



ROBERT
HOLDSTOCK

Memories & Mythagos

To Sarah

Cariath ganuch trymllyd bwstfil



dedication to
MythagoWood (1984) and *Avilion* (2009)

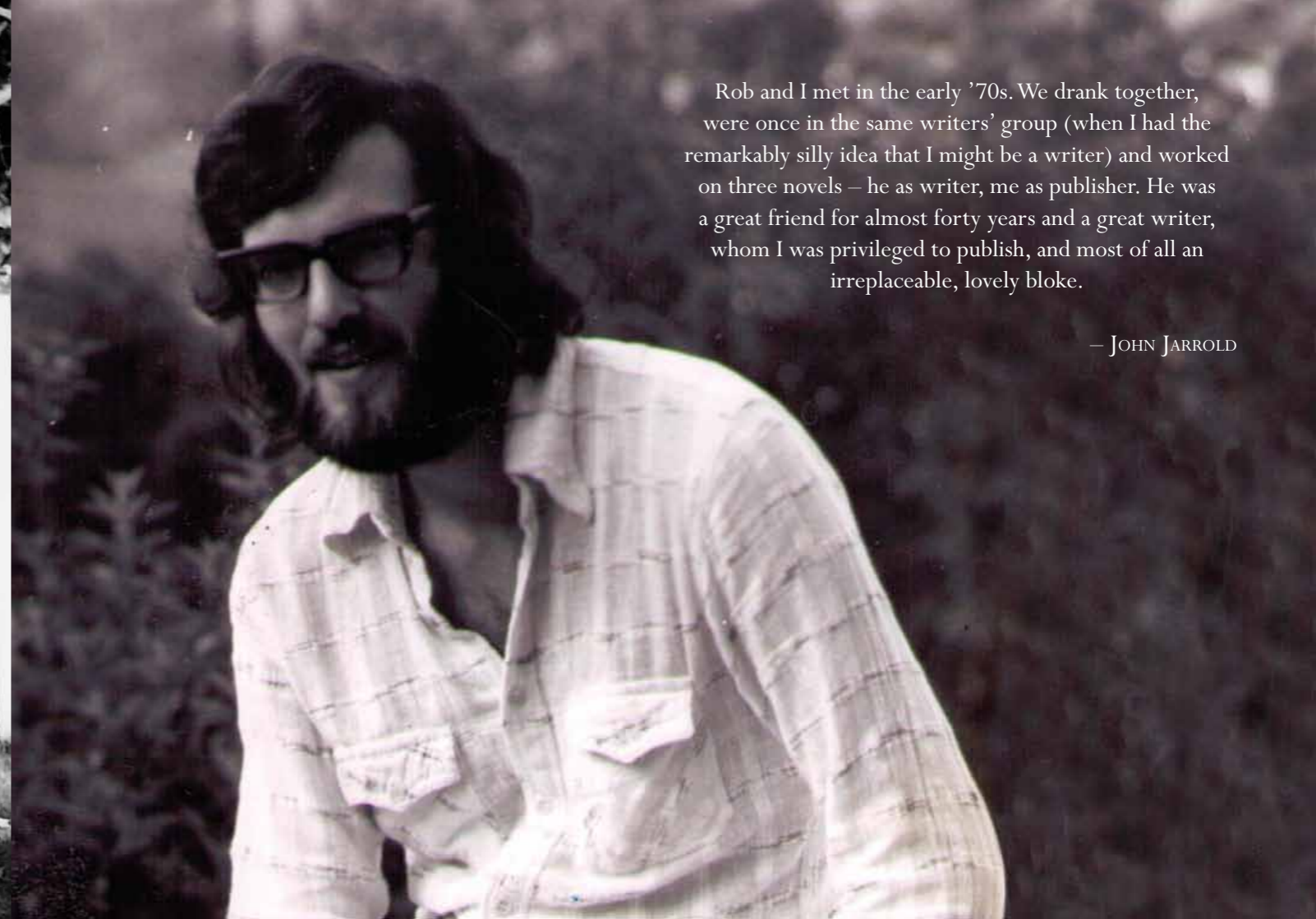


As youngsters we just couldn't wait for school term to finish and summer holidays to begin. It meant that we were to be shipped off for the duration to our grandmother's house at Tenterden, a place we all adored. Rob, being the eldest – about ten years old – was entrusted to get us there safely by bus from Chatham – all of us in knee-length corduroy shorts, gabardine macs and carrying a duffel bag. He was the leader of our little gang and I saw him as my protector.

The next day we would be up at the crack of dawn. An old red deer stag would come to the five-bar gate at the back of the house. Whilst Pete and I peered out from the woodshed Rob would approach it quietly and feed it stale bread until, startled, it would turn and race off down the field and out of sight. We would hurriedly follow – Rob streaking ahead to the old railway line where he would stop, wait for me and help me across as I was scared of the cattle train that used to steam around the bend where we crossed – through the kissing gate, across the deep-cut stream, then Rob would sprint ahead again into the wood where after 10 minutes or so Pete and I would find him by the millpond, now deep in the oak woodland.

One only has to reach up, take a book of his from the shelf, open it, and the smell of those early woodland forays is as clear now as it was then.

– CHRIS HOLDSTOCK



Rob and I met in the early '70s. We drank together, were once in the same writers' group (when I had the remarkably silly idea that I might be a writer) and worked on three novels – he as writer, me as publisher. He was a great friend for almost forty years and a great writer, whom I was privileged to publish, and most of all an irreplaceable, lovely bloke.

— JOHN JARROLD



He was the focus around which so much revolved. His default setting was a smile, always welcoming, always enthusiastic.

My notebook is full of references to ‘rendezvous with Rob’ and ‘drink with Rob’, because whenever I was going to London, I’d usually give him a call. And whenever I had to leave to catch the last train home, he’d almost always say, ‘Go back tomorrow, come and stay overnight.’

Rob was a great bloke, and we all knew it. And, in the end, that’s the best any of us can hope to be.

Last time I saw him was just after the Gollancz party. He’d seemed a bit down earlier, and said he’d have ‘only one’ in the pub. I bought him a pint, we talked, then suddenly he had another drink in his hand, and with us were Paul McAuley and Steve Baxter and Peter Hamilton and Ian McDonald, there was a terrific buzz, and he was on really good form.

The next time we talked after that, he berated me for referring to us both as ‘old codgers’ in an email. “I’m never going to be an old codger,” said Rob. And now, alas, he never will be.

—DAVID GARNETT



For many of us the writing profession is lonely, confidence-sapping and a place full of self-doubt, but Rob was always there to shore up the worried author. He was a pillar of encouragement, enthusiasm and inspiration. Rob had the ability to drive away any demons within the first few minutes of speaking and I would put the phone down fired with new energy. I was not the only one. Rob was the hub for a whole circle of writers. In earlier years we would go for long treks, to Mam Tor, Froggat's Edge and along Offa's Dyke. Rob loved being out in those wild and windy places, which enlivened his mind and were so much an inspiration for his work. In Spain too, he drew from the spirit of the landscape, from the pinewoods and crags of the Sierras, to produce his wonderful novels. He was those forests, he was those mountains.

