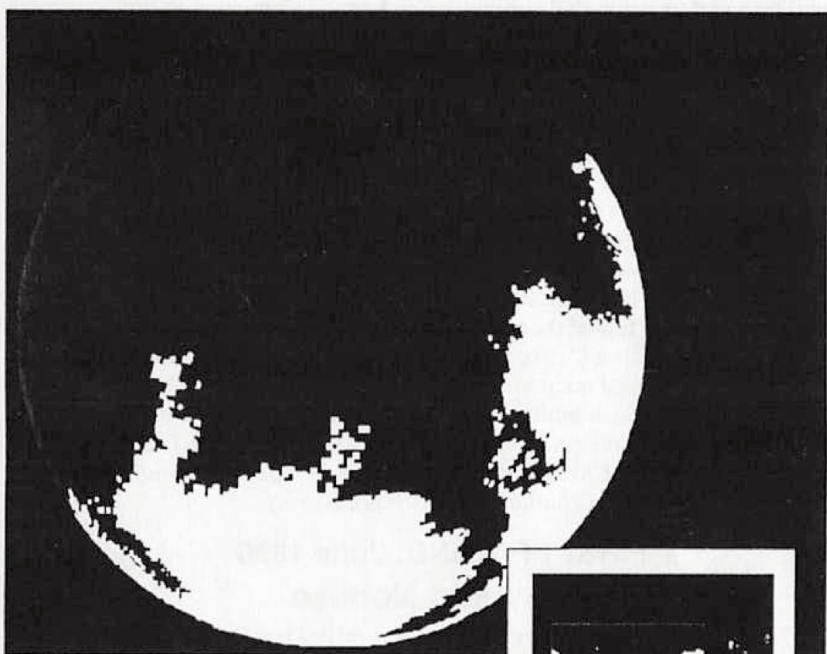


LOOP GAROU 5



Musings on Dark Futures
Down with Derivative Fiction!
Another Saturday Night
Scrapbook Excerpts....

LOOP GAROU 5

Edited by
RAJA THIAGARAJAN

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Chris Engle (“Some Musings on Dark Futures”) is a wayward Zen-Calvinist-psychotherapist attempting to make sense out of a confusing world. In his article, he takes his hobby horse out for a strenuous ride to point out the failings of cyberpunk. His next project will be a matrix game that simulates Kitchener’s Campaign in the Sudan and includes whirling dervishes.

Ian A. Engle (“Another Saturday Night”) sometimes stumbles out from behind the library stacks long enough to write stories. He’s a dancin’ fool who loves fantasy and is remarkably patient with editors who lose his story three times. It is hoped he will show equal patience with people who invent biographical sketches for him.

Jeffrey W. Roberts (“Someone Else’s Puppet, Someone Else’s Stage”) is a short-tempered reporter on a pretty good university newspaper. He vows that he does not stomp puppies or torture kittens for fun. He does, however, harbor some radical opinions, and his article presents a few of them.

Raja Thiagarajan (“Excerpts from the Scrapbook of the Last Man on Earth”) has loved microcomputers and SF for more than half a lifetime, and likes combining the two to create the *Loop Garou*. Raja’s five favorite SF books (in alphabetical order by author) are *The Martian Chronicles*, *Childhood’s End*, *Stranger in a Strange Land*, *Dying Inside*, and *More Than Human*. The sixth is *Gateway*.

SOME MUSINGS ON DARK FUTURES

CHRIS ENGLE

“Cyberpunk is just the six-million-dollar man with a bad attitude.”

— CHRIS ENGLE

“No, Cyberpunk is really the Bionic Woman with PMS.”

— TERRI KLINGELHOEFER

THERE HAS BEEN a lot of talk in science fiction fandom over the years about “Dark Futures” (ooo, ahhhh, booga booga). Most recently this talk has centered on the subgenre called “cyberpunk.” Cyberpunk has the basic message that the world is shit and that not only are you going to die but you are going to die while being raped by the corporate who hired you. Harsh words, I know, but that is what I understand the message of cyberpunk to be. This message doesn’t set well with me, and I have some thoughts on it.

“It is better to die standing up than to live on your knees.”

— SLOGAN FROM THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR

It seems to me that years ago science fiction literature's view of the future depicted a world where order (seen as good) was descending into chaos (seen as bad). Simplistic stuff, I must admit. Still, I like such stories. They appeal to the Indo-European archetypes I know. Good versus Evil, Job versus the Devil, and all that. Why do they appeal to me? For a very simple reason. They are optimistic!

Optimistic?! you say. How could it be? In the older stories, half the world is dead; culture and civilization are gone. What *good* can come from it? The answer is simple. In these stories, the basically good hero goes through a series of trials, through a process of growth. He learns the true nature of chaos and chooses to rebuild cosmos. This is a message that is filled with dignity and hope. It inspires the reader to carry on *despite* the fact that our world is shit.

Naive, simple-minded, stupid, you say. I completely disagree. Let me explain my reasoning....

“The great only appear so because we are on our knees. Let us rise up.”

— JAMES LARKIN, IRISH SOCIALIST

Each of us, in our respective lives, is faced with the challenge of what we choose to do. Do we live good lives or bad ones? This question has nothing to do with material wealth, with health, or with any sign of outward success. It speaks wholly to one's inner being.

History gives extensive examples of men who were evil. Their actions show their nature. I believe that each one of us has the power to make these same choices. Each of us has the potential to be a Gandhi or a Hitler. The choice is up to you.

