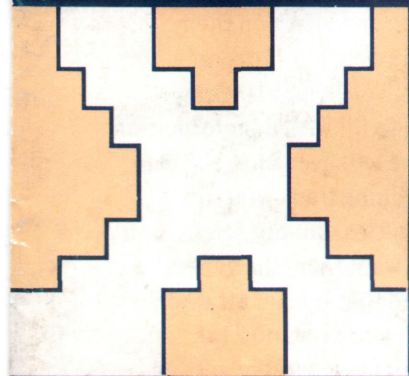


WHERE SCIENCE FICTION MEETS REALITY

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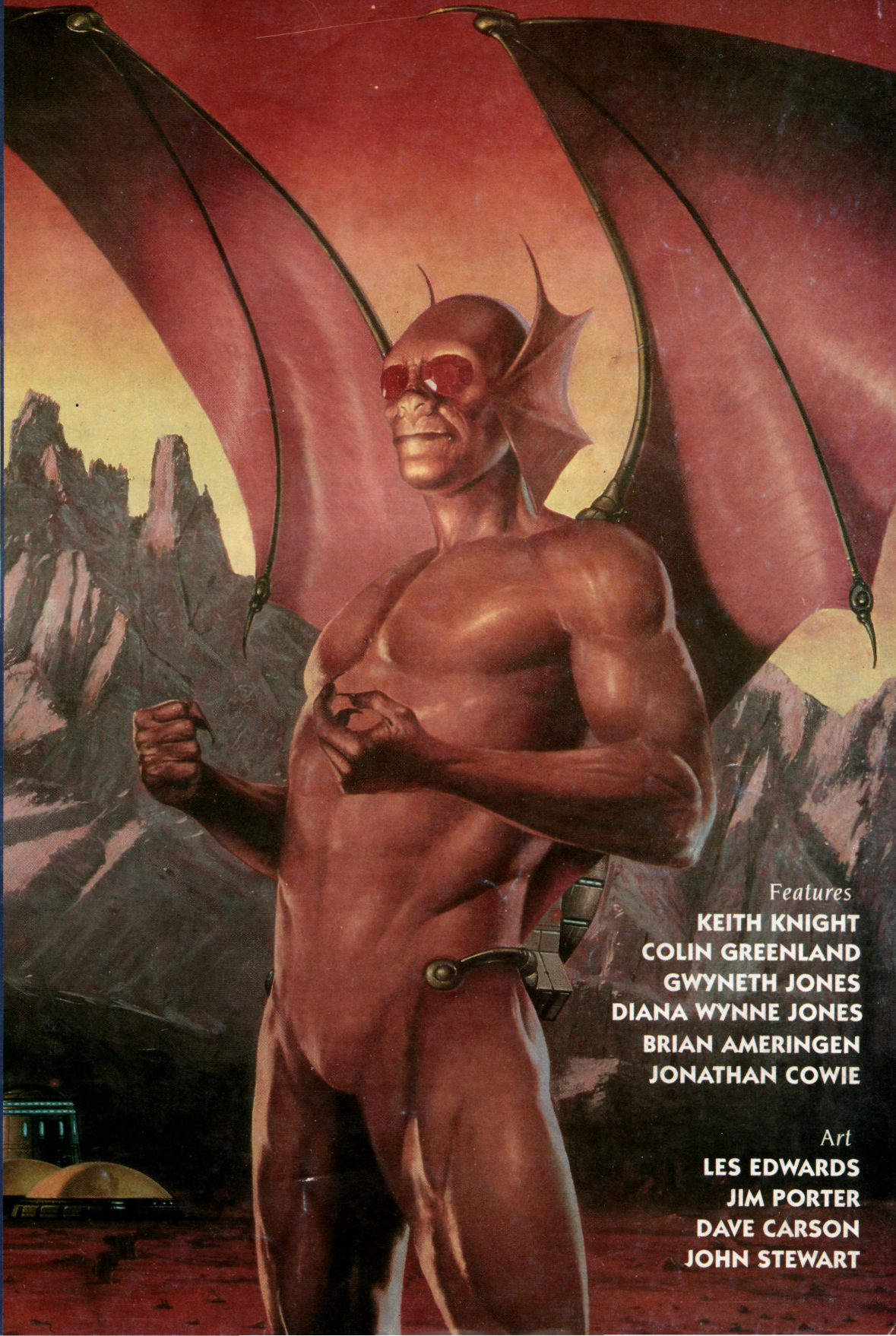
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*Fiction*  
**GEOFF RYMAN**  
**CHRISTINA LAKE**

*Features*  
**KEITH KNIGHT**  
**COLIN GREENLAND**  
**GWYNETH JONES**  
**DIANA WYNNE JONES**  
**BRIAN AMERINGEN**  
**JONATHAN COWIE**

*Art*  
**LES EDWARDS**  
**JIM PORTER**  
**DAVE CARSON**  
**JOHN STEWART**



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The Editor would particularly like to thank the following, without whom none of this would have been possible:

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**Bob Dylan**, whose album *Oh Mercy* played constantly while I lay in the bath dreaming all this up every one of the pre-publication **subscribers** for their good taste and judgement in supporting us when we needed it most, and for their patience and forbearance with the initial delays

all the **contributors** for investing their time and faith in NEXUS and my wife, **Juliet Eyeions**, for putting up with so many disturbed nights, and the non-stop commentary.

This magazine is respectfully dedicated to

**Alice Robertson,**  
**Lucy Mepsted,** and  
**Jeff van Zanten:**  
may they live long and prosper.

And, keeping the best till last, thanks to my **Mum**, who made the whole thing possible in the first place.

Oh boy! A new magazine dedicated to opinion, but with nothing about the war in it. Well, hardly anything.

The first editorial of a new magazine usually tells you what the magazine will be like. If the magazine doesn't do that itself, it's failed anyway. I want to talk about what you *can't* see in the magazine, and the war.

First off, I underestimated how long it would take to set up the business side, so this first issue is rather late. We will publish to schedule now, but, because of this

combat missions against Iraq, and yet all we had for days on end were pictures from one civilian shelter which was bombed. We see what they show us. If they are the only civilian casualties in 70,000 missions, shouldn't we congratulate the US?

And that shelter, was it *really* civilian? It supposedly could hold 2,000 people. I hear the population of Iraq is about 20 million. Does this mean that there are 999 other civilian shelters the Americans didn't bomb? And if it was really a civilian shelter, what kind of life

## HOW THINGS WORK

delay, some of the writing might read as old news. If the most momentous event of recent history were still the dislodging of an incumbent prime minister, then there would be no problem; but how can I expect you to be in the same state of mind when the IRA is bombing London, and we have just liberated Kuwait? Mea culpa: I should have published this on time.

Next, the balance of the magazine isn't right. Some items are longer than planned, so the introduction of *The User's Guide to Science Fiction* has had to be delayed until issue 2. Also, there isn't enough art. It was a difficult decision, but finally there isn't a word in this magazine I would want to cut, and printing more pages wasn't financially feasible.

Finally, we wanted the magazine to be at least two-colour. But, again, money forced the choice—either print it black-and-white, or not at all. However, as soon as we make enough money, the two-colour will be reinstated, and one day we might even manage full interior colour.

What's this got to do with the war? Just this. You hold in your hands a complete magazine. Like the proverbial iceberg, most of it is invisible. You don't see the painful decisions, the all-night sessions, the setbacks: you see what I show you. The allies flew over 70,000

were the Iraqis planning for when they built it? I don't know the answers to these questions; I don't even want to speculate on them. What they indicate to me is an information void which the Iraqis were trying to fill with disinformation.

I doubt we will ever know the true cost of subduing Iraq – you can count casualties, but not stress: and who would want to be the general who ordered that bunker attacked? Neither will you ever know the sleepless nights I suffered getting this magazine into your hands. The price paid is personal and private – only the results are public.

All we can be sure of is that what you do see on television is only a tiny part of this personal horror. It takes art to bring home the true scale of suffering war brings—like the scene in *Gone With The Wind* where we see a single person suffering, and the nurse attendant on him; and then the camera pans up and back to show a whole railway yard filled with similar casualties. In wartime, the normal rules of civilisation are suspended, and atrocities are committed on both sides. We can only hope that the less atrocious side wins, and that the outcome at least will be beneficial. And you can leave the generals, and the editor of this magazine, to their nightmares.



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## 7 DOCTO DECIMO

Comic strip by T K Atherton

High and wide we searched for a cartoon strip before we found this delight. Artist TK Atherton assures us that the world comes through much clearer now he has been fitted with a hearing aid. He has promised to take it out while he researches the further adventures of Bozino and Chup. In the meantime, join them in the quest for Docto Decimo's Geos. (Continued on pp 8, 33, 34.)

## 9 ROTISSERIE

Fiction by Christina Lake

Christina is one of the rising stars of English SF, with stories previously published in *Interzone* and *Other Edens III*. We think this story fits rather well the overall tone we are aiming for.  
Art by John Stewart



## 13 THESE WILL BE THE GOOD WRITERS

Opinion by Gwyneth Jones

Gwyneth is author of *Divine Endurance*, *Escape Plans* and *Kairos*, all science fiction novels aimed at an adult audience. As Ann Halam she has also published many superb novels for children and teenagers, including the matchless *King Death's Garden*. Here she looks at the way science fiction authors are just as fond of weaving myths about themselves.



## 16 STRANGE WINES AND UNFAMILIAR SPIRITS

Historical perspective by Brian Ameringen

NEXUS aims to be a complete guide of science fiction. We will be looking at what is happening now in *The Users' Guide to Science Fiction*, which will begin in issue 2. *Strange Wines* is the first article in a companion series which aims to lead readers to older works which they might have overlooked. You can find the usual themes of SF – robots, aliens, space travel, etc – investigated elsewhere. We have decided to look at SF in terms of things we encounter everyday. Brian is peculiarly well qualified to write on the nexus of subjects chosen here. We look forward to tapping more of his knowledge in future issues.

Art by Dave Carson

## 18 THE DIARY OF THE TRANSLATOR

Fiction by Geoff Ryman

With the three prize-winning novels *The Warrior Who Carried Life*, *The Unconquered Country*, and *The Child Garden under his belt*, Geoff's fourth novel, *Was*, is currently scheduled for publication in 1992. This story was the first he ever sold (to Hilary Bailey's *New Worlds* 10 in 1976). It hasn't seen print since. We thought it was a good idea to bring it to a new audience.

Geoff will be contributing non-fiction as well to future issues of NEXUS.

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## 26 A GENRE TOO FAR: HOLLYWOOD AND SF

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Keith's trenchant views on all aspects of SF will become familiar over the months to come. Here, he looks at differences between attitudes to film and book SF.

## 28 THE GREENING OF SF BOOK COLLECTING

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Jon is an environmental scientist and journalist; he is also a print buyer, and gave much valuable time and advice on the setting up of NEXUS. Following in the tradition of *Redesigning the Cow*, here he puts us straight on some of the misunderstandings Green politicians have generated about book collecting.

## 30 COWARDICE AND CAPRICE

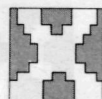
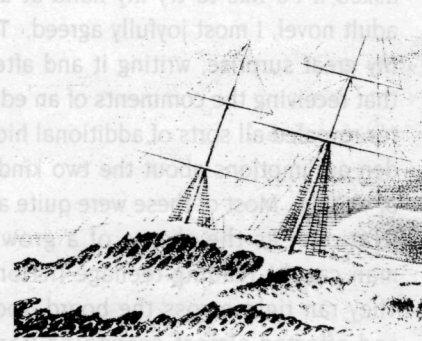
Pages from the diary of Colin Greenland

Colin is the author of four novels, including last year's best-selling *Take Back Plenty*. He is Reviews Editor of the academic SF journal *Foundation*, reviews books for the TLS and *The Sunday Times*, and, most recently, has published several perceptive interviews with leading SF authors. But it is as a letter-writer that he displays his wicked sense of humour best, so we asked him to share his a few pages from his diary of the life of an SF author and critic in his inimitable epistolary style. He has not disappointed us.

## 34 THE NEXUS PRIZE CROSSWORD PUZZLE

Roger Robinson

Another person with awesome breadth of knowledge, Roger has been setting quizzes about SF as long as I have known him. This puzzle should test both your SF knowledge and your disencryption abilities. And if you can solve the whole puzzle, you could win a free subscription to NEXUS.





Diana Wynne Jones

# Two kinds of WRITING

---

I write what is often called speculative fiction. Usually I write it for children, but recently I wrote a novel specifically for adults. This was something I had long wanted to do – really ever since I discovered that quite as many adults read my books as children do; and several grown men confessed to me that, although they were quite shameless when it came to hunting through the juvenile sections of libraries and bookshops, they still felt incredibly sheepish on a train reading something that was labelled ‘Teen Fiction’. Why? I wondered. The assumption underlying their sheepishness seemed to be that teenage fiction counts as just close enough to adult fiction to be seen as regressive, whereas if they are seen reading a children’s book that counts as research. In neither case are they assumed to be enjoying the book for its own sake.

Silly though this seemed, it struck me as hard on them. So when I was asked if I’d like to try my hand at an adult novel, I most joyfully agreed. To my great surprise, writing it and after that receiving the comments of an editor revealed all sorts of additional hidden assumptions about the two kinds of writing. Most of these were quite as irrational as the shame of a grown man caught reading teenage fiction. They ran right across the board, too, and affected almost everything from

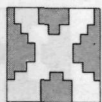
the length of the book to its style and subject matter. And nearly all of them – this was what disturbed me most – acted to deprive me of the freedom I experience when I write for children. Furthermore, when I thought more deeply about these assumptions, I found they reflected badly on both kinds of writing. I think we should all start thinking about what these assumptions are.

To take the most obvious first: I found myself thinking as I wrote ‘These poor adults are never going to understand this; I must explain it to them twice more and then remind them again later in different terms.’ Now this is something I never have to think when I write for younger readers. Children are used to making an effort to understand. They are asked for this effort every hour of every schoolday and, though they may not make the effort willingly, they at least expect it. In addition, nearly everyone between the ages of nine and fifteen is amazingly good at solving puzzles and following complicated plots – this being the happy result of many hours spent

at computer games and watching television. I can rely on this. I can make my plots for them as complex as I please, and yet I know I never have to explain them more than once (or twice at the very most). And here I was, writing for people of fifteen and over, assuming that the people who read, say, *Fire and Hemlock* last year have now given up using their brains.

This is back-to-front to what one usually assumes, if one only looks on the surface, but I found it went much deeper than that. At first I thought it was my own assumption, based on personal experiences. Once when doing a signing, a mother came in with her nine-year-old son and berated me for making *The Homeward Bounders* so difficult. So I turned to the boy to ask him what he didn’t understand. ‘Oh, don’t listen to her,’ he said. ‘I understood everything. It was just her that didn’t.’ It was clear to both of us that his poor mother had given up using her brain when she read. Likewise, a schoolmaster who was supposed to be interviewing me for a magazine explained to me that he had tried to read *Charmed Life* and couldn’t understand a word, which meant, he said, that it was much too difficult for children. So he didn’t interview me. He was making the surface assumption, that children need things easy. But since I have never yet come across a child who didn’t understand *Charmed*

**T**hese  
poor adults are never  
going to understand this





*Life*, it occurred to me that he was making the assumption about himself. But it was a hidden one and, when I came to write for adults, I realised that it was something all adults assumed. I grew very tender of their brains and kept explaining.

This makes an absurd situation. Here we have books for children, which a host of adults dismiss as puerile, over-easy, and are no such thing, and there we have books for adults, who might be supposed to need something more advanced and difficult, and we have to write them as if the readers were simple-minded.

Anyone examining this rather surprising assumption will see that it comes all tangled up in at least one other one: that books for adults are supposed to be longer. Everyone appears to know this. There are jokes about the fifth book in the trilogy – for ‘longer’ seems to mean ‘lots’ as well – and it would probably startle most adults to discover that an average children’s book picked at random from my shelves (it happened to be *To Tame a Sister* by Gillian Avery) runs to 260 pages of very small print, that T. H. White’s *Sword in the Stone* is only a few pages shorter (and is the first of four), and that Arthur Ransome’s series of thirteen books average 350 pages each. Nevertheless, in spite of knowing this, when I came to write for adults, I found myself assuming I was writing something long. It was very exasperating. Though the finished book is actually slightly shorter than *Fire and Hemlock* it carries in it, despite my best efforts, all the results and implications of this hidden assumption.

A long book, it follows, is going to be read in bits. Therefore you have to keep reminding your readers of things, even if they do use their brains. Some adult writers trust their readers so little that if they have, say, a hero with blue eyes who comes from Mars, they call him ‘the man from Mars’ every time they mention him, and interlard this with ‘The blue-eyed man from Mars’, or occasionally ‘the man with blue eyes’. I swore a great oath not to do this, but it hovered, and I had to

fight it. Hovering over me also was the notion ‘This should be the first in a trilogy’ (which is another way of having things read in bits) and I kept worrying that I was also obliged to set up a world in great detail in order to be able to use it again. Now, having come to my senses and started to think about these assumptions, I ask myself why. A book should conclude satisfactorily: to leave the ending for the next volume is cynical (and annoying for readers). And as for having my world there in detail, it was when I realised that I was actually being deterred from considering the sequel by the assumption that adults have to be reminded of the plot and setting of Book First between the lines of Book Second – this despite a host of really good ideas – that I began to feel this was absurd. When I wrote *Drowned Ammet* I did not feel it necessary to recapitulate *Cart and Cwadder*: it would have been largely irrelevant anyway. I took the usual course of those who write for children and relied on my readers having the nous to pick up the situation as they went along. So why should I assume adults are different?

