

The Ghost Wore Many Colours

Andrew James Paterson

The Ghost Wore Many Colours 1 The Man

The boat was waiting for him in Brighton Rock's harbour. The boat was already half-full and this meant that there would be more than enough witnesses when it became time to go through with it.

The man stood in line, cursing the snail's pace of the ticket line-up. A middle-aged couple standing in front of him turned around and glared.

The man didn't seem somehow familiar to the middle-aged couple. They were too old, but they were also useful.

Finally it was his turn to make a transaction . He pocketed his change and walked toward the queue for the boat itself, which moved more quickly than the ticket line-up had .

'David Burgess. You're David Burgess, aren't you?'

The man nodded silently as he passed through the turnstiles and onto the boat. The attendant had indeed recognized him. Recognition usually annoyed him, but not today.

In order to disappear, first you must be visible.

In order to die, first you must live.

He carefully staked out a position by the railing facing toward the shore. As all the passengers waited for the boat to cast off, he smiled to himself as he recognized others recognizing him.

David Burgess. He was a face and a reputation. He was one of those whatever did happen to him cult-figures. He was on the verge of eclipsing all the half-hearted competition for missing-in-action cult hero of heroes. Except that he would be missing but also acting. His life had been nothing but a prelude of his after-life.

The man could hear music from the radio being carried by the two teenage girls standing on the opposite deck. The music was by *Circumference* and the song was called *Matchbooks*. Too bad the radio was playing the radio-friendly version of *Matchbooks* that Mars Hedonis and his insipid band of lackeys released after booting synthesizer-terrorist David Burgess out of the band. Too bad the inspired lunacy of the original recording had been sanitized and then released into the outside world. The version on

The Ghost Wore Many Colours 1 The Man

Circumference's debut CD still featured certifiable Burgessisms, even though they were much too low down in the mix. But the CD version of *Matchbooks*, indeed every single track on the CD, would ultimately become collector's items.

Because David Burgess was playing on them. David Burgess and not Mars Hedonis and his lemmings masquerading as personalities was defining *Circumference's* sound.

The girls with the radio recognized him. The man could tell, because they were lowering their voices as if they were sharing some scandalous secret. The boat was now leaving the dock and they were on a voyage with David Burgess, he whose activities and whose state of mind had for some time now been objects of speculations in the tabloid as well as the pop press.

David Burgess had suffered a nervous breakdown. David Burgess suffered from paralyzing stage-fright. David Burgess was nothing more than a sore loser.

Every passenger on the boat now sailing out of Brighton Harbour would be returning to land within two to three hours. Every single passenger, except for one.

David chortled at the press' stupidity. Outside of all their typically usual innuendoes, they had missed one important fact. Over the past six months, David Burgess had become one very good swimmer.

When it became time for him to jump overboard, he would be able to stay underwater for as long as he had to. He had become highly adept at deep breathing while remaining invisible. He would swim toward the current that nobody had ever previously survived, and he would be the first survivor. No Coast Guard would capture him because nobody would even see him.

But the jump would be visible to many of the boat's passengers and even its crew. There were already several contradictory witnesses and now there would be several more joining the club.

He looked all right to me. He looked depressed. He looked, dare I say it, suicidal.

When the boat reached its furthest point from land, then David Burgess would make his move. He would be able to remain underground for as long as he had to.

The Ghost Wore Many Colours 2 Post-Mortem on Burgess

Andrew James Paterson

Local police captain Bob Stanley nodded gruffly to his superior, Scotland Yard Inspector Ted Warburton.

‘ Well, Inspector? No body has turned up yet, and no body is likely going to be turning up .’.

Ted Warburton was displeased by the local captain’s impatience and overconfidence, but he had to agree that finding David Burgess’ corpse was an extremely long shot possibility. Not to even consider the man still somehow being alive.

‘ You seem to have enough witnesses at least, Captain Stanley.’.

Bob Stanley again nodded gruffly. David Burgess had indeed been seen and identified by quite the variety of fellow boat passengers. It had been the younger passengers who had known the victim’s name, while the older ones had all been in agreement about the man’s wardrobe, facial appearance, and general mannerisms.

‘Well, Captain Stanley? You know very well that we can’t really declare the man dead unless his body does in fact turn up. But I agree with you that such an event is highly unlikely. Therefore, we should unofficially declare David Burgess permanently missing-in-action, unless he actually does wash ashore Lord knows where.’.

‘Thank you, Inspector Warburton.’.

‘ Thank you, Captain. And, by the way, I still require a full report on David Burgess’ life and his death. I would appreciate it by one week from today.’.

One Week Later

The Ghost Wore Many Colours 2 Post-Mortem on Burgess

Andrew James Paterson

to Scotland Yard Inspector Edward Warburton

from Brighton police Association Captain Robert Stanley 24/9/01

Report on the case of Mr. David Burgess :

David Burgess was born in Sheffield on the 27th of November in 1973. This fact indicates that Mr. Burgess's biological age is greater than indicated by the biographical information provided and disseminated by the pop group *Circumference*, of which Mr. Burgess was formerly a member. According to *Circumference's* promotional material, Mr. Burgess was born in 1978.

This disparity between fact and fiction continues with regards to Mr. Burgess' formal education. According to *Circumference's* publicity material and indeed the group's publicist, Mr. Burgess briefly attended St. Martin's School of Art from fall 1998 to spring of 2000. However, a visit to the university's registrar reveals that Mr. David Burgess attended St. Martin's between 1992 and 1997, long enough for him to in fact receive a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree. I also spoke to the university's principal, Robin Faraday. Professor Faraday recalled Mr. Burgess as having been an excellent student, with a particular flair for pop art and abstract-painting. I also spoke to Timothy Albert, a well known portrait-painter who was one of Mr. Burgess' instructors. Mr. Albert had high hopes for Mr. Burgess and was disappointed by his student's later choices in life and career.

I was unfortunately unable to speak with any of the surviving members of *Circumference*, as the band is currently on tour in Australia and New Zealand and will not be returning until nearly the end of the next month. Nobody at the band's record label, Virgin Records, was of any use to me as they simply referred me back to the current band members and to the music press.

Then I spoke at length to a reporter for the New Music Express, name of Philip Cathcart. Mr.Cathcart interviewed Mr. Burgess on several occasions, both during and after Mr. Burgess' involvement with *Circumference*. Mr.Cathcart found Mr.Burgess to be highly intelligent - he actually used the word fascinating- but also quite neurotic and fragile. Nothing indicated to Mr. Cathcart that Mr. Burgess used narcotics or even alcohol. While David Burgess was still a member of *Circumference*, Mr. Cathcart could

The Ghost Wore Many Colours 2 Post-Mortem on Burgess

Andrew James Paterson

accurately guess that Mr. Burgess was dissatisfied with his limited role in the band and that he particularly disliked both the singer Mars Hedonis and the guitarist Neil Venables. Burgess felt that Hedonis, whose real name is Mark Hewitt, and Venables were monopolizing the group's composing credits by ganging up on him and denying his own considerable input. When Mr. Burgess left Circumference, he granted an exclusive interview to Mr. Cathcart, and in this interview Mr. Burgess did not mince words about his former employers. When Mr. Cathcart asked Mr. Burgess what he was going to do next, Mr. Burgess evaded the question as if he didn't even hear it. Mr. Cathcart thought this behaviour was highly peculiar and became worried.

It is also worth noting that Mr. Cathcart's editor at the NME, Bruce Watkins, informs me that Mr. Cathcart has a tendency to eulogize and even fetishize dissatisfied musicians like David Burgess, whom he frequently compared to similar cult musicians such as Syd Barrett and Brian Eno among others. Mr. Watkins is afraid that Mr. Cathcart might indeed have his own ulterior motives for elevating Mr. Burgess to cult-hero status, and the young writer also seemed to harbour some sort of dislike for both Mr. Hedonis and Mr. Venables, quite likely on the basis of their relative success in contrast to Mr. Burgess' failure.

Regarding Mr. Burgess' behaviour on the boat out of Brighton Harbour, several witnesses have come forward and described how Mr. Burgess acted impatiently while in the queue for tickets, how he appeared embarrassed at being recognized by up to five different witnesses, and how he kept staring down at the water rather than looking out onto the bay. It is also worth noting that Mr. Burgess made no attempt to socialize with any of the other passengers. Nobody reports him drinking or indulging in narcotics or even smoking, although Mr. Burgess was indeed a heavy smoker both at St. Martin's and as a member of *Circumference*.

It is also important that Mr. Burgess waited until the boat was at its furthest possible distance from shore, and that nobody has ever been known to survive the current into which he deliberately jumped. Therefore, although a body is still yet to find its way ashore, I feel it's a safe conclusion that David Burgess committed suicide by jumping overboard into an unquestionably fatal current.

The Ghost Wore Many Colours 2 Post-Mortem on Burgess

Andrew James Paterson

Inspector Ted Warburton poured himself a Glenlivet without any ice . As he stoked his pipe, he shook his head disapprovingly. It wasn't Captain Stanley's report that particularly bothered him, even though the report had not exactly told him anything that he couldn't have safely predicted about David Burgess' life, career, and presumed death. It was Burgess the man who was so highly annoying.

As far as Warburton was concerned, Burgess was nothing more than a spoiled brat who had stared success on a silver platter right in the face and then thought himself above it all. And the inspector had no use for snobs, especially those who couldn't back up their pretensions. He knew that his teenage daughter listened to *Circumference* and to other similar pop bands, and he detested the entire stinking lot of them. Too much cheesecake too soon , with all those drugs and those tabloid affairs with high-profile models and so-called actresses. But at least a few of these overgrown adolescents realized that they would do best carefully investing their fortunes and not taking the whole racket so bloody seriously. Burgess was too intellectual to be a pop star lad, he thought he was superior to the rest of the gang. So what does the boy-genius do? Start an alternative career or some other constructive alternative? No, he contrived to manufacture his own personality-cult, buttering up his willing sycophant in the pop press. However, then of course the silly fool realizes how utterly insignificant he really is and subsequently jumps overboard.

Case dismissed, Warburton re-lit his pipe. Even if David Burgess were somehow still alive, he would be a vegetable. He would have struck his head against the rocks in that current, which would have been extremely appropriate since the man already had far too many rocks in the head. Yes, case dismissed. Over and out for Mr. David Burgess.

The head waitress at the Mayfair's smoking lounge was used to Mars Hedonis and his suited friend Fred. Sue Sternwood was so familiar with the pair's eating drinking and smoking habits that she barely had to attend their table. But she was required to keep the other customers from overtly staring at the famous pop star and his mysterious manager.

Sue's daughter listened to pop music and was familiar with *Circumference*. Her daughter was so

The Ghost Wore Many Colours 2 Post-Mortem on Burgess

Andrew James Paterson

familiar with the band and their British pop-chart rivals that her grades were an embarrassment. Sue Sternwood repressed a desire to poison the pop star's afternoon Scotch, but she was aware that the last thing her daughter and her school friends needed to have was yet another popular culture martyr.

And hadn't she recently read some item in the press.....about a former member of Circumference committing suicide? Jumping off a Brighton ferry, right in front of dazed onlookers. She snorted to herself. Some of these kids just couldn't handle success, because they knew their success had nothing whatever to do with talent.

But some didn't seem to mind success at all. Mars and Fred were, she had to admit, quite the odd couple. The pair of them never seemed to have much to talk about. Fred was constantly preoccupied with his pocket calculator, while Marswhose name was really Mark..... was frequently in the loo. Powdering his nose was, she believed, the diplomatic expression.

Now Fred Eastwood was demanding her attention. Sue hoped that *Circumference's* manager or accountant or whatever the hell his job-description was requesting the bill, so she could then loosen up and even half enjoy the remainder of her shift. But no such luck. Fred was requesting his favourite cigar.

She immediately obliged, not that she was expecting any gratitude for her efforts. She was relieved that Mars Hedonis didn't also smoke cigars. Later on, if the lad were actually bright enough to invest his fortune wisely, then he would likely take on the businessman's lifestyle with all of it's disgusting affectations. Mars Hedonis was about nothing if not prescribed affectations.

Fred Eastwood toasted his cigar and then waited for the waitress to move out of earshot before lighting it.

'David's body will never be found.', he remarked assuredly.

Mars Hedonis stared at his accountant as if he'd seen a ghost, and then recovered his balance.

'Of course it won't! If it were a case of David crying out for help, then he would've jumped much closer to shore. Like perhaps somewhere within the coast guard's radar.'

'Or somewhere in the vicinity of a qualified doctor?'

'Exactly, Fred.' Mars decided to order another Glenlivet while Fred sucked on his stogie.

The Ghost Wore Many Colours 2 Post-Mortem on Burgess

Andrew James Paterson

‘We should issue a statement, Mark.’.

Mars Hedonis frowned. ‘I’ll work on it, okay?’.

‘We must reiterate that David’s departure from the band was by mutual agreement, and that all of us profoundly regret his decision to end his life.’.

‘That’s already too many words, Fred. I’ll work on it tomorrow, but it must be brief. Two or three good sentences should do the trick.’.

Fred Eastwood barely nodded. Something more irritating than the obligatory press statement was gnawing at him.

‘Are we sure, Mark, that there is no surviving partner? Or possibly family?’.

Mars couldn’t deal with this potential complication, so he didn’t wish to talk about it.

‘If there is or are, I have no idea whom he might be.’.

‘Or she?’., Fred re-lit his cigar.

‘That’s unlikely.’ Mars retorted . ‘Fuck, man. I hope nobody’s going to try claiming David’s estate.’.

‘Well’, Fred exhaled . ‘People who commit suicide frequently prepare wills.’.

‘I hope he left no heir. I mean think of it from your angle, Fred.. It ‘ll make your life a lot easier of nobody or bodies come forward.’.

‘Agreed, Mark.’. Fred considered ordering a brandy, and then changed his mind.

‘What you don’t seem to realize, my good man, is that if Mr. David Burgess is in fact dead, but incapable of being officially declared dead, then there cannot possibly be any heirs to his estate. That means that no potential parasites will be in any position to come forward. Now does this make you breathe easier?’.

Mars Hedonis nodded. Fred’s logic was definitely reassuring. Mars sipped his Glenlivet, and then lit a cigarette.

‘I thought you were going to attempt quitting, Mark.’.

‘You should talk, Fred.’.

Fred grunted to himself. If Mars Hedonis were serious about becoming a real singer rather than a front man for a pop band, then he would have to develop a range. But he knew that if he were to harp on

The Ghost Wore Many Colours 2 Post-Mortem on Burgess

Andrew James Paterson

this subject, Mars Hedonis would merely remind him that Frank Sinatra and Dean Martin and Aretha Franklin all smoked and had great lungs. And Mars would technically be correct. But booze and nose candy never helped anybody's throat or sinuses, and that was one of life's indisputable facts.

‘ I think our meeting's adjourned. Don't you Fred?’.

Fred Eastwood nodded. He puffed on his cigar and then motioned the waitress. As Sue Sternwood approached their corner table, she discreetly held her nose.

The head waitress at the Mayfair's smoking lounge was used to Mars Hedonis and his suited friend Fred. Sue Sternwood was so familiar with the pair's eating drinking and smoking habits that she barely had to attend their table. But she was required to keep the other customers from overtly staring at the famous pop star and his mysterious manager.

Sue's daughter listened to pop music and was familiar with *Circumference*. Her daughter was so familiar with the band and their British pop-chart rivals that her grades were an embarrassment. Sue Sternwood repressed a desire to poison the pop star's afternoon Scotch, but she was aware that the last thing her daughter and her school friends needed to have was yet another popular culture martyr.

And hadn't she recently read some item in the press.....about a former member of *Circumference* committing suicide? Jumping off a Brighton ferry, right in front of dazed onlookers. She snorted to herself. Some of these kids just couldn't handle success, because they knew their success had nothing whatever to do with talent.

But some didn't seem to mind success at all. Mars and Fred were, she had to admit, quite the odd couple. The pair of them never seemed to have much to talk about. Fred was constantly preoccupied with his pocket calculator, while Marswhose name was really Mark..... was frequently in the loo. Powdering his nose was, she believed, the diplomatic expression.

Now Fred Eastwood was demanding her attention. Sue hoped that *Circumference's* manager or accountant or whatever the hell his job-description was requesting the bill, so she could then loosen up and even half enjoy the remainder of her shift. But no such luck. Fred was requesting his favourite cigar.

She immediately obliged, not that she was expecting any gratitude for her efforts. She was relieved that Mars Hedonis didn't also smoke cigars. Later on, if the lad were actually bright enough to invest his fortune wisely, then he would likely take on the businessman's lifestyle with all of it's disgusting affectations. Mars Hedonis was about nothing if not prescribed affectations.

Fred Eastwood toasted his cigar and then waited for the waitress to move out of earshot before

lighting it.

‘David’s body will never be found.’, he remarked assuredly.

Mars Hedonis stared at his accountant as if he’d seen a ghost, and then recovered his balance.

‘Of course it won’t! If it were a case of David crying out for help, then he would’ve jumped much closer to shore. Like perhaps somewhere within the coast guard’s radar.’.

‘Or somewhere in the vicinity of a qualified doctor?’.

‘Exactly, Fred.’ Mars decided to order another Glenlivet while Fred sucked on his stogie.

‘We should issue a statement, Mark.’.

Mars Hedonis frowned. ‘I’ll work on it, okay?’.

‘We must reiterate that David’s departure from the band was by mutual agreement, and that all of us profoundly regret his decision to end his life.’.

‘That’s already too many words, Fred. I’ll work on it tomorrow, but it must be brief. Two or three good sentences should do the trick.’.

Fred Eastwood barely nodded. Something more irritating than the obligatory press statement was gnawing at him.

‘Are we sure, Mark, that there is no surviving partner? Or possibly family?’.

Mars couldn’t deal with this potential complication, so he didn’t wish to talk about it.

