

SIMULACRUM



TANITH LEE STEPHEN JONES JOHN JUDE PALENCAR

TABLE OF CONTENTS

THE EDITOR'S DESK	3
FICTION	
MALICIOUS SPRINGS – Tanith Lee	5
SOMETHING POISONOUS LIKE A PIANO – Dave Kelso-Mitchell	20
COYOTE – Christa French	25
THE GLASS CAGE – Kristine Ong Muslim	33
ON BEING A GIRRRRRRRRRRL! – W. Maltese	37
POETRY	
THE 7 MUSINGS – Woodruff Laputka	43
INTERVIEWS	
AUTHOR INTERVIEW – Tanith Lee	45
ARTIST INTERVIEW – John Jude Palencar	52
EDITOR INTERVIEW – Stephen Jones	58
SUBMISSION GUIDELINES	72

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THE EDITOR'S DESK

Welcome all to the ninth issue of *Simulacrum: The Magazine of Speculative Transformation*. We sure have a great one lined up for you. It's a downright thrill for me, as both a reader and writer, to present to you the contributors in this issue. And let me take this moment to thank them, heartily, for their time to take part in this issue.

We're excited to bring you a story by multi-talented British author Tanith Lee, *Malicious Springs*, first published in *Interzone* in September 2003. The artwork of John Jude Palencar will be instantly recognizable to many of you, especially those of you who venture into the Cthulhu Mythos often. And then there is Stephen Jones—an Editor and anthologist I'm sure most of us aspire to be noticed by.

We also bring you the stories and poetry of writers you may not be familiar with, but whom you certainly deserve to be! Those of you who have always yearned to see a humorous story about werewolves (intentionally funny, that is) will have a ball with W. Maltese's *On Being a Girrrrrrrrrr!*, Dave Kelso-Mitchell's *Something Poisonous Like A Piano* starts off very surreal and ends up very real. And, in all fairness, deserves a prize for having a very cool title.

Coyote by Christa French is an altogether different werewolf-flavored piece might alternately make you feel pity or loathing towards these particular creatures. And just to topple the theme, we have a sublimely sad story about a boy...well. You'll see in Kristine Ong Muslim's *The Glass Cage*.

We also feature prose by Woodruff Laputka. Have a look at http://www.unfilmable.com/forthcoming_terrors.html about information on Mr. Laputka's film *The Hound*, based on the original short story by H.P. Lovecraft.

A final request: Let us know if there is anything (anyone) specific you'd like to see in the magazine. We're all ears.

Well, actually, we're more than just ears you know, but—you get the drift. Okay. That was my two cents. I'm off to see a wizard. Or was that a man about a gun? I forget. Either way. Should be interesting. Wizards with guns!

I'm off. Enjoy.

—Lynne Jamneck

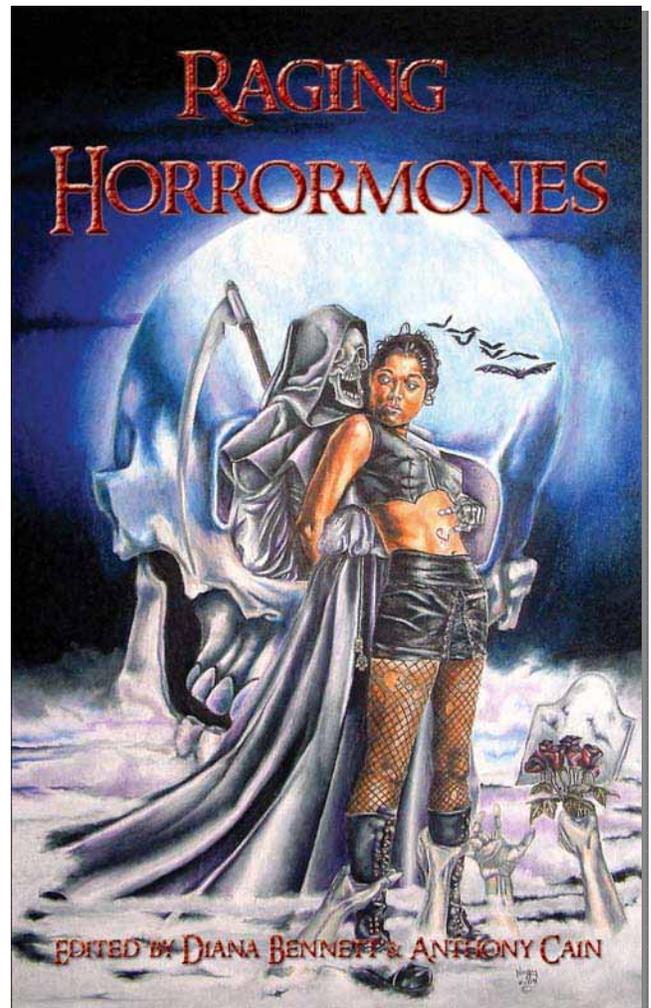
RAGING HORMONES

Edited by Diana Bennett & Anthony Cain

This is a unique collection of stories which take you on strange journeys into uncharted sexual territories. You'll find out what goes on behind the locked doors of our own darkest desires, and come face to face with the horrifying denizens which live there.

The contributors of these forays into the darkest bedrooms in fiction history have pulled no punches, but have pulled out all the stops. So go on, buy the book and enter a world where the term "safe sex" is an oxymoron. In these bedrooms, no one will hear you scream.

**Featuring cover & interior art
by Robert Nagy**



Contributors:

David Lindschmidt, Shaun Jeffrey, Anthony Cain, Dylan Morgan, Diana Bennett, Paul Finch, Ken Goldman, Richard Lee, Karen A. Carpenter, Shawn Francis, Steve Berman, Nicholas Knight, M.K. Bowes, Lisa Ulibarri, John Kiel Alexander, Keith Gouveia, Stephanie Simpson-Woods, Zohar A. Goodman, Lynne Jamneck, Darren Franz, Garrett Peck.

Order now at www.oxcartpress.com or ask for it at your favorite bookstore or online book retailer.

MALICIOUS SPRINGS

TANITH LEE

Like about 2/3 of my ideas for stories, etc there was nothing truly specific that triggered this one. However the (rather inane) “catchphrase”: Hope Springs Eternal, Malice Springs Eternally—did occur to me first. On the other hand, the thought that some of us may carry a kind of dormant, “sleeper germ” inside us—generally inaugurated by the wickedness of others – may well have influenced this tale.

They were rowed across the lake. It was milky blue-green-grey silk, and nothing on it but tiny islands green-meshed in trees, and far over there, a line of ducks cutting a white wake.

"There's something in the water," said Mr. Perkins, the guy who was rowing the boat.

Everyone but Jacob stared over the side at the lake.

"Where?" asked Elaina. Then, "What?"

Mr. Perkins said, "No, not that."

Bill was still interested. He said to Jacob, "*Hey*." But Jacob only wagged his tail. Elaina laughed. And Dad said, "You mean like the Loch Ness Monster, Mr. Perkins?" In that cool, ironic tone that annoyed so many people.

Mr. Perkins though was impervious. He said, "I'm only repeating what I heard. The last lot stayed at the house, they said there was something in the water and it ought to be reported. They left early. Maybe they did report it. But no one took no notice."

"Well, have *you* seen anything, Mr. Perkins?" Your house is only across over there, isn't it, by the farm. Surely you might have? When you were fishing, perhaps."

"Don't go fishing," said Mr. Perkins. "Don't hold with it."

Silence returned. Mr. Perkins had driven them up from the station, then through the village, allowing them a halt at the village shop for provisions, finally loaded their bags into the boat, and helped them in too. Elaina could have managed without any help, Shaw, (Dad) was a bit clumsy. Bill and Jacob scrambled in, in a tangle of arms, legs and paws. Mr. Perkins was that strange combination of taciturn and chatty. Half an hour would pass, then came some

SIMULACRUM

burst of information. "That's the church, see. Twelfth Century that is. There's the road to the shore. Lovely views." And now this about *something* in the water.

Bill peered down through the milky surface of the lake. His ten-year-old eyes were clear enough, the lake less so. He couldn't make out anything much—only some weed, floating. Not even fish.

But in a way it was a relief to have something else to think about. On the train, next in the car, all pressed together, he and Jacob and Elaina in the back, and Dad, the slightly well-known writer, sitting by Mr. Perkins. Awkward.

It wasn't that Bill didn't like Elaina. She was friendly, pretty and quite young, at least nine years younger than Dad, and Dad had been much happier, less cold and preoccupied, since she had become part of his life. But Elaina was—awkward. She was so determined not to try to *take his mother's place* with Bill, that it made both Bill and herself uneasy. The holiday here, at this rented house by the lake, was for Dad to settle down and finish the latest novel. And for them all to "spend time together". Bill assumed too this was a dress rehearsal for Shaw and Elaina—and Bill—living together permanently. Or at least until something else happened, as it had three years ago, when Mum had dumped both Shaw and Bill, and left, as Shaw put it, "On a fucking jet-plane."

"There's the house up there, see," announced Mr. Perkins.

"The white one? Oh yes," cried Elaina, "I recognize it from the brochure."

"Nice house that. Eighteenth century."

"And it has, let's see, an acre of apple orchard, its own well, and an oak staircase with carved banister," finished Elaina.

Shaw smiled. "What do you think, Bill?"

"Looks good," said Bill, encouragingly. It seemed all right, the house, perched up there over the trees. He wondered if it would be possible to spot the Lake Ness Monster from those bay windows at the front. It looked a steepish climb to get there, and Dad would get out of breath and try to pretend he hadn't.

When the boat grounded on the pebbles below the steps, Jacob shot off like a black and brown rocket.

"Jake! Come back!" yelled Shaw, waving his arms in panic. "Bloody dog—he'll have himself lost."

But Jacob only ran up into the trees, barked a bit, then ran back grinning, to see why the rest of his pack was taking so long to join him.

By early evening, they had, Shaw said, claimed their terrain. Elaina, who seemed to like domestic stuff, had made up the beds, and generally reorganized the house, moving couches, scattering extra cushions, arranging candles, putting flowers into vases. Now she was constructing hamburgers from local meat, while Shaw dealt with the salad and cooled two bottles of white wine in the fridge.

SIMULACRUM

Bill did like the house. It had two storeys, with four large rooms and kitchen and scullery on the ground floor, and two winding corridors upstairs, in some parts going up an extra two or three steps, that rambled through another set of rooms.

The views of the lake were wonderful. Even Bill, the pragmatist, could see they were, but best of all, the windows seemed perfect for monster spotting. Dad's chosen 'study' above, however, looked inland to the orchard. "I have to keep my eyes on the computer keys, Bill. The lake's too interesting. But you and Elaina must go for lots of walks." At which Elaina and Bill glanced uncomfortably at each other, and then beamed, to show how great that would be.

Dad was selfish. Bill knew that because Shaw had often said so. "I'm a writer. It makes you selfish."

Jacob loved the orchard. He and Bill had run about there for an hour, then come in thirsty. Elaina, efficiently, already had Jacob's water-bowl down and filled, and a large orange juice in the fridge for Bill.

Shaw washed lettuce and tomatoes at the stone sink. Bill opened a jar of green olives and hooked out two. He noticed Jacob staring at him. Jacob had that funny look in his eyes he got sometimes. Then he sneezed and ran out of the open scullery door, across the little yard there, and back into the orchard.

"That dog is possessed," said Shaw. He sometimes took pride in Jacob's eccentricities.

"You're wrong," said Elaina, "he just likes to be in a big garden for a change."

Bill could see Jacob. He hadn't gone far. He seemed to be jumping about in a rather odd way. Then he came bounding back, grinning, rushed into the kitchen and leapt straight up on the surface where Elaina was working at the hamburgers.

Everyone yelled. Elaina shrieked with outraged surprise as Jacob wolfishly ripped a chunk of the compressed meat from her hand. Then like a whirlwind, Jacob fled back out of the door.

"Are you all *right*? He didn't bite you, did he?"

"No—no—it just—"

"He doesn't do that sort of thing."

Bill wanted to laugh, but didn't. Elaina still looked slightly upset, as if maybe this had happened because she had offended Jacob. She took things too personally. If he had been able, Bill would gently have explained that to her.

"Well, that dog gets no supper tonight," proclaimed Shaw. "I said, he's possessed. He acts half the time as if he has a through-line to some sort of deranged dog-god."

Now Elaina laughed, and relaxed. "It's OK. There's lots left. What he stole will do him more good than canned dog-food."

SIMULACRUM

"Don't make excuses for the brute."

Jacob, disgraced, didn't return. The humans sat to eat in the last summery light, out on the honey-suckled veranda at the front of the house. Golden sparkles crystallised the lake, and long shadows spread purple there from the tree-hung islets. Nothing rose save a single duck, wheeling away into the westerling sun.

"It's beautiful here," said Elaina.

They agreed the food was good. The hot meat and crusty bread from the local shop were first class. The salad too, though Bill had managed to avoid eating most of that. The French wine also seemed to do Elaina and Shaw good, as it usually did. Bill drank his orange juice, wondering with fond contempt what it was adults liked so much about booze. Pretty awful he thought it, the couple of times they had let him try.

"More salad, Bill? Thought not. I'll get coffee. Then I think showers and bed."

Unimpressed by talk of showers, Bill considered the idea of coffee. He didn't get that either very often, but at least it was a drink worth having.

In the night, Bill woke up and heard them arguing. This hadn't happened before, not with Elaina, though she had once or twice stayed at the house in London. With Mum it had happened more or less non-stop, ending in the time she flung a kettle of just-off boiling water at Dad. He had dodged most of it, but by the time Shaw and Bill got back from the hospital, Mum was gone for good.

So Bill didn't like the sound of a row. He lay rigid in the holiday bed, between the clean sheets, with a white moon shining in at the thin curtains, and no Jacob to grab hold of.

"I tell you you're too young to understand, you silly little bitch."

"Shaw—if I'm so fucking *young*, what am I doing with *you*?"

Oh Christ, thought Bill. Please stop it. Please God, make them stop.

Perhaps God, busy though He must be, had a moment, because now the voices went lower, kinder. "Shit, Elly. Sorry. I don't know. I'm just tired—and that book—you know the trouble I'm having with Chapter Seven."

"OK. It's all right. Sweetie, you know I love you?"

Then murmurs too low to decipher. Presently the carefully quiet-because-Bill-may-hear sounds of loving sex. Bill didn't ever mind those, even though they were as alien to him as Mars. They were happy, even funny, sounds. It was just arguments he didn't like. They—scared him. "Thanks, God." Bill was a polite boy.

About two hours later, when dawn was starting to drift from the land towards the lake, another noise – much louder and weirder—woke everyone.

Bill sat upright, and when he heard his father charging down the stairs with Elaina behind him, Bill sprang up and also ran in the same direction.

SIMULACRUM

Back in London, Jacob never stayed out at night. He slept with Bill, usually. Here, as the dog hadn't returned, despite Elaina's cooing from the scullery yard, they had left him to it. Even Bill did that, since he trusted Jacob to be invincible. And now, Jacob was back. He had got in, they reasoned, at a window left ajar in the front room. After which he reached the kitchen, and was currently throwing himself at the fridge door. On the stone floor nearby, his water-bowl lay broken in pieces, water pooling dark as blood.

"Jesus—Shaw—you don't think he's rabid, do you?"

"I hope not. We're not supposed to have it over here—Jacob—calm *down*—what the hell's the matter?"

Jacob stopped bouncing at the fridge door. He turned insane glowing eyes upon them and let out a crackling yowl.

"Maybe he's hurt—"

"Don't go to him, El, let me do it."

Bill said in a high desperate voice, "Dad, open the fridge."

"Don't be crazy. He's not some desperate kid with hunger pangs—he's a dog—"

"Hang on," said Elaina. "Let's just see." She sidled by Jacob, who let her, abruptly looking more worried than dangerous, wagging his tail as she pulled open the door. Then she threw herself back as Jacob leapt once more, straight up against the packed compartment.

"He's after the bloody hamburgers again—"

Jacob's long paws and long nose flailed in amongst ketchup and salads. The half-filled second wine bottle, left from dinner, teetered at the onslaught. It tilted slowly, pondering whether to fall out or not. Then fell. It smashed on the floor, and wine spread in another puddle.

Jacob slid from the fridge, lowered his head and lapped up the wine.

"Jake,—stop that—it's full of broken glass—what's the matter with the stupid fool—" Shaw now had Jacob by the collar, hauling him away. Jacob, docile, tail-wagging, permitted this. Shaw sat on a kitchen chair, holding Jacob's head between his hands, staring in Jacob's liquid eyes. "My God, we have an alcoholic dog."

"I'm off for a walk around the lake. May visit the farm shop. Want to come?"

Bill glanced dubiously at Elaina, all bright, trying to be a good friend but *not* in his mother's place. Hovering at the breakfast table, Shaw was looking miserable, wanting, or afraid, to get back to his difficult Chapter Seven. There had been another row. A quick flash-flood of one. About the bloody muesli. And Bill had sat there, his mouth dry as bone. Only Jacob, cool and reasonable once more and leaning on Bill's leg, helped him keep together. Now he would have to

SIMULACRUM

act like he wanted to go with Elaina. "Sure," he said, smiling radiantly. "Can Jacob come?"

"He'd better," said Elaina, "needs some fresh air for that hangover."

Outside, as they started off along the brow of the hill, Jacob—not at all hungover—bounding through the trees, tall grass and wild flowers, Elaina paused. "Bill, you know it's OK with Shaw and me? I know it's rotten to hear us shout like that—don't know why we did—but we don't mean it, Bill. We—*like* each other, your Dad and me. OK?"

"OK," said Bill. She was a nice woman, trying to reassure him. But he had seen their eyes – like Jacob's, actually, when he thieved the hamburgers, or when he knocked the bottle out of the fridge. Going upstairs to clean his teeth, Bill had passed Shaw's study. Shaw stood by his computer, drinking from a half bottle of whisky. Seeing Bill see, Shaw shrugged guiltily. "Swift nip, sir, prior to embarkation on writer's block." Bill had nodded and gone on to the bathroom. He hadn't seen Shaw drink like that in the morning since the Mum days.