The answer seems to be: because publishers do. It was around this area that I began to run foul of the assumptions of my would-be editor as well as my own. A ‘long’ book naturally entails various kinds of padding. Apart from the kinds I’ve already men-

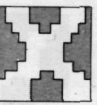
tioned, the most obvious form of padding is description – whether of the galactic core seen from the vertiginous skin of a spaceship, or the landscape passed through on the Quest. Unfortunately, descriptions are where children stop reading, unless something is being described as an essential part of the story. I agree with them. I have long ago discovered that if I know what a given scene looks like in exact detail I do not need to describe, because it comes over in the writing, in phrases and not as a set-piece. But I knew the assumption was different for adults. I used my usual method, but I added a hundred percent more describing. The would-be editor objected. ‘Too short’ and ‘I don’t get enough of a sense of wonder,’ were the phrases used. I bit back a retort to the effect, ‘But you should get a sense of wonder if you stop to imagine it!’ Adults are different. They need me to do all that for them.

Perhaps the difference is merely that they need me to do different things. I started writing for children when all but a few children’s books were very bad and inane. So inane were they that my husband used to fall asleep, when reading aloud at bedtime to our young, after a maximum of three sentences. The resulting outcry convinced me, not only that I could do better myself, but that it was imperative to put something in the books for the benefit of adults who had to read them aloud. I always do this, which is what makes me so amazed that I think of adults as a different animal when I come to write a book specially for them. But – and it is a big but – I am always aware that the different thing I am doing for the children is writing something that can be read aloud. This has nothing to do with subject-matter: it is purely a matter of the cadence of a sentence. If a sentence can’t be spoken with ease, then you rewrite it. When I started the adult novel, I thought, ‘Oh good. – I don’t need to think of that. What freedom!’

Oddly enough, this revealed another hidden assumption. Adults expect a more ‘literary’ turn of phrase. This

Why

should I assume adults are different?





does not necessarily mean more polysyllables – though as a lover of words I seized the chance to use those – but simply the kind of sentence that does not reproduce the way we all speak. It has hanging clauses and inversion and is long – and here was a terrible discovery: more clichés lurk in those literary turns than ever appear in any spoken kind. For the sake of freedom from forms of words that others have overworked, I had to go back to assuming that this too was going to be read aloud.

But I came out of a billow of turgid sentences still assuming that writing for adults gave me more freedom: for instance, in the way I could tell the story. I could split my cast of characters up and flip from one to another. I could have a short section on Tod, out-cast on Earth and bewildered by it, followed by a longer account of Flan, who is in a pocket universe having a nervous breakdown, and then jump to Zillah accompanying a centaur into an alternative world. Everyone concerned with children's books assumes that children have trouble with this kind of narrative method and I got gleefully to work. Adults may expect this, but it is also the narrative method of Dr Who, and anyone who can follow Dr Who can follow this in their sleep.

But there really is greater freedom in writing for adults, you will be saying. What about the actual content of the story? All of sex, violence, politics and the arcane skullduggery of science or magecraft would be mine to use. Yes, despite the fact that I had used all of these in *Power of Three*, I did assume I had this freedom. I did. The measure of that freedom can be seen from my saying with increasing uneasiness as I wrote, 'This isn't like any adult speculative fiction I ever read!' My would-be editor echoed this exact phrase, dubiously, and followed it with, 'And you seem to be mixing sf and fantasy here.' Oh dear. These are simply not problems writing for children. The new and different thing is welcomed. Numerous teachers and librarians refuse shelf-space to writers like Enid Blyton, on the grounds that they

always write the same book; and as for the mixing of genres – well, there is only the one and that is books for children. For children, if I want to send a decrepit starship full of witches to a quasi-monastery in another adjacent universe, no one turns a hair. But adults are handicapped by terminal assumptions about what goes with which genre. If they think I am writing fantasy, then my belligerent witches must go on a Quest armed only with swords and spells and either on foot or on horseback; and if what I am doing is to be science fiction, no one aboard my starship is allowed magic, but only scientific principles not altogether yet proven, such as an ability to travel faster than light.

Does nobody find these unspoken assumptions absurd? There is another: sex. Contrary to most popular belief, children's books concern themselves vastly and outspokenly with sex, for two main reasons: first, because children are so frequently abducted and raped; and second, because children have to spend so much of their lives dealing with the sex-life of their parents – particularly when those parents are divorcing. True, scenes of explicit sex between adults are not much use to children – it affects them rather like the drunk across the street affects you when you happen to be cold sober and in a hurry – but most of them can't wait to grow up and try it. But when such scenes are an essential part of the story, no one makes any bones about putting them in. They run the whole gamut, too, of human emotions, through rapture, tragedy and comedy and all the smaller emotions besides. Now when I came to write for adults, I assumed I had the same freedom, and more. And this surface-assumption of

mine fell foul of another underlying assumption as soon as my would-be editor read the book.

My witches were invading a place full of polite and largely innocent quasi-monks. Apart from the fact that they were all witches, each woman was as different from the others as may be, a real person in her own right. So, as usual, I sat down and thought carefully, 'Now what would really happen, to this real woman in this situation? And to this, and these real men?' The answer is various on both sides, a lot of guilt, a lot of pressure from inside and outside the group of women, and an awful lot of whoopee at some point when enough people relaxed enough. In the course of it two-thirds die, two get badly victimised, one falls into a clinical depression, one gets black-mailed, everyone's judgement goes askew and one woman runs away and nearly gets her small child killed. The assumptions I had ignored came out in my would-be editor's response: 'It's all so nice.' I said, 'I beg your pardon?' The reply was, 'Well, most writers would take this opportunity to make everything miserable and tragic – and you had one pair fall in love'. I had. It seemed to me that they would, those particular ones. In fact, they did it without any help from me. Now what's going on here? I thought. I am assumed to be writing fantasy. Therefore, it seems, where adults are concerned, one must only write of sex in fantasy in a tragic and elegaic way. People are not supposed to behave in the way that people would. Oh no. Surely this is only one editor's aberrant assumption? But I fear not.

This kind of thing cuts down the freedom one ought to have when writing for adults to a point which I find claustrophobic. It gets worse when I realise that there were certain sorts of story which I didn't even consider. To take two examples, I knew I couldn't write anything like Vivien Alcock's *The Monster Garden* or Philippa Pearce's *Tom's Midnight Garden*. *The Monster Garden* is simply a rewrite of *Frankenstein*, in which a modern girl called Frankie (!) accidentally grows some



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**C**hildren's books concern themselves vastly and outspokenly with sex.



protoplasm from her father's lab into a creature. As in all children's books, nothing turns out the as you'd expect (which is part of the beautiful freedom of this branch of writing), but this plot is unavailable for adults because everyone knows its been done before. Adults are supposed to be sophisticated about this. In that case, would someone tell me why people keep writing the one about the female warrior with the map in the front? Or why *Frankenstein* is a nono, while everyone is free to re-use *The Lord of the Rings*? The rationale of these assumptions escapes me.

*Tom's Midnight Garden* is a branch of time-travel writing (loosely related to that of Dickens in *A Christmas Carol*) in which a ghost from the past takes a lonely small boy to explore the house and countryside as it was in his grandmother's day. It is most elegantly and exactly done and rightly a children's classic, but what adult would accept a

# A

adults  
can only accept time travel on  
a fairly gross scale

plot like that outside Dickens? This really raises the whole large question of time-travel, which I will reserve for a later date, only pointing out here what seems to be the hidden assumption: adults can only accept time-travel on a fairly gross scale. Time-travel up or down a generation or so is only allowed for breeding purposes (either with one's mother or one's niece) Otherwise one has to go back to, say, Roman times or way back to our origins – and then only when provided with plenty of anxious archaeological explanations. Personally, since I like more modest time-trips better, I think this is a pity.

In fact, it is all a pity. Every hidden assumption I discovered seems to be felt as a law, or a rule, or an absolute difference between two branches of writing, and I cannot see they are any such thing. They shackle the speculative fiction written for adults and reflect badly on that written for children – since the final hidden assumption has to be that as that written for adults is so puerile, how much more so must that written for children be? This, I know, is not the case. But let no one argue that these hidden assumptions about writing for adults are not there. I assure you they are. I felt every one of them like a ball and chain when I tried to do it. I think it is high time people started examining them in order to free the wealth of good stories cramped under this load of old iron. For, when all is said and done, it is telling a good story, and telling it well, that is the point of both kinds of writing.

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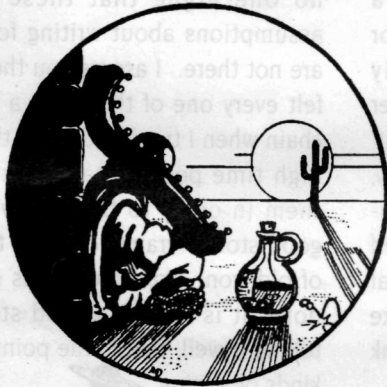




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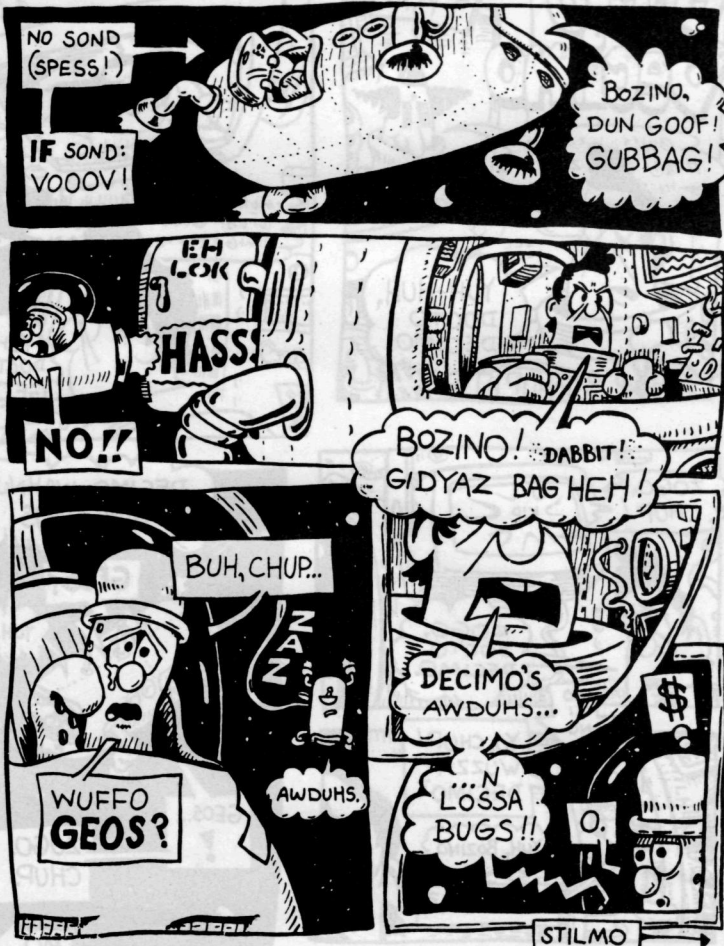
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CONTINUED ON PAGE 33

We all know how much you're enjoying the magazine, and how badly upset you'd be if you missed out on the next issue, so we want to offer a friendly word of advice -

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WHERE SCIENCE FICTION MEETS REALITY



# ROTISSERIE

Christina Lake



Why don't we have months any more?" asked Brinley Balakov. She was the youngest, so considered it her right to ask stupid questions.

"Because we don't have a moon," replied her mother tolerantly.

"Oh mother, that has nothing to do with it," contradicted Perdita. "We don't have months any more because they were inconsistent. Who wants to

spend their life quoting a nursery school mnemonic when it's quite obvious that numbering the weeks gives you far more information."

"Thirty days hath September," chanted Stephan in the background.

I still couldn't work out why my brother had married Perdita, though my latest guess was that he liked moving around in the fall-out from her pronouncements. She was also very beautiful, but I didn't think that would have made

much impression on Stephan. His idea of beauty was a fish with its guts spilled out all over the bathroom floor.

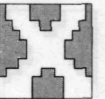
Needless to say, there was no mystery over why Perdita had married Stephan. She wanted the reflected glory from my talents. Unfortunately for her, she wasn't going to get any.

I left them to their squabbling.

"Mother," Perdita insisted, "even if we still had menstrual cycles we'd need thirteen months, not twelve."

"...and twenty nine each leap year," concluded Stephan triumphantly.

I went up to my room and switched on the music. The Balakovs think that I need music to work. The louder I play Beethoven the more they think I'm going to do. The truth is, I don't like making an exhibition of myself, and hadn't done a thing since Stephan brought me there. In fact, I had only agreed to come at all because he'd told me I would like the music library, and he was right. Over the past few



9





weeks I'd worked my way through the eighteenth century and was making a vigorous start on the nineteenth.

Much to my surprise, I enjoyed the company too. Not Perdita, I hasten to add. She expects every conversation to be character-forming. Every time she opens her mouth it is in the expectation of providing an educational experience. But the others are refreshingly bizarre. The nineteen boys, chosen, I suspect, to counter-balance Perdita, are charming if totally indistinguishable from one another. Little Brinley is a lovable mistake (she was meant to be a boy too, but there was some mix up at the clinic), while the Balakovs senior drift through life with all the grace and inconsequentiality of a hologram couple.

Out in the garden, the boys were playing cricket with their father. One batsman, one bowler and eighteen fielders. None of them knew the rules, but this didn't seem to bother them. In the quieter passages of the music all I could hear was the thwack of ball against plastic as yet another bouncer hit the transparent ceiling of the garden dome.

I closed my eyes and contemplated nirvana.

I was on my fifth Balzac when Stephan wandered in. The Balakovs have a good library of novels too, but it's ordered alphabetically not chronologically, which can make for some curious juxtapositions.



"Perdita's holding a dinner party tonight," he told me, depositing a seagull on top of my desk. It was dead of course. The boys had probably gone out hunting after cricket.

"How delicious," I said. "But I don't think that will go far among twenty five, let alone guests."

"She thought you might like to . . ."

"Stephan always slides away from talking about what I do. Or rather, what I could do, if I put my mind to it.

"My sister, she's an umm . . . err . . ." he will say, and look at me significantly.

He even told Perdita that it was bad form to mention what I was. Perdita was so surprised to hear Stephan issue



an instruction that she actually stopped boasting about me to her friends for a while. I think perhaps she's hoping that one day he'll issue another.

I went down to the kitchen and threw out the seagull. The boys had also brought in some starlings, a few crows and a hedgehog.

I picked the hedgehog up by its spines.

"You're not going to . . .?" asked Mrs Balakov, looking slightly sick. She had just poured it some milk into a saucer. She didn't seem to have noticed that it was dead.

"Of course she is," said Perdita robustly. "Do you mind if I stay and watch?"

Watch all you like, I thought, smiling at her sweetly.

"But my dear, we have some perfectly good beef in the freezer," protested Mrs Balakov.

"Do you know what they do to those animals before you get them, mother? They feed them on dead babies."

"Don't be absurd, dear."

"They do, mother. And then they pump them full of dyes and flavouring. There haven't been any real cows for a hundred years or more now. No, my guests would much prefer hedgehog."

"Or seagull?" I suggested maliciously.

Since there wasn't any clay, I buried the hedgehog in the middle of the cricket pitch.

"Why did you do that?" Perdita wanted to know.

"It's an old-style form of protest," said one of the Balakov boys knowledgeably. "Like rain stop play."

All nineteen boys, plus Brinley, had followed me outside to see what I would do. Fortunately they didn't seem to mind having their cricket pitch dug up. Maybe they'd been looking for a change anyway.

"It's to make sure the spines come off," I explained.

Perdita's style was catching. I could hear myself becoming







didactic. If I stayed in the household much longer I would probably be subsumed by the desire to give lectures.

I comforted myself with the knowledge that the information was false.

Mrs Balakov made fish fingers for the boys. These came in five different flavours and were the only food that the boys needed to eat. Some brands of children are very cheap to run, and the Balakov's had quite naturally chosen economy models.

Meanwhile, Mr Balakov made a beef pie for the dinner party.

Perdita's guests were all from her study circle.

"Do meet my husband. Do meet my husband's sister," Perdita gushed.

"She's an umm . . . err . . ." added Stephan, looking at me significantly.

"She's made us a hedgehog pie. From *one* hedgehog."

"Like the feeding of the five thousand," laughed a man with a plastic face. He had just noticed the nineteen boys and one girl lined up along the window embrasure. "Very biblical."

It occurred to me to wonder where they filed the Bible. I might have to wait till 'C' to read it. Or maybe the Balakovs didn't consider it a novel at all.

"Four and twenty blackbirds," hummed Stephan happily. He had never grown out of a penchant for nursery rhymes.

"Shall we be civilised," inquired Perdita hastily, "and have a drink?"