‘If there is or are, I have no idea whom he might be.’.

‘Or she?’., Fred re-lit his cigar.

‘That’s unlikely.’ Mars retorted . ‘Fuck, man. I hope nobody’s going to try claiming David’s estate.’.

‘Well’, Fred exhaled . ‘People who commit suicide frequently prepare wills.’.

‘I hope he left no heir. I mean think of it from your angle, Fred.. It ‘ll make your life a lot easier of nobody or bodies come forward.’.

‘Agreed, Mark.’. Fred considered ordering a brandy, and then changed his mind.

‘What you don’t seem to realize, my good man, is that if Mr. David Burgess is in fact dead, but incapable of being officially declared dead, then there cannot possibly be any heirs to his estate. That means that no potential parasites will be in any position to come forward. Now does this make you breathe easier?’.

Mars Hedonis nodded. Fred's logic was definitely reassuring. Mars sipped his Glenlivet, and then lit a cigarette.

'I thought you were going to attempt quitting, Mark.'

'You should talk, Fred.'

Fred grunted to himself. If Mars Hedonis were serious about becoming a real singer rather than a front man for a pop band, then he would have to develop a range. But he knew that if he were to harp on this subject, Mars Hedonis would merely remind him that Frank Sinatra and Dean Martin and Aretha Franklin all smoked and had great lungs. And Mars would technically be correct. But booze and nose candy never helped anybody's throat or sinuses, and that was one of life's indisputable facts.

'I think our meeting's adjourned. Don't you Fred?'

Fred Eastwood nodded. He puffed on his cigar and then motioned the waitress. As Sue Sternwood approached their corner table, she discreetly held her nose.

'David Burgess' had been a professional pseudonym. This fact had been unknown to *Circumference's* publicists, surviving members, and the band's de facto manager Fred Eastwood. This fact had been unknown to even the man's biological parents, since both of them had died when the boy was still relatively young.

The boy had in fact been christened Gordon Inglis, and now the man had reverted to the name on his birth certificate and even on his social security documents.

Having safely and uneventfully washed ashore well up the coast, the survivor had methodically died his hair black, purchased a pair of thickly-framed reading glasses, and found anonymous employment in a small-town library. But soon it became time to fly overseas, to Canada and not to anywhere within the United States.

Canadian Customs had not presented Gordon with any problems. He had of course purchased a two-way ticket from the Liverpool Airport, and therefore nothing seemed even remotely out of whack to the woman at Canadian Customs. Times being the way they had been for so long, innocent-looking Englishmen were not about to be setting off any fire alarms.

His next step was to find accommodation and then work in Toronto. Both of these of course would have to be done unofficially, but Gordon was not worried about this. He would stay in a bed and breakfast until he found himself a job, since apartments were probably off limits without a job. However, Toronto was a world-class city, and thus not unlike so many other places where one could work in perhaps the renovation or construction or hospitality or other industries while remaining underground.

He made accommodation arrangements with an English-styled B&B slightly east of central downtown Toronto, and then borrowed a Yellow Pages from the pleasant-enough proprietor of the B&B. He scanned the Temporary Help and Personnel agencies, shook his head and then checked out several pages worth of contractors. All of those listed in the Yellow Pages seemed too official, too respectable.

Then he found himself flipping past the Music Publishing page .He slowed down and then scanned

this page. There were prominent ads for the big companies such as Chappel and G.V. Thompson and Leeds, but Gordon Inglis' eyes gravitated toward a small box highlighting a firm that he'd never heard of before.

It turned out that Drummond and Bulmer was not really a publisher. It was an instruments and sheet music retail-outlet with a wholesale component. It became apparent while talking to the warehouse foreman that the operation sold and distributed bootleg or unauthorized arrangements of pop and show tunes. Drummond and Bulmer needed a sales clerk and an order clerk. Gordon applied for the warehouse position and was immediately offered a job.

Obtaining a believable but phony Social Insurance Number was hardly difficult. It did set him back a few hundred dollars, but it was definitely a worthwhile investment.

The foreman's name was Larry Malton and his sole question was when could the man begin. Gordon almost thought that this instant hiring was too good to be true, but he accepted the job offer. Drummond and Bulmer couldn't be up to anything seriously illegal or disreputable, or else they wouldn't be allowed to keep their business up and running.

Larry Malton was easy enough to work for. Each day, he would assign all of his warehouse staff to specific functions and then only badger them when they were facing deadlines. Larry was a pretty easy going guy, which was fine by Gordon. The boss wasn't exactly the world's brightest light, which made it easy to avoid talking to the man in any great depth during coffee or lunch breaks.

The other workers were also tolerable, except for one motor mouth named Terry Harvey. The loudmouth seemed to be obsessed with whether or not Gordon was queer, since he never flirted with any of the secretaries who periodically visited the warehouse with orders and other requests. Gordon suspected that Terry was himself a big overweight closet case, but the man also had a black-belt in karate, so Gordon refrained from simply telling the jerk to fuck off.

Aside from the Terry problem, working conditions in Drummond and Bulmer's warehouse was not unpleasant. Gordon was usually able to work at a quicker pace than his colleagues and thus find himself periods of time to kill. He would find himself amused by the terrible arrangements in the popular song books. Many of Drummond and Bulmer's knockoffs were in the wrong key with the wrong chords and the

wrong lyrics. Oh well, he chuckled to himself, beginners had to begin somewhere.

One day Gordon noticed some new additions to the warehouse stock. At the bottom of the pile that Larry Malton was separating into different price codes, Gordon recognized Mars Hedonis' mug on the cover of a glossy new songbook. *Circumference* had become popular enough for their latest CD to have it's own generic arrangements in distribution.

Penedegradation, that was the title of *Circumference*'s latest full-length offering. *Penedegradation*, how old-fashioned while trying to be shocking. Mars Hedonis and his yes-men were now compensating for the departure of 'David Burgess' by using S&M fascist terminology in their packaging while streamlining their music even more towards the disposable mainstream.

Gordon opened up the *Penedegradation* songbook and appraised the group photographs. Of course 'David Burgess' wasn't in any of the pictures; *Circumference*'s original keyboards player had already been erased from history because pop music and pop culture wasn't even supposed to have history. Gordon hoped that his rather likable pop-critic admirer from the NME, Philip Cathcart, wasn't going to make things difficult by imagining half-baked theories as to how the legendary David Burgess was alive and well and living somewhere exotically mysterious. That was the last complication he needed.

He forwarded the songbook to the band members' biographies. Of course his replacement was included as the last of the lot, almost as an afterthought.. His milquetoast replacement was lucky to even have his picture taken as if he were one of the band.

Barry Sullivan, now a tax exile just like all the original *Circumference* band members, lived in Santa Fe, California. Barry seemed almost too squeaky clean to be for real. In his spare time, according to the band bio, Barry owned and operated a recording studio and he was also a sports car enthusiast.

Gordon smiled. Even the squeaky clean members of the human race have their inevitable weaknesses. Since business had slowed down at Drummond and Bulmer, he requested vacation time from Larry Malton and permission was granted.

'Where are you going for you little vacation, Gord?'., Larry asked casually.

'London', Gordon lied.

The hill was almost too steep for both himself and the car to deal with, but Gordon knew he'd finally reached his destination. The auto garage was about twenty minutes drive out of Santa Fe, and right at the top of the fork-curved hill. He pulled the rented Dodge into the driveway for 'Cliff's Garage' and parked in front of the main office.

The sign at the foot of the driveway advertised Mechanics Wanted, and Gordon caught a glimpse of the taciturn gentleman who remained seated in his little office.

'Good afternoon, sir', the man behind the desk addressed him. "What can I do for you. Nothing wrong with your car to my eye, at least on the outside?'

'Nothing wrong with my car at all, sir. It gets me from A to B, which is all I need it to do for me.'

The manager looked at Gordon, curious but not wary.

'I'm Cliff Taylor. And you are?'

'Joe Lawrence. Pleased to meet you.'

'Sit down a minute first, Mr. Lawrence', requested Cliff Taylor.

Gordon sat down in a chair opposite Cliff's desk, waiting for the man to return with a pad and pencil.

'You sound like you're from somewhere else.'

'I'm Canadian, but I lived in London for several years.'

He hoped that Cliff would recognize London and not London, Ontario.

'So what brings you down to Santa Fe?'

'A girlfriend', he responded shyly.

'You're thinking of moving down here to be with her?'

'Maybe', he was nonchalant. 'If I could land a few days work here and there, that would certainly be appreciated.'

Cliff Taylor narrowed his eyes.

'You see that Ford at the back of the garage. If you can get it up and running, you're hired.'

'I'll take you up on that, Mr. Taylor.'

And Joe Lawrence immediately stood and walked toward the delinquent vehicle. He'd learned a few mechanical tricks while still in his early teens, and he was glad that he'd never forgotten them.

'Do you want to go for a spin, Mr. Taylor?'

Cliff shook his head.

'Just begin, Mr. Lawrence. As soon as you're available.'

A few days later he recognized the high-profile customer. Barry Sullivan, keyboard player for the British band *Circumference*, had indeed pulled into Cliff's Garage because he'd had some serious problems with his year-old Porsche. Cliff and another younger mechanic watched as Barry Sullivan walked toward the lavatory.

'Now, there's the type of customer who makes our day. I understand he's a rock musician, Gary?'

'Yeah, I guess that's how I'd describe him. He's really young, a kid who's come into a lot of money, which of course explains all those cars.'

'Porsche, Aston-Martin, a few others?'

'A few other fast cars, Cliff. Barry Sullivan is seriously into fast cars. He ain't the type to prefer Bentleys and Daimlers and fucked-up chauffeurs.'

Bary approached the two chattering mechanics, who tailed off their conversation.

'I see. What can we do for you today, Mr. Sullivan?'

The peroxide-haired musician smiled at the garage proprietor and his helper.

'Valve problems, I suspect. Just check everything and I'll call in tomorrow.'

Barry Sullivan walked toward the Aston-Martin that was waiting for him at the foot of the driveway. Joe Lawrence could see a Latina-looking woman providing Barry with the necessary ride home.

'Seems like a nice guy, Gary. And of course good for business.'

'Nice girlfriend, too. Nice to see Barry Sullivan's into girls.'

'Oh?'

'Well, a couple of other guys in that band look pretty fruity to me. That singer for sure, Mars Hedonis or whatever his real name is. And the guy Barry Sullivan replacedDavid Burgess. Now there

was an obvious screaming queen.’.

‘You know what, Gary? I don’t give a shit about any of their private lives , as long as they’re good and reliable for business. Now, you still have a bit of a back load, so I’m going to pass this job onto Joe. Okay?’.

Gary nodded. He watched as Cliff Taylor approached Joe Lawrence. Joe was the man with the weird trans-Atlantic accent who certainly did know a lot about cars and their engines. Joe wasn’t exactly the most talkative person he’d ever worked with, but silent types were much easier to deal with than brain-damaged chatterboxes.

The weather was just short of perfect for some serious recreational driving. Barry Sullivan fastened his seat belt and activated his favourite Porsche.

Ana had gone off somewhere with her cousin Luis, and Barry didn’t feel like remaining house bound, now that the car was back and shining from Cliff’s Auto Garage. That new mechanic was a pretty impressive fellow, a genuine trouble-shooter.

He rarely felt like staying home when Ana wasn’t there. Killing time with his and Ana’s CD player and her collection quickly became depressing. Barry could only listen to pop music for so long without becoming very bored, and he could only listen to jazz or classical music for a brief duration without becoming angry at how his own keyboard prowess was being wasted in this stupid pop band.

Yes, but I’m making a lot more money with Circumference than I could ever make by playing jazz with a bunch of ugly bearded losers. Hang in for at least another year, and then get serious about my own music. Yes, that shall be the plan.

Now he was out of the city and onto one of the country roads. Here was a golden opportunity to do some serious driving. None of this stopping and starting , none of that respecting the rights of slowpokes to drive as if every day were like fucking Sunday.

He sped up to one hundred and fourty and enjoyed watching the dust he had activated in his wake. He heard another car’s horn honking twice and he guessed that the whiner was that stupid aqua-green Chevrolet that he’s passed less than a minute ago.

The Ghost Wore Many Colours 4 Barry Sullivan Pt.2 Andrew James Paterson

The dust accumulated and Barry's vision was becoming cloudy. He was still doing one hundred and forty and now he was registering a curve overlooking a big hill.

Barry quickly slammed on the brake. It was too late. His head crashed against the steering wheel, so that Barry first saw clusters of stars and then rivers of blood before seeing absolutely nothing.

Post-Mortem on Barry Sullivan

The brake had failed and thus the Porsche and its driver had tumbled down the hill with the carburetors burning uncontrollably. The car had rolled over and fallen apart, with the driver's charred body barely visible underneath the right bucket seat.

'Good thing he was carrying ID, Bill'.

Officer Earl Sutton showed Barry's driver's license to Coroner Bill Mulvihill.

'Yes indeed, Earl. Identifying him would be an uphill battle for anybody trying to recognize his face.'

'This looks pretty open and shut already.'

'Not so fast, Earl. We still have to attempt an autopsy. Was he drunk, or other some other illegal influence? Did he have a record? Does he have a next of kin? Other questions?'

'I know, Bill. But the car is toast.'

'Unfortunately. But it's still worth talking to some of the local car shops, Earl.'

Officer Sutton nodded. There wasn't a lot for them to work with because there wasn't a lot remaining. Dead before arrival.

two weeks later

'Something that should interest you, Bill.', Officer Earl Sutton had finally gotten through on the phone to Coroner Bill Mulvihill. 'Barry Sullivan was a member of a famous British pop group, *Circumference*.'

'Really? How strange You'd think one of his cronies would have reported him missing by now.'

‘Not necessarily, Bill. I mean, bands like *Circumference* strike it rich quickly, then get taxed to their limits in the UK, so they spread out all over the globe and don’t contact each other for months.’

‘Wait a minute, Earl. They don’t even communicate by e-mail?’

‘Apparently not in this case. Barry Sullivan was a replacement for one of the original members and, according to both my daughter’s speculation and Sullivan’s girlfriend, his attitude was that the leaders of the band would contact him whenever he was specifically needed.’

‘Does that mean that they hated him, or vice versa? Or what?’

‘More like he was only playing with them for the big bucks. I mean, that’s hardly an unusual situation, Bill.’

Bill Mulvihill muttered the words ‘weird to me’ under his breath before countering Earl.

‘This might interest you, Earl. Sullivan’s Porsche was checked-out at Cliff Taylor’s garage just outside Santa Fe, and the particular mechanic no longer works there.’

‘Really. What happened to him?’

‘He quit. Broke up with his girlfriend, and went back to either Toronto or London.’

‘What’s the mechanic’s name?’

‘Joe Lawrence. Pulled in one day, asked for work, fixed somebody’s car in record time, and Cliff hired the man right on the spot.’

‘With no references or credit check.’

‘Well, Bill, you know the kind of under-the-table operation Cliff Taylor manages.’

‘All too well, Earl.’, the coroner nodded sadly, ‘all too well. Check out the name ‘Joe Lawrence’. You say he was Canadian?’

‘He told Cliff that he was. And that he’d also lived in London, explaining his accent. Here’s another item from the chief, Bill. The guy that Barry Sullivan replaced in *Circumference*, David Burgess, committed suicide last year by jumping off a ferry in Brighton. Verdict was the man was torn to shreds by the currents and lies scattered somewhere well underwater.’

‘Well, I don’t know squat about pop music and rock bands, but haven’t there been a couple of others plagued by this sort of jinx?’

‘Probably, Bill. And it’s never the leaders. The lead singer for *Circumference* now jets between Lausanne and Belize, while the lead guitarist lives in New York. He has a record for heroin possession. According to my daughter, Barry Sullivan was squeaky-clean, but with a weakness for fast cars. That also matches with his girlfriend’s testimony, and she’s a high-profile fashion model living in Santa Fe.’

‘Okay, Earl. I think we can conclude for now that Sullivan’s weakness for fast cars was the cause of his downfall. He couldn’t see the cliff because of his own dust, we might conclude.’

‘But the chief wants me to still check out Joe Lawrence and do a little research on *Circumference* - like the band members’ whereabouts and their general dynamic. So, I’m going to get on with it immediately, and I’ll keep you informed, Bill’.

‘Of course, Earl. Please keep me informed, for whatever it might be worth.’

Gordon had contacted Larry Malton , back at the Drummond and Bulmer warehouse in Toronto, reaffirming his imminent return to work. Larry had requested that he return the sooner the better, since Terry the shipper had been murdered in a notorious ravine.

‘My God, I can’t believe that happened’, Gordon remarked to Larry on his first day back.

‘Well’, Larry sipped his morning coffee slowly , ‘It looks to me like it was probably a hate crime.’.

Gordon nodded and said no more. Terry had always seemed like a man who protested too much. Anybody who hated queers that much had to be more than a bit worried they were a queer themselves. He found himself humming the melody of The Teddy Bears’ Picnic, and he tried to get the nasty little nursery rhyme out of his head to no avail.

Larry handed him a slate of tall orders and that kept him busy for the entire next week. He felt comfortable being back at the warehouse. He could talk to Larry Malton and the other order-clerks without needing to divulge anything personal, and the one colleague who had tested his stamina had been eliminated for him. Chickens always did come home to roost, he smiled to himself when nobody was watching.

He did read in two of Toronto’s newspapers that Barry Sullivan, a twenty-one year old member of the British pop band *Circumference* who had been living in Santa Fe, had met a tragic end as a result of his appetite for fast driving and expensive sports cars. Nothing indicated anything other than open and shut accident verdicts. None of the articles even mentioned Cliff’s Garage.