Though Bill conscientiously cleaned his teeth, he hadn't showered. Last night he hadn't taken a bath either, though one had been run for him. In London he was fairly strict with himself, but here—well, it was a holiday. He didn't stink yet. He used the bottle of Evian to rinse his mouth of toothpaste, as they did at home. He had meant to get a cup of coffee off Shaw this morning, but the row had prevented that. So it had just been juice. If this farm shop was any good, he might persuade Elaina to buy him a Pepsi.

The walk was fine, at first. Oak trees splashed up green into the blue sky. The red flowers in the grass were poppies, apparently, and the pink-white ones ox-eye daisies.

Jacob too seemed fine now. It was all fine.

Then, without warning, Elaina started to cry.

This was worse because at first she had tried to hide it, then pretend she wasn't, then she said, "Sorry, Bill. Shit, really sorry. I'm all right. Sorry, Bill."

Bill remembered his mother, crying. Drunk and crying. Slapping Dad. And Dad shouting, and then crying too. Dad drinking whiskey. And then the boiled water flying through the air, and Dad shaking with shock, trying to drive safely to A and E. And saying to a nurse, "Dropped the bloody kettle. Stupid."

Jacob found a rabbit. Jacob chased the rabbit.

"For fuck's sake – leave it alone – that fucking dog—I'll *kill* it—"

"That's Jacob—"

"I know who it fucking—look—do you want to see a rabbit chomped right there in the grass in front of you? / don't."

"He won't. He won't catch up."

"How do you know? What rabbits are there in London?"

"There *are*. On the heath."

SIMULACRUM

"Christ's sake shut up, Bill."

Jacob lost the rabbit. Elaina left off shouting. Bill felt sick. They went on around the lake. After about twenty minutes, she said, "God, Bill. Sorry."

"S'OK."

"I don't know what—it must be PMT."

Bill knew what PMT was, though he didn't *understand* what it was. His mother had always been blaming it for her moods. But Elaina didn't have moods—Elaina was always too worried about upsetting someone—

"Look, there's the farm. And there's Mr. perky Perkins's house, that red one up by the wooded bit. Hey, maybe the farm sells ice-cream."

The farm shop was by the gate of the farm. Beyond, flowed sloping summer fields, with cream rolled up rugs on legs—sheep. The other way, the hill curved down to a craggy path, and so to the strand of the lake. The shop was open, and sold everything on earth.

Jacob took no notice.

The moment they reached the brink of the downward path, the dog scooted away. Bill was terrified Elaina would lose her temper again, and when she didn't, and simply looked concerned, Bill suggested he should follow the dog down. It was a relief to get away. "Ice-cream ready when you come back!" she cried after him.

Bill trekked down the path, through the cascades of oak and beech. He couldn't see the beauty, not even the potential, now. It was just a green place, full of trouble. He found Jacob at the water's edge, drinking and drinking as if about to consume the lake.

"She put you out a new bowl. It was the big cereal one. Didn't you remember to drink the water?"

It was like taking a pee before you left the house. Or washing your hands—which Bill thought he hadn't done, had he? But yes, he had, only using the hygienic moistened tissues. He liked those. They smelled like doctor's stuff. He had liked doctors ever since the kettle and A and E. They had been kind, to Dad, and to Bill.

When Jacob at last stopped drinking, they trolled back up the slope. Birds sang and called in the woods. Just noises. There had been nothing eventful to see in the water.

Elaina had another bag full of items for meals. She handed Bill a can of Pepsi *and* a chocolate ice-cream. He stood holding them, now disabled—both hands lost to him—not wanting either treat anymore. But he would have to eat

SIMULACRUM

and drink them. Not only not to make her feel bad—not to get her *angry*. Yes, he remembered the safety drill for that.

Jacob though, helped out. When Bill managed to drop it, the dog wolfed the ice-cream. Elaina saw, and a moment of fear resulted, but she only laughed after all. "Do you want another one, Bill? Go on, you can. It wasn't your fault."

Not much. "No thank you."

Elaina was drinking cola too. The fat woman in the white blouse leaned over the counter, smiling at them all.

"Yes, they left in a great hurry. Sometimes happens, see. People—they get out of their depth."

"Mr. Perkins—he rowed us across—he said they said there was something in the lake?"

"In the lake? I never. Well, I don't know what that could be. Nothing there but a few ducks and fishes. The water, see," said the white-bloused woman, "that comes in from the river, and goes on to the sea. Bit of a coming back, there. The lake, it's just a bit salty, mind. You *can* drink it. But the best water's up on the hills. Sweet as sugar. Every house has its own well. There's the Holly Well and the Black Ram Well and the Century Well over by the shore road. Water clean as anything, it is. Better than the tapped muck in the town."

Elaina leaned in too, towards the counter. "What well is ours, at the white house?"

"Oh, that well isn't much, I'm afraid. Dried out that well is. Your water comes up from the town, pipes to the taps. Sorry to disappoint."

"Yeah," said Elaina. "And I thought it had a bit of a kick to it, our water. Kidding myself."

"A kick? There's a funny thing now."

Walking back was better. Elaina began to talk to Bill about Shaw, just gently, confiding. Bill liked it, to hear his father so comprehended, forgiven and adored. Was it safe now, then?

"I've been very good," said Shaw, at lunch. "I've done five hundred words." He still looked gloomy. When things were going right, he could skate through two and a half thousand words in a morning. "One interesting line I came up with—listen—" he picked up his longhand notebook, and read: "' Maybe hope springs eternal, but malice springs eternally.' What do you think, Elly?"

"Ironic and nasty. Strong."

"I thought so too. Have to place it right, the line, but it's very pertinent to the text. But, well, I did read a bit, too. About the rivers here. There's a guidebook in the bookshelf."

SIMULACRUM

Lunch was sandwiches, thick chunks of ham and sliced tomatoes. Bill managed to wiggle the tomatoes out and lose them. He took an apple though, and carried it off to eat, then left it somewhere, uneaten.

After lunch, Shaw and Elaina departed upstairs for a rest. Bill thought it was really for sex. That was fine.

He went into the kitchen and looked at Jacob, nosing at his water-bowl, not drinking it. Jacob grunted, shovelling the bowl about.

Bill went to the fridge, got out the Evian, tipped the tap-water down the sink, and filled the bowl again from the bottle. Once he set it down Jacob lowered his head and lapped.

Standing watching, Bill cautiously sniffed at himself. Nothing, he thought, but... he might be wrong. He took another bottle of Evian from the fridge and carried it to the bathroom, where he twice filled the basin, and washed himself all over, thoroughly. He had heard of actors who refused to wash their hair or bathe in ordinary water. Was that why he had done it?

He turned on the tap and let the ordinary water run through, the water everyone else in the house was using for tea and coffee, cleaning fruit and vegetables, and for having baths and showers.

From the bedroom came soft seethings. Poor Martians. He had to take care of them.

Bill craned forward and stared up at the gushing tap. He was about to reach up and stick his tongue under the flow, when Jacob padded into the room. The growl that burst from the dog could have come from prehistory. It was dark and horrible, lawless, menacing and full of fear. Bill stood up. He put his hand, one finger, towards the running water. Jacob snarled, his lip peeled back from healthy gums and ice-white shark's teeth. "What is it?" Bill asked softly. But Jacob had never learned to talk. When Bill turned off the tap, Jacob came and leaned against him, raising his eloquent head to be caressed.

Along the hall in the bedroom, Elaina gave a thin, wavering scream. It was only sex, but normally she kept so quiet, for Bill's sake. Maybe they thought he was out in the orchard.

He kissed Jacob between the eyes and they went down, silently as clever burglars, through the house, and out by the scullery door.

The old well was in the orchard, covered by a movable lid, slung round with ivy. Bill climbed up the step and pushed the lid. He peered over into a rusty nothing, and Jacob, running up next to him, paws on the rim, peered in too. Jacob seemed interested, but not upset.

The well was dry.

From the house, through the open window, voices.

"Oh stop it, Elaina. Just be quiet. I'll work later, when it's cooler."

"I only said—"

SIMULACRUM

"You're nagging. Why? Concerned I can't earn any more money, that it? Stuck with an old man who can't keep you in Chardonnay and fucking Alpen."

"Christ. What is it with you? You are getting to be a pain, Shaw—*Shaw let go of me, you bastard*—"

Bill and Jacob sprinted along the orchard, through the extending shadows of the three o'clock trees. The embryos of apples hung above them. Through trunks they glimpsed hills, distant isolated houses, the flat shine of the lake.

He had only once been seriously late home. That time he had been avoiding a couple of kids, and got lost on the edge of the heath after school. Dad came along later, with torches and two neighbors, calling. Bill hadn't meant to frighten Shaw. Now, Bill didn't consider that. He shut them both, his father, the woman, from his mind. And with them, the sound of the slap he had heard ringing from the bedroom window.

Bill and Jacob ran through the orchard and the afternoon, and wandered across the hills, down to the lip of the lake. There they played desperately, as if very, very happy, in the deepening golden light. When the sun moved over beyond the hills, mauve shadows dipped the shore. The lake turned to pale smooth metal, lit by one long last warm sun-ray. Then everything sighed to a luminous dimness, and stars began to appear on the dark blue sky.

By now Bill was hungry. So, doubtless, was Jacob. Bill sat skimming pebbles out across the lake. He couldn't make them bounce. Jacob sat by his side, panting, not complaining.

Night unfolded its wings.

"How's it happen?" Bill asked Jacob. Jacob looked at him attentively, listening, considering. "Is it the well?" If Jacob knew—very likely he did—he couldn't say.

What time was it? The moon had come and was going over and Bill, who had left his watch behind in the bathroom, guessed the hour was almost 9pm.

Normally by now, dinner had been eaten, dishes seen to. Maybe they would have had some TV, reading, or a game—chess, or *Galactic Grab* on Dad's computer. Bath and bed looming. Bill was tired. Tonight he wouldn't have been sorry to be sent to bed. Should they sleep down here? Bill stared about him. There were creeping shades along the shore, which might be anything. Though they had misunderstood what Mr. Perkins had said—or indeed Mr. Perkins himself misunderstood what he heard—there might anyway be—*things*—in the lake, which only surfaced by night. Could any of those be worse than what might be happening in the house on the hill? Torn between the proper and instructive terrors of youth, and the deadly horror-terror of real life, Bill started to cry. Jacob

SIMULACRUM

shoved in close. Bill held the dog, breathed courage in from his coat, and closed the sluice-gates of his eyes with a sharp pain against the tears. "We'd better go back, Jacob. See how it is, eh? Can't be so bad. Maybe it's OK now. Maybe it wasn't so bad—maybe."

Boy and dog walked back along the shore, and found the steps that rose up to the white house. No one had come to look for them. Or—had searchers gone in another direction?

They ran up the steps, up the hill.

This way, coming to the house from the front, it towered up suddenly, foreshortened, unnerving—*black*. For there weren't any lights on, not in the upper rooms nor the bay windows of the front façade. On the unlighted veranda, the table and chairs had an intense stasis. If anybody had ever had dinner tonight, the table had been monumentally cleared—last night, they hadn't been so tidy. On the other hand, they hadn't, last night, knocked over any chairs, and now one lay on its side. A rose, shattered from the vine, covered the ground below like flakes of white paper.

They had gone out. They must have done. Out looking for Bill. That was it.

New panic enfolded the old leaden panic of the afternoon.

On the top step, below the slope of the hill that led up to the veranda, Bill stood, gazing in darkness, on darkness. And that was when Jacob began, deep in his guts, to growl like a nightmare wolf.

From nowhere—sound and fury, movement and threat. The front door crashed open and light blazed out of the hallway, slicing the veranda down the middle, and the night, and Bill's eyes. And through the light, a roar of a voice, not really human, like some demon in a movie—words, but not properly words, rage unable to decipher itself. It was Shaw. Bill could just make him out through the blinding light, just make out his voice through the demon roaring.

"Sorry—" Bill faltered. He wanted to turn and run, or run to his father and have his father change at once back into—a father.

But the combination demon-man came blundering out and reached for Bill. Then Bill *heard* the words, "Little fucking bastard—get inside—" and a foot kicking out, all the weight of the body behind it, at Jacob—who, instinct honed from the caves of his ancestral past, leapt from its way, and half lay, belly flat to the grass, snarling. For Bill, true reaction had already been too far subsumed by ordinary life. *He* was already caught. Hauled into the house. The door slammed. Three centuries of stone and timber quaked—probably not for the first time.

They were in the front room, and again light slammed on and Elaina was lying there in a chair, her face bruised and her nails broken and her eyes mad, rising up, screaming at both of them.

SIMULACRUM

On the low table were glasses and a glass jug. They had been drinking—what was it?—not wine, not lemon barley water. No. Clear, the glass. Shiny. Water. They had been drinking water. From the tap.

Shaw pushed his son aside. Bill stared up and saw this face that was a devil's and the tortured eyes he remembered, which howled for help from miles away.

Elaina spoke slurringly, as if very drunk.

"I'm thirsty. Go on, you parasitic little git, fill that jug. None of the shit from the bottles. Get it out the fucking taps, d'ya hear?"

"Yes," said Bill. He seized the jug, and ran by his father who, in that extreme moment, seemed dementedly to try to strike Bill even as he passed. But the blow missed, the passage and the kitchen door were gained.

Darkness was still there.

Bill stood breathing. Perhaps they might forget they had sent him on this mission. But no. They would crave what he must bring them. He had only a moment. Bill crossed to the sink, put in the plug, and turned the tap full on. As his night-vision once more adjusted, half turning, he saw the head of Jacob appear wolf-like against the starry kitchen window pane, and heard the dog's body slam against the frame.

Then and only then, there in the dark, refined by the worst fear on earth, terror of those you love, Bill saw it. Saw what was in the water.

A narrow sound scraped out of his throat. Was this a bad dream? Never. Bill was a child, even he grasped that he was, and children know, and children still see—as animals generally do, (unless too corrupted by proximity to mankind) and other creatures who retain their higher sight.

This then was why only he had, this altruistically obedient boy, instinctively avoided shower and bath, even washing his hands with wipes, rinsing his mouth with Evian, not eating any salad, dropping what they thought he *had* eaten off the veranda, unseen, not biting into an apple. Even the coffee he believed he had *wanted*, he hadn't got. Water. Everything had been washed in it. Fruit and veg, human skins—or it was in the kettle for the tea and coffee, mixed in the lemon and barley drink—going straight in at every orifice or little cut, and through the intestines by the mouth itself, that infallible door. Tiding like the sea.

They were like bubbles made of mercury, the things in the water, about the size, he thought, of pound coins. *Easily* big enough to see—once you could see them. If ever you did. And they were hard and firm, yet flexible, and they moved, gleaming, rubbing against each other, attaching and subdividing and making more and more, so the whole sheet of the sinkful of water, the gush from the tap, were like a fountain and a lake of miniature silver *worlds*. But they were like microbes too. Huge microbes. Like amoebas seen in the biology book. And they were the seeds of some ancient evil, come up from the elder spring under the

SIMULACRUM

hill, bypassing cunningly the dried well, entering instead, by some little chip or hairline fracture of the modern pipes, the hermetic public water sent from the town.

The two out there were bellowing. They didn't sound at all human, more like frightened cattle, Bill thought, a bull stung by wasps—

He filled the water jug from the tap, almost halfway. There was a new bottle of white wine in the fridge. It wasn't open. There was no time. At the window now Jacob was barking and howling, scratching, scrabbling, trying to claw down the wall—

Bill smashed off the top of the bottle of wine. He hoped no glass fell down in it, but only out on the floor. He slopped the wine into the water. And, in the dark, watched the things that were in the water writhing—bursting—disintegrating—dying. When they had completely vanished, he heard Jacob fall silent. The dog was grinning in at him, pleased that his lesson had been well-taught.

Bill ran into the front room. Two Neanderthal beings in jeans came rampaging at him. He dodged them and sloshed the dead water and curative wine into their glasses. Then they rushed for those. Would they notice a faint tawny tinge, an alcoholic bouquet? What would happen now, if they drank? Would they too die?

After a few minutes Bill sat down on the couch. He sat watching them. He watched them come back, Dad and Elaina. They returned dazed, and abruptly drunk, pissed out of their minds, yet quiet, rational. They were bewildered. Yet they didn't forget the prelude. They gaped at it in retrospect, and at Bill, and stammered things. They wandered about the room. Shaw staggered over and stroked Bill's hair. Bill held himself like stone not to shiver. By eleven-thirty he felt able to get up and bring the rest of the wine bottle, then let Jacob back into the house. Jacob padded patiently into the front room too, and sat by Bill, as they watched Elaina and Shaw, who had come back, dishevelled and levelled, from the pit of hell.

Though they tried often to speak to Bill, Bill would only nod. He was their judge. Mostly aware of what had occurred, they accepted this fact. They respectfully left Bill to judge them, he and the dog.

Near morning, they went, the man and woman, to the fridge. Brought in the case of Evian and some cans of Pepsi. When morning really came, everyone ate bread and butter and drank orange juice. They didn't talk at all. No one took a bath or shower.

Later each of them slept, there in the chairs, and Bill on the couch, Jacob next to him, head on Bill's knees.

SIMULACRUM

Aeons after, voices drifted across Bill's sleep. She. He. These known strangers.

"Did we? Was it? I? You? What shall we do?"

"Forgive. Don't forget."

"But it must be reported. It's—poisonous—what *is* it?"

"Some hallucinogen—chemical filth. Or natural—unnatural. Maybe always here. Maybe in the old days— Twelfth Century, Eighteenth—they could handle it."

"But we can't just—not—"

"No one believed anyone. The 'other lot' as Perkins put it, probably tried the police. And the police didn't believe them. Or they didn't bother. Or it was hushed up. And you know what they can be like, these sort of—hate to say it, but *parochial* people. Take our money, despise us. We're tourists. Enemies. No doubt they think our sort—we either survive, or we don't."

"But what we—what—"

"It can't happen again, away from here. We have to believe that. And... make *him* believe it."

"Bill. Poor Bill. Oh God, Shaw."

"Don't cry. OK cry. I'll join you. But when he wakes up, we *stop*."

In sleep, Bill was running with Jacob. Running up a mountain of years—ten—twelve—sixteen—and away and away, (the woman and the man left far below for ever) and right over the top, Jacob and he, together and alone.