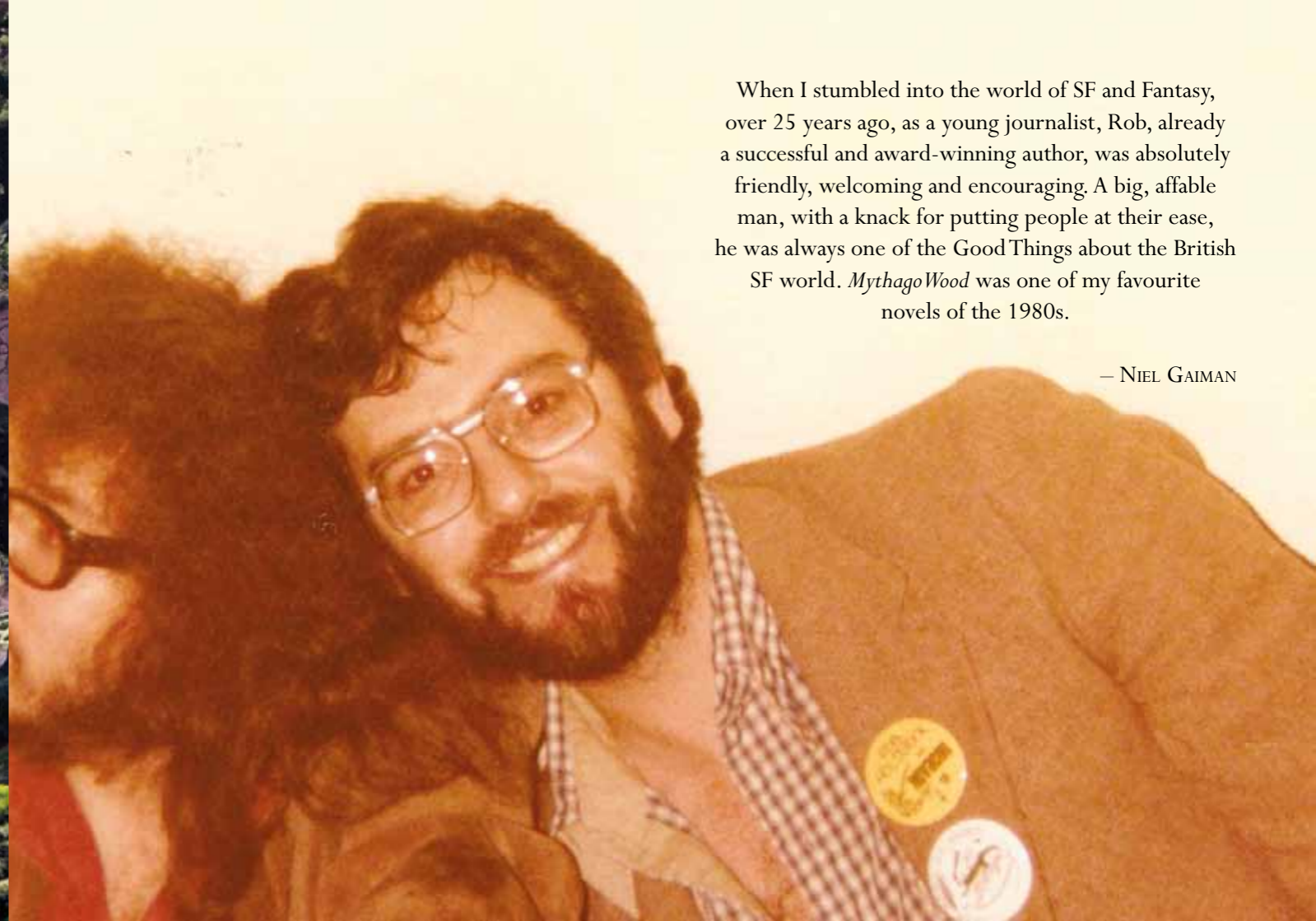
— GARRY KILWORTH











When I stumbled into the world of SF and Fantasy, over 25 years ago, as a young journalist, Rob, already a successful and award-winning author, was absolutely friendly, welcoming and encouraging. A big, affable man, with a knack for putting people at their ease, he was always one of the Good Things about the British SF world. *Mythago Wood* was one of my favourite novels of the 1980s.

— NIEL GAIMAN



I saw Rob as my closest friend, but because he had so many other friends I was never sure if he felt the same way about me. It didn't matter. We now realize he was at the centre of a vast network of closest friends. At least two or three times a week the phone would ring and Rob would say, 'Chris, mate . . . just a quickie.' That was usually an hour of the day used up. Other times he would say, 'Chris, mate . . . just a *real* quickie.' That was about half an hour. The phone has been very quiet recently.

Like most of his friends I have hundreds of vivid memories of him. All of them are about funny incidents involving Rob, or sudden jokes, or weird or insightful things that Rob would abruptly say, or they were odd or touching or charming insights into his gentle side. We always laughed with Rob. He was the best company imaginable.

— CHRIS PRIEST

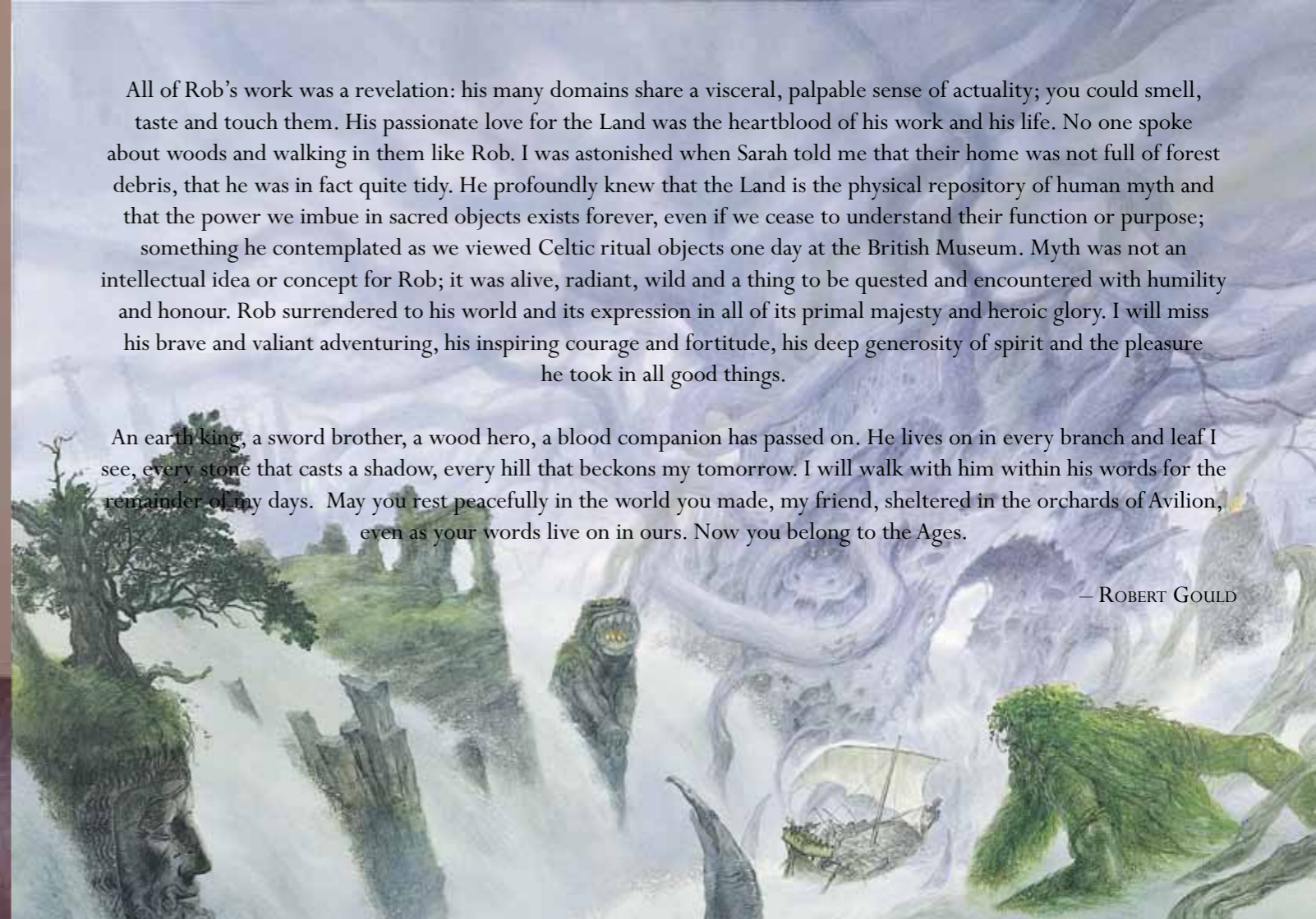




All of Rob's work was a revelation: his many domains share a visceral, palpable sense of actuality; you could smell, taste and touch them. His passionate love for the Land was the heartblood of his work and his life. No one spoke about woods and walking in them like Rob. I was astonished when Sarah told me that their home was not full of forest debris, that he was in fact quite tidy. He profoundly knew that the Land is the physical repository of human myth and that the power we imbue in sacred objects exists forever, even if we cease to understand their function or purpose; something he contemplated as we viewed Celtic ritual objects one day at the British Museum. Myth was not an intellectual idea or concept for Rob; it was alive, radiant, wild and a thing to be quested and encountered with humility and honour. Rob surrendered to his world and its expression in all of its primal majesty and heroic glory. I will miss his brave and valiant adventuring, his inspiring courage and fortitude, his deep generosity of spirit and the pleasure he took in all good things.

An earth king, a sword brother, a wood hero, a blood companion has passed on. He lives on in every branch and leaf I see, every stone that casts a shadow, every hill that beckons my tomorrow. I will walk with him within his words for the remainder of my days. May you rest peacefully in the world you made, my friend, sheltered in the orchards of Avilion, even as your words live on in ours. Now you belong to the Ages.