One of the order clerks did venture opinions on the musician’s car accident. The clerk pontificated at length about famous car deaths such as the John F. Kennedy assassination and the Satanic hex on Jayne Mansfield and her body-builder husband. Gordon knew very well that his fellow worker had read J.G. Ballard’s novel *Crash* and probably seen David Cronenberg’s dreadful movie-adaptation, but he resisted any temptation to comment.

Gordon Inglis didn’t read either pretentious science-fiction or detective novels. Gordon Inglis enjoyed

The Ghost Wore Many Colours Tony 1 Andrew James Paterson

action movies and loathed both art-house crap and boring period costume-dramas. Gordon Inglis paid little if any attention to popular culture, old and new movie-stars, and pop musicians.

But he did sneak a glance at one of his worker's Melody Maker one lazy afternoon and he was not surprised by the headlines. *Circumference* had broken up. Superstar lead singer Mars Hedonis had fired the entire crew of backing musicians, considering each and every one of them to be a liability.

Mars Hedonis hadn't even bothered to formally replace the recently-deceased Barry Sullivan, he'd simply augmented the band both in the studio and on stage with not one but two faceless keyboard players, neither of whom were included in any of the band's publicity shots. So it had become inevitable that Hedonis would ditch the motley crew of malcontents and substance-casualties and replace them with personality-deficient session players. Out went the borderline alcoholic drummer, the reformed addict bass player, and even the unrepentant junkie guitarist-songwriter. The entire lot of losers could enter rehab, concentrate on the stocks and shares, retire somewhere in the South Sea Islands, or find God and then learn to play jazz.

Gordon was amused to read, near the bottom of the Melody Maker's lead story, that former *Circumference* bass player Tony Marsden had indeed exercised the latter option. Tony had successfully completed a rehabilitation programme for heroin addiction and then enrolled in a mail-order divinity class. Gordon was unable to conceal his delighted amusement from Larry Malton or any of the other warehouse clerks. Usually, musicians adapting a faith converted to either Scientology or Buddhism. But Tony Marsden was on the verge of being officially ordained as an Anglican rector, right in his oh so very Northern English hometown of Sheffield.

Tony Marsden just might have been the most annoying member of the band, as far as Gordon was concerned. The journeyman bass-player wouldn't have known an original idea or concept if it had bitten him right smack on one of his ankles. Whatever Mars or Neil told him to do, Tony would comply without even a squeak of a whimper. And it was so typical for a weekend junkie to substitute one addiction for another. Religion was indeed the opiate of the person, because religion and opium were in fact the same damn stupid thing.

Gordon was jolted from his break by Greg Stevens, the new shipper who had replaced Terry. Greg

The Ghost Wore Many Colours Tony 1 Andrew James Paterson

needed to send out an order to a prominent retail-outlet in Halifax before the end of the day. In other words, Gordon had to step on the gas concerning the particular order. Greg Stevens seemed to be a step-on-the-gas sort of guy. He always had the warehouse radio on the country-music station, which annoyed Gordon.

Not that he was about to draw attention to himself by complaining about Greg's favourite music. Gordon's problem with country music, and with its rockabilly cousin, was that he associated it with *Circumference* and with Mars Hedonis in particular. Mars really had fancied himself to be the suave continental cousin of Elvis Presley himself. Mars considered himself a condescending connoisseur of white-trash American culture, when in reality Mars was a coal-miner's son affecting an ironic fascination on the English upper-classes and their comings and goings. Mars Hedonis would always be cheap and tacky, no matter how wealthy he might eventually become before either retiring or being retired.

'Hey, Gord. Seriously, man, that order's got to be on the road by five o'clock today.'

Right, Greg. Gordon focused on his assignment because he was already tired of Greg the shipper's voice and general personality. Larry Malton wasn't bearing down hard on him, so who the hell was Greg Stevens to be pulling rank at Drummond and Bulmer?

It was getting near time for another little holiday, Gordon observed to himself the next morning before beginning the next big important orders.

Mars Hedonis poured himself another Glenlivet and nursed his sore lower tooth. Yes, serious dental surgery beckoned him, and he had postponed the appointment for much too long. But now he could afford to have whatever necessary done, just as long as the painkillers were efficient.

Barry Sullivan's car crash had upset him. Not that he and Barry had been close friends or anything like that, since Barry had never bonded with any of the Circumference band members. But Mars felt that he had at least understood and respected Barry for what he had been, not a personality but a damn fine musician. None of the others had wanted to replace David Burgess with any sort of pretender to the throne, so why hadn't they simply accepted Barry as a competent player who was indeed quite easy to work with.

Yes, Mars sipped his Glenlivet. Professionalism certainly did have its advantages. Nobody had been at all sad to lose Mr. Burgess and his inspired amateurism, the sorry fool had become a liability and therefore he had to be let go. But the idea of any of the other band members calling themselves professionals had long become a joke. The rhythm section was frankly no longer a rhythm section. One drank too much and the other was a junkie.

Or rather, the junkie had found religion and become excessively devoted to his craft and his instrument, at the expense of the band. Tony could have sworn that Tony Marsden had no concept that his job was to accompany the lead singer, not drown the vocals out. To make things worse regarding Tony, religious fanatics were harder to tolerate than junkies. There was such a thing as a quietly competent junkie, while religious wing-nuts by definition would always foam at the mouth. Tony had granted an interview to a local pop-press scavenger, in which he hinted at the presence of substance abusers within *Circumference* including Mars Hedonis, whose vocals had become more and more 'nasal' over the last year now that success had gone to his head. And Tony had also hinted that other aspects of Mars' lifestyle were decadent. There was no further debate about it, Tony Marsden had to go.

And then there was the Neil problem. Neil couldn't write songs to save his ass any more, he'd found a few good patterns so he kept on recycling them. To make things worse, Neil's junk habit was far more

severe than Tony's had ever been. He'd already been busted once, and released on condition of entering treatment, which of course hadn't worked. Neil Venables was on every rock critic's list of next big star to die of unnatural causes.

Barry hadn't exactly died of natural causes, either. Mars hadn't even known about Barry's fast car fetish, but that was a tall part of why Mars had been able to work with Barry. No competition, no need for one-upmanship. Mars knew that Barry's had a girlfriend in Santa Fe, why else would a reasonably healthy Englishman want to live there for tax-related purposes. Mars already owned great sprawling vistas in both the Swiss Alps and the Virgin Islands, but then Mars Hedonis, or Mark Hewitt as he was known by the tax department, was worth a great deal more than Barry Sullivan had been worth.

Barry had been a likable chap, but he had been a replacement. Nothing more and nothing less. However, the very subject of replacing Barry begged the possibility of replacing the entire fucking lot of them.

He had sounded out Fred Eastwood regarding the possibility of Mars Hedonis becoming an official solo act. Fred had been cautious, but not dismissive of the idea. He warned Mars that such a transition couldn't look tacky, that it couldn't look like an aftermath of some personality quarrel but rather like a logical progression. Well, Mars poured another Glenlivet, as far as he was concerned losing the no longer talented parasites and hiring anonymous professionals was a perfectly logical progression. It wasn't so much an inspired career move, it was a given necessity.

But he could never alienate Fred Eastwood. The man was perfect at his vocation, that of a business manager cum accountant who kept the books immaculately and looked after every serious financial transaction. And Fred also knew too much. If Fred were to bolt ship, he could not only work for emerging rivals but he could also spill a few beans to the bloodthirsty tabloids.

Fred had been becoming more and more eccentric while appearing like, well, an archetypal accountant. The man seemed to have abandoned any ambition of having a personal life. Mars knew that Fred visited certain saunas, at which one could remain practically invisible and thus enjoy sex with little if any possible rejection due to girth or poor eyesight or even circumcision. And of course Fred would feel tremendous guilt concerning his small but important pleasures and so he would retire to some horrible pub

and eat the requisite horrible food and drink far too many pints and then operate at less than a hundred percent on the following day. But Fred was nothing if not an accomplished accountant, and Mars Hedonis was planning to make the poor simple man's job even easier than it already was.

Fred was skilled at something at which Mars was completely and proudly unskilled. Mars did not know how to balance budgets, and now he was in a position where he was above such mundane necessities. That alone was why Fred Eastwood could not be shown the door, unlike all the wretched failures who now comprised the band *Circumference*.

It was time to make arrangements for the dreaded dental appointment. Of course, the learned specialist would lecture Mr. Hewitt about the stupidity of rubbing cocaine against his gums, and Mr. Hewitt would tell the man to just shut up and fix his fucking teeth. But this and subsequent appointments were an absolute necessity, if Mars Hedonis was even remotely serious about becoming more than just another flash in the pan generic rock star.

The recently ordained Anglican minister at St. Matthew's Church on the hill, Reverend Anthony M. Smith, presided over the Sunday service's final processional and then mingled with his congregation in the front lobby. He was a quick study when it came to learning and then remembering the names of his more vocal parishioners.

'Until next week, Martin?'

The septuagenarian named Martin nodded and congratulated Rev. Smith on his most relevant sermon.

Today, the enthusiastic young minister had spoken passionately against those ignorant atheists who insisted that the church was devoid of all social and even political compassion. Reverend Anthony M. Smith insistently reminded his congregation that hospitality and medicine and indeed all crucial social services had been initiated by the Anglican among other established churches. He had implied, without needing to spell it out negatively, that without the church there would in fact be no social services and therefore the tired old Marxists and superficially-radical anarchists were actually dead wrong in their ill-thought beliefs.

'Good day to you, Frances. And to you, Jean.'

The mother and daughter were regular attendees at St. Matthew's on the hill. Frances Goodbridge was active in the arts club while her daughter Jean was a fund-raising dynamo. Jean Goodbridge had invited the new minister to dinner on the upcoming Wednesday night, and Tony was looking forward to the occasion. He had yet to meet any Mr. Goodbridge.

'Thank you for the sermon, Reverend Smith.'

A somewhat younger man now stood before him as the last of the congregation shuffled out into the nearby parking lot.

'I'm glad you liked it, Mr.?'

'Olson. Michael Olson.'

'Pleased to meet you, Michael.'

If anybody were to ask him about his middle initial, Tony would say that the ‘M’ in fact stood for Michael. Not Mark, as that was Mars Hedonis’ Christian name.

‘I agree with you very strongly about the relationship between social services and the church. I agree that the far left is dead wrong about the church being conservative.’.

‘Thank you, Michael. Mind you, the church is socially conservative. We cannot condone adultery or drug addiction or alcoholism or homosexuality or other afflictions.’.

‘I don’t disagree with you at all, sir.’.

And Michael Olson now walked out the front door and through the parking lot, but past all of the other parishioners’ cars.

Perhaps this younger member of the congregation did not own a car, Tony surmised. Perhaps he could not afford one, although his clothing was hardly that of a pauper. And Michael Olson did not seem to know anybody else among St. Matthew’s congregation.

Tony walked toward his own parked car. Probably the young man had only recently taken out a membership in the church. Quite possibly, Michael Olson was also a reformed substance abuser or active homosexual or some other reformed sinner. Come to think of it, there was something familiar about the young man’s face.

On the following Tuesday, Tony was purchasing his requisite groceries when he noticed Michael Olson browsing in the next isle.

‘ Good day, Mr. Olson.’.

‘Hello to you too, Reverend Smith. What are you buying today?’.

‘Oh, the basic essentials. Would you like to join me for dinner tonight?’.

Michael Olson mulled it over and then accepted the reverend’s invitation. Reverend Anthony M. Smith promised a well-cooked roast and thus Mr. Olson accepted responsibility for supplying red wine. He looked at his watch and realized that he had a few good hours to make the necessary preparations.

When Michael Olson arrived at the minister’s modest lodgings, Reverend Anthony M. Smith was drinking tea and listening to Albinioni’s *Adagio in Gm*. This composition was actually one of the visitor’s

favourite recordings, although he disliked the fact that it had become so associated with English good taste and select breeding.

‘It’s all right, Michael. We can chat quite easily without music. Don’t you think?’.

Michael also noticed the Turner facsimile on the wall behind the sofa, at which his host was seated. It made sense to him that Tony Marsden’s taste in art would run to the sentimentally pastoral.

‘Some wine, Reverend Smith. Red to go with the roast?’.

The reverend finished his tea and poured two glasses of wine. He then placed the bottle in the kitchen, which the visitor silently appreciated.

He realized that the roast would be extremely well done, and would thus take considerable time to broil. Living in Canada had made him familiar with rarely-cooked meats.

‘So, Mr. Olson. When did you move to Sheffield, and join St. Matthew’s on the hill?’.

‘Very recently, sir.’.

‘And where had you been living before, if you don’t mind the question?’.

‘Oh, London. Paddington, to be exact.’.

‘Do you have family in Sheffield, Michael?’.

‘No. Not at all.’. He knew that Tony was born in the Northern city, but he felt no need to pry further.

‘So, Mr. Olson. What were you doing in London?’.

The visitor sipped his wine. He wished to drink more quickly than the host, at least for the time being.

‘I was a painter, but I wasn’t getting anywhere with it. I had a couple of small shows, in very small galleries. But.....I realized that I was going to remain stuck in that particular rut, so I made a choice.’.

‘And that you did.’, Reverend Smith nodded approvingly.

‘And tell me about your self, sir. You’ve only just begun, as the song insists.’.

Reverend Smith regarded his visitor quizzically. He found it peculiar that Michael Olson would reference such a traditional pop tune. Yet Michael Olson appeared familiar, and he wasn’t going to be sleeping well until he was able to place the man properly.

‘Oh, I was a wild Irish lad, even though my parents were born in Finsbury Park. I played piano in a trad jazz band, and then a swing band. I got caught up in the swing revival, I was drinking and smoking too

much, and then I too made a decision.’.

The visitor nodded silently. When Tony Marsden went to cut up the roast beef and serve the companion potatoes, he permitted himself a chuckle. Tony Marsden’s skill on the piano was even below his own level. Except that he had presented himself as an anti-musician, while Tony had always aspired to being rated for his instrumental prowess.

‘Here we are, my friend. Are you ready for a refill?’.

‘I should think so, Reverend Smith. But please allow me to do the honours.’.

‘If you like.’.

Actually the visitor insisted, although he was careful not to let on about it. He slipped into the kitchen, pouted himself a refill, and then prepared a special for his host. As he had come well prepared, this preparation did not require inordinate duration.

Still, Tony wondered why his guest was taking so long to pour two glasses from an already opened bottle.

‘Is everything all right in there, Mr. Olson?’.

‘Of course it is, sir. I’ll just be another minute.’.

When the visitor returned with the two glasses, he placed the appropriate glass at the appropriate place at the table and then dug into the roast beef dinner with a genuine gusto.

It was only a couple of minutes before the host was not in fact all right . Gordon watched Tony Marsden fall head first into his dinner, and then quickly lose consciousness.

Then he picked up the bottle of wine, quickly slipped out the rear door, and walked toward a main street where he could hail a taxi and immediately get out of Sheffield. He had been careful not to leave any fingerprints or other marks on anything within his former band mate’s drearily small-town accommodation.

Scotland Yard Inspector Ted Warburton tersely greeted Sheffield Homicide Detective Frank Baldwin and motioned for his junior to take a seat. Baldwin spoke first

‘ Anthony Michael Smith. This man just started a new life as an Anglican minister a couple of weeks ago, Ted.’

Inspector Warburton extinguished his pipe and frowned.

‘ You’re telling me he started a new life. His real name was Tony Marsden. Only two months ago he was a bass-guitarist in that band.....*Circumference*. You know that group, Frank?’

Frank Baldwin shook his head slowly.

‘Your kids are too young, Frank. *Circumference* are huge among teenagers and very young adults. Their singer, who calls himself Mars Hedonis but who came into the world as Mark Hewitt, has become a sex symbol or superstar or whatever the term.’

‘Oh?’

Frank Baldwin looked out the precinct window and cursed at the heavily falling rain.

‘Oh oh. Mister Mars Hedonis Hewitt in fact got so big for his britches that he gave all the other members of *Circumference* their walking papers. Now he is a solo act, and nobody else gets to be in the promotional photographs.

‘So our dead reverend was shafted and decided to get a new career? By means of one of those you too can become an instant priest courses?’

‘Something like that, Frank. There are many local ministers for whom I would refrain from closely examining their diplomas.’ Ted Warburton stood and began pacing the floor.

‘Was our friend the Right Reverend Smith a recovering alcoholic or drug addict or something of that ilk?’

‘Most definitely. Drugs and alcohol had quite a bit to do with Mister Hedonis’ big decision to fire all of his back-up lackeys.’

‘Meaning our deceased friend was hardly the only one with problems.’

‘ Correct, Frank.’

‘So, Tony Marsden found religion and then was parachuted into the most convenient rectory? In his home town no less. But there’s no evidence of Tony Marsden having any family in Sheffield’.

‘ Yes, but that’s hardly unusual, Frank. It’s quite likely that his family, if any of them of them are still alive or even functioning , have disowned him. Although many of these pop stars, despite their lifestyles, do become the meal ticket for their families.’

‘They become the one who finally made good, despite whatever personal notoriety.’

Ted Warburton decided to re-light his pipe. Frank Baldwin disliked the odor of all pipe tobaccos, but he was in no position to object.

‘Okay, Inspector. Background notwithstanding, we have established that Reverend Smith or Marsden or Whomever was killed on Tuesday night, but his body wasn’t discovered until Wednesday morning.’

‘Correct, Baldwin. His landlord , Mr. John Matheson, called on his tenant and let himself in when there was no answer.’

‘And he had been poisoned? With strychnine, no less.’

‘No less indeed. Not that we have any leads on how somebody might have obtained that particular chemical. The method of death is certainly peculiar.’

‘Almost quaint, if I may say so myself. That dreadful Cary Grant movie.....the one where his two aunts keep poisoning their lodgers.....was on the tely the other night.’

‘ That’s almost amusing, Baldwin. I suppose now some local vigilante is going to petition for banning that silly movie.’

Frank Baldwin took a breath before speaking up.