They were rowed across the lake the other way.

"Shame you got to go so soon. Business, was it?"

"That's right, Mr. Perkins."

"And a lovely day, and good weather forecast all month. And your missus's face all bruised where she fell down the oak stair—lucky nothing broken. And lost your deposit on the stay, too. There's a pity."

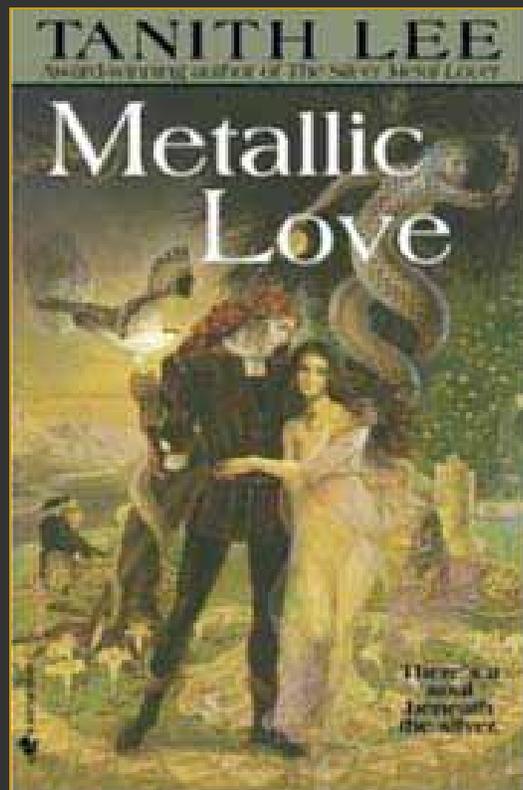
Elaina looked grimly through her sunglasses at the receding hills. Shaw looked silently into his thoughts. Bill, with Jacob watching like a feral yet benign henchman, stared only down into the milky silk of the lake, blue-green-grey. Mr. Perkins, for all his words of commiseration, seemed slightly to be smiling, maybe only at the sunlight, and the perfect tranquility of the day.

(*Malicious Springs* 1st published *Interzone* UK September 2003)

THE END

TANITH LEE was born in 1947, in England. She was educated at Prendergast Grammar School, and later worked as a library assistant, waitress, clerk and shop-assistant, spending a year at art college when she was 25. In 1975-6 she was able to become a full-time writer. She has to date published almost 70 novels, 10 short story collections, and well over 250 short stories. Lee has also written for BBC Radio and TV. Her work has often been nominated for and also won several awards. Her books have been translated into over 16 languages.

CLICK HERE TO READ OUR INTERVIEW WITH TANITH LEE



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SOMETHING POISONOUS LIKE A PIANO

DAVE KELSO-MITCHELL

Something Poisonous Like A Piano—the title came from a cryptic crossword clue. The rest of it was an emetic burst provoked by the amount of attention lavished on the likes of Damien Hirst, Tracey Emmings and other nameless assholes. On one level it's a 'reductio-ad-absurdum' treatment of the 'shocking' and 'controversial' antics these people pass off as art while filling their pockets. At the same time it's a comment on the difficulty (almost impossibility) of communicating anything genuine through art, to the public in general. After the mayhem at the story's conclusion, the narrator is still unconvinced as to its merits. I am reminded of Antonin Artaud's last public speaking where, frustrated at not reaching his audience, he offered them bombs instead of words.

About forty of us entered the exhibition hall, a mixture of ethnic types and social classes. The only restriction I could make out applied to age—there were no visitors who looked younger than twenty and nobody apparently over fifty. Some people seemed genuinely excited by the prospect of what lay inside the halls, others maintained an air of informed skepticism appropriate to their backgrounds. This was, after all, the age of hype we were living through, in which we were kept motivated constantly by the promise of the next best thing.

A door opened and we saw, for the first time, our guide for the event. A ripple of surprise ran through the crowd followed closely by cries of revulsion and horror from those nearest the man. From where I stood, I could not immediately get a good view but the impression I had was that he was clad in some sort of semi-transparent material bunched with moving ciliated tendrils. As I got nearer I realized with a small shock that what I had taken to be a very cleverly designed suit was in fact a number of living tarantula spiders fastened to his body—he was otherwise naked. I could not make out how the spiders were attached—they seemed to be almost growing out of his flesh. I later learned that that was in fact the case. The creatures had been carefully implanted in his body as eggs and nurtured to their current size. Through ingenious neurosurgical techniques, they were grafted to his nervous system.

The man gestured for us to follow him and then I noticed what had previously eluded my attention, due no doubt to the shock of the spider garment.

SIMULACRUM

His eyes had been sewn shut. Nevertheless he moved with the assurance of a person with full sight and conveyed his meaning to those present with total dexterity. As one, we followed him.

The first room we visited was in almost total darkness. There was a strange rustling noise from the floor and walls which seemed to be rippling. The guide beckoned us on. Half of the crowd was well into the room before we realized what was going on. Cries of nausea and panic broke out. The whole room was alive with insects—cockroaches, beetles, centipedes and locusts, which crunched underfoot. Many of them were climbing the visitors' legs as they tried to get back the way they'd come in. To their great dismay, they found that that door was firmly shut and the only escape was by crossing the room to the exit. I think we only lost one elderly woman in that first room. She may have realized what the shifting mass actually was and not entered the room in the first place—I only noticed that she was missing afterwards. I've never really bothered to find out for sure. Considering the carnage of the later rooms, it's a minor concern, anyway. The title of the first room was "Steal Softly Through Snow".

After the visitors had finished screaming and sobbing and dancing frantically in an attempt to divest themselves of insects, we were ushered into a white-tiled room with a tall ceiling. In the centre was a gigantic pile of car and tractor tires. The Artist, clad in an asbestos suit and gas-mask, bowed to us and lit a blowtorch. Realizing what was about to happen, I dived for the exit immediately. One or two other people were ahead of me, but many were too slow and as the huge pile of petrol-soaked tires ignited, the force of the flames cut them off. The acrid, thick black smoke obscured them from our view very quickly. We lost about seven people in the second room which was entitled "Warning! Mademoiselle is Coated With Arsenic!"

The third room was traversed without casualties, although not without fear or loathing. A slender and precarious gantry stretched vertiginously over a carpet of living rats, their bodies surgically stitched together. Although the sight was stomach-churning, the rodents were more involved in tearing each other apart and attempting to tear themselves away from each other, than in the party of spectators warily picking their way through the exhibition above them. This exhibit was called (in a somewhat clichéd manner) "An Insight Into the Human Condition".

There was a short break for martinis and canapés.

We entered the fourth room with more than a little trepidation, in view of what had happened earlier. All that met us, however, was a row of seats and a large projector screen. I did note with interest that the number of seats matched exactly the number of spectators remaining.

SIMULACRUM

We sat for some time, trying not to talk to each other and attempting to appear interested. The lights dimmed without warning and huge blasts of sonic terror almost knocked us out of our seats. Guitar feedback and screaming saxophone—I recognized it immediately as Borbetomagus, but couldn't quite place the name of the track.

The screen flickered to life. An operating theatre, a figure under a sheet, people in surgical robes and masks. I had seen the Roswell film many years ago and recognized this for what it was. I could tell it wasn't the original, but it was a bloody good copy. The sheet was pulled back to reveal the partially decomposed figure of a beautiful young man with huge white wings growing from his back. The doctor's proceeded to dissect the figure. It was a real human body. They cut the wings from the back—it all looked unnervingly authentic. The film and music stopped abruptly leaving us in the dark. We heard our guide's voice and a rectangle of light appeared, framing his silhouette. It was time for the next room. The title of that piece was "Fly Or Take A Train".

The next room contained a huge sculpture made from what looked like parts of dismantled cars. It was in the form of a gigantic crucifix and trapped within it, in a posture of agonized crucifixion was a lifelike waxworks dummy of a woman. People began to move towards it and someone stifled a gasp as the eyes moved. It was no dummy, but a live woman obviously enduring unimaginable agonies. Looking at her we could see how jagged spars and thorns of metal pierced her body in many places, holding her there impaled. Her naked and shaven body was slick with blood and I was curious how she could have lost so much and still lived.

The answer was above us, a huge circular bowl fed blood into her through tubes in order to keep her alive and prolong her agony. It was ingenious and I wondered who had conceived of this torture-sculpture. The plaque beneath said "Icarus" by Willy Whitehouse. A name to watch out for. As we began to move past and towards the next room, the sculpture began to move; needles erupted and pierced the woman's body in many places, small circular saws emerged from the crucifix and started removing segments of her body.

The guide spoke, "she was diagnosed as having terminal lymphatic cancer and only two months to live. She donated her body to art. All appropriate forms of consent and liability have been signed, I assure you."

As I was going through the door I looked up at the blood-filled bowl and saw an unhuman eye regarding us. The bowl was filled with fish, drowning in this unnatural element. A subtlety not many of our party caught.

The sixth room was empty with blank white walls. After the last of our party had entered, the door shut with a click. We stood for an indeterminate period of time until someone decided to try the door. It was, of course, locked. The room

SIMULACRUM

became hotter and the lights dimmed. The air seemed to become stale and some members of our party began to get alarmed. Suddenly a door opened and about a dozen armed men in military uniforms entered. The uniforms were unplaceable suggesting any number of totalitarian regimes—Nazi, communist etc.

They formed a line in front of us, their guns aimed straight at our heads. Their commander stood forward and read from a sheet of foolscap paper. His voice was flat and emotionless. He read a list of a dozen names, then folded the paper and replaced it in his pocket. Then, in the same flat tones, he asked those people named to step forward. Some members of our party looked at each other in confusion. The officer snapped out his request again—this time in tones of growing impatience. The soldiers' fingers seemed restless on their triggers. Eventually a middle-aged couple stepped forward.

"What do you want with us?" queried the man in a quaking voice.

"Where are the others I named? Step forward now or my men will start shooting people at random until you do."

The others named stepped forward. He checked them off his list.

"You will follow me. Please move quickly."

He left the room, the named ones in his wake. Finally the soldiers followed. There was a strange feeling of relief among those of us left. Our guide stepped forwards.

"Every member of the audience has been vetted beforehand and the ones just taken outside were Jewish. They will be taken out to the woods, stripped and hosed down with cold water then taken to a clearing. Then they will be forced into a hole in the ground, covered over with planks and left all night. The following day they will be let free. Please do not be afraid for their safety."

This particular exhibit was unnamed.

We broke for coffee and bagels before being escorted to the final room, being promised that this would be the culmination and climax of the whole event.

The chamber was in semi-darkness, the only light entering from outside through a large stained-glass window. The timing was superb. The artist had calculated the optimum moment for our entrance which coincided with the sun's rays hitting the centre of the window exactly. From hidden speakers, Gorecki's 3rd symphony was playing, rising to its peak. A figure entered the room and walked across to stand before the window. Because of the light at his back, which rendered him an impressive silhouette, we only had a glimpse of him, but he appeared to me to resemble the central figure of Goya's "2nd of May 1808" with its billowing white shirt drawing attention to itself as a focal point.

At this point the music subtly changed, strains of Penderecki's "Threnody to the Victims at Hiroshima" filtering into the Gorecki and gradually overpowering it.

SIMULACRUM

The volume built and I sensed something about to happen. Instinct made me weave my way to the back of the crowd—just in time. All hell broke loose.

I am left with the impression of a deafening roar and fragments of broken glass surrounding me. Through the ringing in my ears I could hear people screaming and shouting. I managed to raise my head from my position on the floor. The stained-glass window was gone. People were stumbling over the remains of other people. The walls were spattered with blood. I guessed (rightly) that the artist had arranged for a bomb to be set off at his signal. (I later found out that this was without the knowledge of the gallery's owners who were uninsured for this). His remains were indistinguishable from those of his audience. He had made the ultimate artistic gesture. But was it art?

THE END

DAVE KELSO-MITCHELL was born in Swansea in 1960, and moved to Telford in 1998. He has been a member of the band *Photographed by Lightning* from 1979 to the present. During late 80's the band was quite notorious in the local South Wales scene but never gained recognition outside. He wrote articles and reviews for many magazines, including *Nox*, *Beat Scene*, *Rapid Eye*, *Blood From Stones*, *The Pylon*, *The Edge* and others. He has ad stories published in the *Cold Cuts* anthology by Razor Press, *Nocturne Magazine* and *Crypt of Cthulhu*. He has also Edited (and contributed fiction to) *The Starry Wisdom*—a Lovecraftian anthology from Creation Press. Under the imprint of Oneiros Books, he has edited and published the following titles: *Metal Sushi* by David Conway. *Lovely Biscuits* by Grant Morrison. *Haunter of the Dark* graphic adaptations by John Coulthart with contributions by Alan Moore. *The Twelve Revelations* by Steven Severin (illus Kathryn Ward) *A Serious Life* was published last year by Savoy Books. Currently, Dave Kelso-Mitchell is compiling another anthology for Creation Books as a follow-up to *Starry Wisdom*, scheduled for publication next August.

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COYOTE

CHRISTA FRENCH

I wrote this story while I was living in a little backwater town near Waco, Texas. I was interested in evoking the language of the place as well as the sense of loneliness that pervades the open spaces there. As for the coyotes . . . who doesn't want to run free in the moonlight? And how many of us get to?

The heat was playing for keeps this summer. Stella could hear it over the air conditioning's calming clamor, tapping its itchy fingers against the windows and forcing its dusty hairs through the chinks in the floorboard. It had crept out of the Texan flatlands and croplands and come stalking Oak City, which was not a city at all but a couple of shops and houses clumped around what used to be a spring, on spider legs. The residents melted like chocolate under its weight. They stayed indoors, mostly, keeping the blinds shut and pretending the darkness was enough shade; but the heat wouldn't stay out; it crept in and licked them where they sat. Stella, who didn't have a job, had taken to sleeping during the day, when she could sleep. That wasn't often, now. The orange noise of the heat was keeping her awake.

If you asked Stella to describe herself to you she would say, thirty-five, divorced, and maybe a teensy bit on the plump side but she couldn't give up those Hostess Twinkies no way. She would tell you that she thought it was a sign that when you bought them in a big box they came wrapped one by one away from each other in separate layers of see-through plastic. Stella thought lots of things were a sign, but if you asked her about that she'd say she didn't believe in those things. She didn't see it as a contradiction.

Nights, now, she took herself outside and sat on the lawn on a pink beach towel that looked blue in the darkness, wondering why she couldn't see the stars for the moon. When she first opened her door it felt like a portal, the cicadas making their wall of slithering creeping noise and the heat just standing there horizontal and face-on with the dark, and it took a certain amount of courage to step through. Like getting into cold water, it worked better if she did it all at once.

SIMULACRUM

The coyotes had been leering around Oak City for about a week, though nobody had seen one yet. Stella knew better than anybody that they were there. She heard them when she sat out at night, listened to their high-toned laughing and crying, wondered what they talked about among themselves so much, worried a little that they might come into her yard, though less for any fear for herself than for the three cottontailed bunnies who'd taken up in the vegetable garden she'd let go to seed in the heat. She felt kin to anything that denied the grabby fingernails of the daytime and went on in the night instead. Sometimes she wished she were one of them.

Stella's neighbor, Miss Shirley, thought Stella was wrong in the head and made no bones about telling her that. Miss Shirley was over ninety and wouldn't let anybody help her with anything, except for paying a boy to do her yard. And once in a while Stella snuck in while Miss Shirley was out at the doctor's or some such and cleaned all the things she knew those old hands couldn't clean, and Miss Shirley pretended not to notice when she got home. "I'm a grown woman," Miss Shirley would say. "I can take care of myself."

She didn't have such a high opinion of Stella, especially now that she was sleeping all day and staying up nights, and especially when Stella told her about the coyotes. Miss Shirley definitely had a low opinion of coyotes. She spit off the side of the front porch where the women were sitting and moved her eyes all around like she could spy up the dusty brown coats, the laughing white teeth, and frowned to scare Moses. "You ain't never had no sense," she told Stella, "but I thought you knowed better than to truck with no coyotes." She said the word like it was three words, coy-o-te, with emphasis on the last. Stella liked the way it sounded and chanted it to herself while she sat out in her yard.

Stella did know better, but the long and short of it was that she was damned lonely. Loneliness squatted on her heart like a bullfrog and bleated its lousy chorus in her ears at every turn. Sometimes she felt infected by it, like a leper, like pieces were about to start falling off, or maybe the scaffolding of her bones inside was crumbling. It made her desperate for anything. It made her brave. She mouthed the secret language of the coyotes to herself as she sat on her towel on the browning grass of her yard. She opened her teeth and lolled her tongue, letting the breath bypass her vocal cords but whir rushing through her throat and o-shaped lips: "Out, out, OUT!" vibrating her chest as Stella howled in silence at the full moon.

One night, he came.

Something dark and wet inside her groin had known he would since she'd first heard him humming and sniffing out in the night. His laugh had mocked her from outside the chain link that divided her yard from the drabness of the

SIMULACRUM

municipal park and the fallow land that slept beyond it, full and rich and male and wild in a way that shivered her thighs and made her lick her lips, mouth watering. On recent nights she'd seen him, the king coyote, pausing slow in the glare of the moonlight, muscles moving under his coat that shivered in blacks and grays, teeth searching for her in the heat. So when she heard his toe nails click on the aluminum of the fence and felt the tiny brush that was his breath exhaled as he reached the inside ground, she knew he had come for her.

He was large and black and shockingly hairless as a human, smooth and oiled. He came to her naked and boiling from the inside, on soundless feet, draped in the shadow of the wizened live oak that stood sentinel at the side of the yard, and knelt and dipped his head into her, and inhaled for a long time. She lay motionless, afraid. But he put his face in the curve of her neck, and left it there, and eventually she put up her hands on his long back and dug her fingernails into canyons of his skin. Then she helped him take her clothes off. He moved against her and surrounded her and was inside her.

When it was over she fell asleep. She slept that night for the first time in twelve nights, liquid-filled, naked, on her lawn.