So which will it be? Will you sell your soul or die, dignity intact? Older stories such as *Alas Babylon*, *No Blade of Grass*, and *On the Beach* always opted for the latter. A simplistic, sentimental choice, some of you are certainly thinking. Again I am forced to disagree with you. The characters of the story had no way of knowing what the outcome of their choices would be, no more than you or I know what will happen tomorrow. Nor did their choices always save them, as is shown in *On the Beach*. Opting for dignity merely reflects their basic outlook on life.

Cyberpunk is different. The choice is the same. The world has gone to hell, and as I have heard so often, “No one man can do anything to change the world.” My response is, “Who cares?” This basic difference has nothing to do with changing the world. It has to do with a personal choice between dignity and degradation. I believe cyberpunk heroes habitually choose the latter.

Gasp! Sputter! Heretic! How can you say that? This is a valid question. I look at a stock cyberpunk setting and I see a world dominated by soul-crushing corporations. In the real world, any corporation that abuses people too much faces the constant threat of nationalization. But if such a corporate-ordered hell did exist, it would pose the same choice between light and dark that anarchy does.

A character is born in the dark. He grows up in a world of street gangs and violence. *Neuromancer* and the short stories in *Burning Chrome* give an excellent view of this world from many angles. The story begins with the hero in some way working for the “Company.” It doesn’t matter that this is the same company that is poisoning the water and food supply with toxic wastes. It doesn’t even matter that this company maintains a social order in which he will always be nothing. He is an automaton of the Lord of the Flies.

Okay, so lots of stories begin with the hero working for the bad guy. True enough. It is also true that the heroes in the short stories “Johnny Mnemonic” and “Burning Chrome” turn on and

combat the corporations. But they invariably do so for motives that betray world-views that are as maggot-filled as the corporate values that spawned them. Self-pity and self-righteousness abound. The character's minds are numbed by addictions and self-mutilations. They are blind to what individual dignity is. Is it any wonder, then, that they are so depressed?

“Give me liberty or give me death!”

— PATRICK HENRY

Thomas Hobbes wrote about a world without order in his classic *The Leviathan*. He pointed out that in a state of nature where the strong dominated the weak, life would be nasty, brutish, and short. Obviously cyberpunk has taken this to heart, but they missed Hobbes' main point. One escapes the state of nature by making social contracts. I agree not to harm your dignity if you agree not to harm mine, and damned if it doesn't work. Bad things happen—don't get me wrong—minorities can always be oppressed by majorities. But the social contract says I can dissent, and that my views will be respected. Most importantly, if I can convince enough people to listen to me (and it takes a lot fewer than you might think) we can renegotiate a part of the social contract of our land.

I know I have lost most of the cyberpunk disciples by now, so I will begin to wrap up. The ideas and world-views in cyberpunk are, sadly, widely accepted in the present day. They carry with them a few nasty implications.

In Japan, the darling of cyberpunkdom, there is very little crime. They have a high respect for the leader, and social dissent is rare. They have a high level of literacy and a school system that is the envy of the world. But the down side of all this happiness is a phenomenal teenage suicide rate, racism to a degree undreamt of in the Deep South, and an underlying

viciousness that, when internationally expressed during World War II, rivalled the death camps of the Nazi Reich.

Dignity? Not for the individual, it would seem. Suicide can become a reasonable response to such mind-numbing control. This does not have to be the case. A world of extreme conformity can demand that one be all the more true in his pursuit of the dignity of virtue. I believe that the people of Japan are doing just that.

Among the Zen Buddhists there is a ceremony concerning the drinking of tea. Within this ceremony every motion is filled with grace and simplicity. Over the centuries it has changed very little but within the conformity of this ritual is a statement of ultimate individuality. Such is the subtlety of Japan.

When reading a story, one becomes a passive participant to the hero's journey, facing the same challenges he faces and able to grow in a similar way. Cyberpunk heroes face darkness, but they do not seem to ask if the darkness is truly dark. They are not confronted, as the person who asks this question is, with the idea that there are no real dualities. That there is only the dignity of unity. Isn't that the lesson one learns from any journey through hell? Think about this the next time you sit down with a cup of tea.

SOMEONE ELSE'S PUPPET, SOMEONE ELSE'S STAGE

JEFFREY W. ROBERTS

Upon the Uses and Abuses of Derivative Fiction

AT THE POINT where writers face that intimidating blank page (or in some cases, blank screen), they are also faced with the question of originality. It is the desire of most writers, one assumes, to create the freshest, most original work possible within the limits of their talent and training. Only beginners and plagiarists set out to intentionally copy a certain style or mimic a certain character. Beginners can be forgiven this because they are beginners, and one proven way for a student to learn the basics of a craft is by imitation. Plagiarists are criminals who steal not material goods but the creative effort of another; they are thieves and should be dealt with as such.

But somewhere between the students and thieves are people who write material based thoroughly upon the work of other writers. Not all of them are beginners; some of them are established professional writers who make at least part of their living with this type of fiction. If these writers have committed theft with their imitative work, they are certainly not treated like it. Instead they are sometimes adored and idolized as much

as, if not more than, those writers who present fresh, original fiction.

What they are writing is derivative fiction. Derivative fiction is fiction that is based on, or *derived* from, the work of another person or group.

Derivative fiction embraces a large and varied body of material. Professional *Star Trek* novels (professional in the sense that someone was paid to write the damn things) and *Star Trek* fan fiction are the most prevalent forms of derivative fiction. Derivative work can also be found in the milieu of Bradley's *Darkover*, McCaffrey's *Pern*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Star Wars*, *Battlestar Galactica*, *Blake's Seven*, *Doctor Who*, and dozens of others. Much derivative fiction is based on movies and television and other media sources. Whether that is a condemnation of these sources is moot: nearly any popular, fan-favorite world or theme will eventually spawn vapid imitations by someone other than the creator of the world, the characters, and the idea.