Now.....we do have a minor lead, which is better than no leads at all.’

‘Yes?’, Warburton was all ears.

‘ We know that he had scheduled a dinner with two parishioners of St. Matthew’sFrances and Jean Goodbridge.....for Wednesday night.’

‘Yes. So what, Baldwin?’

‘Well.....the older Mrs. Goodbridge.....Frances.....called to confirm the date on Tuesday afternoon. So they talked for a while, and Reverend Smith mentioned that he had invited a new, rather young, parishioner to dinner. Name of Michael Olson.’

Ted Warburton frowned.

‘Who and where is he, Baldwin?’

‘I wish I could help you there, Inspector. He’s an unknown quantity.’

‘No records of any variety? What about his landlord?’

‘One of the many dives that takes their money without bothering to ask questions.’

‘ Did the Goodbridges have anything to say about him?’

Detective Baldwin coughed, and then recovered.

‘ Both Frances and Jean Goodbridge told me that Tony Smith or Marsden or Whomever was convinced that he had seen this Olson character somewhere else before and that was why he had issued the dinner invitation.’

‘I see. Now, that is very interesting. But now you’re going to tell me that there are no travel-related records of this Olson character.’

‘Nothing at Heathrow or any other British airports. I think we can safely conclude that Michael Olson is a pseudonym.’

‘That helps, Baldwin. That’s really a big help. But...can we draw some sort of picture from the Goodbridges description of the young man?’

‘That’s something we can work on, Inspector.’

‘Well, then’, Warburton gave up on his pipe. ‘Get cracking!’

Ted Warburton waited for the local detective to exit the precinct, then he set about composing an e-mail bulletin to Detective Bob Stanley in London. He recalled the news of the California automobile death of another former *Circumference* band member, and then there had been the one who had committed suicide by jumping off of the Brighton ferry.....whose body had never in fact been found.

Arsenic and old lace. Sheffield roast and poisoned wine. There had been two glasses on the dining room table, therefore the reverend’s mysterious visitor must have performed the honours while pouring

refills.

Warburton lit his pipe again. He needed a composite of the man calling himself Michael Olson, and he needed it immediately.

Sue Sternwood rushed to the bar to pick up her order of ten bourbon sours. The birthday party that had booked three tables at the Mayfair Lounge was driving her seriously around the bend. Give me this, another of this, you forgot this. Sue cursed the probably cheap revelers, as it wasn't as if they weren't already seriously inebriated.

Not that the remainder of the Mayfair's clientele was overly demanding. There was a table of three businessmen and one of their wives, a twentyish couple who did not wish to be disturbed except upon command, and then there was Mars Hedonis and his manager person Fred the accountant, who mercifully was not smoking cigars at this ridiculously demanding moment.

Sue wished for nothing better than to sit down with a smoke, take a good ten minute break, and then eavesdrop on the pop star and his mysterious Svengali-figure. She had read the headlines and watched the BBC report on the murder of one of the former *Circumference* members, a discarded musician who had cleaned up his life and then become an Anglican minister in Sheffield. The poor boy thought he'd had a secure alternative to the pop lifestyle and now he had an even more secure alternative, with no further options indeed.

'He fell head first into the roast and mashed, Fred. That's so Tony. Always a very simple man with very simple tastes.'

'I'm surprised he hadn't become a vegetarian. I guess that goes with more exotic religions than the high Anglican.'

'Yes. I'm surprised that Tony didn't take jazz lessons and become a Buddhist or something like that.'

'Or a Scientologist, heaven forbid.' Fred attempted to flag the waitress, who was hopelessly preoccupied with what appeared to be a noisily loutish birthday party.

'That poor woman', Mars observed as he lit a smoke. 'She's all on her own, and she really has been working here far too long.'

Fred Eastwood refrained from comment. He was not concerned with anybody's payroll except for

his own, which he kept down to as few associates as possible. *Circumference's* books had been admittedly more complicated than any of his lesser bands, but then Mars had indeed made life a lot easier by going solo.

All the musicians on Mars' recordings were paid scale, and the same with those who toured with Mars. Keep everything simple, and don't treat anybody as if they're anything special. Never encourage musicians with delusions of grandeur and, if they exhibit any symptoms, just show them the bloody doorway. Fred and Mars both subscribed to this meat-and-potatoes employment ethic, and it was bringing in very satisfactory results. Mars' first solo album was selling like hotcakes, with a bare minimum of unpleasant overheads.

Tony Marsden had harboured delusions of his own inflated worth, even if he had been to shy to trumpet them. Tony Marsden had indeed been a futile combination shy and really not terribly bright. Still, it was unfortunate that somebody had poisoned him.

'Tony's murder really bothers me, Fred. Do you know why?'

Fred Eastwood shook his head.

'There was no evidence of robbery, and whatever other possible motive could there have been. Surely Tony didn't shoot all of his money into his arm.....during his devil's music phase.'

'Maybe he did, Mark. But I'm more likely to assume that Tony kept a discreet savings account while living the frugal minister's life. The man was indeed simple, but not utterly stupid.'

'So why would somebody kill Tony then? Evidence is pointing to the man whose face, or a composite of his face based on descriptions, is in the papers and on the tely. So, was this parishioner more than just a friendly acquaintance or something?'

'I doubt it. I've never for one second thought Tony might be queer. I thought that junkie former girlfriend of his.....Mary Ball.....might be a dyke.'

'Oh, so did I.', Mars butted out his smoke as Fred finally caught a moment with the harried waitress.

'Tony was poisoned, Mark. This does not exactly constitute a crime of passion, or any sort of confrontational situation. Whomever 'Michael Olson' is accepted or perhaps finagled a dinner invitation

from Tony, and then went about his business.’.

Mars Hedonis’ face became as white as a ghost for a second, and then the colour returned to his cheeks.

‘ I don’t recognize the killer. He bears no resemblance to anybody I know.’.

‘ Same here, Mark. But.....suppose Barry’s death was not merely a car accident? And.....what about David Burgess? ’.

‘What about David?’.

‘ Well, I can’t imagine how David or anybody else might survive that specific current. But.....David’s body was never found , and you’d think it would have washed ashore somewhere by now.’.

‘ It’s at the bottom of the bay, Fred. It must be.’.

But Mars’ face became even paler than previously , as Sue Sternwood walked up to the table to take their orders.

When Gordon Inglis returned to Drummond and Bulmer's warehouse from his official vacation in Mexico, Larry Malton greeted him warmly and then passed on a message to him.

'While you were in Mexico, Gordon, an old friend of yours from London dropped in on you.'

Gordon felt his facial muscles tensing and unsuccessfully tried to conceal it.

'Friend from London? What was his name?'

'Philip Something. Philip Cathcart. Seemed like a very nice fellow, although maybe a bit eccentric.'

He refrained from inquiring as how just how Philip Cathcart was eccentric. Years ago, he had been interviewed at length by the precocious pop-writer and eccentric had been too mild a word. Severely obsessive was much closer to the mark.

Philip Cathcart had, over the last couple of years, become more than just a brat pop-writer for the NME. His byline was now turning up in periodicals and even in academic journals. Philip Cathcart was probably writing some book all about tragic heroes of the pop music industry or racket, and 'David Burgess' was undoubtedly on the list.

Philip Cathcart was a man with a mission, and men on missions were never to be trusted.

'Here's his number, Gordon. He's staying at a bed and breakfast, somewhere in Cabbagetown.'

Gordon pretended not to absorb this information, then he realized it would be best to accept the scrap paper that Larry had written the address and room number down on.

'We weren't really close friends in London. I hope he hasn't come to Toronto just to look me up. Did he tell you how long he'd be staying in town?'

'No', Larry began dividing up the day's orders for the benefit of his staff. 'But I told him you'd be back today, and he didn't seem to respond.'

Gordon opened his mouth to speak, and then caught himself. It would not be smart for him to suddenly announce a decision that he had just made.

Larry handed him a long and intricate order, to be prepared and then shipped to a feisty old retailer

up in Thunder Bay. The irascible northerner wanted seven copies of each new easy piano and easy guitar songbook published by Drummond and Bulmer. This order kept him occupied, and he had barely finished assembling even a fifth of it when it was time for mid-morning coffee break.

‘That order must be out by closing time, Inglis.’, Greg the shipper dutifully reminded him.

‘Larry?’.

‘Yes?’, the foreman scowled at his coffee which was still too hot.

‘Can I talk to you one on one?’.

Larry looked around the warehouse, and then motioned for Gordon Inglis to follow him.

‘What is it, Gordon?’.

‘I did some serious thinking when I was in Mexico. I’ve decided that I need to take a break from working nine-to-five, and get back to my fiction writing.’.

Larry stared at him.

‘So you’re giving me notice, I take it.’.

‘Yes, Larry. I know this sounds unprofessional, but can I make this my last day?’.

‘It is unprofessional, Gordon. It’s rude and inconsiderate. I understand that you had time to reconsider your life while you were on vacation, but you’re supposed to give your employer at least two weeks notice. It’s standard procedure.’.

‘Okay. Then I’m giving notice for exactly two weeks to this date.’.

‘Too late. I’m firing you, as of now. Anybody who doesn’t want to be here working for me I don’t want here working for me. Now go.’.

Gordon stood silently, offering his hand to Larry, who refused to shake it. Then he walked through the warehouse, past Greg the shipper and the other order clerks, and then out the door and down the driveway leading to the retail store.

Then he burst out laughing. getting rid of his warehouse job had been far easier than he’d anticipated. But now he had to get out of Toronto, and get out quickly.

Why was Philip Cathcart searching for ‘Gordon Inglis’, and not ‘David Burgess’?

He was positive there had been no traces of his birth name among any of *Circumference’s* business or

statistical records. He felt certain that none of the surviving band membersneither Bill Sykes nor Neil Venables nor Mars Hedonis.....had any idea that he had already been using a pseudonym during his glory days with the band.

That left Fred Eastwood, the accountant who still functioned as Mars' sugar daddy. That dirty old bugger did taxes, for both the band and now Mars as both product and global citizen. Was it at all possible that Fred had somehow stumbled upon bureaucratic residue pertaining to the late 'David Burgess'?

However Philip Cathcart had learned his birth name, and however on earth the music journalist had managed to trace him to Drummond and Bulmer in Toronto ; it was now out of the question for Gordon to remain in Toronto. He slipped into a greasy spoon and ordered a draught. He needed to choose a destination soon.....make that very soon.

Vancouver was too obvious, Montreal was no good ultimately because of his complete lack of French.....no, maybe that would be a help and not a hindrance. No, that would be a disaster.....maybe Winnipeg.....no, Halifax. At the exact other end of the country from the too obvious Vancouver. Yes, Halifax.

Gordon quickly swallowed his draught, flagged a cab to the Pearson international Airport, and then bought a stand-by ticket for the next flight to Halifax.

Finding and then securing a room and kitchen had not been terribly difficult. As soon as he touched down in Halifax, he was able to pinpoint Gottingen Street in the city's north end was a likely bet for cheap functional accommodation. Having the cash on him to put down first and last month's rents also eliminated any potential stress.

He told the landlord, Mr. Widgerley, that his name was Adam Oswald, and that he was a painter who had been out of town for the previous few years. Mr. Widgerley perhaps did interpret 'out of town' as meaning out of circulation, and he was quite sympathetic to his new tenant. There was a room for the building's tenants to read or draw or do whatever they did as long as they were quiet about it, and Adam Oswald promised himself to purchase some drawing pencils and a sketch pad. Oils were probably too smelly for other tenants to put up with, but perhaps watercolours might be appropriate.

Gordon felt relief as he unpacked and settled into his new accommodations. He was in solid enough financial shape that he didn't need to find work, and this meant that he could keep his profile conveniently low. None of the other tenants seemed terribly interested in him, which was also preferable. One older gentleman was definitely an alcoholic, and Gordon had always been able to take or leave that particular vice.

He walked around Halifax, appreciating the cool but moist fall air. The city was built around a lookout hill and he recognized the street names as deriving from English war heroes and politicians. He recognized the city's south end as being for those with much more lucrative incomes than his own new immediate neighbours, and he could tell that the hill itself serviced as a gay cruising zone after all the lights were out. He could see sprawling suburbs across the bay that had been amalgamated into the city, and he groaned softly. Gordon felt that small towns should be grateful for not being large ugly cities, but of course they all mistakenly believed that bigger spelled better.

He set himself an assignment to first sketch Halifax's profile facing toward Citadel Hill and then convey the sleepy town as a psychological war zone. He would draw the city as if from a tourist postcard,

and then ravage that nauseating realism by drawing shards and even shrapnel.

But, as he neared completion of the realistic component of his project, he became distracted. He could not tear his mind away from Philip Cathcart. What if the pop writer on a mission had somehow managed to tail him from Toronto to Halifax? True, he had not seen Cathcart at the Pearson Airport, but supposing the reporter had somehow camouflaged himself and then kept a low profile on the plane? Or...what if Cathcart had somehow obtained information about his favourite passenger's destination?

He abandoned his art project and walked out the door toward the nearest magazine and coffee shop. Upon arriving, he focused on the music and recording section. He picked up the NME, and there was the lead article's title staring him in the face.

Circumference: The Foundation and The Fault Lines ; by Philip Cathcart.

He seized the pop weekly and then ordered himself a coffee. He paid for the coffee and took the NME back to his table, where he now flipped forward to the featured article.

Cathcart commenced with a typical flourish , how *Circumference* had been easily the most promising of the pop bands of the mid-nineties, with their emphasis on good songs and smart arrangements combined with an elasticity quite amenable to dance remixes and even collaborations. *Circumference* had it all the glamour-puss lead singer Hedonis, the moody guitarist/songwriter Venables, and the anarchic shit-disturber David Burgess.

And of course everything went downhill. Hedonis and Venables threw Burgess out of the band and monopolized the song writing, nullifying all potential crossovers with beat culture and therefore younger markets who related to DJs and not to analogue rock bands with their traditional instrumentation and dinosaur images. Once Burgess was let go, according to Philip Cathcart, failure was inevitable no matter how many units *Circumference* routinely moved. Without Burgess in the band, the coast was clear for Hedonis to force all the others into faceless back-up roles. So Bill Sykes became the hapless alcoholic drummer, Tony Marsden became the junkie bass player with musical ambitions but no ideas, and Neil Venables became a nineties caricature of the junked out seventies macho lead guitarist.

By the time Mars Hedonis dissolved *Circumference* and launched his solo career using exclusively session players , the quirky pop music that originally gained the band attention had become a hopeless

cliché, since it had in fact been the result of clever manipulation of palatable clichés. Mars Hedonis had taken a long look into his favourite reliable mirror, decided that he was too old to deal with younger audiences, cleaned up his personal life, and successfully played the game very safely. The superstar singer even got married to a debutante named Nina Foster and became a homebody..... never seen drunk or stoned or lusty after girls or occasional boys in public. Mars Hedonis even quit smokinghe wished to be taken seriously as a world-class singer.

Adam Oswald walked home, scowling at the overcast sky and ignoring the tricks of the trade being negotiated on the hill. When he returned to his rooming house's common lounge, he was taken aback by Mr. Widgerley staring at his abandoned sketch. The landlord appeared to be rather offended .

‘ I guess you're not a realist, Mr. Oswald.’.

He refrained from replying that, in fact, he was a fucking realist. Instead, he presented his landlord with a brief flourish about combining the pastoral realist with the psychologically fantastic and then promised to finish the sketch on the next day.

According to Philip Cathcart's article on the rise and fall of *Circumference*, drummer Bill Sykes was now living in Vancouver as a chronic alcoholic who barely kept time for seventh-rate lounge bands. Gordon had always liked Bill, or at least felt sorry for the man. Bill Sykes the drummer had been treated as disposable or replaceable right from *Circumference's* inception. Yet any band committed to 'real' instruments was only as good as their drummer, and Bill had been a wonderful player until the booze had completely taken over.

Gordon decided to spare Bill's life, even though the drummer had consented to getting rid of the lunatic keyboard player. The man's life would already be hell on earth, having to live with his own duplicity and having to live with the fact that he had once been on top of the world and was now merely a seventh-rate time keeper for tenth-rate Frank Sinatra clones. Bill Sykes' life was worth preserving because the man was not worth killing.

But Neil Venables still had to go, not to mention the almighty Mars Hedonis. And also Fred Eastwood, the slimy closet-case manager who still pulled strings for Mister Mars Hedonis. Fred had definitely played a key role in the dismissal of the troublesome Mr. Burgess. Fred Eastwood was in fact

allegedly tight with East End gangster types, and Fred Eastwood deserved to be shot.

Mars and Fred were at the top of his list. But Neil was next, and Neil's weakness was well-known.

Adam Oswald would tidy up his little sketch in the morning, and then grab the first available flight to New York. He would tell his landlord Mr. Widgerley that he was visiting friends in Vancouver.

Sue Sternwood glanced at the clock on the wall and realized that she had at least another couple of unpleasant hours remaining in her shift. Business was slow and steady, but this did not make for a comfortable working environment. On the contrary, she had to deal with a whole slew of gnarly customers.

And her frequent regulars Mars Hedonis and Fred Eastwood were themselves in gnarly moods. Usually, they alternated between businesslike and pensive. But today, both Mars and Fred were angry customers.

‘You’re going to have to make some serious decisions, Mark.’.

Mars Hedonis sipped his Scotch and motioned for another. Booze was apparently the man’s last vice, but today he was making up for all the others that he had left behind.

‘Yes, I know I do. But don’t you even attempt to make them for me, Fred. Get it?’.

Fred got it. He’d heard this implied threat before.....too frequently. The fact remained that Mars Hedonis’ solo career had by now bottomed out. Mars needed to reinvent himself, in the company of others or at least in the company of a committed collaborator. And, by collaborator, Fred Eastwood was not referring to generic hired help but to somebody in position to grab Mars Hedonis by the collar and inform him what worked and what most certainly did not.