— ROBERT GOULD



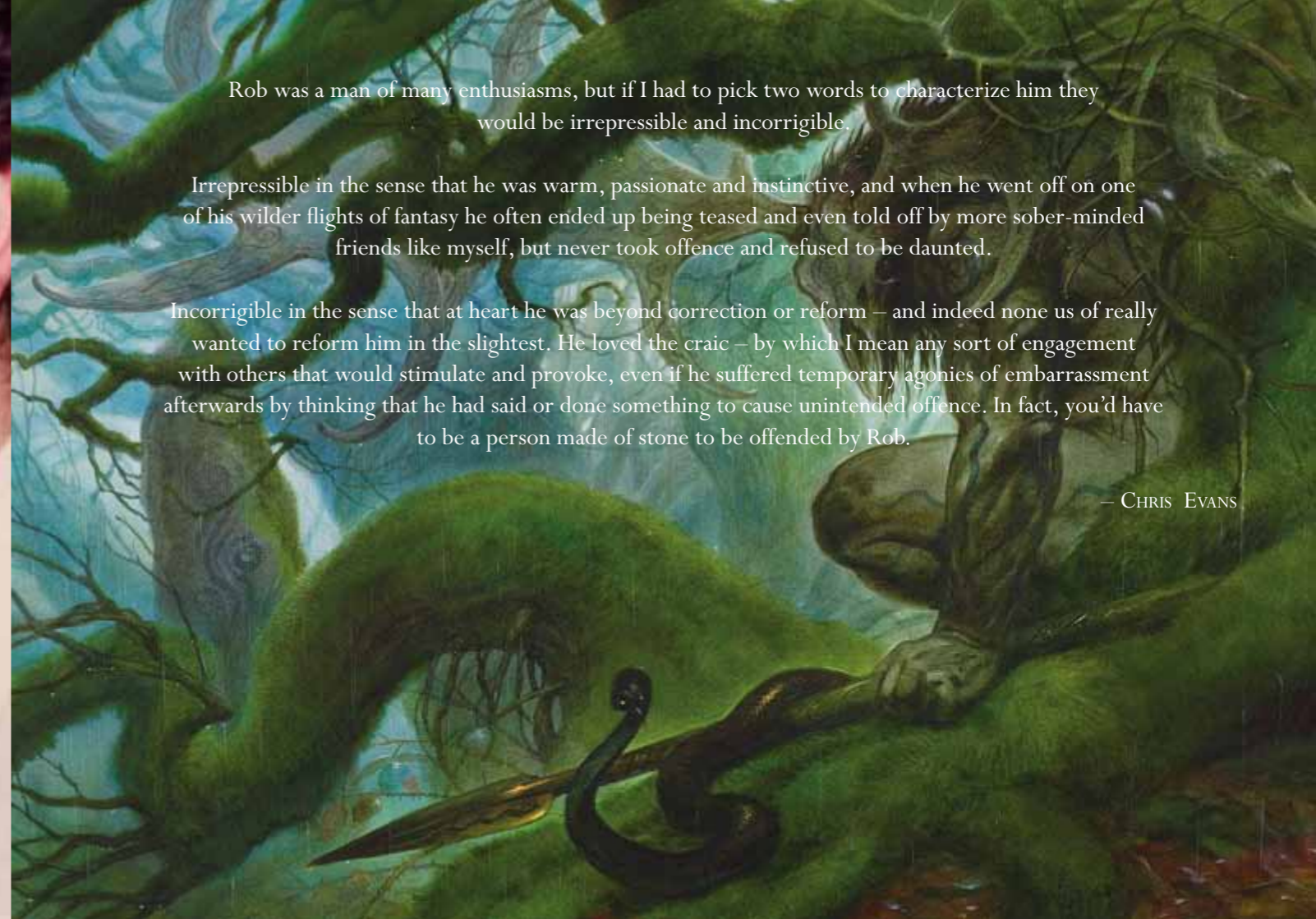


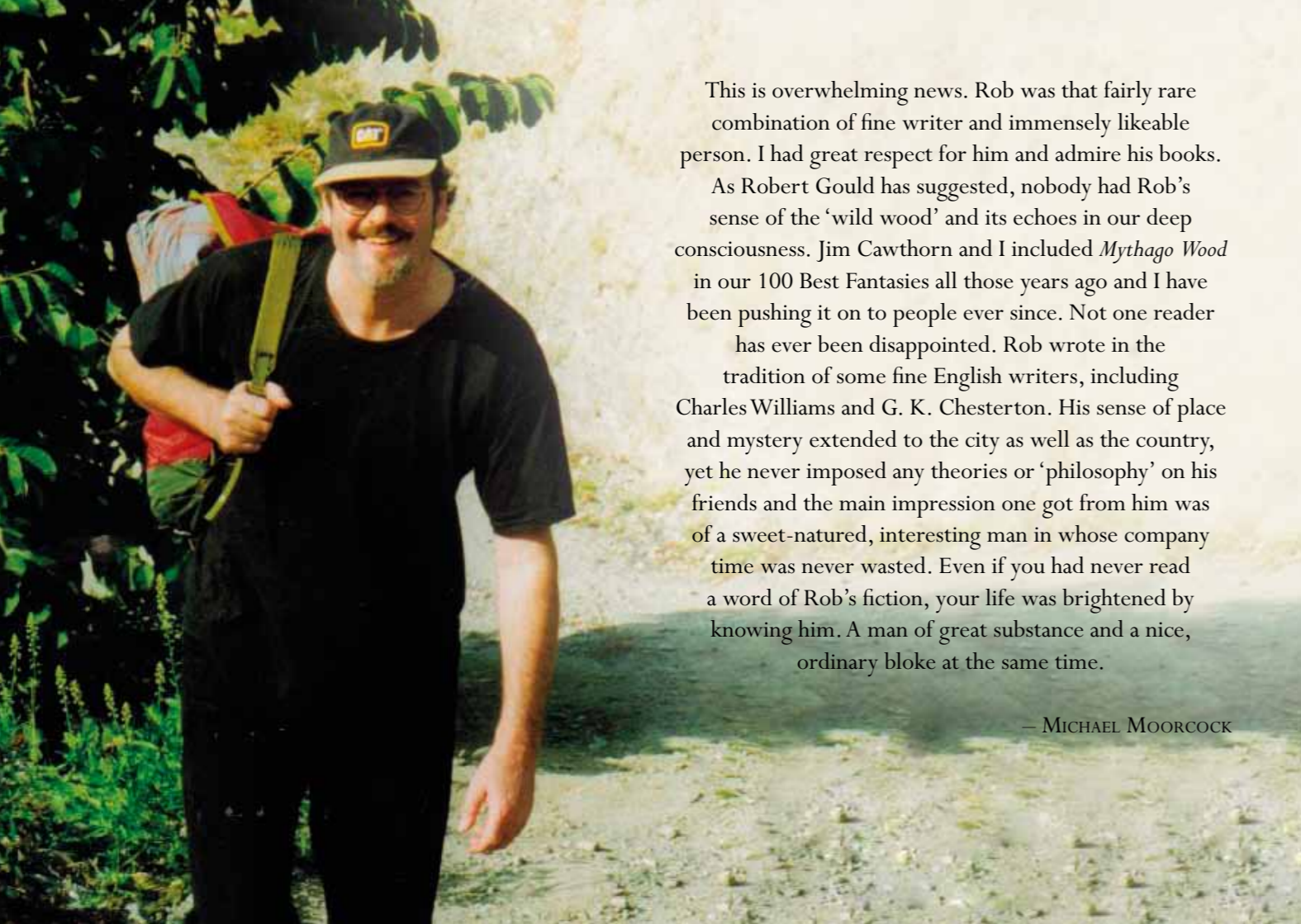
Rob was a man of many enthusiasms, but if I had to pick two words to characterize him they would be irrepressible and incorrigible.

Irrepressible in the sense that he was warm, passionate and instinctive, and when he went off on one of his wilder flights of fantasy he often ended up being teased and even told off by more sober-minded friends like myself, but never took offence and refused to be daunted.

Incorrigible in the sense that at heart he was beyond correction or reform – and indeed none of us really wanted to reform him in the slightest. He loved the craic – by which I mean any sort of engagement with others that would stimulate and provoke, even if he suffered temporary agonies of embarrassment afterwards by thinking that he had said or done something to cause unintended offence. In fact, you'd have to be a person made of stone to be offended by Rob.

