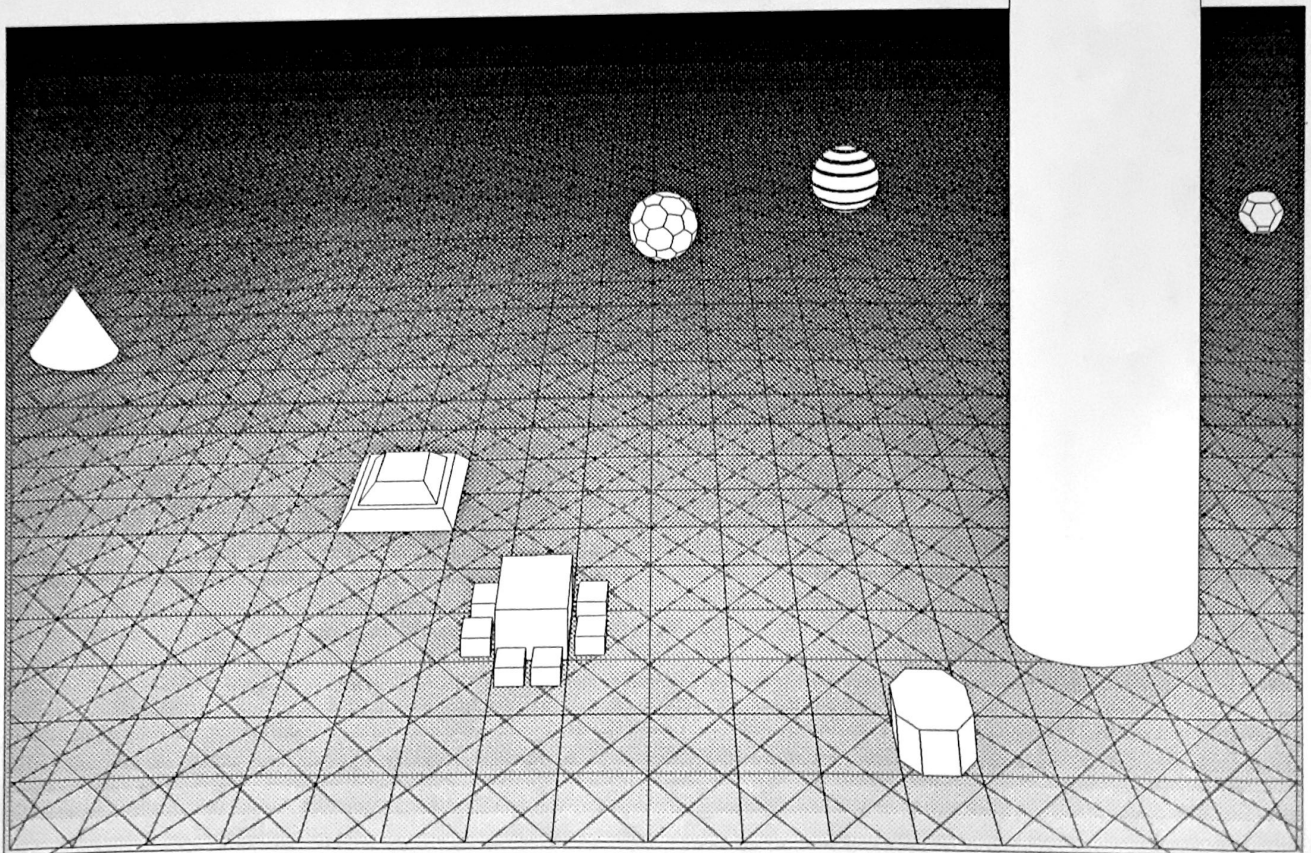


# LOOP GAROU

**Special  
Cyberpunk  
Issue**



## About the Authors

**Rochelle Dvorak** ("Necklace") is a graduate of UNL who is currently looking for a job in the marketing field. She reads comics, plays any and all role-playing games, and collects Japanese animation. Her cats are named Sasha and Fuzzy.

**David Griggs** ("Cyberpunk in Context") is interested in astronomy, bonsai, and cats. His favorite science fiction authors are C.J. Cherryh, William Gibson, and Larry Niven. He says he is a part-time student at IU, working as a janitor to put his wife through medical school.

**Stephen A. Halkovic III** ("Untitled Poem") whose poem "100% Recyclable?" appeared in *Loop Garou 3*, calls himself a fan of Philip K. Dick and Stanislaw Lem. He also reads a lot of black & white independent comics. He says that when he grows up, he'd like to learn to spell.

**Jeffrey W. Roberts** ("Nervously Waiting on the Sunrise") knows well the obstacles facing a horror fan in a science fiction club. However, that doesn't deter him. In between pursuing a double major in Journalism and English at IU, he tries to make a living, read comics, write a little, and occasionally pause long enough to breathe. He says, "Ray Bradbury is a literary God, and don't you forget it!"

**Raja Thiagarajan** ("The Mavrides Affair," "Loop Attitudes on Cyberpunk") reads a lot of books on science, computers, mysteries and, especially, science fiction. (He claims to hate fantasy, but can rattle off a dozen fantasy books he adores.) He owns thousands of books, and his fifty favorite SF authors (in alphabetical order) are Anderson, Banks, Bass, Benford, Bester, Blish, Bradbury, Brin, Brown, Card, Clarke, Clement, Delany, Dick, Forward, Foster, Gibson, Haldeman, Heinlein, Herbert, Hughart, Kube-McDowell, LeGuin, Lovecraft, McCollum, Martin, McDevitt, Morrow, Niven, Pangborn, Pohl, Preuss, Robinett, Robinson, Robinson, Russ, Shaw, Shepard, Silverberg, Simak, Smith, Sturgeon, Strugatsky and Strugatsky, Tevis, Tiptree, Varley, Vinge, Watson, Wells, and Zelazny.

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Cover: "Mona Lisa Overdrive" by Raja Thiagarajan

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This is a special issue of LOOP GAROU, the magazine of the IU Science Fiction Loop.

Guest Editor: Raja Thiagarajan

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# Neuromancer Plus Five: An Editor's Introduction

by Raja Thiagarajan

The sky above the port was the color of television, tuned to a dead channel.

It started for me in a darkened theater in 1982. I'd gone to a movie with my mother and her friend Brenda. The marquee outside said *Blade Runner*, but my head said *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*

My parents and I had just gotten back from two years in Gbarnga, Liberia. I hated living in West Africa. I couldn't get to see *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* (which I'd waited five years for), or pick up *The Ringworld Engineers*, or *Beyond the Blue Event Horizon*, or the Ian-Miller-illustrated edition of *The Martian Chronicles*. If I sound like an asocial geek who loved science fiction; yes, I was. I still am, to some extent.

But one nice thing about living in Liberia was that you could pick up certain books that were unavailable in the US. I picked up Ian Watson's *The Martian Inca* and *The Jonah Kit*. I picked up Bob Shaw's *Orbitsville*, *The Two-Timers*, and *Other Days, Other Eyes*. (This last book is one of the ten best SF books ever written, and it's chronically out of print in the US). And I picked up a number of wonderful, paranoid, and insane books by a man named Philip K. Dick.

Which brings us back to 1982 and the movie theater. I'd been thrilled to find out that Ridley Scott was turning one of Dick's best, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, into a film. So there I was with Mom and Brenda, sitting in the dark for two hours, using my persistence of vision.

What did I think of the film? Well, it was nice, but it was all wrong. The marvelous religion of Mercerism was gone. There was a good rendition of the scene where Deckard tests Rachel for humanity, but the scene where the androids nearly convince Deckard that *he's* one of them was gone. The Los Angeles of the future was terrific to look at, but had nothing to do with the Los Angeles of the novel. And yet—

And yet—

Cut forward to Orwell's year, 1984. I was in the midst of my most serious love affair. That's relevant because

having someone to throw books at, someone to discuss the thrown books with, encouraged me to broaden my reading. I was excited by a lot of experimental pieces of SF that were being printed in *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine*. And someone named Terry Carr was bringing out a series of "New Ace Specials," first novels by new authors that were planned to shake up the science fiction field. The first New Ace Special, Kim Stanley Robinson's *The Wild Shore*, looked mundane, but the second one, Lucius Shepard's *Green Eyes*, looked terrific. I read it, and it *was* terrific. I've been a fan of Lucius Shepard ever since.

The third New Ace Special came out with an interesting cover by James Warhola, a fascinating first-page teaser, and a plug by no less a person than Robert Silverberg. I bought it, took it home, and started reading.

From the first line, which appears as the epigraph above, to the last line, "He never saw Molly again," the third New Ace Special held me entranced. It was, of course, William Gibson's *Neuromancer*. I wasn't the only person who was entranced: *Neuromancer* captured the Hugo, Nebula, and Philip K. Dick Memorial awards that year. Together, *Blade Runner* and *Neuromancer* brought the sub-genre of science fiction called cyberpunk to the fore.

Is cyberpunk for you? The Senate claims it doesn't have a litmus test for approving Supreme Court candidates, but I have a litmus test for whether you'll like cyberpunk. Beg, borrow, or steal a copy of William Gibson's short-story collection *Burning Chrome*. Read the short story "Johnny Mnemonic." If you love it, you'll love cyberpunk.

This special issue of *Loop Garou*, put out five years to the month after *Neuromancer* appeared, is intended to articulate, investigate, and illuminate certain aspects of cyberpunk. My goal as guest editor was to present some entertaining fiction and some argument-provoking nonfiction. I hope you feel I've succeeded.

# Cyberpunk in Context

by David Griggs

Contemporary science fiction has gone through several phases of growth and change in the sixty-odd years it has been around.

- You have the early pulp super-science writings of Gernsbeck and Campbell during the 1920s and 30s. Heinlein and Asimov ushered in 'The Golden Age' of science fiction, bringing characterization and well-crafted plots to the field. The science in science fiction was still the most important part.
- The 1950s were a lull in the science fiction field. It was a time when the lessons of 'The Golden Age' were integrated into the science fiction market. The fans' tastes had matured. Authors who did not satisfy their audience fell by the wayside. New authors quickly filled the gaps that were left.
- In the early 60s you have the 'New Wave' of science fiction; or, as Lester Del Rey referred to it, "The Age of Rebellion." Graphic sex, experimental writing styles and an emphasis on characterization over science sent shockwaves throughout the science fiction world. Harlan Ellison, Michael Moorcock, and Roger Zelazny were some of the authors of this era.
- During this time you have the occasional author like Larry Niven who was writing 'Hard Science Fiction.' It was called 'Hard SF' because the writers would try to portray the science as accurately as possible (something that did not happen in earlier SF stories).
- Afterwards came another lull in the science fiction field. The radical ideas of the 'New Wave' had been met with acceptance, and authors had absorbed the lessons of the previous decade.

In his *Best of the Year* anthology for 1981, Gardner Dozois referred to some of the science fiction that was being written, namely the short stories of William Gibson and Bruce Sterling, as having a punk attitude to it. It had an antagonism towards authority slant and a grittiness most often portrayed by the stories of Harlan Ellison, with its high-tech flavor, grim world-view, and a cooler-than-thou attitude. This style of science fiction quickly acquired the name "cyberpunk."

One of the major things that separates cyberpunk SF from the rest of the field is its attitude towards technology. Technology permeates most all cyberpunk fiction. In the sixties and seventies you would have authors who would write about scientific discovery or technological advance but few would write about how their idea would be taken out of its usual place and put to a new use. Jules Verne had described television in one of his stories, but did not foresee the telemarketing of feminine hygiene products, *Geraldo*, or flash-in-the-pan media stars such as *Wheel of Fortune's* Vanna White. The creator of the first Victrola never imagined that the Beastie Boys could use two record players to rap out new music from old songs. In William Gibson's short story "Johnny Mnemonic," you have yo-yo wielding monomolecular-filament-lined assassination weapons and combat-trained US Navy Surplus dolphins hooked on smack. In his novel *Neuromancer*, you have people who can interface their personality with computers and directly manipulate the ebb and flow of data. This interaction between man and machine is a recurrent theme in most cyberpunk stories. Along with this is the idea that people will take technology out of its expected use and adapt it to their needs. In the novel *Hardwired*, by Walter Jon Williams, there were people who used a computer interface in their heads not to manipulate machinery but to stimulate their pleasure centers. In Bruce Sterling's *Islands in the Net*, you have people who were constantly under an audio-visual surveillance that was being broadcast worldwide throughout a network of satellites. This continual surveillance was to be their "armor of publicity"; the instant exposure of everything that happened to them was meant to deter any violence towards them. In William Gibson's short story "Burning Chrome," neuroelectronic technology intended to allow individuals with damaged spinal cords to walk again was used to make the ultimate prostitute. As Gibson wrote in that story, "The street finds its own uses for things."

## Suggested Reading

The below-listed authors are in no particular order of preference. Their works have helped define the cyberpunk field.

Any recommended readings of cyberpunk must include the author William Gibson. His short story collection

*Burning Chrome* contains three stories, "Johnny Mnemonic," "New Rose Hotel," and "Burning Chrome," that clearly demonstrate his cramped, image-packed prose. His first novel, *Neuromancer*, won the Hugo, Nebula, and Philip K. Dick awards for 1984. *Count Zero* and *Mona Lisa Overdrive* are two later books set in the same universe.

In 1986, Bruce Sterling edited *Mirrorshades: The Cyberpunk Anthology*. This book gathers together stories by the movers and shakers of cyberpunk. Sterling has also written several short stories (collected in *Crystal Express*, which was just printed by Arkham House) and the novel *Schismatrix*.

Pat Cadigan has written several short stories in her "Pathosfinder" series, which have been collected in the book *Mindplayers*.

John Shirley has two-thirds of a trilogy published to date; the titles of the books are *Eclipse* and *Eclipse Penumbra*. A short story in Sterling's *Mirrorshades* provides some background to one of the protagonists in *Eclipse*.

Michael Swanwick's novel *Vacuum Flowers*, is part cyberpunk, part space opera. Evil governments, inhuman computers, true love, and some very well-done characters are to be found in *Vacuum Flowers*. Swanwick also wrote an article in the August 1986 issue of *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine*. Entitled "A User's Guide to the Post-Moderns," it provides a very good overview of the furor that went on during the mid-80s.

I have not read anything by James Patrick Kelly, but he comes highly recommended. He has written a cyberpunk trilogy of novellas, "Rat," "Solstice," and "The Prisoner of Chillon."

George Alec Effinger has written a novel entitled *When Gravity Fails*. *When Gravity Fails* is part Raymond Chandler hard-boiled detective fiction, part cyberpunk. It is one of the few cyberpunk stories that deals with religion. The Islamic faith plays an important role in the interaction between two of the protagonists. The latest issue of *Locus* mentioned that Effinger is thinking about writing a sequel.

[Editor's note: David Griggs plans to do an article on the sociological aspects of certain recurrent themes in cyberpunk (such as the drug use, the ubiquity of Japan, and the grittiness of the future) in the next (regular) issue of *Loop Garou*.]