Sue Sternwood delivered Mars’ refill and then took a similar order from Fred. The two gentlemen had been occupying their favourite booth for more than two hours now.

‘It just might be one of the fact of life, Mark, that you are not cut out to be a solo entertainer. That you might need somebody like Neil Venables , or even David Burgess, to at least take your ideas and flesh them out.’.

‘You are so full of shit, Fred.’.

‘I’m not telling you to hook up again with Neil. Don’t twist my words, Mark. I’m not being absurd.’.

Mars sipped his drink, glaring at his normally taciturn business manager.

‘Don’t you start telling me how to do my job, Fred. Since when I have I ever interfered with yours?’.

Lots of times, Fred muttered to himself. Make that chronically.

‘The idea of me having anything further to do with Neil Venables, or a person of that ilk, is so fucking absurd it’s beneath discussion. And , as for Mr. David Burgess, getting rid of him was the best move *Circumference* ever made.’.

Fred sipped on his scotch, allowing Mars Hedonis time to possibly gather his wits.

‘I’m not so sure about that, Mark. It’s true that, at the time, I thought letting David go was necessary. Butnow I think we might have made a serious mistake.’.

‘What the fuck are you talking about, Fred. David was impossible. He couldn’t even play notes, for Christ’s sake. He could only make noises.’.

‘That may be true. But....why is that so bad?’.

‘Because the random noise element had to go. You can’t chart unless the audience can hear the tunes.’.

‘Or dance to it.’.

Sue Sternwood registered that Mars wanted a refill. She wanted to cut the pair off and then go home, but this was not permissible.

‘It is an unfortunate fact, Mark, that *Circumference* conceded defeat regarding the dance market when the band lost David. He had an ear for hooks of the sonic variety, despite all of your pathetic rhetoric about melodic hooks versus anarchist noise. If you’d kept him on, you might well have been able to cut it in the dance market as well as the pop. Noises make for novelties, and without David Burgess *Circumference* quite frankly became just another stupid pop band.’.

‘You’re full of shit, Fred.’.

‘I strongly beg to differ. There have been a few great bands who’s key to longevity has been their ability to maintain profile on only one but at least two fronts. After David was safely out to pasture and you and Neil reduced all the others to the status of punch card session hacks, *Circumference* made the mistake of putting all of its eggs into one fucking basket.’.

‘And you’ve waited until now to speak up about this, Fred? How thoughtful of you!’.

Fred swilled his Scotch and requested another.

‘ I believe I’ve referred to my own past short-sightedness, Mark. Which is more than you appear to be capable of admitting.’.

Mars Hedonis also called for a refill.

‘ I can’t believe I’m even listening to your bullshit, Fred. I can’t believe I’m even sitting in the same room as you, let alone at the same goddamned table.’.

Mars Hedonis grabbed his refill from Sue Sternwood and then threw the full glass right at Fred Eastwood’s face. Fred saw the glass coming and appropriately ducked, allowing the glass to hit a light fixture on the wall directly behind his seat.

‘That’s it, Mark. I’m out of here. I will think about talking to you when you have concluded your three-year old’s temper tantrum.’.

‘You’re out of here, period. You are fired. Now get out of my sight right this instant or I’ll....’.

‘Oh sit down, Mark.’.

Mars rose with his fists clenched, but Fred Eastwood now turned and abruptly walked out of Mayfair’s toward the taxi-stand by the front lobby.

Sue Sternwood glared at Mars Hedonis.

‘Pay up and now leave the premises. Now!’.

Mars wheeled toward her.

‘Do you know who I am?’.

‘Of course I do, you moron. You’re a rich pop star who indulged in a temper tantrum, and who will now pay up his tab and get lost. Permanently!’.

Mars glared at her again, then retrieved his VISA card then and walked straight toward the cash register.

‘Don’t ever come back here, Mr. Hedonis. We’ll be billing you for the light fixture, and we know where you live!’.

Mars Hedonis now stormed toward the Mayfair Lounge’s front door, stooped in front of the glass to adjust his hair, and then walked out as if nothing had happened.

Fred Eastwood toasted his cigar as he observed all of the other anonymous wealthy gentlemen making use of the private club's facilities. Such antiquated men's clubs did not exist for men to meet other men ; they existed for men to stew away in their respective corners and avoid all potential interaction. He knew at least a few of the other gentlemen , but he had nothing to say to any of them.

Later on he would visit a nearby sauna, at which he would also have nothing to say to any of the gentlemen but then verbal communication would be even further from his intention in visiting the establishment. But now, Fred was mulling over an idea that was refusing to leave him alone.

He knew damn well there was no point in immediately trying to patch things up with Mars Hedonis. He knew that Mark wouldn't immediately hire another accountant to look after all of his own business, because Mark Hewitt simply didn't know too many individuals with the necessary financial acumen. That was why Mars Hedonis and all of those other musicians retained individuals like himself.

Anonymous looking older men who knew their calculators and who knew nothing about trends or movements or scenes or whatever, except in terms of whether or not they brought in revenue.....Fred knew he was one of a dying breed. But, Mars Hedonis needed somebody to tell him he was barking up the wrong bloody tree. He needed somebody to inform him that his solo career was a dead end and that a *Circumference* reunion was the best possible move .

With only Mars and Neil Venables out of the original band members on board, there would be no problem about using the name *Circumference*. There was only one other original band member still alive, for Christ's sake. And skin beaters were a dime a dozen, even though one of the band's best possible moves would have been to have replaced Bill Sykes with a truly dynamic professional who would have kept the others all on their respective toes.

And of course Neil Venables had gone nowhere but down ever since Mars and he had dissolved the band. Neil Venables traded on his name and reputation in the generic New York clubs, hiring pickup bands and catering to the local necrophile audiences who would all cum in their pants if the legendary guitarist

were to finally OD right on stage.

Somebody would have to intervene, or else Neil would soon be turning permanently blue. But who, and then how? It wasn't as if he and Mars hadn't shipped him off to this or that rehab facility, with routinely unsuccessful results.

Too bad the Neil Venables of *Circumference's* inception couldn't be cloned. For that matter, too bad the prototypical Mars Hedonis couldn't also be cloned. Fred couldn't stomach the idea of dealing with either Mars or Neil in their present incarnations. Except, he needed to deal with both of them.

His cigar had gone out and he slipped it back into his case. He knew he wasn't Alan McGee or Malcolm McLaren or Brian Epstein or Colonel Tom. He was a backroom gentleman with reliable accounting skills that had worked on behalf of *Circumference* and lower-echelon entertainers with excellent results. But....the lower-echelon acts were not enough for him. The results were perfunctory and the merchandise just dull.

Fred Eastwood knew that, without either *Circumference* or a similar band, he was toast as far as the recording industry was concerned. His best hope was that Mars would be unable to immediately replace him, that Mars would realize that Fred was not just any old accountant but rather a very subtle and slyly clandestine operator.

He ordered a brandy and looked at the other men in the large room, who were even more faceless than he was. He recalled how it had been the subject of David Burgess that had truly enraged Mark that recent afternoon at the Mayfair Lounge. Mars Hedonis had wanted David out of the band because he knew damn well that David was far more photogenic, far more unique. What would be the point of a *Circumference* reunion without David Burgess? Sure, any competent synthesizer player could sample David's earlier parts and even more outrageous noises. However, Fred knew he was rightthat the beginning of *Circumference's* downfall was the decision to sack David.

But how could the man be replaced, when he wasn't exactly around to replace himself?

David's body had in fact never been found and subsequently identified. Thus he had always been assumed dead, rather than officially pronounced.

Supposing David's suicide had been staged, that it had been a ruse?

No, that was absurd. Fred finished his brandy and refrained from procuring another. There had been witnesses galore, and how could David have possibly survived those particular currents? And, even if he were technically alive somewhere, then he would probably be either in a coma or else permanently brain-damaged.

If David Burgess had in fact faked his suicide and was alive somewhere under an assumed name and with another identity, then surely the purpose of such a drastic action would have been to reinvent himself, to give himself another life and thereby lose his old one.

If the original members of *Circumference* were to reunite and then become a cohesive recording and performing unit, then David Burgess would have to be cloned.

Fred Eastwood decided he could use another brandy after all. Drastic measures were definitely called for, but what drastic measures? Who would then make them transpire, and also how?

Neil Venables stuck another Marlboro into his locked jaw before cranking up the volume. He'd only played with the guys behind him at Irving Plaza twice previously, but that wasn't going to be a handicap. He had to play or else not get paid, and he had to do more than just put in an appearance. Those days were definitely over.

Neil didn't really know his musicians, except for Jeff the Drummer. Jeff didn't make his living playing the drums, he made it by selling dope. But Jeff had to score the dope from somebody else first, lately from an innocuous-looking delivery boy.

Jeff's supplier had emerged over the most recent week. The mule now had a name and a face, and Neil was concerned about this development. The guy looked like he was at least pushing thirty, with obviously dyed blonde hair and an alternating pair of trucker's caps. His name was Steve Underwood and he was a man of few words, but there was something about the guy that bothered Neil. The guitarist would have rather dealt with Jeff directly, but Jeff also had to procure during the gig.

The band staggered through their first tune, a rejected *Circumference* number called *Sticking My Thing*. Mars Hedonis had rejected the song when Neil had first brought it in four years ago now. The song had been too rockist, too utterly traditional. So, now that was exactly the kind of tune that Neil Venables took pride in showcasing.

' Personality Crisis! I Wanna Be Your Dog! Honky Tonk Women! Summertime Blues! '.

Kids in the peanut gallery were shouting out their requests. Some of those requests predated the kids in the peanut gallery. Neil ignored them, and then lit into the Chuck Berry intro.

Which Chuck Berry song were they playing now? What difference did it make? If you must play rock'n'roll, then take it seriously and play rock it right. No jerk-off solos, no wired time-signatures, no pretentiously dramatic dynamics. None of that dance crap for him, Mars Hedonis was fucking welcome to that bandwagon. None of that synthesizer shit, that died with David Burgess. That art-school bullshit

jumped overboard from the Brighton Ferry, and he'd banged his head up against some truly omnipotent rocks.

Jeff the Drummer glared at Neil. This wasn't good news, like the kid with the drugs had finally weaseled his way past the doorman. This was bad news, like Neil was playing way behind the fucking beat.

He paused for a second and then locked in with the bass and drums. Not that either of them were exactly reliable regarding steady tempos, they were both hard-core junkies. Jeff the Drummer was so far gone he had to sell the shit in order to function.

Except, where was that kid who had become Jeff's latest mule? Steve, that was his name. Yes, where was Steve?

Neil began counting out Bo *Diddley* and then sneaked a glance at the audience. No Steve....lots of kids who remembered *Circumference* but knew that none of the band's songs translated in New York. What the hell did New Yorkers care about the monarchy or the class system or even the public school system? Absolutely nothing!

But now he recognized an older man standing by himself with a cigar and brandy in the back row. Fred Eastwood had come to seek him out. The dreary accountant would soon be making his way backstage at the rapidly approaching intermission.

What the hell did Fred want? Didn't that old sleaze bag have bigger fish to fry? Shouldn't he be pigging out at the Everhard Steam Baths or getting briefed up to speed at Ungano's or Some Mysterioso Dining Establishment with Mob Connections?

Neil still read the goddamned NME and Melody Maker and Sounds and Smash Hits, and he was aware that Mars Hedonis had given the old pervert his walking papers. Neil knew that action hadn't been drastic but pathetically inevitable. So what could Fred Eastwood possibly be wanting from him? Hadn't Fred inherited his money from his East End gangster father or uncle or something? What the hell was he doing in New York?

Jeff shot him another glare. Neil had lost the beat, and thus *Bo Diddley* was not even remotely recognizable as *Bo Diddley*. He realized that he'd now sunk to this, being unable to sustain the world's second or third most recognizable rhythm.

Neil began making noises with choked harmonics. He knew that this was a move he had made on one of *Circumference's* early records that would give his audience some of their money's worth. The junkie rhythm section could damn well keep the beat, that was their job. His job was to do something more impressive, and now he was doing it.

When he finished the harmonic cascade, the band allowed him space for applause but only one person in the audience clapped. Two guys in the corner called out for *Bo Diddley*, probably quite aware that *Bo Diddley* was in fact the nominal tune of the moment.

Neil treated the capacity audience to another harmonic shower, and then did his damndest to lock in with the bass and drums. He knew that he could milk a tight Bo Diddley rhythm for more than a few bars, before having to get back on vocals. He had never been a lead singer, but somebody had to play the role.

Fred Eastwood was asserting territory at the back of the hall. *Circumference's* ex-business manager had once tried to encourage Neil as a potential solo act, already aware that Mars' ego was hopelessly unmanageable. Fred may have comprehended calculators, but he had never understood either talent nor presence.

The band finally finished *Bo Diddley*, and then realized they had to play at least one more tune before any possible intermission. So Neil called out *Speedboating*, a *Circumference* instrumental that had once been a minor cult B-side.

Go away, Fred. Please leave the club now and make way for the kid with the drugs. Neil had remembered to leave the kid's name at the door- Steve Underwood. Everybody else had to pay full admission price.

Fred Eastwood better have left the building by intermission. Neil wanted to bash his spare guitar over the accountant's head. He wanted the man to get run over by a speeding getaway car, all in the name of official duty.

Jeff was calling over his shoulder. Neil had indeed ruined *Speedboating* by coming in a bar too early, but many more serious mistakes had already been committed in the first set. Neil now recognized Steve Underwood moving forward in the crowd, and he made no effort to disguise his relief.

They killed the song and then declared intermission. 'Oh, fuck', Neil screamed to both his band mates.

They realized their leader's disgust was related to the fortyish businessman who was rapidly approaching the band's dressing room.

'Neil, I want to talk to you. Please. I think *Circumference* should be reformed.'

'Fuck off, Fred. Just bloody well leave me alone. I hope you have some other business in New York because, if you came here just to try to reform *Circumference*, then you really have wasted your time and money.'

He could see Steve Underwood making a beeline for the changing room. The Fred problem had to be taken care of immediately.

'I think I can talk Mark into recovering his senses. I can get you into the best rehab. I can pay for a blood change, if that's what it'll take to get you cleaned up.'

Neil Venables pushed his former manager out the door, and then slammed the door shut.

'Who the fuck thinks I'm interested in getting cleaned up. To do what ...be Mars' lackey all over again? Fuck that!'

Neil lit a Marlboro and then somebody knocked at the door.

'Who the fuck is it?'

'It's Steve.'

Jeff the Drummer was trying to catch his eye, trying to get him calmed down.

'Okay. Come in quickly.'

Neil looked around for Fred, and didn't see his former manager. Now he let Steve Underwood into the dressing room, and bolted the door shut.

'You've got it?'

'Yes, he's got the shit. Relax, Neil. Come on.'

Jeff the drummer slipped several dry bills to Steve, who walked over to the sink and divided up the drugs.

'You go first, Neil.'

'Fine by me, Jeff.' Neil had already tied up and his spoon was available for powder.

'This is good stuff.'

Neil said nothing. He didn't get the impression that Steve was himself a user. The guy bugged him, with his too small trucker hats and his weird mid-Atlantic accent. Neil couldn't suss if the guy was an American trying to pass for English or a similar Canadian.

'Here we go.'

Neil placed the junk on his spoon and then began torching it. After a good burn, he had his works ready and then he fixed.

'Hey, Neil. Save some for me. Neil?'

Jeff the Drummer watched as Neil fell back onto the sofa and rolled over onto his side.

'Hey! Steve, where are you?'

Steve Underwood had discreetly unbolted the doorway and was nowhere to be seen. Jeff ran toward the booth where the club's manager was passing the night away. The club manager phoned for paramedics, but it was clearly too late.

Neil Venables was pronounced Dead on Arrival. The club's manager ordered all the paying customers to leave the building and then told Jeff and the bass player to get lost permanently. He would keep quiet about everything if they agreed to disappear.

Scotland Yard Inspector Edward Warburton stroked his pipe while reading the Times news dispatch that his secretary had drawn to his attention.

New York City: Reuters:

A British businessman found fatally stabbed last night in West Central Park has been identified as Frederick Eastwood, a prominent and successful pop music entrepreneur. Mr. Eastwood, 47, was best known as the accountant and manager for the cult band Circumference, as well as for that band's lead singer and current solo act, Mars Hedonis.

New York's Homicide Division has clearly declared the case a homicide, but they are not offering any possible motives or additional details at this time. According to Department Head Richard Everett, there are leads but there is no official suspect.

Circumference, probably more than any similar band, has been plagued by premature deaths of its members and former members. The band's initial keyboard player, David Burgess, committed suicide by jumping from a Brighton Ferry nearly four years ago. Mr. Burgess' replacement, Barry Sullivan, died in a sports car accident three years ago. The band's former bassist, Anthony Marsden, was poisoned as he was beginning a new life as an Anglican priest. And, the band's former guitarist and songwriter, Neil Venables, died the night before Mr. Eastwood, from a heroin overdose also in New York.

Only Circumference's singer Mark Hewitt, who uses the stage name of Mars Hedonis and now records and tours as a solo act, and former drummer Bill Sykes survive. Only Mr. Marsden's death has previously been classified as a homicide.

Mr. Eastwood was never married, and there are no known survivors.

Inspector Ted Warburton smoldered his pipe and then buzzed for Brighton Homicide detective Bob

Stanley.

‘ Well, Robert? Now are you convinced that we’re looking for a serial killer?’.

‘ I still don’t think we can jump to that conclusion, Ted. I don’t think we have enough evidence.’.

Ted Warburton scowled at the junior man.

‘Not enough evidence, my foot. How else can we account for the obvious pattern, then? None of these deaths, except for Mr. Venables’, involved any form of habitual behaviour. None of these individuals, again except for Venables, could be considered accidents just waiting to happen.’.