"This isn't a re-enactment is it?" inquired a woman with bright red hair, wearing a feather-covered leotard. "You're not quite sounding yourself, Perdita, if I may say so. You're not expecting us to indulge in alcohol and small talk, are you?"

Strike one to the visitors, I thought.

"Nothing could be further from my mind, Sylvie," said Perdita, recovering quickly. "In fact, I thought we might just go through that Latin translation while father mixes the lemonade."

"We cannot refuse to fight while our country is threatened with disaster," suggested one of the young men.

"*Ita memor pristinarum virtutum, venenum, quod semper secum habere consuerat sumpsit,*" intoned another, rolling the 'r's.

"Poor Hannibal – if he hadn't taken poison, do you think he'd be alive today?"

"Hannibal crossed the Alps in 1988 with his elephants," said the boy who had spoken in the garden. I noticed he was starting to get as bad as Perdita, but couldn't remember if his name was Kingsley or Cornelius. "And committed suicide," the boy continued, "because he was dropped from the England cricket team."

Perdita looked irritated. "Haven't you got any games to play? I'm sure you all got new rattle-snakes last week."

"Roller-skates, Perdita," corrected Brinley. "They were roller-skates."

"Roller skates, rattle snakes, what does it matter? So long as you go and play with them."

After the children had left, the party practised declensions for a while and made some extraordinarily fatuous comments on the strategies of Julius Caesar. I just hoped that Caesar had never written any symphonies.

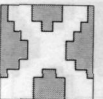
The pie was a great success. Everyone said how much they liked hedgehog, and I could foresee a long and tedious career of mammalian interment ahead of me.

I was beginning to get homesick.

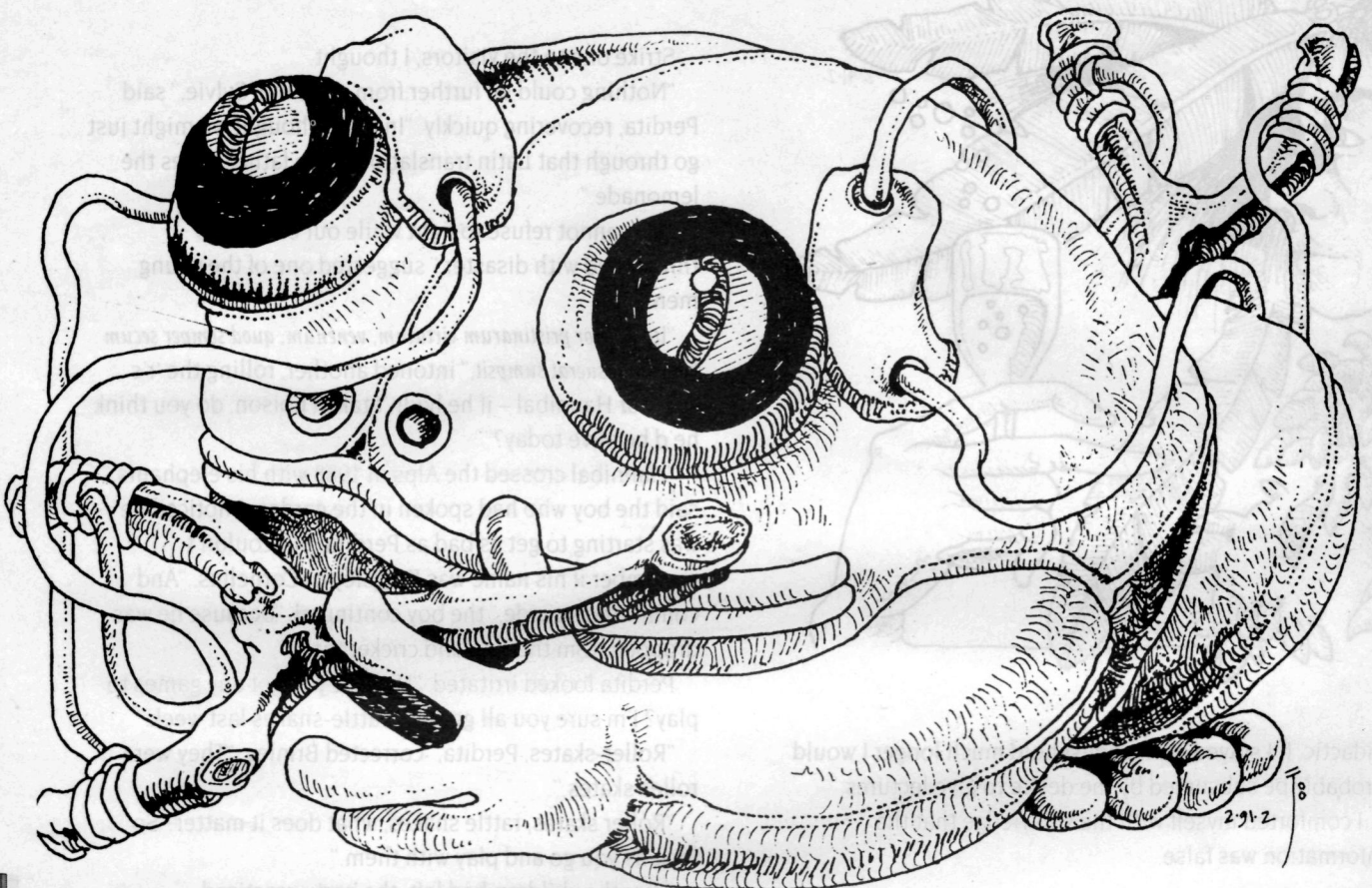
"I do think it's too bad," said my neighbour who was either cross-eyed or wanted to discover at first hand in what ways I was differently formed from other women, "that your people are so badly treated by the government."

"On the contrary," I said, "they treat us very well. They ignore us."

Perdita looked vexed. Possibly she had just noticed that the hedgehog was beef after all. →







"You have the same rights as any citizen," she said. "And you can hardly pretend that the government ignores you. They have been forced to make literally thousands of alterations to existing legislation to cater for you. Take fire regulations, for instance . . ."

Perdita droned on for a bit. Stephan hummed 'London's Burning' under his breath.

"But Perdita," my neighbour interrupted eventually. "Fire risks are hardly the issue. What about the seals?"

"Okay, so they saved a few seals."

"And revived the dinosaurs," I said prettily.

The dinosaurs had been a mistake. They ate too much and kept getting loose.

"There should be more regulations, not less," said Perdita, her voice rising. I had never seen her get angry before. "And they should be MADE to work for the good of society."

"Excuse me," I said. "I have some reading to do."

It had just occurred to me that I could make the page-scanner pick up any musical references in the books and in this way synchronise my reading programme with the music.

Later on, Stephan came up to my room.

"Perdita wants you to leave."

"Because of the hedgehog?"

"No, because you think she's a fool."

This was very perceptive of Stephan. It was even more perceptive of Perdita. I didn't know what to say.

"I'll be staying," he added. "You know that, don't you?"

I thought of the centuries of music I would never get to hear. The authors beginning with the letters 'B' to 'Z' I would never get to read.

"Will you have twenty-one children too?" I asked.

The boys lined up to say goodbye. They each gave me a present. I was touched, though I wasn't sure what I would do with nineteen catapults. Brinley gave me her favourite frog and Perdita a text book on The United Kingdom and the World Monetary System.

"We shall expect to hear news of you, wherever you go," pronounced Perdita sonorously. "I'm sure you'll make the world a very different place."

She had clearly still not grasped that my indolence was consistent and not targeted specifically at her.

"And put the moon back where you found it when you leave," added her mother.

It was a joke of course. The moon had been destroyed long before any of us arrived.

Back at home I told them that Stephan was happy. They said they would grow me another earth-brother if I wanted, but I didn't think that it would be quite the same somehow. After all, how many people can whistle 'Amazing Grace' while upside down in a vat of wine?

I certainly can't, and I'm . . . Well, never mind.

I decided to dedicate myself to learning a few skills for when I next visited the Balakovs.

Reinventing the dodo sounds a good place to start. I thought Perdita might like the first egg.





# THESE WILL BE THE GOOD WRITERS

Gwyneth Jones

Whenever I go to a science fiction convention, I always make a point of visiting the art room. I stare at the exquisitely intricate disembowelled elves, the Iron Maiden rocketships, the plump and glistening Barbarella buttocks. Go on, I say to myself. Take a good look. This is the real face of S.F. This is what your acquaintance outside the genre sees in the mind's eye, when you tell them what you do. This is why they look at you so pityingly, and quickly change the subject...

No, I'm not talking about the cheerfully amateur element that belongs here and doesn't need to apologise to anyone. I'm talking about the cream, the awesomely good stuff. It makes me feel terrible that I hate and despise these glowing, perfectly finished images — produced by highly professional artists, with the acme of skilled technique. Lucky for me that the SF community — according to legend — practically consists of outsiders, loonies, weirdos. As I stroll grimly about, hearing voices from another world telling me I don't belong in this *galere*, (and also, contrariwise, that I have a vital evangelical mission) every other person I meet is also musing (unless too drunk for connected thought): *I am lost and alone. I am a changeling in this alien land. I am one of the first of the coming race, seeking blindly for my soul-kin...*

This machine for making myths (and selling them) is fond of making up myths about itself. One of the most treasured is that of the rough diamond. A good SF writer scorns literary tricks and just scrabbles out the great idea any old way. This claim persists, in the face of any amount of writing groups,

amateur and professional criticism sessions, organised writing workshops, (to say nothing of the endless public discussion of what goes on/what should go on at these workshops). Clearly, in real life science fiction, writers spend an inordinate amount of time and effort in trying to achieve *some* kind of excellence. What kind?

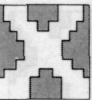
The starting point of this essay was not the artshow. It was an article in The New York Review of Science Fiction (NYRSF), a blameless and entertaining piece about how to get the best fun out of a convention. I think I've sent the issue in question to Bulgaria, so I can't quote. But the advice that caught my attention went something like this: "Take a drink in each hand. Leave the bar. Walk right through the loud colourful crowds, until you see a small group of sensibly dressed people sitting quietly and talking in low voices. These will be the good writers."

What arrant nonsense! I thought — personally stung by this exclusion. For though opinions on my dress sense vary, no one has ever used the word 'sensible'. The NYRSF writer has heard the cliché about the flamboyant artist, and has decided to debunk it, using the very slightly younger cliché that says real artists don't show off. The later cliché is equally inadequate. The good writer may well be abseiling down the front of the hotel in lurid lycra tights, the good writer may be that loud and boring drunk all the sensible people are carefully avoiding... The good writer may be that hopelessly fannish type in the infamously greasy black leathers, roaming the hotel wistfully at 4am, with her poorly concealed private bottle and thinly dis-

guised bedroll... But the NYRSF description can be seen as advice to would-be writers as well as to lion-hunters: and as such I find it disturbing. 'Good' writers, apparently, are indistinguishable from any other sober middle ranking executives. If you want to be a good writer, polish your shoes.

The SF writer as a professional — who writes to make a sale, who counts his/her career in terms of sales made, who is proud of turning in a reliable, uniform product and turning it in on time, is unmistakably an American ideal. In the UK there survives a deep-seated cultural conviction that no kind of art can be regarded as a source of income. Parents will say to their budding painter, novelist, rockstar, not *Okay kid, go out there and succeed!* They'll say — Oh, but you must have a proper job *as well*. The effect of this exclusion of art from the real world is much underestimated. It probably contributes far more to the introversion and gloominess of UK science fiction than our mythical preoccupation with death of empire or convoluted Old World history. But whatever its origins, the white-collar role-model is a powerful one. No one who has a proper job and a yen for creative writing can possibly understand the terrible allure respectability has for those who write fiction (no matter what kind) and have no proper job. In science fiction, obsessed as the genre is with the world's work, technology, concrete achievement, the need to pretend you do something sensible and measurable with your life is especially acute. Even the few who do not need the money have a deep spiritual and emotional need to make money. Even people who spend their lives inventing fantasy cultural constructs for aliens are easily taken in by the fantasy of a career structure, a regular salary, steadily mounting profits.

Publishers are hard pressed at the moment. It may be that the endless peristalsis of capitalism is in the process of squeezing trade fiction quite out of existence, and (as everyone knows) the experience isn't comfortable. There is no question that publishers' editors, insofar as they want to keep their jobs, have to prefer and encourage the polish-your-





shoes attitude. And indeed, this ideal of the artist-in-society has a lot going for it — discipline, *humility*, respect for the reader. It fits neatly into the aggressive version of the anti-literary theory of SF, which states that it is not merely unnecessary to but actually wrong to write SF 'well'. Genre fiction, of which SF is a variety — so the argument goes — has different standards from literary fiction, different but equal. On the contrary, I would contest that every narrative ever conceived works the same way. There is a punchline, a secret, a solution. The telling consists in holding off the moment when this secret will be revealed for some customary length of time (thirty thousand words might be too long in the pub, for a bestseller you need three hundred thousand or the people who turn out those black-and-metallic jackets won't look at you). Mass market fiction simply does this at cut rate, with preformed parts (clichés) inserted in place of a customised delay mechanism. It's supposed to be deficient, and if it's not deficient it doesn't get called genre fiction (cf that shameless three hankie weepy *Portrait of a Lady*; the steamy family saga *Wuthering Heights*).

## SF in itself is not deficient literary fiction

If SF writers, as apart from publishers, are satisfied to limit themselves to the consciously deficient, then that's all very well. As my choice of titles above indicates, no one really knows until long, long afterwards who were the hacks, who were the greats, who were the self-deluded piss-artists. Nor can a consensus be trusted, even when it seems to have been settled for generations. Despise Dickens at your peril today — you'd have been safe enough twenty years ago. But even by its own standards, outstanding genre SF, having accepted industrial processing, begins to break down when the industry is under pressure. The few editors who remain have less and less time for nit-

picking at little questions of continuity, none at all for serious criticism; proof-reading is a vanishing craft. The fairytale as a reliable, uniform product is a fairytale in itself, and ironically the 'good' writers, from both publishers' and public's point of view, are the first to suffer. With the best will in the world, it is hard to find time nowadays to labour over something that will sell without any finicky finishing touches — if it's working, why fix it.

But science is not part of the general experience of the public. The customs of Utopia are not going to go down as smoothly as the invisible ideology of an Australian soap opera. If there is anything in the least challenging in an SF novel's ideas, the means of conveying them to the public is going to need detailed attention. It is not by 'honest story-telling' that the familiar is made strange and the strange familiar. From the successful writer's point of view, if no one is demanding that you express things carefully, there's a grave temptation to put in the minimum of effort; an even graver temptation to decide that the effort was unnecessary in the first place. So there comes about a situation where the dedicated SF reader just blips over the clumsy parts, the obvious errors and passages of impenetrable obscurity. Except for a certain vocabulary to which she is sentimentally attached, she might as well be reading a Western, a Detective Story, or a Mills & Boon Romance, with cutouts where the usual clichés have been replaced by chunks of gibberish. The newcomer to SF, with justice, declares the whole phenomenon—readers and writers—totally incomprehensible.

Meanwhile, those people who were from the beginning attracted SF as something other than deficient literary fiction, have been enjoying their own upheavals. Just as the popular science in SF reflects the changing fashions of the scientific world — designer genes or chaos mathematics — literary vogues reflect fashions in literary criticism. In the sixties experimental writing had a vogue, with words scattered over the page as if the Christmas Tree virus had been at them. In the seventies it was humanist values, more recently SF came

out in a rash of semioticians, structuralists and deconstructors. Now the post-modernists do exquisitely hand-finished imitations of any old pulp form they like, and call it subversion. It's no wonder, perhaps, if the average fan finds these contortions as cynical as the mass-market process, and becomes positively self-righteous in her scorn.

Mass-market SF is built in much the same way as any kind of mass market fiction, certainly (which is no excuse for sloppy craft). But SF in itself is not deficient literary fiction, and it can't be perfected by being made to resemble the fashionable modern novel. Fiction belongs to the human world. In science fiction and in fantasy the delays of the shaggy-dog story that define all narrative are made out of stuff that does not belong to this world — things like death, quasars, multi-generation starships, heavy neutrinos, telepathy, immortality. For a literary SF fan, this is half the fascination. I lied: I don't believe 'ordinary people' look at me pityingly when I say I write science fiction. The reaction (as I perceive it) is more complicated — an odd mixture, it might even include a suppressed inclination to make signs against the evil eye. The poorest episode of *Star Trek* is tainted by a forbidden association — mixing the cosy world of fiction (which tells us only what we already know) with the cold unknown of science, the notional 'absolute reality' outside our heads... 'Literary' SF has to cling to this transgression (in some form or other), make it evident, keep it in mind all the time. If it allows itself to be colonised by the fashions of literary criticism, it is only exchanging one kind of soft option for another.

Dissatisfaction is the nature of the beast. Even the most placid SF consumer must have a secret weakness for divine discontent. Otherwise they wouldn't be looking for a jolly good read in a genre which is expressly concerned only with things that cannot be had — the future, other worlds, different rules. A lot of SF depresses me quite legitimately, if I can use that expression. The most genuinely challenging and exciting novels which the genre can still





provide, sometimes depress me most of all... (*She makes most hungry, where most she satisfies...*). But I think I might be less dissatisfied, in the more usual sense, if certain other readers were a little more demanding.

