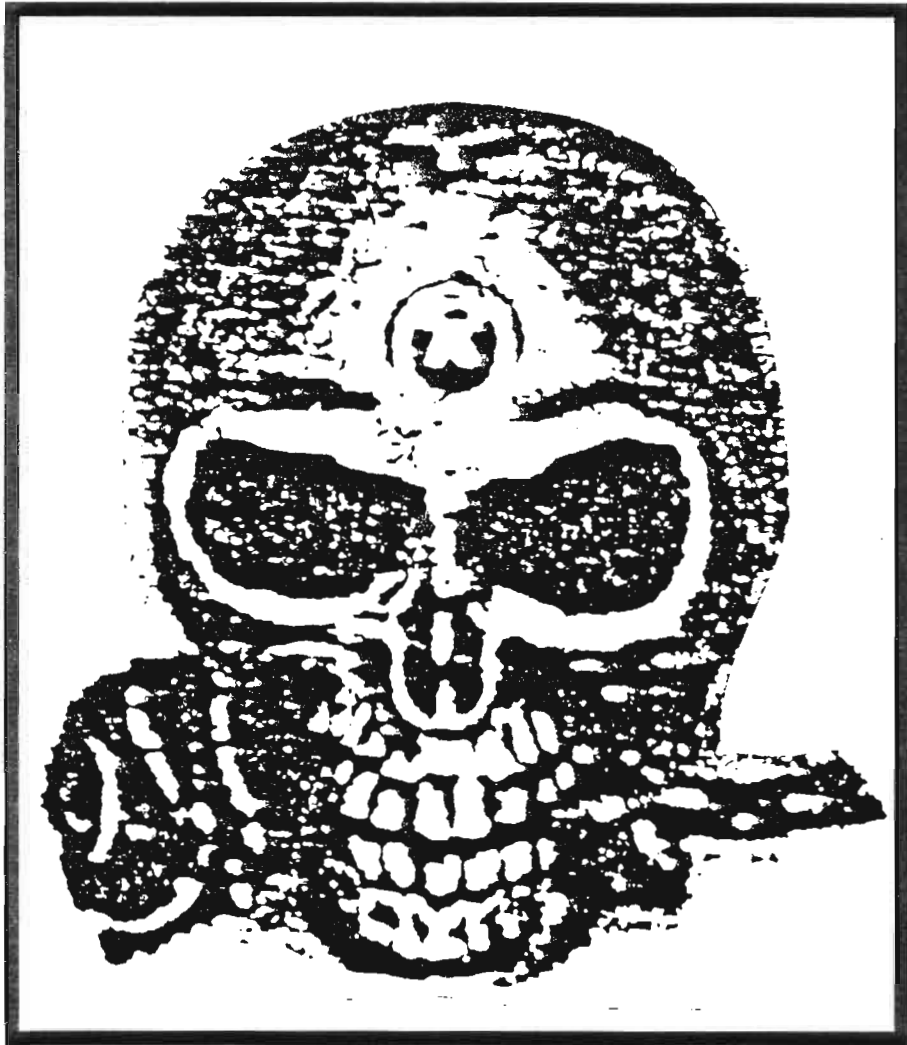


ARROWS of DESIRE 5



DEATH

ARROWS OF DESIRE 5

November 1990

CONTENTS

- 4 Father, Forgive Me
- 5 Death Comes Calling
- 7 Songs for the Dying
- 10 Famous Last Words
- 11 Playlist #1: Suicide
- 12 Death
- 13 More Or Less Than Just Love
- 14 Early Morning, Almost Anywhere
- 15 Deathlist: UK1976 Fatalities
- 16 Stretcher Bearer
- 18 Deathshead Revisited
- 24 One Man's Heaven
- 25 A Hell of a Job
- 26 Playlist #2: Marc Almond Special
- 27 After the First Death
- 29 Advertisement
- 30 On the Improbability of my Existence
- 31 Death's Diary
- 32 (Untitled)
- 33 Death in TV Movies
- 34 Bright Winged, With Pale Hands
- 35 Playlist #3: Death Top Ten
- 35 Playlist #4: Abortion
- 36 A True Faith

- 37 I Drink Beer, Me... Continued

- 39 Loco Citato
- 44 Contributors
- 45 And Finally...

and Olafs by Ken Cheslin

FATHER, FORGIVE ME

S V O'Jay

I dreamed about you last night, so I thought I'd better come and see you today and talk about it. It was a very strange dream indeed, and you know I never used to remember them. I'd come over to mother's to see her, and you were there. You'd come back. You looked somewhat rough, unshaven and wearing that old gardening coat. You were grinning sheepishly, as though to imply it had all been a bit of a silly cock-up, and of course mother was overjoyed, hugging you and crying. I don't remember any words being spoken. In fact, it was rather like a silent film. I can only remember feeling resentful, and thinking: You can't do this! *We fucking burned and buried you!*

I might have been afraid that eventually you'd turn and chastise me for not crying when I saw your body laid out at the Undertakers, or at the funeral, or afterwards, when we came back to the grave and saw all the flowers. You made the local papers, you know. *Parish Councillor Dies...*, well, about what you'd expect. I expect mother still has the clipping.

On October 15th, 1981, I received a phone call from mother in the early morning, telling me you'd been taken to hospital, having suffered a stroke during the night. She told me not to worry, as the doctor had said it only appeared to be mild. Just after lunch I received another call, at work. It's said that people say strange things under stress or when stunned by shocking news.

Sorry boss, can I have the rest of the day off? Only my Dad's just died.

I don't recall the exact words of the reply, but "Go on, piss off out of here" was the gist, delivered in as sympathetic a fashion as the situation warranted. Almost fatherly.

Most of what followed was typically dreamlike. For the first time in my life I was "the man of the family", making arrangements, greeting guests, shaking hands and thanking people for their concern. I spent most of the time worrying about mother, who went to pieces to such an extent that she had even started smoking again (although she has subsequently quit for the second time in her life). How did you expect her to be? She was always the stay-at-home while you were at Council, School Governors and the like. She'd always prayed that out of the two of you, she would die first.

When we "viewed the body", she became almost hysterical and practically collapsed. Her friend Ruby was with us, fortunately, so I could have my moment alone. I was silent, but touched your cheek briefly. Christ, you were cold.

Mother cried all the way through the service and the "reception" back at the house. All of the family were very good, even your brother. I was being the good host, solemn and controlled, locking away any feelings I might have had, only for mother to berate me later with "You never seemed very upset when your father died".

Now this dream disturbs me, so I felt I had to explain it to you, to put my side of the story. I know, I never cried.

Father, forgive me.

DEATH COMES CALLING

Moira Shearman

It is eight years since Wendy died. There is still a hole in my life. It is a minor irritation, like the hollow in my mouth that never quite filled in after I had my wisdom tooth removed. I live with it but I feel the lack. For her parents it is an abyss...

I remember the day she died. She had been due to take an exam in the department where I worked and I had asked the friend who was co-ordinating the students to let me know when she got in. I thought it would be nice to arrange a night out to celebrate the end of term. I was rather taken aback when he said she hadn't shown up. I checked again the next day to find that nothing had been heard, so I checked with some of her classmates and then phoned my Mum. Wendy was missing. It seems that her clothes had been found on the bank of the river Tay and Wendy was being searched for...

A keen swimmer and sub-aqua enthusiast, Wendy was thought to have gone for a dip off Wormit beach, just upriver from the Tay Bridge. The currents were bad there, and if a swimmer went too far out or got into any sort of difficulty the river dragged them under. In this case her parents only had to wait ten days before her body was washed up down the coast. Sometimes the river never gives up its dead.

That is a devastating thing to come to terms with, the death of a friend your own age. Somehow it makes you vulnerable too. In the front line. Death becomes something real and imminent, not far away and somehow romantic. But Wendy was not the first of my friends to die young, nor was she going to be the last. Over the years the list has grown, the news has become easier to believe but not to accept.

We never had many pets when I was young. All that theory of teaching children about life and death sort of passed me by. I liked keeping fish (the only pet I was allowed at the time), but early acquaintance with the fish you win at fetes made me quite philosophical about their lifespan. If they died you buried them and bought a new one. There was the morbid fascination with graves and all the paraphernalia of death when I was about 11. At school we had to bury one of the hamsters, and I remember spending most of my breaktimes tending the grave and building bigger and better memorials to the animal we had loved for three years.

About this time my paternal grandfather died, but it didn't impinge on my immediate life. I was considered too young to attend the funeral and he had never been a big part of my life; we didn't even live in the same town. Although I knew the loss in my head I didn't feel it in my heart. I was much more fascinated by death as a romantic abstract than as a reality which might affect me.

Yes, I became a teenager, and agonised over the lady of the Camellias and read endlessly of the First World War and Arthurian legends. The futility and inevitability of death was something shining and wonderful to me. I lived in a world where consumption was a gentle cough, a few spots of blood on a handkerchief and a slipping away to a better world. Death in battle was something to glorify, my dreams and stories were peopled with pale young poets who sacrificed themselves for their fellow men.

I didn't think of the other side of things: the human realities of blood and pain and infection; soldiers in dirty little dressing stations losing limbs because of gangrene; mustard gas victims literally coughing their guts up while politicians made propaganda victory speeches. Someone should have broadened my reading horizons a bit, although the things I was reading at the time really pulled few punches. Perhaps it was just my attitude of mind and my age. I was the sort of teenager who walked alone, who wore black as often as possible, who sat in darkened rooms burning incense and listening to Leonard Cohen albums... and I mean the early ones that made you feel cutting your throat was the only right thing for a human being to do.

Death was never a taboo subject as far as I recall. To me it was fascinating, but in an abstract, intellectual way. I mourned long and creatively when one of my favourite actors died, I wrote poems and drew pictures for him, even learned to play the guitar so I could play a piece that he had played on TV. Yet death that should have been more immediate and personal didn't seem to affect me as much. My maternal grandmother died, and the parents of two of my schoolfriends, but although these events rippled the surface they didn't stir the depths. I still romanticised, I still wanted to die young and beautifully, leaving a shining legacy.

DEATH COMES CALLING

What finally put paid to that was the death of two of my friends. It was Easter and Anne was driving up from Edinburgh to Wick to visit her parents. The car was involved in a crash, and Anne died in the helicopter on the way to hospital. My mother told me when I phoned home the next day, having heard it on the radio. I was stunned. I went through the motions of phoning the other friends who knew Anne and sent flowers to a family I did not know. Anne was a young teacher who had come to my school when I was in the sixth year. She never actually took any of my classes, but due to our involvement in various school clubs Anne and I and another girl, Sue, became very close friends. We had kept up with each other when I left school, making a point of getting together in the holidays whenever possible, swapping stories and recommending books. I still have the last two books she lent me. Anne was 26.

Less than a week later I had a message from the Domestic Bursar of the Halls to phone home. I couldn't think what was wrong, but felt that something was. I phoned. My mother told me that Sue was dead, could I phone Tricia? Somehow there was no disbelief, Anne's death had prepared me in a way. But Sue had been so alive when I'd last seen her at Christmas. She was young and in love and full of plans for the future. I called Tricia, who was also a schoolfriend and shared a flat with Sue in Glasgow where they were both studying English and Drama. It seemed Sue had been ill with 'flu, must have had some hitherto undiscovered heart defect and had done too much too soon. So now, a mere ten days after her 21st birthday, she was dead. This person I had known and loved as a friend since we first met at the age of six was lying on a slab in a Glasgow mortuary. The reality of it all cut through the dreamlike state I had been in since hearing about Anne, and I reacted in the way I usually react to shock: I dashed back to the flat and threw up.

Anne's death, Sue's death, arranging time off for the funeral, keeping an eye on Sue's little sister who had just come back to University for the start of term; there was so much to do. It had snowballed. Death had come and stirred the depths and I had difficulty reconciling myself. I grew up a lot that week. I wasn't sure I could face the funeral but I went, and I'm glad I did.