When she woke up the weather had changed. Dawn brought clouds and a wind that goosepimpled her skin as she lay, wet and stripped bare, under the live oak that dripped pale leaves onto her naked back. Stella went inside for a shower and a cup of coffee and stayed awake all day. She opened her windows, and cool, rain-smelling air filled the house. She changed all the linen, and swept the floors, and then got down on her knees and scrubbed them until the skin on her hands turned pink with the angered capillaries. As the sun went down she shut the windows and shuttered them, and turned all the lights on to turn away the dark. She took another shower before she went to sleep in her bed in the middle of the house, far away from the night.

Miss Shirley caught her outside the next day and said this: "I knew you didn't have much sense." Then she went into her own house and closed the door.

Stella put on layers of sweaters and kept her shutters closed. She kept on all the white electric lights, artificial and hot; she threw out all her indoor plants. She bleached the kitchen counters. Every day made her angrier, even though she'd thought she couldn't be more angry than when she woke up alone.

At the end of the month Stella visited Miss Shirley, with whom she'd come to a quiet, lined-mouth truce. She brought over fried chicken and mashed potatoes for lunch, and they sat like they'd used to on Miss Shirley's front porch, watching the once-in-ten-minutes traffic that agitated the street and pretending not to see each other licking their fingers. Some days in the autumn in Oak City—which

SIMULACRUM

was, after all, far away from any kinds of big noise—were so empty you could hear the hum of the machines at the onion ring factory across the railroad tracks. The ladies sat listening, watching dust and leaves fill up the gutters.

Then Miss Shirley said, "It isn't come, is it."

"What?"

Miss Shirley narrowed her eyes. All the crinkles around them paled into gray spider webs. "You woman time. It isn't come."

Stella's feel-sense went to her panties: dry. And dry since some time last month, early.

"Mm *hmm*." The old woman sat solidly back in her chair. "No sense."

The sides of Stella's lips slid up, up, up, into a curve.

She got bigger fast after that. She gave the baby whatever he wanted: thick sandwiches dropping cheese and meat, salads with lots of dressing and cheese and eggs and cucumber chunks, lemon-jelly-filled doughnuts and box after box of Twinkies. She took vitamins and went to the doctor too often and lingered in the baby section of the next town's Wal-Mart. She couldn't keep her hands off herself, kneading and stroking her belly with anxious fingers and palms. She grinned like a fool all the time. Stella, for the first time, was in love.

Miss Shirley was a cartoon of an old woman who shook her head like a wheel and spit through pursed lips and muttered old woman mutterings when Stella was around. Sometimes she'd grab Stella's stomach with her tree-root hands and press hard, searching, to spit and wheel and stalk away. Stella was used to ignoring Miss Shirley. One thing the woman said, though, kept pressing on through: "You know you not gon' get to keep it." And she said that one all the time.

Winter came and spit on Oak City with balefuls of water and ice. Sometimes that shifted into snow, but after the too-hot summer the burnt ground quivered and turned it all straight to gray sludge. Stella and Miss Shirley shuffled bent over like crabs around their damp, thin houses, stuffing pots and empty jelly jars in leaky corners and filling the little mouths of the window-chinks with oilcloth and the rags of last summer's clothes. They sat inside now the weather was bad, and said less as their jaws settled closed in the cold. When they drank their ice tea—at Miss Shirley's insistence—the ice stayed whole in the glass after the tea was gone.

The coyotes, whose frantic serenade had fallen silent in Oak City at the first sniff of a chill breeze, stayed away all winter. Stella listened for them in the dark, but all she ever heard was the shrill buzz of the crickets who wouldn't die in the

SIMULACRUM

cold and the brush of brown, overgrown grass outside her door. By the time spring came sneaking in, she'd forgotten to listen.

The weather unfroze so slowly the two women, all cramped up under layers of damp winter wool and silence, barely noticed their backs straightening out. Then one day Stella put her hand to the window glass and it was warm, and the next a lily had gone and stuck its audacious head up pop in the middle of her yard. It made her think of her bunnies and to hope, of a sudden, that they hadn't starved to death in the long winter. She pulled on boots over her big red socks—which were starting to wear thin underneath after serving duty as house shoes all winter—grabbed her coat out of the closet, and forced open first the wooden and then the screen door, which came away in a shower of rust-colored flakes. It was the first time she'd been out back since the summer.

The yard, inside its short chain-link walls, was brim-full and tired-looking. Ponds and rivulets of mud canvassed the sun-warmed center; from under the live oak, with its unashamedly still-green leaves, sprang a forest of high yellow grass laced with nettles and ragweed.

Stella knuckled her back. She was heavy with fat and baby now, maybe a little too heavy, and her feet flattened themselves into the soles of her boots as they sank in to the wet earth. She moved slowly around the small perimeter, reclaiming it with her presence. All the sounds were swishing in the still morning: her old blue jeans on the inside of her thighs; the moist settling of the leaves; the brush stirring in the easy breeze and in her pregnant wake. Her skin softened with the warm water in the air. She felt powerful, isolate, inviolate. The baby moved inside her; she clasped her hands, tiny on her huge belly, and smiled.

A sniffing burst it. Wet breath, hot with meat, and sharp teeth; she could hear the teeth. The snuffling moved the whole length of the fence, and then, as if satisfied, ended in a snort that was almost a bark and moved away, into the scrub. And Stella, left alone flat-footed in her yard, felt the salt and water start up in her eyes. She stared at the toes of her boots, at the ground in front of her, where she could just make out in the mud the tattered remnants of an old pink towel.

The coyote pack took over Oak City's spring nights. You couldn't go outside without a flash of one sparking the corner of your eye with white teeth or the flick of a laughing tongue. You couldn't get away from the noise anywhere; as soon as the sun went down they were talking, talking, sharing whatever coyotes share with each other out in the dark underneath whatever the sky was bringing. These days that was mostly dense, velvety clouds, and lots of thick warm rain

SIMULACRUM

that closed off the houses one from the other and colored in all the spaces-between with the color of deep and wet.

Stella used the rain as an excuse to stay inside. She turned up the tape player to drown out the carnival of noise from the dark, playing tapes she'd bought because she'd heard they were good for the baby, Mozart and classics and things with a strong beat; and then sometimes she'd listen to children's music, just for fun, just to get ready. Every time the baby moved inside her she grinned, even when it hurt; and every time she looked at a window she checked the fastenings on the shutters and then turned her back. She made herself a lot of hot milk with a little bit of chocolate—too much chocolate wasn't good for the baby—and tried to pretend the outside away.

But it was coming in, whether she wanted it to or not. Stella knew it in the pricking of the muscles on her back, and all up and down her spine the message ran, warning. Miss Shirley knew it, too, and Stella found herself wanting to take refuge under those sharp, darting eyes, as if the twisted hands could fight off what she couldn't. When she showed up on the old lady's porch, rain sliding off the scared sweat on her face, Miss Shirley said, "Ain't no good, now. It gonna do what it gon' do." And Stella knew it was the truth.

On the last night of April, almost three weeks before her due date, Stella went into labor. It happened so fast she didn't recognize what was taking her over until she caught her breath and found herself on hands and knees on the floor and noticed, vaguely, the dust she hadn't had the energy lately to clean. The contractions took her again as she stumbled toward the telephone, ignoring her supposed grace period and moving like an earthquake through her. She cried out, frightened, and fell again, legs giving way to a chill trembling that rolled her over head to toe. It was too late already, too late to call her doctor in the next town, too late to drive for sure, and Miss Shirley didn't have a phone but it would have to be her anyway, it was too late to think. Back on her hands and knees, she reached the door and opened it into the night.

The porch was dirty and the ground was dirtier still beneath Stella's hands and forearms. Its grainy touch clutched at her and she responded by raining it with sweat. Breathing was hard with her stomach cramped over like this, but she couldn't get her legs to work normally and walk so she went like that, panting, through the drying grass in the dark. The cicadas were shrieking at her in mad chorus, like a demented opera. She tried to shut them out, concentrating on her own ragged breath.

She wasn't the only one breathing there. She realized it with terror, and it lent electricity to her next contraction, burning from ribs all the way down through to the backs of her calves, and she clamped her lips tight against the scream

SIMULACRUM

she felt tickling underneath her throat. Pushing up from where she'd fallen, she crawled faster. Desperation weighted her shoulders and crouched on the back of her swaying hips. The breathing was all around her there in the dark, the quick insistent breath of the others. It heated up the air around her and pressed against her skin. She could see them now, darker shadows within the shadows, sliding on their bellies under the hedge and nosing beside her in the wet earth, and then their smell reached her—she recognized it from a night last autumn when she'd lain inside it—spicy with wild mint and onions and heavy with oil and musk, and she felt it coat her.

She could see the light in the front room at Miss Shirley's house, now, through the grass that was trying to paste itself to her damp face. She kept her eyes on it, ignoring the brush of the shadowed fur pressing close against her by the moment, the whole coyote pack come into her five or six feet of space. Hand up, forward, down; knee up, forward, down; and then she was laid on her side again with her fingers buried in dirt and dirt in her face and eyes and mouth and she was rolling in it, in the earth and the water from between her legs that spread in a hot, eager wave. Her teeth clamped together and her tongue and lips moved in a silent "no" that had her halfway up from the ground and going again, for a moment. But they were all around her, silent except for their heavy breath, pressing, nosing and licking and pawing at Stella as she huddled and pressed her arms and hands in an x over her belly as if to hold things in place. But it was moving too fast, and the baby was kicking his way out of her, and it was happening now, and *now*, and the scream she'd been swallowing came rushing out in a hot wind that lasted the span of her muscles' moving down, down, down, and he was born on the hot wet earth. He was tinier than she'd thought he'd be, and moved weakly. Stella watched immobile through a mist of pain and salt as the coyotes chewed away the cord that attached him to her, as they licked and nosed him as he moved his feeble limbs, snuffed their wild onion and meat breath into his face. He cried out, an echo of his mother. The coyotes howled.

She heard the changing note underneath their song, her baby, their baby, heard him change. Felt him struggle between her thighs, there, changing. She reached down, scraped her hands on their too-close teeth, and drew him to her chest and held him as he changed, becoming something she could never be. He left four long nail-marks on her chest when he left, his breath blending with the others' in the night. Stella, hurt, wet, and empty, was once again alone.

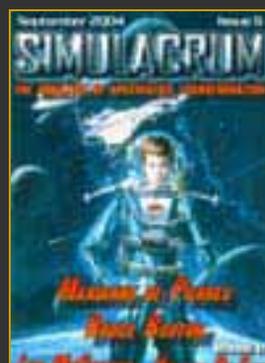
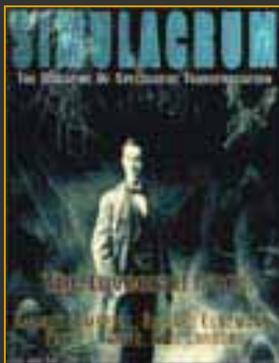
THE END

SIMULACRUM

CHRISTA FRENCH is a 25-year-old single mom who likes to do too many things at once. She writes mostly fantasy and magical realism and is a wannabe SF writer and playwright.

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THE GLASS CAGE

KRISTINE ONG MUSLIM

It was during the peak of summertime when I wrote *The Glass Cage*. I was looking out the glass window of my room, with the computer in front of me starting to heat up like crazy because I have been writing for almost the entire day. The story just started with a question of how it was for someone to understand and watch the whole world through a clear glass confinement.

My name is Adam and this is my home.

This is one of the most amazing places in the universe. Here the sun shines thrice and it never sets. In every movement, there is music. In every music, there is a room for another dream. In every dream, there is me. There is no single reason why a creature like me can be sad. My world is so beautiful it cannot help but remain silent, forever content in its own unbreakable silence.

Everything was supposed to be all right until the man in the white coat came. You see he had this nice set of teeth—so white I could almost see my reflection upon it. He smelled like a mixture of musky aftershave cologne, soiled cinnamon, ginger liniment, and hospital antiseptic, had brown eyes which were kind of greenish when you stared at them a little longer, drank a lot of coffee, and never uttered what Supra used to call the "really bad word." As what I could see, he seemed to be in charge of everything. He just snapped his fingers wolfishly like this and everyone would have to go crazy about doing something for him. I was not sure if he's getting a lot of kicks out of it. The only thing I could tell you was that I always got a little nervous every time he's doing it.

Today is Saturday and I'm really getting a very bad feeling about this man in a white coat. I was sure he was the one responsible for taking Supra, my favorite nurse, out of duty. Not to mention the way he scrutinized me with those fond brown eyes that glimmered with cunning and raw intelligence.

SIMULACRUM

I was doing the maze when he first came into the Station. It was Saturday, and the third sun, the one with a neon green stripe around it, had just shone. He looked at me from my glass cage, his studying gaze not betraying what he was feeling. I felt kind of queasy because I couldn't *read* him the way I did with the others before him. Dr. Rainey, for example, usually smiled at Supra but what he was actually seeing was a mental picture of her undressing in front of him.

"Adam," the man in the white coat said from the intercom, "could you push the red button on your left, please?"

I did. Although my vocal faculty was not well adapted to imitate the human voice, I never had problems interpreting verbal commands. My whole life was fashioned to follow orders. I could be the dirt below a slave driver's foot if I wanted to.

The screen in front of me suddenly flashed a pale red color, bathing me with its soft senseless glow for about five seconds. Nothing happened after that. No chow came out of the food chamber. No gasping for breath like the last time they tried that loathsome volumetric compressor on me. Not that I didn't expect too much from humans. But let's face it: modern science was nothing but an accidental phenomenon founded upon a very shaky platform. The human race wouldn't even be going anywhere if their hairy cave-dwelling ancestors didn't discover fire while one of the rocks they were supposed to be throwing at each other grazed another rock on the ground. I always pictured the historical situation to happen that way. If I ever got out of this glass cage and become a human like you, and you would finally decide to accept my progenies as a day-to-day occurrence, I might even write a book about it. I'd call it *The Fire That Jack Built*.

The man in the white coat began to fumble frantically with the control knobs in the main room. Although he looked very excited to me, I admired the way he kept his cool calculating stance. A sheet showing a highly chaotic graph came out from one of the printers. I honestly didn't care what it was all about this time. My alpha brain waves, my erratic heart beat, my grumbling stomach, the invasion of my intestinal parasites, my farting patterns. It would even be a quick brutal summary of my own death warrant for all I know. I just stared dumbly at the man in the white coat while he seemed to explain something to a uniformed attendant.

Today is Saturday and I simply want to be very honest with you. Enclosed by blinking machines and busy people mouthing the trademark jargons of their profession, I am very bored hunkering, trying not to bother anyone as I mind my own business inside this glass cage. Since I was born, *manufactured* would be a

SIMULACRUM

more appropriate word, not once have I been given the chance to get outside of this glass cage. And since I was born, all I ever wished for was to know what was outside my glass cage, what was outside this white room, what your world was really all about. Because all I knew from your world I learned from my books. I noticed that you've just raised your eyebrows. I can read, buddy, if that is what's bothering you. I can read more than eleven languages, even Aramaic scripts and Egyptian hieroglyphics (*in style*, if you please), understand the complex calculus of Levita-Civita which Einstein employed for the General Theory of Relativity, and laugh at your face while going through your stupid political theories which your society appears to be hinged upon. I am more literate than ten of your best college professors put together. I am a by-product of fifty years of endless research and experiments conducted by the finest minds from all corners of the globe. I am essentially a bored superhuman, a brilliant dog turd kept inside a beautiful glass cage.

The man in the white coat watched me again with his interesting brown eyes. He moved closer to my cage and spoke through the intercom. "Adam, my name is Dr. Walter Shelley. I will be in charge of your care from now on. So if you need anything, just type it on the Station keyboard just like before, and I'll make sure that we'd get it for you on time."

He smiled at me for the first time, showing his white even set of teeth again. I regretted not being able to smile back for lack of a conventional mouth.

At around ten that morning Supra came into the Station and tapped her right hand lightly on the surface of my glass cage. The sound it made was like the squeak of a tiny lab mouse's scurrying feet.

"They're going to make you look like a normal human being, Adam," she said excitedly. "Dr. Rainey said that Dr. Shelley and his colleagues from M.I.T came up with some sort of a DNA structure that could re-synthesize your body. It works by killing your cells and reshaping them. They are going to inject it to you at noon."

Oh, well. The last time your brilliant folks tried to do a little changin' with me I woke up with all my limbs turned into globs of jelly.

"What would you want to be, Adam?" she asked seriously. "Male or female?"

I typed I DON'T KNOW on the keyboard with one of my misshapen limbs. Anyway, I didn't think I would be allowed to decide on that. There was hardly any sense of dignity in trying to suggest anything to your creators, especially if it was all about how you were going to be *made*. And I guess I didn't have any choice

SIMULACRUM

either. But right now, all I really wanted you to remember was that all I hoped for was to become like you.

Supra was about to say something when her pseudo-wristwatch produced an odd monotonous shrill sound. She quickly nodded at me and proceeded to the door. I understood right away that it was her turn to log in to the Reuse section she used to tell me about. It was situated at the fourth floor of the building where attendant androids like her had their weekly defragmentation.

I started to think about what would become of me after they were finished with me. Maybe they might let me get out of this cage if I already looked like anyone else. I could go to the movies with Supra. (It was all right with me if they wanted to send Dr. Rainey along.) I might get the chance to see how an airplane or a bird really looked like when they were both in flight. Or how rain really sounded like as it hit the soft earth. Or how beer would taste like. Pretty childish and damn well poignant, isn't it? But if you spent fifteen years inside a gigantic glass cage surrounded by numerous machines, subjected to various experimental procedures, and convinced that you were going to spend the rest of your life in that state, I bet you'd understand why being like you was the most important thing for me.

I was not concerned about my welfare. I didn't even think I had the slightest right to ensure my survival. The men in white lab coats were the ones who decide on that.

Later at around eleven that noon, I watched them gather around me, their beautiful faces hovering around my glass cage. Resplendent in their white coats, they were merely beautiful creatures who knew what was best for bored hopeful Adam.

Dr. Shelley pushed the tiny black button near the control unit. I couldn't afford to close my eyes while the gas began to fill my cage. I was only afraid I might wake up with all my limbs not only turned into globs of jelly this time.

Today is Saturday. My name is Adam. And all I want is to become like you.

THE END

KRISTINE ONG MUSLIM has been published in numerous venues, including *Dreams and Nightmares*, *Star*Line*, *The Fifth Di*, *The Martian Wave*, *The Horror Express*, and *Electric Velocipede*.

