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SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

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Ramsey Campbell story and interview



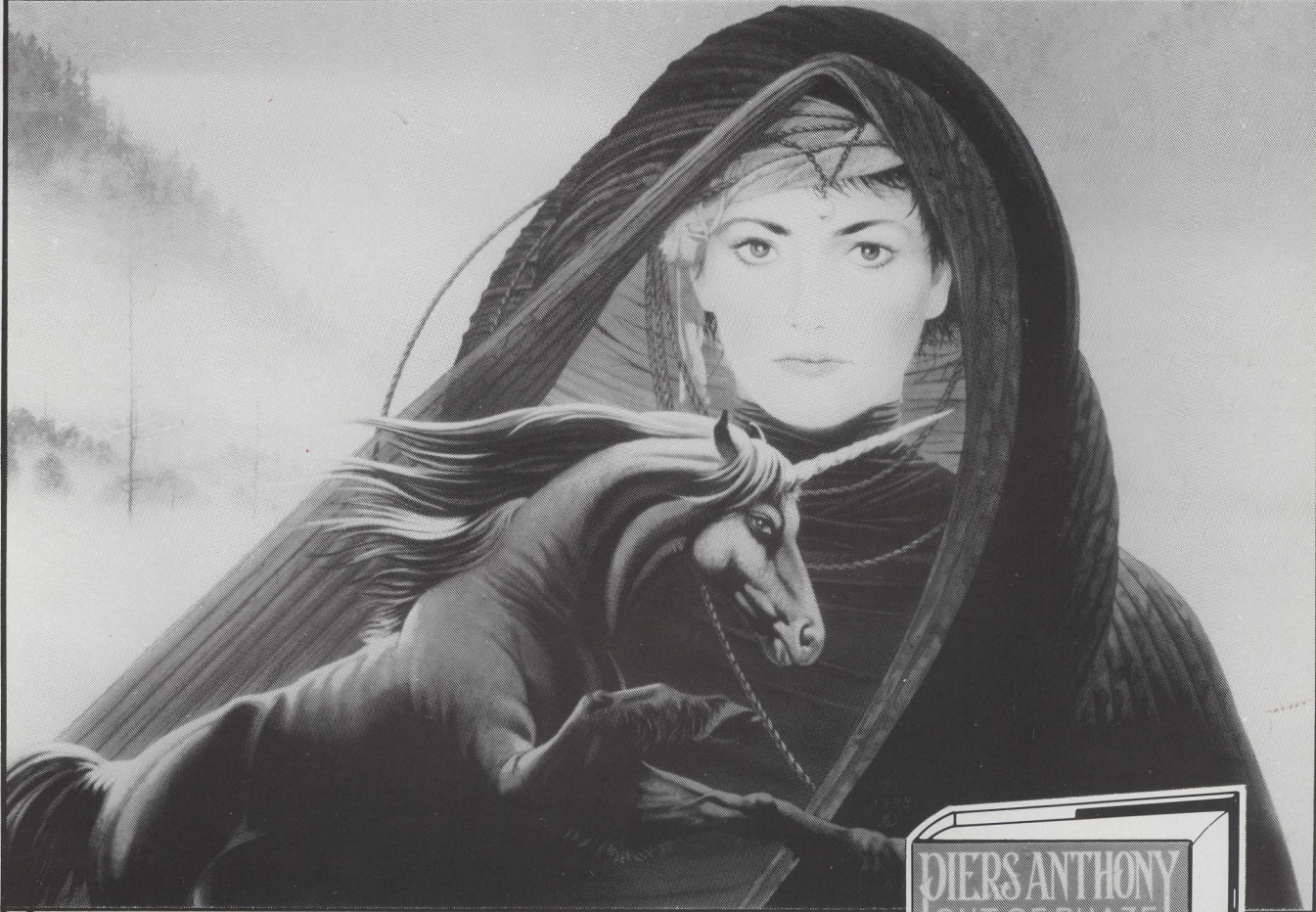
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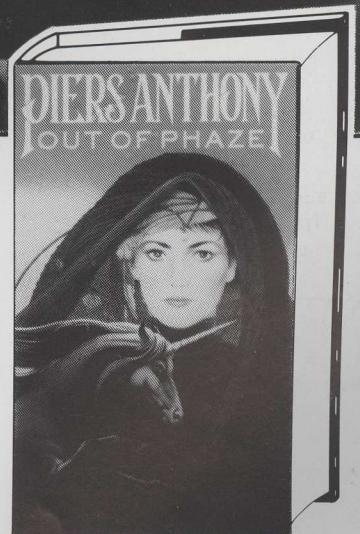
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**Submissions:** unsolicited manuscripts are welcomed, but each one must be accompanied by a stamped self-addressed envelope of adequate size. Persons overseas please send a disposable manuscript (marked as such) and two International Reply Coupons. We are unable to reply to writers who do not send return postage. No responsibility can be accepted for loss or damage to unsolicited material, howsoever caused. Story submissions should be sent to any one of the following addresses:

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# interzone

SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

No 28

March/April 1989

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# Interface

## David Pringle

*Interzone* goes up another eight pages in size with this issue (though we're printing on slightly thinner paper in order to keep the weight down – I hope the results are satisfactory). As I said in last issue's editorial column, we have an abundance of stories in hand, and this increase in size should help us to get some of those stories into print faster. It also enables us to further expand the non-fiction content: as well as our longest interview to date (with **Ramsey Campbell**), this issue contains a vast quantity of book reviews (there should be rather fewer next time). In the coming issue we're launching a new series of critical essays under the general title of "The Big Sellers." These will attempt to analyze the reasons for certain sf and fantasy authors' commercial success. We expect them to be lively, provocative pieces.

The expanded page-count will also help us continue with one of our recent innovations, the "Books Received" listing. A couple of readers have complained that this is an unnecessary waste of space, while others have welcomed it warmly. Quite simply, the intention is to do for British sf-and-fantasy publishing what the US news-magazine *Locus* does for the American scene – that is, to provide a bibliographical record of all new books which seem relevant to our field. Nobody else is doing it in the UK. Of course, the results are incomplete as yet, but we're getting there. I'd be interested in receiving more readers' (and publishers') reactions to this feature.

## FANTASY AWARDS

Yes, believe it or not, there are still more award results to announce. The winners of the latest World Fantasy Awards (presented at the World Fantasy Convention, held in London at the end of October 1988) are as follows:

Novel: *Replay* by **Ken Grimwood**  
 Novella: "Buffalo Gals, Won't You Come Out Tonight?" by **Ursula Le Guin**  
 Short Story: "Friend's Best Man" by **Jonathan Carroll**  
 Collection: *The Jaguar Hunter* by **Lucius Shepard**  
 Anthology: *The Architecture of Fear* ed. **Katherine Kramer & Peter D. Pautz**.  
*The Dark Descent* ed. **David Hartwell** [tie]  
 Artist: **J. K. Potter**  
 Life Achievement: **Everett F. Bleiler**

And the winners of the British Fantasy Awards, presented on the same occasion (this World Fantasy Con, the first ever to be held in the UK, doubled as the British Fantasy Society's 1988 gathering), are:

Novel: *The Hungry Moon* by **Ramsey Campbell**  
 Short Story: "Leeks" by **Steve Rasnic Tem**  
 Small Press: *Dagon* ed. Carl T. Ford  
 Film: *Hellraiser* dir. **Clive Barker**  
 Artist: **J. K. Potter**  
 Most Promising Newcomer: **Carl T. Ford**

This is something of a special **Ramsey Campbell** issue of *Interzone*, so I'm delighted to congratulate him on his "August Derleth Award" (that's the official title of the British Fantasy Society's novel prize) for the best year's best horror yarn. In fact, I'm doubly pleased with these results, because both Campbell's *The Hungry Moon* (Arrow/Legend) and **Ken Grimwood's** *Replay* (published here by Grafton) have entries in my critical work *Modern Fantasy: The Hundred Best Novels* (Grafton, October 1988, £7.95 trade paperback). Prescience, eh?

Congratulations too to the excellent **Lucius Shepard** and **Jonathan Carroll**. We hope to run interviews with both of them before long. The double award to artist **Jeffrey K. Potter** is most welcome: his pictures for the Arkham House editions of Shepard's *The Jaguar Hunter* and Ballard's *Memories of the Space Age* were outstanding. As it happens, **J. G. Ballard** said to me in a recent interview (which I conducted with him for *Fear* magazine) that he thinks J. K. Potter's illustrations are "absolutely brilliant. I think those illustrations repay looking at again and again, they're amazingly rich."

The awards to **Carl Ford** were also well merited. His semi-professional magazine *Dagon* is one of the best British publications of its type. If you have a taste for horror and dark fantasy I recommend that you give the magazine a try. The recent double issue devoted to little-known US author **Thomas Ligotti** was very handsomely produced and must have done wonders for that strange writer's reputation. Carl Ford's address is 11 Warwick Road, Twickenham, Middlesex TW2 6SW, and a six-issue inland subscription to *Dagon* costs £7.

## PUBLISHING FOLK

**Kathy Gale**, lately senior editor at Hodder & Stoughton/New English Library (where she was responsible, among other things, for buying the paperback rights to *Interzone: The 2nd Anthology* and *Interzone: The 3rd Anthology*), has moved to an exciting new job at Pan Books. There she is responsible for all genre fiction – science fiction, fantasy, horror, crime and thrillers – and will be commissioning for both hardcover and paperback publication (Pan is now closely linked to Macmillan and Sidgwick & Jackson). Despite having **Douglas Adams** and **Julian May** on their list (along with a few less commercial names such as **Vernor Vinge** and **Pamela Sargent**), Pan have not been very active in the sf/fantasy area in recent years. But all that is about to change: they have bought **Brian Stableford's** *The Empire of Fear*, and further acquisitions are in the offing. Kathy has a wide brief, and is hoping to make some big buys. She has a particular interest in discovering new British sf and fantasy writers, which is always good to hear.

Kathy is not the only one to move to a new job. I have recently started work as an editor for the newly-founded **G. W. Books** (an imprint of Games Workshop Ltd., the Nottingham-based manufacturers of role-playing fantasy games and lead figures, and publishers of the monthly *White Dwarf* magazine). I hasten to add that this should not affect my editorship of *Interzone*, which has always been a part-time occupation: instead, it has allowed me to give up my "day job" as a librarian at Brighton College of Technology. G. W. Books is opening an office in Brighton, where I shall be working along with artist **Ian Miller** and a couple of other staff. Initially, we'll be publishing fantasy and sf novels based on Games Workshop's game products, in addition to large-format illustrated books by well-known artists. In time, we intend that the new company will publish a wide range of high-quality material, both fiction and non-fiction. No doubt you'll be hearing a good deal more about our plans.

## WE'RE MAKING WAVES

The eighth issue of *Critical Wave*, the news-fanzine mentioned in the last *IZ*, has a feature on the future of British sf in the 1990s. Various people pass opinions on *Interzone* and on the writers we have nurtured these past five or six years. It's good to see the likes of **Geoff Ryman**, **Neil Ferguson**, **Paul McAuley** and **Eric Brown** receiving the praise which is their due. Some of the general opinions are a little odd, though.

Continued on p.74



# S.M. Baxter

## The Jonah Man

**I**n space accidents hit you fast.

And in nine-space...

"It's my bones, doctor. I feel so – fragile..."

"Calcium deficiency does usually take longer to set in than the two weeks since we've left Earth, Mr Tojo."

I'd just completed my morning surgery and was standing outside the crew lounge, trying to forget my aching feet and concentrate on the elderly passenger's complaints. Other crewmen grinned over his shoulder as they made their way past us and around the corridor's gentle curve.

I wasn't thinking about it at the time, but the reason the curve was so gentle was that the corridor happened to be situated just beneath the ship's outer skin. That fact was about to save my life.

The ship shuddered.

The lights snapped to emergency red and my feet left the floor. The corridor exploded into a scene from hell as passengers and crew boiled into it. "Doctor! What's happened?" Tojo was screaming now as he floundered suddenly into the air.

A section of the ship wall blistered and peeled back. Tojo was whisked away pitilessly, his screams drowned by the roar of escaping air.

Then the silence of vacuum settled over the smashed equipment and lifeless faces. The orderly routine of just a few seconds earlier seemed a surreal memory.

I thought it over. No gravity meant the fusion plant had failed. And in that case I was dead. I drifted there while my lungs emptied, trying to remember what I should do –

– until a massive hand grabbed my collar and pulled me backwards.

I found a thick-set face glaring into mine. Pack, I recalled vaguely; Pack from engineering. He nodded with a kind of gruff reassurance, his mouth gaping wide in the vacuum.

As I should have done, he'd wrestled open the entrance to one of the two-man escape pods studded around the ship's hull. I was stuffed inside unceremoniously. I bounced off equipment lockers in the zero-gee darkness and tried to orient myself.

Pack was working the door closed. From the pod's safety I peered back out at the corridor's lethal chaos.

There was a man out there. A passenger. Blood dribbled from his clenched lips.

And Pack was still pulling closed the door. "Two man," I saw him mouth. "Not enough fuel. Only two man."

Those bloody lips opened in a soundless cry.

Black globes clustered at the edge of my vision. I considered letting them close around me. I was too old for this...

I hauled my bulk across the cabin and cannoned into Pack. We tumbled from the door. The passenger fell into the pod and slammed the door shut. The pod's lights came on and air sighed in.

Pack untangled himself. After a murderous glare at me he began to hammer at a large-keyed control pad. There was a jolt as the pod kicked away from the ship.

I found myself pressed against the wall. Through the pod's single port I watched the wrecked ship recede. Like a smeared photograph, the image was distorted by the impossible perspectives of nine-space; but I could see that giant handfolds had been ripped from the centre of its spindle-shaped hull – and where the fusion plant should have been was only a curdled glow.

There were no more pods; only ours.

And then my stomach twisted as we dropped out of nine-space. The dying ship folded out of sight – to be replaced by something very strange...

Heavy hands grabbed my shoulders and twisted me around, away from the port.

"You stupid bastard," Pack croaked in the new air.

"Listen to me..." I protested weakly.

"Why did you let him in? This is a two-man pod... You've killed us both."

Over his shoulder, I saw the passenger's thin face tremble, a mixture of fear and calculation.

And then I looked out of the port again.

Ticking as it cooled, the pod was drifting over a crimson plane that stretched to infinity. There was a sun, set in the middle of the plane like some fantastic jewel.

Life pods are designed to dump you out of nine-space, fast. You can end up anywhere.

My throat hurt.

Pack was shaking me now, spittle flecking his chin.

I wondered about that plane. The black globes moved closer –

**I**sipped hot broth, hanging like a chrysalis in my sleeping bag. "Thanks," I said to the passenger. The single word filled my chest with pain.

Over the tube of broth I surveyed what was left of my world. The interior of the pod was a two-metre-wide cylinder crusted with equipment lockers. It was tight as a coffin after the ship's wide corridors.

Pack was sorting through one of the lockers, muscles moving over his turned back. The passenger had



his wiry body pressed up against a clear section of wall, fingers spread out against the bare metal. His eyes flickered between us. "Thank you," he said to me. His vacuum-wrecked voice was like sandpaper. "You saved my life. Thank you both."

I didn't recognize him. He was about my age, with thin hair stained grey. He was nervy, pale – a typical city dweller... But his eyes were like independent creatures, shrewd little animals peering out of his skull.

"My name's Moore," I said. "The ship's doctor."

He nodded. "Windle. I'm a household bot service engineer. I'm – I was – heading for a job in the new colony at Tau Ceti III... and this is Mr –"

Pack rattled bits of equipment around the locker with growing violence.

"...Pack," I said quickly.

At the mention of his name Pack slammed closed the locker. His face was a broad mask of resentment. "We've got to talk," he snarled.

Windle tried to shrink further into his wall.

"What's the problem?" I asked.

Pack spat: "He is."

I sighed. We'd only been in that pod an hour or so, but already the atmosphere was wire-taut. "Okay, Pack. Tell us the worst."

"He's told you, hasn't he?" Windle broke in, his eyes widened to red circles. "I'm the problem. He tried to close the door in my face. He'd rather have left me behind..."

Pack's voice was brittle. "Look – we're stranded in the middle of nowhere. This pod was designed for two men... to drop out of nine-space, and then lift them back up and get them somewhere safe.

"We just don't have the fuel cells for three. There's nothing to be done about it."

Windle cowered – but the trapped little creatures looking out of his eyes were studying Pack.

I pushed my bulk out of my bag and tried to break up the tension with a bit of bedside manner. "Come on, Pack. That's not the end of the story. I know these pods are equipped with spare cells."

"What do you think I've been searching for?" He held out twenty or thirty card-thin slices of ceramic – superconductor circuit cells. "This is all I could find. And they're all uncharged."

"Well, we're bound to have recharge equipment aboard."

"Yes, but –" Pack growled with frustration. "Even so, there's still only enough for two... with a safety margin. There isn't enough for three." Muscles worked in his cheeks and arms. I was aware that he was half the age of Windle and me... and certainly stronger than the two of us together.

I said carefully: "Isn't enough... or mightn't be enough? Which is it, Pack?"