I had never been to a funeral before and wasn't sure what to expect. A small huddle of family, I suppose, and a few friends. We arrived at the cremmie in Maryhill a few minutes early and met up with a couple of friends who had come through from Edinburgh.. In the chapel there were flowers everywhere, and people – hundreds of young people – all Sue's friends and classmates from Glasgow. Down at the front was Sue's mum looking very small and pale by her friends and her remaining two daughters.

When the coffin was brought in an irreverent thought entered my head, and I had to suppress a giggle because in my mind I could hear Sue herself, talking about her own father's funeral: "I hope the pallbearers don't trip!" Afterwards a large group of us went back to the flat she and Tricia had shared. We ate and we drank and most importantly we talked and talked about Sue (and Anne to those who had known her as well). I cried a lot that day and laughed a lot, and somehow got the feeling that although Anne and Sue had gone from my life they hadn't gone very far. I felt a lot better by the time I was on the train back to Aberdeen. I knew that even if I missed them I was richer for having known them.

Even now, thirteen years on, I think of them, especially Sue. I now live just down the road from where they lived when we were at school. On my way to work I pass the canal bank where we played explorers. I still find poems I want to share with her, and I still keep up with her mother and sisters. In a way we are closer friends than if she had not died. Our lives would have gone in different directions and we would have drifted apart and lost contact without realising it. But now she is with me all the time, with me and the others. Anne, Sue, Ann (who died of a stroke at 26), Willy who was an RAF pilot who crashed, Bruce who had TB and left a wife and two young sons, Wendy, and now my father.

I cannot be sorry for my father. I miss him, but he had been very ill and death was a release. I mourn for those of us left behind. I do not fear death, death and I are old friends now. I have no illusions about it, but I do not fear it. My Celtic nature accepts death as an integral part of life. When I die I don't want my friends sobbing into a couple of ham sandwiches, I want a proper Celtic wake, a damn good party where people can share their memories and comfort each other. We did this for my Dad. The service was hard (for a family who prefer to emote in private), but my brother, sister and I made sure that as many people as possible came home afterwards. It made things easier for friends and later on easier for my mother to reestablish contact with those friends. Everyone seemed to be enjoying themselves and we ended up with two couples

DEATH COMES CALLING

who had known Mum and Dad for over forty years staying on and telling stories from their shared youth. In short, we all felt it was a party Dad would have enjoyed, and that's how it should be.

When death was a more immediate prospect everyone accepted it. I don't think it's a good thing to become inured to death but there is no point in being embarrassed by it. In one sense my father is gone. I have no regrets, I told him how much I loved him, he knew what I felt. We talked. We still talk, as I do with Sue and Anne and Wendy and all those others. At this time of year, when the leaves are turning and the Celtic day of the Dead looms, I feel them close, they stand close to my chair as I write this.

I'm not afraid of these ghosts, they are not scary.

They are comforting.

SONGS FOR THE DYING

Kev McVeigh

Hope I die before I get old.

Peter Townsend of the Who, *My Generation*, 1967

Hope I get old before I die.

Ian McNabb of the Icicle Works, 1990.

They say the devil has all the best tunes, and he seems to have the best band too. The list of performers who died young is endless, from Billie Holiday and Charlie Parker through Buddy Holly, Marc Bolan and beyond. Even greater than this list, however, is the modern mythos which surrounds dead rockstars.

Drugs and drink have taken a significant toll, including Janis Joplin, Elvis Presley and Keith Moon. Given the excesses to which these, and others, lived every day, it is perhaps not surprising that this body count is so high. Led Zeppelin drummer John Bonham, for instance, reputedly drank forty vodkas the night he died; whilst Bon Scott of AC/DC was too drunk to be lifted from the car by his friend, who left him to sleep it off, only to find him dead the next morning. Like Jimi Hendrix a decade before, Scott's death had been a tragic accident as he choked on his own vomit.

Even amongst those who had managed to give up drugs, there have been fatalities: Philip Lynott, who had earlier recorded *King's Call* about Presley's death, eventually died himself of heart failure after years of drug abuse had left him vulnerable to serious infections. Singer Nico also quit heroin, only to have a heart attack after falling from her bicycle in the south of France. Another singer, Johnny Thunders of the New York Dolls, did die, at least inasmuch as his heart stopped beating on the doctor's table, but it was restarted soon enough for Thunders to dine out at reporters' expense for years to come.

Almost as many died in car and plane crashes: Eddie Cochran, Duane Allman, Ricky Nelson, and half of Lynyrd Skynyrd. A few survived: Bob Dylan, Billy Idol, and Def Leppard drummer Rick Allen who lost an arm, but Cliff Burton of Metallica died when the tour coach skidded on a bend, throwing his sleeping body through the window. The death of Randy Rhoads was even more bizarre. The Ozzy Osbourne band guitarist hired a light plane to fly over the tour bus in which Ozzy was sleeping. After a couple of low passes, the plane clipped the bus with a wingtip and cartwheeled into a nearby house. The inquest revealed that the pilot had been freebasing cocaine before the flight.

Drugs also played their part in at least one violent death, that of jazz musician Jaco Pastorius, who was murdered outside a Miami club in a dispute over a deal. His wasn't the first rock 'n' roll murder by a long way, that honour probably goes to "The King of the Delta Blues singers" Robert Johnson. The man who

SONGS FOR THE DYING

"went down to the crossroads" to make a deal with the devil paid his part of the bargain in disputed circumstances in 1938. Some accounts say he was stabbed, others say shot, and poison has also been mentioned. Enter Sam Cooke, shot whilst allegedly raping a woman; Marvin Gaye, shot by his father who objected to the sinfulness of his son's performances; Felix Pappalardi, shot by his wife; and Peter Tosh, whose assassination may have been political or may have been drugs related, but was in any event more successful than an earlier attempt on his former Wailers partners Bunny Wailer and Bob Marley. The latter lived long enough to develop terminal cancers, but was granted a hitherto unique accolade for a rock musician: a State funeral.

The most famous murder in contemporary music history happened in New York (where else?) on December 8th, 1980. When Mark Chapman shot John Lennon it shocked the world, and provided Yoko Ono with an album cover photo of his broken, bloodied, distinctive spectacles. Not since Martin Luther King had such a public figure, and such a peace-loving person, met such a violent death, a death which impinged on the consciousness of every American and millions of others as well. Ten years later after watching the Lennon memorial concert, many people are intensely relieved that it was not Paul, George or Ringo who died! Curiously, nobody playing at that show decided to perform *Happiness Is A Warm Gun*.

Paul Simon, who isn't dead yet, wrote a song about Lennon, linking his death with JFK's and another early rock 'n' roll death: singer Johnny Ace was backstage at one of his own concerts on Christmas Eve, 1954, when he lost a game of Russian Roulette. Perhaps this was suicide, perhaps not, but the death of protest singer Phil Ochs was deliberate. Ochs had begun in a similar way to Bob Dylan, but at some point his career faltered and he began to suffer depressions. After a bizarre attack in Africa where he had his throat slashed, Ochs' voice was never the same, and amidst paranoia and a deep sense of failure, he took his own life. It was later shown that he had reason to be paranoid: the CIA had a huge file on him (as they also had on several other rock musicians!) of some 410 pages. Some still suspect their involvement in the mugging.

According to some sources, the death of Joy Division's singer was announced by John Peel with the words: "Bad news lads, Ian Curtis is dead". Transcripts of the radio show prove otherwise. It was a sad Peel who first spread word of the suicide, which came just days after recording the haunting classic *Love Will Tear Us Apart* in 1980, the song itself subsequently being murdered by Paul Young. The rumour sounds much better though, doesn't it?

Mystery even surrounds the most recent rock death: Stiv Bators, the former singer of the Dead Boys and Lords of the New Church, was found sitting on the pavement by his girlfriend, after apparently having been hit by a car. He refused her attempts to get a doctor, preferring to sleep. He died of a brain haemorrhage in his Paris flat. Paris was where Jim Morrison supposedly died, but there are many of his fans who "know" that the Lizard King is still alive, a phenomenon since echoed by Elvis Presley, never the most original of singers.

It isn't just the stars who find death by rock 'n' roll, and there are many not mentioned here. Amongst the paying customers who could forget Meredith Hunter, beaten to death by Hells Angels at Altamont whilst the Stones played, not *Sympathy for the Devil* as is generally supposed, but *Under My Thumb*. In separate incidents, two members of Neil Young's road crew died of drug overdoses, leading Young to write the songs *Tonight's the Night*, and *Needle and the Damage Done* as a comment on the use of drugs.

Currently in the United States, Judas Priest are being sued because their record *Stained Class* allegedly caused two teenagers to commit suicide, one of them taking three years to die of gunshot wounds, during which time he made his allegations. An earlier case against Ozzy Osbourne over the song *Suicide Solution* was thrown out by a judge because the flimsy evidence was untenable, but the later case is more worrying, despite the defence that the boys admit to having got drunk and smoked pot before their "bizarre pact" (as the papers called it). Does rock music have that much influence? Do kids follow their idols even unto the grave? When I get depressed I listen to Leonard Cohen, and I ain't dead yet! On the other hand, Gram Parsons took Rolling Stone Keith Richards as a role model, but lacked the Englishman's endurance. Alongside Nick Drake (suicide) and Tommy Bolin (drugs), Parsons must be one of the saddest losses of the seventies.

Even the literature of rock music has often concentrated on the deaths of performers. It provides the plot in George R R Martin's *The Armageddon Rag*, and plays a significant role in Iain Banks' *Espaceir Street*, the

SONGS FOR THE DYING

late Hawkwind musician Robert Calvert's *Hype*, Charles Shaar Murray's *Purple Days* (a graphic adaptation of the life of Jimi Hendrix), Gregory Benford's *Doing Lennon*, several Lucius Shepard stories, Bruce Sterling's *We See Things Differently*, and most recently John Gribbin's *Don't Look Back*.

Just occasionally the reports are wrong, as when Paul McCartney's "death" was announced by people reading all sorts of crazy things into a record sleeve's photo, and when Holly Johnson was supposedly on board PanAm 103 which exploded over Lockerbie, but he'd cancelled a few days earlier.

Apart from Lynyrd Skynyrd, and almost anyone connected with Andy Warhol (only Holly Woodlawn, doing cabaret in Vegas (!) and "Little Joe" Dallesandro (see John Waters' new film *Cry Baby* for what he does nowadays) are still living of the real life characters in Lou Reed's *Walk on the Wild Side*, whilst Edie Sedgwick (the target of Bob Dylan's *Just Like a Woman*, The Cult's *Edie (Ciao Baby)*, and the New Bohemians' *Little Miss S* amongst others) is one of the sixties' most notorious victims), the worst position in rock seems to be guitarist with the Pretenders. Chrissie Hynde lost two partners, James Honeyman-Scott and Pete Farndon, in quick succession, both to drugs. On the other hand, all the members of the Grateful Dead are still alive, with the exception of three out of four keyboard players: Ron "Pigpen" McKernan succumbed to his alcoholism, Keith Godchaux died in a car crash, and on July 26 1990 Brent Mydland was found dead at home from unknown causes. I wonder if his successor will be able to afford the insurance premiums?

In the end, as Lou Reed said:

The music is all. People should die for it. People are dying for everything else, so why not the music?

Now who's going to tell Kylie?

Other notable rock 'n' roll deaths:

Mama Cass – heart attack; Hank Williams Sr – another who left fans disappointed by dying on his way to a gig; Sandy Denny – fell down stairs and died of heart failure; Woody Guthrie – emphysema and other illnesses; Karen Carpenter – victim of the male-dominated music biz, she eventually beat anorexia nervosa only to die of the strain on her heart, and be immortalised a decade later by Sonic Youth's *Tunic (Song for Karen)*; Les Harvey – the Stone the Crows guitarist was electrocuted on stage, a fate similar to that of Yardbird Keith Relf; Razzle of Hanoi Rocks – unusual in that the driver of the car, singer Vince Neil of Motley Crue, was convicted of vehicular manslaughter, and ironic that one of the first songs recorded by Hanoi rocks after Razzle had replaced Gyp Casino was *Dead by Xmas* – the date of the accident? December 8th, 1985; Sid Vicious – whilst on bail for the murder of his girlfriend Nancy Spungen.