## Untitled Poem

by Stephen A. Halkovic III

Machine

Machine

Watch its sheen

Your machine

Cogs on pulleys electronic scene

Let me be in your machine

Rev it high and burn it clean

Break my bones in your machine

Blood and guts keep it peachy keen

I'm now part of your machine

My brain enraptured by what it's seen

It longs to have its own machine

Now to separate the mean

Now making a new machine

Splice a gene

My machine

Acting dean

Machine

Machine

# Loop Attitudes on Cyberpunk

interviews by Raja Thiagarajan

**W**hat is cyberpunk? Where did it come from? How realistic is it? How popular is it? And how good is it? I went to the members of the IU Science Fiction Loop with these questions and a tape recorder. My goal was not to uncover deep truths, but rather to get a feel for the Loop members' attitudes on cyberpunk.

My first interview session was on the night of Wednesday, June 14. The four people present were Randy Pardue, Steve Wennerberg, Garner Johnson, and Mike Basinger. I did the interviews one-on-one, but everyone got to hear my questions and everyone else's answers. My other two interview sessions, with David Griggs and Rochelle Dvorak, were conducted without any kibitzers. Here are the highlights of the six interviews.

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## Randy Pardue: Cyberpunk is just a marketing ploy

---

*First off, Randy, how much cyberpunk have you read?*

I haven't read any. But I've heard people discussing it, and I've seen *Blade Runner*.

*And from earlier meetings I know you have strong opinions on it. Well, where do you think cyberpunk came from?*

Cyberpunk came out of hard science fiction, and it's just a grouping of hard SF.

*Is there anything that sets it apart from the rest of hard SF?*

Not having read it, it's tough for me to say. From appearances, from the way people talk about it, and from plot outlines I hear, it sounds more like it's just hard science fiction marketed a little bit differently. William Gibson could probably write any kind of science fiction and do a decent job of it. His particular writing style is being labelled cyberpunk. There's always been this labelling of science fiction trends. I don't think you can say that cyberpunk's a bad thing or a good thing; you just have to look at the individual authors. And we are getting some good stuff out of cyberpunk, out of the end of the eighties.

*Do you think this tendency to label things is good, bad, or indifferent?*

I think that people, especially publishers and editors, like grouping things together under headings, and that's why we have "cyberpunk"; not because William Gibson wants to label his work, not because several other people want to label their work, but because an editor or publisher can use a label to sell more books. If you start labelling books, you can start selling books. William Gibson can't have as many books out as a stable of writers who try to imitate his style and put out books with a sticker on them saying "cyberpunk." Probably not everything out with "cyberpunk" on it is as good as William Gibson's stories. So it's just a heading.

*What do you think of cyberpunk in other media? What's your opinion of, say, Blade Runner?*

Well, I think it's a genre that people like. I think we're away from the crystal-clean future of tomorrow. The near-future's going to be kind of grungy, and we're pretty much accepting that. I believe it's what people want to read about. I believe people want to take a more realistic view of the near future.

*Okay, so you think cyberpunk is more realistic than the good old futures where everyone uses deodorant?*

It could be. No one can look ahead. It's a more realistic look for the time period cyberpunk talks about, especially *Blade Runner*. In the far future, things will probably be a bit different. But cyberpunk is a look, it is an eighties look.

*How realistic do you think it is to have the Japanese dominating everything, as they seem to in a lot of cyberpunk works?*

I don't think that's very realistic, because they're winding down; their economy's winding down, and they are winding down. They're getting a lot of economic pressure from other Asian countries even as we speak. I don't think you can look ahead a hundred years and say that the Japanese are going to dominate. They don't have that kind of stamina.

*How likely is it that things will be dominated by a single country? If it's likely, do you think that country will be Asian?*

I think the possibility of the world being dominated by a single country is very remote. If you look at the trends in world politics, things are decentralizing. The governments of today don't have nearly the power they had at the end of World War II. Larger countries are finding they can do less and less to smaller countries, short of active warfare. There's a new openness in the air. I can't see a single country dominating things, unless America reaffirms its technological and agricultural lead. America is one of the few countries that *could* establish a lead, if it muscled with its agriculture and technology.

*That brings up another thing that's popular in cyberpunk: In William Gibson's books in particular, countries aren't really important, and it's the big corporations that run the world. Do you think that's realistic?*

That's an easy one. It's unrealistic simply because, as much as people like to say corporations control government, I don't think it'll ever come down to that. Corporations compete with corporations, and the government will never be totally made up by one side. You still have to convince the people who vote, and they don't always go the way you want them to, no matter *how* much money you pour into it. No, I think the government will always play a large part, and I don't see governments letting corporations supersede their authority.

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## **Steve Wennerberg: The mindset and influence of cyberpunk**

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*All right, Steve, what great works of cyberpunk have you read?*

I've read *Neuromancer*, *Count Zero*, *Burning Chrome*, *Mirrorshades*, *Hardwired* and *Voice of the Whirlwind*, *Islands in the Net*....

*Anything else that you would call cyberpunk?*

No. And I think that *Voice of the Whirlwind* isn't really cyberpunk. It has elements that are in cyberpunk, but I don't think I'd call it cyberpunk.

*Would you consider yourself to be well read in cyberpunk, not so well read...?*

Average, I suppose.

*All right. You said you wouldn't consider Voice of the Whirlwind to be cyberpunk, and I'd probably agree. But why is that?*

While the characters are lowlife characters, they don't seem to be vicious and cynical, like they are in most cyberpunk stories. I think that'd be the main reason.

*Okay, since the characters aren't lowlife or streetpunks, the book doesn't count as cyberpunk?*

Well, I think that at that point, you're bringing up the elements of cyberpunk, and how it's defined.

*Do you have a good definition of cyberpunk?*

There are things I see a lot in cyberpunk. In most of the books, there's a lot of drug use. There's a lot of human melding with machines, and it becomes difficult to tell humans from machines. There's a lot of genetic construction or reconstruction of humans so that they're semi-human, or even not really human, in a way.

*By genetic construction, do you mean making different species?*

Yeah. Or engineering people to have more arms, or to be more suitable for different environments....It seems like most of the characters are very low-level punks that are fences, thieves, prostitutes, drug runners...basically, kind of inner ghetto-type characters.

*Okay, how do these future "ghetto characters" differ from modern ghetto-characters?*

I've never lived in a ghetto, so I don't really know. But there seem to be significant differences. Most people in the ghetto don't try to connect with major computer networks. It seems like you can get a lot of money in the ghetto in cyberpunk books, at least if you're clever. It seems to me like clever people in a cyberpunk ghetto area, or a Sprawl, or whatever you call it, are very rich and very powerful in many ways that I don't think that their 1980's equivalents would be.

*Where do you think it came from?*

My understanding is that William Gibson was the person who started writing in this style.

Oh, another element of cyberpunk is that it's near future. I have a hard time picturing a cyberpunk story that's set 500 years in the future.



*Short of, say, Schismatrix.*

I haven't read that one.

*Do you think cyberpunk is a living and growing field, or is it on its way out, or is it turning into something else?*

I think a lot of the elements that are in cyberpunk are being woven into mainstream science fiction now. I think that with anything, whether it's science fiction now or religious dogma in the middle ages, you have your mainstream, and you have people who realize that the mainstream isn't picking up certain important elements, and they split off and rebel for a while or write their own stuff within their own genre, within their world-view. I think what happens over time is that stuff gets spun back into the mainstream. And I think a lot of the elements of cyberpunk you can see in some stories that are in center field.

*Such as?*

*Voice of the Whirlwind* has a lot of cyberpunk atmosphere, but it doesn't have the same sort of cyberpunk feeling that *Hardwired*, a book by the same author, does. Gregory Benford's *Tides of Light* has a cyberpunk atmosphere in some ways, but it certainly isn't what I would think of as cyberpunk. But a lot of the human interaction with machinery and a lot of the genetic questions are being raised in other parts of science fiction now. The kind of plot in which the first aliens humans meet will be us.

*What about cyberpunk in other media, like the movie Blade Runner? Are there any cyberwesterns, cyberoperas?*

What I've noticed about *Blade Runner* is that people who like science fiction but didn't like the movie are the ones that read Philip K. Dick's book before the movie and were disappointed because it wasn't like the book. Most people who like science fiction who haven't read the book seem to like the movie quite a bit. I haven't read the book yet, though I've got it. I thought the movie was very good. To me it had all the elements of a classic movie.

*Are there any other movies you would think of as having a cyberpunk feel?*

Loosely, I suppose things like *Road Warrior* and *Mad Max*. But only to a certain extent. I've not seen *Batman*, but that may have a cyberpunk feel.

*Okay. Are there any other matters you'd like to bring up?*

It's better than splatterpunk [laughs].

I think cyberpunk will be joining the mainstream of science fiction.

*Has that happened before in the field? Do you think that's what happened to the New Wave?*

I don't really know what "New Wave" means.

*That was the rebellion of the Sixties. It was pretty radical for the time—I've read people saying about cyberpunk, "Oh, it's awful, we've got to stamp it out now, we should be censoring these authors immediately."*

I think science fiction stories revolve around a certain mindset of the writers of the time period. If you read stuff from the H. G. Wells time period—perhaps it's only me, but I certainly get a different feeling from the style of writing and the atmosphere described in an H. G. Wells science fiction story than from a story by an American science fiction writer in the Forties, or an American science fiction writer in the Eighties.

*Would you say that most of the stuff that's done in cyberpunk is a result of a splinter mindset, or part of the main mindset of science fiction writers now?*

There are an awful lot of writers in science fiction. I don't think I can accurately answer that question. I might get the feeling that it's becoming more mainstream. More writers are considering questions that were only raised in cyberpunk.

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## Garner Johnson: Cyberpunk is interesting, but....

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*So Garner, what have you read that's cyberpunk?*

*Hardwired*. That's it. I haven't read Gibson yet. Cyberpunk doesn't interest me a whole lot.

*Okay. Well, what did you think of Hardwired?*

I liked a couple parts of *Hardwired*. The cybernetics is cool. I liked the idea of man interfacing with machines. Not that cyberpunk was the first thing to do that: Caidin comes to mind, obviously, with *Cyborg*.

*Earlier you mentioned that you didn't think it's reasonable that punks will take over the future.*

The cyberpunk future is based on everybody being a lowlife streetpunk who has been glorified—I guess that's the point. They're not in power, because the Orbitals are in power. And the Orbitals are all these corporate,

straight, conservative types that are sort of taken to their extreme of being exploitive, and not looking out for anyone, and just push, push, push. The punks are seen as the great heroes, the downtrodden masses, who are being exploited into the dust. But they're the real heroes behind all this. It's an attitude I don't like.

*Okay, you don't think the punks are realistic. Do you think the corporations are realistic?*

I'd probably agree with Randy that it's not very realistic, but I find it an interesting alternative. I don't think *anything* in cyberpunk is all that realistic for the time of the future it's set in. I have a real problem accepting all this *Hardwired* stuff occurring in the next hundred years. Well, maybe in a hundred years, but definitely not shorter than that. They don't go into the technology of how this is supposed to occur, either. Most of the cyberpunk that gets mentioned doesn't seem to be hard science fiction. The authors don't seem to want to explain how this interface occurred, how it works, what are its limitations, or explore the basis for it. It's just sort of, "Well, of course, take a synapcoke and you can operate at ten times the speed of a normal person, because you're hardwired."

*Where do you think cyberpunk came from?*

Probably Gibson. And England. England in general. I think cyberpunk's an England sort of underground movement that got a real author who could then give it some kind of credibility.

*And do you think cyberpunk is going in any particular direction now?*

I don't know. I couldn't say for sure.

*Would you consider Blade Runner to be cyberpunk?*

It's got a cyberpunk feel to it. It obviously lacks the large-scale cybernetics. I would almost call that more "hard-boiled" science fiction than cyberpunk, really. That would fit into the "Grim Jack" sort of reality where you've got a grim, gritty future. I didn't see the downtrodden punks all over, and I didn't see the cybernetics increase.

*Does cyberpunk usually have a gritty future? Where do you think that came from?*

Probably the Sixties. It's a social change. In the Fifties, everybody was optimistic, Eisenhower was president, the American outlook was very bright; everything's got a clean, progressive sort of spirit. Then in the sixties, we had all the race problems, and the problems with

Vietnam, and there was a lot of reexamining where the nation was going. All sorts of problems kept surfacing, and I think that influenced all types of writing.

*I don't remember: In Hardwired, is there a strong Japanese influence in the culture?*

There is a Japanese influence in the corporations, but it's not overwhelming. And I don't think the Japanese influence in the culture is overwhelming, either.

*Hardwired* seems to have a nice balance: There are some big Japanese corporations and they have some power, but not everybody is a Japanese corporation, and that tends to make sense. I don't see one country's corporations blocking out all other country's corporations. The Japanese might have a dominance in, say, transistors or microminiaturization, but there are always going to be other countries that have specialties.

*That's how specialization works, and how economics works.*

Right. So I don't think you can say that Japanese corporations will take over.

*Do you think corporations in general will take over?*

Probably not, though I could see a return to the 1880's and 1890's corporate domination in a person's life. Sort of a corporation that looks after you, gives you a car, gives you a place to live, and you live in corporate towns. That's been done in the past. And it *can* work well. The government is still there and in charge of things, but the corporation has much more influence over your day-to-day life. That's a possibility, maybe not likely. It's too hard to say.

*Do you think that we in the real world are headed in that direction?*

I doubt it, but it's a possibility. It's an interesting area to look at.

*Anything else you'd like to say about cyberpunk?*

I think the big thing about cyberpunk that's going to get amalgamated into mainstream science fiction is the cybernetics. That's the most interesting part of it. I think the interface is something that needs to be explored, and it's a cool sort of alternative, and I think that will get put into more mainstream stuff. I think the punks and some of the drugs will get dropped along the way. We'll start seeing more of the influence of man/machine interface on military, man/machine interface on culture overall, that sort of thing from a more "middle-class" standpoint than a lower-class standpoint. I can see that happening.

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## Mike Basinger: It always rains in southern California

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*Okay, Mike, so you say you haven't read any cyberpunk?*

Nothing. Nothing that's in the genre.

*But you have seen Blade Runner?*

Right. And I've played the role-playing game that's been out.

*What did you think of Blade Runner?*

I agree it's not realistic, with the corporations getting over government. The government wouldn't stand for it, for one thing. Unless the corporations are run by government, but that wasn't implied in the movie.

*Can you think of any examples from history a company went too far and the government stepped in?*

AT&T is one [laughs].

*I see Garner's nodding. Garner?*

Garner: Standard Oil, Carnegie Steel, all the big monopolies in the Sherman anti-trust period. There are a lot of areas where the government basically stepped in to put an end to large corporations. It's especially prevalent between 1900 and 1910.

*Getting back to you, Mike: What were some of the things in Blade Runner that really jumped out at you?*

Well, one thing was the idea of advanced genetics for use as slave labor. In the real world, we haven't put any restrictions on cloning or things like that.

Another thing was the mood they had for the movie. It was raining through the whole movie, which I thought was really weird.