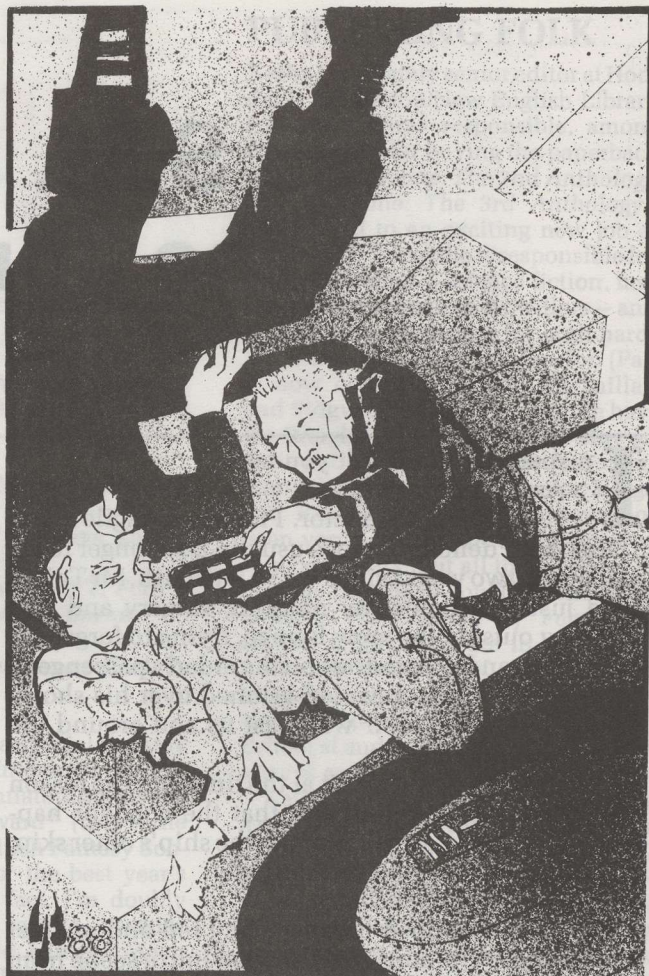
His square face closed up. "Don't play word games, doctor," he shouted. "There's enough for two. And that's it."

Windle's mouth worked. "You're lying, aren't you?"

"You've no right to be here, groundhog." Pack was a block of muscle looming over Windle; the passenger glared back, quivering.

I stared at them, trying to decide what to say next.

Men like Pack – solid, reliable – are the backbone



Illustrations by Chris Brasted

of Earth's merchant fleet. I reminded myself that he'd risked his life to save mine. He wasn't vicious, or a coward... but he'd probably hardly left the ship since signing up at sixteen.

It's a simple environment. It produces simple priorities.

"Let's slow down a little," I said. "Look, Pack, I know the drill as well as you do. We have recharge equipment for these fuel cells. I say we break it out, load up all the cells... and try to save all three of us."

Pack's fists clenched, but he said nothing. I felt a flicker of hope. Maybe I could handle him, protect Windle long enough to get us all out of this.

"But Windle seemed to be doing his own calculations. His black eyes peered at us over his bony nose. "Let me just get this straight. Even if we charge up the cells... even then there mightn't be enough power for the three of us?" He nodded, as if absorbing the logic of the situation, and he and Pack eyed each other like mismatched cats.

"No more talk. Let's give it a try," I said. "Come on, Pack. Show us what we have to do." Briskly I opened up the wall lockers, searching for a suit that would fit around my middle-aged midriff.

After a time, the others did the same.

**P**ack led the way out of the pod. He pulled himself briskly around the hull's sharp curves, searching for equipment caches. I followed, my shadow stretching ahead of me. Windle came last, fiddling with a simple portable analyzer he'd found in one of the lockers.

I found myself panting already in the unfamiliar



confines of a spacesuit. I checked my watch. In another universe I would have just finished my afternoon rounds...

To hell with that. I stared straight ahead and concentrated on moving.

Pack had found propulsion belts; now he pulled one on and clipped a ceramic fuel cell to it.

"The cell charger is a sunlight collector, isn't it?" I asked.

Pack studied the hull with an engineer's measuring eye. "Yah. A parabolic reflector, with the cells at the focus. When we set it up it'll be a couple of kilometres across – a semi-rigid frame we have to spray with all-wavelength reflector skin."

"Right."

He turned to face the star behind me. "We're falling towards that stellar system," he said. "So we trail the reflector behind us, spinning it for stability –"

I turned for the first time.

I'd forgotten about the wall across the sky I'd seen from the pod window. Now I was facing it. I stopped listening.

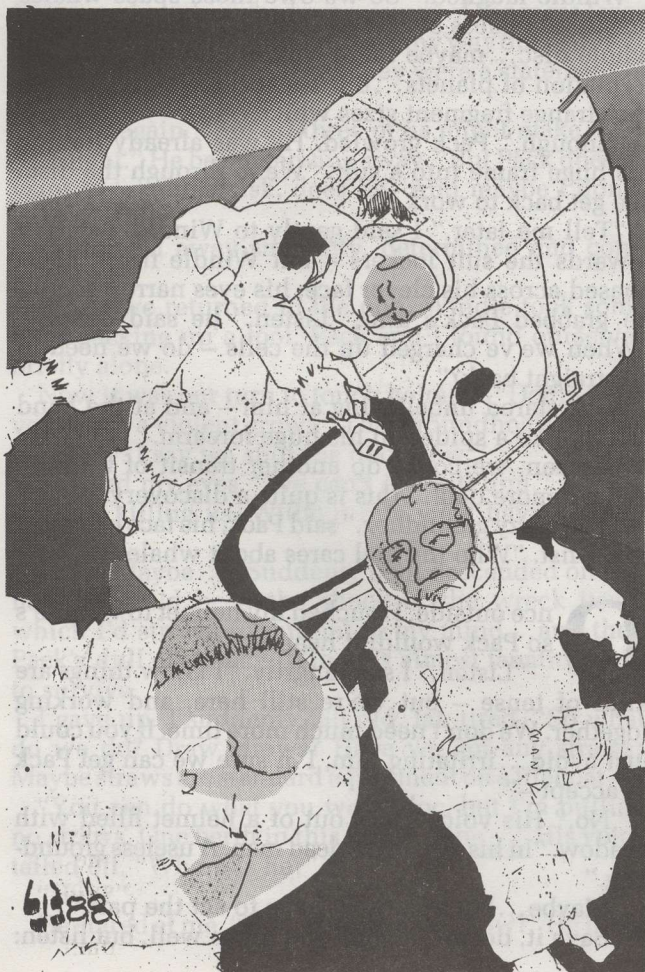
There was a blood-red ocean that stretched to darkness at all sides, hiding the stars. And set at its centre was a sun, sliced neatly in half by the plane.

"I thought I was dreaming," I breathed.

Windle was waving his analyzer around, one foot jammed in a handhold. "No dream," he said. "God knows where we are – but this is a T Tauri. A very young star, surrounded by that disc of red-hot debris."

"I guess the star's heating up the disc."

"Not completely. The disc shines by its own power – from gravitational collapse, and even a little fusion.



"Three times as wide as the solar system. A fifth the Sun's mass. And giving off as much energy at all wavelengths as Sol itself."

"How do you know all this, Windle?"

He grinned. "Self-taught. I didn't want to spend my whole life with my head stuck inside broken-down bots. So I worked and I learned... and I saved enough to make it out here. To see this."

"Yah." The plane of rubies glistened in his faceplate. "Yes," I said, "I know how you feel."

He studied the analyzer. "Of course there are a few anomalies."

"Like what?"

"A ring structure. See?"

He pointed, and I could just make out a thin gap in the infinite disc. Stars peeked through.

"So what? Saturn has a disc of debris with a ring structure –"

"Put there by the tidal effects of its moons. Maybe a Jovian planet here could have the same effect –" He swept the analyzer around his head. "But there's no Jovian! So how did the rings get there?"

"And another thing. Most of the disc is just fine dust, a you'd expect. But around the gaps there are boulders, consistently sized a few metres across. Now how could they have formed? And –"

A dull clang shook the hull. Over the pod's tiny horizon, Pack was opening up lockers and hauling out equipment. "You two hogs going to work, or do I dump you right here?" His limbs moved like steel rods, suffused with impatience.

Windle fumbled to stow away the analyzer – but I thought I saw him grinning at Pack's anger inside his helmet.

Well, I didn't want to know about that. I grabbed his arm and pulled him after me.

**A**fter three hours the prefabricated skeleton of the reflector had grown to a lacy veil draped across the Tauri disc. It was already half a kilometre wide.

Pack called a break.

I lashed my can of reflector spray to a semi-rigid strut and jammed myself back into the pod. We stripped off our suits, releasing a satisfactory stink of sweat.

"We're doing okay," I said, having a luxurious scratch. "Okay."

Pack silently worked a strained muscle as he prepared himself a coffee. Windle was huddled in one corner studying his analyzer's display. For a while, we had a little peace.

It didn't last.

Windle came bustling over to the locker I was searching for food. He waved his analyzer. "Look at this," he whispered, his sly eyes flickering at Pack. "Life! Or at least the complex molecules and necessary conditions – all in the disc of the T Tauri." He poked at the analyzer's tiny keyboard. "I suppose the complex material is left over from previous generations of stars... makes you wonder if this has anything to do with those other puzzles – you know, the strange fragment size and the gaps in the disc. And another thing –"

I watched Pack uneasily. His tubelike fingers were whitening on his coffee cup, every high-pitched word



of Windle's winding him up tighter.

Windle was goading Pack deliberately, I realized. "Maybe later," I said to Windle as urgently as I could. "Later. Okay?"

Pack's fingers stretched out like a cat's claws. "Yeah, maybe you should shut your rattling mouth, groundhog –"

Windle cowered back – but he said sharply: "It might pay you to listen to a bit more."

I moved between them hastily. "All this tension's wearing me out," I said. "If you've got something on your mind just tell us, Windle."

He brandished his analyzer. "According to this we'll hit the Tauri disc in about six hours."

Pack said, "So?"

"So will we have finished with your umbrella thing by then? No? And how well do you think the umbrella will survive a passage through the disc?"

Pack's square face clenched up every time he said "umbrella."

I thought it over. "He's got a point, Pack," I said reluctantly. "So what do we do? Come on, Windle. Don't play games."

"We deflect," he said quickly. "We've got a limited three-space drive, haven't we? We furl up the umbrella, deflect, and go through one of the gaps we observed."

Pack shook his head. "Waste of energy. The fuel cells –"

"We can always recharge the cells on the other side," I said. "And we might not survive otherwise. We'll have to go over the figures, Pack."

He shook his head, stiff with hatred.

But we checked the figures – and there was no other way through. Pack had to give in.

So we suited up again. Pack rammed his fists into his suit sleeves while Windle hummed contentedly to himself – just loud enough for Pack to hear.

**W**e descended towards the gap, the rolled-up reflector trailing behind us.

The disc foreshortened as we approached. Eventually I could make out detail – not individual fragments, but clumps of varying density in the ruddy swirl. Half a sun sat like a dome at the heart of the disc; long shadows swept towards us, cast by the scurrying clumps.

Windle jammed himself and his analyzer to the single port, staring out like a kid. "There's such a lot of detail, such structure," he said, his breath misting up the port. "It's like a smeared-out world out there. Full of organic molecules..."

Pack was a slab of muscle anchored by one hand to a strut. He stared incuriously ahead, simply waiting for the transit to finish.

Windle lapsed into silence. Our breaths were the only sound as we descended, the light shifting through the cabin.

And then the transit was upon us.

We fell into shadows a million miles long. A crimson band swept upwards past the pod. I got a glimpse of detail, a sea of gritty rubble...with a few odd, smoothed-over shapes gliding through it –

Windle scabbled excitedly at his analyzer. "Do you see that?" he asked with real joy. "My God – my God –"

I had to laugh at his enthusiasm. "See what? Show me."

"Those creatures..."

Suddenly what I was watching clicked into place; my sense of scale exploded outwards.

Those pale forms drifting through the plane of the disc like kilometre-long whales... They weren't drifting, I realized now. They were swimming.

Each whale-thing was a bloated cylinder moving inexorably through the crimson mush. The wall-like flanks were broken by huge vents that opened and closed like mouths, and around the vents the flesh was studded with deep pits.

We peering into one pit. At its bottom was something very like an eye. It looked back at us...

Then we dropped out of the disc. The bottom half of the sun was dazzling. The disc detail closed up again to a washed-out uniformity.

"Those things were alive," I breathed.

Windle shook his head, bemused. "I suppose it makes sense. There's plenty of organic material in there...and in places the disc material is warm and dense – quite a comfortable ocean. I guess the lack of gravity would encourage the development of large structures. But who would have thought it?" His thin face was flushed with an analytical wonder. "Look, here," he went on. "They suck in debris through those vents...They must leach out organic material – maybe even simpler creatures, the plankton of this strange sea."

He expanded the scale on his analyzer. There were hundreds of whales, streaming through space. "A school," said Windle. "Eating their way through their orbit around the sun."

"I guess that explains the gaps in the disc."

Windle laughed. "So we owe those space whales our lives. I guess eventually they could consume the whole disc...maybe these whales play a part in the formation of planets...But we still have one puzzle, the strange fragment sizes which –"

"Enough," Pack growled. He was already forcing his huge frame into a suit. "We're through the disc. We get back to work."

"Tell me later," I said gently to Windle. I started towards the suit lockers – but Windle froze. Ideas chased across his clever face; his eyes narrowed and he grabbed Pack's arm. "Listen," he said quickly. "When we've charged up the cells – do we need to go straight back?"

Pack stared unbelieving at him – and at the hand resting like a spider on his huge forearm.

"I mean, we could do another transit of the disc and get more data...this is quite a discovery."

"You crazy groundhog," said Pack, his face clenched like a fist. "Who the hell cares about whales."

**O**nce outside, I touched my helmet to Windle's so Pack wouldn't hear us.

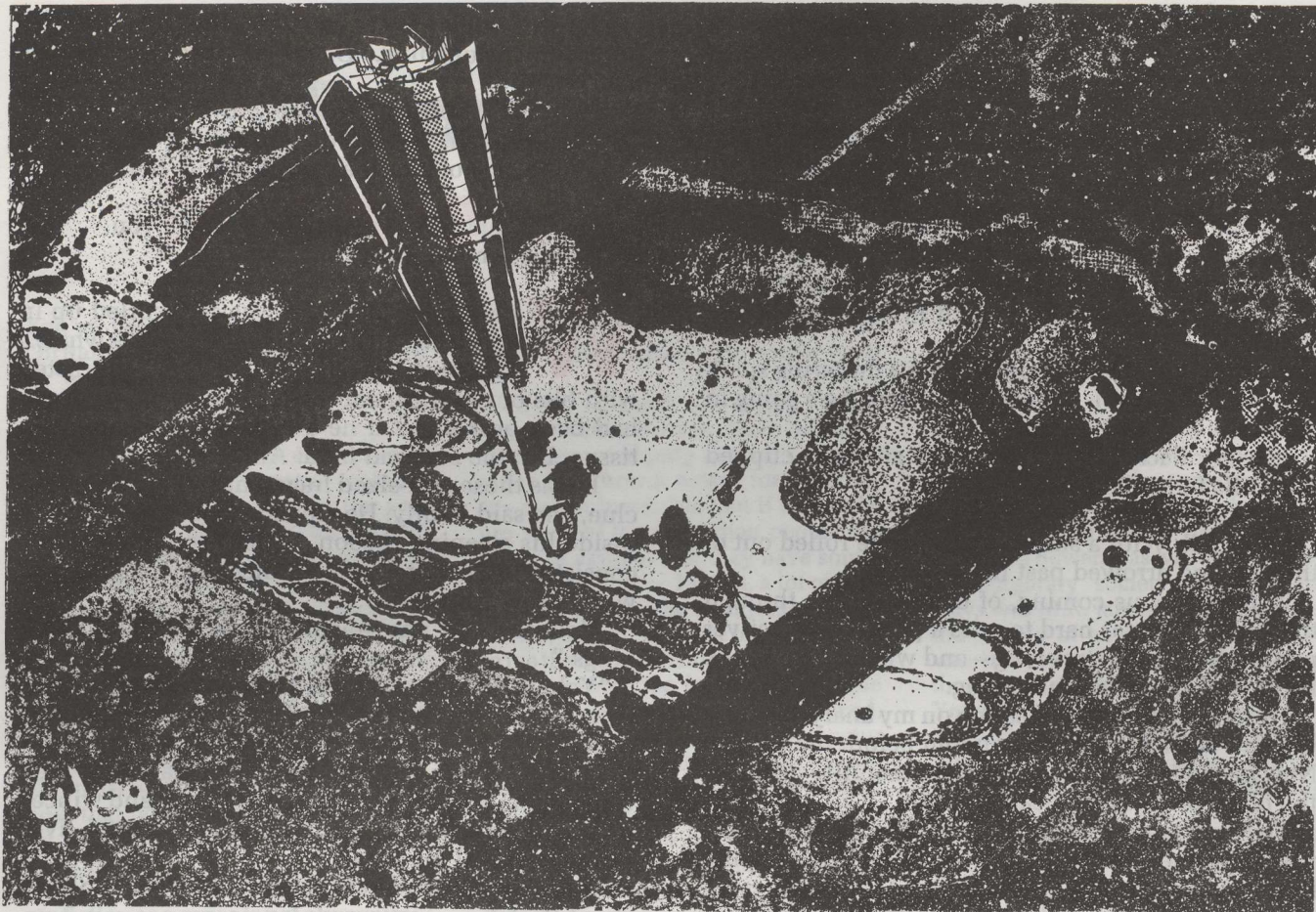
"Listen," I said angrily. "I know things are kind of tense – but we're still here, and working together. We don't need much more time. If you could just avoid...irritating him, I'm sure we can get Pack to accept –"

"No." His voice came out of a helmet filled with shadow. "In his eyes I'm a dead man. A useless groundhog."