I see Olaf persuaded you to
try his headache cure too.

FAMOUS LAST WORDS

Albert Anastasia, gangster. Shot in a barber's chair 1957.

"Haircut!"

Henry Ward Beecher, Congregationalist preacher (1813–1887)

"Now comes the mystery."

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827).

"Friends applaud, the Comedy is over."

Dominique Bouhors, French grammarian (d 1702).

"I am about to, or, I am going to die. Either expression is used."

Anthony J Drexell III, socialite, demonstrating a new pistol in 1893.

"Here's one you've never seen before..."

Heinrich Heine (1797–1856), asked if he was at peace with God.

"Do not trouble yourself. God will pardon me: it's his profession."

Karl Marx (1818–1883), asked by his housekeeper if he had a final message for the world.

"Go on, get out! Last words are for fools who haven't said enough."

W Somerset Maugham (1874–1965)

"Dying is a very dull, dreary affair. And my advice to you is to have nothing whatever to do with it."

Viscount Henry John Temple Palmerston (1784–1865)

"Die, my dear doctor? That's the last thing I shall do."

John Sedgwick, American Civil War General (1813–1864), peering over the parapet at the battle of Spotsylvania.

"They couldn't hit an elephant at this dist..."

Sir Ernest Henry Shackleton (1874–1922), to his doctor.

"You are always wanting me to give up something. What do you want me to give up now?"

Tamburlaine (1336–1405)

"Never has death been frightened away by screaming."

Oscar Wilde (1856–1900), calling for champagne.

"I am dying, as I have lived, beyond my means"

SONGS TO COMMIT SUICIDE TO

Compiled by Tara Dyson

Duel (Propaganda)
Love Will Tear Us Apart (Joy Division)
This Is The Day (The The)
True Faith (New Order)
Cry Me A River (Julie London)
Let Me Down Easy (The Stranglers)
Touch Me (The House of Love)
Everybody Loves You When You're Dead (The Stranglers)
Slaughtered, Guttled and Heartbroken (Squeeze)
Pearly Gates (Prefab Sprout)
Deathwish (Police)
Reasons to be Miserable (Part Ten) (Half Man Half Biscuit)
The Face of Death (Robyn Hitchcock and the Egyptians)
Shake the Disease (Depeche Mode)
Swansong (The Big Dish)
Isolation (Joy Division)
Dream Within a Dream (Propaganda)
Rockin' On Suicide (Carmel)
Losing My Mind (Liza Minelli)
Comment Te Dire Adieu (Jimmy Somerville)
Love Hangover (The Associates)
I Can't Help Myself (Orange Juice)
A Forest (The Cure)
The Number One Song in Heaven (Sparks)
The Beginning and The End (OMD)

DEATH

Jo Raine

Death is the only certainty. We will all face it, perhaps more than once in our lives. We may evade it, but sooner or later we all succumb.

You will live as long as you live and you will die when you die. It is inevitable, so why fear it? Why do we feel more sorrow for a person who dies young than for one who dies in old age? Life is what you make of it, after all, no matter what the length. We have no geriatric spice melange, not yet, anyway.

Death in literature comes in many forms. My favourite deaths are in the Peter Beagle story *Come, Lady Death*, and in the Discworld books where Death is, if anything, too real. In *The Child Garden* Death comes early because all other illnesses have been cured – in the end the real victim is childhood.

We treat death differently when it comes on a large scale; with a kind of superstitious awe that quickly turns into a kind of sickness as we are given, whether we want it or not, more and more information about the dead, what they were like, how they came to be in that place, who grieved for them. We are brought into that vicarious grief, we collect money for their families to assuage our grief at being alive. This time, thank God, not me.

Yet death is not an end but a turning point, a new beginning, when we are judged on what went before. This is true of many religions, whether your destination is Heaven or Hell, or reincarnation upon earth to live a life again.

Death can make you turn to religion, or turn away from it. It was the deaths, within a relatively short space of time, of two people whom I had known since childhood, one murdered particularly viciously, the other of a virulent form of cancer, that turned me down the road which led me to become a Muslim, two years ago. Previously, I had never really given religion, or the idea of God much credence.

Death is. But there has to be a reason why.

Doesn't there?



So, he made
this request for
a game of cowboys
and Indians, then
what happened?

MORE OR LESS THAN JUST LOVE

DF Lewis

When I first met her, she was not my wife, but the longer I grew to know her, the more I was convinced she would one day become, if not mine, that of some brute of a ne'er-do-well. So, for her sake, in a moment of neutered selflessness, I asked her to marry me, rather than abandon her to a fate worse than death, if that's not a pretty meaningless phrase. I suppose I did begin to love her more than I could love any other human being, but whether it was the true love that others experience, I am still uncertain... even now.

Today, things look differently. Yesterday, when I started writing all this down, not only did everybody in the street have their thumb and index finger as far apart as possible, but even domes looked like pyramids. But today, the tops of the shopping parade look as if their chimneys are sunk to the waist in brick bubbles. She returned to haunt me last night... assuming that she was dead in the first place. I shall never be certain. I knew I should never have started writing about her. It was almost as if I were the one guilty of bringing her back. For months now, I have been sleeping alone in the double bed we once shared... recalling the way she used to slide the lip of the sheet up and down, playing peeky-boo with me, and rubbing my feet with hers. Even in the pitch blackness we both used to cherish through many a sleepless hour of love together, I could just discern her half of the bed rising up in even darker darkness. I never let her untwirl my pyjama cord, whilst I had already sewn up the fly. Love for me was cuddling. She never complained, only rubbed harder with her feet.

Mary was her name. She once told me of a father who never said anything, only grunted, having once interfered with her as a child. The psychology was beyond me, but it confirmed my belief that marriage without me would have been her ultimate nightmare, worse than any father of doubtful leanings. They do say that a spouse is but an idealised reflection of the respective parent. Last night, she returned again. In the darkness, I saw the breathing mound beside me. It made tears come to my eyes... real tears, not the ones I used to wet my face in the ensuite bathroom to obtain. The deepest agony, last night, was finding no night smile.

Let me say here and now, I do not believe in ghosts, especially those that pretend to exist by kicking up the bedcovers at dead of night. They're the worst sort, for existence is a foul crime, where such existence is impossible. My only weapon against them is disbelief. Giving them the sense of satisfaction over you would make them into monsters far worse than ghosts can ever be. With this logical response, I ignored Mary's pleas for my acknowledgment. I just turned over in the bed (as I often did following marital squabbles in the old days). My wrenching sobs soon petered out and, turning back, I found that there was nothing in which to disbelieve, anyway.

Today, I feel I can set out, for the first time, the exact circumstances of Mary's death. I must have known, once I got moving with this diary epitaph, that I would eventually reach this crunch point. After all, that was what it was. An amazing coincidence of misfortune, her being in the street, slipping the yale key into our front door, when the chimney stack collapsed upon her with no prior warning. There wasn't even any wind. Those sort of accidents make you believe that if God exists (in itself a farfetched proposal), He must be an evil one. I heard her last scream, cut off in half blast. I was in the front room, you see, channel hopping on the TV, and I literally felt the place shudder and then the scream less than a split second later. I know the feeling will stay with me forever, That loathsome cataclysmic sickness, Because I *did* love her. What I said earlier about it being for her sake that I took her from the purview of other men is all very well. But underneath it all, I loved her madly. To hear her stifled scream and to witness the bleeding splinters of bone sticking through the low denier stockings, bones that the rubble had pushed out from the belly downwards, made me love her even more... if that were possible. I knelt in prayer and kissed the feet that had once rubbed so tenderly against mine... ignoring all the moon-eyed bystanders, none of whom had thought of calling the ambulance men. Within my own secret heart, I knew then she was dead. I blamed the Building Society surveyor. Madness hits you at times like that. I felt like going round to his high-faluting house in the suburbs (if I'd known the correct address) and doing him the direst mischief imaginable. If not him, the people who palmed the house off on us. Or the Estate Agent himself, who was a greasy looking spiv. It was the way he showed us the photograph of the house back in his office. He had it at an angle, holding it between thumb and index finger. Mary said he probably tricked his wife out of the housekeeping allowance

MORE OR LESS THAN JUST LOVE

he made her.

Reliving that day has at least done some good. The thing masquerading as my dead wife has not returned. I write this now more out of duty than need. Soon it will peter out... much as it petered in. I think I must have needed to admit to myself all the cruel details of the accident. Accident? I still believe someone pushed it off the roof. Perhaps the husband she would have married if it had not been for me getting in first. She never actually told me whether her father was still alive. I always assumed he was dead, though. I never pushed her into describing what he did. The word "interfere" seemed to cover a multitude of sins. Some say there is no such thing as rape, but I'm not so sure. All those who believe a woman "asks for it" ought to look deeply into their own hearts.

She came back last night. It was Mary for real this time, complete with night smile. I untwirled the cord all on my own, even before she had the chance to ask me. It seemed all so much easier now she's dead. Better to believe in ghosts than the love of a man for himself. I think she'll come again. The central heating hums all night now that the cold weather is upon us. I can't stand too many covers on me. Gives me claustrophobia, which is only one phobia this side of frigidity. Although one guilt can hide another, the act of petering out is never complete.

EARLY MORNING, ALMOST ANYWHERE

Alison Scott

To the song: "When I'm Sixty-Four"

Ethel was tired when she woke, which was not so unusual. She lay listening to the alarm and feeling the assortment of pains in her back and legs. After a moment, she shut it off and swung her feet slowly to the floor, groping for slippers with her toes. She walked over to Arthur's room, buttoning her housecoat as she went.

"Morning. love," she greeted her husband as she entered the room. "How are you feeling?" Arthur didn't reply, but he awoke and stared at the ceiling. She sat beside him and began to maneuver him into a sitting position, feeling the strain throughout her body. Eventually she managed to get him stable and propped up the pillows. "It's a lovely day," she continued. "I'll just go and make a little bit of breakfast."

She made porridge for Arthur, and tea and toast for herself. Taking a spoon and a cloth, she began feeding him, little by little, chiding a bit when any got dribbled or spilt. "Ooh, you ought to be more careful." Later in the morning the nurse would be coming to help out, but for breakfast she had to manage on her own. She caught sight of the overgrown garden as she ran water for the dishes, and found herself fighting back a quick tear.

Arthur had always been proud of his garden, and had planned to grow vegetables for the County Show when he retired. Only ten months away, and now she knew it would never come. Instead her days were spent caring for a husband she no longer knew, and her nights in fitful sleep, missing his presence.

Finishing the washing up, she managed to stop wishing for a quiet life, and took her tea into the front room to await the arrival of the nurse.

UK DEATHS BY CAUSE, 1976



(in thousands) – Males

327.7 Deaths from natural causes
103.2 Coronary disease, angina
60.5 Other natural causes
54.4 Respiratory diseases
46.0 Cancer (except lung cancer)
33.5 Cerebrovascular diseases
30.1 Cancer of the lung
5.6 Accidents
5.3 Transport accidents
2.6 Suicide
0.7 Homicide and war

(in thousands) – Females

328.1 Deaths from natural causes
79.2 Other natural causes
78.9 Coronary disease, angina
57.8 Cancer (except lung cancer)
54.1 Cerebrovascular diseases
50.2 Respiratory diseases
7.9 Cancer of the lung
6.3 Accidents
2.3 Transport accidents
1.7 Suicide
0.4 Homicide and war
0.1 Pregnancy, childbirth, abortion

Source: Book of British Lists, Hamlyn 1980



STRETCHER BEARER

S V O'Jay

Gaul

Caesar's overwhelming sweep through Europe was nevertheless not without its casualties. The Unknown Soldier had merely twisted his ankle due to a poorly-fitting sandal, and fallen unfortunately upon a rock which knocked him senseless. There he was left, for even had he been aware, he was in no condition to march. After days of forced immobility, and then the wasting of precious energy crawling for water, the end was near. Something in him called out to nameless Gods for deliverance.