*Weather control in the future!*

I don't know if it was weather control in the future, or just the background the director was trying to set. It's just gloomy and dark: a disgusting future.

Garner: Except the end, where they fly off and, "Oh, look at the forest! Amazing! How come nobody lives here?" [laughs]

[laughs] *Because they like huddling together in the city!*

Garner: When it rains! [laughs]

Mike: Because they didn't show the ten-foot mutants who eat people from the city! [laughs]

*Did you like the gritty, grimy feel?*

It was good for the movie.

*Any other movies that gave you the gritty, grimy feel?*

Not that I can think of in science fiction. I had the same feeling when I got done with *Platoon* or *Full Metal Jacket*. It's a very intense feeling; everybody's in a place where they really don't want to be. It's that type of feeling.

*How realistic do you think it is that the Japanese will take over?*

It's not that realistic. I think it'd be more realistic for Japanese and American corporations to merge in the near future, because we've got the manpower that Japanese technology can use. We've got the space, too. Japan has two problems. They don't have a large population compared to a lot of other big industrial countries, and they also are running out of space. It's an island country.

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## David Griggs: Cyberpunk A-Z

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*What have you read that's cyberpunk?*

First and foremost, William Gibson. He's the author that got me into this, with a story of his called "Hinterlands." I believe it was in a gaming magazine. And then there was "The Winter Market." The high-tech low-life attitude towards it all, part Raymond Chandler, part hard science fiction, appealed to me. So I started looking around various magazines, namely *Omni* and *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine*, for more William Gibson. I found the story "Burning Chrome," which is an impressive short story. It is in many ways exemplary of the cyberpunk field, with its plot, with its characterization, with its use of technology. In "Burning Chrome," Gibson wrote, "The street finds its own uses for things." You have in this case people who are using computers to steal from people, people who are using bionics—artificial eyes—for telemarketing and a sort of super-Geraldo Rivera-type talk show with someone named Tally Isham. Gibson with his book *Neuromancer*, his first novel, made me a die-hard cyberpunk fan.

Non-Gibson authors include Walter Jon Williams, who did a very impressive book entitled *Voice of the Whirlwind*. He did another novel, that looks like it took place in the same world a hundred years earlier, called *Hardwired*. It has a few pacing problems. *Voice of the Whirlwind* came a novel or two and several short stories later, and he is a much better author by then.

I've read Bruce Sterling, starting with his novel *Involution Ocean*, which is a science fiction fable in many ways—it has a lot of a folklore or cultural anthropological feel to it. That was his first incarnation, with the Harlan Ellison Discovery Series. He recently went through a cyberpunk phase, starting about '81 or '82, with such stories as "Swarm" and the Shaper/Mechanist series. The Shapers were people that played with DNA and biological sciences; the Mechanists were the silicon and steel high-tech hard scientists. They had radically different cultures, and ended up going to war because of their differences. *Schismatrix* is the only novel he's done in the series; everything else has been short stories. Bruce Sterling also edited *Mirrorshades: the Cyberpunk Anthology*, which is a marvelous cross-spectrum of the field. You get Pat Cadigan (whose book *Mindplayers* collects her "Pathosfinder" stories, which are cyberpunk through and through), Tom Maddox, Marc Laidlaw (who wrote *Dad's Nuke* and *The Neon Lotus*). And, of course, Bruce Sterling and William Gibson.

John Shirley is another cyberpunk author. In many ways, he was doing cyberpunk long before anyone else. Before he did that, in the mid-70's, he was a horror writer. He came to the cyberpunk field as a full-blown professional author, and it shows. He does very good horror, and very good writing. He's done the Eclipse series: *Eclipse*, *Eclipse Penumbra*, and a third book, which isn't out yet.

One other author: George Alec Effinger, with his novel *When Gravity Fails*. Raymond Chandler. Twenty-first century Islamic culture. Cyberpunk. It's a weird mixture, and he's a very good storyteller.

*You named Gibson first. Would you consider him to be the best writer in cyberpunk?*

Six months ago, I would have said yes. But I think there are authors there who tell a better story than Gibson. Gibson has the *feel* of cyberpunk, he has the hard-driven edge, the grittiness that's there. And he exemplifies the cyberpunk field; he set the attitudes, the approaches, the ethics. Or lack thereof. He turned the science fiction world on its ear with *Neuromancer*, and "Burning Chrome," and "Johnny Mnemonic." He popularized cyberpunk with his storytelling. But I think there are

authors like Effinger, with *When Gravity Fails*, and Williams, with *Voice of the Whirlwind*, who tell a better story.

*What do you mean by "tell a better story"?*

It's their writing style, it's the way they handle characters, it's the way they take a plot in directions that I don't expect. I hate predictable stories, which is one reason I don't watch television.

Gibson is one of the founding fathers of cyberpunk, and I think he will always be one of my favorite authors. But for the moment, I think Effinger is my favorite. And he's not done nearly as much, which is a pity.

*Well, of course, he's written a lot of novels and short stories that aren't cyberpunk —*

Things like *Utopia 3*, *What Entropy Means to Me*.

*Do you have a definition of cyberpunk?*

No. I generally give people the collection *Burning Chrome* by William Gibson, and tell them to read "Johnny Mnemonic," "New Rose Hotel," and "Burning Chrome." It will give you an idea of what's going on in most cyberpunk stories. This is the earlier cyberpunk; the global world-view, the world village approach. You have a world community that's a gritty, hard-bitten, depressive community; it's not a happy world-view. This appeared in a lot of the earlier stories, which often had a lone individual armed with his cybernetic talismans, his objects of power: bionic arms, an eye which throws poison darts, things like this. The story is about these individuals trying to survive for another day. Maybe even a week [laughs].

In later stories, like Bruce Sterling's *Islands in the Net*, you have a group of people with a social conscience. They are sort of exclusive about who they want to let into their organization, but they're willing to work for the greater good. They are willing to work as a collective, and try to get a niche in life that is comfortable, and secure, a place for them to raise their children, and grow old, and be safe. This doesn't appear in early cyberpunk stories. The field is maturing: It is changing its focus.

Which is nice. It's good to see it evolve and change. As Gibson pointed out in one of his interviews, when you get the field codified, set, and defined, at this point you start getting people to copy his style. Sort of like the Harlequin romances which are boilerplated.... So once you can pin down a definition of cyberpunk, you start having people blindly copy.

*If you can't define cyberpunk, how can you tell if a particular work is cyberpunk or not? Are there any common features in cyberpunk?*

High technology, but in many cases what's important is what you do with the technology, how you use the technology, rather than the technology itself. You generally have a rather grim world-view filled with corporations, mega-corporations, poly-corporations, intermeshing gemeineschafts. These corporations are the shakers and movers of the planet; they're stronger than governments. The only thing that's as powerful as them are their competitors. Generally, you have the average person getting trounced and stepped on.

*Are there any particular countries or cultures that seem to dominate?*

Japan. Japan and, in some cases, Hong Kong. The language, the culture, the ethics, even the crime lords (the Yakuza) have a very Nipponese feel to them. Some of the marketing techniques, some of the corporate techniques of company loyalty, company anthem, company funeral when you die, show up in a lot of cyberpunk stories. Good examples are in "Johnny Mnemonic" with vat-grown Yakuza assassins hardwired to be as skillful as ninjas out of mythology. They have protective and aggressive reflexes built into their nervous system.

*Would you say there's a lot of genetic engineering and prosthetics in cyberpunk, or is that not a key feature?*

Biotechnology is. It can be genetics, it can be machinery. I think I said earlier that it's like a talisman of power, if you look at it from a folklore standpoint. These are the items that protect you from the world. These are the items that are yours personally. They can't be taken away from you, unless you run into someone with more power than you—better talismans or smarter—who could strip you of your strength.

You have people who have circuitry that's implanted into them. Maybe you have a skill, like how to speak fluent Russian, that's on a chip you can plug into a socket behind your ear. Then you have the people who play with DNA. They resculpt your very flesh. They can speed up your nervous system, maybe make your eyes see better. These are the two main approaches, and in many cases you don't have an overlap. There was an overlap in the Shaper/Mechanist series, but they had a war between the people who shaped flesh and the people who used technology.

Another aspect of technology is the computer interface. Getting back to William Gibson: He coined the term "cyberspace." It is a hallucinatory space where you see geometric figures representing locations of data. With your perceptions of these figures, you can interface with the data, you can manipulate programs directly. You can try and steal information from these places, although they have automated defenses. He had a term called ICE: Intrusions/Countermeasures Electronics. ICE would try to stop you from coming, often trying to kill you with induced epileptic seizures or by stopping your heart from beating. The human/computer interaction is a big thing in a lot of cyberpunk.

*Any other features?*

Stylistically. Writing style. In many cases there's a very cramped prose. A lot of information is dropped on you all at once. A lot of throwaway lines. My fifth or sixth time of rereading *Neuromancer*, it's worth it. Just because of all the stuff that's in there. Gibson had a throwaway line about a Cray pocket computer. Cray is the demigod of supercomputers nowadays, but in Gibson's story it's something you carry on your hip. It's not that big. It's not that important. You find a lot of things like this. It's what I mean by a cramped style. It has a very intense prose to it. If you've read stuff of Harlan Ellison's like "I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream," or "A Boy and His Dog," or "Deathbird"—it's very intense, this writing style. Hostile, even. In most cyberpunk stories, it's not hostile towards the reader (which is what you found in most New Wave stories) but is more hostile or antagonistic towards authority—which gets back to the corporations and mega-corporations.

*Where did cyberpunk come from?*

Good question.

I hate the term "cyberpunk." It gets your attention, and it's provocative, but it's ultimately annoying. I was thinking of other terms, and it occurred to me that it could be called "Second Wave." It's like nouveau New Wave science fiction. In the sixties, the New Wave turned science fiction on its ear, with its graphic sex, experimental prose, violence—the things not found in the science fiction of the fifties. I consider the fifties to be a backwater of science fiction, because there was not much really made. I was talking with a guy I met in the bookstore about how neither of us bought much science fiction between 1975 and 1981. We just didn't like much of what was being put out. (Of course there are exceptions, there always are.) Nowadays I buy a lot of science fiction because I like what the field is doing. Ten years ago, I didn't.

I think cyberpunk, with its hard-driven writing style, is an effort to redefine the science fiction field, an effort for authors to stake out some territory for themselves. Many of the authors said in interviews that they didn't like what the science fiction field was doing, and they knew that nothing would happen unless they did something about it themselves. They happened to find a large audience that agreed with them. *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine* was buying a lot of cyberpunk short stories around 1986. They wouldn't buy the stories unless people were reading them. It only took a few years for the genre to form, to ferment.

*Are there any works of proto-cyberpunk? Are there any older works or authors who were influential?*

Ten minutes ago, I could have answered that question.

*Stand on Zanzibar*, by John Brunner.

I've been reading a lot about the history of cyberpunk, and they keep talking about William Burroughs and his novel *The Naked Lunch*. They say that is sort of a precursor to cyberpunk. He's not a science fiction author; he's a modern author.

That's one thing I've noticed about cyberpunk writers. They have a non-SF inspiration. They have non-SF films, they use rock and roll albums, like Lou Reed and Steely Dan. They have non-SF literary sources. That's nice. It's good to get outside the field.

*One work I think of as proto-cyberpunk is The Stars My Destination—*

Yes! Bester! A friend of mine mentioned a similar attitude. That could very well be proto-cyberpunk. Fetal cyberpunk [laughs].

*A last question: If you had to summarize on a postcard where cyberpunk came from and where it's going, what would you say?*

It came from a rather violent birth. It hit the science fiction world upside the head with a large sledgehammer. It got everyone's attention. It was antagonistic, it was hostile, but not necessarily toward the reader. It looks like it's maturing a fair bit. Books like *Islands in the Net* show that the writers are going into different themes, they're looking at alternatives to the dark future global village. And that's nice.

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## **Rochelle Dvorak: Cyberpunk and the business world**

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*The standard question that I start everybody out with is, What have you read that's cyberpunk?*

Um, what David [Griggs] said [laughs]. *Neuromancer*, *Count Zero*, and *Burning Chrome*, by William Gibson; *Hardwired* and *Voice of the Whirlwind*, by Walter Jon Williams; *Mirrorshades*, by Bruce Sterling; *When Gravity Fails*, by George Alec Effinger, *Glass Hammer* by K. W. Jeter. There's a new one out that I've just picked up: *Bad Voltage*, by Jonathan Littel.

*Would you consider yourself to be well-read, not so well-read...?*

Well read. If I haven't read it, I've at least heard of it.

*What did you think of The Glass Hammer? That's something nobody else has mentioned.*

It's not as typical of cyberpunk as a lot of the other books. It's got a lot of the flavor of cyberpunk, but....

*What would you consider to be more typical works of cyberpunk, then?*

I'm going to be like everyone else and say Gibson, just because he has a really firm grasp of what he's writing about. His name comes up all the time when you talk about cyberpunk. He may or may not have been the first one to write about it, but he was the one who defined it.

*Would you say that he's the best writer of cyberpunk?*

No. I'd say Effinger. I've just read the one story, *When Gravity Fails*, but I was real impressed by it. There hasn't been a Gibson novel that really clinched me the way Effinger's did.

*What did, say, Neuromancer lack that When Gravity Fails had?*

You knew who the characters were, but you really didn't feel for them; you didn't really get involved in the story; you were just reading a story. Whereas in Effinger, you really cared what happened to the characters.

*What are some of the aspects that are in cyberpunk?*

Your teenage-rebels type of thing. The corporate ownership of just everything: The world is divided up not by countries but by corporations. The aspect that there is no hope: Very few of the stories have any hope. The characters think, "I'll get by for today, that's all I can expect; that's all I want." Some of them have dreams beyond that, but—for instance, in *Hardwired*, the main character always wanted to get offplanet, but finally she

realized that offplanet wasn't that different from on-planet. It's kind of a doom-and-gloom genre.

*How would it differ, then, from the standard after-the-holocaust genre?*

It is kind of an after-the-holocaust setting; it's just that the reason for the holocaust is total economic collapse, rather than the bomb or a war or something like that. The only thing that arises from the ashes is corporations, rather than straggling bands of humanity. It's still a kind of sociological viewpoint: What happens to society if something happens? In this case, what if economies fail and corporations take over?

*When I interviewed Garner, he mentioned that nobody explains how we get from today to the standard cyberpunk setting. Do you have any thoughts on that?*

Actually, the first cyberpunk thing that I read was the game itself. I'd heard so much about it, so I picked it up because I collect games. The first cyberpunk story I ever read was "Never Fade Away," which is in the rulebook. The rulebook goes through in great detail how we get from here to there. For instance, Japanese corporations own everything. If you look at the real world, look at how much property over here they're buying, and they're buying a lot of property in Europe, because they've got the money, and we're selling. That's how they end up controlling and owning everything. When you own everything, there's not much the country's government can do. Especially when they're governing apathetic people, like they are now. They mention a lot of other things in the game.