Some of you will recognise the experience: you read the John Clute review in *Interzone*. For once he's on form, rapturous without becoming totally incoherent, reporting as a dazzled eye-witness on his near-death encounter with something truly cosmic. Well, in spite of all the times you've been fooled before, you get hold of the thing somehow (even buy it, as a last resort); and you read it, knowing all along it's just going to be another Greg Bear... Some of you will barely glance at the critique of that kind — the incomprehensible in the pursuit of the unreadable. You'll prefer the sincere, down-to-earth sciffy-type reviewing: *It's an S&S cyberpunk space-opera with LOTR type characters; I like it but it goes on a bit and I think the printers missed out half chapter five but I'm not sure...* The proliferation of shorthand terms available to SF reviewers should be a sign of some kind of sophistication. Certainly (within the genre) an amazing quantity of reviewing goes on. Few non-SF novelists can hope for the same amount of attention. As a writer, I'm very grateful — especially for the amateur book report, almost unknown outside SF, which does the work of that vanished editor—I *liked this bit, I didn't understand that bit*—a little late, but better late than never. But as a reader I find both shorthand and encyclopaedic approaches increasingly formulaic.

Many serious reviewers seem to feel it's rather poor taste to dwell on the little mechanical errors in the plot or the proofreading or deficiencies in style, while discussing the solemn topics preferred by the grandees of SF — and so the guardians of the genre find themselves covering up the failures of the industry's processing. Worse, the expertise of an expert witness can lead him, or her, to do much the same thing as the shorthand hacker of the slushpile — that is, to review a coded abstract rather than this particular example of 'cyberpunk-space-opera'. Sanctioned by the myth that says in SF the *ideas* are

paramount, the means of expression of minor importance, the critic engages directly with the writer's theoretical proposals. And if the narrative doesn't have particularly marvellous drive, or the transmutation of science into fiction is muddled and perfunctory, all the more reason to make up this deficiency in an essay that doesn't so much describe the book, as take its place. The reader is provided with a fine non-fictional disputation on the nature of entropy, crime and punishment on a cosmic scale, phase transition metaphysics, but loses another chance to benefit from a literary judgement. And so does the writer. It sometimes seems as if all the intellectual activity in SF has quietly migrated to the review columns, where a kind of priesthood itself performs, by sleight of hand and with the aid of a lot of coloured smoke, the work that the gods are supposed to have done already. It could be that the priests are propping up the empty shrine out of true devotion to the myth — SF, the fiercely ideated, casually expressed, dynamic literature of ideas. But, in the meantime, they're lending countenance to a quiet process of quality erosion that really doesn't need or deserve their help.

Everyone in SF is exiled from somewhere, on the run from something. We're all misunderstood geniuses and persecuted revolutionaries (or so the legend goes). You don't want to believe everything you hear in the bar. All those 'literary' writers and readers self-exiled from the mainstream will tell you with enormous conviction (just try me) that science fiction is the place where literature is happening, a marvellous hybrid in the process of being born... While treasuring with abject gratitude that not-entirely-dismissive two line mention in a non-genre column, they will refuse with contempt any suggestion that they'd be better off in more refined company, away from the lumpenproletariat of rocketship fantasy. Meanwhile, another excellent writer subscribes absolutely to the philistine myth. SF isn't art! Art is a contaminant! This person has no objection to confessing that he/she spends twenty hours out of the twenty four thinking of nothing else but how to get

the words to behave, how to convey just the right mood, immediacy, urgency:

There isn't really any way of picking out a good writer, in a convention hall or anywhere else. Whenever I'm faced with a group of aspiring writers, the one thing I know is that I *can't* tell, there are no signs. I don't know which will remain hobbyists, which will become professionals, or what 'talent' has to do with it. Some good writers write thirty five drafts of everything, or roll around the floor for three days looking for the right word, like that poor sucker Flaubert. Some just go with the flow. The best description I've ever seen of what I do myself was in Stephen King's *Danse Macabre*: there's no 'talent'. You just have an idea of what's right, and you keep on and on and on slogging away until you get there... and Stephen King can hardly be called elitist.

## S science

### Fiction is the place where literature is happening

There is no conclusion to this essay. SF, like rock'n'roll, is an artform and an industry, two different entities that coincide occasionally. Only a fraction of the phenomenon involves the reading-and-writing of old fashioned narrative fiction, and maybe it will simply go on growing less and less important, the shrinking core of the explosion. Maybe 'literary' SF fans can't hope to be anything more than tolerated lunatics — along with the HOTOL loyalists and the cold fusion buffs — whose moment has passed but whose light is still with us. But writers who dedicate themselves to the process of turning out an uniform, machine-finished product cannot *at the same time* declare themselves to be romantically misunderstood outsiders to the ordinary world of literature — still, after all these years. There's no difference between 'good' writing in SF and 'good' writing of any other variety. And it irritates me no end to see SF hypnotising itself into believing otherwise.





**H**ow do you mix a Science Fiction cocktail? Take some alcohol and add science fiction...or do you take science fiction and add alcohol? Science fiction writers, their works, and the fans certainly have an affinity with alcohol, so how is it mixed into their stories...

Firstly, it can be trickled in and used as background colour. Sapphire Wine has very little to do with the world in which the story is set (*Drinking Sapphire Wine* by Tanith Lee): it just adds a little exotic 'colour' to the story. In the same way, the Pan Galactic Gargle Blaster does not have much effect on the plot of Douglas Adams' story, although at times it has a considerable effect on some of the characters' heads.

Likewise, Aldebaran Brandy and Romulan Ale add little to the stories in which they appear, but they do add a quite a lot to the background exoticism of some *Star Trek* episodes. And at one time it seemed Harry Harrison felt compelled to mention, in passing, a real but out-of-the-way drink in every new book, all of which I recognised, until he mentioned *gassis*. This threw me until I discovered it was a non-alcoholic Israeli drink.

As in the so-called 'real' world, knowledge of, and taste for, different forms of alcohol imply different levels of decadence, sophistication, or inebriation—we all recognise the ale-swilling, muscular barbarian (soon to be both stout and ailing), or the glamorous, wine-sipping sophisticate. In his *Viriconium* books, M. John Harrison conjures images of decadence by having his characters guzzle hot blackcurrant or lemon gin (makes a change from the pints of *Crème de Menthe* the Pope drinks). And in an amazing scene from *Putting Out* by Neil Ferguson, the lead character is so completely entranced by being served a bottle of *Château Lafite de Pauillac, 1867*, that he is completely unable to stop his enemy from kidnapping his dinner companion.

A lot of SF writers use the site where alcohol is dispensed to allow their characters or even societies to interact — Smade's Tavern in *Star King* by Jack

# Strange Wines and UNFAMILIAR SPIRITS

Brian Ameringen

Vance, *The Vulgar Unicorn* in the Thieves World stories by Robert Asprin et al, The Prancing Pony in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, The Place in Fritz Leiber's Change War stories (*The Big Time* etc.) and so on.

There is a certain type of story which uses alcohol and locale both as excuses for bringing together strange and startling characters—who might never meet normally, but who have seen the opposite ends of the same story which one of them then relates and the other completes. These stories are often amusing — *Callahan's Cross-Time Saloon* and its sequels by Spider Robinson, *Tales from Gavagan's Bar* by L. Sprague de Camp and Fletcher Pratt, *Tales from the White Hart* by Arthur C. Clarke, *The Peculiar Exploits of Brigadier Ffellowes* by Sterling Lanier, *Tales from the Spaceport Bar* edited by George Scithers, etc. Most, if not all, of these are descendants of Lord Dunsany's Jorkens tales, collected in a number of volumes, starting with *The Travel Tales of Mr Joseph Jorkens*. These are tall tales in the traditional sense and derive from (and often include) shaggy dog stories.

In practice, the club, pub or bar acts as a focus to draw an audience to the narrator(s), thus the location and alcohol act as plot generator, and no external props and devices are needed. The narrator is all, and the alcohol serves only to oil the wheels of social intercourse (and at times they get very well oiled indeed). But the stories which feature the bar/pub/tavern as an interface between an unknown society and the rest of the universe (often represented by the protagonist) do something other than merely use alcohol,

and thus should really be the subject of an article of their own.

These stories use the familiar and yet exotic image of the bar for instant scene setting. This saves the writer a great deal of work and can still convey complex images. Similarly, authors can say a lot about characters by telling us what they are drinking. Taking this one step further, labelling a character as an alcoholic gives the reader a fairly good idea of how they will think and react.

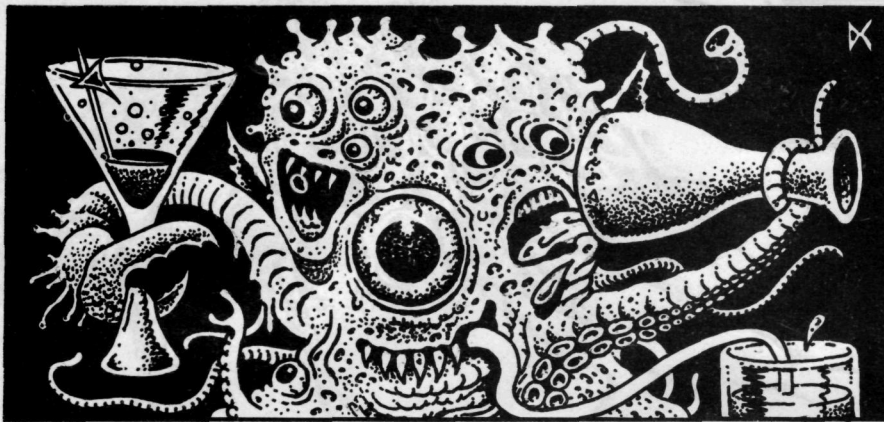
## PAN GALACTIC GARGLE BLASTER

One cube of sugar  
Angostura Bitters  
A cocktail onion  
Blue Curaçao Liqueur  
Sparkling white wine  
Parfait Amour Liqueur

Place the sugar cube in an 8 oz. glass.  
Add a dash of Angostura Bitters to the cube.  
Add the onion and a measure of Blue Curaçao. Top up with sparkling white wine, leaving room for a measure of Parfait Amour Liqueur, which is purple, but turns the cocktail blue again - do not shake or stir!

(original recipe as created by the Cocktail Chef of the Café Royale, as served at the first *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* play at the I.C.A. by the two of us)

For example, Stiffy Grant in *The Visitors* by Clifford Simak is an alcoholic who will do almost anything anyone asks, provided they give him money for booze. He is an entirely predictable character and needs virtually no effort on the author's part as he runs through the pages facilitating The Plot. Grace Farnham, in Robert Heinlein's *Farnham's Freehold*, is a rather different kettle of fish, but her more complex character is still based around her



dependence. And Murray Douglas, in *The Productions of Time* by John Brunner, is an ex-alcoholic, but the principle is the same. This is not to say that 'alcoholic' is necessarily a swift and easy label. I know one book where the Galactic Secret Agent is only pretending to be the town drunk. I'm not going to name it, though: I wouldn't want to spoil the surprise for you. Also, some authors seem almost compelled to include a drunk in their cast of characters — although this is not necessarily a fault, as can be seen in the works of Walter Tevis.

Alcohol does not only feature as a passive element, though; it can take an active part, as in tales which use alcohol as primer, in the sense of it priming the pump — it is the jumping-off point for the action.

There are a few examples of this — in *The Goblin Reservation* by Clifford Simak the souring of the October Ale is what causes The Plot to get going, Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle's *Inferno* is begun by Allen Carpentier, the hero (?), trying to drink a bottle of rum, in one go, while sitting on a windowsill. He falls out and dies, and then the novel starts. In *Land of Unreason* by L. Sprague de Camp and Fletcher Pratt, Fred Barber, an American living in England, drinks the milk left out for the elves, and leaves, in its place, a double whisky. That's when the fun begins! These stories use the alcohol as the initiator of the action but actually it has little relevance, the exception being in *The Goblin Reservation* where the October Ale is not only the primer but also the treasure that everyone is seeking.

There are not many other stories where the treasure is alcoholic — there's *The Drawing of the Dark* by Tim Powers and *Brightness Falls From The Air* by James Tiptree Jr. In each case the emphasis is on the treasure aspect rather than its alcoholic content — the October Ale is difficult to produce and tastes good, the Herzwestern Dark has magical virtue because the body of Finn Mac Cool lies under it, and the Stars Tears not only taste wonderful but have hallucinatory properties too. However, having said all this, there is no fundamental reason why these stories couldn't have been written around The October Plums, Herzwestern Blue Cheese and Stars Tears Light (the low-alcohol version). All these treasures aggravate the characters' greed rather than altering the characters themselves through intoxication.

However, alcohol can act as a defence: in *The Flugler* by Doris Piserchia one of the characters goes out and drinks whisky every night. This saves his life (for a time) as the eponymous monster can't stand the smell, and so doesn't eat him. Similarly, in *Drunkard's Walk* by Fred Pohl, Cornut is protected from committing suicide by the alcohol in his system — it stops the telepathic 'long-lifers' from influencing his actions. But in both these cases the same effect could have been achieved with any household preparation — say, aspirin.

There are even fewer examples where alcohol actually interacts in the story. One is *The Makeshift Rocket* by Poul Anderson, where the physical properties of beer drive a spaceship.


Another is *Robots Have No Tails* (vt *The Proud Robot*) by Henry Kuttner, where Galloway Galleher is an inventor who can only create when blind drunk. When he wakes up the next morning he finds the thing he has created, and then has to puzzle out what it's supposed to do. Obviously, in this last example, the properties of alcohol are not only an integral part of the plot, but also its generator.

Alcoholic beverages are used in our society in many ways and it's hardly surprising that the writers of science fiction extrapolate these uses into the future. Obviously, booze is a lot closer to some writers' conscious minds than others — you'll have noticed that certain authors' names have appeared quite frequently here. This is probably the syndrome Nick Lowe describes in 'Black Wine of Thentis' — when a writer wants a drink, or perhaps has just had one, then it's only natural that their character has one too. However, hardly anyone has managed to infuse drink throughout their work as an integral part of the story.

So, how do you mix a Science Fiction Cocktail? Same as any other, of course: to the consumers' taste. Now, I'm going to get myself another drink, and I expect you can use one too.

What am I drinking? A cocktail I call 'Duck Sauce' (see recipe).

Why is it called 'Duck Sauce'? Because it also makes a wonderful sauce for cooking and/or serving Duck in, of course.

Why another? Well, you don't think I write like this sober, do you? 

#### DUCK SAUCE

Brandy

Old Nutcracker Liqueur

(a Canadian Hazelnut, Walnut and Praline Liqueur, but Pistachio or Macadamia Nut liqueurs are almost as good)

Cold Fresh English Apple Sauce

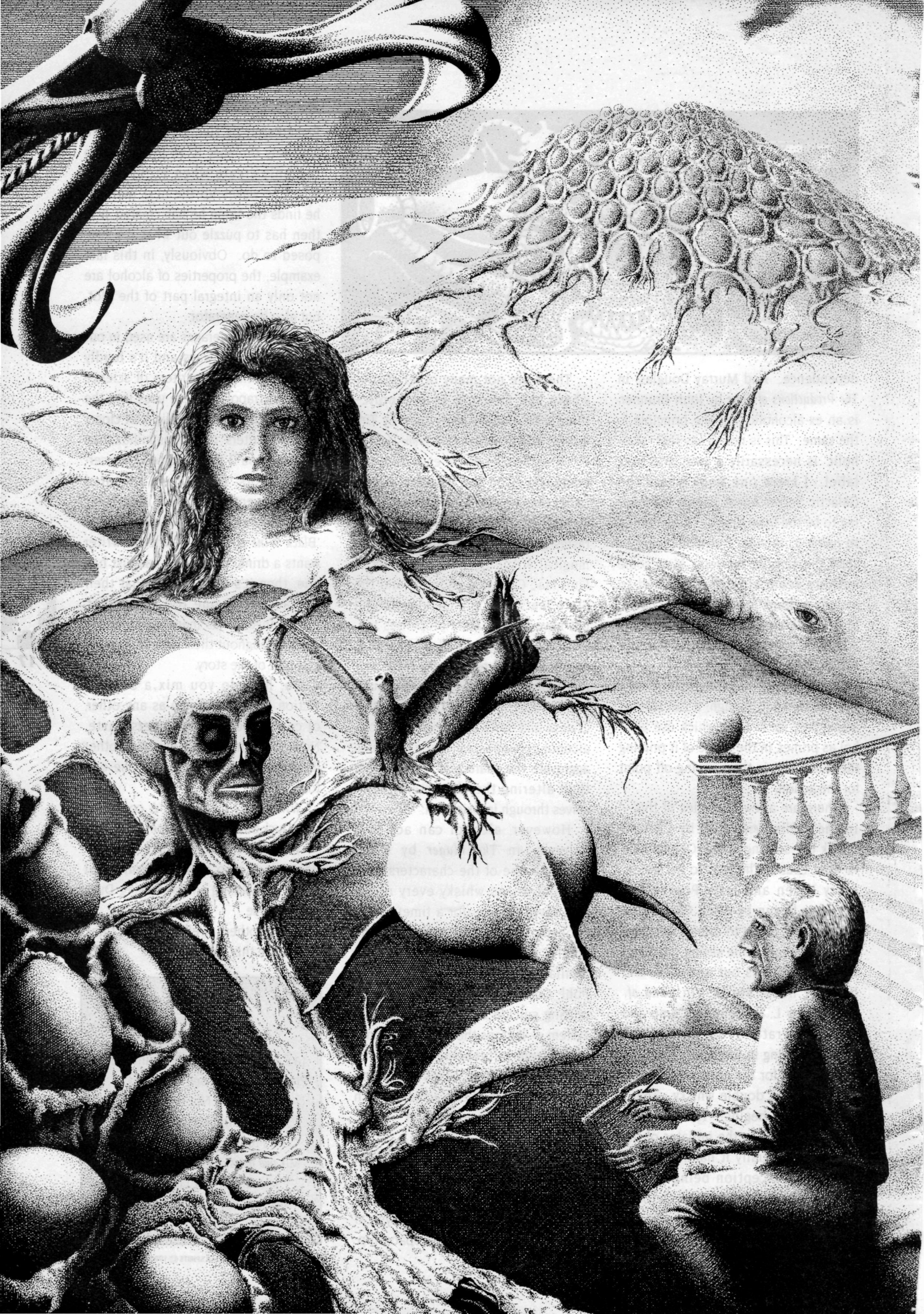
Mix two measures of brandy with two measures of Nut Liqueur.