He was answered in due course.

Jerusalem

Wars fought in the name of religion eventually came to be considered as one of the most fruitless exercises imaginable. After a greater period of time, this opinion was extended to include all arbitrary ideologies. For the Unknown Soldier, this realisation came much more quickly. The Saracens had left him for dead, a fatal slash exposing his intestines to the cruel evening sky, although not quite enough for a swift dispatch, but more than enough to ensure an eventual demise through cumulative loss of blood. As the dark red stain grew around him, he renounced everything which had brought him this far, calling into question each of his previously staunchly-held beliefs, one by one.

His curses were heard.

Alabama

He could see the cotton mill from his awkward position in the grass. It looked like a mirage, or something from a half-remembered dream of times past through his one remaining eye. After a time, the vivid mist began to cloud what remained of his faulty vision, and as he could not move his hands to ensure his continued existence, darkness of an unnatural kind set about him. The Unknown Soldier lay isolated from the world of guns which seemed to be all he had ever known. He felt his leg at last, only to endure the sensation of some small animal gnawing away there. Prayer was long past, and as the hatred and despair welled up in him, the silent cry went out.

His cry was acted upon.

Ypres

Drowning is probably one of the most appalling ways to die. Like suffocation, the victim's ordeal seems interminable to him, and filled with pain. Drowning in water is unpleasant enough, but there are the even less pleasant alternatives of quicksand and, worst of all, mud. The Unknown Soldier was simply trapped, held securely by the sucking lamia of the sea of suffering around him. No one could do anything to help another. Panic in the terrible isolation of helplessness among thousands eventually gave way to a ridiculously calm acceptance of the inevitability of what was to occur. But after a time, when every breath begins to draw in a quantity of slime, the pain begins, and comes to reach an intolerable level. It is impossible to scream when you are drowning. If you try, this merely accelerates the pain. He felt his brain could explode with the unvoiced horror of what was happening to him.

His pain was eased

Nagasaki

Those killed outright at impact were the lucky ones. The burning of the flesh, the blindness and the agony inflicted every victim with even a small spark of life left after that holocaust. There were so many cries of anguish reaching the skies that day that the Deity called upon could only have held up his hands in absolute horror at the inhumanity of it all. Thousands upon thousands of cries, but no answer.

No answer.

STRETCHER BEARER

Hyperspace

The Unknown Soldiers rested in splendid comfort. Fountains played about their feet, and appealing servants ministered to their every whim or desire. The couches were tailored specifically to their needs, and no desire or addiction was denied any of them. They all knew it could only be temporary, having been taken from certain death into the service of a new Commander-in-Chief, who would only ever admit that action might lay "at some time past, or to come".

For occasional amusement, they watched their old world turn, and studied its machinations. On this last occasion, they asked Him the question, why no action had been taken to save the sufferers.

The only response was long and hollow laughter, but after a time, the whispered reason was communicated among them.

Mithras only looks after his own.



DEATHSHEAD REVISITED

Cardinal Cox

Motto: Beauty is only skin deep, beneath that we find only ugliness.

1981. Dave writes some distinctly surreal plays which feature Flemmish Lemming ("the infamous thingy band with a distinct lack of bass guitarist" – The Ayatollah Khauliphlower). And Eddie "Allouiscous" Ursine knows, he knows, he knows...

I like dissecting corpses

Through the mangle they go

Blood and guts everywhere

Legs up my nose

Eyeballs on the wall

Stomachs on the floor

I love dissecting corpses.

Examining the entrails, the future that's shown is not as it turns out.

1982. Flemmish Lemming record their first album-length cassette, "*Severed Armpit*" (PBBR 13). These are the days following the failed revolution. Death-squads stalk the streets.

Swinging corpse, in the breeze

Swinging corpse, hidden by trees

Swinging corpse, broken knees.

Rotting flesh, on his frame

Rotting flesh, got no name

Rotting flesh, in the drain.

Scampering rats, running by

Scampering rats, swarms of flies

Scampering rats, going to die.

Gibbeted man, hung till dead

Gibbeted man, was he Fred?

Gibbeted man, has no head.

This tape also marks the start of a short association with an author who cannot be named.

Six months later they record their second tape with a new drummer. In the Orwellian tradition, the Government uses a limited war to rally the population. Deep beneath Whitehall the High Wizards and Grand Masters contact long-slumbering deities to accept the sacrificed souls.

I wanna be a war hero

I wanna get the girls

I wanna be a war hero

I wanna fight for my country

I wanna be a war hero

I wanna get a medal

DEATHSHEAD REVISITED

War hero, war hero

I wanna be maimed and dislocated

War hero, war hero

I wanna be wounded by a foreign gun

I wanna be a war hero

I wanna be a pawn in a politician's game

I wanna be a war hero

I wanna die for what I believe

I wanna be a war hero

I wanna have my name on a stone

War hero, war hero

Young enough to die but not to drink

War hero, war hero

Young enough to kill but not to vote.

"Cat's Piss" (PBBR18)

1983 had "*Cabbage*" released, hitting the unsuspecting collection of Culture Shock Troopers and Death Camp Followers which made up their fans.

Experiments on Babies.

So you want to live forever

In a highrise pressure home

With no worries 'bout catching cancer

Or anything in a germ

And you don't care 'bout having babies

So you'll let us grow them all

In our tanks and glass test-tubes

While you're all living pretty.

Experiments on babies

That we grew in the vats

Experiments on babies The spares of our brave new world.

You forbade us rats and monkeys

You forbade us those guinea-pigs

Now you give us little babies

To do experiments with

A lot safer in the labs

Unless you want Thalidomide

No-one wants them anyway

DEATHSHEAD REVISITED

*No-one cares about unborn children
You're all graded and predetermined
You're all numbered before the womb
To the illness of the world
We have made you all immune
Give us this day our daily dead
For the spare parts you demanded
For the high-level surgery
So you can live forever.*

(PBBR26)

As well as Dave's harsh guitaring, this also featured a miked-up kitchen waste disposal unit devouring various items.

1985 saw the fourth cassette album recorded. This was called "*Dead Men Eat No Bisquits*" and included the Ballard-influenced "*Car Crash Event Curve Song*" and the charmingly titled "*Chokolate Cake*".

*I've got a toy at home
It's a chainsaw (shiny bright)
I polish it with love and care
And then at night
I can punish naughty boys and girls
'Cause Mummy always said
'Naughty children get what they deserve'.
I don't mean chocolate cake.
It runs on petrol
I have to be careful
'Cause it might hurt me one day
I don't mean chocolate cake.
'Naughty children get what they deserve'
'Cause Mummy always said
I can punish naughty boys and girls
When I go out
And then at night
I polish it with love and care
It's a chainsaw (shiny bright)
I've got a toy at home.*

(PBBR39)

1986. The last recorded full-length collection was "*Occasional Users of the Spare Bedroom at No.22* (PBBR42). This is possibly the best collection, and neatly sums up the whole attitude of Flemmish Lemming:

DEATHSHEAD REVISITED

from the death-trips of *"Like Loeb and Leopold"* and *"Axe Party"* through to social comment with *"Amerika"* and *"Fluid from the Start"* to humour with *"Surf Rider"*:

Appalachian Mountain Child.

Appalachian Mountain Child

Gone wild in the Spring, gone wild, gone wild

Mad like a dog in the hot noon sun

She knows that she's the only one.

Appalachian Mountain Child

Gone wild in the night, gone wild, gone wild

Moonshine touched her dancing head

She's alive and I'm half dead.

Appalachian Mountain Child

Gone wild in the streets, gone wild, gone wild

Sugar's sweet and so is she

She always says she don't need me.

Appalachian Mountain Child

Gone wild in the sun, gone wild, gone wild

Dances like a thing possessed

Likes to think she knows best.

Hallowe'en 1987 saw the recording of the Flemish Lemming single *"Christmas, Oh Christmas"* b/w *"Airships over Gladstone Street"*.

This is the song of a mystical place, a place that is close to our hearts. In this place magical things can happen, this is a place where time flows at a different rate. It is not an ancient monument nor a natural feature but a street in our home town. So just as the Beatles sang of Penny Lane, we decided to do a song of our magical road. This is also a true story...

Airships over Gladstone Street

What'd he have to drink?

Airships over Gladstone Street

What're we supposed to think?

Airships over Gladstone Street

Saucers in my head

When you're on the beat (my son)

You'll wish you're home in bed.

You're not the first my son

You will not be the last

Spotted over cathedral

Lights are spinning fast.

On the morning of March 23rd 1909 a Police Constable heard the sound of a motor car. As he continued

DEATHSHEAD REVISITED

down Cromwell Road he suddenly realised the sound was coming from above. On looking up he saw a bright light attached to an oblong body. This crossed the night sky at high speed.

(PBBR45)

Another album's worth of material exists, though this is unlikely to be recorded. Unfortunate, when you consider the quality of "Justine", "We Are a Virus", "Henry, You're so Punk", "Do The Anthrax", "Pyromania", "Uncle Jimi's a Chicken Farmer Now" and "When the World Becomes a B-Movie".

She is alive

Electrically

They say she's dead

But that ain't for me

Home at night

I dream of her hair

They don't admit it

But she's somewhere.

I see her photo On a magazine

They talk of people

That she had been

Mutated auras

Were on her mind

And in my dreams

She's not human kind

Peter, Peter

You heard her last

I know ambulances

They're never fast

And Jack well

You died so soon

We live your dreams

Men on the moon

But late at night

The picture shows

The world's death love

Grows and grows

We see you

You're everywhere

Calendars you're

Not naked but bare.

DEATHSHEAD REVISITED

Of course, other ideas have been kicked around: A song for "Neighbours" for when Daphne was buried ("*Clarky I love you, urgh*"), and for the politically aware ("*Free Charlie Manson*") and even the Ruritanian World Cup Football Squad Song. But none of these came through, as lethargy had infected our valiant band.

Personnel: Dave Millsop (Guitars)

Eddie Ursine (Vocals)

Andy Winn (Drums, PBBR13, PBBR45)

Iec Gf90 (Drums, some electronics)

Little Tommy Ursine (Choir, PBBR45)

Discography: 1982 PBBR13 *Severed Armpit*

Album-length cassette

Album-length cassette
1982 PBBR18 *Cat's Piss*

Album-length cassette

1983 PBBR26 *Cabbage*

Album-length cassette

1985 PBBR39 *Dead Men Eat No Biscuits*

Album-length cassette

1986 PBBR42 *Occasional Users of the Spare Bedroom at No.22.*

Album-length cassette

1987 PBBR45 "*Christmas. Oh Christmas*"

Single, b/w "*Airships over Gladstone Street*".



No, No, I want a weighty tome.

ONE MAN'S HEAVEN

Aosdana Dubh

Cathedral ruins at midnight –a plaintive cry,
fading,
Full moon unlocked by clouds,
wind driven ever on to nowhere.
The wind that whistles
in through empty windows
down the lonely neck
of the nowhere man, there
in the corner, writing
poetry none shall ever see
in his fading lifetime.
A crowd, partying drunk
see him, laugh, walk on,
forget they didn't see
an empty hollow soul
in a gaping shallow world.
He's looking for someplace to die
to preserve his status quo
creeping on to where he is:
For Heaven and Hell are one.

A HELL OF A JOB

Ian Creasey

Death has a long history. It is not surprising that in ancient times, when there were gods of every thing from commerce to music, water to war, there was also a god for Death, a being to give the personal touch to your demise.

The ancients were fond of anthropomorphising their supernatural beings, and so even in the earliest myths and stories, Death had reassuringly human characteristics. Two of the stories collected by the brothers Grimm illustrate this perfectly. In one, *The Godfather Death*, Death “prepared a large and fresh lamp; but he did it very slowly, in order to revenge himself”: showing human emotion; in the other, *Death’s Messengers*, “the Giant got the best of it, and knocked Death down with his fist, so that he dropped like a stone”: exhibiting human frailty.

