

JOHN DOLAN

Justice for the Trilobites

'How were the limestone cliffs built?
Practice, practice, practice.'
Darwin's favourite joke.

'There's a broken trilobite for every glint on the white cliffs.'
World-weary biologists' tag line.

Why be stingy? There are a billion for every glint.
Every brick in Carnegie Hall
Pressed from their carapaces.
Sheer peer pressure, the way
They make Peking Duck. Velly frakey
Golddiggers of 1933
Million or so years back.
That was the Great Depression.
To make a stage for soliloquies.

It can't last.
They're already teaching tort litigation
At Burgess Shale U. The hotheaded
Trilobite princes are planning
To sue every multicelled organism
As a monopoly. The possibilities
Are infinite. Of course
There's the problem of collecting
Damages. Since the Princes
Are fossil paperweights
By now. And the daunting prospect
Of molecular class-action cases
Against unicellular hosts. It'll get
Fractal for a while. A kind of feeding
Frenzy in reverse, with the predators
The first to go, big fish to little,
Little fish to least, least to the amoeba,
Down to the quark, to the Bosnian forests
Of every balkanised cell, its constituents
Staging legal crowbar fights from now
Till the sun goes nova. Like they say in New York,
'Take a number and wait.'

Try telling them that, though, as they
Wriggle toward Hollywood, trilobite chicks
Expecting stardom the second they step off
The bus. Pimps take some of them,
Gulls even more; the rest
Are found floating like hubcaps
In the surf at Malibu. They'll never
Be more than extras, hired at scale
By the trillion to be a white-cliff backdrop
For a hunk star's pirate speech. Hired
By the inch, each inch
A trillion trilobites; and those cliffs
Are a hundred metres high.
That's a lot of extras, a lot
Of pressure. It's the lawyers
Who benefit.
And the quarries.

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at UCLA Berkeley, the University of California and the
University of Otago. He is currently the literary editor of the
scurrilous on-line journal, the *eXile*, published in Moscow.