— CHRIS EVANS





This is overwhelming news. Rob was that fairly rare combination of fine writer and immensely likeable person. I had great respect for him and admire his books. As Robert Gould has suggested, nobody had Rob's sense of the 'wild wood' and its echoes in our deep consciousness. Jim Cawthorn and I included *Mythago Wood* in our 100 Best Fantasies all those years ago and I have been pushing it on to people ever since. Not one reader has ever been disappointed. Rob wrote in the tradition of some fine English writers, including Charles Williams and G. K. Chesterton. His sense of place and mystery extended to the city as well as the country, yet he never imposed any theories or 'philosophy' on his friends and the main impression one got from him was of a sweet-natured, interesting man in whose company time was never wasted. Even if you had never read a word of Rob's fiction, your life was brightened by knowing him. A man of great substance and a nice, ordinary bloke at the same time.

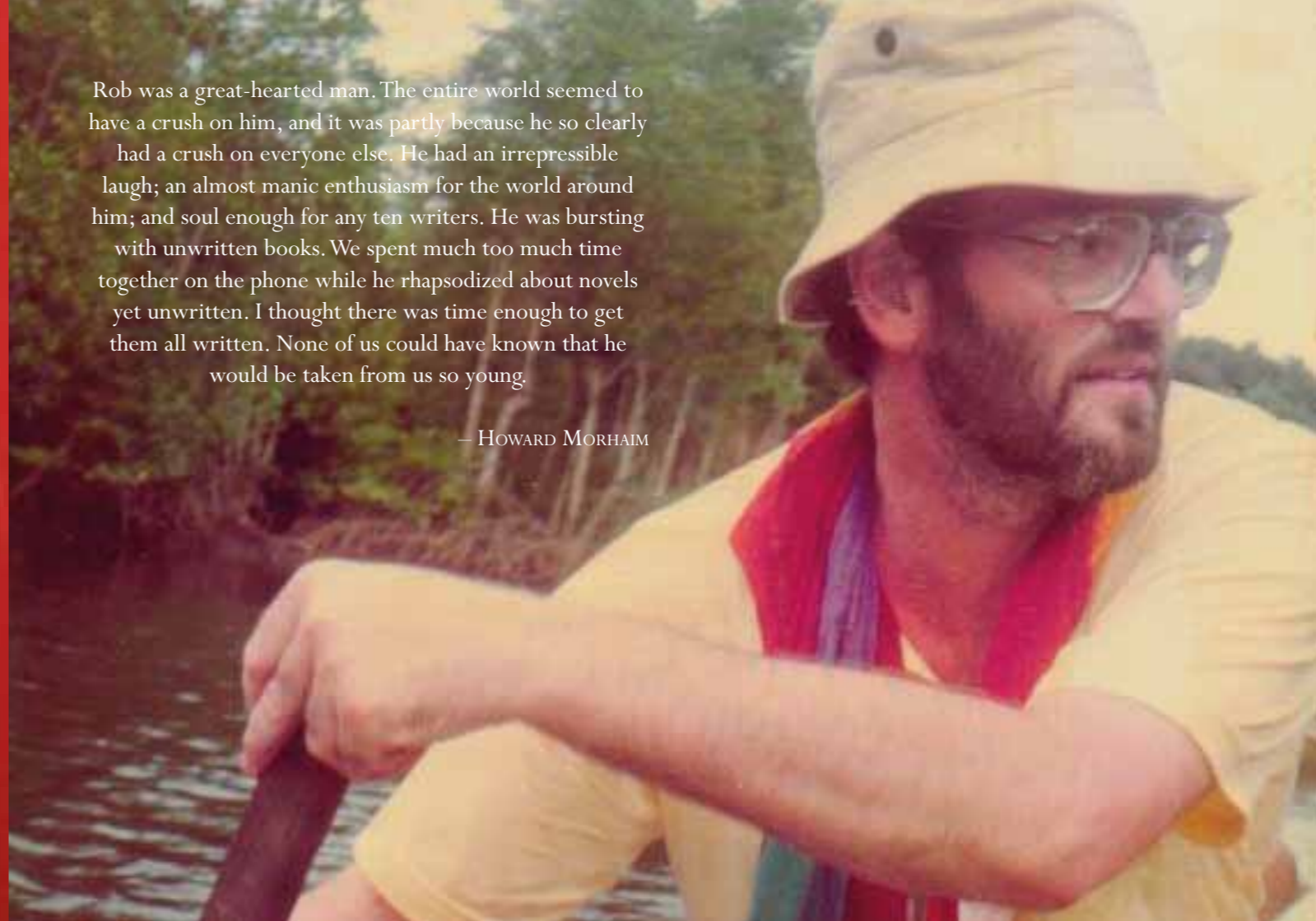
— MICHAEL MOORCOCK

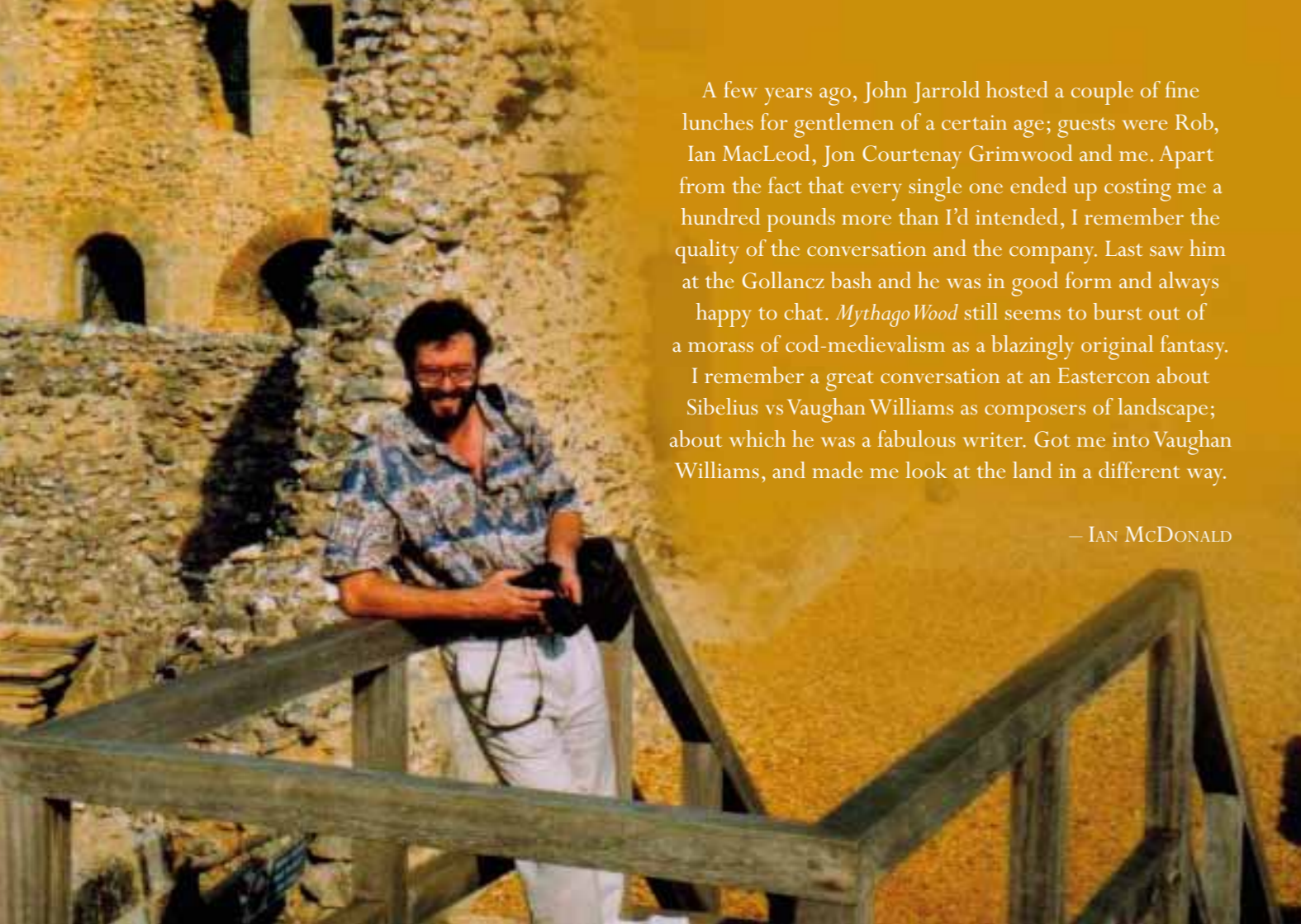




Rob was a great-hearted man. The entire world seemed to have a crush on him, and it was partly because he so clearly had a crush on everyone else. He had an irrepressible laugh; an almost manic enthusiasm for the world around him; and soul enough for any ten writers. He was bursting with unwritten books. We spent much too much time together on the phone while he rhapsodized about novels yet unwritten. I thought there was time enough to get them all written. None of us could have known that he would be taken from us so young.

