

# DESIGN

A short story by Chris Savage King

## Mission Impossible

An unshaven man of no fixed age wearing Benetton slacks and a mildewed yellow cardigan pleads for change from passers-by with an empty MacDonalds milkshake carton. Malcolm lolls under the bridge, watching him closely. Malcolm wonders what the man's doing wrong. If he begged here himself, he thinks he'd make a killing - he knows a lot about form and function.

He works creating images, he's a product promoter. He forgets his job description, it depends on the client's whim. He thinks up ideas to try and convince people that some products and images are better or different from others. It's getting more difficult, it's harder than it sounds. Hence his presence here. He's looking for ideas.

You can get all kinds of ideas from places. Like he used to frequent gay bars a lot. They've run dry recently, nothing new. Right out of ideas - style ideas. They look just the same as everyone else now. He suspects they can't even recognise each other. People like Malcolm are telling them what to do now, and that's bad because he's fresh out of ideas, and he wonders if he'll get all washed up, like them.

But this looks more promising. The environment's great - all this old stuff - black ironwork, grey stone. Nobody's mucked about with it yet. They could film here. Lager, jeans, cars. Gangster-type cars. The people kind of spoil it. They don't look weird or threatening enough. There aren't any 'new women', but that figures. They just can't be done much under 15k pa. People like Malcolm have taken care of that. Women used to have ideas, they don't anymore. People like Malcolm tell them what to do too.

He gets a few ideas from pornography, now and then consulting it in a professional capacity. They're the real experts. World wide. They don't even advertise. They're bigger than Coca Cola. That's what gets him, they don't even advertise. There was this shot of a man pissing into this woman's

mouth. It was beautiful - both lyrical and remote.

The rest wasn't up to much. The lingerie was rubbish. Not larky deb stuff, but nylon, acrylic *tat*. The cock lacked conviction. They should've shot him with testosterone to boost it into a real mythical prick. No, they hadn't bothered - made on a shoestring. The colour was thin, washed out and overprinted. It would've been better in black and white. But he used the idea in a drinks ad. A grapefruit and tangerine fizzy drink in a bottle. Bottles are coming back. Only louts drink from cans. They're ecological. You can hit people with them.

It was a pretty hackneyed setting - a tropical jungle, wild animals, birdsong, lots of green and orange. The girl gets caught under a waterfall (of course) but that's where the close-ups come in and do their work. The hard spray of water - over her face, in her mouth *at a certain angle*. Those who knew would get it alright, those who didn't would get it *subliminally*. She rolled the bottle over her breasts, of course (hastily mashed together with sellotape) and knocked the bottle top off on a palm tree. *Nature's Refreshment*. Terrific slogan.

Now this on its own was pretty damn naff, but it was new naff, you-know-I-know-you-know-naff. All he had to do was get in a few sarky camera angles, and everyone would know it was a joke - even the feminists. Irony. He was kind of proud of that. He knows it's one of those handy tools that has been used by the finest stylists of their ages - Pope, Beardsley, Jean-Luc Godard. And now by him - Malcolm Delaney - for *Fritize!* Smash the cultural elite!

Porn's easy to rip off, and it's what everybody wants. It's just a matter of superimposing the product over the flesh. Let's face it - most girls would rather suck a chocolate bar than have a live dick in their mouths these days.

Of course until recently if you wanted classic style, you went to the blacks, or rather,



you put them in the pictures. Then things changed. They went on agency lists, they got their portfolios and all of a sudden you couldn't get them to do anything anymore. They wouldn't shimmy and kick their legs. They wouldn't wiggle their adorable bottoms. They couldn't either, they'd lost their knack. Middle-class whitish blacks - didn't work.

Recently they'd just picked

kids off the street, offered them a contract, a nice wad of cash. And sometimes these kids would bring something with them that the agency-signed-sealed-and-delivered blacks didn't have. Some small thing - a gesture, a piece of clothing, a facial tic, or a cute verbal mannerism the creative dept. hadn't got round to yet. But the market had waned. They'd done research. The con-



Illustration: Tamasz Holonec

sumer was sick of all these darkies about. They've saturated the market. Now blacks are *verboten* unless they're very black. You have to import them from France.