Therein lies the first of many problems. Derivative fiction sounds like material that infringes copyright; it sounds plagiaristic. But professional *Star Trek* novels (and of these, there are legion) are not routinely brought into court as evidence in copyright or trademark infringement trials. The professionally produced *Trek* products (that is, those designed and manufactured to make money) are certainly derivative, but they are licensed and authorized by the copyright holders. *Trek* fan fiction is unauthorized; it doesn't make any money for Paramount even though it is equally derivative from the source. But generally, the worst a fan writer or publisher will get is a cease-and-desist order from Paramount's attorneys. Even though no legal action may be taken against the people who produce and distribute it, from a legal standpoint fannish *Trekfic* is not acceptable.

This same pattern exists for fiction related to *Doctor Who*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Star Wars*...the list is as long as the roll call of those fictional worlds adored by science fiction and fantasy fans.

The biggest legal issue in the matter of derivative fiction appears to be whether or not the copyright or trademark holders find the derivative work offensive or unprofitable. The proliferation of derivative fiction seems to indicate that these people do not object to works based on material they own. Possibly most fan publishers are too small to worry about.

One can therefore assume that there is nothing legally wrong with derivative fiction. But there is something ethically wrong with it. There is something very troublesome about a person using the work of another as the foundation of his or her own work.

Originality, as I have come to know it, is something to be desired in all creative work that a person does. Originality stamps the mark of the writer indelibly upon the work; it involves depth of imagination, skill with the language, and the ability to at least attempt to go beyond the standard formula of good guy versus bad guy. However, originality as I know it does not necessarily consist of putting Luke and Han in a warpdrive spaceship and sending them off for rollicking adventures; it does not consist of reaffirming (yet again) the merits of colonial warriors and cuteness of fire lizards; it does not consist of using someone else's work as a basis for your own.

If a person writes derivative fiction, either professionally or fannishly, then that writer is not contributing anything new and original. That person may be adding a new perspective on an already-existing legend or theme. He or she may rearrange the attributes of a known character in a fresh and ostensibly original way, but is contributing nothing new in his or her own voice. The words and style may be the writer's, and the words and style may be very good, but the overall voice, the *gestalt of the work*, is that of the person who created the characters or the world. John M. Ford may write a brilliant *Star Trek* novel, and it may be a novel that only Ford could have written, but it is still using characters created by Gene Roddenberry and his first stable of screenwriters. Because of that, it is *NOT a wholly original piece of*

fiction. Frank Miller is in large part responsible for the "grimness" of many current comics because of his revolutionary treatment of the Batman in *The Dark Knight Returns*. Miller certainly approached Batman in a different way, but it was still a Batman story. If the reader did not already know something about the Batman, if Miller had not been able to base his version on the work of Kane or O'Neil, then his Dark Knight story could not have been as effective. Without the history and the work from which Miller derived his story, it would have just been a story about an old hero coming out of retirement. It might still have been a good story, but the power it gained by being a Batman story would have been lost.

THERE ARE certain series that specifically invite writers to create stories set in a shared world. *Thieve's World*, *Liavek*, and *Wild Cards* are three such ongoing anthology series. Further, comic books are well known for having many different writers handling the same character, often in the same month. These books and comics are, by my definition, also derivative fiction. The derivative element in them cannot be denied. The work within them, however good or bad, is not wholly original. But, by their nature, these shared world/shared character series are *meant* to be derivative fiction. The concept of Wild Cards included the idea that many writers were going to come in and play around in that world. Comic books were conceived as serial fiction; eventually, some writers are going to get tired of writing serial fiction and will want to move on to something else. In that case, the company that owns the comic characters usually just assigns the writing to someone else and continues with the series.

The separating factor is that comics and certain series are *intentionally* derivative; it was part of their originator's concept that they should be that way. I find it hard to believe that when Marion Zimmer Bradley first conceived the world of Darkover that she meant to provide the basis for a never-ending flurry of

fan fiction. I don't believe that *Star Trek*, *Doctor Who*, or *Battlestar Galactica* were intended to extend beyond the television programs. If I am invited into someone's house, then I may enter freely. However, if the invitation is not given—and many writers have not invited others into their universes—writing stories set in those universes is tantamount to literary breaking and entering.

IT IS risky to call something derivative fiction. One can cite many writers who have written works derived from other sources. Dante and John Milton would have certainly been lacking in fame if they hadn't had the Bible upon which to base *The Divine Comedy* and *Paradise Lost*. There are plenty of Arthurian stories, Dracula stories, and Robin Hood stories which could not exist without the original legends. Ray Bradbury wrote "Usher II" and Robert McCammon wrote *Usher's Passing*; neither work could have been done without Poe as a predecessor. Much literary work is based on legends or the works of authors who have come before; most of it is, in the strictest sense, derivative fiction. Some derivative fiction is written in the form of a tribute to the original, as many Sherlock Holmes stories have been. Some is written for the purpose of parody or satire. I cannot deny the worth of Milton's work. I cannot say that Bradbury is a lackluster writer merely because he wrote a story based on Poe's work. I do not say that stories written in tribute should not be done. I am not saying that all derivative fiction is evil and should be cleansed from the face of the earth.

The difficulty I see with derivative fiction comes from using someone else's characters, world, or ideas. By authoring derivative fiction, writers eliminate 90% of their work. These writers do not have to go to the trouble of fleshing out a believable character or constructing a logical world because it's already been done. In derivative fiction, when one mentions a

certain character or a certain location, there is a pre-manufactured, pre-set reaction that will come from the reader. The reader already knows who's on the *Enterprise* or what to expect on Pern. The writer of derivative fiction has an unfair advantage over the writer of non-derivative fiction because he or she is already working with a proven quantity. The derivative story will appeal to a certain section of the audience simply because of what it is about. Derivative fiction is often a haven for mediocrity. The writers do not have to hook the reader's attention; they already have it by virtue of their subject matter.