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ON BEING GIRRRRRRRRRRL!

W. MALTESE

A long-time attentive and systematic observer of "things that go bump in the night", even before I wrote my first demons-vs.-us novel in the 70's, I've long held to the theory that no species, including that of the long-existent *wer* population, can survive without, somewhere within its DNA helix, having a gene or genes "for sense of humor". Considering the "nature of the beast", I can see why this aspect of the *wer* has usually been by-passed to provide the more sensational detailed accounts, purely macabre and blood-curdling. However, my sincere belief that no living thing in the universe is genuinely understood unless *all* aspects of its psyche are fully explored is what compelled me to provide this peek into one area—slight smiles among the gnashing and gnawing of teeth—so often overlooked by others in chronicling "the werewolf saga".

Lars tried to take advantage of Mertle, and she killed him. That's probably how all this shit began. Sorry if that analysis comes across a tad too scatological for sensitive ears, but when you spend at least once a month as a wolf, as I do, you're more "into" fascinatingly olfactory "things." I digress but, then again, maybe, you're as interested in the "all" as are the scientists to whom I've provided a lot of poop (pun intended) lately. Being cooperative makes my time in my cell a lot more comfortable.

At first, I tried holding out, like a *loyal-to-my-own-kind-of* gal, and I sorely suffered the consequences doled out by my keepers. At this point, there's little hope of my ever being rescued by my fellow pack members (who are the only ones who are likely to care); the rest of the general *wer* population unlikely gives a damn about queer me and mine, except for their tails in a kink because of so many secrets they'll correctly assume I've revealed; few *wer* appreciate publicity.

The first of my kind goes way back. *Numero Uno* was Gmder who would have been right in there with all the other Adam-and-Eve *begats* if the translators hadn't exorcised him from all *origin* texts for fear of alienating the faithful by confronting them with the reality of the Goddess having been so damned furious with Eve (and Adam)—because of that fruit business (it wasn't an apple, by the

SIMULACRUM

way, but that's another tale to tell). Anyway, Gmder was another stir-up-the-mix "someone"—besides Mr. Fratricide, Cain—assigned by the Power-That-Be to that first blood-line. He's the reason you never hear about Melin, and Plelix, and Morth, either, because—leave Gmder out of the equation, and how are you going to explain all those other Adam and Eve brats eaten (or *wer*-converted) by their *once-a-month-wolf* brother?

Anyway, back on spore: AKA Mertle killing Lars. It was actually an accident (not that Mertle ever regretted it). It wasn't like she hadn't been taken advantage of before. She was Alpha Female of our pack, at the time, and Lars was Alpha Male, weren't they? She'd managed that power trip with a good deal of clever planning, supplemented by a whole lot of *love-you, love-to-be-used-by-you* fakery. It was just that, this particular day, she *really* wasn't in the mood and reflexively reared back to provide a more than usually fierce "love" bite to a particularly vulnerable part of Lars's neck. Took out his whole larynx is what she did, leaving us all stunned and momentarily growl-and howl-less.

Well, that might well have been the end of Mertle, right then and there, once every *gee-do-I-get-to-be-Alpha-Male-now?* pack member finally got his wits about him. But we didn't consist of just male wolves. Mertle had seen to that when out biting for converts (as I can bear witness). So, those of us similarly inclined toward female-female loving took Mertle's *good-riddance-to-Lars* side, and went after our male counterparts—as if each was to be the next made larynx-less—and they departed with their tails between their legs by way of feeble furry protection for their worthless manhood. Nor am I talking figuratively when I deem their manhood worthless. Every *wer*, male and female, is sterile, and has been from the get-go. Propagation is entirely via love-bites to our human counterparts, as opposed to our—*I'm genuinely-hungry-and-you're-a-goner!*—more fatal chow-downs. So, suddenly it just dawned on those of us who never found male poking all that pleasurable, and were gutsy enough to break from tradition, that—well, you can bet your furry butts that word soon got out that there was a queer gal pack of *wers* "out there" whose members got their loving by meaningful conversation; let's take the time to get acquainted; slow and easy foreplay; and, only then, *I know just how it's done, babe* (being a babe myself). Gals from other integrated packs were suddenly howling to join ours, and our straight male counterparts were as growling mad as werewolves successfully snared by werewolf-chasers.

While on the subject of chasers, I wasn't snared by one. I was more conventionally nabbed, albeit inadvertently, in human form (full moon twenty-some hours away). What happened was—

I was sitting in a bar, hitting on a really attractive chick in whom I had already invested a good deal of time to know really well, and who I'd let get to

SIMULACRUM

know me (as much as I could, at that moment in time; having her down as a convert as opposed to a meal).

This babe and I went to her place.

Since Donna (that was her name) and I knew the benefits of a long and leisurely build-up to sex, we spent additional lead-in looking at pieces of jewelry she designed. Her intent was to take her craftwork commercial, but the cost of gemstones, locally, had, so far, made retail infeasible. I travel to South America a lot, because of my import-export business, and suggested that continent's predominant *Gemstones SA* as the wholesaler for which she was looking. I let her know that I might be persuaded to pick up some stones on the cheap. Her business wouldn't compete with mine. Mine deals mainly in Third World rural arts and crafts. You want a basket from the boonies, a piece of fired pottery from some backwater, a hand-woven silk scarf from some out-of-the-way, you'll find them at any *Maltese World* store.

You might be surprised (maybe not), by how many *wer* live 24/7 in the Third World, just because a poor person, eaten by a hungry werewolf, doesn't set off too many—if any—alarm bells there. We're actually appreciated by many of those host governments just because we winnow out the unproductive members of their populations.

Not that I was ever tempted to head off to one permanently, just because of all the easy and plentiful feasting. Pay whatever compliments you like to the boonies-Ballet, or the backwater-Theatre-Company, or the out-of-the-way-Symphony-Orchestra, but I dare you to say, and mean it, that they genuinely compare to their counterparts found right here. From the get-go, I've needed more than a full belly to be fulfilled.

Anyway, Donna's craftwork was nicely done. Not that I'm into jewelry, since I once made the mistake of transmogrification while wearing a strand of my dearly departed granny's pearls. While I thought the result quite fetching, I got a lot of ribbing. Jaws, teeth, and paws aren't exactly designed for unfastening a necklace clasp. Ask any dog that has tried to be free of its collar. No way did I break the string and irretrievably scatter a fortune.

Donna and I had a glass of white wine. We discussed the whys of our mutually liking a new CD of Schubert's *Concerto for Two Organs*. On the way to her bedroom, we paused to examine her new print, *Fig and Banana (#6 of 9)*, by local artist Denny St. John.

I left Donna with the impression that I was definitely a gal who had *been there, done that, got the T-shirt, burned it, and scattered the ashes*. Meaning, she was more than comfortable—even happy—to have me back for repeats, and we had a date for just that.

SIMULACRUM

I was flying high from my fun-time with Donna, as well as from the drinks in the bar and at her apartment. I had no bloody business behind the wheel of my car. Not that I, even sober, would have had a clue that my car brakes had been tampered with by some *didn't think things through* dyke-hating straight male *wer* (in human form); hell, it took the cops over a week to figure out I wasn't responsible for the drunk I hit, bounced off the hood, on and off the roof, on and off the trunk, and then cascaded—*Thud!*—to the hard pavement behind me. One witness swore that the guy weaved out in front of me (the truth, I swear to Goddess). Another witness, though, insisted I aimed, even put my foot to the gas pedal, to launch the transient like a rocket. Jail time resulted (the dangerous-to-*wer* consequences unlikely ever considered by the saboteur). The mechanical facts of the accident were too slowly (from my standpoint) ferreted out. In that, a full moon rose before I met bail. My transmogrification occurred. One guard's misplaced curiosity had him ponder too closely just how the "nice doggy" ended up replacing me in my jail cell.

It's all crap (*that* word again), by the way, how a werewolf looks. I've seen the movies, and the illustrations; they're so far off the mark as to make me wonder whether or not anyone ever saw one of us before that guard saw me—just before I took a mouth-size chunk of meat out of his right forearm. Granted, we're not all beauties, but I've yet to see even one of us with the matted black hair and raving-lunatic demeanor of Lon Chaney in all his flicks. We're *werewolves*. Our fur is glossy, well-groomed, and comes in various shades—usually damned luxurious. Mine is wondrously buttery with dark highlights and radiant sheen. You see it, and you want to pet it (the guard's reaction typical, not the exception). You *don't* mistake me for a dog needing to be sent to the vet for suspected mange.

"Would you look at that gloriously beautiful pelt!" The very thing Dr. Joanna Miller said when she first spotted me. She and I have become exceedingly close since she was brought in on "Project SWHAM (**S**he **W**ho **H**owls **A**t **T**he **M**oon)".

Joanna isn't the beauty that Donna was (and is), but I've never been as attracted to a person's outside as to the inside. If Joanna's hair is beginning to go gray, if her tits and ass are beginning to sag—if she has a bit of a paunch, and her thick glasses make her watery pale-blue eyes slightly owly—she can still get my juices flowing (and vice-versa).

We've managed to get to know each other over the months, far more intimately than Donna and I ever managed. Joanna and I truly "relate". We've found lots to laugh about; humor is a real turn-on in my book. We've shared secrets (she *is* a closet lesbian; I *was* a closet werewolf).

SIMULACRUM

We've ended up in bed together—*woman with woman*; I yearn to show her the magic of *werewolf with woman*, and hopefully tonight is the night. A full moon is suddenly visible in the night sky beyond the bars on my window.

The locked door to my cell unlocks, and Joanna steps through. She walks toward me, hugging the shank of lamb that I've agreed to snack on—instead of on her—if the hunger should possess me while we make love (I've promised not to convert her; although, who knows?).

Oh, she really does turn me on. Not *just because* she's all I have available; not *just because* I'm so intent upon my survival. At least, I think not.

She *and* the lamb smell sooooo gourmet-delicious.

She smiles.

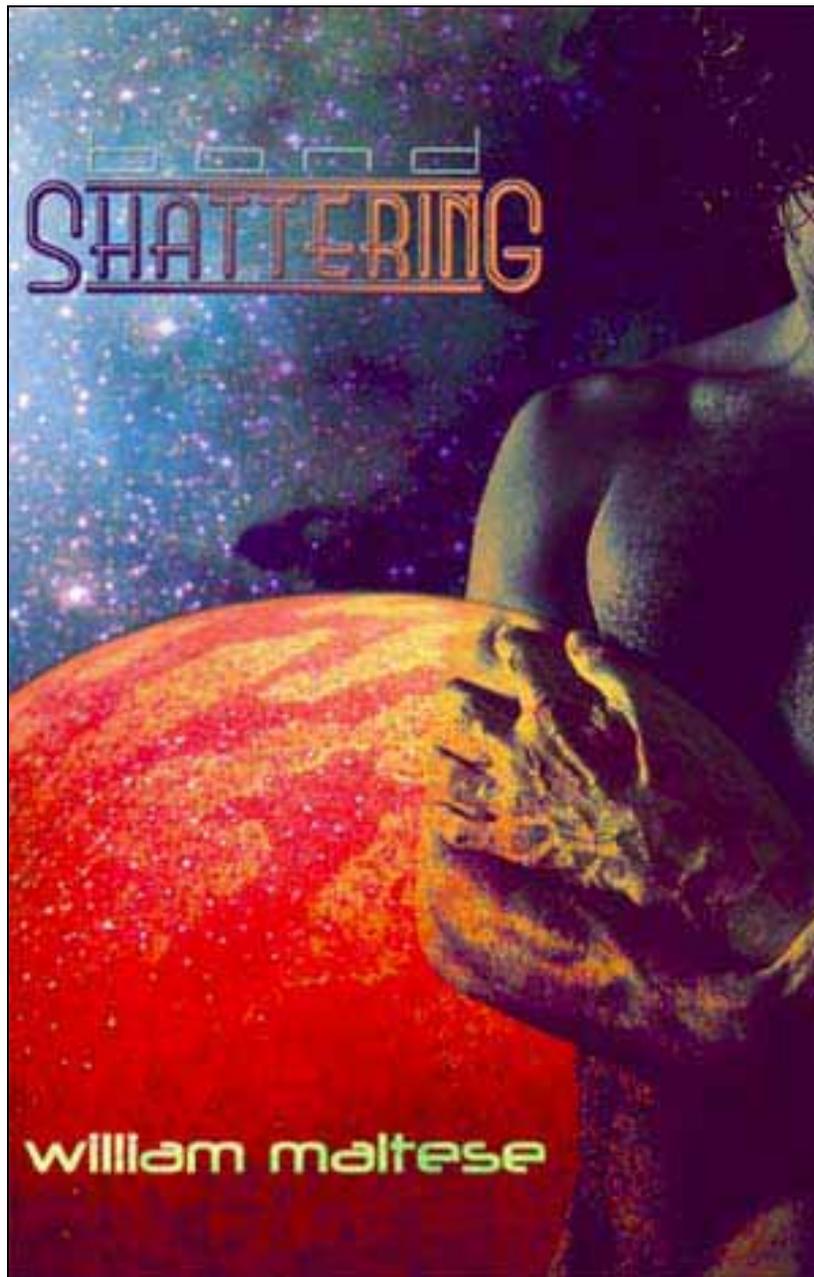
I smile back. My canine teeth elongate as I begin transmogrification and as she begins, slowly (ever so slowly), to unbutton her blouse.

THE END

W.MALTESE'S 1971 classic *Valley of the Damned* was the first gay werewolf novel. Maltese's follow-up *Demon* series (*Demon's Stalk* and *Demon's Coronation*), and novels *Too Beautiful*, and *Dog Collar Boys*, all pitted gays against the supernatural. Additional works include over one-hundred books, covering the whole spectrum of recognized (straight and gay) literary genres: more recently including *California Creamin'*, *Summer Sweat*, *When Summer Comes*, *A Slip To Die For*, *Thai Died*, *A Conspiracy of Ravens*; *circuSex*, *Slovakian Boy*, *The Brentridge Gold* and *Dog On A Surfboard*. Maltese's sixteenth sci-fi book, *Bond-Shattering*, is due out from nightwares LLC any day now. Maltese's romance/adventure, *Beyond Machu*, is due out from Haworth in the spring of 2006. The author, whose work has been translated for publication in over fourteen foreign countries, is more extensively listed in *Who's Who In America*.

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THE 7 MUSINGS

WOODRUFF LAPUTKA

Along the grassy slopes stand tall the 7 marble statues of our greatest gods in their most glorious victory poses, garland with all manner of earths genial delight. Because gods do pose, of course vanity in their blood, why would they not make man to sculpt them so that they may reflect upon their vanity? The clouds parted one moment, and a great flash covered the earth, then wild beasts. And, BEHOLD! Man rose as an artist, and fashioned as instruments for the gods to reflect themselves. So, in their vanity did they sculpt us all in their likeness, to brand us as their own. And we went forward in a sense of petty ignorance and foolish demand for answers, and thus followed the path set for us from the beginning. In question and passion did we conceive the gods likeness, and their bellies grew fat with joy at the glamour we did make. No matter the cost, the earth spewed for the great cities of man to be the crowns of the gods mother vassal.

One morning, while on my walk through the gardens of god did I come upon those very statues which the great ones had fashioned first. They told me the stories of High Cepriom and his battle over his mother for supremacy, or the fall of the son of the high fathers crown, only to rise again in promising servitude. These stories had shaped the culture which we were meant to be, and looking into the pale eyes of those colossal deities did I shed a tear of sadness. Sadness that we were slaves. And to my tear did the ground open wide, engulfing me and all the gardens into a pure and awesome light. And I immersed, as like from water, through the floor of the great court of the high father and his sonless crown. Cepriom, have mercy on my soul! I fell to my knees at the sight of he on the high throne of the world and his vast courts of the other gods, prostrating myself in praise.

Their very faces sang tunes unheard to earth, save only vaguely in the most distance corners to even the universes greatest travelers, those who disappear. Their robes shine with such brilliance that I immediately burst into such tears I had never before shed, as I was in awe. Than Cepriom bade his great falcon come from the cosmos beyond the great citadel above us, perch on his arm and bring him news, and so it did. Than did he rise from his illuminating throne and descend 7 stairs of The Rantulia, and spoke to me.

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"Why have you shed a single tear for your own kind as if mice unto the hell of the mighty gods of my court and to me?" "Oh great god of gods" I said "I find such beauty in the likeness of my people to the great design you have set, that it burdens my soul to feel that anything remotely part of you must be unto anything less than its own will" to which the all mighty Cepriom responded "son of the gods, our will be done in all things. It is impossible for you to will anything that is not in our great design, till the great trumpets sound the coming of the key holder and the waking fire of Leviathan engulfs all mankind". He said no more, and as he turned with the sent of a thousand and one roses, another tear fell from my eye, turning to diamond about my neck, and there has it ever stayed. The floor sunk from underneath me, and I discovered I had returned to the peaceful garden in prostration of the high icon, whose might lasts against all ages. I than looked down at the earth for sometime, and with a great force took the grass before me and sprang into the air, my voice growing wings and carrying to all corners of the universe, for in that instant my realization had brought me my destiny, "I AM MAN!!!" and confusion reigns no more.

THE END

WOODRUFF LAPUTKA is a Freelance Writer and Philosopher from the South Eastern United States. A skeptic by nature, his fascination with the speculative and mysterious has taken him on a devoted quest towards the heart of philosophy and truth of the natural, bizarre and the impossible. Influenced at a young age by such writers as H.P. Lovecraft and Edgar Allen Poe, as well as such visual artists and surrealists as Salvador Dali and H.R. Giger, his love for horror and the odd mix with in his many visual and musical works as well as his many written works and film adaptations of his own incredible fantasy to inspire such profound emotion with a look from the weird to all that may be possible. He currently lives with his family in Florida.

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AUTHOR INTERVIEW

TANITH LEE

Tanith Lee was born in 1947, in England. She was educated at Prendergast Grammar School, and later worked as a library assistant, waitress, clerk and shop-assistant, spending a year at art college when she was 25. In 1975-6 she was able to become a full-time writer. She has to date published almost 70 novels, 10 short story collections, and well over 250 short stories. Lee has also written for BBC Radio and TV. Her work has often been nominated for and also won several awards. Her books have been translated into over 16 languages.