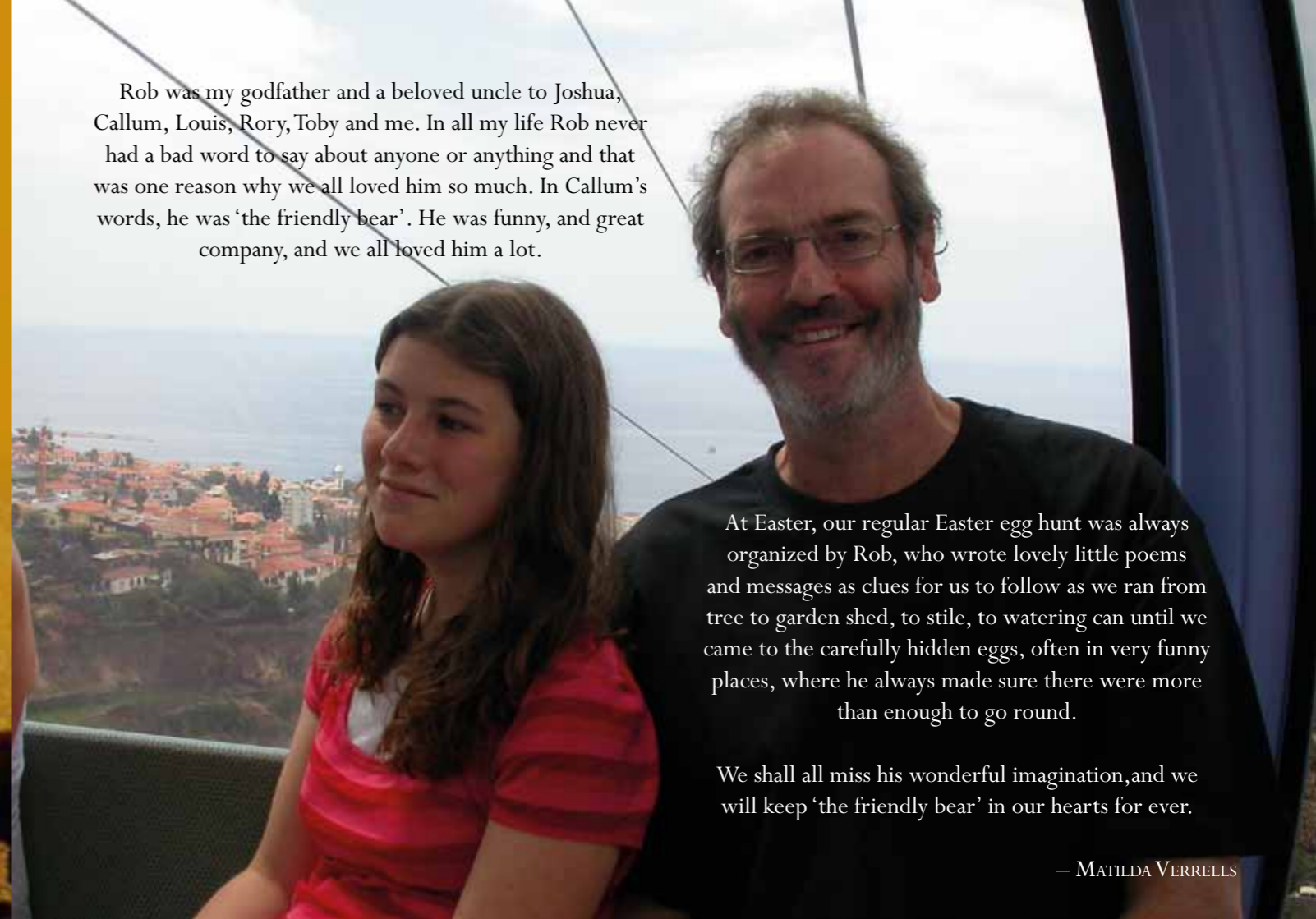
— HOWARD MORHAIM





A few years ago, John Jarrold hosted a couple of fine lunches for gentlemen of a certain age; guests were Rob, Ian MacLeod, Jon Courtenay Grimwood and me. Apart from the fact that every single one ended up costing me a hundred pounds more than I'd intended, I remember the quality of the conversation and the company. Last saw him at the Gollancz bash and he was in good form and always happy to chat. *Mythago Wood* still seems to burst out of a morass of cod-medievalism as a blazingly original fantasy. I remember a great conversation at an Eastercon about Sibelius vs Vaughan Williams as composers of landscape; about which he was a fabulous writer. Got me into Vaughan Williams, and made me look at the land in a different way.

— IAN McDONALD



Rob was my godfather and a beloved uncle to Joshua, Callum, Louis, Rory, Toby and me. In all my life Rob never had a bad word to say about anyone or anything and that was one reason why we all loved him so much. In Callum's words, he was 'the friendly bear'. He was funny, and great company, and we all loved him a lot.

At Easter, our regular Easter egg hunt was always organized by Rob, who wrote lovely little poems and messages as clues for us to follow as we ran from tree to garden shed, to stile, to watering can until we came to the carefully hidden eggs, often in very funny places, where he always made sure there were more than enough to go round.

We shall all miss his wonderful imagination, and we will keep 'the friendly bear' in our hearts for ever.

— MATILDA VERRELLS



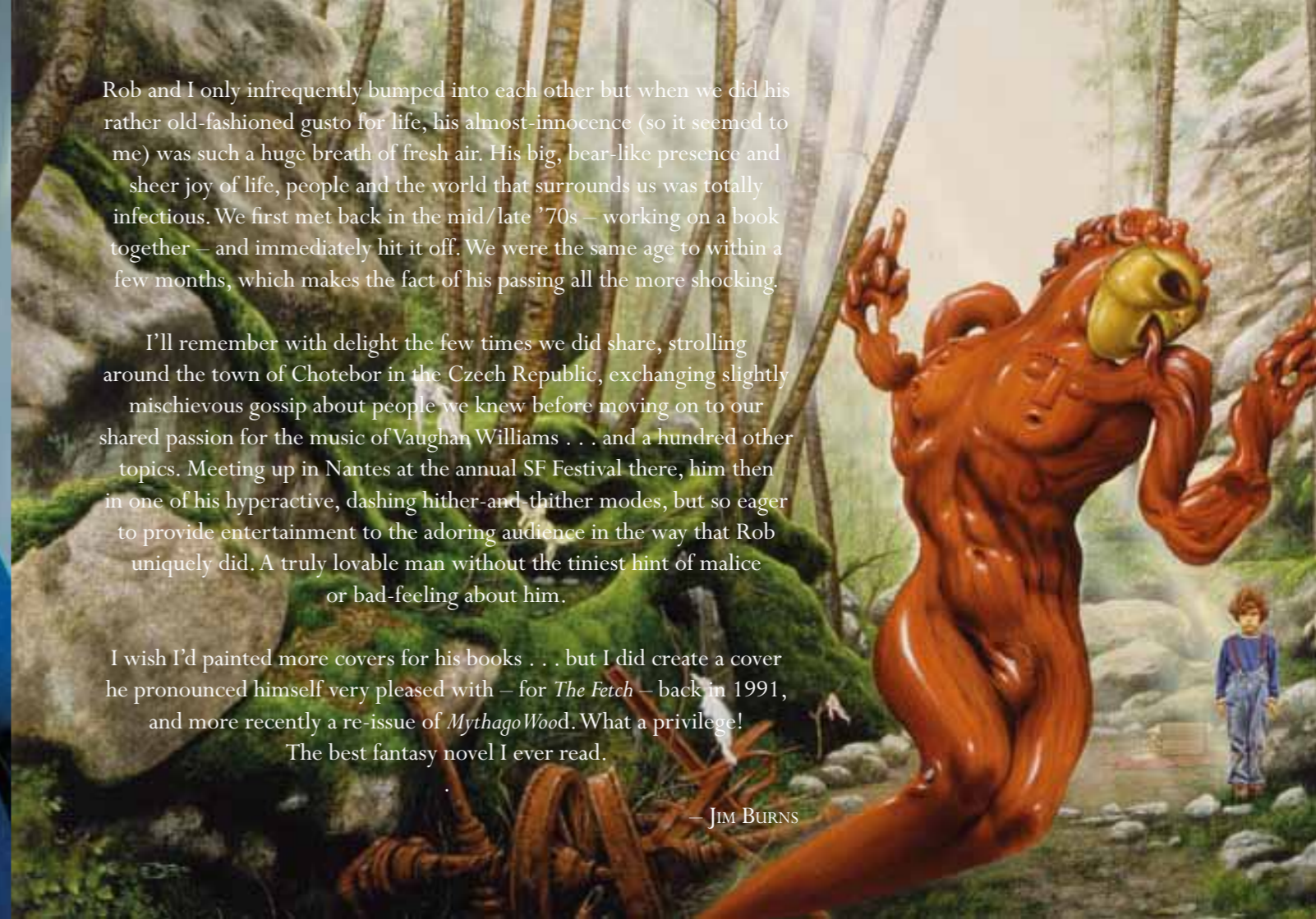
Rob and I only infrequently bumped into each other but when we did his rather old-fashioned gusto for life, his almost-innocence (so it seemed to me) was such a huge breath of fresh air. His big, bear-like presence and sheer joy of life, people and the world that surrounds us was totally infectious. We first met back in the mid/late '70s – working on a book together – and immediately hit it off. We were the same age to within a few months, which makes the fact of his passing all the more shocking.