‘What about Fred Eastwood?’, Bob Stanley retorted.

‘What about him, Bob?’.

‘ He was known to enjoy anonymous sex with other men, for starters.’.

Ted Warburton angrily opened a window.

‘For starters, you’re not informing me about anything I don’t know. Eastwood’s father was a fairly low-ranking East End criminal type, and no doubt Eastwood’s own personal finances are suspect, in that the man has never in fact been a registered accountant throughout his entire life. But....the section of Central Park where Eastwood’s’ body was found was not known as a gay cruising zone. Fred Eastwood was in fact rather closeted, and more likely to frequent sauna baths that have never advertised themselves as catering to ‘the gay community’.

‘You haven’t convinced me that Eastwood wasn’t killed by some bad trick, Ted.’.

‘Haven’t I, Bob?’., Ted Warburton stared at Stanley incredulously. ‘ If there is a serial killer responsible for the deaths of *Circumference’s* former members and business manager, and I’m convinced that there is, then how are we going to connect the dots between a violent trick and all of the others.’.

Bob Stanley cleared his throat, and then spoke.

‘There are parallels between Eastwood’s and Marsden’s murders....these being the only two we can even conclude are homicides.’.

‘Yes, Bob. Please continue.’.

‘ While Eastwood was killed in New York, and Marsden in Sheffield ; Marsden was known to have entertained a relative stranger..... in his home. A man named Michael Olson . There is no evidence of

anybody else seeing the victim on the day of the murder.’.

‘There is only the evidence of two church ladies who heard their new reverend invite this mysterious Mr. Olson to dinner. For all they know, their new priest might well have been leading a double or even a triple life. There is concrete evidence that Anthony Marsden was poisoned. Now....while we’re also referring to poison..... the drummer who was playing with Neil Venables in New York has agreed to a witness-protection programme, and he has provided a description of a man calling himself Steve Underwood , who was supplying both himself and Venables with heroin. The drummer...Jeffrey Rhodes..... knows nothing about this Underwood character’s own sources.’.

‘Well? What does any of that prove, Ted? Aside from this Jeffrey Rhodes being a typical stupid junkie?’.

‘Just sit down and look at these pictures, Bob.’.

Bob Stanley reluctantly examined the two composites that Warburton now placed before him.

‘ There are similarities, I’ll admit it. The eyes are similar.’.

‘The eyes are very similar. So are many of the facial features, if you take the time to look close enough.’.

‘That’s still not enough, Ted.’.

‘Of course it isn’t! We need names, locations, travel information. But I’m convinced that Michael Olson and Steve Underwood are one and the same person.’.

Bob Stanley lit a cigarette.

‘ The replacement keyboard player, Barry Sullivan, he had a record for speeding offenses.’.

‘Speeding? You mean traffic offenses.’.

‘Yes, Ted.’., Bob Stanley exhaled. ‘Barry Sullivan might in fact qualify as an accident waiting to occur.’.

‘On the subject of Barry Sullivan, Bob, we have a description of a mechanic who worked at the deceased’s favourite garage in Santa Fe for a very brief duration. A long-time worker at Cliff Taylor’s garage thought there had been something funny about this fellow. The guy’s accent was peculiar....he’d told the foreman that he was an Englishman living in Toronto.’.

‘That’s not unusual, Ted. What seems weird is this auto garage that hires people without references or character-checks.’.

‘Hardly unusual in the maintenance trade, Bob. According to Santa Fe police, the garage owner testified that this mechanic, who called himself Joe Lawrence, had a girlfriend in Santa Fe, as incidentally so did Barry Sullivan. When Lawrence’s relationship broke off, the man quit his job and presumably returned to Toronto. The owner was sorry to see the man leave....he’d been quite the mechanical wizard.’.

‘Do we have a composite of this Joe Lawrence?’.

‘Just hang on for a minute.’.

Ted Warburton now accessed the necessary computer programme and both detectives watched while the composite of the man who’d called himself ‘Joe Lawrence’ filled the screen.

‘Well? What do you think, Bob?’.

Bob Stanley drew on his cigarette and then ground it out in the nearby ashtray.

‘ I think Mr. Lawrence is the odd one out of the three.’.

‘Hmmm.. I don’t disagree. But I still feel in my gut that we’re dealing with a serial killer who has targeted members and associates of the band called *Circumference*.’.

‘ So, then who has the obvious revenge motive? Surely not Mars Hedonis? I mean, he might be cruelly indifferent to the fates of his former inferior associates, but why would he want to get rid of them any more than he already has ? What about the surviving drummer?’

Warburton began filling his pipe.

‘Mr. William Sykes is an exile in Vancouver. The man is a chronic alcoholic who can barely keep time to *Stormy Weather*, let alone execute a series of murders.’.

‘Maybe his visible alcoholism is a ruse.’.

‘Don’t be absurd, Bob. Please.’.

Warburton lit the pipe and glanced at the window, which still remained open.

‘ I agree that we should place Mr. Sykes under protective surveillance, but I emphasize the word ‘protective’. Although it’s obvious that our killer is working his way up the ladder, so to speak.’.

‘Well, then. That leaves Mr. Hewitt or Hedonis.’.

‘Exactly.’, Warburton puffed on the pipe. ‘Now Mr. Hedonis is a man with his own fetish for security. He is married to a prominent socialite named Nina Foster , and they live together in a very expensive sprawling mansion called Stargreaves , not that far southeast of London. Mr. Hedonis, or Hewitt, is extremely particular about his servants and other staff. I know, for a fact, that he has recently fired a chauffeur with a bad drinking problem. As well as a bodyguard he caught snorting cocaine.’.

‘Mr. Hewitt or Hedonis is a former user, no?’.

‘For all I know or even care, he’s a current user who forbids the servants from following his own example. Hedonis is typical of many self-made men. He has married very well and cleaned up his former bad habits. At least, that’s according to his publicity.’.

‘But.....obviously Hedonis, and this Nina Foster, require protective security.’.

‘Yes, Bob. In fact, it’s already in place. Hedonis and Miss Nina still enjoy giving dinner parties at Stargreaves, and we have installed an excellent cook among his staff. Now....’.

‘What, Ted?’.

‘Did you know that ‘David Burgess’ was not the deceased original keyboard player’s real name?’.

Bob Stanley looked startled.

‘No. It never occurred to me.’.

‘No’, Warburton almost smiled ‘ And in itself this is not even all that significant. But, when combined with the fact that the man’s body has never been found and therefore he cannot be pronounced officially dead.....well, Bob, I would say that we have some serious food for thought.’.

‘ How did you catch on, Ted?’.

Warburton lost his smile.

‘The man’s student records didn’t pan out. Let’s just take it from there, shall we?’.

Adam Oswald flew in and out of Boston before returning to Halifax. Canadian customs were a pushover, since he'd had the blonde dye excised from his hair during his Beantown stopover.

The rooming house on Gottingen Street hadn't changed one bit, and he was quite grateful for this consistency. He now found himself cooking in the semi-communal kitchen as often as possible. He was aware that his fellow tenants were mocking him for his affectation, but he paid them no mind. The immediate neighbourhood wasn't exactly overflowing with wonderful restaurants, and cooking appealed to his artistic sensibilities.

Cooking was not unlike the way music should have been for him, an outlet for creative collage. This ingredient can bloody well go with this ingredient if I say it can, so now take that you pathetic dullard.

He did eventually take a stroll down to the nearby Coffee Grinder to pick up copies of the British pop papers. There were predictable obituaries for Neil Venables. None of the pop writers for the Melody Maker or Sounds or Smash Hits had any dispute with the New York coroner's verdict. Neil Venables had been an accident waiting to happen, a washout who finally died of a heroin overdose.

Fred Eastwood's death didn't rate nearly as much coverage. Eastwood's other acts had all been small potatoes, after Mr. Hedonis' dismissal. Adam speculated that, if any of the pop tabloids could have proven Fred's murder by a rough tradesman, then they would have milked the hell out of the story. But they had nothing to go on, so they simply stuck to the ridiculously convenient facts.

The NME was something else again. While Eastwood's death was simply a perfunctory news item, Venables was given the royal cover treatment. Appreciations were written by editor Lewis Firestone and by the inimitable Philip Cathcart. Adam grimaced, and then began reading the eulogy written by Cathcart.

Neil Venables: 1962- 1997:

Former Circumference guitarist and co-songwriter Neil Venables died last week from a heroin overdose in New York, only two days before his thirty-fifth birthday.

Venables was born in Beckenham to his parents Roger and Jane Worthington, in the midst of England's notorious Profumo scandal. Roger Worthington was a foreign affairs bureaucrat whose name was convincingly linked to that of call-girl turned Sloane Ranger Christine Keeler and, as a result of this revelation, the barely-twenty Jane Venables broke off with her husband and took the baby with her.

Neil's childhood was unremarkable until his mother's death by motor mishap in 1972. Although there had been rumours of foul play, Beckenham's constabulary insisted that Ms. Venables had been drinking heavily before attempting to drive home from a friend's birthday party.

Adam became impatient with Cathcart's lengthy exploration of Neil Venables' troubled childhood. His own hadn't been dissimilar, the Profumo scandal notwithstanding, and he hadn't turned into a pathetic old junkie rocker. He scanned past the inception of *Circumference*, past the revelation that Neil had indeed chipped five years from his age for publicity purposes, and even past the throwaway lines about the suicide of original keyboard player David Burgess.

As Circumference's stature grew to that of a supergroup, paradoxically singer Mars Hedonis eclipsed all of the other musicians but especially Venables. The guitarist still received co-writer credits, but only for naming the chords that Hedonis could not articulate let alone actually play. For a man who became such an unapologetic old rocker, Neil Venables certainly did know his passing chords.

Venables was arrested for heroin possession shortly after moving to New York in 1994, as soon as all the band members became eligible for the ninety percent tax bracket. Even prior to his inevitable dismissal by Hedonis, as part of the singer's move toward becoming a professional song and dance man in the mode of Frank Sinatra, Venables had become infamous as the next likely pop star to die as a result of drugs. In his final years, the guitarist played with pickup bands in dinosaur New York clubs. He would play perhaps three Circumference songs scattered among New York Dolls, Stones, and Eddie Cochran covers. He had become famous for once being famous, but he didn't really become famous again until his

predictable overdose.

Adam persisted to the bottom of the article, but it didn't contain anything unusual or unexpected. Philip Cathcart, after building up Venables as the soul of the band, now switched gears and eulogized David Burgess as being the band's true creative spark. He typically blamed Burgess' suicide for Venables' subsequent depression, which in turn encouraged his burgeoning addiction .

Oh, bullshit! Philip Cathcart was strictly treading water. The pop writer knew damn well that he couldn't publish any speculations regarding the whereabouts of personal cult hero David Burgess until he actually knew what the fuck he was rattling on about. And Cathcart had been tricked , forced right back to Square One.

A perfunctory note at the end of Cathcart's obituary for Neil Venables mentioned the mysterious slaying of former *Circumference* manager Fred Eastwood, somewhere in west Central Park. Fred's death had immediately been declared a homicide, but there was no further information. There was no real description of any circumstances, let alone any speculation concerning a possible motive.

Neil's death, according to all the pop papers, was indisputably an OD. Neil Venables had been a junkie. About as startling a revelation as the news that Liberace had been a homo. The cause of Venables' death was so obvious that coroner's reports and post-mortems were utterly beside any point. The guy scored some bad shit and that was the end of the poor fool. Nobody cared where the guitarist scored the bad shit from.

Or so the pop papers would have had it. Adam Oswald knew otherwise.

The paramedics in New York had to do more than merely go through the motions. Adam knew that he had left quite the little trail behind him in New York. That moron junkie drummer would do anything to save his own bacon, including describing his mule to the cops. That description would include both physical characteristics and a name. He was grateful for the public knowledge of Neil Venables' addiction, because the guitarist's demise had been easily the messiest one yet. Well..... the mule's the physical characteristics had been taken care of in Boston, and his name had also been idiosyncratic to New York.

Philip Cathcart was a bigger worry. The pop writer turned snoop had traced him to Toronto, and odds

were highly likely that he had visited New York very recently. Maybe Philip Cathcart had followed him to Boston and now back across the Canadian border to Halifax.

Philip Cathcart might be in Halifax at this very moment.

Adam wanted to set eyes on him. He wanted to kill the pathetic wannabe. All pop writers were frustrated wannabes, and Cathcart had been the worst of the entire stinking lot. Too bad it had been Fred Eastwood who'd been mugged to death in Central Park, and not Philip Cathcart.

He stared at the bottom corners of his bedroom wall for an extended period. He was fascinated by a rippling effect caused by the fading sun being deflected by his window blinds. Then he abruptly rose and retrieved his painting-in-progress of Citadel Hill. He carried the canvas and his painting supplies into the common room, where his landlord Bert Widgerley was sipping a lager.

'That's quite the canvas you have there, Adam. You almost finished with it?'

'No', he bit his tongue. 'The painting always tells me when I should consider it accomplished.'

Bert Widgerley regarded him like he was being profound, when he was only pronouncing an obvious truism. People set themselves assignments, so the assignments supplied the rules and regulations.

One more to go. Take out Mars Hedonis and then truly disappear and paint away to my heart's content.

'Are you going to be cooking again tonight, Adam?'

He nodded. He didn't want to commit himself to any set time, but he would indeed be cooking for himself after spending some quality time with his painting.

'That was quite the casserole you conjured up the night before your little vacation. You know what? I've been thinking of hiring you to cook for more than just yourself. Open up a little diner, so to speak.'

Adam spoke slowly to his landlord.

'I think you're exaggerating my culinary prowess, Mr. Widgerley. When I know nobody but myself is going to be eating something, then I can relax and have fun with the process. But....the minute somebody else's taste expectations become involved.... then the stakes become higher and I freeze. It's like I can't really handle pressure. I'm that way as a painter, too. When I'm doing it for myself, then I can be my own judge. But when the public becomes involved, then I have to deal with all of their tastes. And, since there

are indeed not one but several publics, then that's a lot of different tastes that just don't blend together very smoothly. Do you know what I mean, sir?'

Bert Widgerley finished his lager and opened another, offering some to his tenant.

Adam declined, and unsuccessfully tried to focus again on his painting. He decided to pack up for the day.

'Calling it quits?'

He didn't acknowledge the landlord's question. He decided that now was the time to treat himself to one final working vacation.

'I'm stuck, Mr. Widgerley. Do you know what? I need to drop down to New York for a stretch, take a look at all those different galleries both downtown and mid-town. Yes, I'll write you a cheque for next month's rent, and I'll see you when I get back.'

He closed his bedroom door behind him, quickly packed his dressiest clothes, and then hailed a cab to the airport. The first available two way flight to London left in an hour's time, so he purchased his ticket and then killed time in the W.H. Smith's bookstore.

On the cover of the NME, there was a headline for an in-depth interview with Mars Hedonis, written by somebody other than Philip Cathcart. The writer was prying into Hedonis' personal life, rather than bludgeoning the singer with questions about his dead collaborators. Hedonis was actually letting his guard down, in the mode of somebody who knew that his prime years were no longer.

Hedonis was admitting to turning thirty within the next week. Adam knew that the singer would be throwing a very important birthday bash.

Mark Hewitt and Nina Foster sat down at opposite ends of the long table in the Georgian dining room at Stargreaves. Preparations for Mars' Hedonis' upcoming thirtieth birthday party had left the couple more than slightly exhausted.

'It's not that I don't trust you regarding the guest list, Nina. I just think we should cap it off at one hundred.'

Nina Foster removed a hair clip and then shook her head slowly.

'I fail to see how a few more bodies could cause any problems. Even with a few token rivals and those dreadful royal brats. Prince Dickey and Prince Tony are unpleasant enough, but that Lady Alicia really takes the cake. The girl is simply incapable of holding her drugs'.

'I detest the royals and in fact the fucking monarchy itself..... probably even more than you do, Nina. My dad was a coal-miner, and the royals and their friends never let me forget it. And they never will, okay? They'll never grant me any title'.

'You never let me forget it either, Mark. And every commoner knows that the delinquent royals are proudly incapable of moderating their drug and alcohol intakes. But.....you're the one who's actually invited all the members of Blotter, even though you never shut up about how much you hate their music.'

'Who's invited to my birthday party has little, if anything, to do with my own personal aesthetic tastes. I'm certainly not inviting either Sir Adam Vauxhall or DJ Delirium because I'm even remotely fond of their music. And I have much more use for both Adam and Mr. Delirium than I have for those glorified lager louts in Blotter. I've merely been suggesting that too many guests are more likely to lead to at least one unmanageable situation.'

'I think you're being far too conservative about this event, Mark, just as you're generally conservative about everything. It's going to be your night, so just loosen up and go wild. That, if anything, is the point of it all.'

He didn't respond immediately. He concentrated on checking off designated names on his e-mail

address book.

Then Mark Hewitt looked up and smiled at his spouse.

‘ I guess you’re right, Nina. After all, there will be five security guards on duty Terry, Gary, George, Matt, and Victor’.

‘That’s an entire football team right there.’.

‘Football players can be extremely useful specimens, don’t you think?’.

Nina laughed and then retreated to her den for a cigarette. Since Mars Hedonis no longer smoked cigarettes or even drank very much, the den was the only place where Nina could indulge her nicotine habit.

He knew she also smoked hashish and snorted coke in that den, even though she’d claim to have given up nose candy. He could also tell that she was having an affair, but he did not broach the subject.

That sort of confrontation violated the agreement terms of their relationship. The problem was that he was jealous of her having more than a life than he had for himself . It wasn’t as if he didn’t occasionally fancy soft but large breasts and also big hard uncut cocks. But neither emotional involvement nor anonymous sex were right for him, especially at this stage of his career.

His career? What fucking career?

He opened himself another bottle of water, and then pulled his prescribed bottle of clozapine tablets from his pocket. He placed one tablet on the tip of his tongue, and then swallowed deeply .