*So you consider it to be a plausible future. Would you consider it to be highly probable or fairly improbable?*

As far as the economic standpoint, I think that there's a good chance that it could happen. As far as the technological standpoint, we've got a long way to go. This game is set in the year 2013, which doesn't seem to give much time—

*Twenty-three years!*

—to get all these cybernetic parts and things. There are cybernetic parts now, but they're very expensive and in very limited use. To get to the point where you can just go to the five-and-dime and pick up a cybernetic arm, like they can do in the game, and in the books—well maybe not quite like that. Maybe you can't get an arm from Target; you might have to go to Ayres—that part of it will take longer than 23 years. But the economic parts of it are highly probable. It says in the game that they

took things that are happening now and extrapolated out, and took the worst possible scenario.

*Do you think the Japanese will be dominating the world in 23 years, or 100 years, or whatever?*

I would say that they're dominating it now.

*Okay. [laughs]. More than the Russians and Americans?*

It depends on your definitions of "dominating." If you're talking about military might, then I suppose you would have to say the United States and Russia. The problem is that you can't use military might when you've got that much; you've got to threaten, and there's only so far you can threaten without actually showing something. If you're the only country that's buying everybody's exports: To me, that's where the real power lies. Then again, I'm a business student, so I'm prejudiced towards that. There are very few countries that have more exports than imports, and Japan is one of them. Their ratio is just huge.

*How about technologically?*

There again, too, the Japanese are far ahead of the United States and Russia, and they're getting further and further ahead because their emphasis is on that. It's on education, and technical advances, and that kind of thing. In Russia, they're always playing catch up and always have been. Over here, we were on top for so long that we got complacent. We became, "Let's have fun and spend our money." They're going past us. They're running past us.

*Is cyberpunk more suited to short stories or novels?*

It seems to me I've read better short stories than I have novels.

*Since Effinger hasn't done any short stories, who's the best short-story writer in cyberpunk?*

Probably Gibson. I really liked "Never Fade Away," and that's by—oh no, Mike Pondsmith. To date, this is my favorite one.

*As a business major, you have a different perspective from most of the people in the Loop. Is there anything in cyberpunk that calls out to the business major in you? Anything you notice as being particularly plausible or implausible?*

I just think it's cool the way corporations run everything [laughs]. And I find it plausible because corporations can afford to send 30 or 40

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# Nervously Waiting on the Sunrise: Some Thoughts on Cyberpunk as She Is Known

by Jeffrey W. Roberts

This is not, contrary to what many people might be expecting, a “Why I hate cyberpunk” article. I don’t hate cyberpunk. I don’t hate cheerleader high-school romance novels or Longarm westerns, either. But neither do I read them, nor do I suspect I’d enjoy them if I did read them. But they, like cyberpunk, are an existing sub-genre phenomenon, and as such must be dealt with in the course of browsing over the racks.

Some caveats: I am not as steeped in the gestalt of cyberpunk as some of my esteemed colleagues. I haven’t yet jacked into cyberspace, so the attitudes and opinions contained herein are those of the uninitiated. However, much as one can look at the exterior of a bar and tell that he really doesn’t want to go in there, I can determine from a brief inspection of the surface of cyberpunk that it is not something I care to explore too deeply. What I am attempting to do here is to articulate, in a more-or-less reasonable fashion, the peripheral aspects of cyberpunk that bug me. These opinions are most assuredly my own—though there may be a small voice of assent wailing somewhere in the wilderness—and I encourage debate from all quarters. I apologize only for glaring misconceptions that result from my basic lack of familiarity with cyberpunk, not for what I think about it or for having the gall to do this article without first having read a potful of cyberbooks. Upon approaching cyberpunk from the outside, the man from Missouri might say “Show me.” I will paraphrase that, even at the risk of belligerence, and say “Convince me.”

Since the advent of it, and not that long ago, the debate has been rolling around as to “what is cyberpunk?” The hue and cry has been mostly in the vein of hyperbole, that it is the “new age” in science fiction (with silicon chips as icons rather than quartz crystal, one surmises), that it is a fresh and daring genre, even—and a bold assertion this is—that cyberpunk is the future of science fiction. This is the type of thing one reads in *Publisher’s Weekly*, self-congratulatory cover blurbs designed for one

purpose only: to sell that book to whomever is holding it at the time. Such over-inflated descriptions, then, cannot be usefully applied to an examination of cyberpunk. The rather exclusive-sounding name “cyberpunk” seems to set it apart from the rest of science fiction and create for it a genre all its own. It is not a separate genre. It is nothing more than a sub-category of the whole of science fiction. It is a *type* of science fiction story, as much as space opera, tampering-with-forces-unknown, or first contact stories are types. It could perhaps be considered as an extrapolation of what happens when we let highly advanced technology go too far and invade the commonality of human life to the extent that it becomes commonplace, as inseparable from an average day as clocks and cars. Science fiction writers have been speculating about the far-ranging effects of encroaching (and sometimes frightening) technology since the Golden Age. That particular aspect of cyberpunk does not set it apart or distinguish it in any way from its counterparts. Smith speculated about men whose flesh was controlled by implanted devices, Del Rey wondered if a man could fall in love with a machine, and Heinlein considered a planet dependent on a system of rolling roads. Cyberpunk takes a rougher, more sharp-edged approach to the same kinds of technological forecasting, but that does not elevate it away from the science fiction that came before it; if anything, it drives it in deeper and settles its foundations solidly into the overall landscape of science fiction.

An important quality of cyberpunk seems to be its atmosphere and its message. It deals with a very dark, gloomy, and depressing future. Cities are dirty and overcrowded, the people are unsavory and mean, and there is absolutely no chance of things getting any better. The many are ruled by the few, as surely as a beekeeper rules his drones. There is no hope in a cyberpunk world. Everything sucks. Everybody is going to die in squalor and despair, and they know it. The only suspense is when



and under what circumstance they will perform their final exult. What's the use? Why bother?

Why bother, indeed? What could be the point of even *attempting* to make things happen differently in a world where everything is destined to crumble into dust, where any human resistance is as futile as trying to fight fog? Where is the basis for the conflict that is essential to fiction in a world where all is certain to fail? Fiction, *all* fiction, can be summarized into a basic framework involving conflict, and it is this: Character A (the protagonist) desires to reach some goal. Character B (the antagonist) stands in the way of A's achievement of that goal. The essence of fiction is A's struggle against B so that he may either reach or be denied that goal, and in some fashion grow or change when he either defeats or is defeated by B. One should be able to derive this basic skeleton from *any* story, in *any* genre, at *any* point in the history of the written word. Cyberpunk, it appears, does not allow space within the organism for such a skeleton to exist. The protagonist can grind away at his enemies, and can maybe even enjoy a temporary victory, but in the end, in the cyberpunk world, he will be beaten. This, to me, does not make for a very exciting premise for an entire category of SF story. Characters in a world like this will only exist; they will not live. There will be no room for a character to grow or change, no *reason* for that character to do so, if there isn't at least some hope of improvement, something he can work towards, something to care for. I have no qualms with depressing stories, in fact I enjoy them greatly, but depressing stories with no point to them, no reason for the depressing elements to be there, are as boring as watching the turnips grow. Even in horror, a genre noted for large body counts, morbid scenarios, and larger-than-life forces that can't be easily fought, there is a small portion of hope. Maybe the eldritch horror will be defeated with the proper application of arcane knowledge, maybe the dreaded murderer will be caught or stopped, maybe the supernatural forces that work to make things difficult can be overruled or avoided. Where does this possibility exist in cyberpunk, when one of the defining standards of the category is that there is no hope and never will be any? I am not advocating stories full of good cheer and happy endings. The types of stories where everything always comes out fine and wonderful are just as artificial as stories where everything *will* be destroyed and all is grim and unpleasant. The bad guys don't always lose, nor do the good guys always win, but where's the suspense in a story where there is no doubt one will always do the other? We all possess a fundamental assumption that the Sun is going to come up tomorrow, and only the deranged sit about in the hours before dawn, wringing their hands and

glancing in worried anticipation at the Eastern horizon. A story destined by its definition to end in despair and depression and defeat contains approximately as much interest and suspense-inducing capability as nervously waiting on the sunrise.

Yet despite these qualities, which sound as though they should create instant censure of cyberpunk, it remains a very popular category of SF. I have to wonder if its popularity is nothing but a fleeting phenomenon. It is certainly something to which a lot of hype and publicity has been aimed, and this brouhaha has made it a very lucrative venture. The people who have become disciples of cyberpunk have fallen victim to a very successful marketing ploy. From all appearances, much of the interest in cyberpunk has been manufactured. It has been hailed as a movement, as important as the New Wave movement of the 60s that produced the exemplary SF writers of today. Most contemporary SF fans are too young to remember the New Wave, but they recognize its importance; if cyberpunk is *just* as important, then they don't want to miss out on it. This desire to be in on a piece of SF history has been very skillfully manipulated by those who package and sell cyberpunk per se, and has generated what I feel in an artificial "boom" period. Cyberpunk also revolves around some certain personalities, the most noteworthy (and overexposed) of whom is William Gibson, but which also includes among the members of the star chamber Bruce Sterling, Rudy Rucker, Lewis Shiner, and John Shirley. The promotion of these people has brought a certain name recognition and association with cyberpunk, whether or not what they write is actually a cyberpunk book. The *People* magazine mentality, the grasping at names and personalities, so often scorned by SF fans as pedestrian and sophomoric, has made itself felt within the happy home of science fiction by the excessive hyping of the writers who are most closely associated with cyberpunk.

Another aspect of cyberpunk that has been manipulated, and very subtly, is its treatment of high-tech themes. The proliferation of computers is a very real phenomenon. Our credit rating, our academic records, even our identities are governed by computers and the people who operate them. There is a great deal of interest, and sometimes anxiety, among the public about this increasing dependence on a bundle of wires and plastic to keep the structure of society ordered and maintained. This preceded cyberpunk by many years. Cyberpunk offers a treatment of the use and misuse of computers, and even casual, computer aware, readers will say "Ooo! Cyberspace! Neat!" and fall upon the "genre" happily. Cyberpunk seems ready-made to capitalize on that interest. SF fans are most prone to be intrigued by

cyberpunk, but it has filtered out into the increasingly "mundane" population outside the boundaries of SF. Large numbers of computer literate people are familiar with the basic ideas behind global computer networks and instant information access, and whether they fear it or embrace it, cyberpunk offers a pre-fabricated forum where they can explore their feelings about it. Further, cyberpunk looks at such issues as prosthetics and their use. People cognizant of their mortality and fragility have been acutely aware of advances in technological replacement of body parts. Cyberpunk plays successfully off that awareness, offering both a glimpse of the benefits of such things as an artificial eye, and the potential dangers in the form of cyber-psychos. Many aspects of cyberpunk have the tendency to hit all the right buttons in readers, and once the readers have been activated, they find it as important and expansive a "genre" as the hype has led them to believe. The technological jargon in cyberpunk is of the type of pseudo-scientific doublespeak which sounds impressive but in close analysis means little. At one point in the history of SF, the terms "spaceship," "warp drive," and "hyperspace" were awe-inspiring. Now they are merely overwrought cliches which evoke derisive snickers even from true SF fans. It shall not be long, I suspect, before anything prefixed by "cyber" will elicit a similar reaction.

Some say that cyberpunk is dead, or at least dying. Some say that it is going as strong as ever. Whatever its status, it has left a mark that will be long in fading. The retroactive declarations of novels or stories as cyberpunk, when they were written years before Gibson had even purchased his first pair of mirrorshades, seems to be an indication that the movement is losing momentum, and that the cyberpunkers and punkettes are clutching desperately at any mote of cyberhood in grim, harsh stories they have read, perhaps in hopes of propping up a sagging category of SF. Perhaps it only means that what is now known as cyberpunk has actually been around for quite a while, but has only recently been brought to prominence by talented writers and clever publishers.

I would like to say again that I don't hate cyberpunk. I would never advocate its demolition. If only a single individual derives pleasure from whatever it is that constitutes cyberpunk, then that gives it the right and legitimacy to exist, and to continue to proliferate. But I must insist on my right to not enjoy it, and to be annoyed with it, and to find it lacking. I would hope that by now, the man from Missouri might be able to say "I've been shown." I, however, remain unconvinced.

(Continued from Page 11)

lobbyists to have a bill passed or not passed, whereas a town that's fighting a corporation can't afford to send anybody, except maybe one person who will have to pay for it themselves. And they won't know anybody, whereas the corporate lobbyists know everyone because they're there year-round. I think it's really plausible; as the authors say in the game manual, you need to just push things a little bit further and take a dim view of what's going on.

*It seems to me that there are certain countries that wouldn't work that way. For instance, how would a corporation take over Russia?*

It was harder, and it would have been well-nigh impossible because everything is State-owned. *But* they're getting away from that. And also, they don't mention Russia too much in cyberpunk stuff except as a backwards country that no one ever pays attention to.

*Do you see that as likely? Is Russia really going to be a backward country in the future?*

If they stick with *glasnost*, I don't think they will be. Man is not going to work for enough to just get by: He wants more. Each time you set a goal and he reaches it, he's going to set another goal that's higher. And that's just the nature of Man. So if they allow people to work for more and actually get more, then Russia will be fine because people will work harder. Those people who want to just work as much as they've always worked and do just enough to get by: fine. But most people aren't like that.

*Finally, do you think cyberpunk is growing evolving and changing, or is it dying out, or is it merging with the mainstream of science fiction?*

Up until a little while ago I would have said either merging or merging and dying. But now I've found *Bad Voltage*, I'm more hopeful. They don't call it cyberpunk anywhere on the cover, but it is. So I would say it's merging with general science fiction. A lot of authors really hated the moniker "cyberpunk" anyway.

# The Mavrides Affair

by Raja Thiagarajan

Dedicated to Fran,  
who knows where half of it came from  
And to Dave,  
who faithfully saved a copy of this story

## Part One: Albany

Leo Mavrides was such a busy man that he didn't even look up when the delivery person brought the balloons in. They were red and green and chrome and gold, and they were for his birthday. Leo typed an acknowledgement at his desk, and the delivery person left.

Leo didn't look up for the birthday present, either. It was big and red and boxy, and Leo acknowledged it at his desk, too.

I know from the cube record that Leo didn't look up when the birthday present exploded. Not that it would have made any difference. He couldn't have done anything to save himself from a half-kilogram of NRDX. The balloons shuddered in their corner when the package blew up.

My name is Donald Rice. I'm an investigator for the FBI. I'd been trying to track down Mavrides for nearly two months. For five weeks, I hadn't even known that Leo was just one person. I'd been trailing three major payoffs that hadn't appeared as income anywhere. When I finally caught on, I spent another two weeks digging for evidence. What I'd found shocked me. I went to a judge with memory dumps and a few paper receipts. The arrest warrant she sent arrived two hours after Mavrides's birthday present blew him over the Empire State Plaza.

The Albany Police were very polite and helpful. They let me in and gave me a representative to bring me up to date on the investigation. You'd never have known that my boss had pressured them for two hours.

I checked in and said my name and pressed my thumb for the records. Then they let me in to see the room.