The writers of derivative fiction can be, at worst, like lazy puppeteers. They do not take the time to carve their own puppets or build their own stages. Instead, they trot the tangled limbs and joints of someone else's work across worn planks nailed in place by another. Yet they wish audiences to cheer and applaud the versatility and freshness of their performance. Versatile it may be, but it can *not* be original. It did not come wholly from the person presenting it. It was derived in some part from the work and sweat and toil of another's imagination. A derivative fiction story is someone else's puppet on someone else's stage. All the writer is doing is controlling the strings.

In some ways, all fiction is derivative. Writers gather together their experiences, their writing skills, and the authors they have read. They then bring them together at the point where the imagination filters onto the page. They have *derived* from all of those sources the piece of fiction being written. But does that piece of fiction contain someone else's characters, settings, or fictional gestalts? If not, the writer is not writing derivative fiction, but something one assumes to be original.

If a work is derivative fiction, that does not automatically make it diabolical and worthless. Much derivative fan fiction is, unfortunately, little more than slobbering fannish fantasy that insults the nobility of trees by being printed on a wood by-product. However, some fan fiction is written for love of the genre. If the fiction isn't good, at least the intent is admirable.

Some of it is the tentative work of beginners. Some of it is actually good, which at least proves that the writer is trying to write passable fiction. Most derivative professional fiction exists because fans will not let the particular mythos die, and pros have to pay the rent, too. Ultimately, most derivative fiction related to science fiction fandom is harmless. It is unoriginal—and damned infuriating because of it—but harmless.

There are readers who would like nothing more than to read a story where Han Solo heads Warp 10 for Darkover to stop a Cylon invasion incited by Dr. Doom and Ming the Merciless. And there are writers willing to provide such fiction. However, there are other writers who are attempting something a bit more original. These writers are, fortunately, in the majority. They also fall somewhere between the students and the thieves, but their puppets, carved by their own hands, are quick and supple. Their stages are new and shine from a fresh coat of paint. And both puppet and stage are uniquely, undeniably, their own.

EXCERPTS FROM THE SCRAPBOOK OF THE LAST MAN ON EARTH

RAJA THIAGARAJAN

Prologue

“A SCRAPBOOK? REALLY?” said the interviewer. “How is it arranged?”

“I put the items in reverse-chronological order,” said the interviewee, “so the latest entries are easiest to find.”

Day 42, Year 315

Scientists on Charon have uncovered several ice crystals with trails that suggest the passage of a large particle with “unusuality.” In the Main System, physicists of the Darkmer school of thought have seen this as evidence in favor of Darkmer’s $SU(7)$ unification of the six forces.

Day 212, Year 312

Officials examining the wreckage of Temple have declared it “the worst disaster in the history of the Colonies.” The new examination of the wreckage has turned up 48 additional bodies, bringing the total to 2,036. No new survivors have been found.

Day 201, Year 311

Kelcy Darkmer, of the Chaldron Belt Colony, has caused considerable stir in the academic world by presenting a new hypothesis that would bring the fifth and sixth forces within the province of the Grand Unified Theorem. The new $SU(7)$ theory awaits examination and testing by authorities in the Belt and elsewhere. In a press conference, Ms. Darkmer stated, “While I don’t personally believe in [the theory], I do think it’s a useful ‘mathematical fiction’ of the real world.”

Day 136, Year 310

In a move that has received much criticism, the Sledsy School of Heredity has announced that it will “no longer continue research on sex-linked diseases.”

The press conference was short, and went without friction until someone asked about the fate of the School’s test subject. At that point, the school’s representative frowned and announced that the conference was at an end.

Day 151, Year 308

“This is Christy Base. Since 8:14.26 GST, *Athena* has been on the surface of Charon. Telemetry data is forthcoming.” With these words, the human race has set up its first permanent base in the region of Pluto.

Day 137, Year 307

Aboard *Athena*, it has been an uneventful trip, except for a minor fire in Lander Six. The fire was spotted by the CenComp, and extinguished twelve seconds later. No irreparable damage was done.

Expedition leader Francine Jadsder had nothing to say to the

press. To the schedulers on Phobos, she said only, “No, it’s all right. No damage. Why don’t you leave us alone? We can take care of ourselves.”

Day 42, Year 228

Physicists on Callisto, working in conjunction with Ionologists, have solved the problem of the Io Crystals. Unfortunately, the solution is not one that is likely to make physicists elsewhere happy. “The only way that the various lateral disruptions [in the crystals] can be explained is to postulate a sixth force in nature, one whose effects distorted the parent body from which the crystals fractured.”

Efforts continue to find the parent body, but scientists are not optimistic. “It’s been four years since that meteorite hit Io, and the lava flows from Pele have already buried the crater. We were lucky to find even the crystals.”

One other researcher, who asked not to be named, said that the problem could be solved simply by increasing funding. She said, “Everybody knows that this problem would be short work for a team of women on Io. If the Consortium really got behind us, we could get that team outfitted and going within two years. They’d have little trouble cutting through the lava—after all, it’s fresh—and finding more of the meteorite.”

Day 13, Year 226

The Sledsy School of Heredity has announced that its test subject will no longer be on display. An official stated, “We’ve decided to let the poor bugger be—he’s been prodded and poked for the last twenty-eight years of his life, and we’ve found out all we want to know about men. We really don’t need to know more; after all, why spend tens of thousands studying the last member of a dead race? We’ve just decided to let him be, to give him a room, and to stop looking at his scrapbook.”

