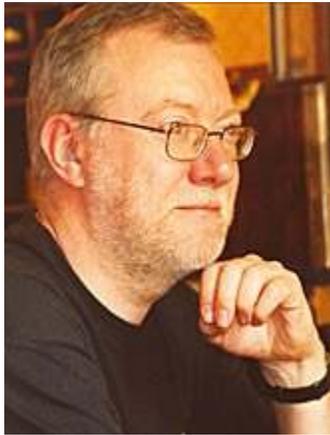
He cleared his throat and nudged his shades up his nose, hoping that rising temperature he felt on his cheeks wasn't obvious to the rest of them. 'Okay,' he snapped, emulating Smolensky's neutral, east-coast accent. 'We done here?'

Baxter nodded, and Otto stepped forward, Neena at his side.

They knew the President was in. Now all they had to do was get to him.

## JOHN JARROLD AN INTERVIEW

John is one of the UK's most influential agents working in the Science Fiction and Fantasy genres today.



He has been an editor since 1988, eventually leaving publishers such as Orbit and Random House to become a freelance Script Doctor, which he does both for major publishers and private clients.

He has been an agent since 2004 and among his clients are Mark Morris, Sarah Pinborough, and Ramsey Campbell.

As an editor, both then and now, what is it that really excites you about a manuscript?

**T**he writing, first. If the writing on the first page draws you in, then the story and characterisation.

In your experience, have you found that authors who are more open to your editorial advice are more likely to succeed than those who remain, for want of a better term, precious about their work?

**I**f someone is precious about their writing, they are unlikely to be published. Every author is an individual, of course, so you don't deal with all of them in exactly the same way. However, one tries to improve a book!

You clearly love your work. Can you say this of most (if not all) editors in UK genre publishing?

**Y**es. I set up an SF editors' Christmas lunch in 1989, and fifteen or so of us would get together, chat about personal stuff, business and the genre until late into the evening. We are all, in our individual ways, great fans!

Having been arm-wrestled into acting as an agent, do you find that your decision to do so has been well-received in the industry?

**W**ell, I wasn't really arm-wrestled into it. In one way, it's a natural progression, since it allows me to continue working with authors – which I always loved – and talk to ex-colleagues and rivals in publishing, who know that as an agent I am aware of what they need and of the pressures on them, having sat on the other side of this conversation for fifteen years.

You've become good friends with many of the writers that you've worked with over the years. Do you consider your life to have been enriched by the career that you practically fell into?

**I** first read for publishers and agents in 1975, less than two years after my first SF convention, and I went out of my way to do that. I knew I wanted to work in publishing then – so I didn't 'fall into it'! It took a long time to do it full-time, though. Like anything worthwhile, it was worth waiting for.

But it has been – and is – the best thing about my life, the thing that drives me and informs who I am. And, as anyone involved in the business will tell you, publishing is away of life, not a job. I find endless reasons to be enthusiastic about it!

What are some of the more interesting reasons you've heard from a writer on why they would like to become published?

**W**riters write. Some want to be published, others simply write and if publication comes, that's great. One thing I avoid: writers who say their reason for writing is to become rich.

Give us the absolute bottom line: What is it that a publisher wants from a new author?

**A** brilliantly-written novel with deeply involving characters, terrific plotlines and stunningly-realised settings.

Do you think the SF/F market will ever shake it's predilection for trilogies?

**F**act: series sell far, far better than one-off novels. Readers like returning to a setting they know. Publishers produce books for a commercial market.

With the recent re-release and re-packaging of a host of classic SF novels by Gollancz, do you believe that there is hope we may once again see the 60-80,000-word novel popular?

**P**robably not.  
Could you list a few books that every new writer should read?

**T**his is obviously personal: On the SF side - TIGER TIGER and THE DEMOLISHED MAN by Alfred Bester; THE SPACE MERCHANTS by Pohl and Kornbluth; THE CRYSTAL WORLD by J G Ballard; THE SALIVA TREE by Brian Aldiss (and his history of SF, TRILLION-YEAR SPREE) THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS by Ursula Le Guin; NOVA by Samuel R Delany; THE MAN IN THE HIGH CASTLE and THE THREE STIGMATA OF PALMER ELDRITCH by Philip K Dick; LORD OF LIGHT by Roger Zelazny; DYING INSIDE and UP THE LINE by Robert Silverberg; USE OF WEAPONS by Iain M Banks; THE STAR FRACTION by Ken MacLeod; ENDER'S GAME by Orson Scott Card; EON by Greg Bear; NEUROMANCER by William Gibson; SCHISMATRIX by Bruce Sterling; ALTERED CARBON by Richard Morgan; THE SKINNER by Neal Asher; PASHAZADE by Jon Courtenay Grimwood; REVELATION SPACE by Alastair Reynolds; NATURAL HISTORY by Justina Robson; SINGULARITY SKY by Charles Stross.

In fantasy - THE SWORDS OF LANKHMAR by Fritz Leiber; STROMBRINGER and THE ENGLISH ASSASSIN by Michael Moorcock; TIGANA by Guy Gavriel Kay; MYTHAGO WOOD by Robert Holdstock; THE ANUBIS GATES by Tim Powers; THE LIGHT AGES by Ian R MacLeod; THE EYE OF THE WORLD by Robert Jordan; THE DRAGONBONE CHAIR by Tad Williams; A WIZARD OF EARTHSEA by Ursula Le Guin; A GAME OF THRONES by George R R Martin; NORTHERN LIGHTS by Philip Pullman; GUARDS, GUARDS by Terry Pratchett (or any Witches or City Guard novel); AMERICAN GODS by Neil Gaiman; THE LIES OF LOCKE LAMORA by Scott Lynch; SCAR NIGHT by Alan Campbell; PERDIDO STREET

STATION by China Mieville. And THE LORD OF THE RINGS.

That's a mix of some books I consider seminal and some that give a new writer an idea of where the market is in 2007. There are, as you can imagine, many others I could have mentioned. There's no Asimov, Clarke or Heinlein there, for instance. Or story collections. And not enough women.

Finally, if you had to give a single, fundamental piece of advice to writers seeking publication, what would it be?

**A**ctually, two things. Firstly, always deal with publishers professionally. Secondly, remember commercial publishing is a business. Market research is a Good Thing. Oh, and third - ENJOY YOUR WRITING!

Find out more at John's website:  
<http://www.johnjarrold.co.uk/>

You can ask John your own questions at:  
<http://www.chronicles-network.com/forum/publishing/>