

Publishers Note: In around July 2005 (according to his blog) William Gibson began writing the novel that became Spook Country and delivered it 18months later to his publishers. Reproduced below is William Gibson's original proposal for this novel

Proposal for a novel by William Gibson

"Warchalker" is one of the more obscure and peculiar of the many warblogs and news-filters that sprang up on the Web in the run-up to the invasion of Iraq. Obscure because it generally offers little more than the apparent result of some news-junkie sitting in a basement, endlessly splicing in links to the latest-breaking from AP, Reuters or other standard sources. Peculiar because the thread of routine news is occasionally interrupted by some deeply strange dispatch from Warchalker himself -- as, for instance, his first-person account of the looting of the Baghdad museum, involving any number of international art-mercenaries and at least two supposedly extraterrestrial artifacts. Or his earlier report from a secret US facility in which a gifted "remote viewer" is sometimes able to describe, in minute quotidian detail but with a complete lack of imaginative

understanding, the doings of the fugitive Osama -- though without being able to hear what OBL might be saying, or know where he is. "They're having that spicy lentil thing again... Now he's flossing his teeth... It looks like a room in a really bad motel in New Mexico, but there's no glass in the window, no television, and he keeps peeing into this hole in the floor..."

But one of Warchalker's stories involves a truly enormous bale of well-circulated US hundreds (looking, he puts it, "like a HumVee shrink-wrapped in a humongous garbage-bag") gone missing from Baghdad in the fog of war. Close to fifteen million, according to Warchalker, but only a fraction of the amount of US cash pumped into Iraq to keep the civilian government afloat in the wake of the invasion. (These were, in fact, the largest known shipments of US cash to ever have left the United States, and upon arrival were turned over to Iraqi functionaries who didn't even have to sign for them. They drove away with them, and that, apparently, was that.)

Warchalker has a least two sometime readers who, quite naturally, have never met.

One is Caroline Rand, a networks theorist whose professional passion is “public authoring”, that oddly-named accumulation of ideas for combining the Internet and GPS technology to, as Caroline puts it, “turn cyberspace inside out”.

The other is a young man in Manhattan, American of mixed immigrant parentage, and very bright. He lives in a single room in a building on Broadway, just below Spring, with a bed, a desk, a PC optimized for online gaming, a giant plasma screen, a guitar and amplifier, and not much else. He makes his living maintaining computers for what his father would have called either the mob or the Mafia, but in today’s Manhattan mafias are many, and lower-case. The Italians are less comfortable with the technology than the others. The Russians have their own people for this. As do even the Jamaicans, it seems, though our young man hears that they draw on London-based talent.

There is nothing particularly criminal about his life other than who he works for, and whatever responsibility he could be held to bear for what they do. And what they do is far less than cyber-glam, the bosses of this walkup bullpen on Canal Street, with its rows of middle-aged men seated

before vanilla plastic computers. Our young man is nobody's Mafia superhacker. Nobody's Mafia anything, really.

Except... He's tried to impress a girl. It happens, even to the most sensible. In his attempt to get over, he's not so much dropped hints as played mysterious. And the girl in question has a very eclectic range of acquaintances. Without his knowing it, his computer skills have been exponentially conflated, for the teller's own purposes, into full-on maestro genius. And now someone, unnamed, wants to access those skills.

Behind this narrative, or rather offshore of it, moves a single large and blankly enigmatic object: a shipping container. Its contents left Baghdad in the month after the Americans took the city, and it has become a rectangular, numerically-coded Flying Dutchman, amid the millions of its identical kind at sea, perpetually adrift in a deliberately-generated Sargasso of red tape and botched shipping instructions. It's been around the world several times now.

Caroline Rand and our young man, between them, if they can access the high and ever-dubious strangeness that is Warchalker, might just be able to find it.

And of course there's someone who wants them to, just as badly as it's possible for very bad people to want anything at all.