He wasn’t keeping his prescription for anti-depressants a secret from Nina. But he preferred to conduct this daily ritual when alone.

‘So, Mark. You’re comfortable with the catering arrangements?’.

Nina returned after finishing her coffin nail.

‘Yes. I had an good talk with Inspector Warburton, and we’ve agreed that Mayfair will be the appropriate caterer. That woman who used to waitress at the Mayfair Lounge...’.

‘You mean not so sweet Sue?’, Nina Foster made a face.

‘Yes. The one and only Miss Sternwood. Don’t worry, dear. We’ve made up since my argument with poor blessed Frederick. Sue Sternwood may not be my idea of the most agreeable company, but the old girl

certainly knows how to run a tight ship.’.

‘Well, then. That certainly makes her your type, doesn’t it .’.

He winced but tried not to show it as he finished checking off his e-mail booklet. He pretended not to register Nina sitting idly at the other end of the table, at loose ends with no specific assignment before her.

If she was so damned independent, then why did she always need somebody to be giving her instructions? Nina Foster was such an inarticulate masochist, but maybe that was a role she enjoyed playing as part of her extracurricular activities.

He decided that now was as good a time as any to make his announcement.

‘I’m going to kill off Mars Hedonis, Nina.’.

She sat up, as if not believing the statement she’d just heard.

‘I’m going to terminate Mars Hedonis’ career, that’s what I’m attempting to communicate to you.’.

She tensed up noticeably.

‘How are you going to do that, Mark. What the hell has come over you lately?’.

‘Nothing, Nina. Mars Hedonis is going to do nothing, and that is precisely the point.’.

‘Oh.....I think I see.’.

‘I’m glad you do. Now, this decision of mine elevates this party to an entirely higher level.. It means that a few strategic press types must be invited . Even some of those sycophants whom I’ve sworn I’d never speak again...they will serve their purpose on this particular occasion. Now, can you please take care of this matter?’.

‘Sure, Mark. Let me smoke another cigarette, and then I’ll assemble a list for your approval.’.

‘Don’t even worry about my approval, please. Just use your imagination.’.

Nina Foster stood and walked toward her smoking den. She closed the door, lit her cigarette, and then dialed Philip Cathcart’s home number. She had been planning to spend the approaching evening with Philip , but now she wanted her lover to be present and on high alert when Mars Hedonis would be dropping his major league bombshell.

Charles Ehrlichson appraised the roast of lamb that his supervisor had already deemed fit for service at Mars' Hedonis' thirtieth birthday party. Charles knew that Mars Hedonis', or rather Mark Hewitt's , age was in fact thirty three ; but he also knew that such a fact could never be permitted to spoil the petulant pop star's fatal finale.

He indicated to Sue Sternwood that the roast was indeed of the finest possible calibre. Sue responded with a left-handed thumbs up. She seemed to be a thumbs up or down sort of individual, often accompanied by more than slightly raunchy commentary.

Securing employment with Mayfair Catering had been a piece of cake. Charles had been aware of Sue Sternwood's own history with the Mayfair Lounge, and its notorious clients Hedonis and Eastwood. He speculated that His Royal Hedonis must have apologized to Sue big time for his previous temper tantrums, including the argument that finally made Fred Eastwood snap his twigs.

If Mark hadn't pissed off Fred, then Fred wouldn't have made his foolish sojourn to New York and been mugged to death in one of the more unsavory sections of Central Park. Mars Hedonis' was therefore at least indirectly responsible for Fred Eastwood's death.

Charles retrieved a Kleenex from his pocket, not because he had a runny nose but because he needed to reassure himself that the clopazine tablets were still there for the time when he would need them.

'Cheers, crew.'

Sue Sternwood hoisted up a bottle of brandy and offered a shot to each and every kitchen crew member. Charles was inclined to pass, but then he thought that might look snotty.

No point giving out snob signals when you're nothing more than just another kitchen helper. It's all about appearance, don't let anybody convince you differently. You've made it so far, Charlie boy, so don't blow it now.

Those five football boys hadn't even given him a once-over. He was respectfully in the employment of Mayfair Catering, and everybody and their dog knew that Miss Sue Sternwood ran one very tight ship

indeed.

So the entire kitchen crew including the new recruit Charles Ehrlichson toasted one another with the brandy, and then each individual member returned to his or her station. Places, everybody.....not unlike a stage play in which even the extras had to remember their precise and proper lines.

‘ Quiet, everybody! ‘ , Sue Sternwood sounded like she was bellowing into a megaphone. Then she winked at Charles, and whispered. ‘ If you crane your neck just a stitch to the right, you can observe all of His Royal Hedonis’ guests arriving.

And for sure there were several early-birds. Charles recognized at least two of The Blotters, looking as if they’d enjoyed a definite head start at the nearby pub prior to their arrival at Stargreaves. Charles didn’t see any of the expected royal teenagers, but he did pick out the recently knighted Adam Vauxhall. He recalled Adam Vauxhall’s brief marriage to that notorious dyke one-hit wonder.....Julie Marinetti, and he knew that even in those early years that Adam really preferred rent-boys not at all unlike the one arriving on his arm tonight.

Then he almost broke his neck in disbelief. Philip Cathcart was arriving at the party, accompanied by a woman who resembled the BBC’s idea of an asexual stenographer. Surely Philip Cathcart could not possibly be a friend of His Master Hedonis? Then he realized that some of the other, some of the less expensively dressed invitees, must be ladies and gentlemen of the press.

So press people were invited, and not just clandestine gossip columnists? This was not a possibility that had occurred to Charles. This meant that Mars’ birthday party was meant to be a much higher-profile event than he had anticipated it being.

Not good, damn it. Charles muttered to himself as Sue Sternwood now commanded her crew to get back to work at their proper stations. What if Philip Cathcart wandered onto the kitchen by mistake, in search of the loo or just plain lost in the country mansion that was so obviously beyond anything the likes of himself could possibly afford?

No. Philip Cathcart will not be invading the staff quarters. The precocious journalist was a guest just like all the others, and guests never mixed with the staff.

Charles immersed himself in his duties. The ten main dining tables were now being set, and he had to

appraise every item on the menu before it could be properly arranged.

He and all the other kitchen crew could clearly overhear Nina Foster telling Mars Hedonis to stop primping himself up in the loo and at least have the bloody courtesy to greet his guests personally.

‘Sorry, Nina. I’m coming.’.

He spent another minute straightening his hair and his collar and his sleeve-cuffs and then emerged, walking beside Nina to Stargreaves’ front door. They watched as their manservant Nicholson directed the invitees to the coat check.

‘ Good evening, Adam. I’m glad you could make it, as it’s always good to see you.’. Mars of course completely ignored Adam Vauxhall’s latest upscale rent boy.

‘Your highness, your highness, and not to forget your ladyship.’., he completely fudged the protocol regarding Princes Dickey and Tony and the straggling Lady Alicia, who only compounded matters further by incessantly giggling.

‘Your coats, please’, Nicholson by now had acquired assistance from none other than Sue Sternwood.

Mars watched the younger Prince Anthony and his still-giggling girlfriend immediately sneak off to the upstairs loo. He anticipated that his guests who might actually need to relieve themselves during the course of the evening might spend a lot of time waiting for the royals and other similar brats to clean up their noses and then at least flush the toilet.

He had been just like them during his entire twenties, and now he had finally come of age. And to think that such a leftover eighties drug had made a comeback. The entire lot of drug-addled pop stars and their leeches could all go straight to hell, with of course no convenient return tickets permitted.

Now he watched Nina greeting one of her journalist guests, and whispering something to him as some sort of afterthought. He tried to put a name to the writer’s face but failed . This man was somebody to whom he had granted an interview quite some time ago, but. the face was not registering. It was somebody with the Melody Maker, no Sounds International..... Stephen Fleetwood...no, definitely not that one..... Daniel Bernstein, Douglas.....Derek...some ‘D’ name.....no, not Sounds but the NME.

Philip Cathcart! That’s who it was, with his hair now jet black so he could play Goth twenty-five years after the fact. And why was Nina whispering something into his nosy ear? He had clearly instructed

her to use her judgment in making up the press invitations, but why the hell had Cathcart been invited? He was incapable of taking a scoop at face value, he would have to twist and then wind up killing the story.

Maybe Nina wasn't tipping him off about his intended announcement. Maybe Philip Cathcart was Nina's lover!

Mars decided that Nina could bloody well greet the guests, since so many of them were hers. Mars decided that it was already time for him to have a drink.

He poured himself a glass of red wine, out of a bottle that he and Nina had brought up from the wine cellar what now seemed like ages ago. He threw it back like a shot, and then checked himself. He would be drinking, but not all at once.

He looked into the mirror, and then almost threw the wine bottle at it. He wheeled the swivel chair around so that he could face away from the mirror, and then poured himself another glass of wine. He retrieved two clopazine tablets from his waistcoat pocket, crushed them into the wine glass, and then swallowed for almost a minute. Then he returned the chair around to its original position, and stared into the mirror.

Goodbye, Mars. It has been quite the life, but great lives were not meant to last forever.

Mars carefully positioned the wine bottle and then emerged from his den. By this point, there must have been close to one hundred people at the party. He knew most if not all of them, and the guests chatted politely but aimlessly while Nina kept topping off their glasses.

The guests were all killing time. Well, when the hour would be appropriate, Mars Hedonis would be demonstrating how to kill a lot more than just time.

He could see the royal teenage brothers, scrambling out of the upstairs loo with obvious boogers hanging out of their nostrils. He imagined that the precocious Lady Alicia was indulging in the same filthy habit in the downstairs loo. He fantasized kicking the little princes Dickey and Tony down the stairs and out onto the porch, but restrained himself. Probably the King Himself wanted somebody to literally kick sense into his offspring's heads, and Mars had no desire to gratify any fucking King of England.

'They'll be dining soon, everybody. Everybody in their places.'

Charles Ehrlichson stood at attention while Sue Sternwood inspected her kitchen troops. Sue was

indeed beginning to remind him of Winston Churchill, albeit sober and without the cigar.

He overheard Sue whispering to the chef, confirming who was vegetarian and who would be savoring the roast lamb. He also overheard her complaining that Mars Hedonis was drinking more than she had anticipated.

Charles repressed a smile. Sue Sternwood and presumably Nina Foster were predictably alarmed by Mars' robust celebration. But, as far as Charles was personally concerned, Mars was making things a lot easier.

The guests were now being summoned to the banquet tables and being seated. Nina Foster had personally worked out the seating arrangements, and she had managed to keep all of the guests in conveniently designated groups. The lager louts in Blotter were an exception, as she and Mars had agreed to scatter them for the sake of the greater company. And now Mars was registering that Philip Cathcart had been seated next to Sir Adam Vauxhall, flanked by Sir Adam's rent boy and Philip's lesbian sister or cousin or whatever her alibi.

Mars sat back while Nina called all the guests to attention.

'To Mars, everybody. To Mars, on the glorious occasion of his thirtieth birthday.'

'To Mars.'

More than one hundred revelers raised their glasses to the pop star, whose face had reddened and whose eyes had become badly shot.

The guests finished their toast and then continued their previous small talk. Mars was acutely aware that he had nobody on his left to banter with, that he had only acquaintances and no friends except for Nina, who'd had the gall to invite her lover to his own soiree.

Fred was gone, Neil was gone, they were all gone. *Circumference* was history and his solo career hadn't even been that.

He requested more wine from Nina and she knew better than to instruct him to pace himself. He listened to her small talk with one of the lager louts' girlfriends. She'd invited her fucking lover, but hadn't the guts to sit at the table beside the man.

Sue Sternwood burst into the kitchen and frantically announced that the birthday boy was dissatisfied

with the roast lamb.

‘More seasonings, please. I wish he’d been more specific but that’s not the way he is. Charles! Get on with it! More seasonings, and quickly!’.

He addressed the flavouring problem while overhearing Sue discussing the host with the cook.

‘His taste buds are off tonight, my dear. He’s drinking like a fish, and he hasn’t done that for almost two years.’.

Charles still hadn’t found the right moment to dispense the clozapine. Up until now, Mars’ unexpected drunkenness had been looking good for him. But now, he worried that Mars’ might get sick and literally spoil everything.

Sue again whispered to the cook.

‘I don’t think it’s just booze. I think he may have ingested something else. I wish I knew what else.’.

Sue finished the cigarette she’d been sneaking and then picked up the freshly seasoned roast, confident that Charles had attended to the perceived problem.

‘Stand by, everybody. The roast isagain....ready.’.

She herself carried the roast on its silver tray out into the dining room, where the conversation had become strangely silent. Guests were talking to their immediate neighbours and not across the room. More than a few eyes rested on Mars Hedonis and Nina Foster.

‘ So, Nina. You’re not pulling any wool over my eyes. I now perfectly well that Mr. Philip Cathcart is your latest lover. He who has always attempted to undermine me. Is he a good fuck, my darling?’.

Nina raised the decibels.

‘Yes, Mark. My lover is indeed a very good fuck.’.

‘That’s difficult to believe.’, Mars smirked at Nina. ‘ I’ve always suspected Philip to be a necrophiliac. I’ve always imagined him going down on David Burgess’ corpse.’.

By this point even the giggling royal brats and the members of Blotter were dead silent.

‘Mr. Cathcart’, Mars now spoke loudly across to another table. ‘ I must speak to you for a moment, so I command you to cross the room at once.’.

Philip rose, and then tiptoed past his dinner companions and then stood in front of Mars and Nina.

‘ I understand that you and my wife are lovers. It’s not that Nina and I don’t have an open relationship, because we do. However, all of our second and even third-tier partners must be subject to the other’s approval. And you, Cathcart, simply don’t cut the mustard. You’re not even a journalist. You’re a carpetbagger and a ghoul.....a bloody necrophiliac who can only exist vicariously from your superiors’ blood. Now get the fuck out of my house, Cathcart! Now!’.

All but a few of the guests had been listening to this exchange , and now they observed Philip Cathcart clenching his right fists only to be restrained by Nina Foster.

‘ Don’t sink to his level, Philip. I’m coming with you.’.

Nina spat at Mars, then grabbed Philip by the hand and pushed the manservant Nicholson out of the way before retrieving their coats. Before letting themselves out the front door, Nina shouted ‘ Happy birthday, loser!’.

The remainder of the invited press core immediately swarmed the departing twosome, armed not only with questions but also paparazzi. Unfortunately, they were mercilessly shoved out of the way by Philip while Nina repeatedly commanded them to go fuck themselves. Two of the football player security guards grabbed Nina by the hands and led her out the door.

‘I can make an exit on my own steam, you moronic goons! Just get your fucking hands off of me!’.

Nina ran out into the street and toward Philip’s idling car.

The paparazzi now ran back to the banquet tables, where Mars Hedonis’ was anticipating their collective question.

‘ I wish my wife and her distinguished lover all the bestprovided that they relocate to Antarctica and live happily ever after among the penguins. Since they are both so polymorphously perverse, I suspect that they will enjoy glorious inter-species orgies. Thank you, and now go away! All of you, get lost and just leave me alone!’.

Sir Adam Vauxhall clutched at his rented companion, and then made a point of being the first to leave.

‘You’ve always been messy, Hewitt. You’re a slob. Always have been and always will .’.

A few press types lingered behind, while the rest of the invitees all took their cue without any

further arguments. The delinquent royals realized that they'd been seriously upstaged by their host. One of The Blotters staggered up to Mars' side and complimented his elder for the outrageous performance.

'I'm not acting, you stupid wanker! This is not a performance, this is a funeral. And I'm going to give you two seconds to get out of my sight, or I will kill you!'

The hapless pretender froze for a deadly second, then realized that Mars' wasn't kidding even though the senior pop star appeared to be unarmed. The Blotter boy pivoted and ran toward the front door, where his cohorts had been advising him to run for his life.

'You like that, do you?'. Mars screamed at one remaining photographer.

One of Mars' football players tried to restrain the star. Mars crudely informed the lad that his job was to keep an eye on the guests and not the host.

By now Sue Sternwood and all of the kitchen crew except for Charles Ehrlichson had emerged from their quarters.

'Mr. Hedonis. Please call it a night and go lie down. Please stop making such a royal ass of yourself.'

Mars wheeled at Sue Sternwood, enraged.

'I've always hated you, Sternwood. I went along with your plan but I've always hated you! Get out of my fucking sight now, and take your minions with you!'

He burped and then continued his oratory, even though the kitchen crew were all packing up and the photographer had left.

'This anti-party is the last act of the fraud known as Mars Hedonis. From this point on, I insist on being addressed by my Christian mane of Mark Hewitt. I am obscenely rich, which presents me with several options. I might go back to art college, I might write my memoirs, I might study the scriptures. I don't know just what I'm.....'

Mark Hewitt fell face first into the roast that still hadn't been cleared from his table. Regurgitated meat and dressing rolled from his mouth and onto his plate. Sue Sternwood stared for a second, and then dialed for an ambulance.

'Nobody touch anything, and nobody leave,. Understand?'

Then Sue ran into the kitchen, where only Charles Ehrlichson remained at his post.

Charles now realized that the kitchen crew would be transforming into the cleanup crew, and their duties would be performed while paramedics and other authorities examined the entire premises. The food, the drinks, the china.....everything would be thoroughly checked for clues.

The five football types, whom Mars had employed to keep tabs on the invited guests, stood ill at ease, looking particularly clueless. They hadn't realized that observing the birthday boy had also been a key component of their contract.

Sue gave instructions to each crew member as to their respective duties. Charles was mercifully relegated to wrapping the leftovers. He was relieved that he would be able to remain in the kitchen, that somebody else was now responsible for transporting the wine back to the wine cellar. But he knew he was in a quandary.