I'll remember with delight the few times we did share, strolling around the town of Chotebor in the Czech Republic, exchanging slightly mischievous gossip about people we knew before moving on to our shared passion for the music of Vaughan Williams . . . and a hundred other topics. Meeting up in Nantes at the annual SF Festival there, him then in one of his hyperactive, dashing hither-and-thither modes, but so eager to provide entertainment to the adoring audience in the way that Rob uniquely did. A truly lovable man without the tiniest hint of malice or bad-feeling about him.

I wish I'd painted more covers for his books . . . but I did create a cover he pronounced himself very pleased with – for *The Fetch* – back in 1991, and more recently a re-issue of *MythagoWood*. What a privilege!

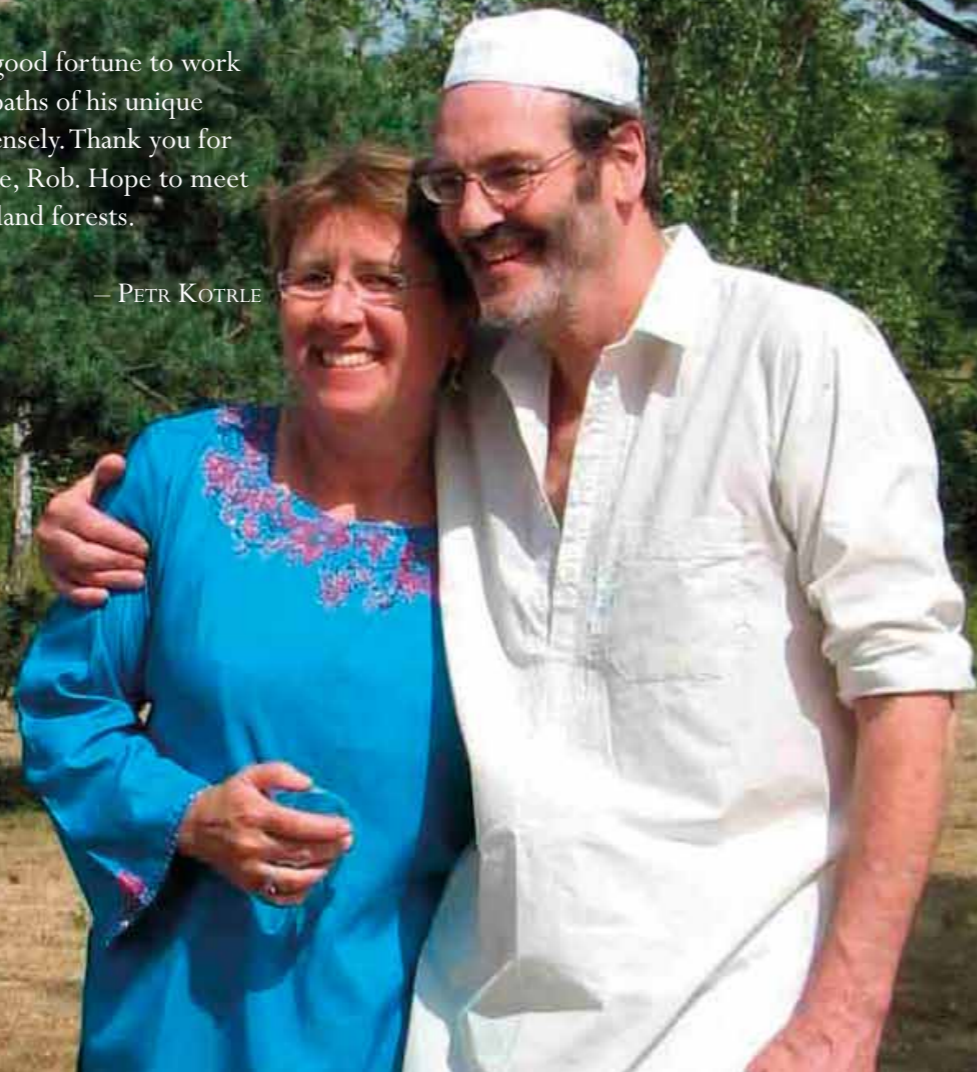
The best fantasy novel I ever read.

— JIM BURNS



As one of his translators I had the good fortune to work with him, trying to follow the paths of his unique imagination. I will miss him immensely. Thank you for every word you ever wrote or spoke, Rob. Hope to meet you in one of those otherland forests.

— PETR KOTRLE

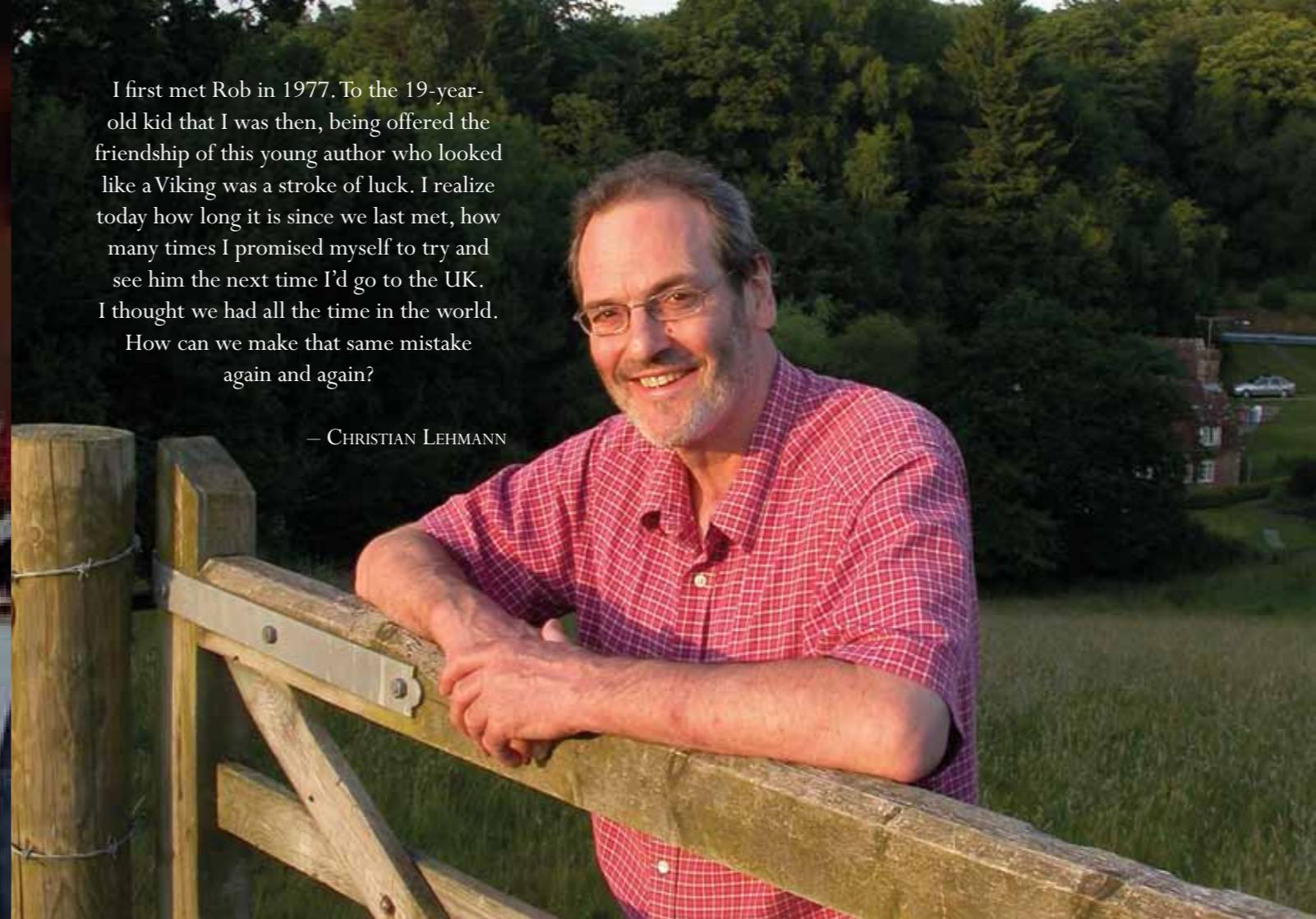




I first met Rob in 1977. To the 19-year-old kid that I was then, being offered the friendship of this young author who looked like a Viking was a stroke of luck. I realize today how long it is since we last met, how many times I promised myself to try and see him the next time I'd go to the UK. I thought we had all the time in the world.