"Maybe...but you don't have to act the part."

"Save it, doctor. I know you mean well, but listen:





you can't help me. You don't even need to help me. I'm a survivor. I worked my way out of the mess I was born into, didn't I?—and I'll work my way out of this."

His words were chilling. They were a statement of fact.

I tried again. "But all three of us might make it."

"Might." He began moving away. "But Pack doesn't want to take that risk, does he? And maybe I don't, either."

He moved away smoothly, determined and composed.

When we returned to the pod, Windle took some time packing up a tool. Pack and I found ourselves briefly alone.

Now it was our turn to touch helmets. "Doc..." His voice was a violent growl. "That groundhog's driving me crazy. I say we shut the door now."

I closed my eyes. "We can't just kill him."

"He's killing us. Without him we'd have a safety margin."

"Yah. Maybe..." Suddenly it all descended on me, hard. There'd been the shock of the wreck itself, which I'd striven to put out of my mind...and then Pack's dull obstinacy, Windle's almost fanatical will to survive.

I gave up. I suddenly felt old, fat, tired. "So what do we do? Draw straws? Have we got any straws? Maybe straws are standard equipment on a lifeboat—"

"You can do what you want, doc, but I'm pulling no straws. One berth in this boat's mine..." His voice tailed off. "Where is he?"

"Huh?"

He stared at me. "How come he's so slow?" He hung

there for a moment...then dove cleanly to the door.

Our nearly-finished structure was a net of silent shadows. There was no sign of Windle.

I shrugged. "Do you think he's in trouble? Maybe got stuck—"

Pack was unblinking. "The groundhog wanted to go back to the disc, didn't he? Go back and take snapshots of the whales."

"But how could he? He only took a propulsion belt..."

Pack opened up a locker. "And more than half our spare fuel cells," he said softly.

He floated there for a few seconds, a single muscle ticking beneath the surface of his cheek as he thought.

"We take the pod back," he said slowly. "We furl up the damn reflector, again, and we take the pod back after him. We've enough cells for that." His voice grew brisker, as if in relief that the crisis was finally here.

I hesitated. "I hate to say this, but... why don't you just leave him? That was what you wanted."

"Because we need the cells he's taken. No. We follow him back to the disc. Then," simply, "I kill him. We take the cells. We recharge them, and leave here. Yes. That's what we've got to do."

As he spoke, his claw fingers were flexing inside spacesuit gloves.

I prepared to turn the pod around. I didn't know what else to do.

**I** dug another hand-held analyzer out of a locker, worked out how to use it well enough to track Windle.

Once more we hurtled towards the disc, a mote tumbling to a vast red carpet. The gap grew from a



band of starlight to a ragged-edged highway, full of detail.

It wasn't hard to find the school of whales working methodically through their cold ocean. We dropped amongst them and buzzed around their mottled flanks, Pack cursing as more of our precious energy was wasted.

I stared out in awe. Whales loomed around us like nightmares, great living walls sliding past the sun. Jaws larger than the whole pod worked steadily at the sparkling debris around us, and eyes metres across studied us as we passed.

"There!" I said at last, pointing at a fluttering spark ahead of the school. "There he is. Jesus, he's going in close –"

"Right." Pack snapped shut his suit and clipped fuel cells to his belt.

"Pack, listen –"

He didn't. With a surprising grace he rolled out of the pod and arrowed past the whales.

Windle saw us coming, of course – even through the ruby fog it was hard to miss a partly-rolled silver parasol two kilometres long – and when he saw Pack leave the pod he began moving.

I turned up the magnification on my analyzer. Windle had been hovering at random before the school. Now he moved – clumsily but purposefully – towards the blunt prow of the nearest whale.

The great animal worked through the mist like some vast machine, utterly oblivious to the tiny creature flitting around it –

– and to a second which now appeared before it, for Pack had seen Windle's move and had arced in front of the whale. Now Windle was trapped between the multiple mouths of the beast and the equally deadly hands of Pack.

Pack slowed to a halt – relative to the whale – and hung there in space, a great block of muscle gently beckoning to Windle.

Windle hovered before the animal for a moment, and I studied him, baffled. Surely he realized he'd trapped himself – it was almost as if he'd done it deliberately...

Windle raised a hand to his face. I upped the magnification on my analyzer.

He was thumbing his nose at Pack.

I cringed –

– and now Pack came hurtling into the image. Misty debris swirled and sparked in his wake, and his hands were outstretched like talons.

Windle, with sudden skill, flipped over backward and blasted away from Pack as fast as his belt would take him, and straight into the massive mouth. He curled into a ball and disappeared.

Pack realized what he was heading for. He fell past an eye pit and tried to brake, stopping just inside those huge lips. He scrabbled at the cold surface of the skin – and then the great lid slammed shut over his lower body.

Something splashed over the pallid surface. Pack's head jerked back, once. I couldn't see his face. Then he fell out of sight.

So it was over. With dark stains congealing around one vent, the whale moved on. The agitated knots it left behind in the disc debris began to smooth and clear.

I heard a voice.

"Moore?" Coughing. "Doctor Moore? Can you hear me?"

"Windle? Where the hell are you?"

A weak laugh. "Where do you think I am? Just on the sunny side of the whale's...rear end. But I...could you..."

"Leave your carrier wave on. I'll track you."

I grabbed my propulsion belt.

**W**hen I found him he was still curled up in a foetal ball. His passage through the whale's digestive system had left his suit crusted with bits of hot rock, and half the bones in his body had been broken, as if he'd been wadded up like a tissue. But the suit had held. And he was alive.

"It was those odd-sized fragments that gave me the clue," he said faintly. He sipped at a coffee, huddled inside his sleeping cocoon. "They were too big, too consistent a size, to have formed by chance. And when I saw the whales..."

"You realized the fragments were whale droppings."

"Yah. And if the creatures passed chunks that size, then provided a man entered one of those vents fast enough – to avoid ingesting muscles at the front – then he'd have a fighting chance of making it right through the whale's system." He laughed, and winced in pain. "It was fast, hot, dark, tight – but I lived through it. Call me Jonah."

"Yah." I put a bit of hardness into my voice. "Shame about Pack."

His battered face showed traces of a sneer. "Well, he wasn't exactly the type to think through a situation like that. And I didn't force him to chase me."

"Didn't you?"

He shrugged and turned away. "Anyway, I guess we've solved the problem of who's going home and who's not."

I recoiled from the casual chill of his words. "You know, I felt sorry for you. I tried to protect you. But I was wrong, wasn't I? The way you goaded and provoked him, systematically – Pack never stood a chance."

He coughed and clutched at his ribs. "I don't need to listen to this."

"Well, what now?" I demanded. "Do you still want to go back and study the whales?"

He coughed again, a little blood flecking his lip. "Whales? For Christ's sake, unfurl the umbrella and let's go home. I've won. Who the hell cares about whales?"

There was nothing more to say. I turned away and began to suit up.

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**Steve Baxter** has contributed two previous stories to *Interzone*, "The Xeelee Flower" (issue 19) and "Something for Nothing" (issue 23), and we have a fourth from him coming up soon. His story "Blue Shift" recently won second prize (\$750) in the Writers of the Future contest, and will appear in an anthology during 1989. He has also contributed several stories to the semi-professional magazines *Dream* and *Opus*. He lives in High Wycombe, Bucks.

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# Ramsey Campbell

## Interview by Phillip Vine

**You've been variously described as "Britain's leading horror writer" and as "easily the best horror writer working in Britain today." How do you react to such praise?**

I'd like to feel that I'm in a select company, which is both aware of what the field has been capable of in the past and also has attempted to develop what the field is capable of now. I've spent most of twenty-five years finding people either looked at what I was doing in terms of what they considered horror fiction ought to be or, alternatively, looked at it in terms of what the remembered horror fiction as having been in an imagined golden age and therefore didn't particularly appreciate what I was doing. So, it is gratifying now that people seem to have caught up with what I was trying to do in the first place.

**I think it's true to say, though, that horror fiction as a genre is not always universally admired.**

Absolutely. Nor should it be, of course, given some of its worst examples. There's a whole group of horror writers and readers who've grown up really only with the explosion of horror fiction over the past ten or fifteen years – what you might call the Post-Exorcist explosion. There's a whole area of horror fiction, written and read by people who seem only to have read what has been written in this field in the past few years; and not merely is that all they know of their own field, I've got a horrible feeling that's all they know of any kind of fiction. There's a whole area of horror fiction that is going to disappear up its own fundament sooner or later because it is not even intelligent enough to be self-reflective. What it's become is simply self-consuming and its references are all to what people do in other horror books. The writer seems not merely not to have read, but never to have experienced anything outside of that, and there is a sense in which the characters simply repeat the clichés of a very contemporary area of horror fiction. It has nothing to do with real life, it has nothing to do with anything. Then there are writers within that grouping who complain that nobody takes them seriously. Their writing becomes more and more graphic, more and more sadistic, more and more explicit because the work has nothing else to base itself upon. I find that worrying.

**Do you feel that you're labelled with some of those other pulp horror writers?**

Well, I'd be careful of saying "pulp" horror writers because there has been some very good pulp writing. Lovecraft was a pulp horror writer, for instance. It's almost inevitable that if the books are shelved together, then people are going to assume that they have something in common. I mean, a lot of horror fiction is in the business of going too far, but on the other hand, it seems to me there is a considerable difference between going too far to make people squirm and squeak and be shocked, and going too far in the sense of actually trying to talk about things people would not normally want to look at. If you're doing it in order to disturb, then it seems to me to be as legitimate a thing as art can do. It seems to me that all the best art seeks to disturb in different ways.

Another thing that bothers me is that because of this curious sort of homogenized view of contemporary horror fiction you get writers who seek to rise from the ashes of what they see as being a long-lost art and say "Look, I can still write a ghost story" – implying that it had not been continuing during the past thirty or forty years, which of course it had. Or the reviewers make this sort of claim on their behalf. For example, one of the things that Peter Ackroyd's *Hawksmoor* seems to be to me is an extremely fine sustained novel in the English supernatural tradition, but what bothered me about it was that many of the reviewers seemed to say this was the first time anybody had done this since Le Fanu and M.R. James. There is, too, what I'd call the **have been doing something similar for horror fiction.**

In a groping sort of way, yes. I can't pretend that I actually could have voiced a manifesto at the point at which I was writing *Demons*. I was more skulking in the corner and hoping that this little bit of what I was doing was going to mean something to someone out there sometime. But yes, I suppose in a sense there was a similar kind of intention.

**How do you feel about the boundaries? How would you classify writers such as Angela Carter or Ray Bradbury? And Charles Dickens wrote some rather interesting ghost stories.**

Absolutely, yes. Perhaps *Interzone*

It doesn't seem to me that one has to do that at all. In fact, it seems to be a fallacy that's grown up in some strange way. Again, it's looking back to a golden age that never existed and misperceiving what the author sees as a golden age to which they want to relate. A lot of the best ghost stories of the past were also set in *their* present. Elizabeth Bowen was writing about her contemporary society. So in many ways was M.R. James, although it was the society of an antiquarian. But he was still setting it in what he knew of the contemporary world.

**Your own novel *The Influence* is a ghost story in a modern setting. Why did you decide to write a ghost story?**

I didn't. I mean the novel decided me. I almost never set out by saying I'm going to do this as the next thing I'm going to write. It was simply that this idea suggested itself to me and it's really a question of where do ideas come from. In this case it was that my daughter, then eight years old, when I began to work on the book, in odd lights and in odd poses and even in odd speech-patterns reminded me very much of my mother whom my daughter never really knew. When she was three years old, my mother went completely mad although she had been going that way for a long time. Now I'm not suggesting that this is going to be inherited by my daughter. I don't think it is for a moment, but somewhere at the back of my mind there is a vague fear that it could rise again and this is very much what *The Influence* is about. It's about a relative more terrible than my mother was, certainly – an embodiment of the terrible relatives that perhaps one remembers from one's own childhood – who has the ambition to rise again, more specifically to manifest herself as the next generation of that family. Now, once that fear became developed it was inevitable that that was the way in which that book was going to go.

At the back of my mind, too, was the challenge that people were saying that nobody writes ghost novels, that there have been very few good ghost novels written, particularly the notion that nobody writes them any more apart from Susan Hill. If anybody says this or that can't be done then I tend to go and do it. Yet another motive force which didn't really establish itself until the book was well under way was



the problem of writing a ghost story from the viewpoint of someone like myself who is, at best agnostic, at worst pretty sceptical. So how do you write a book that has to deal with the afterlife and still remain sceptical? I think, though, one of the many real answers to your question may be that each of my books progresses from the last one. There are themes which are beginning to stir in the previous book that tend to get themselves developed the next time round. It's a process, though, which I'm not particularly conscious of except in retrospect.

**Do you not set out with a fully formed plan of your novels?**

Not any more. With short stories I used to plot them out very fully in advance and it wouldn't be until I had a breakdown of a plot in a notebook that I would ever set pen to paper. The same thing certainly happened with the novels, more so in fact, because I had been writing and publishing short stories for 13 years and therefore I felt extremely nervous about taking the leap into writing a novel – so I plotted that out extremely thoroughly. First of all, as I normally do, I collect immense numbers of notes in whatever form they happen to come in, towards the writing of the novel, and then I index them into an exercise book. I actually had pretty well worked out precisely what was going into each chapter. This was *The Doll Who Ate His Mother*, you understand.

**Yes, which you've recently rewritten...**

Very slightly. It was the ending which a lot of people thought was bathetic in the extreme, or the penultimate chapter actually, and I tended to feel that they were right and one ought to have a little more ambiguity as to what actually happens to the unlucky antagonist in that book. But *The Doll* was pretty well written as I'd plotted it out, which really meant that I didn't give myself enough leeway to see where, if anywhere, it was going wrong. The problem with *The Doll* I think – which is not something I can do anything about now unfortunately because it would mean unpicking the entire thing and starting from scratch – is that it actually begins with as resounding and unlikely a coincidence as I've ever concocted. Although every plot is necessarily contrived, there's the sort of contrivance that conceals itself and there's the sort of contrivance, as in that book, which is absolutely glaring.

**What do you see as the advantages of letting a novel grow naturally?**

Precisely that. It grows naturally and it actually develops a stronger structure and more truth to itself than if you box off its various avenues. It was in *Incarnate* that I learned how to do this really. Previous novels I had actually written at considerable length and then cut large chunks out of. *The Parasite* lost about 40,000 words, about a

dozen chapters. *The Claw*, I rewrote maybe a dozen chapters of that from a different viewpoint to its very considerable benefit. With *Incarnate* I was still providing a long and complicated synopsis for the benefit of the publisher before I started the book and my editor, who was an extremely gentlemanly chap from Brooklyn called George Walsh, with Macmillan in New York, made a couple of suggestions about the novel. He felt first of all that he would like more unity of place and therefore he felt that there should be at least some setting that was central rather than a whole group of disparate plots that gradually knitted themselves together. He also felt that there ought to be one character who was in some way more central rather than simply five or six characters who got equal plot weight. There should be someone who was the centre of what was happening. However, as soon as I realized that there were advantages to doing this, I simply threw away most of the plot I'd originally worked out and the plot became very much about the way that the various characters became drawn together and the way that their realities interpenetrate. Long before the half-way mark I was finding that there was no point in trying to keep the plot that I'd already worked out because far too many good things were suggesting themselves that were elbowing the old ideas out of the way. I don't think I could ever have gone back to plotting thoroughly in advance. Now I just tend to work out how to get into the book because there's always an ideal point at which to enter the narrative. In other words there's always the best first chapter you can have and so I've got to work that out before I start writing. I usually also work out a few of the things that are going to follow on from that, but from there on the book will tell its own story. I find that intensely exciting.

**It writes itself.**

Well not always that, unfortunately. It's when it doesn't write itself that things get actually very disconcerting. You actually do find yourself out there in the middle of the unknown thinking "My God, how did I get here and where am I going?" But what I found interesting about that is that there's nearly always something earlier in the book which is a solution to where you've got now if you've allowed the thing to develop organically. It's remarkable that something I will put in early on, something maybe that just seems to be a bit of background detail, maybe 30,000 or 50,000 words later I'll suddenly realize that that's precisely what I need at that point to show me where to go next. Basically you've got to trust yourself. You've got to trust your subconscious. I believe very strongly that fiction is a way of letting the subconscious speak for itself and that this is

especially true of horror fiction. You've got to develop that instinct to trust yourself.

**Do you find it difficult to trust yourself when the literary establishment is so dismissive of horror fiction?**

I think that's changing. But I've worked twenty-five years or more and I don't see what else one can do. The trick has been for some writers who have already established a career in the "mainstream" to then write something which is horror or ghost fiction without any doubt. They can then say because I've written these other things, I'm writing literature. What can one do? All I can do is simply to do the best I can and hope that eventually someone is going to notice. I don't think there is any way out of it. The way one sees being taken by some writers – I don't think I should blame the writers: let's say I'm more likely to blame the publishers – is to achieve a mainstream breakthrough in terms of the way their books are placed on the bookshelf. You know, it won't be any longer in the horror section. The publisher will then describe it as "transcending its genre." This seems to be semantic rubbish. I mean, it's like saying a symphony transcends the form of the symphony. You cannot transcend the form you're using. There are cases, at least so I'm told, and I think I have seen a few, where the writer will make it big within a genre and then will say – I don't write horror fiction, I write mainstream fiction. This is something I wouldn't do. I honestly don't believe I should achieve success at the expense of my own field. I've simply attempted to continue to write what I write and continue to say what I write is horror fiction. In Britain we have no *Contemporary Literary Criticism* – the American critical annual which has, I find, a startlingly large section devoted to me in a very recent volume. All I've done is keep writing horror fiction as best I can. The critical establishment eventually comes to you. I'm not in favour of trying to woo success at the expense of one's field.