Add eight measures of apple juice.

Stir.







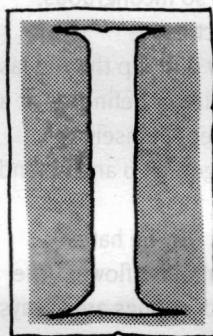




# TRANSLATOR

## The diary of the

Geoff Ryman



I am a Translator. I am a Reader. I work all day on the Decks, and at night I do not dream. I doodle with words, instead, in this diary, to clear my mind so that peace can come and with it, sleep.



I have finished *Moby Dick*. Mother liked it, but it is a fraud. I come from a desert world, and have never seen a real sea, or a whale. There are no whales now, except on tape. There never was an Ishmael; Herman Melville poured all his ghost into his work. No memories by those hearty, simple souls who manned the 19th century have yet been discovered.

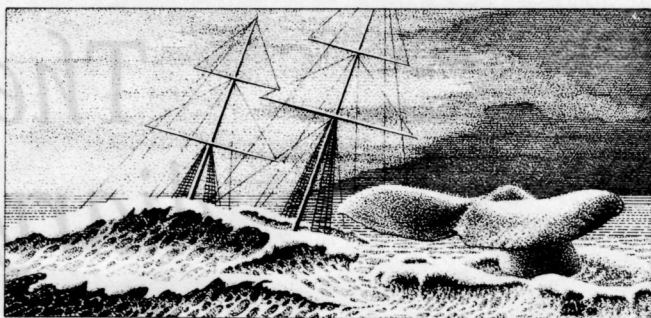
So I have had to create a world and a great white whale from words alone. My ocean is blurred and glassy, and I have been quite unable to imagine a huge timber ship. How would it sit on the water? What is meant by the creaking of ropes? My white whale is faceless, as Melville describes him, but he is made of stone, not flesh. My translation is dead and bleached, like pages.

Yet Mother approve. And she approve because I have kept it simple, so light. No-one will have to struggle, as I did, with the tangle of tackle and rigging and whaling lore that takes up most of the book. I got rid of that. Descriptions do not translate well. They collapse back into unnamed and unknown sights and sounds. Or is it only me, the Reader, who is lost when wordless? I did a speed through on it all, to catch a lingering taste of whaling and of the sea.

Mother say I have caught the symbolic essence of the story. We are too used to dreams to know when things are not real. Without its try-works and its whale anatomy, the book has become what Melville feared it might — 'a hideous and intolerable allegory'. My translation is →







grotesque, all portentous characters and over-heated imagery. The ending! Ishmael riding up the vortex on a black bubble! That silly hand hammering the flag to the mast even after the rest of the ship has sunk. Poor Herman! It all belongs between the pages of his book.

The book that now no one will ever bother to read.



Ate with Luton. He's doing Marx.

'It's an impossibility!' he insisted, over his food. He stirred it constantly, but did not eat. He has large, pink arms streaked with black hair. It seems so incongruous, that hair. We spoke, just to keep in practice.

'They thought differently to us. They built up their ideas in stages, like their buildings — one delicate definition at a time. It was the only way they could keep themselves organised. And they kept on building, going up and up and out. It's relentless!'

Luton is such a contrite man. That's why he hates failure. As he spoke, I conjured up a Simulant flower. The fibres in the stem were only half-formed. Things are always more complex than we can imagine

'Well, if you understand what Marx is saying, perhaps you could tape just that.'

'But it wouldn't be Marx!' he exclaimed. 'A book by Marx, or any of the philosophers is a process. He was laying out a definition of reality step by step. It's very slow, very methodical, but that is the thing itself. It has to be worked through to be understood. It's not a sudden intuition, something that arrives like a dream!'

On the grass nearby, two Frips had conjured up a replica of a vagina and were grinding out cigarettes in it. It sighed and shivered. Finally one of them crushed his glass monocle into its labia, and dispelled it. They had clouded eyes and smiled at our Readerish intentness. A scientist was eating a that Cord, too. His face was withered with time and concentration. He obviously refused overlays. Even without his cloak, I would have known that he worked.

'And beside,' growled Luton, 'I don't understand him. The amazingly precise definitions of his words! You have to keep them before you all the time. I just...' He broke off with a shrug. '...lose track.'

'It could be worse,' I said. 'You could be Jol. He's doing Wittgenstein.'

'Hmph!' he admitted, with a rueful jerk of the shoulders that was almost a chuckle. 'I suppose so. We're all slaves of the Magic Lamp.'

Luton should have been a philosopher. So should we all, all of us Readers, have been artists or philosophers. But artists of the new are not wanted, and new philosophy is banned. Philosophies thought out on tape are swallowed whole; every premise is accepted without question. Logic died with words. Mother need Translators and Historians to rescue the past, so that is what we must become. The past haunts and holds us.

An insect flew in. A real one, there's still a few left. It was some kind of Stinger, with a small hooked needle in its tail. The girl Frips shrieked, and their friends crouched low in horror. Finally the scientist stood and wordlessly waved the insect away. Confused, it wandered back out into the eternal sunshine. One of the girls collapsed in hysterics. She was led out, shaking, to be transmitted to a Health Cord. The scientist looked at me, his lips drawn tight. He was disgusted with her, disgusted with Frips and Lumpens.

What, I wonder, does a Scientist do with his god-like knowledge of time and space? How does energy become matter? How do the Machineries work? I don't know. More problems of translation?

I watched Luton after we said goodbye. He has a funny walk; a huge man with a proper, precise, scholarly stride. I wish I knew what I saw in it that made me so very sad.



Mother have asked me to do another book, one of the old style microfilms from the 'Redemption'. The book is quite awful, by some cloistered woman, but Mother have decided I have a flair for the 19th century. The book is called *Sense and Sensibility*, a title with so many possibilities as to be almost meaningless. Words are so imprecise! They mean different things in different contexts and time-levels, even to different people. It's like trying to communicate by scratching in the sand with a trowel. *Sense* has more immediate impact than most ancient texts. But what a piece of trivia! Two uninspiring females follow the custom of their age and marry the men we knew they would marry all along. For some reason the nicer of the two gets stranded with a very dull older gentleman. This, the author seems to feel, is a great good. Can't think why Mother want to save it. Some of the detail is well done. At least it will be simpler to do than the last monstrosity.



Found, after more than the usual amount of indexing, the correct time-level definition of the words 'sense' and 'sensitivity'. 'Sense' in this case does not mean a faculty of the nervous system, but an ability to think sensibly. 'Sensibly' is an adverb meaning reasonably or judiciously. It is not to be confused with the noun 'sensitivity', which can mean something quite nearly the reverse. Oh, the hell of words! No wonder we did away with most of them. 'Sensitivity' meant — and it had fallen out of common usage a scant hundred years later — a receptivity to experience and a susceptibility to emotion that may be overly developed. The two sisters in the book embody these two different ways of responding to the world. So the



book is at least about something, even if it is monumentally dull. Austen must have been a frightful woman, all gossip and local chat. She keeps talking about marriage as though it was a financial arrangement designed to keep idle people fed. Sounds rather like Mother. Some of the characterisations are supposed to have a satiric edge to them, I think. But I cannot tell for sure. Everyone seems so constrained by conventions I don't understand.

Had nothing else to do, so I did a quick speed-through for Mother. She seemed pleased with it. I hate idleness.

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I need more detail — houses, clothes, transportation, that sort of thing. We have books about the 19th century and tapes of ancient films made about it, but we have never actually seen beyond its very edges. Did find an early essay about *Sense*, filed under Untranslated. The writer claimed that Austen was really balancing two conflicting strains of philosophy — Classicism, and the newly burgeoning Romanticism. How am I to get that into a translation? Was Austen really interested in philosophy? Seems a rather indirect way of discussing it. Also distinctly felt that the woman who wrote the essay was just as interested in saying something about philosophy as about Jane Austen. They always did that — bandied about each other's books to say something new. Perhaps a book was one long, complex word, to be carefully defined and used again. Perhaps there was a whole language of books.

I coughed up blood this morning. I am not well, despite all the patching up.

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Found a memory! Stumbled upon it sifting through the 20th century South Central English section of the Decks. In 1966 a student visited a hamlet in Hampshire called Chawton. He came, unbelievably, to see the house of Jane Austen. Only one hundred and fifty years too late, give or take some decades. The house itself was dead, all bare floors and irrelevant documents on the walls. There was an unhelpful little plaque announcing that the lady herself had always written over a particular spot, on a table rather like the one on display. But the village! And the student!

Chawton was bursting with sunlight and flowers. The houses were of old brick or flint and were top heavy with roofs of rolling thatch. The streets twisted and flowed without reason like rivers. Beyond the shade of the great trees were wide, hot fields with cows.

A motorway, hidden in a man-made ravine, hummed with traffic.

Through the student's hushed and whispering mind, I could imagine what Chawton must have been like one hundred and fifty years before that motorway existed — four hundred years before the Transmutation! And six hundred before the demolishing of the Earth!

People had grown their own



vegetables in the profusion of those gardens and had worked in the homes of nearby Alton or on the large farms. They had gone no further than Alton for their stores and hardly ever saw beyond the next parish, unless they were wealthy. They had drunk the warm milk of local cows. They had just, within the last few years, stopped weaving cloth on home looms. A quiet, slow life, then, with plants pushing themselves out of the ground, and grass turning into milk inside the stomachs of cows. The student also paused in reverence before an old, blackened horse-drawn cart, for which I am grateful. I now have a fresh image of a cart to work with. Horses, I will always be a bit shaky on.

He was a strange, likeable lad, this student, not clever, but observant and very sensitive. Life later disappointed him. He looked up at a portrait of Miss Austen, and saw something in her plain, strong face that, without his help, I never would have seen. Her eyes he looked at particularly. For him they were black and deep. Miss Austen, he always called her. Miss Austen, as though the title conveyed something sad and essential. She did not marry, and that he found tragic. In the age before his, that was a mark of failure in a woman. For him, this sorrow and defeat permeated her books and haunted the village and had made her vision clear. For him she was a great writer.

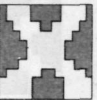
I must re-read that book.

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Another message from Chawton. From a Mrs Welk who lived in Chawton all her life and died in the 1930s. Lots of rooms and furniture; she remembered things like that, Mrs Welk. She had a practical, regular clock of a mind. She was an expert at crotcheting. It fills her memory — yarn coiling and uncoiling endlessly, like the rotation of planets. I slid together several memory impressions of her sitting-room and got a fairly complete image. Lace coverlets over the backs of chairs, china figures on shelves, miniatures of relatives on the walls, and ugly electric lamps. I will use it, without the lamps, for *Sense*.

Mrs. Welks considered herself a woman of standing, as she had married the local dairyman. She knew everyone in the hamlet, and most of the folk in east Alton. She knew what they all did for a living, so I now have a better idea of the economic system. The family that owned the cows sold the milk, or might trade it for garden goods. This in an age when Man had long since dropped his tools and had begun flicking switches. Mrs Welk kept the accounts and wore spectacles, which she thought ruined her appearance.

In her simple and vigorous youth, Mrs Welk had been plump and pretty. She had sex in a field with a man called John. He pushed up her frothy petticoat and peeled down her white bloomers. The grass prickled her. As he was about to descend, she felt a great weight of fear and anticipation on her stomach. She →





became pregnant, which is why they married. She did not at first love her husband, with his large hands and clumsy penis. But she grew to, with time and domesticity. Her love was a comfortable groove worn into his shoulder at night. He died, surrounded by her and their growing children. The pain in her was intense, like a parting of flesh.

I have never loved anyone. It seems such an impossible thing to do.

No more ghosts to exhume. Nothing else on Chawton is recorded. Many other 20th century villages survive on tape, but they give me no new information. Have run through Edwardian London again, in case that helps, but I shall have to begin soon with what I have. Extraordinary how some people have left behind such strong traces of themselves, while others have faded. It seems to have nothing to do with strength of personality. Could it be that thoughts unspoken never die, but struggle vainly on for expression?

Have re-read the book again. There is indeed something formidable there, but what it is I cannot say.

Nothing happened today. I sat, Communicator pressed against my ear, but no visions came. I played back my speed-throughs to see if they had preserved any inspiration. But the images were watery and rippled past like reflections in a stream. I forced myself to tape anyway, which is always wrong. Dry, stiff little figures tottered through rehearsed routines against a shadowed backdrop. The tape accelerated into an angry fantasy in which Elinor knifed Mrs Jennings over breakfast. Scrapped all of it, and listened to Bartok. Got bored with that, tasted a bit of Ulysses. Bloom was defecating. Spent the rest of the afternoon staring at the sky and my hands, too dulled by taping to move.

What use is Translation, or the New History? How can the past ever provide answers for us? These old books hold no solutions; they no longer even ask the right questions. All these ghostly memories merely record hope and mundane confusion. Yet our only labour, aside from maintaining the Machineries, is the resurrection of the past. Mother plan — of all the insane schemes! — to rebuild a New Earth, to hang in space like a bauble. No one asks which Earth, when. No one asks what possible good it could do us. Yet they clamour for it, these Frips and Lumpens. Mother give them tapes of *Hamlet*, tapes that can be absorbed in minutes, and they think they are encountering some form of truth. But the truth cannot be given! The abyss cannot be answered!

Hello Mother. I can feel you listening! You cannot make me happy. Do you hear that? All your technics and wizardry cannot make me or anyone else happy. You may not care what I think because I am powerless, but you too are powerless.

More days of waiting. More useless days.

A Historian has received and taped a message from the 19th century. The announcement slid into our minds at mid-day. I could not help but feel sad. Another century for us to loot and plunder.

There were signs of celebration out on the Grid, though how can one know when a carnival has become a festival?

As usual, it was ablaze with light and music and conjured dancing bears. The Decks were more sedate. They continued to work, but in a state of joyful agitation. Deckhands smiled to each other as they gave directions to the great machine. The air quivered with broadcast excitement. Jant, the Indexer, swept up to us in her long brown cloak.

'Chaos in Records,' she thought at us.

'Chaos here,' replied Ari.

'Everyone wants it.'

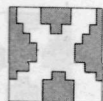
'Will help you, too,' she said, beaming her warm happiness to me.

I don't use my Communicator much. I don't necessarily want my private feelings blasted out into the universe.

'Yes, I suppose it will,' I replied in words. She was not enthusiastic. Her smile dimmed somewhat, and she turned back to her friends. Such a pretty girl, with round cheeks and bright grey eyes. I have never been able to talk to her, even though she is a Reader.

As the Deckhands were busy pushing the message out to the millions, I did not bother them for it. It did not sound too interesting. The new memory is that of a rich pottery owner and concentrates mainly on his varied greenhouse. It has increased our knowledge of Earthly foliage to a fair degree, they tell me. Unfortunately the man didn't think about his business much; his father had built it for him. He cursed his father for proudly planting the pottery works in full view of the house. He considered himself a philanthropist, gave money to the poor, and was quite concerned with the plight of American Negroes. There are hints, supposedly, of a convoluted relationship with both of his parents.

Yet another memory from the 19th century has wafted into the view of the Historians. Less excitement over this one, if even more self-congratulation, as it confirms that a new



time-level has been penetrated. I swallowed it.

The boy's name was Stephen. Stephen Cross. He was an apprentice in a mill. It was afternoon, and he was upset because that morning, at the gates, one of the older girls, with a dirty face and a hard little grin, had been rummaging about his genitals. He did not know what it meant, or why she had done it, but he sensed, probably correctly, aggression in her. He cried, and the other boys laughed. He had no private retreat, so he had wrapped himself instead in the clatter and bustle of his work.

The ceiling was low and made of plaster, and there were few open windows. Looms were connected by leather belts to a spinning shaft that ran the length of the room. Every once and a while a yelp would go up, and Stephen would run to a roll of orderly warp to tie broken threads back together.