Day 58, Year 113

Clonebirths now outnumber bisexual births on Havron, sociologists say. Rather than calling it a fluke, they see it as the wave of the future.

A few have protested vociferously about the findings of the sociologists. "This is ridiculous," said one (male) researcher. "No one's ever going to make the male half of the human race extinct, no matter how much easier it is to have clonebirths. There are just certain things that women can't do."

Day 117, Year 18

On this, the fifteenth anniversary of the FDA approval of his clonebirthing process, Dr. Temple has announced that he is ending his research in the field. "I've spent twenty years trying to improve [the process], trying to make it possible to 'fertilize' an ovum with male cellular material. But I really haven't gotten anywhere. Maybe there's some intrinsic difference between male and female cells on a level more subtle than we know about."

In response to a journalist's question about the lasting significance of his work, Dr. Temple said, "I don't know. Sometimes I think it's great; I think, 'Now men will never again have to live with heavily damaged bodies; they'll be able to grow clones and replace organs.' But sometimes...sometimes, I think my failure to make cloning work with men has spelled their doom."

Day 117, Year 3

The FDA today approved the Temple process of cloning "for use in the regeneration of organs, under the supervision of a doctor." The eighty-six page report cites the "high rate of experimental success" of the process, and hints that approval will be quick in coming when the process has been extended to males.

On the latter, Dr. Temple said, “There seemed to be some problems at first, but I think we understand it now. I really don’t think it should take more than two years for our first laboratory success, and in five years it should be commonplace.”

Day 1, Year 2

On her first birthday, Cathy is doing well, Dr. Temple told the press today. Her mother, Cecilia Rosemont, has announced that she will be giving up hostmothering, “to raise Cathy and give her a new home.”

Day 286, Year 1

The scientific community was stunned today by the announcement of the existence of the world’s first human clone. Dr. Temple, at Johns Hopkins, announced that the girl, named Cathy, is a near-perfect clone of her mother, who has asked to remain anonymous for the time being.

Despite the mother’s anonymity, Dr. Temple was able to provide tissue samples of both mother and child for examination by “any major university that wants them.” The Harvard School of Medicine is one of the universities that has requested, and received, samples. A spokesman from Harvard was very skeptical and said, “We should be able to prove this, one way or another, in a week.”

[The following text is TENTATIVE and reconstructed from the diggings at New York, Site II]

July 14, 2021

The results of the 2020 census, which include data on the dozen American space colonies, are in. The figures concerning Earth

hold no surprises; population growth continues to follow the curves set over the past half-century. But the numbers on the “New Cities” show a surprising growth in popularity and population.

Also of interest are several trends that have been noticed on the Colonies. Women now outnumber men in jobs requiring zero-gee work, and women as a whole draw more money than men, even though their wages are still unequal. “It’s just a temporary fluke,” said one official. Another disagreed, saying, “You’ve got to see the whole picture, and this is it: Women are just better adapted to live and work in space, and they may well become dominant, economically and eventually politically, there.”

[The following text is TENTATIVE and reconstructed from the diggings at Chicago, site IV]

June 4, 1983

The current issue of *Discover* Magazine included many articles of interest to me, but the most interesting, I think, was the one on the press conference by Svetlana Savitskaya, the second woman cosmonaut. Ms. Savitskaya made several important statements about the future of women in space, including one that “Women have been programmed by nature to adjust more quickly. Not only do women perform better at tasks that require a great deal of accuracy and attention to detail, but they could turn out to be better cosmonauts all around.”



Epilogue: Two further news items

Day 47, Year 319

The test subject at the Yvonne Sledsy School of Heredity died last night, of natural causes. He was 121.

A spokeswoman said, "We're all sorry to see him go, of course, but I really don't think that Ms. Fletcher knew what she was doing when she set up an 'in perpetuity' care fund for him. He cost the schools about sixty thousand Ecos a year, and we really didn't need to spend that much on a test subject we didn't use."

Asked about the implications of the death of the last male member of the human race, she said, "I really don't think it's that important. After all, he didn't really affect society too much. Anyone who thought about him probably just thought of him as a throwback."

Asked if another male could be produced, the spokeswoman said, "We've got the ability certainly; Ms. Fletcher stored some of the semen, and it's in a deep freeze. But I don't think anyone will really want to do it."

Day 96, Year 322

A power failure occurred at the Sledsy School of Hereditary Diseases, ruining thousands of Eco's worth of experiments and "thawing the deep freeze."

Insurance is expected to cover most of the losses.

ANOTHER SATURDAY NIGHT

IAN A. ENGLE

IT WAS FALL, and it was dying time again. On the tenth of September, 2039, the cell of high pressure which had settled over the eastern seaboard became three weeks old, and the reduced air circulation gradually pushed the air quality into the intolerable range. While death was a common enough visitor among those New Yorkers who lived out their short lives without the benefit of filtered air, pure water, or untainted food, during a spell of the intense decirculation which accompanied the stalled high pressure cell, death came to dance even with the wealthy and the powerful.

It had been predicted less than a century before that global warming might have a devastating impact on the world's climate. The Greenhouse Effect became the bogeyman of a decade. Most people thought that it only meant hotter summers and milder winters and neglected the fact that the circulation of the planet's air depended upon regional differences in temperature. As the global temperature became more uniform, stagnation became the norm, and "blocking highs" visited decirculation and mass death on fearful populaces.



MALO ST. THOMAS stood by the windowall of his apartment, gazing out over the smog-shrouded city as the veiled sun set. A breeze of filtered and conditioned air played over his skin, while on the streets below the poorer citizens of New York shuffled home to suffocate in private.

He turned away from the view and walked into the bedroom, picking the newspad off the coffee table as he went past. The headlines were full of health alerts and reports of some of the increasingly gruesome deaths attributable to the deteriorating air quality.