**You're not naming any names, but one name that occurs to me – although perhaps not in quite the way you mean – is J.G. Ballard, who has moved away from the straight science-fiction genre.**

Yeah. I certainly wouldn't be talking about Ballard. I have a great admiration of him as a man and as a writer. I met him for the very first time via Malcolm Edwards of Gollancz at the beginning of 1987 and I stood there absolutely tongue-tied and I'm sure he thought I was utterly rude because I said, how are you?, and couldn't say anything else at all. So, if he ever gets to read this at least he will know I wasn't being rude, I was just being mutely admiring. I still occasionally am at a loss for words.

**But he's an interesting case of someone**



who did start off within the confines of sf.

That's right. But he immediately began to break through them and to expand them and I think that to me is the way to do it. I'm not aware, though I could be wrong, but I don't think Ballard has ever said that he doesn't write science fiction, except in those cases, as in *Empire of the Sun*, where he very clearly isn't writing sf. My impression is he was still publishing in *New Worlds* and he still tends to be published with the science-fiction packaging to some extent. I'm not aware that he's actually turned his back on that or would particularly want to do so.

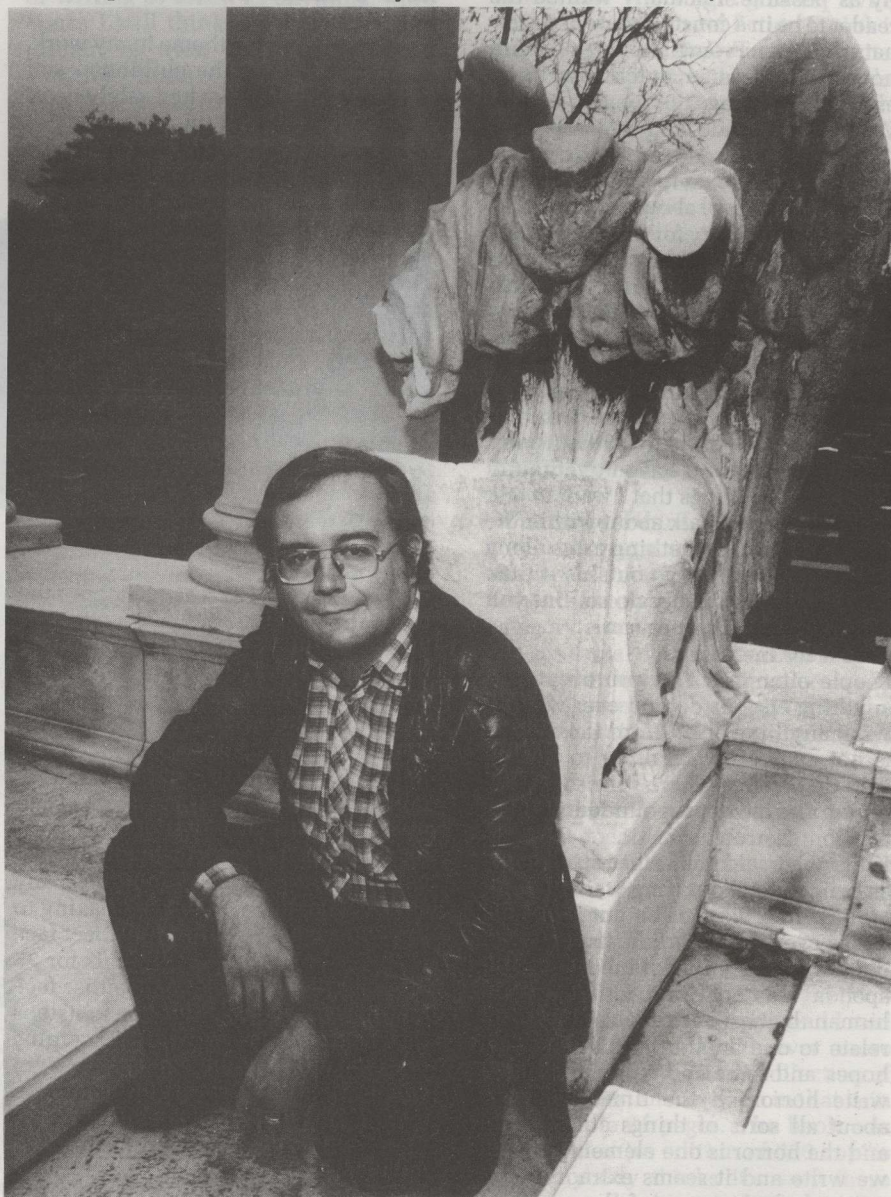
**You say Ballard had broken new ground. I wonder in what sense you feel as a horror writer you've been able to do something comparable?**

*Demons by Daylight*, my second book, was an attempt to do that. I still have difficulty in looking at it objectively. I certainly remember at the time feeling that nobody had ever written horror fiction quite like this before, and in a sense I was importing techniques from the mainstream, whether it was from people like Robbe-Grillet or Beckett or Graham Greene or Nabokov or various others whom I greatly admired. I hope the dependence on these folk is not too evident, but perhaps it was more simply that I was going outside the field for my models as much as I was looking inside it. As a matter of fact, *Demons by Daylight* was written very much out of a dissatisfaction with almost my entire field. Now I think this is a process many people have to go through in order to break new ground. Then you look back and you see that perhaps you haven't broken that much ground and in a sense – the most radical artists are the real traditionalists in a way – that you're rediscovering things that you felt people had forgotten.

In *Demons by Daylight* I was writing about everyday people and their relationships with the supernatural in a way that perhaps it hadn't been tackled before. It was normal, in those days, that if you wrote about everyday settings and everyday people, there was something else out there that invaded it. In my stories it tends to be much more something that the characters had excluded or denied about themselves which was returning in some other form. It might even be the dark side of their everyday life. So in that sense, perhaps *Demons* was a breakthrough. I certainly felt it at the time. In fact, having finished the book and typed it all out and packaged it up ready to send to August Derleth, who was my publisher back then at Arkham House, I was actually seized by an appalling depression and felt that it was awful because nobody writes horror fiction this way and therefore it can't be any good. I felt it was not even going to be worth spending the postage

to send this airmail over to Wisconsin. In fact I did send it and that was the turning point for me.

**There's a similarity again, you see, because back in the early sixties, Ballard issued a manifesto on the future of science fiction, in which he declared it was a function of sf to explore inner space as opposed to outer space, and it seems that you**



Photographs of Ramsey Campbell by J.K. Potter

**have been doing something similar for horror fiction.**

In a groping sort of way, yes. I can't pretend that I actually could have voiced a manifesto at the point at which I was writing *Demons*. I was more skulking in the corner and hoping that this little bit of what I was doing was going to mean something to someone out there sometime. But yes, I suppose in a sense there was a similar kind of intention.

**How do you feel about the boundaries? How would you classify writers such as Angela Carter or Ray Bradbury? And Charles Dickens wrote some rather interesting ghost stories.**

Absolutely, yes. Perhaps *Interzone*

could offer a prize to anybody who could give us a list of 20 writers of adult short stories who never wrote a ghost story or horror story? That would be fairly difficult, particularly if you confine yourself to the English language. It seems to me that the ghost story, the horror story, is a field that's been created to some extent by the people who would normally be identified as

mainstream writers anyway. It therefore seems nonsensical to me to argue that it has nothing to do with the mainstream. I've seen the argument by Douglas Winter, the American critic, that horror is not a genre, it's an attitude or an emotion and therefore to try and compartmentalize it, rather than to acknowledge that it crosses over the entire field of fiction, is not at all helpful.

**In the introduction to your recent collection of short stories, *Dark Feasts*, you classify two of the stories, "Again" and "The Hands" as "pure horror." What does that mean?**

It seems to me that the vision is absolutely unremittingly dark, but then I



would also call Andrejev's *The Abyss* pure horror. And if you push me a bit more, I would call Samuel Beckett's *L'Innomable* pure horror. I think it's an expression of how the story makes me feel, rather than an attempt to categorize it. There was a time, *The Parasite* is the most extreme example of this, where I wanted to write as scarily as possible. I actually wanted the reader to be in a constant state of supernatural panic. From *Incarnate* onward, however, I became much less interested in making the reader afraid. Whatever it made you feel was fine, but the ideal would be to disturb in some way. For example, *Obsession* is essentially a novel about people taking more responsibility for things that they didn't even really know they'd caused in their childhood. And the background is very much a picture of everyday life in Britain today and the present political conditions. Inevitably, if you tell the story and be true to yourself, then your view of the world is going to come through without your having to force it. I haven't yet found that there are things that I want to talk about that I can't talk about within the horror genre. If something came along that required me to go outside it then fine, I would probably do so. But you haven't asked the question...

#### **Pose it for me.**

People often ask, "Do you ever write anything else, or do you ever want to write anything else?" And the answer is not, you know, in order to prove I can do it, no. There's this strange notion and it was propounded recently by Don Herron, a critic of Stephen King, who said that what struck him as being odd about King was that here was a writer who, as he put it, "wrote weird everyday." But the truth of it is that he does nothing of the kind. King spends a lot of time writing about human beings and about how they relate to one another and about their hopes and fears and so on. We don't write horror all the time, we write about all sorts of things all the time and the horror is one element in what we write and it seems extraordinary, particularly in terms of the novel, to assume that all a horror novel does is be horrifying.

#### **Both you and Stephen King write about ordinary, everyday people in ordinary, everyday situations.**

Right. But again, this was simply part of the process of learning to write like myself. My first book was an imitation of Lovecraft. And then, as soon as I'd finished this book, I became utterly dissatisfied with Lovecraft. I'm still now very fond of Lovecraft, incidentally, but it was a process I had to go through. What really seems to me to be the crux of it was that when I was imitating Lovecraft, I was writing about someone else's fears and imaginings and what I needed to do was to

write about my own. Once I began to do that, then of course the whole thing became increasingly close to reality. Perhaps it should be more autobiographical, though more often than not, I'm not aware of the autobiographical element until long after I've finished the story.

#### **Your writing often views the world from a child's perspective. Is this autobiographical?**

Yes. It's a recurring theme in my work, childhood fear or the childhood self which we thought we had safely dealt with or put the lid on and which is merely waiting around for us to be sufficiently unaware or sufficiently unguarded to come back to us. It's more, though, disguised autobiography. Disguised, that is, from me in the act of writing more often than not. My story, "The Chimney," for instance, is very much a story about my own childhood. It's a metaphor for that but I wasn't aware that it was when I wrote it. The story's about a young boy, reflecting what I was like when I was a kid, who is terrified of the notion that Santa Claus comes down the chimney on Christmas Eve and that this figure comes into your room in the dark. Now Christmas as I remembered it was delightful, a time of real magic, and the only thing that kept me awake on Christmas Eve was anticipation of what I was going to find in my Christmas pillow-case in the morning. What I'd forgotten, and I really had forgotten this, was that once my parents became estranged, which was pretty well as soon as they got married as far as I can work it out, I became the emissary on Christmas Day to call my father down to Christmas dinner. You see, my parents were not only not speaking to each other, they didn't even meet face to face, and they didn't do this for 25 years. And I didn't see my father face to face either; he was just the footsteps on the other side of the door, or coming up the stairs at night as I lay awake in bed. So I would go up the stairs on Christmas Day - my mother would have this seasonal relenting - and I would have to go and rap on the door, in a fit of panic, and say do you want to come down to Christmas dinner? There'd be a sort of mutter of refusal on the other side of the door and I'd hare off downstairs thinking, thank God that's over for another year. Now I really had to write "The Chimney," I think, in order to remember that. And there is a sense in which, if I hadn't forgotten, or if I hadn't been able to forget it while I was writing the story, I wouldn't have been able to write the story at all. Perhaps the story was necessary to dredge out of my own subconscious the memories that I'd suppressed. It wasn't conscious suppression, it was simply as far as I knew, an act of forgetting, but one never quite knows about these things.

#### **What other fears surface in your fiction?**

What scares me above all is what I would call the rush to belief. It's a desire for order at any cost. In *The Parasite* it's the occult and in *The Hungry Moon* it's fundamentalism.

#### **Yes, religion and its deadening effects, especially upon children, is another important theme in your fiction. There's your story, "Words that Count"...**

That I suppose, was as subversive as I ever got on religious themes, where I suggested that there were religious upbringings so repressive that magic is the only thing that could possibly act as a release. Funny that no-one has ever objected to that or ripped it off the bookshelves so far as I know, although I gather that a lot of books of mine did end up on the top of piles of books for burning in the States, which I must admit I find immensely satisfying.

#### **Where was this? What books?**

I was told that *The Doll Who Ate His Mother* was seen on top of a pile of books in a tent in a television film about evangelists. It was a pile of books that was about to be loaded onto the flames. I've always regretted that nobody recorded that on my behalf so that I could have a copy and play it when I was feeling depressed, but no doubt it will happen again.

#### **Another of your constant themes is urban decay. You seem to have replaced the gothic with a socially realistic horror story.**

Absolutely, yes. This was yet again a function of what I started out to do almost as soon as I turned my back on Lovecraft. I was turning my back on what I saw as artificiality.

#### **Mention of Lovecraft again leads me to ask you about the major influences upon your fiction.**

I have to confess, if confess is the word, and clearly it's felt that it should be, that I find Lovecraft to be still probably the most fascinating writer in the field, because he set up the model for the horror story more completely than anyone who came before him. In a sense he defined the structure, drawing on people like Machen and Blackwood and more particularly, drawing on what I think he saw as the failures of Machen and Blackwood, which he tried to improve on, and the kind of structure that he created where subtle details gradually orchestrated, build up to, in many cases, a tremendous climax, which has never really been surpassed.

I'm still disconcerted, though, to see how many people misperceive Lovecraft. I was reading Mike Moorcock's book *Wizardry and Wild Romance* recently, which in many ways is a lot of fun, good infuriating stuff as Mike knows how to do, but he makes such extraordinary claims that Lovecraft "regressed into a sort of infantile



stance where he simply withdrew entirely into a state of pure terror." That's precisely the opposite of what Lovecraft did in the later stories. I mean he actually developed into a much more open writer in his stories like "The Shadow out of Time" and "The Mountains of Madness." They're no longer about terrible monsters that are going to wipe out the human race. They're much more about a sort of largeness of perception – indeed the monsters become much less monstrous, and not quite human, but certainly are received with a certain amount of respect on the part of the narrative. It's strange, the tendency to dismiss Lovecraft for what he's supposed to be rather

can't take those words out of the Lovecraftian structure and expect them to mean anything.

**Who else do you admire?**

I've edited a book recently for my American publishers called *Stories That Scared Me* which resurrects a few which are not that easy to come by. Le Fanu, I greatly admire him for the sort of bleakness of vision and the rigour of writing as much as anything. M.R. James I still think is one of the great masters of what you might call the glancing phrase of terror, the thing that goes by you almost before you've read it and which contains an enormous sense of things left unsaid. The thing about James, and about Lovecraft actu-

one's neck. Algernon Blackwood at his best is the great master of the awesome. Stories like "The Willows," "The Wendigo," "Ancient Sorceries," "Secret Worship" and so on. In fact that whole group of them that Everett Bleiler edited for Dover Books – *Best Ghost Stories of Blackwood*; that I think is a magnificent book. William Hope Hodgson actually has that largeness of vision too. The single greatest living writer of supernatural fiction I think is Fritz Leiber. He really was the writer who gave me something of a model when I was doing *Demons by Daylight* in the sense that he wrote very contemporary, big city supernatural horror stories in which the supernatural element somehow was a function of the environment rather than a threat to it, and *Night's Black Agents*, his first book, was one I was still able to read with immense pleasure when I was rewriting *Demons by Daylight* and being dissatisfied with practically everything else. Robert Aickman is extremely difficult to sum up, but absolutely required reading.

**Who do you admire among your own generation?**

Clive Barker I think is the master of the graphic horror story where the graphic imagery is the stimulus to imagination rather than a substitute for it. The latter category sums up my basic objections to a great deal of the rest of contemporary graphic horror fiction where it's as though somebody's simply opened a book on autopsy and regurgitated a couple of photographs or pages into the pages of their novel. Clive, by contrast, seems to me to be using both extreme and exquisite imagery. T.E.D. Klein, too, I think is the master of the Lovecraftian structure, in his novel *The Ceremonies*, but also in his shorter stories. And Thomas Ligotti, an American writer; I put him into *Stories That Scared Me*. In introduced his first collection a couple of years ago and I said that I didn't think I'd ever more enjoyed a single author's collection of horror stories, and went on in that vein for a couple of pages. The book was published in an edition of 300 copies so if anybody thinks it's easy these days to make it as a horror writer because it's such a successful field, well maybe not always as you see.

James Herbert, too; it was Herbert really who brought the English horror story out of the Country House into his childhood environment, the East End, and then developed what seems to be a form of horror fiction that actually derives from H.G. Wells and John Wyndham in a way, with very English characters confronted with some quite devastating cataclysm, an almost apocalyptic change in the environment. The disaster novel – but whereas Ballard was doing it in a psychological sense, Jim Herbert was doing it very much in a spectacular sense. And *The*



**have been doing something similar for horror fiction.**

In a groping sort of way, yes. I can't pretend that I actually could have voiced a manifesto at the point at which I was writing *Demons*. I was more skulking in the corner and hoping that this little bit of what I was doing was going to mean something to someone out there sometime. But yes, I suppose in a sense there was a similar kind of intention.