Given this tradition, it is not surprising that novels have been written featuring Death as a character; it is perhaps more surprising that we have had to wait two and a half centuries for them. But the 1980s was a good decade for Death – he featured in the works of no less than three authors. Patrick H Adkins fictionalised Greek mythology and turned Thanatos into a mad scientist conducting experiments delving into forbidden knowledge. Piers Anthony added Manichean Christianity to twentieth century magic, creating the *Incarnations of Immortality* series, in which Death is a man who gets the job by killing his predecessor. And Terry Pratchett’s Discworld novels feature the Death we all know and love: he of the grinning skull, who speaks in hollow capitals, and is fond of cats and curries.

The conventions of the novel demand that characters have thoughts, emotions and motives. Applied to Death, this results in some interesting philosophies. The three authors I have mentioned take radically different approaches.

The Adkins books – *Lord of the Crooked Paths*, and *Master of the Fearful Depths* – deal with the interaction of the elder Greek pantheon. Power reigns supreme, and morality is a flexible notion which Kronos, ruler of the gods, has invented to further his own ends. Death is merely one player in this pageant – however, the depiction of Thanatos as a nervous misunderstood scientist is unforgettable. He is an outcast among the Olympians, both for his distasteful personal habits and his disgusting experiments into the nature of mortality. (He is almost the reverse of Victor Frankenstein, since he attempts to bring death to the immortals, rather than to bring life to the inanimate.) Whenever Kronos asks him for a progress report, he stutters in such fear that he can hardly speak. But Thanatos can himself inspire fear. Newly discovered creatures, miniature gods called *men*, have an instinctive aversion to him...

Zane, the protagonist of Anthony’s *On A Pale Horse*, has such an aversion to death that he manages to botch his suicide: he ends up killing Death rather than himself. He thus inadvertently becomes the incarnation of Death, and has to learn his job as he goes along. He discovers that his function is to weigh the balance of sin and virtue in each borderline soul, and send the departed to Heaven or Hell accordingly. However, he becomes dissatisfied with the narrowness of this duty, and begins to expand his activities. He persuades a would-be suicide to continue living, and rescues a man from drowning. Conversely, he also kills those kept alive against their will. It is the latter which Anthony seems to feel most strongly about – “Death is the most sacred right of the living”, says Zane in justification. He muses upon the causes of death, concluding that most are avoidable, and the purposes of life; and all this is a sideline to the main plot, which concerns Death’s battle against Satan. The novel ends by saying that the quality which Death should have is compassion.

But how can Death be compassionate? In *Mort*, the Discworld’s Death says that the compassion proper to his trade is a *sharp* edge. The novel is funny, but it is fundamentally bleak. Death is whoever does Death’s job; he is merely an anthropomorphic personification. Having tried fishing, dancing, gambling and drink, allegedly four of life’s greatest pleasures, he doesn’t even see the point of life. “There’s no justice – there’s just me”, he says. “Everybody gets what they think is coming to them. It’s so much neater that way.” This outlook – which also lies behind the other books of the series – is depressing, but also more horribly plausible than Anthony’s basic optimism. The response which the Discworld evokes is laughter in the dark, defying the ultimate indifference of the Universe.

A HELL OF A JOB

In summary, the above Deaths are all valid in their own unique ways. They all do their job, whether enthusiastically, incompetently or indifferently. In the end, it is comforting to think that *someone* will attend our extinction – no matter how weird that someone may be.

SUICIDE PLAYLIST #2: MARC ALMOND

Compiled by Tara Dyson

SOFT CELL

Non-Stop Erotic Cabaret (1981 – BZ MC 2)

Frustration

Say Hello, Wave Goodbye

Non-Stop Ecstatic Dancing (1982 – BZM 1012)

What

The Art of Falling Apart (1983 – BIZ LC3)

Loving You, Hating Me

The Art of Falling Apart

This Last Night in Sodom (1984 – BIZ LC6)

Surrender to a Stranger

Soul Inside

MARC AND THE MAMBAS

Untitled (1982 – BZM 13)

Untitled

Caroline Says

If You Go Away

Torment and Toreros (1983 – BIZ LC4)

In My Room

Black Heart

Narcissus

Gloomy Sunday

Torment

A Million Manias

My Little Book of Sorrows

MARC ALMOND

Stories of Johnny (1985 – T FAITH 1)

Stories of Johnny

Love Letter

Vermine in Ermine (1986 – unknown)

Tenderness is a Weakness

A Woman's Story (Some Songs to Take to the Tomb) (1986 – T GLOW 212)

For One Moment

Mother Fist and her Five Daughters (1987 – T FAITH 2)

There Is A Bed

Mr Sad

Ruby Red Stained EP (1987 – unknown)

I'm Sick of you Tasting of Somebody Else

The Stars We Are (1988 – TCPCS 7324)

These My Dreams Are Yours

Only The Moment

Jacques (1989 – BREL 1C)

Alone

My Death

Enchanted (1990 – TCPCS 7344)

Orpheus in Red Velvet

AFTER THE FIRST DEATH

Helena Bowles

The thread is spun by the virgin, the flax pulling and thinning in her slim, calloused fingers. She concentrates on teasing and twisting, oblivious to the heat, noise and sensation. The woman measures the thread. She dances and pants, sweat like molten drops of mother of pearl stands out on her cheeks and temples, a nacreous sheen on her chest leading down between the heavy breasts. Sensation and distraction are her life as she carries the tangled skeins of blue-glowing threads throughout the streets of the world.

Then ck! go the scissors. Ck! Snap! The old woman is jaded and bored by the shallow pursuits and vain posturings that are the concerns of the world. Ck! Snap! Randomly she severs the threads, sometimes where the woman wishes, sometimes not. What does she care? She of the clicking shears and final power; she who has mastery of the gatherer.

My first was old, easier perhaps. Green as cats' eyes and straining to hide it, given a choice of course I could handle it. The door opening onto a yellow-dim shuttered room, strange thick air, half sweet smell of infection-decay-disease. Sheet covered shape on the bed. First impressions: dry, open mouth, rim thick-caked. Old yellow tissue paper stretched over deep orbits, lax flesh falling into toothless cheeks. They draw the sheet back, misshapen torso, deformed with age, disease, distended abdomen pregnant with fluid, gurgling and shifting as the body rolls. Small fatless breasts flop low on ribcage, nipples horned with dead skin. I look into her eyeballs: open, dry, scum of mucus clouding one. Empty. It is a betrayal.

Bitterness pricks at my mouth. Ill, I turn my gaze to the postage stamp prison barred window. Traffic grumbles and snorts all around the nearby flyover. 0740. In the world a woman grunts and gives a yell of pure strength as she heaves her burden of new life into the clinical air. A man pumps and shouts in the final dissipation of ejaculation. Two lovers kiss their hellos, two more part with harsh words. A woman with teased blonde hair applies lipstick with the aid of her rearview mirror. Lives begin, continue, stutter in pain or boredom or transient joy. She, however, is dead.

I saw a man die, but later, when the protective veneer of professional cynicism had coagulated about my vulnerability. I had one elbow hooked under his armpit to lever him higher onto freshly crisp pillowslips. In mid hoist he exhaled, eyes closed and his chin flopped to his sternum, a thin trickling of bloody vomit discolouring the too small hospital pyjamas, as obviously dead as if he were already worm-ridden and stinking.

There are only two distinct digital moments in life, two precise points in an analogue process. Alpha and Omega, beginning and end. Conception and death. Spermatozoon penetrating ovum, fusion of DNA, the spinning of the thread of life. All existence and experience from that point is analogue – define the moment of birth – the onset of labour? The crowning? Full delivery of the head? The feet leaving torn and bloody vagina? **There is no finite moment.** Puberty – an ongoing process. Loss of virginity – where is the line between innocence and experience – first touch of lips? First grope? Penetration? If so, the first kiss of cock to cunt or the full acceptance of shaft within vagina? Or first orgasm? **No finite moment.**

Death you can see, empty house shell devoid of spark of full humanity. Call it departure of religious concept (soul) or explain total relaxation of muscles, even from sleep patterns unconsciously held and observed. Disturbing empty swelling pushing dark whispers of personal mortality into the front of our minds. Death, second measurable instant, point of time when Atropos cuts the thread so that the flesh and bone marionette falls to the ground revealing it a tangle of wooden limbs on a string. A string of biology. The thread of DNA running from conception to death on which all our joys, pains and petty insecurities dangle and flap like flags in the wind. The sheet is at her knees, the origin of sweet-foul smell seen to be urine-faeces-vomit pooling on starched sheet. They call me to help. Gagging at slimy-clotting-coffee grounds vomit sliding across my hand. Teeth spasming, but I *will not* show it. Gloves would distance it, make it bearable... Silently we clean, sharp smell of urine and faeces coating scanty wisps of pubic hair, age having withered even that to expose the secret female crevice. Gloves would maintain a barrier, *it is too real* but I did not know, *I did not know* the... cruelty of death.

Perhaps that is the worst. The indignity. Do not turn away and hide, you will not escape either. My words are not for they, the stranger, the other – they are for you. You cannot break free of the final obscenity – that it

AFTER THE FIRST DEATH

does not matter. Whether you are Ozymandias or Ahasueru, Cleopatra or a match girl, whether you hold the highest of high rank or are the alcohol-sodden tramp freezing to death beneath the bridge, your moment will come and go with no bells, hosannas or trumpets for your passing. The worlds will not stop in their celestial dance, no-one will notice as you take the first step towards the levelling dust; as your face takes on the slack look of those kissed by the gatherer. Surrender at last to his suit, go to his arms gladly. Lose yourself in his touch and do not look back, for to do so is to witness somebody's ultimate abandonment to his embrace to see the final emptying of bladder, bowels and stomach in noxious gouts onto starched sheets.

She is clean now, white sheet swathed, tied down human shape pulling memory association bandages-mummy-Hammer horror schlock, giggling to cover, underneath disturbance that now uncurls and stalks to front of mind, lets loose subliminal frissons of fear not present when actual fact of death was uncovered. I want to leave now, but the violation is not yet complete. The locker is emptied onto the bed. Treasure trove of life's emotional baggage that I do not wish to be made aware of. The shape - there is no identity, just cold meat in human form that cannot cause me to fall upon my own sword of compassion, I do not wish to see the old photograph (a soldier - husband? lover? brother? is he alive or... No! I will not think it), combs and mirror, handkerchief and bus pass, purse with keys, evidence of a pitiful economy, lipstick (and I will not allow the pathos of this broken creature's last human vanities to strike a chord... I must not identify!), train tickets and letters, a necklace and pens all duly recorded and ticked off in a safe and distant beauraucracy. I am safe, I am not touched, wounded or bleeding. Unscarred and unscathed. Last, to label the object with name and number, to categorise and file. I reach for the medical notes to append the name to the list.

The blade slices cleanly through major arteries and I bleed, I bleed. No protection sufficient to armour me against this last revenge. The dead woman bore my name.

And I bleed.



NECROCON

Guest of Honour:

JAMES BLISH

Special Manifestation by:

L RON HUBBARD

Media Guest:

MERRITT BUTRICK

Artist Guest of Honour:

KELLY FREAS

Other Guests (in order of decomposition):

JULES VERNE

H G WELLS

IAIN M BANKS

Fan Guest of Honour:

BERNIE EVANS

IT'LL KNOCK YA DEAD!!!!