Since they'd known how important Mavrides was, they'd started work almost immediately. They had replaced the camera and patched the hole in the wall from the outside. They had taken cubeshots from every angle, and sent a worm through Archives to search for more. Then they had removed and catalogued debris with loving care. The modern police make archaeologists look slipshod.

The room was a mess. What the explosion hadn't taken out, the fire afterwards had. When I stepped in, the only things recognizable were a cubeholder, a toner pad, and the bunch of balloons. Everything else was a pile of oozing plastic.

I pointed to the largest lump, and asked the young woman who was the Police Representative, "What was that? His desk?"

She said, "Yeah."

"Wired?" She nodded.

I moved over to the cubeholder and looked inside. It was empty. "Where's his cube?"

"Cubes," the Rep said. "With the Technical Consultant."

I looked up and said, "*Cubes?*"

The Rep looked annoyed at herself for letting something useful slip. "He had four," she explained.

Four cubes! One cube could hold a twenty-volume encyclopedia; why would he need four? I asked, "What's your Tech found on them?"

"Don't know. You ask."

Such a friendly woman. "I will." I turned to the toner pad. "Where does it plug in?"

She looked at me strangely. "It's battery-powered."

So it was. I almost asked where you put your fingers, but I make it a rule not to ask two stupid questions in a row. Instead, I said, "Your Tech look at it?"

She was embarrassed enough to use a complete sentence. "No, we didn't think it was important. Do you want him to?"

"No." I looked at the balloons. They were just balloons. "Right. Where did they stop cataloguing?"

She pointed to one of the piles of plastic and winced when I started digging into it. I found a couple of wiped dataslates and what must have been a cup. Next pile.

After turning up a couple of pointers, I pulled out a black plastic square. I whistled. It was the first floppy disk I'd seen in twenty years, and it was even a five-and-a-quarter. "I didn't know that Mavrides collected antiques."

"Huh?"

"The floppy." I held it up.

She frowned. "What is it?"

So young, so young. Must have been more than twenty years. "They were used to hold computer data before cubes."

She looked at me as if she thought I might be a legitimate detective after all. Reaching for the disk, she said, "Maybe our Tech can get something out of it."

I looked at the tear in one side and started to shake my head, but stopped myself. Hadn't there been companies that could recover ruined floppies? But that had been years ago. "Okay. Good luck." She took the floppy and left me alone in the room. Or as alone as you can be in a government building.

After the Millennial Scandals, the people had decided that you couldn't trust government unless it was under constant scrutiny. So they had studded government buildings with cameras and hooked them up to public access channels. The politicians screamed, but they had done that during the Scandals; nobody really cared what they thought. There was a flood of people quitting

government jobs, but there was an equal flood of applicants: The government jobs paid well, and young people didn't mind the cameras.

They might not have, but I did. The camera turned to follow me as I dug through the other piles. I wondered who was controlling it right now. Some slicer with a homebrew? Someone bored at not seeing the inside of the bathrooms? I tried to ignore it. After scattering the contents of the last pile across the floor, I went to see the Tech.

"Robinson?" I asked.

"Rice," he answered. "You wanted to see me."

Claude Robinson looked like something from a swashbuckler video of the last century. Not because of his clothes (he was tee-shirted like any other thirty-year-old slicer) but because of his prosthetic arm, which whined as he lifted it from his desk.

"Yeah," I said. "What's on the cubes?"

Robinson sighed, and tapped enter on his desk with a metal finger. A flood of facts and figures appeared. "That's what's on the first cube. On the rest...." He typed a few commands. A pattern of bright yellow squares appeared on the desktop.

I looked closer. "That's the starting sector. Where's the cube's directory?"

He typed a few commands. "Here." A new pattern appeared: gray, with bright red streaks.

"Any luck deciphering it?"

He shook his head. "No. And I don't think we'll have any. I doubt it's a code."

"What, then?"

He typed another command. Diagonal blue slashes appeared on a green background. "I think someone chose patterns and laid them down at random on the cube sectors. It'd foul up any pattern-recog program. But if you knew exactly where to look—"

"You'd get records. But they could be encoded, too."

"Yes." He typed another command and orange patches broke out.

"It wouldn't be easy to do, would it?"

"No. A professional would charge maybe a kilobuck per cube. But it's uncrackable."

Bad attitude for a Tech. But I let it pass for the moment. "What about the floppy?"

"Hm? Oh, the black thing. I couldn't read it. I don't think anyone can."

"Fine," I said. "Do you know the name of a Tech who won't give up so easily?"

Robinson glared at me. "Rice, this is way out of my league. It'd take me years to crack the cubes, and I don't have the resources to read the floppy. Without an outside consultant—"

"Who said you had to work without an outside consultant?"

"Albany Police."

They did? My boss would have to crack the whip again. "The FBI's in charge of the investigation now," I said. "Hire whoever you need."

"Okay." And he grinned. "Okay. With a consultant, I'll have it for you in a week."

"Hire two, and make it three days."

I started to walk out. I was in the doorway when he asked, "Rice, how'll we know when we've found something?"

I turned around, and said, "Look for computer programs or balance sheets. The government wasn't the only client Mavrides did accounting for. Anything else?"

"No."

I left his office. The cameras turned to watch me as I walked out of the building.

As far as I can tell, Leo Mavrides hadn't started out as a big-time criminal. He'd been clean when he started work for the New York State government. Hell, he probably still *was* clean as far as his government job went. It isn't easy to do anything illegal when anyone at all can be watching you.

But somewhere along the line, he'd found a way to access the Government Planning Net. It probably took him hours to get on each time, but he was willing to spend the hours during the weekend. After all, there people who paid well to get government plans ahead of schedule. The first buyer that Leo found overextended

himself and collapsed. The second bought the information but chose to ignore it. Then there was the third.

I had clear evidence for the first two buyers, but nothing at all on the third. Except tantalizing hints.

Last year, a foreign government had come out of nowhere and become an early supplier of wheat, two weeks before the American harvest arrived. They made a killing, and depressed world wheat markets. I understand that the wheat glut caused part of our inflation last summer. (But we didn't get the worst of it. The New Ugandan government cut back on food production, under the assumption that prices would stay low. The summer was very harsh in New Uganda: There are rumors of impending famine.)

That foreign government may have been Leo's third buyer. But I didn't have a shred of proof. And without any proof, the U.S. government couldn't do a thing about it.

I woke up the next morning to the sound of my desk chiming. It was my boss. I threw on my shirt and opened the line.

"Hello, Don, sorry to wake you up," she said. "I've got some news, though."

I know that when my boss says she has news it's never good. "Decided to take me off the case?" I asked.

"Nothing that simple," she said. "The Albany Police are fighting over jurisdiction. They want to know what proof we have that this is a national matter." She paused. "What proof *do* we have?"

"I've shown you the dumps and the receipts—"

"Both of which were local. What about this 'third buyer' of yours?"

"Nothing new. But—" I loaded an image of the floppy and sent it to her. "I found this in his office. I think there may be something on it."

She sighed. "Nothing better?"

"No. But I'm working on it."

"Okay." She started typing. "I'll report the floppy as a possible link to interstate interests."

"International," I said.

She shook her head. "No use pushing it. Anything else?" When I said no, she said, "Okay, I'll try to keep you on the case. But I can't hold you forever. Bye, Don."

"Bye," I said, and broke the connection. Then I dragged myself to the shower.

By the time I got out of the shower, there was a message waiting on my desk. Robinson said the consultant he'd called about the floppy reported success. I finished breakfast in three gulps and rushed over.

As I walked down the hall to Robinson's office, I passed a clean-cut, impeccably-dressed man in his mid-fifties. He smiled, and I smiled back. The hall camera ignored us.

Robinson was bent over a pile of antique computer hardware in the corner of his office. He stood up straight when I walked in. He said, "You just missed the Polaroid representative; want me to call him back?"

"No, I think I passed him in the hall. You said you recovered the floppy?"

"Yeah, Polaroid used to do data recovery on floppies. Here it is." He held up a bright red floppy disk. "Polaroid still has the original; the Rep just brought us an early copy."

"Take a look at it?" I asked.

"I don't know if they did—oh, you mean me. No, I was just about to." His prosthetic arm waved at the antique computer. He said, "I dug up this stuff at CthaatMarket—"

"At what?"

"Never mind. I just plugged it in; should be warmed up by now." It beeped. "There," he said. He put the disk into the drive, then started looking over the computer. Finally, he said, "See the restart button?"

"There isn't one," I said. "Hold down 'Ctrl' and 'Alt,' and press 'Del.'"

"Okay." The screen went black and the drive started to whir. "How did you know?"

"I used to have one of these." I could see him revising his estimate of my age upwards.

"If I get stuck, do you think you can—" He stopped when the computer beeped again. And again, and again, and the screen said

ANGRON INVADERS  
HIGHSCORE 3322199

PRESS ENTER TO START

Great. Just a great way to start a day.

And I wasted the rest of the morning trying to make some sense out of the debris the Albany Police had catalogued. I saw some sort of spool, part of a flowerpot, and more melted plastic than I'd ever seen before in my life; nothing meaningful. But we had two breakthroughs that afternoon.

The first was at Archives. Dr. Newmark called me and said she had views of the murder. I rushed over.

Dr. Newmark brushed a loose lock of silvery hair out of her eyes, and typed a command. Turning to me, she said, "This is a copy of what the camera in Mr. Mavrides's room was recording at 11:05 that morning." That made it five minutes before the package arrived.

At first, the camera seemed to point at random. We were treated to loving closeups of Leo's toner pad, his desk, the balloons in the corner. Someone very bored had been in control.

"Notice that things change about now," said Dr. Newmark. And they did. The camera stopped wandering, turned smoothly to Leo's desk, and watched Leo pull a set of numbers from the government net. Leo modified some of them, then frowned. He pulled up a set of rules and pored over them.

"What's on his desk?"

"Repair order for a new desk in Transportation," Dr. Newmark said. "Perfectly legitimate, as far as we can tell, except that they'd used the old forms. Mr. Mavrides had to update them."

Leo was still updating the forms when his door chimed. Leo said to come in, and the deliveryperson did. The camera turned smoothly to point at him. He was carrying a bright red box. He put the box down near Leo's desk, and Leo acknowledged it. Then the deliveryperson left. But the camera kept watching the box, with Leo working in the periphery. It was still watching, a minute later, when the box exploded. The picture shook, and tilted crazily on its side. We saw flames licking around the base of the wall, then the room filled with smoke. We heard, but didn't see, the fire alarm and sprinklers go on. Dr. Newmark said something about the camera being destroyed by the smoke, but I wasn't listening. I was thinking about what I'd just seen.

Someone had taken control of the camera just a few minutes before Leo had died. That same someone had watched the package, waiting for it to explode. If we could only know who!

I was still feeling frustrated at 15:00, when Robinson called. "We got something on the third cube. Want to come over?" I went.

There was a fifteen-year-old girl bent over Robinson's desk when I walked in. Robinson said, "Rice, this is Bobby Kemmerer. Bobby?" Bobby smiled: a flash of white teeth below short black bangs. Robinson continued, "She pulled out a meaningful sector." Bobby leaned away from the desktop and let me see it.

It was about a third of a page of text. I scrolled down, and saw bright blue triangles just beyond the last line. "No pointers to the next page?" Robinson shook his head.

I moved back to the beginning and started reading. Not only was it boring, but it was frustrating, too. Leo hadn't used names for anyone, just initials. So all I found out was that he'd worked with people named D and P. I was about to give up when I got to the final paragraph.

"Filed copy of transactions. P said it was a good idea but didn't know how. Gave it to S. S did conversion. Should be safe, nobody does magnetic media anymore. Will take disk in—" It stopped in midsentence.

A copy of his transactions! That would be perfect evidence, but where was it? Had he given it to S, to be converted in some way? Or had he been talking about something else? And what about the disk?

"Robinson," I said, "have you checked out the disk thoroughly?"

"Yeah." The servos in his arm whined as he typed a command. A report appeared on his desktop. "Found two dozen old programmers on CthaatMarket. One of them had Angron Invaders; said it was a collector's item. We compared disks; apart from the damage, they're identical. Nothing special about our disk, except it would have been worth money to a collector."

"What about his mention of magnetic media?" I mused. "Any idea what he's talking about?"

"No," said Robinson. "But I'll check CthaatMarket."

"Robinson," I sighed. "Just what the *hell* is CthaatMarket?"

Robinson laughed, and said he thought everybody knew. CthaatMarket was the name of the most popular computer network. You could place a request for almost anything and get some sort of response. "That's where I got the antique," he said, waving at the computer in the corner. "And that's where I found Bobby."

"Yeah, Mr. Rice," said Bobby. "There are even people there who might be old enough to remember magnetic media."

I didn't mention that I remembered magnetic media. "Robinson, I'm not doing anything. Why don't you let me check into it?"

"I—" Robinson looked me over. "I guess it'd be okay. Be careful, and don't give your access code to anyone."

"Yeah, and I'll look both ways before I cross the street." Robinson frowned at my non sequitur. I asked, "How do I get on?"

"Bobby can show you as she leaves. Bobby?"

"Sure." She grinned. "You'll want a desk. Which one can we use?"

Robinson said, "Nobody uses 15E. Down the hall, last door on the left."

"Okay. Mr. Rice?"

"Wait a minute, Bobby. One more thing, Robinson." Robinson turned to me. "Off the record, do you know any way to find out who controlled a camera at a given time?"

"In a government building? On the record, no, that's illegal. Off the record," he thought a bit. "No. But I think I know a way to find out while it's happening."

Better than nothing. "How?"

"Try CthaatMarket first. I'll try to get something lined up. If it doesn't work, we can try what I have in mind."

I frowned, but Bobby said, "Come on," and pulled me out of the room. I'd ask Robinson again later.

We entered the net and searched CthaatMarket for references to magnetic media. We didn't have to search very long; converting old recordings to cube was a popular service. Through the CthaatMarket, we found four different people who did the translations, and they could handle anything from floppies to eight-track tapes. They didn't have any idea why Mavrides had written

"nobody does magnetic media anymore." From the four people, we got references to six others who also did translations. One of the references was a man named Shepard. S for Shepard? I called, and found that Shepard was out of town. Leaving the scene of the crime, or just on vacation? I left a message with the Albany Police to find Shepard for questioning. Maybe I could straighten things out by talking to him in the morning.

But things didn't get straightened out that morning.

Quite the opposite. I woke up again to a call from my boss.

"Rice," she said, "the Albany Police went to the judge with their jurisdiction fight." She paused, and I wiped the sleep out of my eyes. "They won."

I was wide awake now. "But what about my evidence!"

"What *about* it? A floppy that plays an old arcade game? The fact that someone pointed a camera at a red box that blew up? Where's your proof? Maybe if you had those transaction records—"

I exploded. "If I had them, I'd be done with the case!"

"Yeah. But they aren't going to accept anything less." She paused. "Well?"

I told her what she could do with her 'well' and everything else. She said, "Call me when you're calmer," and disconnected.

After fuming for ten minutes, I could see her point. She'd stuck her neck out for me, and they'd taken her head. I called to apologize.

When she answered, she said, "Took you long enough. Well?"