How can we make that same mistake again and again?

— CHRISTIAN LEHMANN





For many years now, whenever Brian and I walk in a forest, we are bound to have what we call a 'Holdstock moment'. Anything strange, anything that smells of loam and leaf mould, anything that looks vaguely mythic, tribal or otherworldly and most of all, anything of beauty, has become a Holdstock moment. Rob could make imagined sensory experiences come to life with a few well-chosen words. I 'know' what it feels like to live in the worlds he brought to life. I 'know' how it feels to pass from Realm to Realm, from one culture to another, and to step back a thousand years or so with the turn of a page. I cherish those experiences and am more grateful than I can say to have known this man and to have had the pleasure of sharing his world through his writing as well as at the dinner table.

— WENDY FROUD

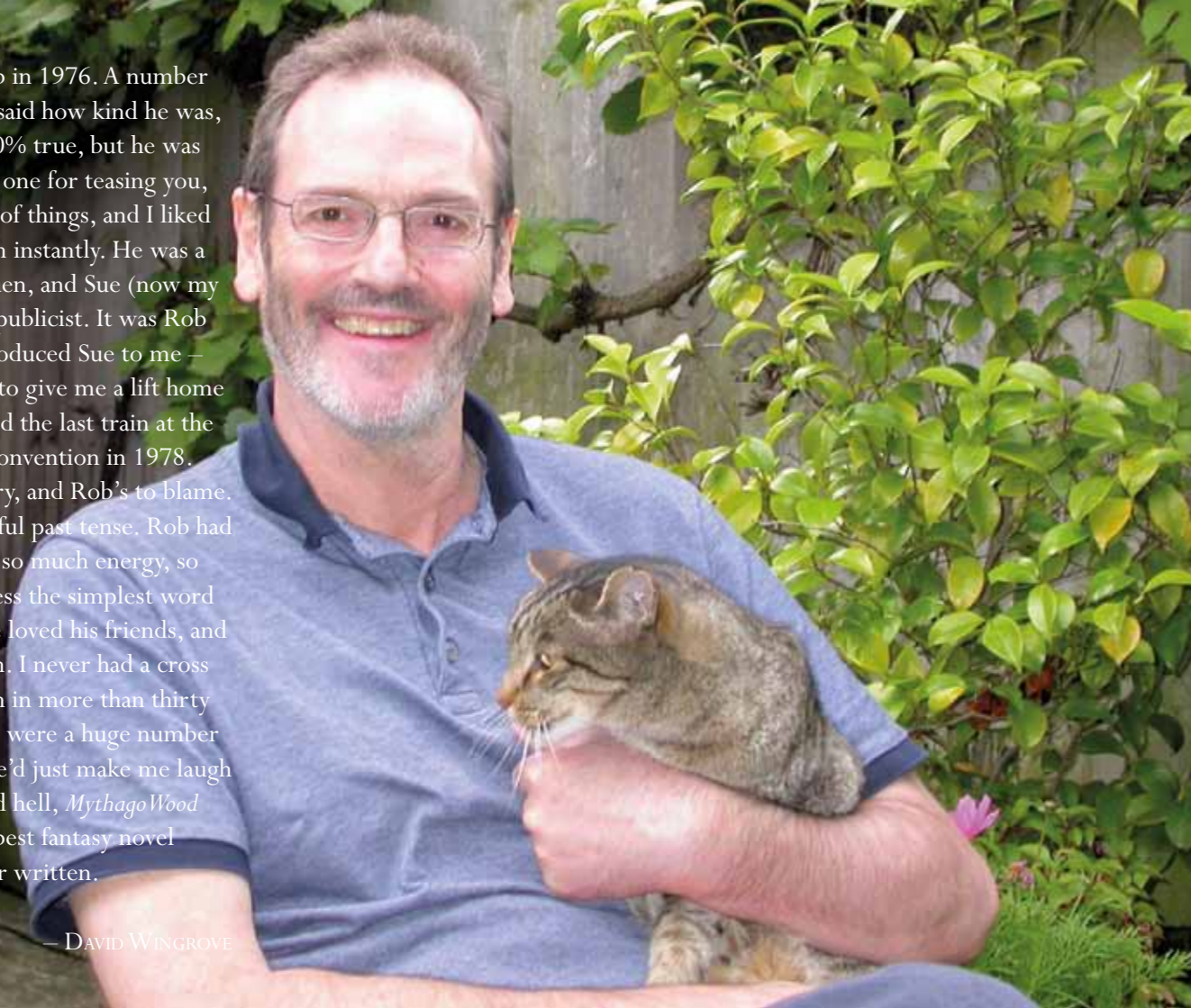


He was a fine writer whose novels, deeply felt, intensely imagined and engaging, deserve a place among the great works of English fantasy. More than that, and in the best, old-fashioned sense of the word, he was a thoroughly decent man: warm, and charming, always attentive to everyone he met, and given to acts of kindness and generosity small and large. He was helpful to me in all kinds of ways when I began to go to conventions, and has been a good friend ever since. I'll miss him more than I can say.

— PAUL MCAULEY

I first met Rob in 1976. A number of people have said how kind he was, and that's 100% true, but he was always a great one for teasing you, making a joke of things, and I liked that about him instantly. He was a Faber author then, and Sue (now my wife) was his publicist. It was Rob who first introduced Sue to me – persuading her to give me a lift home when I'd missed the last train at the Heathrow Convention in 1978. The rest is history, and Rob's to blame. Or was. That awful past tense. Rob had so much life, so much energy, so much . . . I guess the simplest word for it is love. He loved his friends, and they loved him. I never had a cross word with him in more than thirty years and there were a huge number of times when he'd just make me laugh out loud. And hell, *MythagoWood* is still the best fantasy novel ever written.