He would have to be transported back into London, but how. He would have to invent a ruse for slipping out of Stargreaves' back yard, walking to the nearest main street, and then hailing a cab back into the city. And Sue Sternwood wasn't about to let him off before personally declaring the kitchen spotless.

Charles told Sue that he had to pee and then walked briskly toward the downstairs loo. He made sure the door was locked and then threw his clozapine tablets into the toilet. Then he flushed, watching the tablets dissolve before washing his hands thoroughly.

When he returned to the kitchen, he found himself alone. Sue Sternwood could be heard bellowing at everybody to be ultra-careful with their fingerprints. But it was only a matter of time until one of the crew had to pop into the kitchen for some or other inconvenient errand. So, it was now or never. Now was the time for Charles Ehrlichson to slip out the back door.

He slid the door open without making any noise, but he could already hear some worker informing Sue Sternwood that Charles was not in the kitchen. Now Sue was paging him, repeatedly calling out his pseudonym outside first the downstairs and upstairs loos. Her voice became fainter as he now approached the county road running to the rear of the late Hedonis' mansion.

He felt safe. The paramedics and their cohorts would be arriving as fast as possible on the main road, and he had successfully slipped out onto the secondary route.

But now he could hear approaching footsteps accompanied by voices. One belonged to Sue Sternwood and the other to a man.....a male voice that he couldn't recognize. He hid in the basement doorway of a house facing out onto the road...he wanted Sue and her male cohort to pass by while he remained invisible.

'Charles! We know you're around here somewhere. We only want to talk to you'.

Sue called out to him while the man remained silent. Like hell they only wanted to talk to him. Didn't they all use that line when dealing with madmen?

Charles could tell the man with Sue wasn't any member of the kitchen crew, but then who could he be?

There still wasn't any sound of any approaching paramedics.

He crouched down to his knees and then sat tensely on the final step of the stairwell he had taken refuge in. Now Sue and her accomplice were approaching, each suggesting to the other that they check out different directions.

'You take the left, Ted. I'll go right.'

'He must be somewhere close by. There's no way the man can be that nimble.'

Ted was right. The fugitive must be nearby, unless he'd had a driver waiting for him. Fat chance of that kind of luck. Fat chance of him having any loyal accomplice.

Charles could hear the man named Ted peering down the stairwell to his immediate north. Ted had a flashlight, and Charles could only hope the man would keep moving north.

Now the ambulance siren became audible, and the paramedics' arrival coincided with the advent of some foul unrecognizable odor. What the hell could be causing that odor? It wasn't fire...there was no fire, unfortunately. Maybe it was gas...maybe somebody in the kitchen had left a stove or burner on.

He coughed, and then quickly attempted to muffle the sound. It was too late. Ted abruptly wheeled back toward his stairwell and now as flashing the light into his face.

'Over here, Sue. I've got him!'

Charles choked again as he witnessed Sue Sternwood running toward the stairwell. She stood beside Ted, who was a steely-eyed short stocky man in his early sixties who did not appear to be armed.

But Sue Sternwood was prepared. She quickly produced a pair of handcuffs and slapped them around his hands, tying them together.

‘ Mr. Inglis, I presume? Very pleased to meet you, sir.’.

Ted’s voice had become almost musical. It was so sweetly musical that it was sickly. The odor had disappeared, and now Ted had succeeded it with a different clamminess.

‘This way, Gordon. You’re coming with us. This way.’.

Scotland Yard Inspector Edward P. Warburton and Mayfair Lounge Proprietor Susan J. Sternwood clicked their brandy snifters and then toasted each other.

‘ To Ted, on his promotion and of course to his considerable raise.’.

‘To Sweet Sue, on her ascension and of course to her considerable raise.’.

Sue Sternwood beamed at Ted. Not entirely as a result of her valuable assistance in the apprehension of pop star turned serial-murderer Gordon Inglis, she had been the obvious choice for manager when former Mayfair Lounge honcho Ron Leckie had finally thrown in the towel.

‘How does it feel, Ted?’.

Ted Warburton puffed contentedly on his pipe.

‘ Not all that different, actually. My bank manager’s manners and general demeanor have of course improved by several notches.’.

‘ I feel like I’ve earned something’, Sue ground out her cigarette. ‘ Mind you, Ted. My lips are and will be eternally sealed as to my most recent clandestine activities.’.

‘Cheers, Sue.’.

They toasted each other again. They were each on their third brandy, and neither of them had any further responsibilities for the day. Sue felt complete competence in her day and night managers.

Now she suddenly frowned at him.

‘What’s wrong, dear?’.

‘ I’ve been thinking long and hard about this, Edward.’.

‘About what?’.

Sue Sternwood burst out laughing, at a high enough volume to distract all of the Mayfair Lounge’s customers.

‘I’ve been thinking that the future of our relationship depends on you seeking out a much more

aromatic pipe tobacco.’

Ted felt that she was actually being very serious about this demand. He decided that his best defense was a good offense.

‘I think, Susan, that it’s more of a priority to be drinking a toast to our most unlikely secret agent.’

‘Yes, dear old Philip Cathcart’, Sue chortled. ‘The best secret agents, in my opinion anyway, are those who are blissfully unaware of their true occupations.’

‘We couldn’t have done it without the little brat’, Ted signaled the waitress for refills.

‘When Philip bravely ventured into the Mayfair Lounge and impersonated Scotland Yard, that was our clue. Follow whomever is a follower.’

‘And when you eavesdropped on Philip cell-phoning Nina Foster, that was even more valuable.’

‘Yes, dear. So, to Philip Cathcart. The enfant terrible who makes detective work so much easier for everybody concerned.’

Sue personally acknowledged the waitress, and then enjoyed a hearty sip of brandy.

‘If it hadn’t been for our boy sleuth, then we wouldn’t have seized on the birthday party scenario. Then Inglis wouldn’t have come to Mayfair, looking for the necessary employment’.

‘I guess not’, Ted stroked his chin pensively. ‘Cathcart thought he had a major-league scoop, tracing Inglis first to that music-publisher in Toronto and then the rooming house in Halifax. But Inglis was so professional about leaving paper trails.’

‘Yes, that was how he kept his spree going for so long. He was definitely adept at manipulating the underground economy. The music-publisher in Toronto, the quack mechanic in San Jose…….’

‘He was also good at fitting in, surprisingly for such an anti-social person. But, we have accumulated witnesses who thought there was something not quite right about our chameleon. There’s the younger mechanic in San Jose, the shipper in Toronto, the two ladies of the parish in Sheffield who were so enamored of their new priest…… and not to forget the drug-dealing drummer in New York. We haven’t much of a case without that sad sack’s testimony.’

‘The landlord in Halifax is also quite a character. He wondered about ‘Adam Oswald’ on the basis of the lodger’s painting. Not exactly a realistic masterpiece. Compared to what I see in the media and at the

art colleges, I'd say young Inglis missed his true calling.'

'Then, Susan, you're in agreement with his former art teacher. But hindsight is always hindsight. I just remembered...'

'What, Ted?'

'That our killer went to art college as 'David Burgess' and not under his birth certificate name. Of course, Mom and Dad were already long out of the picture.'

'Well, there you go.' Sue lit another cigarette. 'He could have done nicely for himself as an actor. Gordon Inglis was quite the capable chameleon. He was even smart enough to spare his poor hopeless drummer, condemned to a life on the bottle out in Vancouver.'

'Wait a minute, dear. I've visited Vancouver, and it's not at all unpleasant. Although it rains all the time.'

'Well, there you go. And then what about Fred Eastwood? Did Mr. Inglis take him out and then make it look like a mugging?'

'No, I honestly don't think so', Ted shook his head. 'Fred Eastwood had become convinced that *Circumference* should be reformed, so he took it on himself to confront Neil Venables. Fred was going to pay for the best possible drug rehabilitation and whatever else might be necessary to reform the band. He thought he could persuade His Royal Hedonis into abandoning his solo career and reforming the band.'

'But Mr. Inglis was so much more efficient. And so much more versatile than his nemesis. Mars Hedonis only had one persona, if even that. Do you know what really amuses me, Ted?'

'What?'

'That Nina Foster probably thought Philip was the killer.'

'I think that might be stretching it, Sue. However.....it's a good thing for her that he isn't. I doubt that she's shedding too many tears about Hedonis' or Hewitt's self-inflicted demise, but we can't pin any conspiracy charges against her.'

'Those two drank at the Mayfair one day, and I mean drank. And of course they had little boogers hanging out of their nostrils every time they peed.'

'Well, it's not as if you've never served drug addicts in your heyday.'

‘So?’, she butted out her smoke and stood. ‘Am I now under arrest for duplicity?’.

‘I have to think that one over.’.

‘Think hard, Ted. Take your time. But.....I really think we’ve had enough to drink, if you know what I mean.’.

Ted finished his drink and then stood, and Sue let Ted rub his body against hers. She liked what she felt inside him.

‘We could very easily retire to my office. I now have an office, you realize. It’s known as a perk’.

Ted looked around the Mayfair Lounge nervously, and then nodded.

Sue stood in front of her office, slowly reading her name on the door. She impatiently waited for him while he peed .

When Ted emerged from the men’s loo , Sgt. Bob Stanley burst into the Mayfair Lounge with an urgent telegram.

‘Ted. We’ve just received word that Gordon Inglis has escaped from Strangeways. He somehow managed to impersonate a guard, and then take his regular lunch break.’.

‘Shit!’, Ted and Sue both exclaimed simultaneously. Sue looked particularly crestfallen. All of her own subterfuge had been in vain, and now her own newfound status might be in jeopardy.

Then Ted Warburton groaned , ‘ Once an actor, always an actor. Well, let’s get back to work!’.

He'd quickly managed to lose the prison guard's uniform and replace it with a black trench coat, which served to camouflage nondescript black service trousers and a white shirt. He'd also purchased a grayish green tweed cap, which concealed his red hair and hopefully added a couple of years to his immediate profile.

Buying a ticket for the Brighton ferry hadn't involved any complications. None of the ticket agents or officials had paid the slightest attention to the man.....even his tentative Scottish burr hadn't raised anybody's eyebrows.

He did not intend to start or participate in any conversations aboard the ferry. However, in case he did wind up killing time by talking to strangers, his name was Peter Ross and he was vacationing from Glasgow.

Just another young but pushing middle-aged man with idle time on his hands.....waiting for the ferry to move far enough from land and deep enough for him to take the plunge.

Most of the passengers appeared to be families, out for the day and enjoying the breeze. Oddly enough, it hadn't even showered for the past few days. Usually the weather was cold and damp and anti-social, but it hadn't been lately. Perhaps there was some truth to the omnipresent news stories about warmer currents and global warming.

There was also very little wind, which bothered the man. He would have preferred at least a good breeze.

However, the man had never been one to allow the weather to determine his emotions. He'd read about that particular form of depression, and had never understood any possible causes for it. The weather was only relevant for those whose livelihoods and favourite activities required them to spend too much time outside.

He registered a few passengers who were not family or even siblings. They were teenagers with mauve and burgundy hair treatments and ridiculously baggy trousers, on both the boys and the girls. They

were ravers catching up on their fresh air quotients, now that field raves had become such an endangered species. They were kids who'd been too young for *Circumference* five years ago, let alone today.

He laughed at Mars' late career dance-market moves, and how they'd completely backfired. Mars was stupid enough to think he could but fool audiences by paying off particular high profile DJs.

Maybe the teenage ravers had laughed at all the brouhaha surrounding Mars Hedonis' fatal birthday banquet. More likely none of them even gave a shit. Singers and hack instrumentalists may have been in retro-fashion in the mid-nineties pop boom, but not today.

Circumference could have gained that audience's attention, and then sustained it . It was all a matter of inventive mixing followed up by effective marketing . Don't just buy brand-name DJ's, cultivate them. Make sure your record becomes associated with special occasions , like fabulous sex and good drugs, not the same old drugs that made too many lives and careers messy and unmanageable.

If only Mars hadn't insisted on always having his way and if only Neil Venables hadn't been such a guitar dinosaur. If only Mars and Neil and their untalented passengers had allowed 'David Burgess' to provide the rhythms and the colours, not to mention the band's image.

Oh, shut up and enough already. The man cursed himself for thinking nostalgically. It had already been too late for him even when he'd been unceremoniously shown the door by Mars and Neil and that closeted accountant. Maybe , if he were prolong his life by another two or three miserably furtive years, it might be time to resurface. Yeah, right. It's all over because it actually was all over.

Now there was a considerable wind factor, since the boat was well out of the harbour. The man could feel the breeze rippling against his face, which meant that he would immediately be swimming into the current.

All the blue-rinsers and the daytime ravers would see him jump, and what might they do. It wasn't as if anybody had pursued him the first time around. It wasn't as if witnesses were important on the man's second round, either.

So many of the families included obvious grandparents, and so many of the middle-aged couples' faces and general bearings anticipated their elderly fellow travelers. The man noticed how familiar everybody but the ravers were with the Beatles tunes playing over the ferry's sound system. He

remembered that The Beatles were still the top selling recording act in the world, and wondered why. It couldn't be just the aging boomers and their children, there had to be at least one other market. The man did not understand how The Beatles could be so endearing to so many. Even their best records seemed so cluttered and ill-conceived.

An airplane's sound drowned out The Beatles and their endless medley, and for a moment the man was grateful. Then he realized that the approaching plane was flying very close to the water. If the pilot was intending to land on the water, then who was the pilot and why would presumably he be doing so?

Or....., was the plane flying so close to the water because somebody on board was taking aerial photographs. He couldn't read any markings on the plane, but he feared that it was a police helicopter.

The man decided to retreat from the deck until the plane sound went away.

The downstairs cabin was almost perfectly quiet. A young couple and their infant daughter were avoiding the sun, but the baby wasn't crying or being demanding. The man appreciated the solitude, although he knew he had to return to the upstairs deck and soon as the plane had passed over the ferry.

Somebody on the plane may or may not be taking photographs of the passengers. By the time any successful document would be passed on to the authorities, it would be too late for them to intercept the ferry.

As he could no longer hear any sound of the passing airplane, the man returned to the upper deck, where the wind had strengthened during his absence. But the wind was not loud or gusty enough to impair the sound of the ferry's sound system, which had interrupted the Beatles medley in order to provide a news update.

The first four dispatched concerned the ongoing American War Against terrorism being waged in Afghanistan and threatening to spill over into tangentially-related nations. The fifth item concerned entirely a different matter.

Nina Foster had been found dead in the banquet room of Stargreaves, the mansion she had evidently inherited from her deceased husband Mark Hewitt, who had been known professionally as Mars Hedonis. A Scotland Yard spokesperson announced that the agency was indeed searching for one Philip Cathcart, although the spokesperson stressed that the prominent pop writer was, at this point anyway, only wanted

for questioning.

Well well well, the man snickered to himself. It certainly hadn't taken long for the widow to invite her lover to share the house, so to speak. And the moderately clever but hopelessly deluded Mr. Cathcart had now run quite the full gamut, from upstart critic to infamous lover to murder suspect, if not a murderer.

Perfectly on cue, the radio now played an early *Circumference* record..... *Matchbooks*. It was one of the few tracks still in circulation to which 'David Burgess' had made an audible contribution, although Mars and Neil had mixed the anarchic synthesizer squalls well below the level of the lead and rhythm guitars. Somewhere on the net, the man knew there was a bootlegged copy of the earlier demo on which the synthesizer has really squeaked and squalled and then shimmered.

Matchbooks could have been an outrageous record, not merely a novelty-item.

You blew it, Mars and Neil. And Fred, and everybody else who was involved with *Circumference*. Including you, Nina and Philip. Piss on the whole fucking lot of you.

The wind picked up even more than it had already. The gusts were loud enough to interfere with the radio sound, which was a blessing. The man had no desire to hear any more old *Circumference* recordings, he had no use for any further music. Even the most obnoxiously anti-social techno-industrial squalor was now beside the point.

The ravers were of course probably listening to their techno-squalor but only on their omnipresent I-Pods. The man's ears had detected strains of their delirious but relentless noise leaking from their identical headphones, but now that leakage had been fixed. And the Beatles had by now been replaced by the baroque composer Addario, and his Adagio in G minor. The man was extremely comfortable with this exquisitely predictable composition. Of course, the music had long become overfamiliar by its association with television commercials for the tea that dared to be steeped alone, but it was still a wonderfully mathematical example of musical art.

He wished for a moment that he could die then and there, that he would not have to jump overboard. The wind was increasing and therefore the currents were becoming stronger, but the adagio was the perfect funeral music. It was as if the captain knew of his intentions and was even subtly encouraging them.

The man stood perfectly still, allowing the by now considerable wind to blow against the back of his

head. The water was tinged with green, on account of the temperature being above average for the season. He didn't want to jump yet, he wanted to preserve this perfectly still moment.

But now an approaching motorboat was drowning out the exquisite music. The boat was moving toward the ferry and very rapidly. It was obvious to the man that the boat's intention was to either arrest or cut off the ferry, and even from the still considerable distance he could recognize the two people commanding the boat.

Inspector Ted Warburton clutched the steering wheel while Sue Sternwood impatiently stood beside her captain. The sound of their motor completely obliterated Albinioni's adagio, but not enough to drown out their own frantic dialogue.

'Bear right, Ted. More to your right.'

'It's under control, okay?'

'I damn well hope so!'

The man observed Ted Warburton inching the motorboat a few inches to his right, preparing to roar in front of the ferry and then order the ferry's captain to stop. The man now strode to the front of the upper deck, took a deep breath, and jumped in front of the boat.

'Jesus, Ted. Kill the motor, now!'

Ted Warburton yanked at the motor, but his hands were gripping the rope so tightly that the boat could not stop immediately upon command. Because of this failure, the boat's right starboard struck Gordon Inglis right against his left temple, causing the man to lose consciousness and sink to the bottom of the bay with his forehead bleeding profusely.

©©2009 Andrew James Paterson
All rights reserved