**How do you feel about the boundaries? How would you classify writers such as Angela Carter or Ray Bradbury? And Charles Dickens wrote some rather interesting ghost stories.**

Absolutely, yes. Perhaps *Interzone*

than for what he is. It's partly because the style is apparently so easy to parody. People like myself and many others thought we could, but we couldn't in fact because however many of the adjectives you attach to your own writing – you know, describing things as amorphous and eldritch and alien and fungoid and so forth – all of that is quite meaningless without the way that Lovecraft very carefully orchestrated it. It's like music. You



Fog still seems to me to be one of the most relentless, energetic books in the whole area.

**Yes. The whole effect is to strip back the veneer of civilization and of rationality, which your books do too. I found that particularly striking in *The Hungry Moon*.**

What scared me about *The Hungry Moon* was that I did go and see Billy Graham and to some extent I derived Godwin Mann's evangelical tirades from him. However, I also tried to invent things that pushed the whole story into absurdity or outrageousness. Well, then, blow me if things that I had invented didn't then turn out to be true. The wretched book was scarcely out when somebody told me that *Wonder Woman* was indeed being seized from comic dealers in the Mid-West! So what can you do? Perhaps for me the scariest thing of all is that no matter how terrible the things are that I imagine, reality almost immediately catches up. Maybe I should stop doing it before I cause the apocalypse!

**Assuming that you do manage to avoid destroying the world with your words, where do you see yourself going from here?**

In so far as the publishers feel less and less that they've got to market the books as full of shock and gore and so

forth, and less and less inclined to put covers on them that oversell those aspects of the books, it seems that I'm going to be accepted for what I am, which is really what I always wanted to happen in the first place. What I suppose I feel I am is somebody who greatly admires the tradition of the horror story and who wants to continue to do the best of which it's capable, and develop that because it seems to me that the form is as eloquent as any I know and capable of going wherever I want to take it. If that sounds like a challenge that's what I'm saying to myself. I always want to do better than the last time. I always want to surprise myself and when I stop doing that it will be time to screw the lid down.

The interviewer, Phillip Vine, was the editor of the now-defunct *Words International*, and we are grateful to him for allowing us to use the above piece, originally intended for that magazine. Ramsey Campbell's 1988 novel, *The Influence*, is out in paperback from Arrow/Legend this month. Also due for immediate hardcover release by the same publisher is his brand new novel *Ancient Images* (£12.95), the powerful tale of a film editor who is "haunted" by a lost Hollywood horror movie.



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# Ramsey Campbell

## Meeting the Author

I was young then. I was eight years old. I thought adults knew the truth about most things and would own up when they didn't. I thought my parents stood between me and anything about the world that might harm me. I thought I could keep my nightmares away by myself, because I hadn't had one for years – not since I'd first read about the little match girl being left alone in the dark by the things she saw and the emperor realizing in front of everyone that he wasn't wearing any clothes. My parents had taken me to a doctor who asked me so many questions I think they were what put me to sleep. I used to repeat his questions in my head whenever I felt in danger of staying awake in the dark.

As I said, I was eight when Harold Mealing came to town. All my parents knew about him was what his publisher told the paper where they worked. My mother brought home the letter she'd been sent at the features desk. "A celebrity's coming to town," she said, or at least that's what I remember her saying, and surely that's what counts.

My father held up the letter with one hand while he cut up his meat with his fork. "Harold Mealing's first book *Beware of the Smile* takes its place among the classics of children's fiction," he read. "Well, that was quick. Still, if his publishers say so that's damn near enough by itself to get him on the front page in this town."

"I've already said I'll interview him."

"Robbed of a scoop by my own family." My father struck himself across the forehead with the letter and passed it to me. "Maybe you should see what you think of him too, Timmy. He'll be signing at the bookshop."

"You might think of reviewing his book now we have children writing the children's page," my mother added. "Get some use out of that imagination of yours."

The letter said Harold Mealing had written "a return to the old-fashioned moral tale for children – a story which excites for a purpose." Meeting an author seemed an adventure, though since both my parents were journalists, you could say I already had. By the time he was due in town I was so worked up I had to bore myself to sleep.

In the morning there was an accident on the motorway that had taken the traffic away from the town, and my father went off to cover the story. Me and my mother drove into town in her car that was really only big enough for two. In some of the streets the shops were mostly boarded up, and people with spray

paint who always made my father angry had been writing on them. Most of the town worked at the toy factory, and dozens of their children were queuing outside Books & Things. "Shows it pays to advertise in our paper," my mother said.

Mrs Trend, who ran the shop, hurried to the door to let my mother in. I'd always been a bit afraid of her, with her pins bristling like antennae in her buns of hair that was black as the paint around her eyes, but her waiting on us like this made me feel grown up and superior. She led us past the toys and stationery and posters of pop stars to the bookshop part of the shop, and there was Harold Mealing in an armchair behind a table full of his book.

He was wearing a white suit and bow tie, but I thought he looked like a king on his throne, a bit petulant and bored. Then he saw us. His big loose face that was spidery with veins started smiling so hard it puffed his cheeks out, and even his grey hair that looked as if he never combed it seemed to stand up to greet us. "This is Mary Duncan from the *Beacon*," Mrs Trend said, "and her son Timothy who wants to review your book."

"A pleasure, I'm sure." Harold Mealing reached across the table and shook us both by the hand at once, squeezing hard as if he didn't want us to feel how soft his hands were. Then he let go of my mother's and held onto mine. "Has this young man no copy of my book? He shall have one with my inscription and my blessing."

He leaned his elbow on the nearest book to keep it open and wrote "To Timothy Duncan, who looks as if he knows how to behave himself: best wishes from the author." The next moment he was smiling past me at Mrs Trend. "Is it time for me to meet the little treasures? Let my public at me and the register shall peal."

I sat on the ladder people used to reach the top shelves and started reading his book while he signed copies, but I couldn't concentrate. The book was about a smiling man who went from place to place trying to tempt children to be naughty and then punished them in horrible ways if they were. After a while I sat and watched Harold Mealing smiling over all the smiles on the covers of the books. One of the children waiting to have a book bought for him knocked a plastic letter-rack off a shelf and broke it, and got smacked by his mother and dragged out while nearly everyone turned to watch. But I saw Harold Mealing's face, and his smile was wider than ever.

When the queue was dealt with, my mother interviewed him. "A writer has to sell himself. I'll go



wherever my paying public is. I want every child who will enjoy my book to be able to go into the nearest bookshop and buy one," he said, as well as how he'd sent the book to twenty publishers before this one had bought it and how we should all be grateful to his publisher. "Now I've given up teaching I'll be telling all the stories I've been saving up," he said.

The only time he stopped smiling was when Mrs Trend wouldn't let him sign all his books that were left, just some in case she couldn't sell the rest. He started again when I said goodbye to him as my mother got ready to leave. "I'll look forward to reading what you write about my little tale," he said to me. I saw you were enjoying it. I'm sure you'll say you did."

"Whoever reviews your book won't do so under any coercion," my mother told him, and steered me out of the shop.

That evening at dinner my father said "So how did it feel to meet a real writer?"

"I don't think he likes children very much," I said.

"I believe Timmy's right," my mother said. "I'll want to read this book before I decide what kind of publicity to give him. Maybe I'll just review the book."

I finished it before I went to bed. I didn't much like the ending, when Mr Smiler led all the children who hadn't learned to be good away to his land where it was always dark. I woke in the middle of the night, screaming because I thought he'd taken me there. No wonder my mother disliked the book and stopped just short of saying in her review that it shouldn't have been published. I admired her for saying what she thought, but I wondered what Harold Mealing might do when he read what she'd written. "He isn't entitled to do anything, Timmy," my father said. "He has to learn the rules like the rest of us if he wants to be a pro."

The week after the paper printed the review we went on holiday to Spain, and I forgot about the book. When we came home I wrote about the parts of Spain we'd been to that most visitors didn't bother with, and the children's page published what I'd written, more or less. I might have written other things, except I was too busy worrying what the teacher I'd have when I went back to school might be like and trying not to let my parents see I was. I took to stuffing a handkerchief in my mouth before I went to sleep so they wouldn't hear me if a nightmare woke me up.

**A**t the end of the week before I went back to school, my mother got the first phone call. The three of us were doing a jigsaw on the dining-table, because that was the only place big enough, when the phone rang. As soon as my mother said who she was, the voice at the other end got so loud and sharp I could hear it across the room. "My publishers have just sent me a copy of your review. What do you mean by saying that you wouldn't give my book to a child?"

"Exactly that, Mr Mealing. I've seen the nightmares it can cause."

"Don't be so sure," he said, and then his voice went from crafty to pompous. "Since all they seem to want these days are horrors, I've invented one that will do some good. I suggest you give some thought to what children need before you presume to start shaping their ideas."

My mother laughed so hard it must have made his earpiece buzz. "I must say I'm glad you aren't in charge of children any longer. How did you get our home number, by the way?"

"You'd be surprised what I can do when I put my mind to it."

"Then try writing something more acceptable," my mother said, and cut him off.

She'd hardly sat down at the table when the phone rang again. It must have been my imagination that made it sound as sharp as Harold Mealing's voice. This time he started threatening to tell the paper and my school who he was convinced had really written the review. "Go ahead if you want to make yourself look more of a fool," my mother said.

The third time the phone rang, my father picked it up. "I'm warning you to stop troubling my family," he said, and Harold Mealing started wheedling: "They shouldn't have attacked me after I gave them my time. You don't know what it's like to be a writer. I put myself into that book."

"God help you, then," my father said, and warned him again before cutting him off. "All writers are mad," he told us, "but professionals use it instead of letting it use them."

After I'd gone to bed I heard the phone again, and after my parents were in bed. I thought of Harold Mealing lying awake in the middle of the night and deciding we shouldn't sleep either, letting the phone ring and ring until one of my parents had to pick it up, though when they did nobody would answer.

Next day my father rang up Harold Mealing's publishers. They wouldn't tell him where Harold Mealing had got to on his tour, but his editor promised to have a word with him. He must have, because the phone calls stopped, and then there was nothing for days until the publisher sent me a parcel.

My mother watched over my shoulder while I opened the padded bag. Inside was a book called *Mr Smiler's Pop-Up Surprise Book* and a letter addressed to nobody in particular. "We hope you are as excited by this book as we are to publish it, sure to introduce Harold Mealing's already famous character Mr Smiler to many new readers and a state-of-the-art example of pop-up design" was some of what it said. I gave the letter to my mother while I looked inside the book.

At first I couldn't see Mr Smiler. The pictures stood to attention as I opened the pages, pictures of children up to mischief, climbing on each other's shoulders to steal apples or spraying their names on a wall or making faces behind their teacher's back. The harder I had to look for Mr Smiler, the more nervous I became of seeing him. I turned back to the first pages and spread the book flat on the table, and he jumped up from behind the hedge under the apple tree, shaking his long arms. On every two pages he was waiting for someone to be curious enough to open the book that little bit further. My mother watched me, and then she said "You don't have to accept it, you know. We can send it back."

I thought she wanted me to be grown-up enough not to be frightened by the book. I also thought that if I kept it Harold Mealing would be satisfied, because he'd meant it as an apology for waking us in the night. "I want to keep it. It's good," I said. "Shall I write and say thank you?"



"I shouldn't bother." She seemed disappointed that I was keeping it. "We don't even know who sent it," she said.

Despite the letter, I hoped Harold Mealing might have. Hoped! Once I was by myself I kept turning the pages as if I would find a sign if I looked hard enough. Mr Smiler jumped up behind a hedge and a wall and a desk, and every time his face reminded me more of Harold Mealing's. I didn't like that much, and I put the book away in the middle of a pile in my room. After my parents had tucked me up and kissed me good night, early because I was starting school in the morning, I wondered if it might give me nightmares, but I slept soundly enough. I remember thinking Mr Smiler wouldn't be able to move with all those books on top of him.

**M**y first day at school made me forget him. The teacher asked about my parents, who she knew worked on the paper, and wanted to know if I was a writer too. When I said I'd written some things she asked me to bring one in to read to the class. I remember wishing Harold Mealing could know, and when I got home I pulled out the pop-up book as if that would let me tell him.

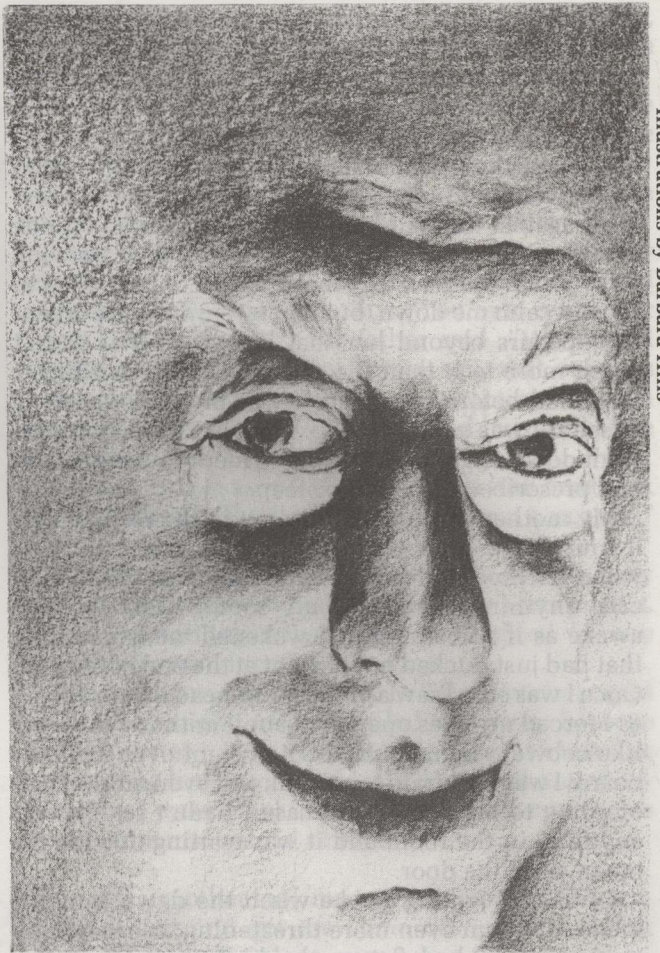
At first I couldn't find Mr Smiler at all. I felt as if he was hiding to give me time to be scared of him. I had to open the book still wider before he came up from behind the hedge with a kind of shivery wriggle that reminded me of a dying insect. Once was enough. I pushed the book under the bottom of the pile and looked for something to read to the class.

There wasn't anything I thought was good enough, so I wrote about meeting Harold Mealing and how he'd kept phoning, pretty well as I've written it now. I finished it just before bedtime. When the light was off and the room began to take shape out of the dark, I thought I hadn't closed the pop-up book properly, because I could see darkness inside it that made me think of a lid, especially when I thought I could see a pale object poking out of it. I didn't dare get up to look. After a while I got so tired of being frightened I must have fallen asleep.

In the morning I was sure I'd imagined all that, because the book was shut flat on the shelf. At school I read out what I'd written. The children who'd been at Books & Things laughed as if they agreed with me, and the teacher said I wrote like someone older than I was. Only I didn't feel older, I felt as I used to feel when I had nightmares about books, because the moment I started reading aloud I wished I hadn't written about Harold Mealing. I was afraid he might find out, though I didn't see how he could.

When I got home I realized I was nervous of going to my room, and yet I felt I had to go there and open the pop-up book. Once I'd finished convincing my mother that I'd enjoyed my day at school I made myself go upstairs and pull it from under the pile. I thought I'd have to flatten it even more to make Mr Smiler pop up. I put it on the quilt and started leaning on it, but it wasn't even open flat when he squirmed up from behind the hedge, flapping his arms, as if he'd been waiting all day for me. Only now his face was Harold Mealing's face.

It looked as if part of Mr Smiler's face had fallen off to show what was underneath, Harold Mealing's



Illustrations by Barbara Hills

face gone grey and blotchy but smiling harder than ever, straight at me. I wanted to scream and rip him out of the book, but all I could do was fling the book across my bed and run to my mother.

She was sorting out the topics she'd be covering for next week's paper, but she dropped her notes when she saw me. "What's up?"

"In the book. Go and see," I said in a voice like a scream that was stuck in my throat, and then I was afraid of what the book might do to her. I went up again, though only fast enough that she would be just behind me. I had to wait until she was in the room before I could touch the book.

It was leaning against the pillow, gaping as if something was holding it open from inside. I leaned on the corners to open it, and then I made myself pick it up and bend it back until I heard the spine creak. I did that with the first two pages and all the other pairs. By the time I'd finished I was nearly sobbing, because I couldn't find Mr Smiler or whatever he looked like now. "He's got out," I cried.

"I knew we shouldn't have let you keep that book," my mother said. "You've enough of an imagination without being fed nonsense like that. I don't care how he tries to get at me, but I'm damned if I'll have him upsetting any child of mine."

My father came home just then, and joined in. "We'll get you a better book, Timmy, to make up for this old rubbish," he said, and put the book where I couldn't reach it, on top of the wardrobe in their bedroom.