Latest publications:

UK: *Cast a Bright Shadow*, Book One of the *Lionwolf Trilogy*, from Macmillan. (Book Two: *Here in Cold Hell* due 2005.) Also due March 2005: *Metallic Love*, Bantam, USA, plus two works of abstract lesbian fiction under the pseudonym Esther Garber: *Thirty-Four* and *Fatal Women*, and a contemporary detective novel: *Death of the Day*—all from Egerton House Publishing, available via the net. (Due later this year from Egerton: two contemporary novels: *L'Amber* and *Greyglass*.)

Website: www.tanithlee.com Biblio site: [Daughter of the Night](#)

Tell us a little about your background; was there anything specific which steered you towards a career as a storyteller?

There may well have been, but frankly I just think I was a writer and storyteller from the moment I became fully, if immaturely, conscious—around the age of six. I know I used to pin poor fellow kids to the spot and tell them invented tales. I also told stories generally among my parents and their friends. A couple of these got typed and I still have them. They are gloriously hilarious—mostly unintentionally!—but show a compulsion to go after weirdness, justice, animals and grand romance and adventure among humans. So nothing changed there. I couldn't read until I was almost eight—I'm slightly dyslectic, which would be

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recognized now, I assume. In fact my father taught me to read, and I shot from 'non-reader' to 'best reader' in my (very rough) school. I started to write at nine. My parents were storytellers too. They both wrote, I might add, though only my mother ever got published years later. They both deserved to be in print.

As to actual background, we were always skint, and spent a lot of years living in one or two rooms in various other people's flats. My parents were ballroom/Latin American dancers of unusual talent and beauty. But success in most fields needs luck, if not dosh. We endlessly moved—not running from debts, surprisingly, but just so they could find work teaching others what they did so well. I had a fascinating childhood, which I still enjoy in retrospect. But I had it, I now see, on the back of their difficulties.

Which authors have inspired your own work the most, style and content wise?

Everyone inspires me, among the very many writers I love. Mary Renault and Graham Greene, Rebecca West and Elizabeth Bowen, Mervyn Peake and Angela Carter, Ray Bradbury and Fritz Leiber and so many more. Shakespeare too, who first showed me the potential of beauty and profundity in the service of a plot—or vice versa. Chekov and Pinter who demonstrated the power of the enclosed space, the agony of little things. Ruth Rendell who never sacrifices richness and character to a page-turning ability seldom matched. And on and on . . . Milestones were, I will note, however, reading and seeing *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, reading and seeing, in an *inner* way, Jane Gaskell's never equaled Atlan series. Mary Renault's *The King Must Die*. Bradbury's early stories, Oscar Wilde's *Salome*, Golding's *Lord of the Flies*... I could fill a book with them, actually.

More and more, I find that writers are not limiting themselves to write within the boundaries of genre, which is encouraging. This is something I've always felt you never did. Was that a conscious effort on your part?

I never did, I never do, I never *will* be restricted in that way. It is irrelevant both to me and to all writing. I'm delighted that more and more people break these silly 'laws'. When I began to write I was never aware of them, and proceeded accordingly.

Do you still write longhand before typing up the manuscript?

SIMULACRUM

Always. I can write a letter and even do an interview on a typewriter (yes, not yet a computer.) But when the story and the people want to come, I can only hear, see and feel what's there if I write, in black biro preferably, on narrow feint-lined white paper. These notebooks are getting harder to find. Part of my life now is a constant search for replacement stationery, as most of the exercise books of the right feint have lines so dark I feel they must be meant to write music on, not words.

What is the deeper attraction to myth and fairy tales for you? They certainly seem to have a huge influence on the types of stories you write.

Myth especially, if I analyze my reaction to it, seems basically a part of all humanity. Our history is myth, by which I don't mean it isn't real, but that it takes on, once lived, the quality of myth—a story full of Fate and patterns, battle and victory and tragic defeat, full too of the archetypes that human things project both into their inner and outer worlds. Mythology as such seems to hold out clues, as do the fairy tales, when looked at in any depth, as say A.S. Byatt and Angela Carter do it. My mother, who told me stories in my childhood of her own making, (they were eccentric and wonderful) also told me the Myths of the Greeks and Romans, and those of the Vikings and Celts. Her ironic and humorous angle on fairy tales undoubtedly sparked my own. She had a neat touch for Dark, too.

Tell us about your new book, *Metallic Love*.

The narratrix isn't Jane. She starts her story with the warning: 'You won't like me'. Though she found and read Jane's book—the original novel as told by Jane—the new writer, Loren, is canny and street-wise, sure her armour is steel-hard against most things, even the perfect vision of love she has always since cherished as uniquely Jane and Silver's. But then they (a big *faceless* They known as the META Corporation) bring back the robot line, and Silver with it. What can Loren do but succumb to the magnetic pull and go to find him? But *what* she finds is not Silver at all, but a being like a god who, like her, has no intention now of letting humanity crush him . . .

It *is* a story about love, though not especially the love of Jane and Silver. But also it's a story about the blind heartless mask of 'authority', the ancient war between what is real and what is sham, which isn't, either, necessarily limited to Man v. Machine.

Is writing still a process in which you learn more about yourself?

SIMULACRUM

As far as I'm concerned I learn absolutely *nothing* about myself when writing—save that I am incredibly lucky to be able to do it, and love it more than doing almost any other thing on earth. In fact I should be appalled to think I'd learnt anything about *me* while working at my trade. Of course I'm quite interested in myself, most of us are—it's built into the survival mechanism. But what I 'learn' when at work, concerns everyone else, and everything else. And that is what turns me on and fills me with delight.

Of course, I'm sure others, if interested, can learn stuff about me from what I write—but *I* already know about these things—my obsessions, my causes of anger and happiness. And then again, a reader should always be careful, with any book or story, not to confuse the writer with the character. Most of us can become someone else, as an actor can, providing we let them take us over for the duration.

The vampire is one of the mythic creatures featured in your work, most notably the Blood Opera Sequence. What does the archetype of vampire symbolize to you?

Well, they symbolize vampires really . . . I mean, you can say, Oh, they are the blood-suckers who drain us, or the demons under the bed or out in the dark wood by night, or sexual desire tuned to a stranger pitch. But truly, I just find them fascinating. I started with Bram Stoker's classic and haven't looked back since. There always seems to be just one more twist you can put on vampire legends and habits. They pay for the bonus of immortality in very harsh ways. Something in that, maybe?

The argument that British dark fiction is decidedly, well, darker, than its American counterpart still persists. Would you agree with this?

I can't really comment on this. I read voraciously, but not that much in my own field (which it isn't anyway, as I write other things than horror, Science Fiction etc.) I've read stunning, brilliant stuff from both countries, and in translation out of Europe and Africa too. Good is good. It's a dangerous world, and I can't really believe any nation has a true monopoly either on darkness or optimism.

Is there still a sense of apathy in terms of describing (ascribing) literary merit to the Horror genre?

Likewise. But I'd really think intelligent and flexible people could hardly dismiss this genre, which holds such luminaries as Arthur Machen and Conan Doyle,

SIMULACRUM

Dickens, Poe, Golding and such newer lights as Angela Carter, Jeff Vandermeer, Nigel Neale, Chelsea Quinn Yarbro and—let's face it, Margaret Atwood.

Your husband, John Kaiine, is also a writer. How do you find that he compliments your work, and vice versa?

I can't imagine being able to live with someone who wasn't, in some form, a writer. Indeed living with *anyone* was far from being on my agenda. But then I met John Kaiine. The compatibility is fairly obvious—we both understand the other's need for slabs of solitary time—or rather very crowded time, as we work among our characters. We share chores, and when I, particularly, have to work flat out on something, John is highly supportive. As anyone who knows my work will have seen, he gets a lot of credits for inspiring a story with an idea or even an entire structure, and with one novel in particular, which most unusually for me I could *not* get started, he suggested the perfect and only possible solution to the plot dilemma. We've also written together, though not very much—but even that we do separately, running off with the various bits that are ours, welding it all together later. John has also taught me a great deal about areas of life and certain kinds of myth I either did not know, or didn't know well enough to attempt using in a book. He always seems to predict the kind of research books that will be of maximum help too, and produces them with all the grace and agility of a world-class conjuror.

Is it easy to live with another writer?

Probably my previous answer demonstrates it is—but maybe only if you are a writer yourself. I can imagine other people strangling each other, or one thinking the other seriously mental. The way a writer *is* is quite odd, when I consider it. And then too one has to take on living in a house that is always full of 'other' people, and anyway rests half-way in/out of another dimension: the Current Work/s.

Do you think aspiring genre writers are still influenced by those who have come before them? Are they still looking towards the "Elder Tribe members" for guidance and inspiration? Should they?

Everyone has to make his or her own mind up on this. Some are going to benefit immeasurably from reading other writers and others are going to do better by refusing to read *any* other writers. We're all different.

Have you ever considered writing for children again?

I've hardly stopped, you know. I've had five Young Adult novels come out with Hodder-Headline during the period 1998-2004. These were the four Claidi books, and the crazy pirate novel *Piratica*, out last year—to which I'm about to write a sequel.

What are you reading at the moment?

I'm re-reading some Arthur Machen right now. Just before that I read a book about Rudolf Nureyev, Ruth Rendell's excellent latest, and some Strindberg—partly for work, the last, but certainly no chore at all.

What are your top five books for 2004? Anything specific you're looking forward to in 2005?

You'll probably have gathered from the previous answers that this question can't really be tackled by me. And anyhow I couldn't restrict it to only five, there'd be scores of them. For 2005 I'll only generalize, saying that I'm looking forward to more Byatt, more Bowen, (also more Kaiine), and in Fantasy and Science Fiction, more Liz Williams and Cecilia Dart-Thornton. Really I'm just looking forward to reading anything great I can get my hands on.

Do you think there will ever come a time when you feel you've told every story? A time when you might start recycling yourself?

No. We all tell the same stories over anyway . . . aren't there supposed only to be five? Or is it seven? It's what you want to say about them, it's what you want to think about and say about people, places and things. While I live, I write.

What's the best compliment someone has ever given you about your work?

You know, just someone saying, or writing to tell me, they have read anything of mine and really liked it. I love what I do, and to find others can enjoy it is a bonus beyond gold. That people too will trouble to communicate their pleasure—these are gifts I never tire of, nor could I. A lot of lovely things have been said to me. All treasured.

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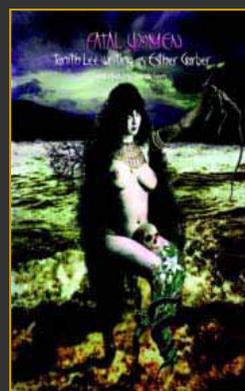
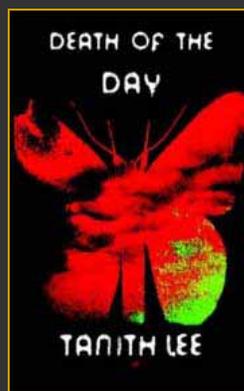
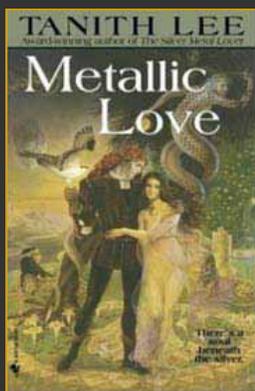
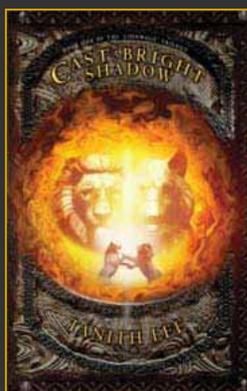
Your greatest fear for the world today is...?

The world has always been a dire and dangerous place, never, in the old saying, fit to bring children into, but thank God people still did and have. Despite the daily doses of reported illness, threat and worry we are all subjected to, I think the biggest fear is that we may *believe* we are doomed. I am a firm advocate of fighting on, and believing that good can come out of us all, individually and on the grand scale, the human race. Since the start of time, it seems to me, people have been brain-washed with notions of their own unworthy vileness, which has doubtless sometimes assisted in *making* us unworthy, and even vile. But most people have a spark in them, and many have a fire. We must believe in ourselves and in our ability to change for the better—yes, it's uphill all the way, but the only other option is down. I still feel there is a road through the wood. But if we don't reckon there is, or that we deserve to shine, how can we find it? How can we do it?

What would you like your epitaph to read?

My work is the best of me. So long as some of it survives, that suits me well. But for myself? The marker should, I think, read: *Fashionably Late*.

LATEST BOOKS BY TANITH LEE



More details at: www.tanithlee.com or Amazon.com or Amazon.com UK

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FEATURED ARTIST

JOHN JUDE PALENCAR

Vital Stats

Age: 47

Country: USA

Training: Columbus College of Art & Design, Illustrators Workshop Paris, France.

Medium: Acrylic, watercolor, oil, egg-tempera, sculpture with stone, wood.



Influences: Many influences, but I'd like to mention Andrew Wyeth, Salvador Dali and Hieronymus Bosch.

On The Web: No personal web site yet.

Fan sites:

<http://www.sarafelix.com/palencarbio.html>

http://home.att.net/~shadowlandhome/palencar_frame.html

http://www.ilustradores.org/galerias/p/John_Jude_Palencar/index.htm

How long have you been working as a professional illustrator?

I've been selling paintings since I was fifteen years old but my first professional position was at age 19 at American Greetings, Inc. At the same time, I was freelancing for a variety of magazines and corporate clients. During my sophomore and junior years in high school, my client base grew from regional

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to national and international clients. When I was a senior, I won a scholarship to the Illustrators Workshop in Paris, France, presented at The Society of Illustrators in NYC and the top student prize at the Society of Illustrators Student Competition. Winning both awards led to my first book cover assignments from the New York publishing industry.

Which artists have influenced/inspired you the most?

Frederick C. Graff, a professional artist and my high school art teacher was the first major influence. Later, Andrew Wyeth and Salvador Dali. A. Reynolds Morse, an avid collector of Dali's work and a personal friend of the surrealist, amassed the largest private collection of Dali's work outside of Spain. Our high school art class was fortunate to be treated to private showings in Morse's northern Ohio Corporation. This collection is now the Salvador Dali Museum in St. Petersburg, Florida. I feel very lucky to have been able to study some of Dali's most famous paintings under such intimate circumstances.

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

This is a loaded question. I'm a traditionalist and maybe an artistic dinosaur at heart. I am driven by the final work as a physical painting. Being able to see the layers of paint, the texture, glazes and the "hand" of the artist is a visceral experience for me. The final product of a two dimensional digital piece is essentially an ink jet print with no inherent organic "presence". The digital medium is fleeting in its final form. This is not to say that it cannot be used as a tool for artists. Just look at what artists have been able to accomplish in the digital realm with special effects for the movie industry. I love it in that form. But when digital art is in a static two-dimensional printed form—it leaves me empty. Traditional painting is like a big baked potato with all the trimmings versus the digital art potato chip

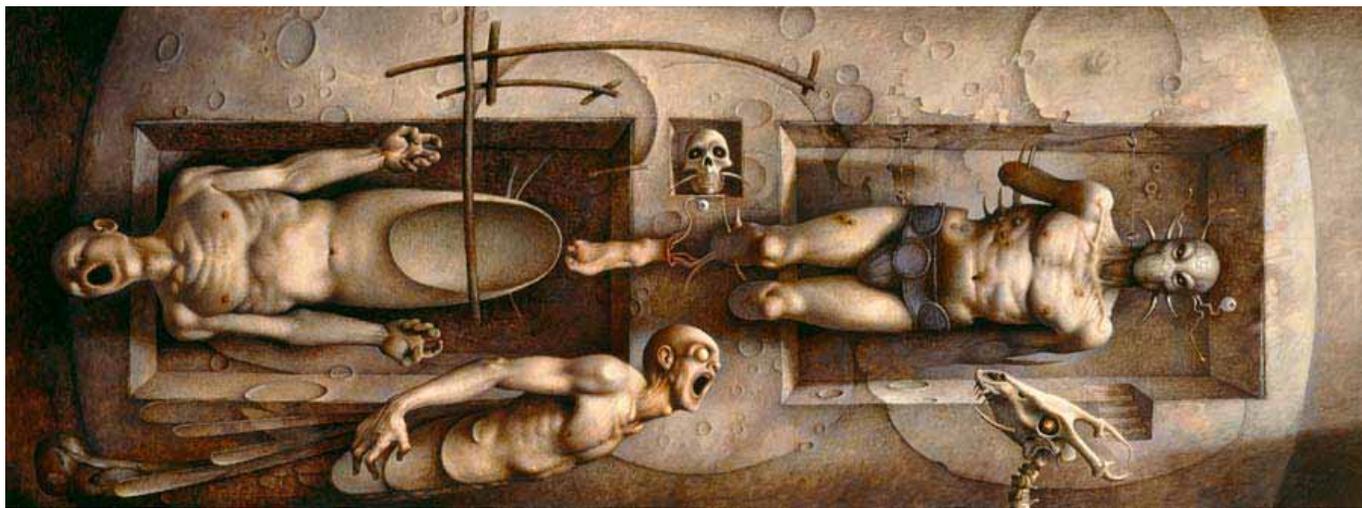
What are some of the work in your portfolio that you are most proud of?

I'm really not proud of any work in particular. There are paintings that I say "okay, you have done something here that is about eighty percent of what you have intended." Trying to match the inner vision is the challenge. For me, to be too proud of something is to become complacent. Learn from your mistakes, celebrate your successes and move on to the next thing.

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You've contributed illustrations to many books in the past. What have been your favorites amongst those?

Having done hundreds of book covers, I do have a few favorites—the Lovecraft covers, a few for Stephen King, Charles de Lint, Marion Zimmer Bradley, Ursula K. Le Guin, Octavia Butler, PD James, Sharon Shinn, Louise Marley. Robert Holdstock, Piers Anthony, Tanya Huff, Christopher Paolini. Most of the work I like is not so tied to the author's book/plot, rather it has an independent life separate from the author's work. It can stand on its own merit.



You worked in the greeting card industry before becoming a professional illustrator. How did that come about?