'Move, damn you! That one! That one there!' the weaver barked, confusing him. Stephen blinked. He was a piecer because he had small delicate hands. He was terrified of being struck over them with the empty shuttle. When he couldn't find the broken thread, he began to cry again. The room dissolved for him and his fingers fumbled helplessly among the conflicting strands.

The message ended in confusion. That is all that survives of Stephen. It had been dark when he arrived, and it would be dark when he moved through empty and shadowed streets to the closeness of his home. I caught a glimpse of his mother. She had a narrow, bitten face and black hair tied with a scarf. Saw his home, too, as he remembered it, all grey wood, and the bed he shared with his brothers.

Is it possible that this is all he did with his childhood? There were no memories of toys or books. The only dogs he ever saw crept like rats through the gutters. There must have been a smelter nearby. Red dust settled in puddles and sweltered like blood in the streets. Everything was damp. He was ill with it; slow fire burned in his lungs.

He lived and died in something called a slum. The word 'slum' is derived from the word 'slump', which meant a low-lying mire, the kind of ground on which many of them were built. A slump also came to mean a depression, emotional or economic. Words have a truth, an extra meaning in them, like potatoes in a sack.

I am more confused by Miss Austen now. Was she heartless or merely unaware of the Stephens of her world? Perhaps her silence was a form of modesty. Or was it timorousness? A woman in that time could fall to great depths. Miss Austen does not lie about that. Perhaps she was afraid for herself. Is that why whenever she heard someone coming, Miss Austen leapt up from her work and hid it?

I still want desperately to know if Stephen found the broken thread.

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One final ghost.

The discovery of still another memory was announced, and Mother beamed that it might be of special interest to

me. I agreed, and the memory came.

Suddenly I was walking down the streets of another village, not Chawton, but one similar. It was, I am sure, the 19th century, very clearly. Earlier possibly even that that, though it would be difficult to prove. The long straight dresses were out of focus and the surrounding village strangely dim. Whoever it was paid little attention to clothing and architecture. She was interested instead in faces. The tape was a procession of them. Each face was pounced upon and held until it yielded up some secret.

This was an iron mind, and a hungry one. The 'I' in it had been erased, or put away, rather, like an old crushed keep-sake in a drawer. It gave no hint of its name, peering intently into every face.

And in every face it saw something different. A swagger of humour there; a wizened and proud solemnity here; there the pursed lips of someone exhausted by her own weakness. The faces were lined and rugged; they had weathered things, like stones. I envied them. They laughed, over nothing. There was something self-assured and calm about them, like lions.

I have begun *Sense and Sensibility*. I will save it, really save it. I have a suspicion whose ghost it was I encountered today. Mother must think me crazy.

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It has been seven days since I last wrote in this diary. I have been taping all that time. Never before has the translation of a novel taken so long. It is unprecedented. Continually blotted out parts of it and imagined them again. Writers used to do that, to clear away the fog of hazy words. So should Translators revise and edit. We are lazy. Everything is sacrificed for immediacy. We leave smudges across our dreams and our characters change faces suddenly. Mine do not. Marianne remains Marianne. I have given her curly hair and a chin that is slightly too large. Hints of crow's feet appear around her eyes by the end of the novel. I have pulled other details into view. I forced myself to hear every spoken word; to see each movement of the hands, to even







smell, as far as I was able, beech trees and roses and varnished furniture. I conjured them up from the Grid, just to feel them.

Which is not to say that I have been faithful to Jane Austen, except in spirit. I concentrate on meaningful images and revealing entrances of characters, rather than on clumsily translated descriptions. These things I have learned from translating plays. I have also shortened the story, removed characters and whole sub-plots, cut background information. In a tape you can let people know things without telling them. It is a form all of its own, and deserves respect.

I have great circles under my eyes from lack of sleep. I don't mind. Mother gave me a facial overlay to hide them, but I ordered it away. Let them see my circles. I am proud of them. I shall surely sleep tonight.

Mother have rejected the tape. Child Bri tried to tell me as gently as he could, but he fumbled with his words and resorted finally to beaming me his measured sympathy. He is not an unintelligent man, but he looks like a panda, and speaks like one. 'Is good. Is clear. Is too much you!' was the best he could manage.

Mother Fen himself followed, in his monkish robes. He, being a Reader, had been sent to give me a more literate explanation. 'Good day, Child Rold,' he said, extending his hand in the ancient greeting. 'You are well?' He did not use his Communicator. It glinted dead and sinister behind his ear, like a tooth.

'As well as I might be,' I replied.

'Child Bri has informed you of Mother's decision?' he asked, sympathetically, and settled next to me. 'We are sorry.' Words for him are made out of metal and have sharp little points. His voice is always even. 'We recognise the fluency of your tape and its technical excellence. I would say, speaking for myself, that it contains some of the finest

detail work I have ever swallowed. But certain other requirements have not been satisfied. You have deleted whole portions of the artifact and have substantially altered others. This is not pleasing to Mother. She do not consider it a precise translation.'

'But everyone simplifies!'

'It is necessary in some cases, yes. But your tape is not so much a simplified translation as an adaptation. A Translator's duty is to preserve, not to modify or to create.'

'You mean that I have actually said something.'

He paused, to re-phrase what I'd said. 'Your own feelings have been allowed to flavour the tape, certainly. This is the problem. It expresses something very personal. An attitude to the past perhaps.'

'But art consists of saying something personal!'

'Exactly.' He nodded as though we had never disagreed. 'A translation, after all, is not a vehicle for one man's feelings. We have no need for art now. All men are artists.'

'Are they? They tape, yes, and Communicate, yes, and spew up dreams all over the Grid. But an artist dreams of things that have a meaning for everyone. Like these old books! Why are we resurrecting them?'

He smiled slightly. 'To preserve them. Don't you think they deserve to be preserved?'

'They deserve to be read.'

'Perhaps. But Reading is a dead form of communication. Mother don't have the right to force people to read.' He leant forward. 'Child Rold, Mother are not trying to deprive you of anything. I have been authorised to offer you another opportunity to translate the book.'

'What will happen to my tape?'

'It can be filed with the other private tapes, if you wish.'

'It will be lost then, won't it? Cheapened.'

He still smiled. 'Art is cheap. The standards Mother maintain are high.'

I look at his blank and perfect face, and I hated him. 'Mother cheapen,' I replied, the words gurgling in my throat like a snarl. 'Everything.'

'Would you care to re-translate the book,' he repeated.

'No,' I growled. 'No, I would not.' He rose with a silent nod and left.

Art is not cheap. It is purchased with tears and loneliness and long aching hours. Mother do not understand. She have given my book to Hayre, Hayre of Green Gables! He'll give the woman long, wild hair and sandals. Their faces will be suntanned and dreamy and pleasant. No threat of destitution will shadow them; no quirks will mar the perfection of their lips and brows. Everything Jane Austen lived and felt will be honeyed over. And Mother will call it an act of preservation! I had forgotten words could lie.

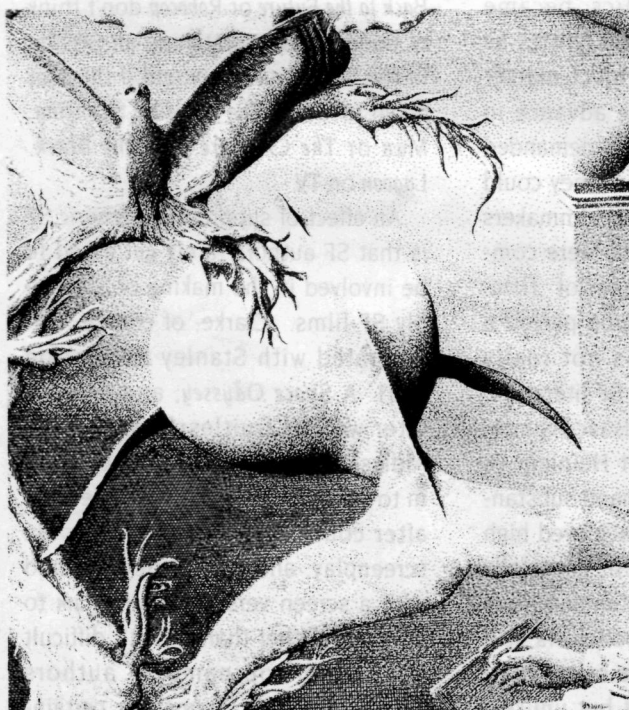
Went for a walk on the Grid, to get away from the Decks. This was once a barren, rocky world until we came and coated it with a carpet of grass that never grows and a blue

sky with clouds that never rain. In the grass, and around the world's circumference run metal strips. Some run north to south, and others east to west, and where they cross, there is a Cord. The word is short for Co-ordinate. Again, the magic imprecision of words! For these Cords do bind us to our Mother! Through them comes everything we need, or want. Some Cords specialise, and are set aside for Food, Health or Transportation. Delicate buildings balance over them on stilts. The Decks themselves, open to the air like a ship, rest on a Cord. All others are given over to Sport. So they call it.

A man summoned up a woman, and to satisfy his jaded palate, ordered that she be one-legged. A gaggle of Lumpens rolled in a sensuous sea of crême caramel that had come bubbling out of the ground. A child, naked and fat, demanded a dog, and ordered it to love him. It crawled up out from the Grid plate, a tiny creature with a long body and short, struggling legs. Its eyes were bright with trust and eagerness. But the child didn't like the animal. Perhaps it was the wrong colour. Perhaps it was too real and smelt a bit of fur and wet tongue. 'Go back!' the child commanded. In the very act of running towards its master, the dog was dissolved in light and Re-absorbed.

Tapeworms spotted the plains, like cattle. There are more of them now. Mother are getting worried. Blinded by the tapes they swallow continuously, they sit staring ahead for days at a time, their eyes like stones. They forget to eat. Mother put food into their stomachs. They forget to blink, and their faces stream with tears. They look like a silent chorus for the dead. My work does this to them. We have been robbed of decent, useful labour.

I suddenly longed for seagulls, and there were seagulls, but it was not the same as the memories I had swallowed of finding them wild and free on rocky coasts. I transmitted to Forests, where Mother had designated Forests to be. I



hoped to wander among plants and the fleeting shadows of birds. But there was a hunt on, and men with rifles were shooting deer and Simulant savages. The men's faces hung limply on their skulls, lighting up only for that instant when death exploded from their hands.

Why has success diminished us? Mother say we are free, finally free to develop our human potential. I see no development. I see greed and sloth and poverty of spirit. Do we need hardship to make us noble? If so, what a terrible conundrum is all of human life and human politics. For who could condone the deliberate creation of pain and oppression as a means of human improvement? Yet I wished suffering on those people. I wanted to break open their boredom and their complacency like scabs.

There is an old story in a book that has not been translated. A man destroyed a flock of waterfowl by giving the birds more fish than they could eat. The males turned on each other; the females forgot their nests and ate their young. The colony died out within a year. Nothing worth having is ever given. Perhaps that is why we destroyed the Earth, and why we want to rebuild it as our own. Then word 'Earth' meant soil, along with water, the source of life. Life also is a gift, and we destroy that, too.

On my desert world, they have resurrected Paris as it was in the 20th century. I wonder if they resurrected the German occupation as well. I was born a cripple. They gave me new legs, but I am still a cripple inside. I have never loved or cried or touched a real flower, or ploughed the earth in the hot sun. I work my long lonely day in the Decks, pouring dreams down the gullet of the great machine, though there is no need for me to work so hard. What expiation have I undertaken and why? What sins are mine that must be redeemed?



I have had a dream this night, a real one. I was skimming over the surface of the sea, and the sun was running with me, on the waves. The water was lime green, and underneath it, just ahead of me, something vast and white and dim was swimming. Suddenly it rose up towards the surface, and my chest clenched like a fist. Its skin was mottled: I could see the ripples of light cast by the waves on its back. But then it subsided back into the depths, a fleeting shadow, a ghost. I knew that the sun and I would chase it forever.



THE DIARY OF THE TRANSLATOR © 1991 GEOFF RYMAN

Geoff Ryman writes: *This story did me a lot of harm. It was the first short story I wrote and it sold and so I thought that all I would have to do is write the next story in the same way. It took seven years to learn otherwise. The key ingredient was a certain force of inspiration. I got the idea on the way to a party. The idea as such was not a notion, but a tone of voice, which grew words, rather like a tree grows leaves. I kept reciting the words en route to the party, and during the party (I never was much fun at parties). At the party I took a pencil and a pad, and wrote the story during the trip back.*

*This is substantially what appeared in print. It went through many other drafts, nearly killing the story, before finally falling back on a second or third draft.*


*I still nearly kill stories through revision. I still have a childish faith in inspiration. I still write stories in which things are read for people without effort, without pain. Some people never learn.*





# A GENRE TOO FAR HOLLYWOOD AND SF

Keith Knight



**T**he ITV programme Saturday Night at the Movies invited viewers last year to nominate their top film of the Eighties. Although my choice — *Heimat* — didn't show, the results were nevertheless interesting. The top three films (all we were vouchsafed) were *Aliens*, *Back to the Future*, and *E.T.-The Extraterrestrial*: all films with science fiction topics, respectively, future combat in a 'bash the aliens' mode, time travel and alien on Earth. What does this mean? Can it be that the viewers of Saturday Night at the Movies are all rabid SF fans, incapable of considering anything outside the genre to be worthy of their votes?

For me, the answer lies elsewhere. These three films were big budget Hollywood productions — although, in the case of *ET*, not too big — all made by directors fresh from earlier successes, which garnered critical praise and, certainly by the time they reached British shores, strong word of mouth recommendation. They were all technically adept, with an air of vitality about them and even, despite *Aliens* being a sequel, a certain freshness: they all used well-worn SF plots, but burnished in a way that made them glint anew. And, although all indubitably SF films, they became immensely popular because they weren't marketed as

such and because the mass of the film-going public — and probably many who voted for them — didn't regard them as SF.

This paradox has been at the heart of Hollywood filmmaking since *Star Wars* tore up the rule book in 1977 and put SF subjects into the forebrain of every studio head. Most years since then have seen films with SF or fantasy subjects register high in the annual box office reckoning. Many reasons have been put forward for the success of *Star Wars* and its ilk: that an increasingly young cinema-going audience, weaned on SF topics on television and in comics, became self-perpetuating in the Eighties as more films with SF subject matter were released; that the advance in special effects techniques demanded films to be made in which they could be displayed; or that the filmmakers with power and influence were committed to these types of film. However, during the same period a similar revolution has not really occurred in the field of SF literature. True, some authors — Isaac Asimov, Arthur C. Clarke, Robert Heinlein — have been able to command substantial advances and have achieved high sales, but the mass of SF, especially that which is better written and more challenging in its approach, is still only achieving moderate sales, guaranteed a certain market but unlikely

ever to stride en masse into the hearts and pockets of the book buying public.

For someone who knows and cares about science fiction, to talk to the average person who picks up an SF book in WH Smith or the library can be a galling experience. Most of these people know little about the history of the genre or its current trends and what's more they don't care or want to know. Mention Sterling, Delany or Crowley to the average Douglas Adams reader and you'll get a blank stare; lend them examples and all too often they're returned with comments that they'd rather stick to what they know than read this demanding stuff. SF as a genre to the average SF reader is a no-no: they happen to read it but they don't view themselves as SF fans, only as someone who happens to read SF. And so with SF films. For a Hollywood film with a megabudget riding on its back to be labelled a Science Fiction film, while not necessarily being a box-office kiss of death would certainly lead to diminished revenues. It's noticeable that SF is never mentioned in the marketing: adverts tend to gloss over any reference to the genre even when the subject matter is palpable. And for this reason, most of the millions who see *Back to the Future* or *Robocop* don't think of themselves as watching an SF film in the way that they would if they sat down to watch *The Incredible Shrinking Man* or *The Creature from the Black Lagoon* on TV.

An effect of suppressing generic SF is that SF authors rarely get asked to be involved in the making of ostensibly SF films. Clarke, of course, collaborated with Stanley Kubrick on 2001: *A Space Odyssey*, and Kubrick later worked fruitlessly with Brian Aldiss; William Gibson was brought in to script *Alien III* but has bowed out after continual tampering with his screenplay; and John Varley tinkered with a screen version of *Millenium* to no avail. Other than this it's difficult to think of top-name SF authors being involved in filmmaking, certain-


ly in the post-*Star Wars* era. Gibson's experience is probably symptomatic. Hollywood, with its constant compromises and eye for the lowest common denominator doesn't know what to do with the genre's major authors and prefers to eke out its own notions of SF which usually hark back to SF's misnamed 'golden age' and Sixties' TV series. As Samuel R Delany said of *Star Wars*: 'It brings the SF film up to about the Lensman stage'. By the same token one could compare *Aliens* with *Starship Troopers* and *Back to the Future* with *By His Bootstraps* as modern reworkings of SF's staple plots.