That didn't help. The more my mother tried to persuade me that the pop-up was broken and so I



shouldn't care about not having the book, the more I thought about Mr Smiler's face that had stopped pretending. While we were having dinner I heard scratchy sounds walking about upstairs, and my father had to tell me it was a bird on the roof. While we were watching one of the programmes my parents let me watch on television a puffy white thing came and pressed itself against the window, and I almost wasn't quick enough at the window to see an old bin-liner blowing away down the road. My mother read to me in bed to try and calm me down, but when I saw a figure creeping upstairs beyond her that looked as if it hadn't much more to it than the dimness on the landing, I screamed before I realized it was my father coming to see if I was nearly asleep. "Oh dear," he said, and went down to get me some of the medicine the doctor had prescribed to help me sleep.

My mother had been keeping it in the refrigerator. It must have been years old. Maybe that was why, when I drifted off to sleep although I was afraid in case anything came into my room, I kept jerking awake as if something had wakened me, something that had just ducked out of sight at the end of the bed. Once I was sure I saw a blotchy forehead disappearing as I forced my eyes open, and another time I saw hair like cobwebs being pulled out of sight over the footboard. I was too afraid to scream, and even more afraid of going to my parents, in case I hadn't really seen anything in the room and it was waiting outside for me to open the door.

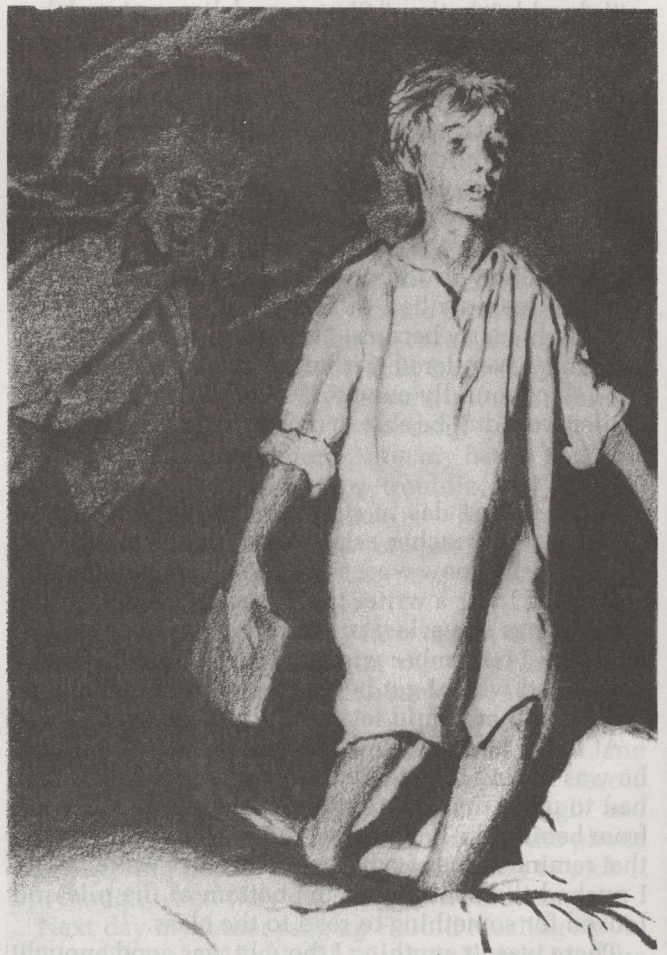
I was still jerking awake when the dawn came. It made my room even more threatening, because now everything looked flat as the hiding-places in the pop-up book. I was frightened to look at anything. I lay with my eyes squeezed shut until I heard movements outside me door and my father's voice convinced me it was him. When he inched the door open I pretended to be asleep so that he wouldn't think I needed more medicine. I actually managed to sleep for a couple of hours before the smell of breakfast woke me up.

**I**t was Saturday, and my father took me fishing in the canal. Usually fishing made me feel as if I'd had a rest, though we never caught any fish, but that day I was too worried about leaving my mother alone in the house or rather, not as alone as she thought she was. I kept asking my father when we were going home, until he got so irritable that we did.

As soon as he was in his chair he stuck the evening paper up in front of himself. He was meaning to show that I'd spoiled his day, but suddenly he looked over the top of the paper at me. "Here's something that may cheer you up, Timmy," he said. "Harold Mealing's in the paper."

I thought he meant the little smiling man was waiting in there to jump out at me, and I nearly grabbed the paper to tear it up. "Good God, son, no need to look so timid about it," my father said. "He's dead, that's why he's in. Died yesterday of too much dashing about in search of publicity. Poor old twerp, after all his self-promotion he wasn't considered important enough to put in the same day's news."

I heard what he was saying, but all I could think was that if Harold Mealing was dead he could be anywhere — and then I realized he already had been. He



must have died just about the time I'd seen his face in the pop-up book. Before my parents could stop me, I grabbed a chair from the dining suite and struggled upstairs with it, and climbed on it to get the book down from the wardrobe.

I was bending it open as I jumped off the chair. I jerked it so hard as I landed that it shook the little man out from behind the hedge. I shut my eyes so as not to see his face, and closed my hand around him, though my skin felt as if it was trying to crawl away from him. I'd just got hold of him to tear him up as he wriggled like an insect when my father came in and took hold of my fingers to make me let go before I could do more than crumple the little man. He closed the book and squeezed it under his arm as if he was as angry with it as he was with me. "I thought you knew better than to damage books," he said. "You know I can't stand vandalism. I'm afraid you're going straight to bed, and think yourself lucky I'm keeping my temper."

That wasn't what I was afraid of. "What are you going to do with the book?"

"Put it somewhere you won't find it. Now, not another word or you'll be sorry. Bed."

I turned to my mother, but she frowned and put her finger to her lips. "You heard your father."

When I tried to stay until I could see where my father hid the book, she pushed me into the bathroom and stood outside the door and told me to get ready for bed. By the time I came out, my father and the book had gone. My mother tucked me into bed and frowned at me, and gave my forehead a kiss so quick it felt papery. "Just go to sleep now and we'll have



forgotten all about it in the morning," she said.

I lay and watched the bedroom furniture begin to go flat and thin as cardboard as it got dark. When either of my parents came to see if I was asleep I tried to make them think I was, but before it was completely dark I was shaking too much. My mother brought me some of the medicine and wouldn't go away until I'd swallowed it, and then I lay there fighting to stay awake.

I heard my parents talking, too low for me to understand. I heard one of them go out to the dustbin, and eventually I smelled burning. I couldn't tell if that was in our yard or a neighbour's, and I was too afraid to get up in the dark and look. I lay feeling as if I couldn't move, as if the medicine had made the bedclothes heavier or me weaker, and before I could stop myself I was asleep.

When I jerked awake I didn't know what time it was. I held myself still and tried to hear my parents so that I'd know they hadn't gone to sleep and left me alone. Then I heard my father snoring in their room, and I knew they had, because he always went to bed last. His snores broke off, probably because my mother had nudged him in her sleep, and for a while I couldn't hear anything except my own breathing, so loud it made me feel I was suffocating. And then I heard another sound in my room.

It was a creaking as if something was trying to straighten itself. It might have been cardboard, but I wasn't sure, because I couldn't tell how far away from me it was. I dug my fingers into the mattress to stop myself shaking, and held my breath until I was almost sure the sound was ahead of me, between me and the door. I listened until I couldn't hold my breath any longer, and it came out in a gasp. And then I dug my fingers into the mattress so hard my nails bent, and banged my head against the wall behind the pillow, because Harold Mealing had risen up in front of me.

I could only really see his face. There was less of it than last time I'd seen it, and maybe that was why it was smiling even harder, both wider and taller than a mouth ought to be able to go. His body was a dark shape he was struggling to raise, whether because it was stiff or crippled I couldn't tell. I could still hear it creaking. It might have been cardboard or a corpse, because I couldn't make out how close he was, at the end of the bed and big as life or standing on the quilt in front of my face, the size he'd been in the book. All I could do was bruise my head as I shoved the back of it against the wall, the furthest I could get away from him.

He shivered upright until his face was above mine, and his hands came flapping towards me. I was almost sure he was no bigger than he'd been in the book, but that didn't help me, because I could feel myself shrinking until I was small enough for him to carry away into the dark, all of me that mattered. He leaned toward me as if he was toppling over, and I started to scream.

I heard my parents waken, far away. I heard one of them stumble out of bed. I was afraid they would be too late, because now I'd started screaming I couldn't stop, and the figure that was smaller than my head was leaning down as if it meant to crawl into my mouth and hide there or drag what it wanted out of me. Somehow I managed to let go of the mattress and

flail my hands at him. I hardly knew what I was doing, but I felt my fist close around something that broke and wriggled, just as the light came on.

Both my parents ran in. "It's all right, Timmy, we're here," my mother said, and to my father "It must be that medicine. We won't give him any more."

I clenched my fist harder and stared around the room. "I've got him," I babbled. "Where's the book?"

They knew which one I meant, because they exchanged a glance. At first I couldn't understand why they looked almost guilty. "You're to remember what I said, Timmy," my father said. "We should always respect books. But listen, son, that one was bothering you so much I made an exception. You can forget about it. I put it in the bin and burnt it before we came to bed."

I stared at him as if that could make him take back what he'd said. "But that means I can't put him back," I cried.

"What've you got there, Timmy? Let me see," my mother said, and watched until I had to open my fist. There was nothing in it except a smear of red that she eventually convinced me was ink.

When she saw I was afraid to be left alone she stayed with me all night. After a while I fell asleep because I couldn't stay awake, though I knew Harold Mealing was still hiding somewhere. He'd slipped out of my fist when I wasn't looking, and now I'd lost my chance to trap him and get rid of him.

**M**y mother took me to the doctor in the morning and got me some new medicine that made me sleep even when I was afraid to.





It couldn't stop me being afraid of books, even when my parents sent *Beware of the Smile* back to the publisher and found out that the publisher had gone bankrupt from gambling too much money on Harold Mealing's books. I thought that would only make Harold Mealing more spiteful. I had to read at school, but I never enjoyed a book again. I'd get my friends to shake them open to make sure there was nothing inside them before I would touch them, only before long I didn't have many friends. Sometimes I thought I felt something squirming under the page I was reading, and I'd throw the book on the floor.

I thought I'd grown out of all this when I went to college. Writing what I've written shows I'm not afraid of things just because they're written down. I worked so hard at college I almost forgot to be afraid of books. Maybe that's why he kept waking me at night with his smile half the height of his face and his hands that feel like insects on my cheeks. Yes, I set fire to the library, but I didn't know what else to do. I thought he might be hiding in one of those books.

Now I know that was a mistake. Now you and my parents and the rest of them smile at me and say I'll be better for writing it down, only you don't realize how much it's helped me see things clear. I don't

know yet which of you smilers Harold Mealing is pretending to be, but I will when I've stopped the rest of you smiling. And then I'll tear him up to prove it to all of you. I'll tear him up just as I'm going to tear up this paragraph.

---

**Ramsey Campbell**, born 1946, lives with his wife and two children in the Wirral, close to his native Liverpool. A full-time writer since 1973, his first novel was *The Doll Who Ate His Mother* (1976). His last contribution to *Interzone* was "Boiled Alive" (issue 18), since collected in the volume *Dark Feasts* (Robinson, 1987). He has a new novel, *Ancient Images*, due from Century Hutchinson/Legend this month, and the long interview elsewhere in this issue of *IZ* will tell you a great deal more about him.

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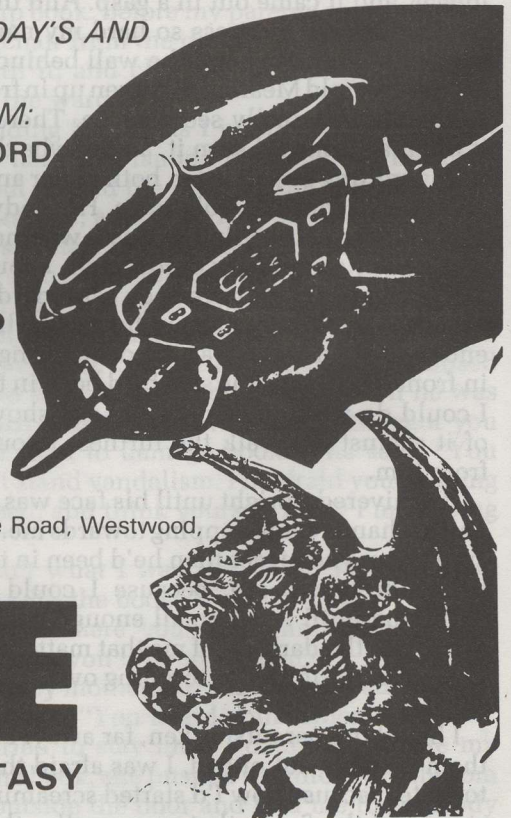
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# THE GATE

SCIENCE FICTION & FANTASY





# Kim Newman

## Twitch Technicolor

Playing the buttons was all well and good, but Monte thought sometimes you had to get your hands in the colour. He had Bela Lugosi frame-frozen in mid-snarl, stretched black and white over the video easel, wooden stake jutting. Patiently, he combined film overlays in his plastette. Red was the key here. People like red best of all, and there would have to be a lot of it in the *Dracula* remix. It was integral to the property; perhaps a major factor in its lingering appeal. Finally satisfied, he inserted the plastette into the assessor, and sat back while the machine digitally encoded the precise shade that had struck him as proper. When it was done, the assessor pinged like an antique oven, and Monte plucked the now-primed squirtstylo from its lightwell.

He squeezed a blob of red onto the tip of his forefinger, and examined it. It was fine. Then he dabbed the electronic image/analog with the stylo, dribbling red between the reproduction lines. The monochrome filled in, and gore gushed from the dead actor's starched shirtfront. The film looked better already. It was the personal touch that distinguished the Monte Video product from the competition's all-machine "enhanced" remix jobs. He plugged the stylo, and noticed phantom rinds of red under his nails. His hand looked as though it belonged to a murderer. He shook his fingers, and the red vanished in a static crackle. He adjusted the easel to give him a screen-view, and assessed his handiwork. He keyed ADVANCE, and the film slow-forwarded a few frames. Lugosi completed his snarl, his hand clawed at the stake, blood flowed freely. The red grew, a blob in the centre of the image. It was fine. Monte keyed SAVE, and the colour took. The vampire's glowing eyes and skull-head cufflinks lit up, the exact red of the blood on his chest and about his mouth.

Michaelis Monte could remember the beginnings of the remix business, the ineffectually "colorized" films of the '80s. He had been among the first to test the potential of image/analog encoding, the process that enabled a skilled remix man to have an original moving picture reduced by the assessor to a particle chain of information bits and then rebuilt again in accordance with his own vision. With his own technologies, he had stolen the march on the majors, resisted many an attempted corporate rape, won all the Dickie awards going, and marked out Ayatollah's share of the marketplace. Monte Video's *Dracula* was already a q-seller on advance orders. Securing the rights from the schizoid corporate

descendents of Bram Stoker, Universal Studios, Hammer Films, the BBC and about twenty others who had dipped their claws into the property had been a length and costly battle. With such an important acquisition, Monte might in any case have taken the time to handle the remix himself. Thanks to the Troubles, he was being forced to do the hands-on work personally. He was still the *primo uno* in the business.

Trevor, Ruby Gee, Consodine, and now Tarnaverro. All remaindered. Someone had it in for his remix men, or was trying for a stranglehold on Monte Video.

He keyed PROCEED, and the assessor took over, absorbing Monte's decisions, replacing the drab greys of the original with dayglo colours. He liked to think that Monte Video's *Dracula* was the movie Tod Browning would have turned out in 1930 if he had been free from the censorship requirements of the day and had access to unlimited technical resources. Browning had been forced to have Van Helsing stake *Dracula* offscreen, with only a tame groan to mark the villain's death, but now the anti-climax could be fixed. Lugosi floundered through the vaulted crypt, eyes aflame like an electric Antichrist, pushing aside curtains of butterfly-wing/stained glass cobweb, recoiling from a succession of violently violet neon crucifixes. Then the vampire was down, and Peter Cushing was on top of him, hammering furiously, driving in deeper the killing stake.

Actually, Edward Van Sloan had played Van Helsing in Lugosi's *Count Dracula*, but since nobody remembered him any more, Monte had decided to mix in Cushing's definitive performance from the 1958 version. In fact, aside from Lugosi and Dwight Frye as the fly-eating Renfield, he had recast the whole film: James Dean as Jonathan Harker, Marilyn Monroe as the victim-cum-vampirette Lucy, and Meryl Streep as the heroine, Mina. He'd even stirred in Humphrey Bogart as the comic cockney asylum attendant. There weren't enough David Manners or Helen Chandler fans to make a dent in the marketplace, and Monte was always in favour of anything that added to the commercial afterlife of a property. His instincts had made him a rich man; rich enough to afford an unparalleled fine art collection – 3-D religious postcards, popster necrophiliabilia, Woolworth's clown prints. Michaelis Monte was well-known as a man of influential tastes.

Onscreen, *Dracula* putrefied spectacularly, maggots bursting from his eyesockets. An entirely apt Jimi Hendrix guitar burst accompanied his deathscreeams. Monte upped the zynth. More noise, more music,



more scream. He infilled with more red. The last of Dracula should be a bloody pool on the lining of his opera cape, red on red. "Fuck you, Count," said Peter Cushing, "and the bat you rode in on." It was well said, and Monte's vocals people had taken a lot of care to perfect the actor's clipped voice pattern. Hendrix segued Tchaikowsky, winding up the film with the snatch of *Swan Lake* that had been heard in the Transylvanian prologue, and the end titles strobe-flashed as Cushing led Dean and Streep out of the crypt into the rainbow-bright sunrise that lettered out "THE END" in the sky, and subliminally flashed an expensive ad for Coca-Drugs.