After my first year in art school I wanted to get some experience in the commercial art world or more specifically to be around art during my summer break from college. The American Greetings Company was the only game in town. The controversial alternative comic artist Robert Crumb had also worked there. So I walked in, unannounced, without an appointment to the American Greetings studios with my high school portfolio. The reason I used my high school work because up to that point, the college work I'd done had been foundational exercises with no unique artistic merit. I was willing to sweep or mop floors to be around working artists. When I left the interview I had acquired a position as an artist. Eventually, like Robert Crumb, I found that I wasn't right for the greeting card industry and they weren't right for me. I moved on to freelance in other venues.

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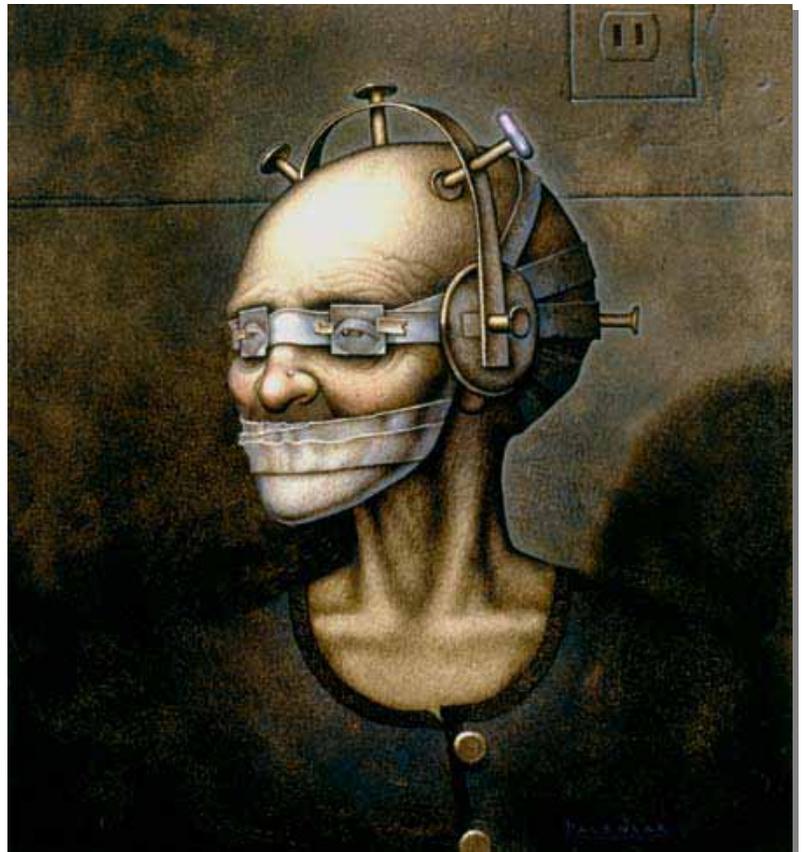
Have you ever been approached to contribute your work to film or television projects?

Yes. I've been contacted for about a half a dozen films. The Hollywood folks have knocked on the door but nothing has ever been taken to final form. It's only a matter of time before the "right" film comes along. The closest and most recent assignment that has a connection to the movie biz has been an Xbox game cover for the *Chronicles of Riddick—Escape from Butcher Bay*. So I got to work with the people at Vivendi Universal. To be honest—I'd rather direct a film.

What advice can you give to aspiring artists on handling the business side of Art?

Most aspiring artists just want to get their first job/commission. First, don't make it about the money because that will take care of itself later. Be passionate about your art and have fun. Work hard and do the best job that you can. When someone has passion, vision and commitment to their art, that passion is contagious and will generate interest, assignments and continued business. If you create your art with spirit and quality—they will buy! Quality work brings quality clients.

Next, you will have to have your art seen by the people who buy it. There are a number of promotional methods to get your art "seen". The cheapest are the competitions. Although you are not guaranteed acceptance or inclusion, these competition annuals are by far, more cost effective than the "paid" promotional directories. Once you obtain "interest" or get hired for an assignment, be honest with yourself and with your clients. There is always a learning curve when it comes to contracts and agreements. Read them again and again and ask



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questions. Create the art, get paid, and become famous!

If you could illustrate for a specific author, whom would you choose? (Living or dead)

I would say H. P. Lovecraft and I have already done that. He was one of the first genre authors that I read. The book was *The Dunwich Horror* and it scared the crap out of me! At the same time the television program *Night Gallery* aired. This program was the follow up to the *Twilight Zone* series and also created by Rod Serling. One of the episodes was titled *Pickman's Model*, another Lovecraft story! I could revisit his work time and time again and still create a variety of approaches for his writing. There are other authors of a more literary nature and few poets that I'd like to illustrate but I have a soft, squishy, sentimental spot for Lovecraft.

Salvador Dali said: "People love mystery, and that is why they love my paintings." The same can be said for your own work, which invokes the unknown in a very mystifying sort of way.

Thank you for the compliment. It's funny you mentioned that quote. I always refer to Albert Einstein's quote. "The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious". I know exactly what he means in that statement. There is genuine beauty in mystery. It tugs at a portion of your soul that floats you right off the ground. I'd rather create "questions" in my art than answers. Recently, I was an invited artist in residence at the Cill Rialaig Project in county Kerry, Ireland. This was my second time there. The folks who operate this artists' retreat provide me with a beautiful stone studio to paint in. The studio is located in a desolate, pre-famine village along the mountainous Irish coast. When there is a force eight gale outside, the wind makes the studio resonate like a low Irish whistle—very spooky. I also participated filming a performance art project that involved New Age Druids at a group of ancient standing stones high in the mountains—now that's mysterious! I'm sure this experience will find its way into my work.

What are you currently working on?

I've been working on the book covers for the reissue of the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy for the U.S. publisher of J.R.R. Tolkien's celebrated series. Trying to measure up to this project has been daunting. Since I can't compete with Peter Jackson's epic films and the work of other artists and artisans that have done

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simply beautiful work for the films and past covers—I have had to create a more intimate and quieter approach visually.

Any interesting projects in the pipeline for the nearby future?

A web site to market posters, prints and originals. Develop my personal painting and continue illustrating book covers.

Five things every aspiring artist must know:

Create it with passion.

Create it with quality.

Listen with your eyes.

When you're discouraged and absolutely can't draw anymore—draw some more!

Have fun!

Parting shot:

Try to experience the mysterious.

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Lovecraft Mythos—Book cover (Ballantine /Del Rey)

Neuro Head—Magazine cover, *Postgraduate Medicine* (McGraw-Hill)

Bird Shrine—Personal Painting/gallery work (*Simulacrum* Cover, March 2005)

Comet Rider—Personal painting/gallery work. Was in the collection (for a short time) of actor Whoopi Goldberg. I think it creeped her out too much so she returned it to the gallery!

EDITOR INTERVIEW

STEPHEN JONES

Stephen Jones lives in London, England. He is the winner of three World Fantasy Awards, three Horror Writers Association Bram Stoker Awards and three International Horror Guild Awards, as well as being a Hugo Award nominee and a sixteen-times recipient of the British Fantasy Award. One of Britain's most acclaimed anthologists of horror and dark fantasy, he has more than eighty books to his credit, including *Shadows Over Innsmouth*, *The Mammoth Book Of Vampires*, *The Hellraiser Chronicles*, *Great Ghost Stories* and the *Dark Terrors* and *Mammoth Book Of Best New Horror* series.

You can visit his web site at www.herebedragons.co.uk/jones

Tell us a little about your background; how did you happen to get into fiction editing?

I began editing around the mid-1970s. At the time I was working at a television production company in the heart of London's Soho district. We made commercials and sales-aid films, and I eventually worked my way up to becoming a producer/director there, before heading off to start my own company with two colleagues.

Anyway, I had recently joined the British Fantasy Society and, after criticizing the quality of their publications, I soon found myself editing their twice-yearly journal *Dark Horizons*. I immediately improved the print and design quality of the magazine, which published both fiction and articles, and I quickly discovered that I enjoyed being an editor. It also brought me into contact with a number of professional authors, such as Ramsey Campbell and Brian Lumley. So when it came time to launch my own fiction magazine, *Fantasy Tales*, co-edited with my friend David A. Sutton, I already had a number of years' experience and a pool of talent to fall back on.

Fantasy Tales initially ran from 1977 to 1987 and published seventeen issues. At the time there were very few other outlets for fantasy and horror short fiction—only *Whispers* and *Weirdbook* in America were doing anything similar.

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We used color covers, paid our contributors, and got to work with a veritable "who's who" of genre authors, including Michael Moorcock, Ramsey Campbell, Brian Lumley, Karl Edward Wagner, Randall Garrett, Manly Wade Wellman, Peter Tremayne, Dennis Etchison, Hugh B. Cave, Lin Carter, Thomas Ligotti, H. Warner Munn, Robert E. Howard, Robert Bloch, Charles L. Grant, William F. Nolan, Steve Rasnic Tem, Clive Barker, Fritz Leiber, David Case, Richard Christian Matheson and many others.

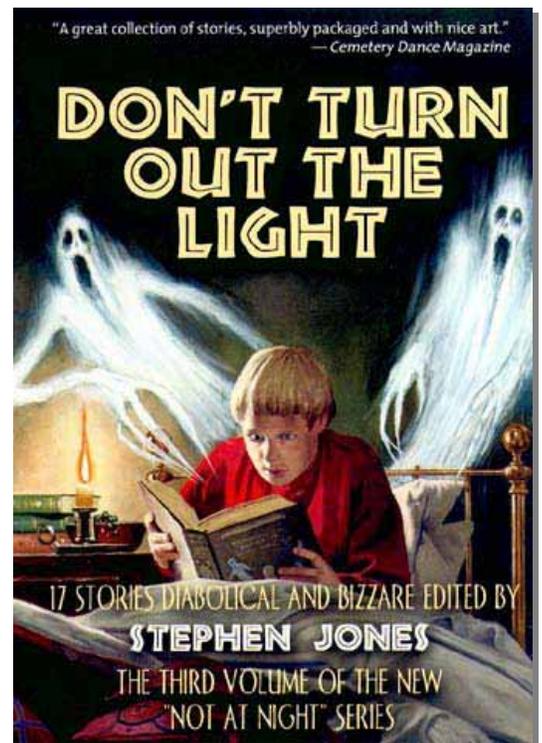
It was a very rewarding experience. The magazine and many of the stories we published won awards—including the World Fantasy Award—and I got to hone my skills as an editor. I also got to meet and work with many writers who were my heroes. But after a decade, the time came to move into the professional arena . . .

Before becoming an Editor you were in the broadcasting industry. Did that have any bearing on the type of fiction you like?

Not really. I have always been a film and television buff, and working in the broadcast industry also allowed me to meet and work with people I admired—David Niven, John Cleese, Charlie Drake, John Gielgud, Tom Baker, Bernard Cribbins and numerous others.

Unfortunately, despite various attempts, I was never able to get a genre show off the ground. I had been reading comics, monster magazines and books since I was a teenager in the 1960s. I read science fiction, fantasy and horror. Everything I could get my hands on. You also have to remember that I was writing, editing and illustrating in my spare time while holding down a weekly job.

The only thing I will say is that being a director was very much like being an editor. I can (and often do) make the analogy between the two jobs: As a director (editor) you are supported by a crew (publisher) and working with actors (writers) to create a finished product (anthology) with your personal stamp upon it. As someone who has to oversee an entire project while bringing their own, hopefully unique, slant to the material, there really is not that much difference between being a director and an anthology editor. Except in what the former receive as payment! [Laughs].



You have numerous projects lined up for 2005. Can you tell us a bit about the ones you're most excited about?

I always have numerous projects lined up! I have a mortgage in London to pay! [Laughs]. This year is not really any different to any other. Now that I do this stuff full-time I have to have a number of projects on the go all the time.

Let's see . . . First up is the third volume in my "Not at Night" series of anthologies for Peter Crowther's PS Publishing. These are inspired by a series of books edited by Christine Campbell Thomson in the 1920s and '30s. The third volume is entitled *Don't Turn Out The Light*, and I'm delighted to say that it includes stories by Ray Bradbury, Richard Matheson, Paul McAuley, David J. Schow, Basil Copper, Charles L. Grant, Terry Lamsley, Peter Atkins and others.

After that comes *Sea Kings of Mars and Otherworldly Stories*, a bumper collection of Leigh Brackett's fantasy stories set on Mars, Venus and other worlds. This was a blast to compile for Gollancz's marvelous "Fantasy Masterworks" series—I'd previously put together collections for them by Robert E. Howard (all his "Conan" tales) and Clark Ashton Smith. The book includes a wonderful collaboration between Brackett and Ray Bradbury, which I read as a kid and absolutely loved.

Back in 1988, Kim Newman and I put together a volume entitled *Horror: 100 Best Books*, in which 100 horror writers, editors and artists wrote about their favorite titles. It was very well received—it won the Bram Stoker Award and has remained in print, going through four progressively updated editions. So we decided now was the time to do a follow-up volume, as the horror genre has changed so much since the boom years of the 1980s. The result is *Horror: Another 100 Books*, in which a totally different 100 people select and write about their favorite horror titles.

Another "sequel" book or sorts will be *Weird Shadows Over Innsmouth*, a follow-up to my 1994 volume of Lovecraftian stories. The new anthology contains work by Richard A. Lupoff, Basil Copper, Kim Newman, Paul McAuley, the late Hugh B. Cave, Ramsey Campbell, Michael Marshall Smith and a killer novella by Brian Lumley. It should be published by Fedogan & Bremer in time for this year's World Fantasy Convention in Madison, Wisconsin.

I'm also doing an annotated bibliography for PS Publishing of my friend Basil Copper's work, and the sixteenth volume of my annual *Mammoth Book of Best New Horror* will be out as usual around Halloween.

I've also got bits and pieces of non-fiction coming out in other people's books. Looking further into the future, I've just done *H.P. Lovecraft's Book of the Supernatural* for Carroll & Graf, and *More Great Ghost Stories* is a follow-up to

SIMULACRUM

an anthology published in 2004 which I "co-edited" with my late friend R. Chetwynd-Hayes. I'm sure there's more stuff, but I've probably forgotten it at the moment . . .

The argument that British dark fiction is decidedly, well, darker, than its American counterpart still persists. Would you agree? What is the cultural significance of this?

Yes, I would generally agree with that statement. Britain is a darker country. We have a darker (and longer) history. As a people we tend to be more introspective than the Americans, who are taught from an early age to be positive and expect to succeed. We tend to always look on the bad side of things. If something is likely to go wrong, it most probably will.

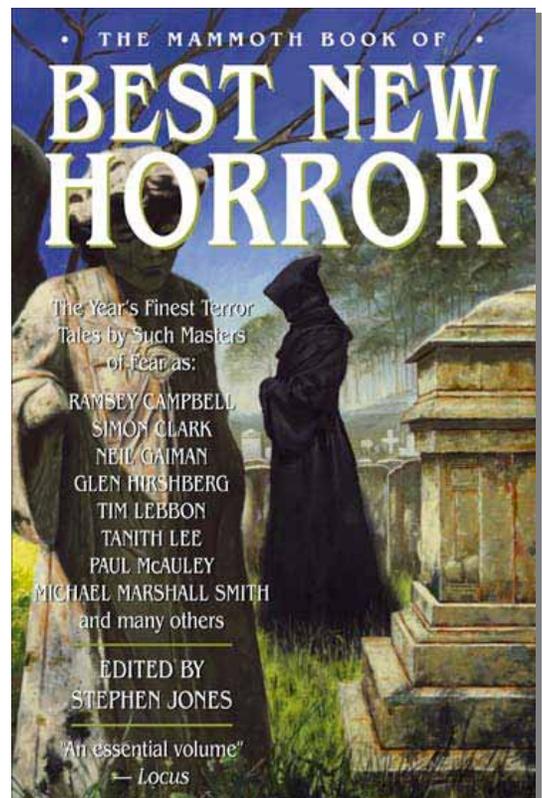
Also, it's not that sunny here in Britain . . . [Laughs].

I don't want to get into a political diatribe about how this country is run, but I think that the ambition and creativity of many people has been crushed by successive governments. The flip side of that is that I see some kinds of horror fiction as escapist literature, which is why the genre tends to prosper during darker times. Of course, that doesn't apply to all types of horror. The best horror fiction is still a dark mirror held up to the world around us.

Through all the anthologies you've edited, you've worked with some of the best artists in the field today. What are some of your favorite covers?

Since the *Dark Horizons* and *Fantasy Tales* days I've been very lucky to work with some of the top artists in our genre. These days I have also got into commissioning and designing (with Michael Marshall Smith) many of my own covers.

I guess the artist I work with the most is the incredibly talented Les Edwards, who also paints as "Edward Miller". Les lives in London and also happens to be a friend, so it's very easy to work together. Some of my own favorite covers of his are those he did for *Dark Voices 4*, *Dark Detectives*, the *Great Ghost Stories* hardcover, the past couple editions of



SIMULACRUM

Mammoth Book of Best New Horror, last year's revised volume of *The Mammoth Book of Vampires* and the forthcoming *Don't Turn Out The Light*. As "Edward Miller" he has also done some very evocative covers for two collections of R. Chetwynd-Hayes' work I compiled.

Back in the *Dark Horizons* and *Fantasy Tales* days I got to work with Stephen E. Fabian a lot, as well as J.K. Potter; Bob Eggleton did the covers for the first two volumes of *Dark Terrors*, which looked fabulous; and I recently worked with John Picacio, a young American artist, on *The Mammoth Book of Best New Horror*.

I also often try to include black and white illustrations in many of the books I edit. Over the years I've worked with Dave Carson, Jim Pitts, Martin McKenna and other artists. More recently, I've done a number of books with my brother-in-law, American illustrator Randy Broecker. His artwork to date on my three "Not at Night" volumes is, I think, amongst some of the best work he has ever done. He's also a delight to work with, as we have so much in common (over and above my sister).

Have the current political climate and the post-9/11 events influenced the kinds of Horror stories you're seeing at all?

Not really. At the time of that appalling atrocity, I was deeply worried that it would provoke yet another fundamentalist backlash against the horror genre. We had seen it before (especially under Margaret Thatcher's government here in the 1980s), and there was no reason to suppose that the moral Right would not jump on the political bandwagon and try to use it to promote even more Draconian laws and further censorship.