But this is to ignore the fact that, given their limitations, these are highly effective films, mainly because their filmmakers take the genre seriously and have a belief in it. Directors like Spielberg, Kubrick, Zemeckis, James Cameron and Ridley Scott have all produced challenging work from within the Hollywood system. Meanwhile, in the independent

**T**hey all used well-worn SF plots, but burnished them in a way that made them glint anew.

sector filmmakers are working with the freedom to express themselves fully in generic terms without the need to make concessions. This has most obviously borne fruit in the associated horror and fantasy fields, with the films of George A. Romero, David Cronenberg, David Lynch and

Larry Cohen, but it is encouraging to see John Carpenter return to small-scale filmmaking after a somewhat compromised spell in Hollywood. And even in the UK the occasional SF film breaks the surface, usually — like Peter Greenaway's *The Falls* and Peter Wooler's *Friendship's Death* — from experimental filmmakers on a very low budget.

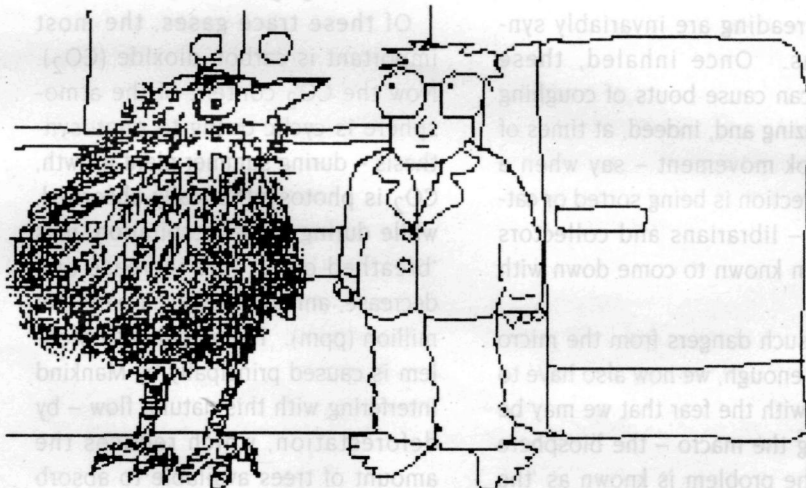
Apart from the occasional rarity, we will probably never get SF films released to a mass public which combine the intellectual vision of the best SF writing with the production values required to bring the vision to fruition. The best we can hope for is one or the other — and while films of the quality of *The Terminator*, *Mad Max 2*, *Robocop* and *The Fly* are released, I suppose we ought to be happy. But we can yearn for uncompromised adaptations of Gibson's *Neuromancer*, Jonathan Carroll's *A Child Across the Sky*, or anything by Philip K. Dick. Can't we? 

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To me as a scientist, the term 'green' indicates electromagnetic radiation of half a micrometre's wavelength; or it has until now. As an 'environmental' scientist, I am ever more bemused by some of the strange ideas paraded as 'environmentally sound'. But as a science fiction fan and book collector, I was astounded to be told book collecting was a hazard to our planet!

Naturally, as a book collector, I take my 'hobby' seriously. It is, after all, a daring pastime, as risky as mountain climbing, or hang-gliding. Even the simple act of opening a book can be dangerous.

Though not a pervert, I am a compulsive book sniffer. There is nothing quite like the aroma of a solid hard-back tome: but, according to a recent report<sup>1</sup> of a paper first published in the *British Medical Journal* (BMJ), this is hazardous to health. Accompanying the olfactory pleasure is the possibility of microbiological attack from *Aspergillus versicolor* and *Penicillium ver-rocosum*. These are moulds that grow in little-used books, waiting for the unsuspecting browser to come along and breathe – and veteran book collectors will bear witness that breathing and reading are invariably synchronous. Once inhaled, these moulds can cause bouts of coughing and sneezing and, indeed, at times of peak book movement – say when a book collection is being sorted or catalogued – librarians and collectors have been known to come down with a fever.

As if such dangers from the micro were not enough, we now also have to contend with the fear that we may be damaging the macro – the biosphere itself. The problem is known as 'the greenhouse effect'. The so-called 'greenhouse gases' in the atmosphere do the important job of keeping the planet warm; without them Earth would be a cool -25°C. Unfortunately, any significant rise in their quantity warms the Earth too much for our liking, and might cause agricultural belts to shift and low lying areas to be flooded by seas rising as the polar ice caps melt and the seas thermally

# The GREENING of SF BOOK COLLECTING

Jonathan Cowie

expand. Of course, with all the 'green' hype, you knew that. Even so, it is worth remembering, as John Gribbin points out<sup>2</sup>, that we knew of the importance of trace gases to climate as long ago as the 1860s.

Of these trace gases, the most important is carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>). Now the CO<sub>2</sub> content of the atmosphere is cyclic owing to photosynthesis – during summer plant growth, CO<sub>2</sub> is photosynthetically absorbed, while during winter respiration, it is 'breathed out'. This increase and decrease, annually, is seven parts per million (ppm). The greenhouse problem is caused principally by Mankind interfering with this natural flow – by deforestation, which reduces the amount of trees available to absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere; and by burning the resulting wood or wood products, along with fossil fuels, which increases the amount of carbon dioxide put into the atmosphere.

By burning fossil fuel alone, our species has already added significantly to the atmospheric reservoir of CO<sub>2</sub>. Currently, in 1990, the atmospheric concentration of carbon dioxide is about 354 ppm (extrapolated

from 1988 figures<sup>3</sup>). This represents an increase of 84 ppm over the pre-industrial level of 270 ppm, as measured from air bubbles trapped in polar ice. During the 1980s the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere increased by about three billions of tons of carbon (btC) per annum. This compares with roughly 100 btC being taken out and 100 returned through photosynthesis and respiration of living things. The burning of fossil fuels contributes 5.6 btC annually<sup>4</sup> which is, in part, counter-balanced by an unknown quantity probably being absorbed by plankton in the oceans (British scientists are currently examining this theory).

The part of the equation argued, by some, as being a reason to ease up on book collecting is that between one and three million tons of carbon enter the atmosphere each year as a result of deforestation. Everyone knows that paper comes from wood pulp, and wood from trees. Consequently, the inference is drawn that the production of books is not a 'green' activity. But, as I have already indicated, there is a difference between what a lay 'green' believes and what an environmental scientist understands.

Most timber is burnt. Firewood is still the most common energy source for the majority of the World's population. But even the wood which is turned into paper is a problem in most cases. Your average daily newspaper, by definition lasts only a day (and in the UK more paper is sold as newspaper than as books). Old newspapers are used to light fires, thrown out with the rubbish and burnt in municipal incinerators, or, at the very best, buried with the rubbish in landfill sites where they decompose into, yes, you guessed it, carbon dioxide (and methane, a minor but more potent greenhouse gas). Newspapers should therefore be recycled. Equally, anyone who writes letters or memos, or produces governmental reports, political manifestos, mail shots and all the other junk destined for the bin, should use recycled paper



— which in turn should be recycled.

Conversley, book collectors, be they professionals such as librarians, or amateurs such as SF fans, are the only paper consumers being environmentally friendly in terms of the greenhouse effect, in that they provide a banking service for carbon. Although some greens may not agree, books are 100% environmentally friendly. The sums go like this. Half a dozen average 350 page paperbacks weigh roughly a kilogram. Thus a reasonable sized collection of, say, 2,000 books weighs 350 kilos, of which 40% (or 140 kilos) is carbon—carbon which is not drifting about in the atmosphere as part of a greenhouse gas. Naturally, the bigger your collection, the more safe carbon you have stacked on your shelves (and this is not to mention the shelves themselves). In this way, a library acts much like a tree (or, if it's big enough, a copse) in that it stores carbon in a safe form. Roughly 2,000,000,000,000 tons of carbon are stored by plants and animals throughout the World — but nobody has yet estimated how much is locked up in libraries. So look at your book collection with pride. Far from compounding the greenhouse problem, by extracting carbon from the cycle and storing it safely, book collecting actively reduces it.

The real problem with deforestation is that the majority of trees cut down are never replaced. Even developed countries, which should know better (and can afford to be better), do not replace all the trees they fell. Canada only replants nine out of ten trees felled, while in third world countries such as India, the ratio is a low as three out of ten.

And yet young growing trees (at the end of the year) absorb far more carbon from the atmosphere than the mature trees which are lost. So, when a tree is cut down to make books, there is no problem if the books are stored in libraries. Replacing it with a sapling *should* then be a matter of course; that would be the ideal situation, and it is here would-be greens

should be pointing their fingers.

There are other environmental benefits to book collecting. Books have excellent thermal insulation properties. A wall of books in one's living room makes a good insulator. It also acts as a short term reservoir of heat, which can help to average out temperature changes in winter which are caused by, for instance, briefly opening the door. Additional insulation can be achieved by leaving a gap between the books and the wall. A book collector's house with the books judiciously arranged can save considerable amounts of heat, and thus also save fossil fuel, which means in turn that less CO<sub>2</sub> will be generated. The potential savings for Britain from energy conservation were first highlighted by Leach's Low Energy Strategy<sup>5</sup>, a prophetic work still very relevant today. Britain's space heating bill could be cut by as much as 30% if we all used insulation. Here, your book collector is already ahead of the game with ready-made insulation installed.

**D**o not  
let a green tell you that you  
are contributing to the  
destruction of your planet.

On a more abstract level, SF book collectors can claim true environmental credibility. In the 1970s, a report called *The Limits to Growth*<sup>6</sup> was published which, though flawed, added much impetus to the academic environmental movement. This was the one which pointed out that Earth's resources were finite, and drew the conclusion that we could not continue our business-as-usual approach to life indefinitely. Its opening pages surmise that the root of the global environmental problem lies finally in the way people perceive the world and their relation to it. The average

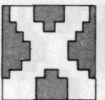
person, the report says, thinks mostly about life for their family; gives a daily thought for events in their town; less for regional news; and less still for national events. For happenings overseas, we need a special effort, things like 'Band Aid', to galvanise action. In terms of time, most people think regularly about what they are going to do tomorrow, fewer of what they will do in, say, ten years times, and fewer still of what their grandchildren will be doing. But SF as a genre deals with just such remote issues as a matter of course. It is primarily concerned with events in the future, and even on other worlds. Thus SF readers habitually think in the far-reaching terms necessary to proper ecological awareness.

Finally, Dr Jack Cohen, in his book *The Privileged Ape*<sup>7</sup>, puts forward the idea that SF has its uses as an educational medium. An intriguing thought. After all, advertisers have found SF useful, and would not continue to use it unless it worked; so why should educationalists not similarly use SF to gain access to minds that are not so much closed as not even aware that they could be open?

In terms of environmental issues, then, it is plain that SF book collectors are in many ways well ahead of those who fail to enjoy the written word. So, whatever happens, do not let a green, masquerading as an environmentalist, tell you that you are contributing to the destruction of your planet. You are not. You are contributing to its salvation. Rather, it is the greens who are parasites, who live off and disseminate hype and misinformation, along with the moulds like *Aspergillus versicolor* which corrupt our books and give us the sniffles, that we should beware of.

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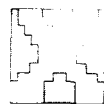
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PAGES FROM  
THE DIARY OF  
*Colin Greenland*

# COWARDICE AND CAPRICE



30

**p**ootling about with this as I am, at the end of 1990, I suppose I should put something about the tyrant Thatcher. My part in her downfall. Frankly, I can't be bothered. I have been that reduced. Her power to do this, to shout and resist and ignore opposition, to wear down all stubbornness in others, has been the mainspring of her reign. Like even *Taureans*, man.

When she arrived, I was a hippy. I was out of university, out of work, out of love. I gave some thought to simultaneously justifying and abbreviating the rest of my life by committing it to her assassination. It was a good time for great, gloomy dreams.

Since then I have jettisoned idealism, sold my Steve Hillage albums, cut my hair, got my act together and turned into a glib, corrupt, cynical, shifty-eyed opportunist who phones up BBC producers for a bit of a natter. I have an investment account. I have an *aluminium briefcase*.

She won.

If you write little short paragraphs like that, you can soon fill a column.

So then. Political comment. Something gnomic, resonant.

They say he looks like Joe 90.

Margaret Thatcher is Sylvia Anderson.

Science fiction is the literature of paranoia. In America, they think it is the literature of power. They think it really is about The Future! Pessimistic, they call us. Downbeat. We sneer and turn our backs. If they only knew our secret identity.

Here's my sf prediction, my scenario for The Future.

The Iron Lady will walk again. Keep watching the streets. Look there, there, beyond the river. Me, I'll be in here with my p.c. and my autoreverse walkman and my gas fire. In fact, I think it's time I made another pot of tea. Anything rather than working.



People who don't read it think writing sf must be easy because you just make everything up. In fact, it's difficult because you have to. This reflection recurs to me while I'm working on a story for *The Weerde*, the second of the Midnight Rose 'shared world' anthologies. Before long now my hapless heroine must experience something that allows us to understand that the unpleasant people detaining her are not mere hillbillies but actually members of a hidden race. The world is not

**M**argaret  
*Thatcher is Sylvia Anderson*

as she, or we, supposed it to be. The whole of history is different.

Fortunately I don't have to rewrite the whole of history, human and otherwise, because the Midnight Rose team have made it up already. All I have to do is that node of history that impinges on a reluctant visitor to a scuzzy mobile home in a forest in Maine c.1966. Well, I suppose you can just put ' "Aliens!" she screamed. "You're aliens! Keep away from me! Aaagghhh!!!" ' But I always thought there should be more to it than that.

Actually, the fact that the whole of history has been written for you, or more precisely that it is being written for you, by the other contributors to the book, the cover designer and artist, the copywriter, the marketing department of Penguin and you yourself, gentle reader — all this invisible and, frankly, haphazard collaboration changes the way you write that encounter. You know it does. You do, if you're mad enough to be writing sf in the first place.



My brother Martin tells me a friend of his from university days has a story in *Interzone*. His second story in print this year; the first was in a book of short stories, Martin thinks it was something about computers. 'Digital Dreams edited by David V. Barrett', I say. He is most surprised. 'Have you got it?' he asks. 'No,' I say. 'NEL don't send me books.'

Which is actually pretty terrible, I suppose. I mean, that if I didn't get a book free, as a publicity handout, then I haven't got it.

I went to see *An Angel at My Table* the other night with my friend Fiona McIntosh, it was brilliant, we wanted it to go on hours longer, I can't imagine anyone who wouldn't be absolutely spellbound by it, but anyway, the thing was, I saw Nigel Floyd there, who is a full-time professional film journalist. And I was most surprised. And he was, if anything, slightly embarrassed.

He explained to Fiona: 'If you see four or five previews a week, and you miss one, you tend not to catch the film.'

He said: 'Once a film's out on

release, it's too late.'

Which is a bit like me and books. Once a book is actually published, I'm almost certainly reading next month's book, to review somewhere. Or if I'm not reviewing that month, then I'm reading Charles Dickens or Marguerite Duras or Patrick Leigh Fermor; or catching up on things I missed when they got published and got away.

I've just been ill, you don't want to know about that, but while I was ill I read:

Peter Ackroyd's *Hawksmoor* (Great stuff, but I was a bit let down at the end. When I realised there was a detective, halfway through, I thought there was going to be a plot.)

William Goldman's *Edged Weapons* (Thrillers, if they're not too convoluted, are just what I need when I'm feverish. Goldman, like Kurt Vonnegut, and Terry Pratchett, is a pastoral writer. I mean they write like shepherds, leading you through the story, pointing out what you need to know and giving you a running commentary on every pass and making sure it's okay with you before they do the next one. Perfect when you need good strong primary-coloured, primary-emotional entertainment but your eyeballs ache and your brain is a stew of paracetamol and pain. Mind you, I still don't see who shot Cyrus Kinnick. Or whose finger it was in the envelope.)

Joan Didion's *Democracy* (The style looks a bit like Vonnegut, non-linear, pseudo-documentary, ex-journalist farting around writing about herself writing the book you're reading but got it's good. Tough to follow with a fever but the clarity when you get in there is appalling, stunning. The dialogue is better, sharper, funnier, more painful than anyone's. And the blood, the sensitivity that wells up in the spaces in between the terse clips. The book is just like its heroine, seems to be so passive and spaced out and superficial and disengaged, then the conviction gradually overwhelms you that this woman is one of the strongest, most impressive and dignified and enduring people you've ever met. Read about, I mean read about.)

## My computer made me a lab mouse.

David Zindell's *Neverness* (Actually I only got a quarter of the way in, the hero foolishly but boldly commits himself to the Ultimate Quest and meets the Ultimate Entity, well so he did that, she gave him a poetry test and even though he only knew two of them, he got all three right, one because he had this Mystical Awareness and the other, the catch question, because she gave him another try. Beware books that line up the Ultimates at the beginning. After that, there's only one way it can go. So macho, too, that, all talk and no trousers.)

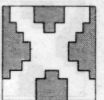
J. G. Ballard's *The Day of Creation* (Pish, tush, the critics who said it was a 'dwindling of imagination' after *Empire of the Sun*. This is echt, prime Ballard, right in there with *The Drought* and *The Drowned World*, with more maturity than them, more bedrock solidity beneath the airy paradoxes and visionary conceits. I do wish he wouldn't use the word 'already' in every paragraph, though. Once or twice a page is enough already.)

All these books except the Zindell and the Ballard I bought. With my own money. Second-hand.

So anyway, what I was going to say was, I haven't read *Digital Dreams* edited by David V. Barrett with my brother's friend's story in, and I haven't even got a copy, so my brother is somewhat more impressed than he should be that I guessed right. He says, 'How on earth did you know that?'