— DAVID WINGROVE





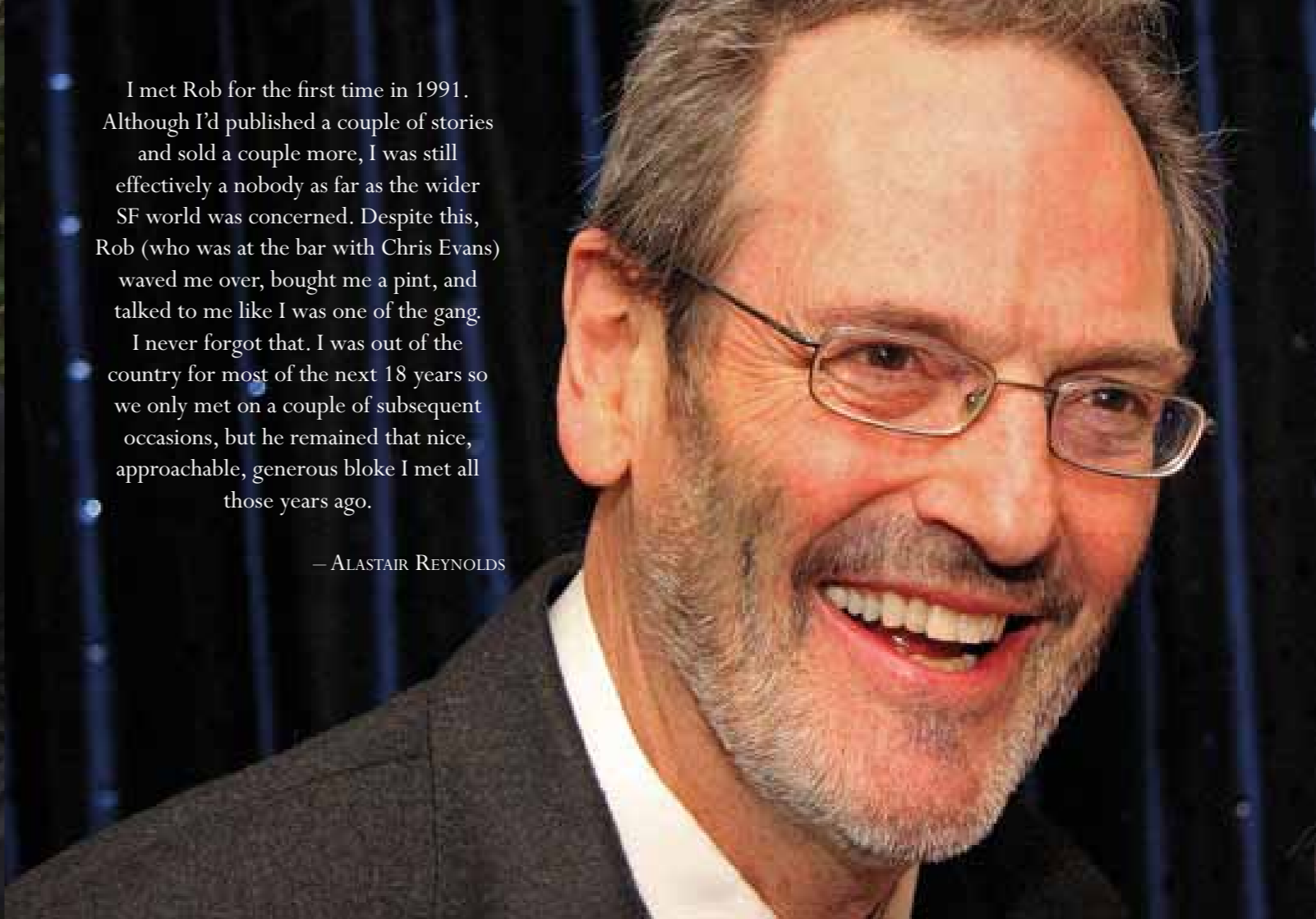
I can't quite take it in. *MythagoWood* was one of the classic English fantasies of the last 100 years, and Rob one of the most powerful engines of fantasy of his generation.

— M. JOHN HARRISON



I met Rob for the first time in 1991. Although I'd published a couple of stories and sold a couple more, I was still effectively a nobody as far as the wider SF world was concerned. Despite this, Rob (who was at the bar with Chris Evans) waved me over, bought me a pint, and talked to me like I was one of the gang. I never forgot that. I was out of the country for most of the next 18 years so we only met on a couple of subsequent occasions, but he remained that nice, approachable, generous bloke I met all those years ago.

— ALASTAIR REYNOLDS





All of us who were lucky enough to know him as family or friend also know what a great sense of humour he had and how he could get everyone laughing with wild exaggerations about his misfortunes as a writer or gleeful stories of how he had embarrassed himself and everyone around him by committing some dreadful faux pas. We all loved him for it. He never had any misplaced sense of his own dignity and was as happy behaving with very few inhibitions as he was joking about it afterwards. He was someone who could literally be the life and soul of any party, with no side to him and just a desire to be with his friends and help them enjoy life as much as he did. A lovely man, a great friend, a terrific writer and a very special person.

— ROY KETTLE

The world will be a poorer, greyer place without Rob: without his warmth; his huge, generous enthusiasm. As a writer and as a friend he was always the best company: inspiring and whole-hearted. In a way neither of us could ever have expected, he helped change my life when he took me for a pint and a plate of rabbit stew at the Nag's Head in Edale.

— COLIN GREENLAND





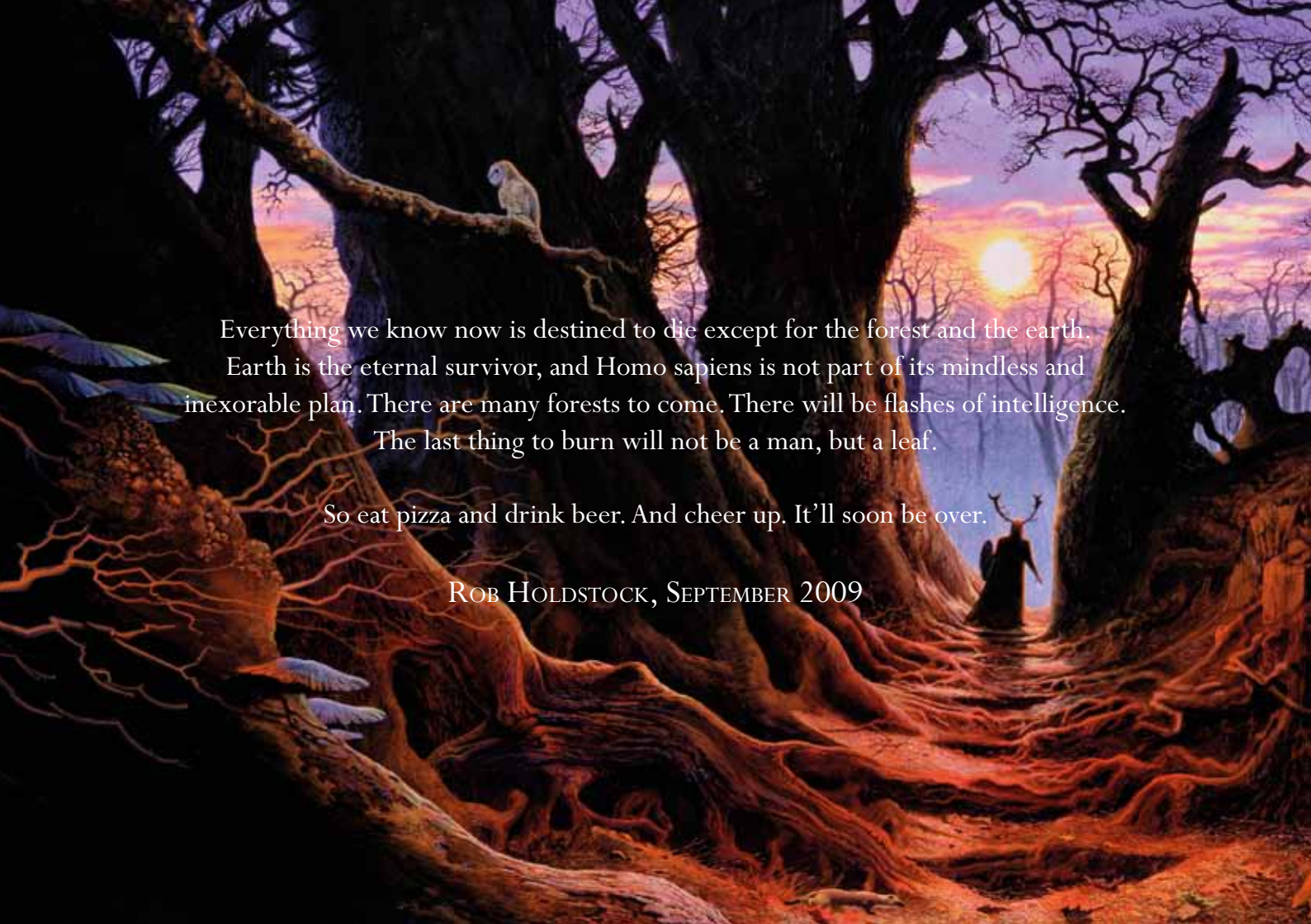
Life is a tapestry of memories and experiences held dearly to us – some experiences more dear than others. And nature slowly rips us and everything apart like it was never there. And so we cherish our memories for a life while we can. But we are always glad that we knew each other, and seeing we all come from the same melting pot then that makes us have a lot in common!

R. I. P, my brother Rob, may your journey be a good one.

– JIM HOLDSTOCK

Thanks to everybody who contributed – sometimes unwittingly – to this keepsake, and apologies to everybody whose memories couldn't be included for reasons of time and space.



A surreal forest scene with gnarled trees, a sunset, a white owl, and a devil-like figure. The scene is set in a dark, dense forest with large, gnarled trees. The ground is covered in a thick layer of roots and fallen leaves. In the background, a bright sun is setting, casting a warm, orange glow over the scene. A white owl is perched on a branch in the upper left. In the distance, a figure with horns and a dark cloak stands on a path. The overall atmosphere is mysterious and ominous.

Everything we know now is destined to die except for the forest and the earth.
Earth is the eternal survivor, and Homo sapiens is not part of its mindless and
inexorable plan. There are many forests to come. There will be flashes of intelligence.
The last thing to burn will not be a man, but a leaf.

So eat pizza and drink beer. And cheer up. It'll soon be over.

ROB HOLDSTOCK, SEPTEMBER 2009