

Peter Sirr

# THE SWERVE



Gallery Books

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*for Enda and Freya, as always,  
and for Jack Wyley*

## *To Whom . . .*

Of course the skills may have vanished  
or the language broken up, so many lumps  
of indecipherable clay in the satellite library.

I stand here before you —  
something: dust-messenger? Designated  
sliver? Last person out, remember

the planet . . . I'm sorry,  
the role was inexactly determined,  
in such haste assigned and after all

I hardly expected the responsibility.  
Still, this is what you have; what, really,  
you always get. Open the box

and out shambles a minor functionary  
with his bag of beans. This is how  
we counted, these were the names of the kings.

Study the spreadsheets. I put down  
what I could, kept adding slides to the deck.  
Not everything would play. The technology

is brilliant until it isn't. Heat  
the clay. Or not? Be patient.  
This is us. We weren't. Or not enough.

## *The Messenger*

is always wrong have you noticed

I swear

I never touched the corpse I was nowhere near  
I was watching the match in the security hut  
then stopped off for shashlik

see the stain on my shirt

I almost didn't come

anticipating just this reception

Still here I am

Someone snuck out

to do the deed you can be sure of it the footage  
will bear me out

It's all right for the dead

they have no appetite but a man even a messenger  
even a bearer of unwelcome news

there was mist everywhere

I couldn't see past my nose plus the stink  
the stink of the corpse so naturally we retreated a little  
The match was dull ninety minutes of ineptitude  
extra time then penalties

it must have been then or thereabouts

though as soon as the mist cleared we saw the damage  
had been done

someone not me not any of us

had moved the corpse

someone is always moving the corpses

## *An Afterlife*

The wind whistles in the moorland,  
the wind whistles in the fen.  
The moon wakes up in our language,  
then slips back to sleep again.

## *Correspondence*

Your faxes have faded but the waterfall  
is wholly legible, the water  
still flails the granite like a horse's tail.

The mosses and ferns are printed in the mist  
and whatever we said is in there now,  
the droplets fall on my skin, particles

charge the air and far off  
the old machines come to life again  
shaking hands across the dark

until the slow paper comes  
spooling over the edge, waterfalling,  
horse-tailing, the hot words leaping.