ON THE IMPROBABILITY OF MY EXISTENCE

Barry J Bayley

Yes, well death, of course, or perhaps Death, or even D-E-A-T-H, is a subject close to my heart, I being one of those people who generally feel that life is not quite worth the trouble, not quite the full two bob, and occasionally I have envied my elder brother who had the good fortune to be strangled by his own umbilical cord, or so I am told But why so gloomy, old chap, I hear you saying, after all you haven't got long to go. Indeed, sir, indeed I have not. And that leads me to ponder my funeral arrangements. Increasingly in the modern world, funerals are likely to be conducted by the deceased. Ah yes, and so I imagine friends and relatives gathering and taking their places (with the absence of my daughter, who has given advance notice that she will be far too busy to bother with such mediaeval nonsense), their emotions worked on by solemn, sonorous music shot through with hints of passion and uplift – composed by myself, of course – and then, after a trailing, floating chord, there suddenly appears on the large monitor screen the face of the dead man, myself, to deliver my taped valediction. In it I shall remind those in my captive audience of the transience of life, impressing upon them their own mortality, something along the lines of: "You who still breath the air and feel the sunlight upon your faces, remember that none of you knows that he will see tomorrow, and the time is brief before you meet the oblivion in which I now rest...". What a pity one cannot be there to see it, though I believe there have been those curious enough to arrange even that, faking their deaths and attending the subsequent ceremony. Maybe that is a better arrangement? Paying one's respects to the soon-to-be-deceased, rather than to one just gone? I do feel that the undignified and bizarre bit of the proceeding is holding it in the presence of the corpse. It's a bit like holding a public ceremony over the disposal of one's dung.

So what is death?

Has it ever struck you that most writers of parallel-world novels have got one itchy-bitsy little detail wrong? Usually the alternate Earths have different histories but throng with the people we know, though living different lives – Hitler is a bicycle mechanic, Einstein is a dictator and so on. But that simply couldn't happen. To rehearse what has often been pointed out, the pre-meeting odds against the arising of any individual are stupendous. First of all the parents have got to meet, and as we know most people in the world never get to know of one another's existence. Then they have got to mate on a particular day when a specific ovum has been released by the mother, and of the huge number of sperm cells made available for ejaculation by the father's testicles that day, one specific sperm cell has got to penetrate the ovum first. Once that is done the genes from the respective germ cells have got to combine *at random* in our own particular permutation, about like shuffling a pack of cards and having them come out in numbered sequence suit by suit.

It is astonishing that I am here, especially as I have never won a lottery in my life.

On the other hand, historical processes are large-scale and perhaps don't depend much on individuals. There is something to be said for the argument that history throws up individual roles and shapes candidates to fill them. A parallel Earth might be almost indistinguishable from our own in its general features, but if it varied the tiniest bit in its small-grain resolution it would be populated by an entirely different set of people.

So what is death? That's easy. Death is all the people who once existed but now don't; death is all the people who will exist but don't yet; but most of all, death is the vastly greater number of people who never will have existed.

Should we feel sorry for them?

Not unless you think there is some immaterial "store" of potential people, only a tiny proportion of whom get expressed into the air and sunlight (and not, of course, if you think there is an infinite number of parallel worlds in which every possible person gets expressed somewhere). Death, really, doesn't exist. Life exists, but death doesn't. It's one of those poetical misconceptions like love, something else people get anguished about.

ON THE IMPROBABILITY...

But enough of morbidity. Let us not be negative. Instead we should be concentrating on the exciting issues of today's world: for instance, why hasn't the EEC declared a decimalised calendar? The old one is far too arbitrary, much too unscientific. We could have a year of ten months, each of a regular 4 x 10 days, each day divided into ten hours. Of course, this means that we shall have a day consisting of 0.913 planetary rotations, but with our quartz watches and computers and stuff, why, that isn't going to be any problem at all.

Or what about the fascinating phenomenon of synchronicity? Do you know that there are forty-eight houses on my side of the street, and I live at **number** forty-eight!

Can that be coincidence?

I – think – not.

DEATH'S DIARY

Marc Almond (reprinted without permission)

On Monday I took a flower,
Dried it in my hand,
Covered it in poison
And threw it on the land –On
wasted ground it tried to root
But choked upon the sand.
And there's room in my diary
For you, my friend.
There's room in my diary for you.
On Tuesday I took a bird,
Such a pain to hear it sing,
I blackened it with petrol
And oiled its little wings –I tainted
the breeze
As I threw it to the wind.
On Wednesday I took a man, He
begged please help me die,
For he lay in pain and suffering,
It made his loved ones cry –I can
be terrible and gentle
In the blinking of an eye.

On Thursday I took a woman
Heavy with child,
My old friend Rape had paid a
visit,
Had stayed a little while –In a
back street I touched her
With a wire and a smile.
On Friday I took a city,
Cursed it with a plague,
Powdered crystals, smoking
pipes,
To crush and to enslave – And a
row of dirty needles
Lines the route onto the grave.
On Saturday I took a country
Praying for the rain,
Parched throats and swollen lips
Without a harvest grain –And I
wiped out generations,
And I'd do it all again.
On Sunday I took the world,
A bomb I did employ.

Seven days to create life
And one day to destroy – Every
woman, every man,
Every girl and boy.
Now as I close my diary
And I've made my final date,
I blow away the ashes
And I stoke the smoking grate
–I've no distinction between pain
and joy,
No line twixt love and hate.
There's no room in my diary
For you, my friend.
There's no room in my diary for
you.

UNTITLED

Nina Watson

The thrill of the baseball game.
How it feels to run over the line,
Feel the wind rushing past.
How many seconds to first base?
The thrill of the cliff edge.
How would it feel to step over and fall,
Feel the wind rushing past.
How many seconds to the base?

* * *

Sudden Death gives no chance to say goodbye.
The slow drip drip of blood into the basin.
Could anyone have said or done anything to prevent
that decision taken in solitude?
Creeping Death is drawn out and cruel
to those that care, whose lives are bound
To those who live on, minds fading like the curtains of the sick room.
Death to one whose mind lives in a dying body,
Whose husband treasures every look, every word.
How can he still insist those were the happiest times of all?

DEATH: SOME TV MOVIES

DEATH AMONG FRIENDS (1975)

Fairly typical lady cop murder mystery.

DEATH AT LOVE HOUSE (1976)

Unbelievable ghost tale, but fun to watch screen veterans like Dorothy Lamour, Joan Blondell and John Carradine. Filmed at the impressive Harold Lloyd estate.

DEATH BE NOT PROUD (1975)

True-life dramatisation of John Gunther's 1949 account of his son's battle against a brain tumour and eventual death at age 17.

DEATH CAR ON THE FREEWAY (1979)

Duel-type plot in which a maniac van-driver terrorises lone women drivers. Lots of familiar faces including Mahogany Man George Hamilton, Frank Gorshin, and Shelley Hack as the leading lady who forgets to act.

DEATH CRUISE (1974)

Depressingly familiar disaster drama with depressingly familiar cast.

A DEATH IN CALIFORNIA (1985)

Above average thriller in which a socialite develops a love-hate relationship with the killer who has raped and terrorised her, as well as murdered her boyfriend before her eyes. In common with many of the films on this page, features an ex-Charlie's Angels cast member, in this case Cheryl Ladd.

A DEATH IN CANAAN (1978)

Is there nowhere safe? Actually a dramatisation of a Connecticut murder case in which a local teenager is suspected of the mutilation of his mother.

DEATH MOON (1978)

Witchcraft in Hawaii. Plodding.

DEATH OF A CENTERFOLD: THE DOROTHY STRATTEN STORY (1981)

Well-known and reasonable adaptation of the story, featuring Jamie Lee Curtis as the tragic Stratten. Also used by Bob Fosse (*Star 80*).

DEATH OF A SALESMAN (1985)

Excellent version, though still not as good as Laslo Benedek's 1951 film, this won Emmys for Dustin Hoffman and John Malkovitch. Most of the cast were from Hoffman's 1984 Broadway revival of Miller's classic.

THE DEATH OF OCEAN VIEW PARK (1979)

Dreadful disaster effort in which a hurricane hits a seaside amusement park on a holiday weekend. Considering a real park was destroyed for the film, the effects are crap.

DEATH RACE (1973)

Boring WW2 drama with Lloyd Bridges, Doug McClure and Roy Thinnes, all of whom should know better (except possibly McClure).

DEATH SCREAM (1975)

Vast cast, including some worthwhile names (Ed Asner for one) in a story based on the Kitty Genovese murder. Unfortunately degenerates into a bog cop thriller. Later renamed *The Woman Who Cried Murder*.

BRIGHT WINGED, WITH PALE HANDS

Jo Raine

And the seas rose and the sky fell. All things came to an end. The agent of this destruction looked upon his work and knew it to be good. He laughed, dark joy in his eyes, on his arrogantly beautiful face.

For thousands upon millions of years he had regarded his father's creation with envious eyes and plotted its downfall. Many times he had engineered its destruction but he had always been thwarted. Now, at last, he had succeeded. and success was sweet.

With a gesture, the world became dust. An emptiness deeper than darkness spread across the face of the land, leaving nothing behind it, a negative space, a negation of even the possibility of life, of light.

Yet, impossibly, there was light, a terrible brightness, all-consuming, and in the light was a Presence.

My Son, what have you done?

The voice resonated through him, rich and powerful, yet full of yearning. There was no reproach, no judgement. only love for something long lost.

"Why don't you call me by my name – by one of the names I've been taunted with by your creation over the years. Call me Beelzebub, Ba'al, Iblis, Sutekh, Shaitan. Call me Lucifer. As for what I have done – I did nothing! Mankind was your creation. You gave them free will. I merely gave them..." He paused, and then smiled, his voice silken. "...toys. They didn't have to destroy themselves. After all, you made them in our image, and look at us!"

Yes, let me look at you, my son.

The light expanded, touching his skin, his hair, entering every pore of his being, his mind, his soul. He fought hard, but the presence was too strong. All the pretence, all the artifice, all the barriers he had created within himself dissolved. Naked, his beauty gone, his brightness extinguished before that terrible, merciless light, he cowered, pale hands covering his ravaged face.

"I only wanted your love!", he cried, his voice howling desolation. "You were always busy with something else. When I fell, you didn't catch me. You saved every living thing, you cared for every living thing, but not me. You shut me out. You shut me out!"

You were the brightest and best of my creations. Always.

The words reverberated through his being, rending him apart. The light of the Presence was all around him and in him and through him now, making him anew, changing his being. He was safe. He was loved.

Pure white, burning and beautiful, he was a phoenix reborn from the ashes of the old world. From him, new life would spring. There would be a new beginning.

The Presence released him into the void.

Let there be light.

And in that great silence, he unfurled his wings and flew.

DEATH PLAYLIST: THE TOP TEN

Compiled by Ian Creasey

Dr John (Sleeping Stephen) (Chris and Cosey)

Fly on the Windscreen (Depeche Mode)

All Cats Are Grey (The Cure)

Through A Child's Eyes (Bananarama)

The Perfect Kiss (New Order)

Joan of Arc (Maid of Orleans) (OMD)

Seconds (The Human League)

And On (Yazoo)

Wooden Horse (Suzanne Vega)

Let's All Make A Bomb (Heaven 17)

MUSIC TO HAVE AN ABORTION TO

Compiled by Tara Dyson

Bye Bye Baby (Bay City Rollers)

Spare Parts (Bruce Springsteen)

Never Stop Bleeding (Robyn Hitchcock and the Egyptians)

Sweet September Sacrifice (Terry Blair and Anouchka)

It's Different For Girls (Joe Jackson)

Why Worry (Dire Straits)

Sean (Everything But The Girl)

New Sensation (INXS)

Intruder (Peter Gabriel)

Crosseyed and Painless (Talking Heads)

Pulling Mussels From A Shell (Squeeze)

Not Here. Not Now (Joe Jackson)

Too Much Sex, Not Enough Affection (Timbuk 3)

Leave Me To Bleed (Erasure)

Executioner (Robyn Hitchcock and the Egyptians)

Lily the Pink (Scaffold)

A TRUE FAITH

Patrick McKay

"...time for bed, said Zebedee." On the television.

"Boing!" said the children, Nicola and Simon, in unison. Sat on the floor they yawned obediently and stood slowly.

Julia was just a little surprised to have got the children to go to bed so easily, and she wondered if she should prepare for nocturnal disturbances. There was really little she could do if they did wake. Picking up the stray toys and left-over biscuit fragments she thought about this. It had been the closing lines of *The Magic Roundabout* which had prompted their peaceful and smooth departure. Was this meaningful? They hadn't even wanted to wait for Daddy, so she hadn't had to explain that he was away on business. Again. She hadn't had to tell them a story, the TV had been enough for them.