The message pore in the top right of the easel spiralled open. Monte saw an inset of his own doorstep, from the p.o.v. of the monitor-eyed stone eagle perched atop the lintel. Sally Rhodes stood on his WELCOME mat, drenchcoat belted tight, hat-brim pulled low over her domino breather. She looked the eagle in the eye and gave a tight smile. Monte pulled over the nearest slab, and ran the routine checks. The image in the pore proved true; a first-generation, unscrambled mimesis (he supposed that he only had himself to blame for the fact that you couldn't routinely trust anything you saw on television any more). The household recognized her heat pattern, cross-checked the clearance of the Sally Rhodes Agency with the latest listings, and gave him a manual control over the door. He palm-printed an okay, and the pore closed as Sally Rhodes was admitted into his hallway.

Monte had scheduled this meeting for late evening in an attempt to avoid embarrassment. He had, of course, been keeping the state police updated on his Troubles, as he was obliged by Law to do, but it was no secret that Monte Video was financially able to afford access to private sector policing. The Sally Rhodes Agency was known for its discretion, and Monte found that quality worth a hefty annual premium. He was even willing to overlook Sally Rhodes' tactless jibes about his business and taste in *objects d'art*. In a market rife with piracy, Monte Video rarely suffered from bootlegging, and the last large-scale operation to try infringing its copyrights had been permanently retired thanks to Sally Rhodes.

Monte met her in his gallery. The paintings were asleep, but the room was a-whisper with their steady breathing. Sally Rhodes was admiring his shagpile Rothko. "There is some interesting work being done with sub-sentient jellies and acrylics at the moment, don't you think?" he ventured. The poised young woman turned and held up a hand in mock horror, waving it as if to ward off Dracula with a crucifix. He missed the point.

"That shirt," she gasped. "It's...it's..."

"It's called a paisley pattern," he told her. "The lemon yellow and eggshell blue combination is my own idea."

"You didn't have to tell me, Miki. My grandmother told me about the 1960s. They must have been hell to live through."

"I wouldn't know. I was very small at the time."

"And now you're very big?"

"Quite." He adjusted his chrome and lucite love beads. "Are you in a position to make a report?"

"Only a preliminary. I note that you've lodged provisional declarations of war against Agfa-Daiei and Disney-McDonald's. You know what kind of commitment that will entail."

"What choice have I got? Someone's been singeing my remix men. With Tarnaverro gone, there's a severe crimp in my output. It has to be an alliance among the competition. They want me scuppered before Frankfurt."

"Perhaps," said Sally Rhodes. She peeled off her domino, and sniffed with distaste the herbal-scented air. "Do you have a roomscreen handy? I've got a tape to run for you."

He accessed the downstairs suite, which came complete with a full editing slab, and a glasswall display of Monte Video's topselling remix jobs: *Citizen Kane*, *Battleship Potemkin*, *Psycho*, *Faster Pussycat! Kill! Kill!*, *King Kong*, *High Noon*, *Double Indemnity*, *The Best of Sergeant Bilko*, *The Elvis Autopsy Video*, *The Seventh Seal*, *The Breakdancin' Nun*. Monte thumb-signed the slab, and a framed poster for the Bob Dylan/Sylvester Stallone/Glenda Jackson/Madonna *Women in Love* remix rose into its ceiling slot, revealing a milkwhite wallscreen. It was the only colourless thing in the house.

Sally Rhodes unscrambled the sequence lock on her briefcase, and produced a video cassette. It was a Monte Video Own Brand product. "This is from Tarnaverro's office," she said. "I've established that it was what he was working on when he was killed."

"Then it should be *Captain Blood*?"

"1935, Michael Curtiz, with Errol Flynn and Olivia de Havilland. Warner Brothers. Right?"

"Your pardon?" he double-taked. "Oh, forgive me, I always forget you're a, what are they called?, film buff." He spat the word with distaste, recalling the petitions that used to flood into his slab.

"Let's pass over that, shall we?" she said, shuffling fiche notes. "You've kept up on your autopsies, I trust?"

"Yes."

"But let me remind you. Tarnaverro was attacked by someone with a long, sharp, heavy blade. A carving knife, a machete, or a sword. He was almost literally hacked to pieces."

"Yes. That's why I suspect those Agfa-Daiei bastards. The multi-nats like to throw in a scare when they open hostilities." In his struggle to swallow Thorn-Futura-McAlpine before the combine swallowed him, Monte had authorized as bad or far worse. "And you know what the axis are like."

Being market leader was a precarious position. Since the Troubles started, with Trevor, Monte Video had lost over 20% of its employees to the marketplace. Even disemployment was better than being an unarmoured casualty in a corporate skirmish.

"It may not be that simple, Monte. Have you ever thought to match the methods of assassination used against your people with the properties they were working on?"

Monte was startled. "No. Why should I?"

Sally Rhodes held up her fiche. "Trevor was the first. Two months ago. He was blown to bits by some kind of frag charge. He was remixing *Battleground*."



Ruby Gee was expertly kicked and trampled to death. Her current assignment, *The Gold Diggers of 1933*. Consodine had his throat ripped out by some kind of animal. Remember the werewolf jokes in the newsies? His last property was *Lassie Come Home*. Do you see it?"

He wanted it keyed out for him.

Sally Rhodes slid *Captain Blood* into the VCR maw, and began to play the buttons. As always when you slot a cassette at random, the sex scene faded on. "This is the sequence Tarnaverro was remixing when they got him. We had to clean the blood and guts off the tape. The assessor was clogged."

Onscreen, Errol Flynn was extensively sodomizing the cabin boy. It had seemed wasteful not to feature the star's most legendary endowment in the film, and all this historical research proved that buggery would have been a way of life on the all-male pirate ships of the 17th Century. Besides, they had wanted to work up a role for the teenage David Bowie. There was a little ghosting, and Tarnaverro's green notation blips came and went in the corner of the image, but otherwise it was fine. It was an effective addition. Sally Rhodes was distracted, not looking at the action, but waiting for something else to appear. "Look, here it is, here's where it happens –" she framefroze – look at this line." There was a thick band of different quality colour, crossing the screen like a ripple. She ADVANCED frame by frame, demonstrating the glitch's progression. It was a diagonal wipe from left to right. Inside the band, the colours were different: a little like the pastel shades of three-strip Technicolour, not very realistic and far too thin for Monte's taste. When the band had passed, all colour had gone. Bowie's face faded into Olivia de Havilland's, and, a cut later, Errol Flynn had his clothes on. There was a ruckus outside the cabin, and Flynn was bounding, cutlass in hand, to the door.

"So this is where Tarnaverro broke off. This is the original version."

"Not quite," said Sally Rhodes, tapping a finger to the screen, initiating PAUSE. A horde of pirate extras cowered in tableau as *Captain Blood* laid into them. They were typical Warner Bros. swashbuckler extras: scarred, scurvy sea-dogs with earrings, three or four knives apiece, striped headscarves, leather boots, stupid expressions. But in the middle was a balding pirate with Coke-doke bottle glasses, and a twopiece whaieskin suit. It was Tarnaverro. The woman took her finger from the screen, and action resumed. In a long shot, Flynn threw off two huge attackers. Tarnaverro was in the melee, turning to run. His glasses fell off, and were kicked over the side by a sneering Basil Rathbone. The remix man made a dash for safety, and tripped over De Havilland's skirts. Flynn smiled, impossibly beautiful in the smoke of battle, and ran the interloper cleanly through. He heaved the body off his cutlass, and Tarnaverro fell into the sword-waving through. The pirates hacked at him merrily. He even got his own close-up, still twitching, eyeballs free-floating, a coil of rope grey under his head. Then, he was out of the film – another dead extra – and Flynn was facing up to Rathbone, jeering at the villain's frenchified ringlets.

Monte was appalled.

"Elaborate, isn't it?"

He had to agree. "It would take expert remixing to...do that. But it's pointless..."

The film went on. Monte waved down the sound, but the black and white figures still danced on the wall. He had to think.

"Mr Monte, do you know a Caspasian Kleinzack?"

"Of course. He's a remix man. With Agfa-Daiei. I've been trying to get to him. With the Troubles, we'll need to net a few top defectors to keep up our output. He's not up to my standards, or Tarnaverro's, but he's a professional jobber. Is A-D involved in this?"

"Unlikely. I mention Kleinzack because he's dead too. The newsies haven't got it yet, but he's definitely a casualty. I think A-D have had others, and there's been a total security clampdown at McDisneyworld. Someone doesn't like remix men, Miki. Kleinzack was shot. He was working on *My Darling Clementine*. Do you know the property?"

"1946, John Ford, with Henry Fonda as Wyatt Earp and Victor Mature as Doc Holliday. 20th Century Fox. You're not the only one who can remember things. A-D screwed me out of the rights in a nasty negotiation last year."

She smiled. "That's the one. A-D buy their policing from the Salvation Army. That's fundamentalism for you. I've got a few friends in The Sal, and I was leaked some fiche. According to them, Kleinzack was deleted with something exotic, a Buntline special. Ever heard of it? No reason you should. It was a white elephant showpiece of the Wild West, with an eleven-inch barrel. Wyatt Earp had one. Do you see the pattern? The Sal aren't saying any more, but it's my guess that if you were to screen Kleinzack's *Clementine*, you'd see a technicolor twitch, and it would wind up with a lab-coated Kraut remix man blundering into the crossfire at the OK corral and getting his globes shot out."

Later, after Sally Rhodes had gone, Michaelis Monte had a few stiff drugs. He was rattled, no doubt about it. In previous corporation wars, the higher echelons had been off-limits. You can't negotiate a peace with a frazzled corpse. But this new thing, this campaign of terror, didn't appear to be a particular respecter of the ethics of monetarist diplomacy. He found Sally Rhodes' conclusion unutterably creepy: "someone, something, doesn't like what you do Miki, and is taking extreme measures to shut you, and everyone else in your line, down."

He was safe in his household. The defences were on, the grounds were secure. There were no human agents in the system to turn traitor, and the governing AI had had its loyalties freshly upgraded. Killflies were loose in the corridors of his retreat – he knew his employees referred to it behind his back as The House on Haunted Hill – and were coded to administer lethal injections to any moving thing that didn't match Monte's displacement configurations. He was as protected as a man could be.

He sat on the psychedelic bubble couch, and looked at his tiger-striped echt-Mondrian. The painting stirred in its sleep. He let the pleasant warmth of a soother seep through his body, calming him. As he watched, the painting's breathing grew ragged. It died, colours fading to grey, jelly congealing behind glass. It had happened before. A fault in the heating. There was



nothing to worry about, the soother in his bloodstream told him. Deep in his brain, an unsoothed fragment of his consciousness screamed.

He floated back to his easel room. As he passed the sensors, his body heat registered. Overhead banks of lights lit up, then shut off when he had moved on. There was darkness in front and darkness behind, but he was always in the light. Safe, in white light.

Behind him, black eyes shone in the darkness.

Monte heard the swish, and turned. He couldn't see, but he had a strong afterimage. A tall man, with a heavy cloak.

He had to be alone. A 3-D wallplan proved it. He showed up as an orange pinpoint, winking in a corridor. There were no other warm bodies in the house.

**H**e arrived in the easel room just too late. The twitch was disappearing off the lower right corner of the screen. A black and white picture remained. Monte stood over the easel, and watched as the camera tracked around an empty crypt. Lids fell off coffins, and creepy-crawlies – giant spiders, rats, an armadillo – scuttled in corners. Dracula's sad-eyed wives waited, infinitely patient, in long white shifts for their Master's return.

In his system, the soother reached the zenith of its effect. The tranquillising bulk of the pill had dissolved, putting a potentially dangerous dosage into him, and the emetic core spread in his gut. If he wanted to drug any more, he would have to empty his stomach. He wasn't soothed right now. Fear played his buttons, icy fingertips keyed his vertebrae. He would have to empty his stomach.

His bathroom was mirrored and luxurious, richly carpeted and hung with turquoise and scarlet silks. The design was copied from a Cecil B. DeMille spectacular of the 1920s he had rejected as too outmoded to be worth even a thorough remix. Jewel-encrusted gold taps shone against lime green, veined marble sunken tubs. This was the focus, far more than his austere bedroom, of his fantasies and fulfilments.

Monte bent double over a puce and ginger toilet bowl, fashioned like a triton's horn, and vomited tidily. He slammed down the oyster-shaped lid and sat on it. The emetic had a calming side-effect. He felt bad, but was instantly better. He got up and walked to the sink – a mustard replica of the font in Salisbury Cathedral, and washed his face.

Behind him, a door silently opened.

Monte peered minutely at his face in the mirror. It was possible to be flabby and haggard at the same time. He bared his teeth. They were filmed yellow. Then, the thing took him. He saw the hand that gripped his jaw and felt the one in his hair, but neither showed in the mirror. He was held fast by emptiness. Arms like metal bands gripped him. Angling his eyes down, he could see the dark sleeve of a dinner jacket and the black folds of a cloak; but in the mirror (on-screen?) he was struggling only with himself. His paisley collar was yanked away from his neck. Cold lips clamped to his throat, ice-chip teeth sank in...

The turquoise and scarlet faded first, turned dead and grey. Then, his shirt calmed down and resolved itself into a dingy, indeterminate smear. His vision slowly bled, the technicolor twitch passing from left to right before his eyes...

He felt himself emptying out. Feebly, he raised a hand to push away the unseen face pressed to his throat. He had no more feeling. His hand flapped, chilly and wet, in his field of vision.

The last things he saw were his fingers, stained forever with the black of his own blood.

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**Kim Newman** has contributed four previous stories to *Interzone*, the last of which was "Famous Monsters" (issue 23) – described by Terry Pratchett as "one of the best shorts I've read all year." He is the only writer to have appeared in all the *IZ* anthologies to date. His highly-praised non-fiction book *Nightmare Movies* was recently reissued in a revised version by Bloomsbury. Kim has also had short fiction published in *Fantasy Tales* and *Fear*, and his first novel is now long overdue!

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# Mutant Popcorn

## Film reviews by Nick Lowe

If you think the British cinema has a hard time, spare a tear for the planet Neptune. Its moons alone host more creative talent than the whole of downtown Beverly Hills, yet young film-makers face problems of finance and logistics inconceivable by terrestrial standards. Even the cheapest East European film stock is well-nigh unobtainable, and raising the capital for even a three-minute promo consumes the entire GNP for the outer planets over twenty trillion years. A completed Neptunian feature has little prospect of distribution outside its world of origin, and to date no Neptunian picture has even been considered for selection at a European or American film festival. At present, filmgoers on Neptune have to make do with poor-quality satellite TV signals intercepted from Earth. Nevertheless, local film-makers show a surprising resilience and even optimism about the future, despite the difficulties a Neptunian faces, as a bonded flux of charged deuterium nuclei, in interacting with the physical universe at all. Neptune's current orbital status as outermost planet has led to a surge of local pride and identity, and many look to the forthcoming Voyager encounter as a historic chance to "put Neptune on the map." Others remain sceptical, remembering the poor response on Earth to Viking transmissions of the Martian Geological Players' award-winning performance piece "Stasis," or the woefully misappreciated Uranian project to create a zany comic sculpture from their planet's magnetic field. It remains to be seen whether anything comes of present plans by young Neptunian film fans to celebrate the Voyager visit by programming their weather system to spell out "Still waiting for Lemon Popsicle VII" in 450-mile-long methane streamers in the upper atmosphere.

In the meantime, would-be devotees of extraterrestrial cinema have to be content with pictures that simply look like they've come from other planets. Happily, there seem to be more and more of these about, if you can sift past the seasonal clutch of late body-swap vehicles and brainless ghost comedies. *Moonwalker*, for instance, was clearly made on a planet where Michael Jackson is not a pathetic twerp with the

sexual energy of a Care Bear and the songwriting skills of a jar of marmalade. But rather more rewarding are those occasional films that actually look, speak, and breathe like the world of a different sun; and of all such lately, unquestionably the most amazing has been the West African fantasy epic *Yeelen*.

Souleymane Cisse's perplexing fusion of folklore and art-house esoterism plays like a vaguely Martian remix of *Return of the Jedi*. The film follows the quest of a young Bambara sorcerer, Nianankoro, whose precocious skills lead him to steal the tribe's objects of power and flee into the wilderness with his witch mother. Nianankoro's father, the dark sorcerer Soma, sets out to pursue and destroy the fugitive before he can learn to use his plundered power. Nianankoro's only chance lies with his exiled uncle, who preserves the lost talisman that can channel the power of his stolen jewel. But the uncle lives beyond the territory of the hostile Peul, and Nianankoro's mother is too old to make the vast, hazardous journey; so he must set out alone through desert and enemies with his father's magic ever closing in pursuit, and only his own still-immature powers for protection. Through the expected series of rite de passage adventures, Nianankoro develops in manhood and magic, and comes also to understand the real significance of the showdown with Soma that looms inevitably ahead.

But if this sounds familiar stuff in outline, the execution is uniquely and brilliantly alien. The strange imagistic narrative, often bizarre dialogue, the weird alien symbolism of the final scenes, and above all the light and landscape of the Sahel evoke the uncanny poetry of another world, in which story and players seem eerily at home. The power of kinship, the unquestioned reality of Bambara magic, the universe of symbols that these together build are taken for granted as part of the cultural furniture, not just by the characters but by the whole narrative they inhabit. Aside from the locations and a certain technical minimalism, *Yeelen* has little in common with the other Mandinka film to get a wide recent showing, Med Hondo's *Sarraounia*. That was an enjoyably shambolic period adventure,

complete with action pieces, vivid politics, robust humour, and a wonderful villain; this is a visionary celluloid poem, a rare and remarkable attempt at an African art film.