Well, they brought in their obstructive laws but, much to my genuine surprise, horror fiction did not become the whipping-boy this time around. I guess they had more than enough bogeymen in the real world to heap blame upon without going after the fictional variety as well. So, after a reasonable lull in the market as a consequence of 9/11, horror fiction has bounced back to where it was before. In fact, if anything, it is even more popular than it was a few years ago.

The only impact I have been aware of is that I occasionally receive a "9/11" story—most usually a redemptive ghost story written by an American. I treat these type of stories with the same prudence that I also reserve for stories set during the Holocaust. If you're going to go there, you *really* need to know what you are doing as a writer . . .

SIMULACRUM

If you could pick any person—dead or alive—to co-edit an anthology with, whom would it be?

That's easy. August Derleth. Although I never met him—I never even corresponded with him as he died in 1971, the year I first started reading seriously in the genre—he has done more to influence my career than probably any other editor. It has become fashionable in recent years amongst some Lovecraftians to belittle Derleth's contributions to the genre. But they forget that if it wasn't for him, H.P. Lovecraft would probably not be anywhere near as well known as he is today. He almost single-handedly kept Lovecraft's name alive and in print in the two or three decades after the author's death. As a teenager, I used to devour his Arkham House anthologies (albeit in cheaper paperback editions), and it was Derleth who basically introduced me to all the great names in horror fiction.

As a writer himself, I thought his work was okay. But as an editor and publisher I thought he was brilliant. In the end his dedication to the genre and his authors put him in an early grave. But nobody else has probably been a greater influence on me or my work. Over the years I've tried to base my career on his, to treat my authors with the respect and devotion that he treated his own writers. I think there are certain parallels in our careers, and my anthology *Shadows Over Innsmouth* was definitely a tribute to the sort of anthologies Derleth edited for Arkham House.

That said, I also have a great deal of respect for David A. Sutton, whose *New Writings in Horror & The Supernatural* and *The Satyr's Head & Other Tales of Terror* I had read and enjoyed before I ever met him. We have of course collaborated on many volumes over the years, and he is always a delight to work with.

Another editor I admire greatly is Hugh Lamb, and he and I are trying to find a project to work together on at the moment. I'd also like to collaborate with Ellen Datlow some day. We've talked about it in the past, but we have just not found exactly the right concept yet.

I have to ask: (I still believe there is untapped first-rate fiction on this subject out there SOMEWHERE) what do you think is the fascination with the vampire archetype?

To be absolutely honest, I'm not sure I actually know the answer to that question. As my friend Kim Newman once said on a panel at a convention, "Vampires are the Star Trek of horror". And that's true—vampires, like *Star Trek*,

SIMULACRUM

Doctor Who, *Buffy*, *Star Wars*, *The Prisoner* and other associated topics, seem to attract their own, specific, group of fans beyond the general horror crowd.

You can talk about the vampire's inherent eroticism (the exchange of bodily fluids), the attraction of immortality or the power to shape-change into a beast. Or it may just be the undead's ability to look cool dressed all in black! [Laughs]. I really have no idea why so many people are attracted to vampires but maybe don't read any wider in the horror genre. You tend to see the same thing with authors as well—there are some people who just read, or predominantly read, the work of such authors as Stephen King, Clive Barker, Anne Rice, Brian Lumley and others, but ignore other books and writers in the horror field.

All I know is that those vampire books I've done—*The Mammoth Book of Vampires*, *The Mammoth Book of Vampire Stories By Women* and even the non-fiction study *The Illustrated Vampire Movie Guide*—have been amongst the most successful of all the titles I've worked on. Of course, having said that, I have two new vampire anthologies I've been trying to sell to publishers for a couple of years without any success. Sometimes I just think they don't understand how popular vampires are as a sub-genre.

As for untapped fiction, I've definitely found stories that have done something new and different with the vampire myth. Otherwise, I just wouldn't be interested in doing those types of books.

What are your feelings on the present state of the Horror genre? Have you seen any new interesting angles come to the fore lately?

I truly believe that the horror genre is more creative and more vibrant than it has been for at least a decade. There is an incredible wealth of new talent coming up through the ranks at the moment. Those writers who held in there during the bust years after the 1980s are now writing some of their best material, while many of those authors who jumped on the bandwagon and contributed to the implosion have thankfully moved on to other, perhaps more lucrative, genres.

Although there really is no direct correlation between films and books, it seems that horror is "hot" again in Hollywood, and some of this popularity will eventually filter its way through to publishers. The independent presses are booming, newspapers and magazines are reviewing horror again, and bookstores are bringing back horror sections. After a number of false starts and too early-predictions, I am starting to see a careful resurgence in horror again.

Of course, I've been through a couple of these "dips" now, but if you can ride them out and manage to survive, I believe you emerge stronger whenever the market picks up again. After all, I've published more than eighty books by now. I have some kind of reputation—even if it is only in a specific genre.

SIMULACRUM

Enlighten us on some of your pet hates and editorial peeves . . .

There are quite a few! [Laughs]. Firstly, I hate it when people come up to me at conventions and try to pitch me something when I'm obviously having a private conversation. I'm always happy to talk with anybody at such events (that's why I go), but I wish these people would learn some manners and choose their time more carefully.

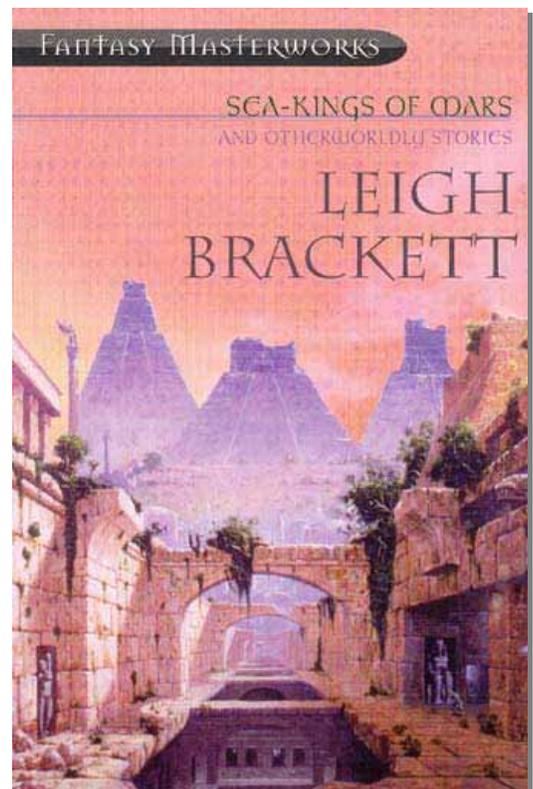
People who don't read the guidelines drive me nuts. There's no point sending me a science fiction or fantasy story for *Best New Horror* unless it has some horror content. I'm not an idiot. I read this stuff and I can tell the difference. It's just a waste of my time and theirs. The same applies to original stories—it's a *reprint* anthology, for god's sake!

Don't send me unsolicited manuscripts. This is a full-time job for me. I simply do not have the time to read a story or novella (or, god help me, a novel manuscript) unless it relates to something I'm actually *working* on. And even then I suggest querying first (all my contact details are on my web site). I spend half my life reading fiction. I want to do other things with the rest of my time that does not involve giving free advice on somebody else's work. When a project is open to submissions, I always post the information as widely as I can.

If you live outside the U.K., don't put foreign stamps on your return envelope. They don't work in other countries! (Duh!) That's why we have International Reply Coupons, although they are going the way of the dinosaur thanks to e-mail. I much prefer responding electronically these days. And when it comes to submitting a manuscript, try to be professional: double space the lines, underline the italics and spell it "grey" not "gray". The other Americanizations I can go with, but not that one.

For god's sake, read your manuscript through before you send it off to me. If you can't be bothered to check your spelling, grammar or punctuation, then why should I? It's a distraction for me when I'm considering a story and, more importantly, unnecessary these days when most computers have spell-check (although don't only rely on that).

Finally, don't give me a synopsis of the



SIMULACRUM

story in the covering letter—let me find out what it is about when I read it. Don't tell me that your story is brilliant and perfect for my book—let me be the judge of that. And don't list all your semi-professional and electronic credits. It's the professional appearances that count.

I think that's enough of a rant for now . . .! [Laughs].

What trends in speculative fiction did you see in the previous year, and how do you think they're going to change in 2005?

I suppose the biggest trend I've noticed recently is the return of the ghost story. Probably thanks to small press publishers such as Ash-Tree Press and Sarob, the traditional ghost story is definitely popular again. The anthology *Great Ghost Stories* I compiled "with" Ron Chetwynd-Hayes went back to press in paperback just a month after it was first published last year. I've already done a couple of other books along similar lines, and publishers are talking to me about doing some more.

Meanwhile, newer authors such as Glen Hirshberg and Terry Lamsley are coming up with original twists on the ghost story for contemporary audiences. It's a good time to be writing supernatural fiction.

As for predicting trends, I can't. This kind of stuff only becomes apparent when you look back on it. That's one of the wonderful things about doing *The Mammoth Book of Best New Horror* every year. It gives me the opportunity to look back and make the connections in retrospect. If I could predict what the Next Big Thing was, I'd be much richer than I am! [Laughs].

What kinds of stories scare Stephen Jones?

Sadly, very few these days. Most good horror doesn't so much "scare" me as disturb me. I love stories about strangers in strange lands, I love subterranean stories, I love new twists on old ideas. But most of all I love being surprised.

If, after thirty years of reading this stuff, you can surprise me with where a story goes—and the writing is good enough, although that can always be fixed to a certain extent—then you will probably have me hooked. However, I've got to say that that happens very rarely—finding an original concept that is well written. But when you do find it, then that is what makes this job so worthwhile.

Do you consider yourself a "hands-on" editor? How far are you prepared to go with an author to make a story perfect?

SIMULACRUM

Very much so. I often work very closely with my authors, often suggesting a number of changes to improve a story in my opinion. In the end, of course, it's up to each particular author whether they want to listen to my advice, but in the majority I would say that they do take my comments on board. After all, I'm only trying to make their story and my book as good as they can possibly be!

I often send the writers I work with a long list of suggested changes and corrections before I accept a manuscript, and I hope that both of us feel the story is improved by that editorial input. Of course, I can also be argued out of a point! [Laughs]. In fact, I now have some authors who simply send me an early draft of their work and ask me for my input at that stage, before they produce a final version.

Obviously, it is a little different with the reprint anthologies, although even there I am prepared to change things—with the author's permission—if I don't like it. I think that the number of stories that I have published that have won or been nominated for awards is some testament to the fact that I probably know what I'm doing! [Laughs].

What a lot of people don't understand is that being an editor does not simply involve accepting a bunch of stories and throwing them into a book. It's much harder and more time-consuming than that. At least it is for me.

Is there something as being *too* original—*too* cutting edge—in terms of fiction?

I wouldn't have thought so. You can't be *too* original or *too* cutting edge. You can be too clever for your own good, but that's something else. I'm much more concerned with people who know *too* little about the genre they are supposed to be working in. Far too often I receive work that is basically a re-hash of an idea that someone has done before (whether the author in question is aware of it or not).

It is very important for any prospective writer to read widely in this field—and I just don't mean the bestsellers—before they start writing themselves. The chances are that your "original" idea has been done before—and better—by someone else. The more widely read and more knowledgeable you are about the genre (and other types of literature), the less likely you are to come up with something that has already been done before. Of course, there's no problem with producing a new spin on an old idea—that's what most horror fiction does—and I suspect I would welcome with open arms anybody I considered to be *too* original or *too* cutting edge! Far too much of the material I read is merely mundane.

SIMULACRUM

How big an influence to you think the small presses and independent publications have in terms of what people read—and what others think is publishable?

I'm not that sure that the smaller presses—because of the size of the print runs and their limited distribution—actually have all that much influence on what people read. I would still prefer to have a book published by a mass-market imprint, simply because I know that it will reach a much wider readership.

However, having said that, there are definitely some projects that are more suited to an independent publisher, and you usually know that you are going to get a superior production from the small presses. Something I'm moving more towards is a split deal on a book. *On Great Ghost Stories*, *Cemetery Dance* did a superb job on the limited edition hardcover and, as mentioned earlier, Carroll & Graf have had some commercial success with a large-sized paperback printing. That's getting the best of both worlds. With the "Not at Night" series, I'm hoping that some enterprising mainstream publisher will pick up the mass-market rights or do a translation deal. Especially as the line-up of authors and stories is so strong in this series.

In some respects, my concern is that the small press can be *too* influential. In recent years we have seen the rise of a number of authors who are perceived as "hot" without having published a single book with a mainstream publisher. It's all very well having your work appear in print-on-demand editions, e-books or handsome small press hardcovers, but if you haven't had your work published by a mainstream imprint then, in most cases, you are only reaching a fraction of the potential horror readership.

Of course, as we know, that doesn't stop you from winning awards—especially the Bram Stoker Award, which has almost become synonymous with the small press in recent years, much to its detriment—and there are definitely occasions when exposure in the independent press has led to an author's works being picked up by a mainstream publisher. You only need to look at the success of people like Tim Lebbon or Jeff VanderMeer, while it would appear that much of the Leisure list owes its inspiration to its authors' appearances in the small press.

I guess that what this tells us is that quality will rise to the top. Sometimes.

What do you look for in a story? Does this differ in any way from the way you approach it as a reader?

Oh, yes. As a reader, I often approach a story very differently. As a reader, I'm basically looking to be entertained or moved (in some way) by a piece of fiction.

SIMULACRUM

As an editor, I'm looking for more than that. Along with, of course, entertainment value, I'm also looking for technique, style and a basic grasp of grammar.

As I mentioned before, the first thing I look for in a manuscript is that the author has laid it out correctly so that any silly little mistakes do not interfere with my reading of the story. After that, I'm looking for a good tale, well told. You can often have one or the other, but it is when both come together in a manuscript that you know you are on to a winner.

How do you think the Horror genre has evolved in the last fifteen to twenty years? Has the media (mainly film and television) changed the reading public's perception of what 'Horror' is supposed to be?

There really is not that much crossover between horror films and horror books. We have seen that a revival in the popularity in one type of media does not necessarily translate into a rise in popularity in another. There is no doubt that a successful horror film or a TV show like *Buffy* will raise the profile of the genre slightly, but it is more likely to lead to the rise of even more cranked-out "novelisations" rather than new and original work by up-and-coming authors.

There is also the time-lag. Hollywood is notoriously slow to recognize trends—but so too are publishers—so it always seems to me that the two are invariably out of step with each other. By the time Hollywood has picked up on the latest "trend", it is already over.

Unfortunately, neither the studios nor publishers are willing to tack risks any more. Most have no idea what they are looking for so, as a consequence, they are looking for something just like the last hit. Only different. Instead of leading with new ideas and new writers, they are content to sit back and safely follow the latest trend—without any idea of why that particular concept caught on with the public. Anybody who has been called in for a meeting with television executives about a proposed new horror series knows how frustrating and soul-destroying it can be. You only have to look at the numerous J.K. Rowling knockoffs being touted as the Next Big Thing in children's books to realize that most publishers basically have no idea what they are doing. The answer seems to be to just throw obscene amounts of money at projects in the hope that one or two may end up a success.

What they should be doing is spending smaller sums and investing in filmmakers and authors of the future who actually have new and original concepts to develop. In publishing, nobody cares about books breaking even or making a small profit these days (even when, as is usual, they receive zero publicity or promotion). They would rather waste huge amounts of money speculating on one or two major successes than invest in a coherent publishing program. That's

SIMULACRUM

where the small presses have stepped in and picked up the slack. If it wasn't for them, there are many authors out there who would not be published today. (Although perhaps some of them deserve not to be published—that's what natural selection is all about, but that no longer applies with the rise in self-publication and print-on-demand.) Even more interesting, sales of some hardcover runs from independent presses will easily dwarf those from a so-called mainstream publisher.

What do you enjoy most about the short story format?

The fact that it's short! [Laughs]. If it is bad—and I read a *lot* of terrible fiction—then I haven't invested too much of my life in reading it. And if it is good, then I can move on to the next manuscript and hopefully discover another gem.

For a writer, it is much more difficult to write an effective horror story in the shorter format—establish location, develop characters, create a story and still scare the reader—than it is to develop a similar tale in a novella or novel. I admire anybody who can pull that off compellingly.

Who are some of your current favorite short story writers?

In no particular order: Michael Marshall Smith, Glen Hirshberg, Dennis Etchison, Ramsey Campbell, Caitlín R. Kiernan, Kim Newman, Neil Gaiman, Christopher Fowler, Terry Lamsley, David J. Schow, Richard Christian Matheson and probably several others that I've completely forgotten at the moment. When you receive a submission from any of these writers, you know you will probably be getting a quality piece.

What would you like your epitaph to read?

"He Did His Best". Because that's all I can do. Trust me, I don't make a lot of money doing this stuff, but I love my life. I love working in the genre, and I hope that I am making a difference. I try to treat all the authors I work with in the same way that I would want to be treated by others. I have attempted to be honest and forthright in all my dealings, to encourage new talent where I can, and to support those older writers who are no longer perceived as "commercial" by the mainstream.

I also fight for my authors' rights, and I will not compromise if I feel it is the best thing to do. Sometimes I think this "hands-on" attitude has hurt my career, but my primary obligation is to the writers I work with, not with the corporate entities who run the publishing industry. I can sometimes be pretty forthright in

SIMULACRUM

my views, but that's because I passionately believe in what I am doing and the field I am working in.

It's hard graft for very little return. But I can look back on all those books with my name on the spines, and occasionally dust my awards, and feel that perhaps it has all been worthwhile. I truly believe that nobody knows their place in the world while they are still in it. Only after I'm dead and gone will my contribution to the genre become apparent. And by then I won't care anyway! [Laughs].

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- Needs: Fiction\Poetry\Artwork—most speculative genres (H/F/SF/MR). (Quiet, gothic horror as opposed to gore and violence.)
- Will look at articles, reviews and interviews on request.
- Pays in copies and one-year subscription to the magazine. Format—pdf.
- Fiction—between 1000 and 8000 words.

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