Malo left the headlines and moved down to the social section. Decirc alert or not, he was pleased to see that St. Mark's was open for business as usual.

"Only the best for our clientele," read the St. Mark's motto. At St. Mark's everything was tested, filtered, purified, and disinfected. If not paradise, St. Mark's was at least the best facsimile money could buy, and in the midst of hell, paradise was a very marketable commodity. Even tonight—especially tonight—anybody who could afford it would be at St. Mark's.

He picked up the phone and made reservations for a dinner date. That done, he dropped onto the bed and accessed the style columns on the newspad. Gazing through the week's fashion plates, he considered his wardrobe. He wanted to wear something in style so as not to call too much attention to himself, but not anything that would make him look like just another clone. He finally decided on black trousers and a black mandarin-collared shirt under a red vest, gloves, dancing shoes, an offensive lapel button and the *de rigueur* shades. Black was an "in" color, which was good since black made his dark good looks appear even more exotic. He dressed slowly, savoring the feel of the silk on his skin as he pulled on the shirt and trousers. The vest had been cleaned just that week, and the subtle pattern of the brocade, red on red, pleased him. An ex-lover had tried to get him to dress in red more often. Tonight, Malo wore the vest in his memory.

The drawer in his night-table held a collection of buttons pinned to a velvet backing. Some of the buttons had pictures of cultural heroes, some had slogans. Malo sorted through them until he found the one he wanted.

“There is no despair so deep that it can’t be overcome with a fifth of Chivas and a blond in leather,” the button proclaimed.

Malo looked at himself in the floor-length mirror. He posed in various positions and then frowned. Something was missing. He went back to the night-table and rummaged after a second button. He found the one he wanted and pinned it on as he turned back to the mirror.

He smiled again as he studied his reflection. Sometimes a man just had to sacrifice fashion for statement. He ran his hands down his chest and read the second button.

“You’ll quiver for a week...or was it eight minutes?”

Smiling, he grabbed the pair of shades and a carry-bag off the wardrobe, and headed out into the night.



St. Mark’s was the jewel hanging in the ear of the Ethiope night. Cabs were dropping off their passengers in the airlocks tonight, which meant that there was a wait before Malo could even get into the club.

Inside the foyer, the oppressive night was shattered by a burst of lights and a blare of music. Marble columns rose tree-like from the mosaic floor to the distant ceiling, and staircases cascaded from the entrances of the baths, the restaurant-bar, and the disco.

A stream of affluent Islanders pushed around Malo as they coursed from one satisfaction to the next. He checked his bag, took off his shades, and watched the flow of people who were making their way to the disco. When people came to St. Mark’s to be seen, only the disco would do.

Someone touched Malo's shoulder, and he turned to find himself eye to eye with a young Oriental man.

"I'm Oliver," the young man said, "Why don't we go back to my room and get it on?"

"Malo, and I'm meeting someone. Maybe later," Malo said.

"Well," the young man said as he slipped a key into Malo's vest pocket, "If your friend doesn't show, the invitation stands."

He touched the uppermost of Malo's buttons.

"I can't manage the blond, and I won't try the leather, but the rest is as good as it comes," he said, and with that he melted into the crowd.

Malo turned, looked up the stairs, and let his feet carry him towards the light and sound.

It was a meat market night at St. Mark's, and Malo was propositioned twice more before he could get into the disco. The first backed off when Malo glared at him; the second had to be told in no uncertain terms that he was a troll and should get back under his bridge.

Inside the disco, the overhead lights were dark, and accent strobes supported the beat of the music. Malo ducked away from the dance floor and made his way to a free table on the left-hand mezzanine. A waiter came by to take his order after a minute, and once he was gone Malo turned his attention to the dancers.

Decirc alert or not, the disco was packed. A buffet of fashionably-dressed bodies gyrated across the floor below him. He let his gaze linger over several good-looking younger men before spotting an older blond man dressed in dun-colored leather.

"There's the one," he thought.

Malo stayed sitting on the side watching. The blond danced with several partners over the course of the next hour. Fast dance or slow, the man's body was a hypnotic sight. Twice he passed close enough for Malo to make out his features clearly. Considering the man's age there was a surprising innocence in his face.

The second time the blond passed, he noticed Malo watching him. He held the eye contact between them and smiled, revealing perfect teeth.

Malo smiled in return and held up his glass. The blond shook his head no and led his current partner, a dark Newyorican, back into the cluster of dancers.

“Shit,” Malo swore under his breath, “The little prick isn’t making this any easier.”

The song ended, and the blond and his partner made their way through the crowd to an unoccupied table. Malo kept on watching them until the blond looked his way. They cruised one another for several minutes until the blond rose and, leaving the dark, young man behind, made his way around the room.

Malo beckoned for the waiter.

“Two more Drambuies,” he said.

The waiter left just as the blond came up to the table.

“Hi,” he said. “Mind if I join you?”

Malo pushed the other chair back with his foot. “Be my guest.”

The blond sat down.

“My name’s Clint,” he said. “That vest looks really good on you. Red’s your color.”

“Malo, and I don’t look half as good as you did out there on the floor.”

“Do you dance?” Clint asked, “I mean, I didn’t see you on the floor tonight.”

“I used to,” Malo admitted, “but not much anymore. I haven’t felt like it in a while.”

“Oh. I’m sorry. Bad feet?”

Malo looked down into his drink.

“No. My ex-lover and I met at a little disco in the Village, and we used to go dancing all over the city. Then I found him cheating on me. Not just tricking out every now and then, I mean real major-league cheating, and in our room. There was an

ugly scene, and we broke up. Dancing just sort of died for me then.”