"I'm sorry about—"

"Screw your apology, Rice," she said. "What are you going to do?"

I swallowed. "Whenever you've got a new case for me, I'm ready."

She shook her head. "Rice," she said, "you amaze me. We both know you aren't going to let go until you're done. That's why—" She paused, looking a little embarrassed. "That's why you're my best investigator."

"What the hell do you want me to say! They took me off the case!" I started to disconnect, but she just sat there, smiling.

"Rice, you know you haven't taken a vacation in two years? I'm giving you a week off." Her eyes twinkled. "Who knows, maybe you can spend it in Albany."

"I—" I bit off my angry reply as I realized what she was saying. "I—thanks."

"Fine. And Rice," she said. "I don't know what you'll do in Albany. But save me that apology; you might need it later." She disconnected, still smiling. I rushed over to see Robinson.

My security status hadn't been downgraded yet, so I managed to get into the building. I slipped into Robinson's office, and sat down to wait.

I didn't have to wait long. "Rice! What are you doing here?"

"Any news?"

Robinson looked pained. "You know I can't tell you. You're just an ordinary citizen now; Albany's on the case again. Why aren't you at work?"

"One-week vacation," I said. "Any news?"

Robinson sighed. "No. The Albany Police didn't buy your theories; they're looking for a homicide motive. Now will you please get out of my office before I get in trouble?"

"Not until you tell me how to find out who's on the end of a camera."

Robinson looked sharply at the camera on his wall. "What are you trying to do, get us both indicted?"

I shook my head. "Tell me."

Robinson looked me straight in the eye. I didn't flinch. After a moment, he said, "Coffee break time," and walked out.

I did some breathing exercises, trying to control my anger. But then Robinson stuck his head back in, and said, "Aren't you coming along? There's a vendor on Hamilton street who has great doughnuts." I mouthed a silent "Oh" and went along.

As soon as we were out of sight of the building cameras, we saw a couple of policemen. Robinson waved, and we walked around the corner. He took us to the alley.

"Rice," he pleaded, "you're going to lose me my job. And if I can't pay maintenance on this," he waved his metal



arm, "I'm unemployable. I'm not losing my arm for you or anyone else."

"I'm sorry," I said softly. "I understand how you feel—"

Robinson snorted. "Like hell." He fumed for a moment, then said, "What do you know about implants?"

I bit back the first answer that came to my mind, then said, "They connect to your nervous system and amplify signals."

"Like the Headphone. You know about the Headphone?"

"I wear one," I said, and rubbed the left side of my neck. "Hearing impairment."

"So maybe you *do* know something." Robinson was silent for another moment. "What would you say if I told you there are people who connect their visual perceptive systems to implants?"

"No way. The software's at least—" I stopped when I saw the look on his face. "Oh." I thought for a moment. "Christ."

"Exactly," said Robinson. "Illegal, but all the best things in life are. And if you hook yourself to a net—hell, nobody's written software that compares to the human brain. Nothing's half as fast or flexible. Gib—the man I know says he can read anything that's open on the Net, and get around half the stuff that isn't. That's how you find out who's on the other side of a camera. Now, was that worth dragging out of me? You going under the knife for an illegal operation that could leave you blind?"

I thought about it. I thought of spending two months trailing a phantom who'd turned out to be a middle-aged accountant. I thought of my boss, who'd said I was the best because I never gave up. I thought of being so close, *so* close.

I thought of hungry children in New Uganda.

"Where do I go for the operation?"

Robinson sighed, the longest sigh I'd heard from him. He said, "Connect to CthaatMarket, get to the cosmetic surgery section, and ask for Bradley Gibson. Gibson's the best at this sort of thing." And he walked away.

## Part Two: CthaatSpace

**A**fter the interminable haggling, after tubing to New York and spending two hours finding Gibson's

place, I had finally gone under the knife in a cluttered, but spotless and sterile room. I woke up in the middle of a colossal cave.

I shut my eyes and tried opening them again. The cave was still there.

"Gibson!" I bellowed. Strangely, it didn't echo.

Part of the cave wall swiveled inward, and Gibson ran inside. He said, "Don't worry. Take a deep breath and listen."

"Where the hell—!"

"I said, don't worry." He shut up. After a few seconds of babbling, I did too.

"All right," he said. "One question at a time."

"Where the hell am I?"

"You're inside the—" Gibson's eyes unfocused, and I saw a brown streak move across my vision for a moment. Then he laughed. It made me madder and madder.

"Oh, sorry," Gibson said after a minute. "It's just that—well, you're the first patient to put things together so quickly. They usually wake up asking what the smoke is. But your visual perceptions have *already* adjusted. Must be because of your earlier implants."

"Gibson!" I yelled. "Where the hell am I!"

"No need to shout," he said, peeved. He continued, "I already told you. You're inside the operating room."

"When did you move the operating room inside a cave?"

"I didn't," he said. "Stare at the stalactite on my left for a moment."

I did. Then I bellowed, "Hey!"

Gibson nodded. "It started to fade, right? You're still inside the operating room. It's just that your visual perceptive system is getting two signals; one from your eyes, and one from your implant." The brown streak flashed across my vision again. "It's doing a marvelous job," he finished.

"Marvelous! I see brown marks!"

Gibson smiled. "That's just me. I switched to your perspective for a moment."

"Switched to my—Gibson, are you reading my mind?"

Gibson laughed. "No. I can just access the data stream coming out of the implant. The flow's two way; your implant gives your brain data, and your brain sends some of it back. The two feedback to keep everything working. The brown streak is because the data stream freezes for a moment when I connect in."

"I—" I thought for a moment. "So my mind's making a cave?"

"No," Gibson said.

"No! Then where the hell's the cave coming from?"

"The circuitry in my walls has to be on all the time," Gibson said. "So I use the transmitted signal for decoration. I used to go spelunking," he finished wistfully.

"Great! So I'm going to hallucinate wherever I go—"

"No! I told you, this stuff's only good where the walls are wired with transmitter/receivers. This is the only place where you'll see decoration. Well, apart from other CthaaSpace enclaves."

He looked at me as if he was waiting for me to ask what CthaaSpace was. I refused. "Gibson," I said, "how does seeing a cave get me better computer access?"

He said, "It doesn't. This is just surface stuff; there's a second level where you get to—" He stopped and thought a moment. Finally, he continued, "It isn't easy to describe. The closest thing I can say is, you get to deal with the computers on their own level."

"That doesn't make any sense."

"We can argue it when you wake up."

I said, "I'm not sleepy," but then I realized that I was.

"Surgery takes a lot out of you," Gibson said. "I'll leave you now."

"Gibson," I said as I started to drift off. "How'll I call for you when I wake up?"

He shook his head. "Won't have to. I've got your pattern now, and set an alarm. Sleep tight." Then the cave wall swiveled again, and Gibson left.

Gibson was seated on a large rock when I woke up again. "How do you feel?" he asked.

"Great," I said, and I realized I meant it. "Totally ready. Now, can I look at the second level?"

"In a moment. First, though: any irregularities in your vision?"

"Why don't you sample me and find out?"

"I am," Gibson said. "Just wanted to know if you have any problems."

I frowned. "What about the brown streaks?"

"They're gone. While you were sleeping, your brain adapted to the last parts of the interface. It even set up a low-level defense system."

"What do you mean?"

"This—" he said. He picked up a rock and threw it at me, hard. I yelped and tried to duck. The rock turned into a wadded piece of paper as it hit me. "Sorry," he said, "I couldn't warn you. But what did you see when the paper got close?"

I said, "Gibson! I'm tired of playing games."

He said, "Hold still and listen to your doctor. This is serious."

I shut up.

"Now, you don't remember what you saw, so we'll play it back. Close your eyes."

"Play it back"? How?"

"It's just a video signal, like any other. I recorded it while I sampled it. Now close your eyes."

I closed them. Gibson said, "First frame." After a moment, I saw the inside of the cave, with Gibson frozen in place while reaching for the rock. "Mmm, too dark. Turn up the brightness."

"How?" I asked.

"Not yet. Just wait a moment."

I did, and my eyes adjusted to the darkness. Or—hell, they did *something* so I could see.

"Good," Gibson said. "Now we'll run it slow."

We did. Gibson threw the rock in slow motion, it headed for me...and a few seconds before it hit, it wavered. Finally, it turned into a wad of paper. "Look at the background," Gibson said. I did. It was the inside of my operating room. "In an emergency, the brain shuts off the implant signal," he said.

"How do I shut it off now?" I asked.

He sighed. "That's what we'll try to find out. You'll have to find the right thoughts to get the emergency cutoff. It'll take at least an hour."

It took two, but when I figured it out, I could turn it off in under a millisecond. "Not bad," Gibson said. "Usually it takes longer. Thank your hip implant."

I growled. "My hip is none of your business."

"Sorry," he said. "But it just got you used to signal processing, that's all. You have more potential than me."

"Okay. What's the next lesson?"

"Sleep," Gibson said. "It's been six hours, and I'm tired. See you in the morning." I did the cutoff and saw him walk out the door for the first time. Then I went to sleep.

I dreamed I was walking around inside a large cave with stalactites. But whenever I looked too closely, parts of the cave faded into snow. Video snow, that is, though it was three-dimensional somehow. I tried looking at the snow closely, to make it fade, but it didn't. Strange.

I turned around, and saw a passageway that hadn't been there before. There was a dim, phosphorescent green light. I stared into the green light, but it didn't get any brighter. After a while, the walls started dissolving, and turned into snow. That didn't bother me, in the dream. When there was nothing left but snow, I started walking towards the green light.

After a moment, I saw a large cavity in the snow just ahead of me. There was a green globe in the geometrical center of the cavity. I stepped inside, and was suddenly weightless. Weird. I pushed toward the green light, and bumped against it lightly. It was a little warm. I felt all over its surface, found some sort of seam. I pushed—

—and in a flash, all the snow vanished and was replaced by bright green lights. Gravity had reappeared, stronger than I'd ever felt. I clung desperately to the seam, but it was starting to give. My left hand scrabbled for another handhold, anything, until my right lost its grip. I fell half a kilometer, saw an infinitely hard green plane below me—

—and woke up, feeling more confused than scared. It took me hours to get back to sleep again.

"Right," Gibson said in the morning. "I've taken the surface stuff as far as it'll go; now you're ready for the real thing?"

"Second level?" I asked.

"Yes," Gibson said. "We'll start by mixing the two levels; I'll give you a low-power signal plus a visual of the data flow through the walls."

"I don't understand," I said.

"Hold on, it's easier just to show you." His eyes unfocused for a moment. The cave vanished, to be replaced by the operating room. "There. What do you see?"

"The operating room," I said.

"Really?" Gibson unfocused again. "Oh. Okay. Let me try again."

Gibson sat without focusing his eyes for almost five minutes. Finally, I asked, "What are you trying to do?"

"Send a low-power direct signal plus a distractor."

"What?"

"Never mind," he said. "It's just that your mind refuses to mix the two. Somehow, you built a barrier that keeps the second level from coming in at the same time as the surface stuff."

"Can't you get around it?"

"I've been trying," he said. "Not so far; everything gets stopped cold."

"Well, why don't you just send a second-level signal straight?"

"Not until I understand what's wrong."

"How long can that take?"

He didn't look happy. "Not long. I should have gotten it by now."

"You should have," I repeated. Then I said, "Dr. Gibson, I haven't got very long. Seven days since I walked in—"

"I can't—"

"Dr. Gibson," I said, "I want you to try without a halfway measure. Send me a low-power signal without your distractor."

Gibson sat up straight and looked me in the eye. His words were precise and clipped. "Mr. Rice," he said. "Your mind never evolved to handle a direct signal."

Everything gets caught by your senses, filtered by your perceptions. If you took it straight, you could lose your sanity.”

I looked straight back at him. “Dr. Gibson, I understand that you’ve gotten yourself involved in surgery that’s banned under the Implant Acts of 2024. I don’t see why you aren’t a little worried about your legal standing.”

Gibson’s expression turned icy. We stared at each other for a minute, then I cast my eyes down. “I’m sorry,” I said. “I don’t know why I said that. I—I’m just worried. I’ve spent days here, and I need results fast. You were my last hope.”

Gibson’s expression softened, and he said, “Perhaps you’re right. I can build a ‘wall’ between you and the main connection and try a weak direct signal. But I—” He stopped there and sighed. “Lie back on the couch, and put this in your mouth.” He gave me a piece of plastic.

I frowned. “What is it?”

“Keeps you from biting through your tongue.” His eyes unfocused. “Whenever you’re ready.”

I put the plastic in my mouth, breathed deeply through my nose, and nodded—

—and found myself blinded by green, green, green all around me burning like lava and swirling and I was drowning and somewhere I knew my body was shaking and I wanted to scream but couldn’t control my mouth couldn’t even see my body and the green oh God the green—

—but somewhere there was a white dot I turned and tried to swim through the green towards the dot but sank sank but tried harder moved a little closer towards the white—

—it wasn’t just a white dot it was a spot of video snow I swam harder but it wasn’t enough I was going to sink sink into insanity and death—

—but the fear gave me an extra kick I made it to the snow pulled it around me—

And suddenly I was through.

My brain had converted those first direct signals to visual perceptions, had tried to save me from taking them directly. But not anymore.

There isn’t any way I can describe what was happening to me. I felt like an electric current surging through the walls of the room, but not really. I bumped into the boundaries and limits of Gibson’s wall systems, but it wasn’t really a bump. I saw the connections to the outside world, but I didn’t really “see” anything. I just can’t describe what I felt in the seconds while my mind raced through Gibson’s computer systems.

While I was playing, I felt a connection to something inside the room. Gibson. Gibson was worried, and trying to talk to me in a simple, visual way. I laughed, and ran my perceptions over his connections. I saw where he’d tried to build a wall that I’d smashed joyfully when I went through. I saw that he was getting frantic, so I made sure I could reconnect to this level again, and broke back into my body—

—and spat the piece of plastic out, and laughed hard. “Gibson,” I said. “I got my money’s worth. If I can’t use this—” I shifted the conversation to the direct level: to get everything I need, then there’s no way. But I know I can get it all. Thank you, thank you, thank you. I thank you (here I sent him a lurid visual signal, a bright red valentine) from the bottom of my heart.

So it was on Friday morning, six days after I’d walked into Gibson’s place, that I was standing back outside the government building where Leo Mavrides had worked. I was wearing a maintenance uniform, and carrying an interface pak and a dataslate with instructions on installing the pak. Of course, if anyone looked closely....The interface pak wasn’t really the tester it seemed to be; it was really a transmitter that would connect me to the building net through a standard desk. It was crude—I wouldn’t be able to get visual signals, and the connection to the second level would be slow and cramped—but it’d be more than enough for my initial sortie. All I wanted to know for now was what the Albany Police had done, and where they’d put Leo’s cubes. I would come back later to plant software traps on the cameras and try to analyze the cubes. All I had to do now was walk in, take the elevator to 15E, and connect. Trying to look like a bored maintenance man, I pushed the door open and walked into the building...