She remembered reading somewhere she couldn't recall, that the BBC had written their own scripts to dub over the original pictures. Were they French? She thought so. Anyway, it was supposed to be too political to translate properly, too directly satirical, so they had fitted new stories to imported scenes. The children loved it, and Julia thought it worked better than many of the newer, specially created programmes she endured with them. She switched the video off, revealing the news. Foreign protestors were changing the world again, successfully it seemed, whilst AIDS ran unchecked in Britain. Julia picked up a fluffy pink rabbit. Suddenly she had a curious thought: What if the news were dubbed, like *The Magic Roundabout*? Perhaps the BBC (not the government this time, the stories had the wrong tone, too dark) thought that people shouldn't hear the real stories, and so they had invented these wild tales to fit the pictures. She laughed at this equally wild idea. It was a new form of censorship, but it might be true.

And if enough people believed it, did it matter? Didn't mass popular acceptance make fiction apparently real? People thought TV shows were real. Wasn't the truth often dismissed as fantasy and speculation? She remembered hearing this suggested before. What if Reality were a democracy? Julia recalled the term consensus reality. People think that the CIA shot Kennedy, so they might as well have done; other examples came to her now: Yoko split the Beatles, Thatcher rigged the elections, Bob Dylan can't sing, she thought, looking at Richard's tape collection. All true because people believe they are true. Dylan used to be able to sing, but people said he couldn't and now he can't. Proof.

How many did it take, though? Obviously not a majority, because lots of Africans hadn't heard of Mrs Thatcher (although some of them might know the Beatles). So maybe it was just a majority of those who had a firm opinion on the matter, a sort of Balance of Belief. Julia wondered if there was a universal Law of Conservation of Faith, or did it decay, ebb and flow, its spring tides provoked one time by a Salman Rushdie, another by some other pointless "outrage"? It might just take one particularly intense person to change things. Julia decided to believe something to test her theory. It couldn't be just anything, she needed to be precise. It had to avoid pure chance interfering with her result.

Richard was not home that night – he said he had a conference in Bath – but Julia had expected him to phone. She was so engrossed in her search for a "belief" that she didn't miss his call until after ten. So much for her thought of an early night like the children. He'd be at dinner now so he wouldn't ring. Or would he? Julia wondered if he was as alone as she was, or if he had his secretary, Sara. Blonde and tall Sara could easily make a man neglect his wife and children, she would distract him with a thought. Julia didn't know that Sara had gone with Richard; she didn't know that they were having an affair; she didn't know but she believed it, and that made the difference.

She could find a pretext to call Sara – Richard's train times, perhaps? – but if she didn't answer it would weigh down all her fears. Ignore it and let it go away, then? It might be best. Get Christmas over with, at least. For the kids' sake.

Julia decided this calmly. She had a nice house, great children (tonight, at least), a part-time job but no need to work, and a husband who was sleeping with his secretary. She would be all right.

Preparing for bed, Julia looked in the mirror and thought again about her husband and his lover. She was sure. What else could she do but ignore it? How would she win him back? A new image, change her

A TRUE FAITH

hairstyle? Her legs needed shaving, she was sure Sara's legs were long and smooth.

Outside it began to snow. By morning it would lie like Julia's bedsheets: deep and crisp as mid-Winter dawn streaked it blood-red.

I DRINK BEER, ME... THE STORY CONTINUES...

Nic Farey

I owe you, Martin.

"Hello, Marty? Yeh, it's me. Remember that "problem" you had a while back. . Wrote about it for Tony. I should 'a seen it comin' really. Yeh, same problem. Well, more problems really. I dunno, maybe less. Well... what? No, I didn't really want to talk about it that much. You know me well enough by now. No, no... Yeh. No... look, just shut up a minute will ya? Listen, you git... no, sorry mate... no really. Yeh, well, I suppose I just wanted to thank you for writing about it then. No, really. Yeh, well, look... Oh fuck, can we talk later? Yeh, OK, see you at Novacon then. OK. Bye."

(Imaginary conversation)

Really, it did help. Remembering Martin's piece of October 1988 made the symptoms very obvious to me. I knew what was happening. Actually I always knew. I knew then, when I read it. I knew before. Debt, days off work, mood swings, you name it. Every spare penny was a proportion of a pint; every shilling a slice of a swig.

"Fifty thou a year'll buy a lot of beer."

(Timbuk 3: The Future's So Bright, I Gotta Wear Shades)

The trouble isn't only that, of course. Would it were that simple. (You think you had it bad, Marty? Read on boy.) Well of course it can't be *that* bad can it? After all, I still have my flat (just). I still have my girlfriend. When I drank too much I just fell asleep perched on something as unlikely as a Calor Gas heater. Harmless, eh?

Then we come to that extra added ingredient, guaranteed to generate sufficient heat to evaporate all sympathy. That extra little spice which turns a common problem into an uncommon one. Oh, girls, it's a real frightener. Yes. I'm talking about **VIOLENCE**.

"Violence, Violence, it's the only thing that'll make you see sense"

(Matt The Hoople: Violence)

█ is a friend I've known ages. She's stuck with me through thick and (mostly) thin, even when I was having a really bad time and lots of mood swings when I'd decided to leave my wife. She's had a lot to put up with. The first occasion I don't even remember, probably because she didn't tell me too much about it at the time. I was, as usual, completely legless, and this conspired with one of my occasional but regular bouts of depression to put me in a foul mood. (Later, you'll notice a pattern emerge here.) I suppose it wasn't what you'd call too serious. No marks. No real damage. Just slapped her around a little. Well, put it down to the general emotional confusion of the period. Let it go.

The second time was worse, but probably only because I remembered some of it, and it was public. well, it was public to the extent of occurring in the street, in front of a garage on New North Road as I recall. I

THE STORY CONTINUES...

screamed, shouted, carried on, threw fists, kicked, and then screamed some more. I can't even remember why, but I kept yelling "Get the fuck out of my face!" at high volume. We row a lot, me and [REDACTED]. I suppose it comes of being such good friends. This one, though, was a milestone. Still, I was depressed at the time.

Last week, I'd been depressed all week. Louise was away, and I was generally demotivated about life in general. So come Thursday, I went to visit [REDACTED]. We went to the local pub for a drink, we ate (she cooked), I cheered up. It was nice. Then I got really drunk on Wild Turkey. *Really* drunk. Stinking drunk. Obscenely drunk. Grossly drunk. Filthy, dirty, arsehole bastard *fucking drunk*. I threw away the bottle cap, saying I wouldn't need it (almost true). From what [REDACTED] tells me, Clive Barker could've got several novels and a couple of lucrative film contracts from the look in my eyes. Fists flew. Tears were shed. Lies were told.

"Alcohol provokes the desire, but takes away the performance."

(Swedish TV ad)

It must have looked like a bad outtake from *9 1/2 Weeks*. I ordered her to crawl around, then get back by the door, then crawl, so many times that her knees were a mass of carpet burns next morning. When she was too slow to comply I hit her across the face. Eventually, she was released by my passing out on the floor. Three staggers and down. She managed to find the bottle cap and save the last couple of measures.

To digress: Martin's answer was to stick to beer. Just beer. No wine, no spirits. For me, apart from the first step of admitting the problem (and admitting it to selected colleagues at work, including my boss) I cut out lunchtime drinking straight away – and believe me, that's quite a saving already. I try not to drink during the week, or at least not too much. This, I figure, won't hamper my socialising, convention going or partying, only my more solitary imbibing.

End of digression. It's an accepted theory that your true nature and desires come out when you've had a drink or two, so what does this mean? I already knew I was moody. I already knew I was prone to depressions. I thought I already knew a lot. I didn't know I was a latent sadist. I didn't know I had that capability for violence. I didn't know I could be so nasty to my best friend.

I love you, [REDACTED] and I'm so sorry.

I don't remember.

Was that me?



LOCO CITATO

The Readership

[S V O'Jay is italicised and squarely parenthesised]

Alan J Sullivan, c/o 13 Weir Gardens, Rayleigh, Essex SS6 7TH

Many thanks for **HATE, FEAR AND LOATHING (Arrows of Desire 4)**.

Let's see... "Tell Me About It". I reckon I've walked down a few of the same streets – a nicely evoked aura of urban paranoia. The "you-are-being-followed-no-don't-look-keep-walking" feeling.

[I agree that the piece has an "urban" feel, but it's based on the emotions I had walking home as a child in a small village with only one street lamp. Boy, was I glad to reach that street lamp!]

"Hate, Fear and Loathing" – As Frank Zappa was wont to say: "Bizarre", I must try and get my mind round it sometime – looks intriguing.

"Good Intentions" – A nice, tightly-written piece, certainly a different angle on the road to Hell.

"Killing a Child" – Very controlled, very... neutral. This makes it seem rather bland, when you consider the highly emotive subject.

[Perhaps you're right. To my shame, I failed to credit Kev McVeigh in issue 4 with the editorship of this piece, carried out at my request. In fact, Kev made a very few small changes, and we were both pleased with the end result.]

"Loathing and Litigation" – Hmm, yes indeed This sort of thing seems to happen a lot in the USA.

"Textbook of Green" – An excellent rendering of the sort of helpless fear you get in all the very best "I Want" nightmares... ends like a dream with the jerk back to reality.

"Hate and Fear at the Movies" – There's a lot of it about. The industry seems to thrive on it; even in the comedy films some poor beggar has to suffer.

"What is it You're Afraid Of?" – I remember reading a book once *[Only once, Alan?]* where one character says to another "How many things are there to be afraid of?" "I don't know", the other replies, "That's what scares me". A philosophical point, but not without a certain humour to it, albeit of the blackest kind.

"Why?" – I don't know either, and I'm not sure I want to. Two sentences say it all. Neat.

"Pass the Sick-bag, Alice" – Heh, heh, heh, heh. Sick...

"Hateseeker" – From the visceral/emotional/sensual to the coldly cerebral to the world-weary ending. Obviously, they don't all end like that. (Do they? I'm waiting to find out if one does, anyway.) There's a definite "maybe the next one" feel to the end of it. A nice upbeat ending always beats a Soap Opera cliché anyway.

"How Petheridge Died" – This has a very definite period atmosphere to it, almost... Wellsian? *[I'm flattered!]* Maybe it's the late Victorian style language that does it. Otherwise, a pretty simple exercise in murder by character assassination. An effective piece, with a "dated" yet timeless quality about it (now there's paradoxical).

"Fear & Loathing in Hate City" – Quite a set of gut reactions there. The bit with the crowds and the flame-thrower is reminiscent of a Woody Allen comment on large, pressing crowds (he preferred a machine-gun, or for single pests a giant polo mallet). The overall feeling I get from this is that the hate, fear and loathing seems to stem from situations of constraint, frustrations and helplessness against an uncaring, unseeing, unfeeling mass. Thus do individuals suffer, or something like that (I wish I could remember where I stole that line...)

"Great Hate Figures of Fandom" – I can't think of many people I could add to this as being generally disliked. There are a few I could add for personal reasons, but that's too petty.

LOCO CITATO

[I think you could be taking this too seriously! Mind you, Dave Langford has seized on the fact that he happened to be the first name on this (numbered) list and is gleefully proclaiming himself to be fandom's Number One Hate Figure (see Sglodion, April 1990). It was almost a shame to tell him that the list was in no particular order.]

"HFL Playlist" – Quite a list... there's some really good tracks here, and one or two really bizarre ones – Pinky and Perky?!? Oh well, at least it wasn't the Smurfs Now there's a subject for hatred!

And apart from the letter column, the end of the zine. That's about it for this, too.

DF Lewis, 7 Lloyd Avenue, Coulsdon, Surrey CR5 2QS

Thanks for the copy of #4 I find this a most original magazine in its format and style, particularly the non-use of illos. The "under eights" joke was a bit near the bone!