Malo looked back up and said, “This is the first time I’ve been in a disco since we broke up. In fact, I’m celebrating tonight.”

“Celebrating?”

“I can face the scene again.”

The waiter arrived with the drinks.

“Thanks,” Clint said, picking up the glass.

“To my seven-month anniversary,” Malo said, raising his own glass in a toast.

Clint raised his glass and they drank.

“So why don’t we dance?” Clint asked.

“Let’s finish our drinks first,” Malo said, smiling.

They sipped the Drambuie through the next few songs, making catty remarks about the klutzes and trolls on the floor, and when the DJ announced that the next segment would be golden oldies from the Twenties, Clint asked, “You remember some of these fossils?”

“Sure. How could anyone forget the Tiffany comeback?”

Clint shook his head.

“It was pretty awful, wasn’t it?”

“We used to say that she should’ve taken a lesson from Elvis,” Malo said.

“How’s that?”

“Well, face it. Elvis may be dead, but at least *he* isn’t getting any fatter.”

They laughed, and as the music started Clint asked, “You want to try a few?”

“Well, I think I can remember some of the steps,” Malo admitted, “You’ll lead?”

“Sure! Come on.”

Clint stood up and held out his hand.



HOURS LATER, Clint and Malo strode down the staircase into the foyer, laughing riotously over a joke that would not have been nearly as funny on the other side of two o'clock. The doors were closed, and the bouncers were off duty, but one could still call cabs. Clint and Malo fumbled with the cab pager without success.

"It's no use. There's an art to these things, and I never learned how to do it stoned. I don't know if we'd end up in Harlem or Staten Island," Malo laughed.

The two of them started to laugh.

"Two white boys wouldn't last long in Staten Island at this time of night," Clint said. "Why don't we just stay here?"

"Don't be gauche. Spending the night at the baths went out of style when the Plague came in. Didn't you say you'd driven yourself?"

Malo asked.

"Yeah. But you don't want me driving like this. I'm worse than you; I'd get us killed faster than Staten Island," Clint said.

"I'll drive. That's the beauty of a touchy stomach; you always end up driving because you can't drink as much. We could go back to my place. You game?"

"Oh yeah, I'm game. Where do you live?"

"Close. Just off the Park. I was in the right place at the right time to get a great deal on an inefficiency apartment."

They laughed, and Clint asked, "You sure you can get us there in one piece?"

"Of course," Malo said. "Have I steered you wrong yet?"

"No."

"Well, then, let's go do it."

Malo retrieved his bag and put on his shades and his gloves, and they sauntered towards the elevator.

"So, genius, where'd you leave the car?" asked Malo.

"Uh, level four," Clint announced after some thought.

The elevator took them to the fourth level of the garage.

"It's a Hyundai Dorado, a red one," Clint said.

“Is that it over there?” asked Malo, pointing.

Clint looked and said, “Yeah! That’s my wheels.”

Malo whistled.

“That’s one nice piece of car you’ve got there. You must do well for yourself.”

“Yeah, I guess I do.”

Clint unlocked the car, and they got in. Malo took the controls and checked to see that Clint had fastened his safety harness.

“You ready?” Malo asked.

“Yeah. Let’s go.”

The car started easily and rolled up the ramps to the airlock. The gate took the ticket and flashed “\$25.00” on its screen.

Malo fed the machine two and a half eagles, and drove the car past the first set of doors into the airlock. There was a painted pressure grid on the floor, and when they had come to a complete stop the inner doors closed behind them.

“Where’re the controls to the air conditioner?” Malo asked, rolling up his window.

“On the left, under the headlights. Hyundai changed the position two years ago,” Clint said.

Malo pressed the button and the air conditioner came to life with a whir. He pressed the horn pad and the outer doors of the airlock opened.

On the street, the air was thick, and the headlights only illuminated a few yards in front of them.

“Thank God we don’t have to go out in this,” Clint said.

“Yeah,” Malo said, “You did bring a mask didn’t you—just in case the car broke down or something?”

“Nah. With a car phone and Triple A, who needs to open a door?” Clint asked.

Malo nodded and drove the car towards the Park.

They rode in silence. Occasionally Malo would look over at Clint, who was watching him closely, eagerly. Malo grinned before turning his eyes back to the street.

They got to Columbus Circle, and Malo took the car off the city streets and up into the Park.

“Shortcut?” Clint asked.

“Yeah.”

They drove to the north side of the Park, and as the car passed the Meadow, Malo fished something out of his bag. He slowed down, pulled the car down an access path, turned off the headlights, and stopped.

“Hey, what gives?” Clint asked.

Malo smiled seductively.

“What do you think?” he asked.

Clint smiled back, leaned over towards Malo, and found himself face to face with a blinder.

“What—” he started to ask.

Malo triggered the blinder, and, for Clint, the night turned brilliant orange.

“Goddamn!” Clint yelled, rubbing frantically at his eyes.

“What the hell are you doing?”

Malo said nothing. Instead he disconnected the handset for the car phone. He took a breathing mask out of his bag, put it on. Then he unfastened his harness, and opened the door. The air conditioner whined with activity, but despite its best efforts, the oxygen-poor air of the city poured in.

Clint was clawing for the phone as Malo walked around the car.

“Operator!” he screamed into the handset, “Oh Christ, operator!”

Malo opened the passenger door, undid Clint’s harness, and dragged him out by the shoulder of his leather vest.

“Wait! What are you doing? I’ll suffocate out here,” Clint yelled, beginning to cough as the particulate pollution got into his lungs.

“Yeah,” Malo said through his mask, “That’s possible.”

The two of them tussled away from the car and into the overgrowth and brambles where Malo threw Clint to the ground.