...and stumbled, spilling my slate and pak. Instead of a dingy government lobby, I’d walked into a forest clearing, complete with babbling brook! I thought the cutoff, and picked the slate and pak up. Then I found the nearest chair and sat down heavily.

Someone had studded the inside of this lobby with electronics that had no purpose but communication with visual implants! But who? And why?

It didn't make any sense, none at all. It must have cost kilobucks, and if anyone caught on....I looked up, and hurriedly turned away. The wall camera was watching me.

I'd already blown it by stumbling at the entrance; if whoever had built this CthaatSpace enclave (wasn't that Gibson's term?) had been watching, he knew I was here. So...I shed all caution, and tried to connect on the second level.

Connection came swiftly and clearly. I surged through the system, was amazed to find that it spanned the entire building. *Tens* of kilobucks, then. And who could—

With equal swiftness and clarity, the connection vanished. I was stunned; I thought nothing short of an EMP could cut a connection that quickly.

I opened my eyes and found myself facing a giant.

He was two and a quarter meters tall, with unkempt brown hair and a scraggly beard. He was clad roughly, in animal skins that looked like they'd been taken just a minute ago. He carried a large club—actually, it was more like a freshly-uprooted tree.

His voice came through on the second level. It boomed, and matched his appearance. It said, Who are you?

I gathered my wits and responded on the second level: Not important. What are *you* doing here?

The giant scowled, said, I created this place. You are here without my permission. Before I destroy you (he hefted the club) I shall give you a chance to explain yourself.

This was getting silly. All I had to do was think the cutoff, and yell at the camera for help. But perhaps the giant knew something. To humor him, I said, I'm Donald Rice, and I'm looking for—

He cut me off. Your trivial search is of no interest to me. Leave here, Donald Rice.

I said, As soon as I find what I need. If you can help me—

The giant replied, I have no interest in helping anyone too incompetent to see what's before his own eyes.

Hotly I said, So you know who killed Mavrides?

The giant shook his head. Not important; assassins can be bought on the open market. No, but everything else I do know.

I said, Where are the transaction records?

He shook his head and said, I have no interest in helping the police.

I said, If you help, we may be able to give you amnesty for building all this—

He laughed. Who will give *you* amnesty, Donald Rice. You're wearing more implants than I am.

He kept laughing, and I got mad enough to think the cutoff—

—and I saw a blinding flash. Even though it wasn't real, my instincts responded; my pupils shrank and everything went black. I heard the sound of running footsteps. I switched to the second level, and grabbed desperately for him. I located him as he entered the elevator, and started running my senses over him, trying to get his pattern. I didn't get much; hardly a second had passed before he noticed me, and turned as slick as glass—I lost him. I connected to the building computer and found that it had forgotten what elevators were—he hadn't wasted the second. By now, my vision had cleared, and I swept through the cameras, searching for the elevators on my own since the building didn't know where they were. It was fruitless. It took me nearly ten minutes to find all the cameras in the elevator lobbies; by that time, he was long gone.

I rubbed my eyes and thought it over. Whoever the giant was, he'd suddenly become my best lead. I would have to come back and find him. Problem was, I couldn't do that without looking on the second level, and that'd keep me from ever seeing his real appearance. But there was something I could do about that.

The giant and I had come out even in our first encounter. I was going to beat him in our next. I went home to call my boss.

“Charlotte?” I said.

My boss turned toward the screen. “Don! Where are you? Do you have the records?”

I said, “I'm at home. No, I don't have the records, but I have a lead on them.”

She snapped, “You called me out of a meeting with the NBI Branch Heads of the Seven Cities just to tell me you have a lead?”

“I'm sorry,” I said. “But Charlotte, I need your help.”

"What?" she barked. Seeing me start, she smiled, and said. "Sorry, but I know when you call me Charlotte, I'm not going to like it."

I said, "Okay...boss." We both laughed at that. I told her a carefully edited version of my encounter with the giant, treating it as a meeting in a side street, and leaving out everything concerning implants.

She listened without enthusiasm. Finally, she said, "Rice, why do you think this is a lead?"

My boss calls me Rice for half a dozen reasons. This time, it meant that she was annoyed. "Because of what he said. I think he knows where the records are."

"Because of what he said," she repeated. Then: "Rice, why do you believe him?"

Why *did* I? When I'd heard him on the second level, I'd been convinced he'd told the truth. But I didn't know *why*. I only knew that it hadn't "sounded" like a lie or boast.

None of which I could explain to my boss. "Uh, I can't tell you."

"Great." She grimaced. After a moment, she said, "So, Rice, what did you want from me?"

"A codebreaker."

She exploded. "Great! You call me out of a meeting, tell me you talked to some guy in a dark alley, and you want a codebreaker! What the hell do I tell the judge, one of my boys had a hunch?" She disconnected.

I called her back immediately, using my priority code. I said, "I'm sorry, Charlotte, but I need the codebreaker."

"Why?"

Why? Because I think it'll let me trap him. Or at least slow him down enough so I can do the cutoff and see his face. But I'd have to explain implants. "I can't tell you."

"Rice!" She took a deep breath, calmed down a little. "Rice, I don't know why you bothered to call. We both know that your story won't satisfy a judge—"

"I know."

"Then why did you pull me out of my meeting?" She took another breath, and said in a calmer voice, "Why, Rice? Tell me."

I took a breath myself. "Because Judge Cadigan owes you a favor."

"Great!" She reached for the disconnect, decided against it. We both knew I'd just call back. "Great," she said. "Rice, do you know how long I've been holding that favor? Eight months. I didn't use it for Bettendorf, or Cline, or Montgomery—"

"Charlotte," I said, "they didn't need it as much as I do."

"Maybe," she said. "Rice, why the hell should I give it to you?"

I said, "Because I'm your best investigator."

She looked ready to explode again, and I cringed. But when the explosion came, it was of laughter. She said, "I knew it'd come back to haunt me." She thought about it a moment, then said, "Okay, Don, you've got your codebreaker. I'll get it to you in the morning?"

"Charlotte," I said, "I need it before Leo's building closes for the weekend."

"Why?" She raised her hand and said, "I know, don't bother, you can't tell me." She drew another deep breath, made a face. "Okay, I'll call Judge Cadigan now. It'll be on your desk by one. I hope you enjoy your lunch more than I will."

I thought over my plans as I ate lunch. At exactly one p.m., my desk got a call from the Justice Department and started printing out the documentation on the codebreaker. I went over and looked at it.

It said that the codebreaker could only be launched once; nothing new there. The codebreaker had to be launched sometime in the next twenty-four hours. I hadn't known that, but it didn't matter. The codebreaker would take at least forty seconds to execute. Ouch!

I looked through the rest of the documentation carefully, and found a section (under the heading "For Software Technicians Only") on shortening the time. Turned out that there was a command to put the codebreaker into standby mode; if I could fence off a couple megabytes for it, it would set itself up and await the attack order. I plugged Gibson's interface into my desk and set aside a couple megabytes and meticulously built the fence described in the manual. When I was sure it was perfect, I put the codebreaker in place, and told it to go on standby. I gave it a copy of the pattern scrap I'd taken from the giant. The codebreaker read it and warned that it couldn't give a better than sixty percent chance of

success without more information. When I saw the giant again, I'd try to get more of his pattern.

Out of curiosity, I tried running my perceptions over the codebreaker. The result was—strange. The codebreaker kept shifting its pattern, writhing like a snake. The second-level equivalent of camouflage, I guess.

Satisfied, I disconnected everything and went to my wardrobe. I pulled out my suit and put it down on the bed. Then I sat on it. After that I put it on; good, it was nicely rumpled. I looked like a harried company Rep who'd been called in by the Albany Police. Which was fine, because it'd let me walk around the building without rousing any suspicions. Time to go. I headed for the tube.

I managed to slip into the building an hour before it closed, and found a secluded spot. I stole two megabytes of storage space from the building computer, fenced them off, and put the codebreaker on standby. After a couple minutes, I managed to arrange things so that the fenced-off area followed me around. Then I started searching through the building for a fast-moving pattern.

Nothing on the first two floors. Nothing on the third floor. But—there, down a corridor, near Mavrides's room. I only got a little, but it felt like the giant's pattern. I headed for the elevator.

They'd cordoned off the hallway leading to Mavrides's room. Strange. Making sure nobody was around, and turning the hall camera away, I stepped over the cordon, and walked into the room.

There was someone sitting behind the pile of slag that'd been Mavrides's desk. He said, "Come in." I did, and he looked up.

It was Leo Mavrides.

He laughed at the expression on my face, his outlines blurring. When they'd settled again, he was the giant. He spoke to me on the second level: Sorry, Rice, I couldn't resist.

I calmed myself down, thinking it would be a pleasure to launch the codebreaker at him, and said (on the second level): Don't mention it.

He said, Rice, you're trailing something. Like— (I felt him running over my pattern on the second level. Hastily, I erased all connections to the codebreaker. He continued:) Well, I guess it doesn't matter. I have a business proposition for you, Rice. Are you listening?

I connected myself back to the codebreaker, and said, Uh if you tell me where the transactions are, yeah, I'll listen.

He said, Okay, I'll help you find them if you listen to me. (Why were his eyes twinkling?) He continued, Rice, you've been wearing your implant for a few days; have you really thought about it?

I said, No.

He asked, Why did you get it?

I said, I wanted to set camera traps. The guy who killed Mavrides took control of his camera to make sure the bomb worked.

I heard the giant's booming laughter. After a moment, he said, Sorry. But it's just that the best people got into it for the wrong reasons.

I said, Excuse me?

He said, This is getting nowhere. Rice, why are implants illegal?

I shrugged, said, You've got me.

The giant answered his own question by saying, Partly because people are squeamish about applying signal processing to nerve impulses. But mostly because they're afraid of the power it could give someone.

I said, Power?

The giant said, Rice, do you realize how powerful these things are? You can already move through the nets faster than people who've been slicers for twenty years, and your reaction time is much, much shorter than theirs. When people realize how great our capabilities are, things are going to change.

Great, I'd found a power-hungry fanatic. I said, And when things change, you plan to come out on top?

The giant frowned. He said, Rice, that's not important to me. You can't suppress this technology for long. When it leaks, it's going to turn civilization upside-down. If that's got to happen, I think it should happen *now*. We're safe, secure, and at peace. If this had been developed during a war.... (The giant shuddered.)

Perhaps he wasn't a simple megalomaniac, then. I thought a moment, then said, So why are you talking to me about it?

The giant said, Because you're bright and you don't give up. We—my associates and I—are planning to go to

court to make visual implants legal. We need as much manpower and as much strength as we can get. Now, do you want to join our revolution?

I said, I'll think about it. Now, where are the transaction records?

He laughed again, breaking the spell. He said, We're back to that again? Rice, they're in this room. If you had eyes, you'd see them.

Then he vanished.

Cursing myself for a fool, I shifted to the second level and grabbed for his pattern. I didn't get much, and it was receding fast. I gave the codebreaker everything I had, and launched it. That should take care of him.

Gingerly, I ran my perceptions around the cutoff area of my implant. Yes, he'd set another flash trap. I scraped it away cautiously—

—when suddenly trap, scraper, and even perceptions vanished. Stunned, I opened my eyes, and saw a tall man with brown hair running towards me and carrying a stick. I raised my arm to fend off the blow, but it was too late. The stick came down, and everything went black.

I woke up underneath the bundle of balloons. A voice out of nowhere said, "Rice, your damned codebreaker managed to crash the building system. Let's see how you like living without implants."

They aren't that important to me, I answered the voice. I got up to leave...and couldn't.

Dammit, they didn't play fair! I tried a few probes on the second level, found that everything was tangled like spaghetti. It'd take at least a half-hour to clear it out. I started on it.

But then I heard the sound of hissing. I saw a cannister in a corner of the room, and suddenly realized what the cordons in the hallway had been for. The Albany Police, in their infinite wisdom, had decided to fumigate Leo's room! Fighting my panic, I thought back twenty years....

*It was a dark and stormy night: The wind was howling and the rain was coming down in sheets. I'd been trailing a man for three days now, and it looked like he was near the distribution point. He was crossing the street, and I followed him carefully. He suddenly looked over his shoulder, saw me, and grinned. Then he took off like a shot. Cursing, I ran after him. I never saw the car.*

*I woke up in the hospital two days later. The car had done an almost surgically precise job of crushing my*

*last few vertebrae, breaking the connections from my spine to my legs. They told me I'd never walk again.*

*I didn't give up, of course. I was in and out of the hospital, trying surgery, trying therapy. Nothing worked. I learned to live in a wheelchair, to crawl when necessary. And I became bitter.*

*Two years later, a doctor came in to see me, with a proposition. She'd been looking at some of the research on electronic augmentation of nerve signals, and thought some of it could be applied to spinal damage. She'd had fair success with test animals, and now the FDA had given her approval to try a human subject. I was the best one available for her purposes; was I willing to try?*

*I threw her out of the house. Damned doctors, always poking, prodding, telling you the therapy would work if only you'd try hard enough....*

*But I called her back the next day, and apologized. Gritting my teeth, I agreed to be her subject.*

I came out of my reverie with a laugh. I'd been so resentful, back then: resentful of the doctors, resentful of the therapists, resentful of the hip implant that came only after two years of hardship and indignity. But now I saw how stupid I'd been; I should have really been grateful to the doctor who'd let me walk again. When I got out of this, I was going to send her a bunch of flowers. I laughed again, and started coughing from the fumes.

But I didn't panic. I thought back to the therapist who'd taught me how to crawl. I crawled out of Leo's room. I got to the hall (where, presumably, the camera didn't have an idyllic scene of a motionless room playing for the benefit of watchers) and waved at the camera. After few minutes, the camera started nodding; help was on the way. I settled back with a smile, and inhaled too much of the fumes.

I woke up in the hospital again, and the young male nurse who was watching me called for reinforcements. I talked to the doctor, starting out simple and ending up flirtatious. After one of my more flamboyant sallies, she said she was glad to know I was feeling better, and asked if I was willing to see my boss. I made another proposition, and the doctor grinned and let my boss in.

"Don!" she said. "We were worried! You found a hell of a way to spend a vacation!"

I grinned. "Hi, Charlotte, thanks for the flowers." Something occurred to me. "Uh, Charlotte, when they brought me in for inhalation, they didn't look at anything else, did they?"



The doctor spoke up. "Well, we did spot some unusual hardware connected to your implants." She winked. "We ignored it, figuring it wasn't hurting anything. It wasn't, was it?"

"No." I grinned again.

"Why are you so happy?" said Charlotte. "Your vacation's over; you'll be back at work as soon as they let you out—"

"Not before the day after tomorrow," my doctor interrupted.

"—and it'll be back to the grindstone. Why so happy?"

I grinned even wider. "I know where the transaction records are."

Charlotte was out of her chair in an instant. "Where?"

I kept grinning, and shook my head. "I'm not going to tell you, I'm going to show you. Doc, are you sure the day after tomorrow is the earliest I'm getting out?"

"Well...." She typed some commands on the desk. "Move your legs okay?"