Yet with an environment like this! It's different, it's got potential. You could shoot it straight. No fancy tricks. Just the real thing. That's what they were after. Real...authentic...and *crucial*. There was a meeting earlier

in the week. They'd done everything, the chairman said. They all listened, tapping Pentels on capped teeth, table tops, files, watches, coffee cups, all tapping with caffeine twitches. Malcolm nodded his head as he listened, like he used to nod his head to songs about times-a-changin', and blues songs sung by white boys about kickin' yaar wuh-mahn arana flawr. Well

dodgy now, of course. He listens to authentic African music these days. Nobody knows what that's about.

The chairman looked sorrowful. We've done the Americas: festive Latin, wasted Central. Gone through the Stalin look, the Eurolook...no one wants to touch the Maoist look just now. We've got no choice, we've got to go back to basics. 'Back To Basics,' they all murmured.

Look at tradition, the English heritage. The British love their people, as they love their castles, their monarchy and their sweet thatched cottages. Love them as much as their wise country folk, their colonels, their Yuppies, their burly little punks. Our own creations! They're giving us nothing new. Look at something new, something we haven't done.

So here's Malcolm looking at the British tramp, the beloved classical British tramp. Except he isn't. Where's his scruffy black raincoat? Where is the poignant string waistband of old? Malcolm nearly weeps. Going, going, gone, the way of the great red phone box.

He watches the man - get a new angle...Benetton slacks, yeah with MacDonalDs... pretty witty. Embracing the new world market perhaps. He is using irony in his own way, this man. He'd ruined it with the cardigan. It didn't fit - physically, conceptually. The slacks hadn't worn well - too baggy. And he didn't look sporty, bent over like that. He was bent over in the wrong sort of way. Malcolm knows this particular bent over look stems from deprivation, not introspection, and while anxiety is in, depression is way out. They did the 30s years ago.

But they could do something about that. Get him an overcoat. Then the face. The stubble was fine, the dirt was *great*. It could be very urban, or ultra rustic. At a pinch, with new clothes, he could just about pass as the more rugged type of new man. House purchase. TV dinners.

He approaches the man. He'll offer him a job. He's

close to the man, close enough to smell him. It's unbearable - he reels back, horrified. Alcohol. Urine. Mould. Old sweat. 'Got some money for a cuppa tea?'

Tea? With a milkshake carton! Baaad co-ordination! He leans towards the man, in spite of himself. 'Got any spare change, mate?' That was better. Simple and direct. The man's breath is pure, so the insides are clean, it's just the outside that's a mess. He must be getting his roughage somewhere then. Newspapers? Chewy scraps from dustbins? Rats?

There are some brass coins in the man's MacDonalDs carton. Malcolm wonders when they are going to be discontinued. It can't be far off. A pity really. Pretty colours - the delicious zinc n' copper mix. Fantastic design values, those pennies, 2ps. Better than the carton, on reflection. But no - oh that *smell!* The teeth they could fix. Getting him a regular bath might prove a problem. There are things people should take care of for themselves.

Malcolm slips him 50p, it's all he's earned. There are other ways of doing this - more successful ways. Like on the tube they get these grubby little kids approaching you. Now they had it, yes, they could use a few of those. Victorian retro chic. Due for a re-run. Maybe they could renovate the apocalyptic look.

Insurance? Private schooling? Personal Health Scheme? He returns to his office and realises with a chill he lost sight of his brief too early in the assignment. He'd gone on what he knew, discovered nothing new, as everyone, even beggars, know what he knows now, even if they're slipshod on a few minor details. Bad forward planning. Not enough vision. He shivers, he might be out of a job. He might be obliged to adjust his lifestyle accordingly. The choice isn't with him, not in his hands now - none of the choices worthy of the name. They used to call that politics. Hell - he should worry! Now it's Party Politics. He sells that too.\*