Joe McNally, 106 Somerton Road, BELFAST, Northern Ireland BT15 4DG

"Hate, Fear and Loathing", eh? All subjects close to my heart. I went through a period in my adolescence when I made it my business to hate everybody until they gave me a reason to feel otherwise. There isn't a lot you can tell me about hate.

"Tell Me About It" I enjoyed, although I get the feeling you didn't attempt to elicit that particular response. I was raised a Catholic, and thus felt guilty about everything I did between the ages of about ten and fourteen or so, when I stopped feeling guilty about anything I did. But they were an interesting four years: washing my own pyjamas, leaving the windows open to clear various odours, some less licit than others, and, behind it all, the sure and certain knowledge that I Was Going To Hell For This. So, I actually found this one quite a laff riot.

[You're right, not the reaction I had anticipated. Still...]

Jayle's bit was a nice meditation piece; I'm just annoyed that he left out Roadrunner cartoons from the list at the end, while including Bugs and Daffy. I mean, I thought everybody knew that until "Last Year In Marienbad", nothing portrayed the workings of the mind better than the Roadrunner – or, more precisely, Wile E Coyote. Genius.

[R D Laing obviously had the wrong end of the psyche!]

"Road to Damascus" *[Actually the piece was called "Good Intentions"]* was OK, but I've never really enjoyed fiction that goes all cosmic over Christian imagery (PKD can just about carry it off).

"Killing A Child": Insensitivity, stupidity, selfishness and might-have-beens. Such is life. It must be true, I read it in a Christmas cracker...

"Loathing" and Litigation: howcum you leave out the Harlan Ellison – Michael Fleischer lawsuit? *[I didn't have the details – simple enough?]* It would have been perfect for the theme. Fleischer apparently took exception to the fact that Ellison had referred to him as "bugfuck" in print, and took him to court for libel. Ellison at one point stood up in court and claimed that he used "bugfuck" as a term of endearment, and that was the context in which he meant it.

Michael Fleischer, incidentally, is now writing for 2000AD. He's crap.

"Textbook of Green": the same comments (more or less) as those above for "Killing a Child". The writer just needs a good kick up the arse

"Hate and Fear at the Movies": Pity you limited yourself to titular hate and fear, or you could really have had fun.

Maureen Porter's exploration of the nature of fear really touched a nerve with me. For the last while – since Eastcon, in fact – my own future has looked very uncertain, and I'm rediscovering just how many things in

LOCO CITATO

the world there are to be afraid of. Something not dissimilar happened last year as well. At least this time I don't have to be afraid for anybody.

I'm still unsure if that piece was meant to be fiction or not. Always a mark of effective writing.

"Why?": It's because not everybody seems to realise that sexism doesn't just apply to women. It's just as sexist to say that all men are potential rapists as it is to say that all women are asking for it. It's just more socially acceptable to claim the former.

[I agree with your basic point, but think that this is an execrable way of putting it, reinforcing as it does the nominal roles of aggressor and victim. It's been argued that the male archetype has the positive value "Provider" and the negative "Aggressor". The equivalent female values are "Homemaker" and "Deceiver". Many classic myths, especially pre-Roman, portray some female characters in this vein. The animal equivalent is the vixen, also a term of insult for women which survived until comparatively recently. The typical female criminal might therefore be said to be Lucrezia Borgia, since poisoning is a "deceptive" method of murder. It might therefore be a valid comparison to say that if all men are potential rapists, then all women are potential poisoners.]

Sick jokes: How can you tell when your girlfriend has come? Who cares?

"Hateseeker": weird. Not unenjoyable.

"How Petheridge Died": Nice idea. Very nice idea. Hee hee.

"Fear and Loathing": Much material for debate here. For example, a large number of Storm's "angels" fit into different categories for me. I find it easier to hate, rather than loathe, people whose religious or political beliefs conflict that badly with my own. Mind you, that's probably because I have to walk past some minor equivalent of the Rev. Dr. Paisley, or occasionally the Grate Man himself, every time I go into town on a Saturday, telling me that I Am Definitely Going To Hell.

But broadly, I agree. Crowds in particular. Belfast, despite being fairly large, and a city, is very much a small town. With all that entails, except with guns. And people that it is really very, almost unimaginably, dangerous to get into a fight with, because even if you beat them shitless, you might feel a tap on the back while walking home from the pub one night and spend the rest of your life on crutches (BlackAndDecker-BlackAndDecker...).

So, to get back to the point, if you look at all weird, (I do) crowds in Belfast can be a Whole Load of No Fun At All. Unless you know the right people.

Hate Figures. I'll tell you how anybody can possibly hate Harry Bond. 1989 Unicorn. Belfast. Myself, my then girlfriend, Joy Hibbert (two separate people, I should add), Dave Rowley and Harry Bond go out for a meal. Since three of the party are vegetarians, I suggest a totally hoopy Indian restaurant. We stand scrutinising the menu, and before long, this culinary version of "Mayfair" has worked its magic and the juices of four of us are flowing profusely.

Then Haz sez something along the lines of "Well I can't eat Indian, so I'll just go off to the Italian next door, shall I?" in tones more suited to somebody saying "Has anybody got any razorblades or very powerful sleeping pills? I'm just off to the bathroom, no need to worry about me or anything..."

Playlist. Come on, who are you trying to kid? WHERE WAS REM'S "THE ONE I LOVE"? The most perfect hate song ever written – it even charted ferchrissakes! I could suggest many more obscure songs – "Terminus" and "The Full Pack" by Psychic TV suggest themselves, as does "Revolution" by the Spacemen 3 – but that was an almost unforgivable omission.

[What can I say, other than "Never heard of any of 'em, guv". Neither have I listened to "the charts" for a number of years, although I do rather like that Paula Abdul record.]

And Joy Division had nothing to do with "Blue Monday". *[For that one though, mea culpa.]*

LoCs. Sorry, have I missed something here? KEN CHESLIN'S SON IN IN NED'S ATOMIC DUSTBIN????? Fugginell. Almost as startling as Pete Lyon's claim in Sglodion (the veracity of which I cannot vouch for) that

LOCO CITATO

Dave Langford's brother is in the Three Johns. Evidence of some sort of conspiracy here, methinks. What next? Linda Pickersgill to join Sonic Youth? Wilf James taking on vocal chores in the Soup Dragons? Ken Lake to produce the next Skrewdriver LP? I think we should be told.

[Not least, perhaps, who half of these "bands" are, assuming them to be purveyors of music in the modern idiom.]

Kiki's LoC hurt even me. I always try and avoid being drawn into arguments like this. This is no exception. Let me just say that I don't think a fanzine, no matter how personal its subject matter may be, is the place to carry on this little tete a tete.

[I'm not convinced of this viewpoint, lest of all whether "tete a tete" is the phrase to describe the "exchange". The LoC was subtitled "A Different Perspective", and that is what it purveys, and indeed is a perspective on which Kiki is entitled to comment. The LoC was neither sought nor refused, neither the contribution "Good Intentions". Having received the contribution and LoC, what would your opinion have been had I refused to publish on such grounds?]

Patrick McKay's LoC mentions your little statement about sex always being good &c. Yes, SV, he's right. I could tell you stories, but won't, Ha.

By the way, how do you play football (or play Novacon, for that matter) on the phone? Sorry, I'm just being silly. Time to go.

Ken Cheslin. 10 Coney Green. Stourbridge, West Midlands DY8 1LA.

[This LoC edited for sense & spelin. Also Ken: yes, three, and no, that's not why.]

if I had seen AOD 1 and 2 also I might have been able to draw a more sure inference: is it your intention, then, to have a theme for each issue? *[Yes.]* Well, your way of doing it isn't mine. *[Tough. Or perhaps IDIC.]* I don't say you're wrong, and I understand that you depend on what you get in the way of articles, though you are responsible if you outline the type of material you want. I would have done things in a less serious vein. (I wonder if it's possible to do a series around the seven deadly sins, though I'd have to look up what they are.) *[Let me save you the trouble: pride, covetousness, lust, anger, gluttony, envy and sloth.]* Love last time, hate this time. what next? Envy? Sloth? I can imagine someone making a good (amusing and fannish) item from either of them. *[Or, indeed, the other five!]*

Though I says it (who shouldn't?) I don't think much of the skill of the front cover artist. The back cover doesn't look so bad, but possibly because it's sort of abstract and harder to see if the illustrator has succeeded in his/her intentions.

[It's at moments like this that I strongly suspect the extraction of a certain amount of urine. If you are being serious, the front/ back cover is a single picture, which should be apparent if you open the cover and hold it towards you. The artist is male.]

I think you could do with a few bigger headings and a few illos or something to break up the type, though you may (justifiably perhaps) begrudge the space. *[Not at all. Your wish is my command - at least this time.]*

Unmoved by "Tell Me About It". Wasn't terribly impressed, wasn't terribly disappointed.

Jayle Summers I had more of a reaction about, like "This S V O'Jay must be very peculiar, or desperate, printing such garbage". I had an acquaintance once who used to write words and phrases down on strips of paper, mix them up and pick them out, writing the result down as poetry. This, I felt, could have a certain arguable validity, and that's the best I could say about it.

"Good Intentions". Overwhelming impression: utterly boring, but take no notice of me. *[A tempting offer!]* I used to be interested in all sorts of Deep and Significant things: the Meaning of Life, Love, Pain, Suffering, the Poll Tax, but now I don't give a monkey's fart. Well, most of the time I don't, but most of the time I'm not sitting in some corner of a convention supping my third drink and getting maudlin. There should be an article in there somewhere, like what makes for this disinterest in the aged; slowing down of the blood, senile

LOCO CITATO

decay, years of experience/ disillusionment, and what is the relationship between the two? From what I recall it was the English type students who were mostly inclined to flap their mouths about all these very serious subjects, though "the Arts" generally were to some extent that way inclined. Damn all philosophers, prophets, mystics, theologians and politicians!

"Killing a Child". Nothing that doesn't happen every day. I can't fault it for that. It gives me much the same sort of feeling I get on reading those advice columns in womens' mags... partly how can people be so daft, or so stupid, or so simple, or so nasty and unfeeling, and partly sadness and sympathy for some, be it "their fault" or not. Apart from a superficial "immediate response" level, I try not to "blame" anyone. That too I attribute to getting older.

The DF Lewis seemed purposeless, which ain't all that unusual. Bored me.

Movies. OK if you like that sort of thing, but it seemed a waste of space to me.

"What Is It You're Afraid Of"? If read from about halfway down the first page, for preference, it reads like someone who is mentally ill. If that was the intended impression it succeeded, but it's nothing I could get interested in.

Men & Women. [*Barbara's "Why?"*] Now that was amusingly true to life. So were some of the "jokes".

"Hateseeker". Boring.

"How Petheridge Died" I liked. A very neat little piece, probably the best thing in the zine.

Page 21. [*"Fear and Loathing in Hate City" – Storm Constantine.*] No comment.

Hate figures. Amusing too. This could possibly have worked quite well giving each victim eight or ten lines enlarging on their faults, sins, personal habits, with examples. [*In some of the instances, this doesn't really bear thinking about. Especially McVeigh.*]

Playlist. *Very* boring.

[*There followed some reactions from Ken to editorial comments on his LoC of last issue. To avoid further penalising the already bewildered, my responses are: (1) No. (2) Bloody Hell! (3) Oh, good! Normal service will now be resumed.*]

Kiki writes too serious a LoC for me to comment on.

The blank spaces don't exactly annoy me, but it does seem to be a waste.

Pat McKay. NFA (No Fucking Address)

re: your Fear and Loathing issue: **-I HATED IT!**

Ha! Ha! Ha!

Seriously (as in razor blades!), another **BITCHIN** issue. Damn, that should have read **HITCHIN**. Better luck next time. Seems to me you been goin' at the method acting re fnz prodⁿ, so how you gonna follow death? Another issue at Easter?

[*Out of the mouths... As usual, next issue's theme is announced in the colophon, and is entirely appropriate to your comment.*]

ARROWS OF DESIRE 5

November 1990

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Contributions, LoCs etc to the editorial address by 1st March 1991.

AND FINALLY...

YOU DIE...