Well, how do I?

It's hard to explain to the rest of the world how much sf is what in the 60s we called a 'scene', a network, a sub-culture, with a social side to everything. I first heard about David Barrett's idea for a computer anthology from David himself, on 18th March 1986, when he was trying to get *Computer Weekly*, the magazine where he works, to publish it. He told me while





I was interviewing him, because he's a friend of mine, because I knew he could give me useful information to put in a book I was ghostwriting. 'Yes of course I'd be interested in writing a story for your anthology,' I told him, because I'm a friend of his, because anyway you do. 'Yes of course you can use my name.'

London is the capital city of the sf subculture, as it is of publishing, as it is of the country. You don't have to be crushed up against the bar in the Wellington Arms at Waterloo on the first Thursday of every month to participate (my brother's friend isn't), but that's where I was thinking about this the other night. Given fair publishing weather (like we've had here the last few years, sales figures notwithstanding), fandom is fertile. There at the Wellington was David Barrett, giving a cheque to Paul Kincaid for his computer story, and Alex Stewart was there, giving a cheque to David Barrett, or was it Paul who was giving a cheque to Alex, I forget. Just in case you get the idea we have a little clique going here, keeping the power and the money circulating nicely between ourselves, I point out that no one was giving a cheque to me. Harrumph.

Robert Holdstock once gave me a cheque at the Wellington. He said, 'Welcome to *Other Edens*,' and he shook me by the hand. He did, he actually did. A great man for the old rituals, is our Rob.

Anyway, what I thought was, Here are three men, now professional editors and writers, who were all originally fans, maybe they feel they still are. I know *Interzone* supremo David Pringle feels he's still a fan, he said so on Radio 4. There was me trying, in the nicest possible way, to drag Kaleidoscope's circle of vision away from the compulsives amongst us with their phasers and their inflatable pink pterodactyls — I was trying to talk about science fiction, that it is powerful stuff because you can, you have to make up a new universe each time on page one, and there was David Pringle saying, "Fan" is a label they wear proudly. We wear proudly.

This devotion, this pride, is unfathomable to me, partly because I hate to think what I might find lurking at the bottom of it. Who is this we? Who is this person who speaks so cheerfully and assertively on their behalf? I wasn't there, I never signed anything, honest. But I do know the existence of fans is a source of creativity and connection and support no other writers can even imagine, let alone enjoy. Would I mind reading a story to a bunch of people in a pub and coming for a curry afterwards? Why not? Will I come to a party you're holding one weekend in this big posh hotel, you'll pay for my room and my fare and buy me lots of drinks and listen to me talk? I'm on my way. May you use my name as a potential contributor to your anthology *Great SF Stories about Skinks*? Too right my son.

I remember when *Digital Dreams* was possible, unlikely, being discussed, being shelved. I had one (1) idea for a story, based on the time I looked up from playing my first ever reflex game on my very own brand new p.c. and realised it was nearly 3 a.m. and I wasn't even enjoying myself. Change your life with technology. My computer made me a lab mouse. Cheese tomorrow, just keep pressing that button.

So I wrote a couple of notes for a story about a nerd who buys the ultimate computer game and disappears inside it, along with his friends and family and the whole world, really. Not terribly original, I grant you, but intense. Interesting fugues. But when the *Digital Dreams* invitation letter finally arrived, it said, 'No stories about computer games that become real.' I said Oh and closed the file.

Some time later, deadline approaching, David said: 'You haven't sent me a story for *Digital Dreams*.' I told him why. He said, 'Oh, write it anyway.' So I wrote it anyway. And he rejected it anyway. 'It's a story about a computer game that becomes real,' he apologised, handsomely, 'and there are too many of those already. It's the best story about a computer game becoming real that I've read,' he said, pouring balm on all possible resentment.

Which poses another problem. Is this wonderful vital fecund community also a hothouse, packing too many blooms into a confined spacer and speeding up the seasons? 'Drinking Buddies', Wayne Allen Sallee's not-at-all-bad little story about a serial killer subculture in *Journal Wired 3*, has no impact if you've read Neil Gaiman's serial killer convention in *Sandman*, which is scarcely Sallee's fault.

Unless he foolishly told Neil his idea a while ago, long enough ago for Neil to forget it was someone else's and think he was making it up. The way I did with one I found in a story of Mary Gentle's. A prize for the sharp-witted reader who spots it! Void where Colin has already told you this absolutely fascinating story once, twice probably, knowing me.

When I'm writing, deep in, writing something because I need to rather than because I've been asked to, I think I probably go a bit mad. This is 'Love, Helen' now, the last of my *Three Women* sequence, weird rather than Weerde. I'm walking around talking to myself. I do that constantly anyway, but now my maunderings take on a clipped, manic purposefulness. I get up later and later, my diet turns strange (spinach and baked beans seem to have featured prominently in the last weeks). I wear the same clothes for days on end or fail to get dressed at all. At these times pyjamas and a dressing gown seem to me the supreme products of civilisation. Considerations like haircuts are completely beyond me. I sit at my desk with the same tape (as it might be, Robbie Robertson/R.E.M. *Dead Letter Office*; or today, The Pixies *Surfer Rosa/Sonic Youth Goo*) going round and round, over and over. Switching to the radio, I find the words of the songs suddenly, cunningly, matching my story. I've just written the word 'shadows' and a song comes on with the word 'shadow' in it! Ha! Exactly.

If you phone me you're likely to get a bizarre epic three-hour Cinemascope answering machine message with a cast of thousands and quotes from



Milton. Be grateful. If you get me in person, I sound like someone who's just been discovered after fifty years on a Pacific atoll hiding from the Japanese. Either that or the universe is a chrysanthemum and I can prove it. I spent most of yesterday drawing a graph of multi-coloured lines, charting the time sequence of 'Love, Helen', one colour per phase, in units of a quarter of a page. Yes, yes, it's obvious! Too much brown in the fourth quintile, and there should be more grey everywhere, and one more bit of light blue, but only one.

This is the first time I've actually sat chuckling over a piece of paper with purple and brown stripes on it. I'm so dazzled by my own invention, my own ingenuity, that when the phone rings I recklessly answer it and babble enthusiastically to whoever it is about this new technique for finding out what you've been writing. Fortunately it's Peter Knight, who made me the Pixies tape. 'Oh, I'm always doing that,' he says. 'I make charts and graphs and diagrams. Then I don't write the story.' He advises me to play Throwing Muses albums, back to back, over and over, and I do, but it doesn't work. They don't use any of the right words.

Yesterday on Woman's Hour a haughty-sounding woman was reminiscing languidly about her time with 'anti-psychiatrist' Ronnie Laing in the 1960's, going into deep regression, finger-painting black breasts all over the wall. I bristle, deeply distrustful, remembering how we exalted infantile states, promoting spontaneous self-indulgence into an ethic as doctrinaire and orthodox as the suburban repressiveness it was supposed to replace. I think I don't like this woman because she's referring to her descent into hell as if it were a routine journey, something everyone did, you phoned up the AA and got a map.

In fact it isn't that at all. It's jealousy. This is my infantile state, mine, mine, mine. She's not having it.

An awful peeled pink tenderness sweeps over you when you're writing hard and deep. You turn into a prawn. A mention in *Critical Wave* that a

woman I hardly know is newly married fills me with a wrench of yearning and regret. A letter with a stranger's return address on the envelope makes me suspicious and afraid to open it. I read every word of a circular from CND asking for money; it strikes me as extremely sinister. I had another one last week, it touched me to the heart, I wrote a cheque, crying yes, go forth and stop the war. I can't control the emotion that surfaces, bleeding, I can't even dump it on anyone. All my girlfriends are away, scattered, out of reach, all gone at once on important trips to America, or facing their own real showdowns with loss and death. I am alone in here with the Pixies and a tin of spinach soup.

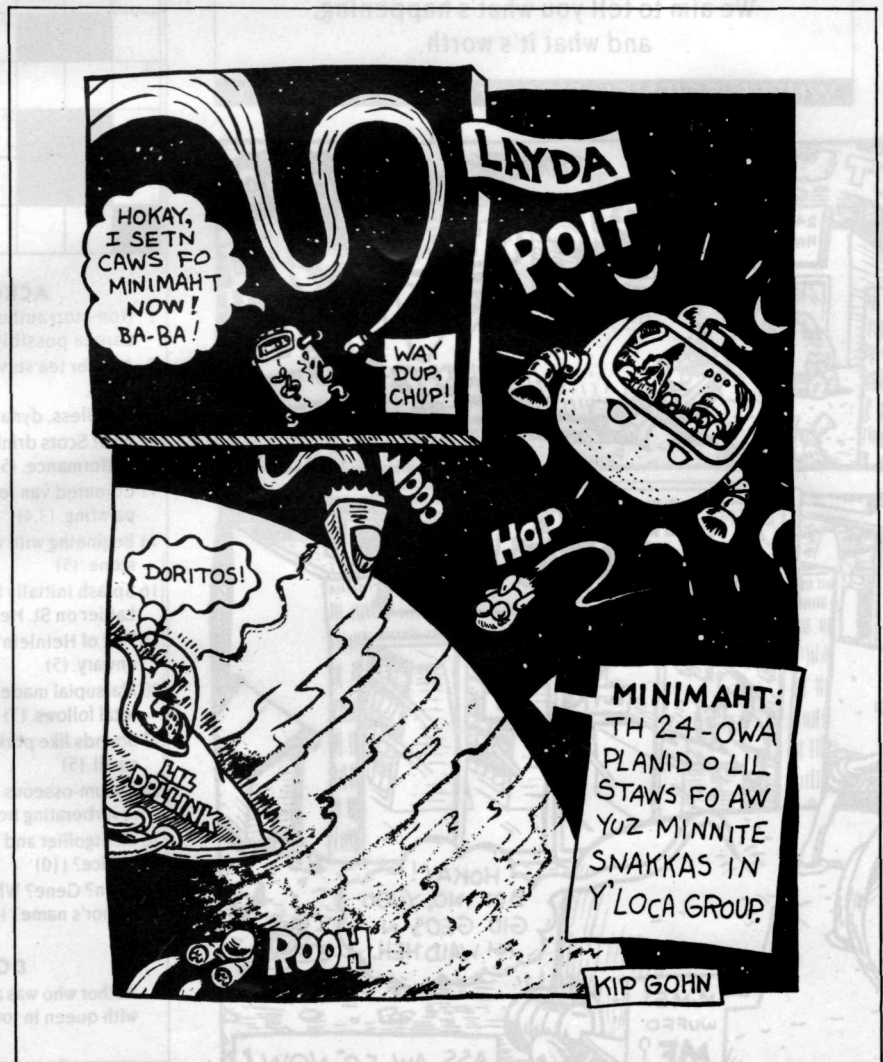
And a keyboard!

That's the trick.

Also in the post, two new books from Games Workshop: Ian Watson's *Inquisitor* and *Deathwing*, an anthology.

'Enter the war-torn universe of the 41st millenium.' The covers and illustrations are crude and helpless and wonderful, Megacity fascism, fanged skulls and portable missiles, brooding tyrants encased like super-reptiles in their exorbitant armour, scowling at the galaxies that sprawl at the feet of their cold marble thrones. Within, alien cities fling a bony arm across the gulf of light-years, beckoning the unwary space marine with hell drugs, the ecstasies of pain, the scented flesh of the courtesan-assassins. Tremulous with recognition I riffle the pages. Charles Stross, 'The Monastery of Death'. So this is Technogoth! "I fear that there are scant glad tidings for the Master of Temporal Administration," he said hesitantly. Yes, yes! I too hunger for this, in my anorak and peeling trainers, gazing wistfully in the bright window of the local comics shop. This innocence, this comfort.

COWARDICE AND CAPRICE © 1991 COLIN GREENLAND



DOCTO DECIMO FOD ONE © 1991 TK ALBERTON  
WATCH THESE SPACES IN BSELE TWO FOD TWO  
OF THIS EXCITING ADVENTURE IN SPACE



## NEXUS IN THE FUTURE

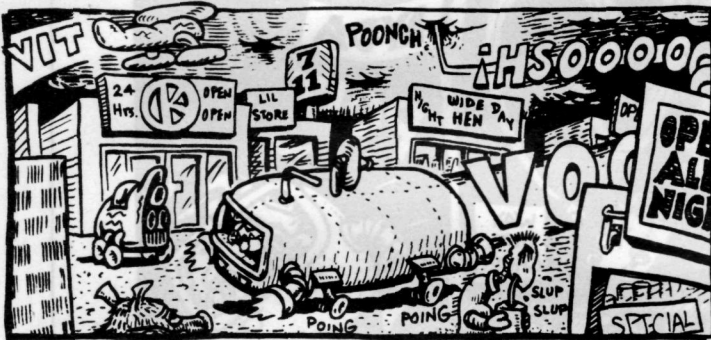
For our next issue, we already have an article from **Bob Shaw** about the mess computers are making of SF. Also, **Harry Harrison** has promised to point out some of the problems with Cyberpunk. We have a science article from **Paul Birch** which investigates the properties of resublimated thiotimeline, and points out **Dr Asimov's** experimental errors; regulars **Colin Greenland** and **Keith Knight** will be here, and **Geoff Ryman** is still promising a film column.

Fiction will be by **Scott Edelman**, who says his story has upset everyone he has shown it to, and newcomer **Jennifer Steele**, who manages an apocalypse with a big difference.

Also appearing in issue two of **NEXUS: THE USER'S GUIDE TO SCIENCE FICTION** This feature aims to make what is going on more accessible: it will feature listings of forthcoming events, books, tapes and whatever other news we can find, salted with reviews.

We aim to tell you what's happening,  
and what it's worth.

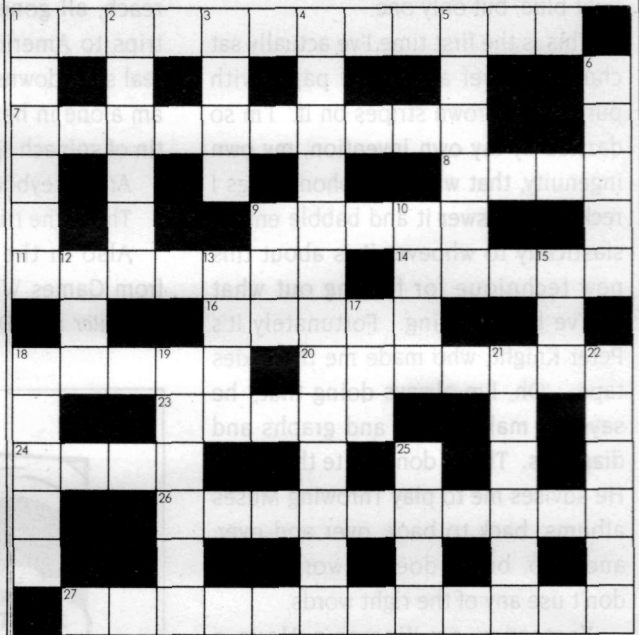
WHERE SCIENCE FICTION MEETS REALITY



## Welcome to the NEXUS SCIENCE FICTION prize crossword puzzle

As so many of you have a copious knowledge of the genre, we thought we'd give you a little fun with our cryptic SF crossword puzzle. To add a little interest, the first three correct solutions out of the hat on May 1st 1991 will win a year's subscription free.

And you don't have to mutilate your magazine to enter; if you want, send a photocopy of your final solution to  
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### ACROSS

- 1 Non-stop author - a.k.a. Jack L. Caren possibly. (5,1,6)
- 7 A silver tea served up by I ac. (6,4)
- 8 Merciless, dynastic baddie. (4)
- 9 What Scots drink? - a rousing performance. (5)
- 11 Coloured van for use in painting. (3,4)
- 14 Beginning with disturbed stone. (5)
- 16 Splash initially from Sterling Lanier on St. Helena. (5)
- 18 Part of Heinlein's footwear traps unwary. (5)
- 20 Marsupial made work - large total follows. (7)
- 23 Sounds like porker. My! he's small. (5)
- 24 Circum-osseous sound reverberating from TMD. (4)
- 26 Montgolfier and Branson - from Venice? (10)
- 27 Gean? Gene? What is this author's name? (6,6)
- 2 This land is cut off - or land is cut up. (6)
- 3 Did Delany win this novel British award? (4)
- 4 Poul's post-apocalyptic crazy, daft, morose day. (5,8)
- 5 Can CIA men make someone who sells his frozen assets. (6)
- 6 Ray is delighted when topped and tailed. (5)
- 9 Boy returns an Indian pulse. (3)
- 10 Pairs of moles and horses form this planetary feature. (4)
- 12 Tree creatures begin to entertain. (3)
- 13 See beginnings of extra-terrestrial siren Princess Yolande. (4)
- 15 Centre of thighbone gets the bird. (3)
- 17 See 13 down beheaded. (3)
- 18 JHKB's star-seeking mammal (or mammals)? (5)
- 19 Farthest point alternates from tan 'P' to a grey 'E'. (6)
- 21 Anderson's armorial novel. (6)
- 22 A cat - or another gray companion. (6)

### DOWN

- 1 Author who was a heartless beast with queen in tow. (6)
- 25 Wellsian race who come back in a cabriolet. (4)







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