“Let me go! I’ve got to get back to the car, damn you!”

Malo dropped on Clint, knocking the breath out of him.

“You’re not going anywhere,” Malo said.

Clint groaned. There were trails of blood from his nose and mouth now, and there were wet tracks of tears leading down from each eye. He tried to struggle against Malo’s grip, but his lungs were robbed of air.

The two of them lay together for the better part of an hour. Clint’s struggles grew weaker and weaker, and eventually he stopped breathing altogether. Malo sat up and felt at Clint’s neck for a pulse. His heart was still beating, so Malo pushed the mouth shut and pinched the nose closed. Ten minutes later, he let go.

Leaving the body, Malo went back to the car and got a small bottle of whiskey, his blinder, and a special homemade attachment. When he got back to Clint, he replaced the blinder attachment with the homemade one which had two long, stiff wires coming out of it. With care, he turned back both upper eyelids and pushed a wire through the inside of each, deep into the brain. When he was satisfied with the placement of the wires, he gave the trigger three quick squeezes.

Malo pulled the wires out and smiled.

“Good night, old buddy,” he said to the corpse as he ran his gloved fingers down the jaw. “You had lousy taste in men, but at least you knew how to dress well.”

When the body was found, the police would write it off as a drunken faggot with car trouble, phone trouble, and not enough common sense to wear a breathing mask. If they tried a cerebral download, they would get nothing coherent, and if Clint’s family wanted to upload another clone, they would have to use the backup copy, one in which nobody named Malo figured.

He put the keys in Clint’s pants pocket, and sprinkled the corpse with some of the whiskey. He walked back to the car, and opened the hood. After loosening several electrical connections in the engine, he shut the hood and got back inside. He pulled a

bottle of clear nail-polish out of his bag and coated the handset jack with a thin layer of polish. When that had dried, he reconnected it to the phone.

Malo put everything of his back in the bag, got out of the car, and closed the door behind him. He walked away, leaving the dead car and the dead man alone in the smog.

MALO HAD a hard time getting out of the park. Even with the mask, he was gasping to get enough oxygen. He wondered if the alert had in fact been upgraded to an emergency. In a decirc emergency, the oxygen content of a breath of air fell below minimum standards, and even a healthy adult with a breathing mask could suffocate.

“Just like Clint,” he thought.

The bus came by ten minutes after he got to Eighth Avenue. Malo paid his fare, and sat down for the fifteen-minute trip. The bus’ air conditioner made it easier for Malo to breathe, but when he got off five blocks from St. Mark’s the suffocating oppression closed in on him again. Most of the city was still fitfully asleep, and the night people had been forced off the streets by the air. Malo might as well have been alone in the city.

The front doors at St. Mark’s were locked, of course, but it was easy enough to get in at the service entrance. The air scrubbers were working. Malo stripped off his mask and took several long, deep breaths before he shoved it into his bag. When he felt better, he made his way along the service corridors into the baths wing. The hallways were all but deserted. Customers were still in their rooms, and the two times Malo heard staff coming, he was able to step into a closet until they passed.

When Malo got past the social rooms into the accommodations wing, he pulled the key out of his vest pocket and checked the number engraved on it. The room was one of

the last ones in the wing. Malo heard nothing when he listened at the door, so he gingerly fit the key into the lock and turned it.

The room was dark, and the light of the hallway made a Malo-shaped silhouette in the doorway. A lump under the bedcovers stirred, and a dark head burrowed out and blinked.

“Malo?” it asked.

Malo stepped into the room and shut the door behind him, listening to the lock click. He dropped his bag on the dresser and pulled off the shades and gloves.

A light at the bedside blinked on, and the young Oriental man sat up, pulling the covers with him.

“You have something good waiting for me, Oliver?” Malo asked.

“Start with what’s on the table.”

Malo opened the bottle of Chivas he found there and poured himself a glass. Oliver made room for him to sit down on the bed, so Malo handed him the drink, sat down, and started to pull off his shoes.

“You sure took your time,” Oliver said. “Where’ve you been—not outside?”

“Yeah, I had to take care of something,” Malo said, “But it’s bad out there. I think the city went into a decirc emergency tonight.”

“It did. About four o’clock. The staff came around and told us.”

Malo took the glass back and sipped at the liquor.

“What’re you thinking?” Oliver asked.

Malo looked at the younger man.

“Did you know your eyes are brandy-brown?” he asked.

“You saw that in the glass?”

Malo reached over and brushed the hair back out of Oliver’s eyes.

“I see it now,” he said.

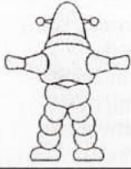
Malo put his glass on the bedside table and dimmed the light. He eased the vest off his shoulders and tossed it onto the nearest

chair before stretching out alongside Oliver. As he ran his hand through the young man's hair, he considered the body he had left in the park.

The police would find Clint eventually. They might make nothing of it and just add his name to the thousands of others on the night's mortality list. Then again, the police were not stupid, just overworked. Some bright officer might notice that this was the fifth time that a Clint Stryker had appeared on the list.

Maybe he should give it up, even though on the night he had discovered his lover's infidelity, he had vowed he would rid the Earth of every manifestation of Clint. It was easy to take revenge too far, and no matter how much planning you did, it was possible for circumstances to get the better of you. Tonight had made that clear to him, and five deaths made it one for every guy who had been in the bedroom when he had found them.

"Then again, maybe I'll just sleep on it," Malo thought as Oliver rolled on top of him and kissed his throat.



**SCIENCE
FICTION**

FANTASY



HORROR

**COMIC
BOOKS**



...are four things we love to discuss at the IU Science Fiction Loop. If you like to discuss them too, why not give us a try? Bring your opinions and a sense of humor.