I tried the test they'd taught me eighteen years ago. "Yeah." I quoted the line they'd taught me then: "No unusual sluggishness, or—"

"Fine," my doctor said. "You're resting tonight, but I'll let you out tomorrow. If you're a good boy, that is."

Charlotte tried to argue to let me out earlier, but my doctor just smiled. After a few minutes, Charlotte gave up, and said, "Anything I should know, Don?"

"Don't let the Albany Police touch Mavrides's room," I said.

"Okay. Will do."

We chatted for five minutes, then I yawned. My doctor shooed everybody out. I settled back, and pulled over the desk's spare keyboard. It was strange to be typing instead of just moving through the net directly. I sent my doctor a bunch of flowers, sent Charlotte a bunch of flowers, and gave instructions to have flowers sent to my old doctor. Then, after checking out one other thing and reading a message that was waiting for me, I went to sleep.

They discharged me at eleven the next morning, but with all the forms I had to fill out I wasn't out of the hospital till noon. I met Charlotte in the lobby of Mavrides's building. She greeted me, and told me that she'd told her Branch Head we had the proof they needed. She asked, "You *do* have the proof, don't you?"

"Oh ye of little faith....Of course I do. It's in Mavrides's room."

"All right," she said, and we walked to the elevator.

"Really very simple," I said when we were inside the room. "Mavrides figured that his storage system was so old, no one would recognize it." I paused. "He was almost right."

Charlotte said, "It wasn't the disk?"

I shook my head. "No, that was the payment. For the person who made this." I walked over to the bunch of balloons. One of the ribbons was brown; I pulled it out. Handing it to Charlotte, I said, "Magnetic tape. It should be easy to find someone to convert it back; check CthaatMarket."

That night, when I was home, I dug out the interface pak and plugged it in. I thought about the message I'd read last night. When I had called one of the conversion services, something had appeared on my desk just before the final connection. It had said:

Very good Rice. You aren't so blind after all. We can still use your help; what do you say?

It had been signed "Sterling" and included a number for connection on the net. It had also included the program that Sterling had put on the camera in Leo's room. The program had provisions for calling the paramedics if I hadn't escaped in another minute.

I thought about the program. I thought about the implants the doctors had put in my body, and the latest one. I thought about the attitude that if you had to turn civilization upside down, you should do it when things were stable.

Then I called the number Sterling had given me.

# Necklace

by Rochelle Dvorak

The wailing of passing sirens filled the tiny bedroom. A man lay sprawled, face down, on the bed beside a still woman. He stirred, moaning. He pushed himself slowly into a sitting position, so as not to disturb the sleeping woman or his own pounding head. Dak Hawkins squinted out the darkening window as the last rays of light reflected off the heavy silver necklace he always wore around his neck. Dak eased himself off the bed, grabbing a pile of jumbled clothing from the floor on the way to the bedroom door.

In the next room, Dak silently pulled on a faded, ripped pair of jeans, a red "Black Friday" rock band t-shirt, an old Kevlar military jacket from the corporate wars of '09 and a pair of biker boots. Into the left boot went a .44 Bulldog, .45 Servicemaster in the back waistband of his jeans, .357 Desert Eagle in the shoulder holster and a knife up each sleeve. From the table he took three stimulants and swallowed them in quick succession. Hearing a sound from the other room, he quickly let himself out the door.

A few minutes later, he was on the now-dark streets. Only a few people were visible. "Money." He needed money desperately. He still owed for the new cyber arm and if he didn't come up with the money on his own, the MedCare Corporation would give him jobs he couldn't refuse. He flexed the new arm, mentally hearing the servos. With the arm, he could easily crush someone's throat. No time to find a job that paid the kind of money he needed; he would have to see if an old acquaintance of his would buy some of his stuff.

Twenty minutes later, Dak pushed open the door of Gib's Electrical Repair Store. The short, graying owner himself was behind the counter. "Evening Dak, where ya been keeping yourself?"

"Nowhere special."

Gib asked, "What can I do for you this evening?" Dak pulled out the .45 Servicemaster and said to the now-frightened Gib, "I just want to sell this, what can you give me for it?"

Without looking at it, Gib said, "Don't really need any more guns but I could give you 800 credits for the

necklace you're wearing, real silver, ain't it?" Dak narrowed his eyes and absentmindedly clutched the chain. Memories of his partner and lover, Kestrel, flooded into his mind. Memories of her lithe grace in battle in some darkened back alley, the same grace later sensual, when they made love in their apartment. The tearing memories of her death, her wooden body falling clumsily to the ground, blood pouring from multiple bullet holes. Dak shook his head to clear the memories. "Not for sale, ever!" he growled huskily.

"Tell you what I can do for you," Gib suggested, "I have something that needs to be picked up at the Sim-Stim Club on fourth street. I'll give you 200 credits when you get back, but ya gotta hurry." Dak wondered what it was. He needed the money and he really didn't have anything to sell but the tools of his trade so he overrode his customary caution and accepted. Gib whispered the name of the person he was to get the package from and Dak walked hurriedly out the door.

From behind the curtain in Gib's store, two men in expensive suits stepped out. "Our business is now at an end, little man," one of the "suits" said. "Wait," pleaded Gib, "Shouldn't you wait for Dak to return with the package?" "We'll let him pick it up and then we'll take it from him. It shouldn't be too hard for two corporate samurai to take whatever they want from a down-on-his-luck mercenary. It will probably be boring. Speaking of boring, we really don't need you anymore and we can't let someone get away with taking in stolen property of the Takashi Corporation. It sets a bad example for the rest of the world." A grin split the otherwise chiseled face, and he nodded at his companion. Gib began to run but didn't even get halfway across the room before one of the "suits" leaped over the counter and 20 feet across the room. He grabbed Gib by the collar and one-handedly held him up so that his legs dangled wildly. Then, looking Gib in the eye, and grinning coldly, he curled his left hand into a fist. SNICK! Razor sharp, 4-inch claws sprang out of his knuckles. With a swift horizontal motion, he ripped Gib's throat out and threw the twitching body onto the floor.

Dak arrived at the Sim-Stim Club. People of all kinds lay in booths, electrical wires running from their bodies to

nearby machinery. People who found it safer to live out parts of other people's lives than to live out their own. Dak spotted a technician, "Where can I find Shirley?" he asked. The technician wordlessly pointed out another technician working at a desk in the back of the room. Dak walked over and said, "I'm here to pick up a package for Gib."

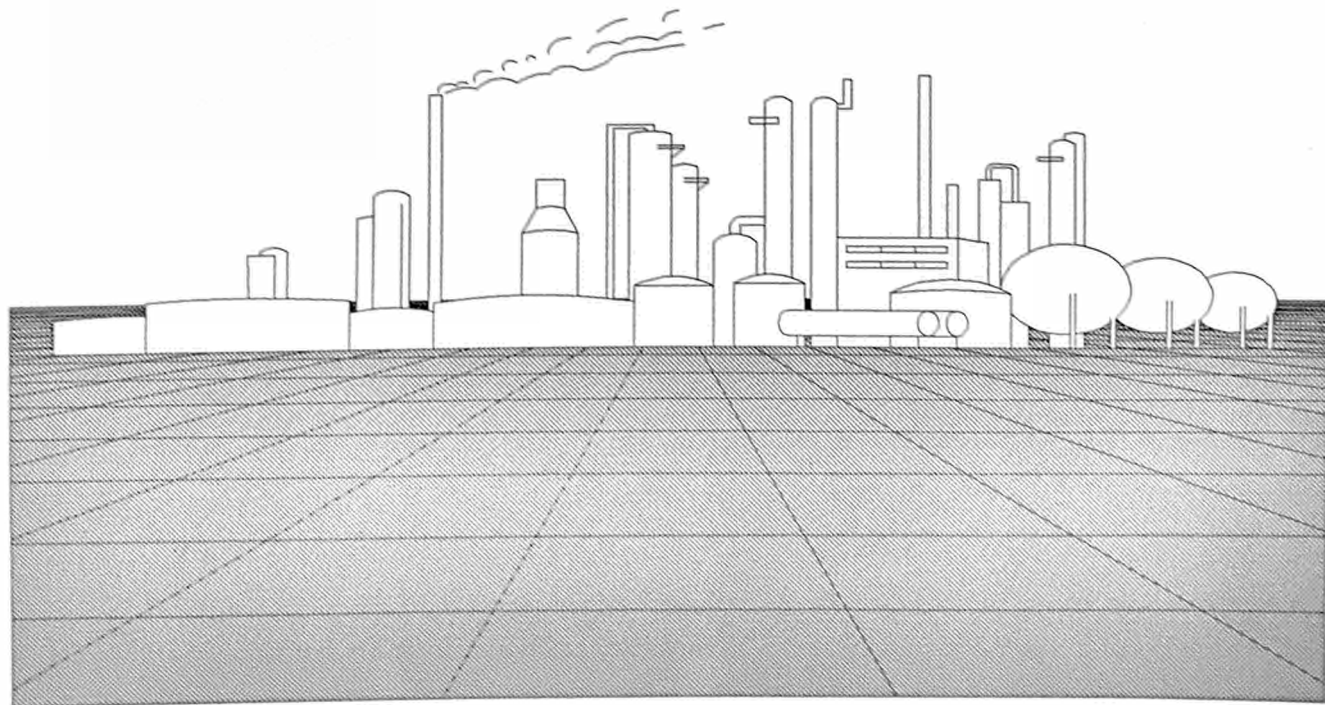
"Wait here," she said, rising and walking through a door behind her desk. A few minutes later she came back with a brown package the size of a piece of bread. Dak wordlessly put the package into the inside pocket of his jacket and left.

He had only gone a few blocks, when he heard a gunshot and was slammed face down onto the pavement by the force of slug hitting his Kevlar jacket. He rolled over to the side of a building, .357 Desert Eagle in hand. Mentally switching on the infrared option of his left eye, he scanned the streets for his assailant. Off to the left, crouched in the doorway of an apartment building, Dak saw a man with a rifle pointed his way. Dak took careful aim and squeezed off two shots. The first went a little wide, just over the man's right ear. The second shot took him in the right eye and threw him back against the wall, where he slowly slid to the ground and stayed. Dak took a deep breath and when he looked around once more, he saw nothing out of the ordinary. He got up, gun still in hand, and headed for the alley and a shortcut he knew.

He knew it had sounded too easy for the number of credits involved. He'd have to talk to Gib about that.

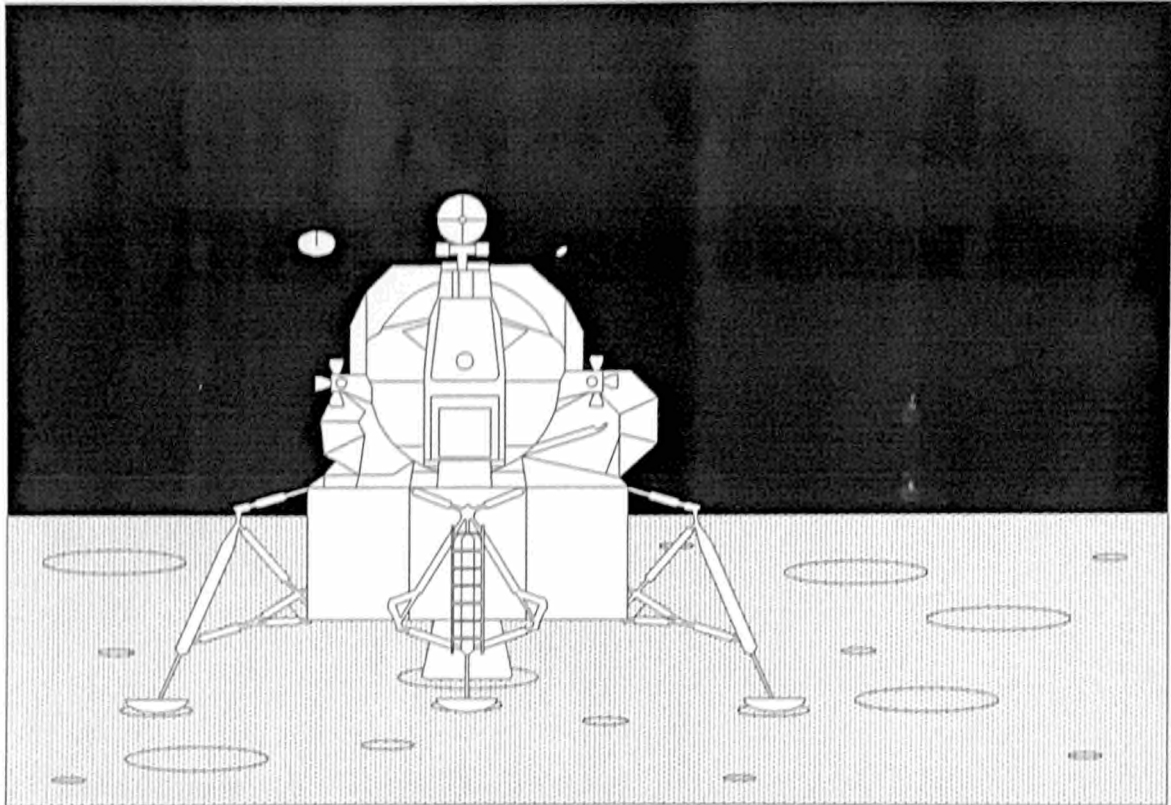
Once in the alley, Dak felt safer: It was where he operated best. Skirting the usual garbage in the alley, human and organic, he made his way swiftly to Gib's store. He was only 15 feet from Gib's back door when he was again hit from the rear by a high-powered rifle shot. Again it shoved him face first into the pavement, only this time he didn't move. A man in an expensive suit jumped down from the roof of the two-story building and nudged the body with the toe of one of his expensive shoes. He reached under the body and into the jacket for the package that he had been after for so long. Wheeling about, he headed down the alley and into the street.

A small figure came out of one of the trashcans in the alley. It moved furtively toward the body, eyes darting around cautiously. Its dirty fingers lightly but efficiently searched the body for anything of value. The three guns and two knives quickly disappeared into the folds of its clothing. When the fingers rested upon the necklace, they gleamed with feral delight. "This will be enough money to last me several months," she thought, taking it from around Dak's neck. She lightly and quickly moved the other way down the alley and into the street. The wailing of passing sirens filled the dark, narrow alley as a dead man lay sprawled, face down in a pool of his own blood.



# Explore New Worlds

## With The IU Science Fiction Loop!



The Indiana University Science Fiction Loop is a group of people who get together at the Indiana Memorial Union on Wednesday nights and discuss science fiction and fantasy books, movies, and the future of the genre. At recent meetings, we have discussed Roger Zelazny's *Frost and Fire*; the movie *Batman*; Barbara Hambly's *Those Who Hunt the Night* and other recent vampire books by Rice, Saberhagen, and Yarbro; our personal Top Ten lists; *Inconjunction IX*; and, of course, cyberpunk. If you like having discussions on the fantastic and hearing "consumer reports" from people in the field, why not pay us a visit? Bring your opinions and a sense of humor.

Wednesday nights at 7:30 \* Indiana Memorial Union \* Room 447