*Yeelen* has been badly overpraised, with a lot of Oedipal wittering from festival critics, and it's exactly the sort of film I'd have expected sf buffs to abhor. Yet every genre fan I've found who's seen it has loved it to death and back. The reason, I'm convinced, is that it triggers all those disused adolescent tingles of actually watching an alien world unfold, something longtime sf readers are affected by powerfully but which has never been even approximately achieved in a genre film. (I'd personally make an honourable exception of *Dune*, but look how much effort that cost, and how few thanks.) *Yeelen* has most in common with another great tribal epic of landscape and sorcery much savoured in sf circles, the Lappish spectacular *Pathfinder* (followup now in production, I'm happy to note). There's something hugely, primitively absorbing about historical fantasies from subindustrial cultures, set in landscapes sufficiently remote from tourism and wildlife documentaries that they seem familiar in imagination rather than in earthly reality. All this, plus a soundtrack showcasing the golden tonsils of Salif Keita, *le Domingo de la Chanson Africaine!* Are you sure you have strength to resist? Unlike *Pathfinder*, *Yeelen* will have you nodding off now and again, but that's cool. It's still the nearest thing to a movie from Mars.

And so to a film that seems beamed across from a whole nother dimension where they really know how to boogie. To say I enjoyed *Dead Ringers* is about as pallid as remarking that the inside of David Cronenberg's head is not as other places. This, just for example, is the movie that includes a credit for "Radical Surgical Instruments." This is the movie, prized by its author as his long-awaited breakthrough into realism, that features a sequence where Genevieve Bujold separates a pair of Siamese twins on camera with her bare teeth. This is the film in which a drug-crazed gynaecologist becomes convinced that his clientele are all MUTANT WOMEN with uterine abnormalities hitherto un-



known to science. This is *Valley of the Dolls* meets *A Zed and Two Noughts*, *The Parent Trap* meets *The Brood*. This is – no, no, I'm fine, really, I'll be fine if I just do a synopsis.

Okay, Drs Elliot and Beverly Mantle are identical twin gynaecologists who achieve international fame while still medical students by inventing a revolutionary piece of surgical apparatus. (*Steady...*) Soon they are treating the reproductive machineries of wealthy ladies in their thriving private clinic

cute his Geigeresque designs for a set of new-wave gynaecological tools...

*Dead Ringers* is Cronenberg's pet project, very freely nursed from horror writer Bari Wood's 1977 novel (with Jack Geasland) *Twins* – itself an opportunistic psychothriller prompted by the now-forgotten Marcus twins scandal a couple of years earlier. (The original, superior title got appropriated by Ivan Reitman's forthcoming goof-off comedy about Schwarzenegger and DeVito as identical twins.) It's an

familiarity.

All the same, a lot of the film's ambitions are pretty wishful. Cronenberg obviously wants to demonstrate that the things he's been making genre films about all his career are serious human ideas that would be equally at home in a realistic picture; that he's a film-maker with a unique, important vision that pleads for critical respect. I've no quarrel with any of that. Us lot have known for years that the man's a



Jeremy Irons and Genevieve Bujold in 'Dead Ringers'

in Toronto, and enjoying worldwide acclaim for their joint research. Suave extravert Elliot handles the PR end with panache, while studious Beverly has the human touch toward clients and painstaking appetite for work. With appropriate attention to hair and dress sense, they are accomplished at passing for one another: a ruse that serves them well in public and private, where everything is shared all the way from apartment to women. But all goes awry when hysterine mutant and recreational user Bujold falls for Beverly but very much not for Elliot, and rejects both when she finds she's been two-timed in a novel sense. Beverly, torn between her and his twin, descends into spiralling drug use himself, and at the height of a paranoid obsession with mutations of the uterus commissions a sculptor in steel to exe-

important manoeuvre in its maker's career-long quest for mainstream credibility: a serious, non-genre dialogue movie rooted in character and performance, confining the old Cronenberg obsessions with mutations of mind and flesh within a studied façade of naturalism. Ironically, it makes more adventurous and pervasive use of special illusions than any of his previous films, in the seamless virtuosity of new split-screen wheezes to allow Jeremy Irons to play both twins together. But the wizardry is meant, as in the oddly parallel faked interactions in *Roger Rabbit*, to recede invisibly into the film texture, in which it largely succeeds, thanks both to fine work by Irons and to painstaking mimicry of perfectly routine track and pan shots, little unobtrusive snippets of everyday film grammar that lull suspicion by their very

mild form of genius, whose nightmare romances of the radical flesh set out consciously to decode our largely submerged terror of decay in the body. With hindsight, it hasn't helped Cronenberg's pursuit of mainstream recognition that he suffers from a healthy sense of humour about himself and his work, and a comfortable, unembarrassed attitude to genre. But when he has tried, in *Fast Company* and *The Dead Zone*, to show he can make films without baroque extravagances of makeup and sheep guts, nobody's been terribly interested in the results.

So in interviews about *Dead Ringers* Cronenberg keeps stressing how this is a realistic movie, an actors' movie, an emotional drama dependent on script rather than screen magic, and how all the wizardry is dictated by the story, not other way up. This is disingenuous



to the point of mischief. The script isn't really all that great (there are some laughably stilted lines of O-yes-very-clever dialogue), much of the drug stuff is pretty gothic, there's some riotously improbable bumps of plot and plausibility lapses, and the Bujold character and her role in the twins' relationship are very erratically handled. There's even a couple of difficult moments of old-fashioned Cronenberg schlockery: the oddly anticlimactic surgical homicide at the end, and a preposterous earlier dream sequence reminiscent of Geena Davis's birth nightmare in *The Fly*. (A second, even sillier, dream was shrewdly snipped, but Cronenberg claims response to test screenings supported the retention of this one. Yet, unless I blinked, a crucial scene in the disintegration of Beverly's affair with Bujold seems to have flittered to the cutting-room floor.) Yes, Irons is very good – no more pasty-faced period toyboy leads for him – and the twins' strange bond is very well imagined. Especially satisfying is

the way it's the amiable Beverly who goes psycho and the glib Elliot who then reveals a powerful streak of empathy and compassion. But Cronenberg's come on from an iffy start to do excellent work with actors lately, and there's nothing confirmed here that followers haven't known already.

Fact is, Cronenberg goes blithing on about how he's always wanted to make a film about twins, when it's perfectly obvious that this is the film he's always wanted to make about gynaecologists. The fundamental reason why *Dead Ringers* is so wonderful is its brilliant deconstruction of the myth of women's insides. Here, more than anywhere, is an area of social thinking about sex and flesh where the body itself is treated as an alien beast. Even their owners sometimes feel wombs are a parasitic lodger hosted deep in their flesh, with awkward animal purposes of their own that the host organism is powerless to control. The fact that there are expert veterinarians who know something about the handling of these tempera-

mental uglies doesn't altogether make the situation any more comfortable. Everyone, gender notwithstanding, is afraid of their insides to a degree, and submitting to someone else's professional invasion is unsettling enough. The surgeon who flips out in the theatre when you're helpless under his knife is a potent nightmare – indeed, there's just such a scene in *Dead Ringers*. But male gynaecologists going hoopla fetch out in addition all the emotional crockery of sexual control and aggression, and there we are back in the classic Cronenberg territory it used to be fun to call venerable horror. There's much excellent stuff in the twins scenario, and obviously I hope Irons gets his Oscar; the Academy does tend to favour gimmick performances, so it's more than an outside chance. But the real stars of this beautiful, sublimely extraterrestrial film are the radical surgical instruments, and shame on anyone who tries to apologise for it. ●

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# Lyle Hopwood

## The Outside Door

**“M**aiasa, stop daydreaming! I asked you to fetch the silver polish!” Maiasa jumped up guiltily and ran down the corridor to the storecupboard. She plucked the oddly shaped thing – jar? urn? – from the polish shelf and skipped back to the mastercleaner.

“Here you are, Mastercleaner,” she said shyly, offering the thing – vase? cokebottle? – to the grumpy woman.

Anita Mastercleaner belied her name. She was filthy and the striplighting in the Rozzabee household showed up the rents and smears on the shift she threw over her bigroom clothes. Maiasa, half her age and still gangly with youth, showed promise in the untidiness field but lacked Anita’s finesse. Both now bent over the Rozzabee silverware and polished for all they were worth, which was about four silver pennies an hour. In a short while, Anita found another reason to chide the apprentice.

“Maiasa, why haven’t you brought the finishing cloth?”

Maiasa skipped – she was that type of girl – to the storecupboard and threw open the door. And screamed. Anita ran up and they both gazed into the cavern behind the walnut door. A five foot wide chasm had been driven through the Beliac household adjacent to the redright wall. About two stories deep, it extended as far to the left as they could see. To their right, it vanished into a cloud of dust as the grobbling machine ate along the line of the strong foundation wall. Presumably it had bitten off the back of the storecupboard by accident. When she leaned out through the hole, Maiasa could see the Beliac wallpaper hanging in shreds, plaster showing through here and there. The back of the storecupboard held the remains of a doorframe, as though it had once been an access to the Beliac house. The rooms across the gap yawned like a huge dolls’ house.

“Kids!” said Maiasa with undisguised glee. “Mrs Beliac is going to be sooo pissed off.”

Mrs Rozzabee wasn’t too pleased either. She gave the cleaners the week off while Beliac’s workmen located a builders’ storecupboard and placed the RSJs for reconstruction.

**M**aiasa was a life member of the #600 Historical Trust. Members always spent holidays at a Stately Home. Stanmore, the most fantastic, was a long way away, though, and the #600 Trust map sowed more confusion than enlightenment. The diagonal route, though short, looked difficult. It

led through the immigrant area in #6AF, and passed no coffee bars. She would take straight down, and then across Shunt, a large gallery and several mezzanines of great natural beauty. It would be a return journey of about nineteen miles.

She left in the morning, carrying a bag in case she found a lightbulb storecupboard on the way. Anita had insisted. She took the main Rozzabee stairs to the #6AA landing, and opened the doors with the rusty key from her staff chain. The communal stairwell, maintained by council workmen, was half-choked with trash. For a hundred and twenty-four flights she walked steadily down and then lost count. The flight numbers on the little landings were obscured with graffiti and billstickers. She would have to head red-right, hoping a native would give her a floor number.

She pushed at the fire door on the landing, and it gave in with a squeak. She set off down the corridor, keeping the red wall on her right, and came to a vast bigroom set around with shops and bars. Ordering a coffee, she sat down facing out from the bar. She took out the map and laid it on the metal table, but lost interest when a blue streak flew past her ear.

A bird! She watched the bluebird skip and soar across the bigroom, craftily heading for a strut or beam and darting aside at the last instant. If it had been a busker, she would have thrown it a penny; it put on a good show. As she watched the bird grew bolder and she clapped her hands and laughed, the laugh freezing as a man sat beside her and put his arm on her shoulder.

“#600 Trust? I read your badge,” said the man. He was young and intense, with suspiciously big feet. “My name’s Arctan. Are you visiting an area of outstanding natural beauty?”

“Stanmore,” she said, suddenly conscious of her tatty clothes.

He chatted, politely and amiably. She was aware he was questioning her, and she guessed that he was a policeman. Possibly he was on the case of the Grobbling Kids, and suspected any stranger. When he offered to lead her to the #6AA liftshaft she accepted, thrilled. She had never been in a lift. They walked down redright corridors to a private home, and turned into it with an apology to the doorman, who popped his head out of his gate-hut and rubber-necked them for all the world like a wooden turtle. Then through the lounge and across the bathroom, through a wooden door into the adjacent dwelling, down a backstair and across a hydroponic room; Maiasa was totally lost. The map didn’t go into details



of the private dwellings. The man led her across a cafeteria's huge kitchens which boasted, in the corner, a man-size dumb waiter.

"It goes right down to the Stanmore level," he assured her.

As she got into the cramped lift, Maiasa mentioned her lightbulb quest. Arctan thought about it and pressed the button on the lift.

Exiting the lift on the Stanmore level, they headed for a change down blueright corridors; they were heading away from Stanmore. Once again, Arctan led them through several private dwellings, and eventually wrenched open a storeroom door in a beautifully furnished Louis XIV flower shop. A million lightbulbs at least tumbled to the floor. Maiasa filled her bag with 60 and 100 watt bulbs, and felt like skipping again. Several storecupboards stood nearby, and she tried all of them – nothing ventured, nothing gained – and found copper pipes, rubber goods, dried pulses in bags, bedding and a jaroid thing (a flask?) like an upside-down silver polish vessel. She held it out to Arctan.

"Fire fighting equipment," he said, reading the label. "It produces a thick fire-retardant mist."

Maiasa put it in her bag. "We're in Shunt now, aren't we? Nothing else could have such rich furnishing," she said, pointing to the chairs, and to the intricate mouldings on the ceiling.

Arctan tugged her hands. "Follow me. I'll show you beauty," he said.

**T**hey walked back down the corridor, now with the red wall on their right. They were going back. Arctan opened a small door that Maiasa would have missed, and led her up a flight of service stairs. They walked round a curved greenright corridor with rooms leading left but not right. After about 320 degrees, he led her to another service staircase and up another flight.

They emerged into a gallery. Rooms led off left, but the huge low space to their right had only a glass hexagon in the centre of the floor. Great floodlights on stalks angled into it. The hexagon was about three feet high and covered over with triangular leaded glass panels. Brushing dust from the cover with her cleaner's instinct, she gazed down at the panorama below. She was looking into the Shunt Bigroom from above. She squealed with delight. As a member of an historical trust, she fully appreciated her vantage point. Two stories below her people shopped and chatted and drank coffee in an atmosphere soaked with the high culture of Shunt. The architecture of the facades! The murals! In the far corner, a mobile clacked and spun which was undoubtedly original work by Adrian Mastersculptor. Only one thing marred the view. In the centre of the hexagon an iron load-bearing beam had been placed, and on it a family of bluebirds had made their home – and their latrine. The inaccessible place had never been cleaned. She turned to Arctan.

"You'd think they'd clean that," she said.

Arctan shrugged. Then he looked her in the eyes and said, "Who's this 'they'? And where would the dirt end up if they did?"

She knew that. "They" were the council. And the dirt would end up flowing through the sewage system



Illustrations by Mike Hadley



to the nearest reclamation plant where it would be processed and sent to the level's hydroponics plant.

"And where is the electricity generated for all this?" said Arctan, continuing his soliloquy.

It was generated at the fusion plant on #1A9.

"Where does all the waste heat go? Maiasa, have you ever wondered how many levels there are?"

She hadn't. Now she knew he was a policeman. He must be testing her. He evidently suspected her of joining the Grobbling Kids in trying to Break Out. Terrified, she stuttered some answer. It would be wrongful arrest. She didn't believe in "Out". "Out" was a concept extrapolated from "outside a room" to "outside a dwelling" to "outside all the dwellings". She knew that it couldn't bear the larger meaning. Everything was inside a dwelling or logically it couldn't exist.

She couldn't discuss criminal philosophy under stress though. Her voice shrank away.

"How come everything we need we just find in a storecupboard?" he continued.

Now, Maiasa had gone to morning school, and her teacher had taught her what she always referred to, gigglingly, as the "two R's and an A"; and this involved some elementary philosophy, as is right, but kept in touch with practical matters, as is even better, and the teacher had outlined the two different creation theories, from a book called *The Almighty vs. the Continuous Council Workman*. In the first theory, an Almighty Council Workman had originally filled up the cupboards when the dwellings were "created". If that was true, then they would become empty as equipment was used. And they didn't. Storecupboards were always full. Ergo, the Continuous Council Workman was the only viable theory. She tried to explain this to Arctan.

But he was raving, almost frothing, as a stream of mystical rubbish poured from his mouth. He'd seized on the metaphysical concepts of "Outside", "Creation", and "Ultimate Exit", this last also known as the "Outside Door". Funny that he should use the slang word for "crematorium", she thought. But it convinced her that Arctan was not a policeman, despite his big feet.

He was a prophet-guerrilla of the Grobbling Kids.

**"M**aiasa, I can rescue you. I will find a way out. We can go together through the Outside Door."

She shivered. She pulled away from him and ran.

He caught up with her quickly. After all, she was completely lost. He found her trying to hide in a storecupboard of replacement bulbs for the floodlights. He dragged her down, and pulled her along the yellowright corridor floor. She screamed, she struggled, but the Shunt Community were all at afternoon tea in their private homes. He brought her to a dank Unsafe Area, a structurally unsound dwelling waiting for council workmen to locate a ferroconcrete storecupboard. She protested in vain that she didn't need rescuing.

She heard a rustling in the gloom behind her, and a number of ragged Kids emerged from a service duct, the flat low channels that ran above the thin false ceilings of the corridors. Water dripped from all sides as burst plumbing and – she wrinkled her nose –

wastewater pipes remained unrepaired. Proof if you like of the Continuous Council Workman theory. She tried to communicate this to Arctan, but he was yards away, working on a huge machine made of salvaged pipe-laying parts and pneumatic drills. He fired the machine into life and came for her.

"Come, this may be it. This time we may break through to Outside," he said, and lifted her like a sack of new clothes from a recently discovered storecupboard.

She lay in the cab of the grobbler as it ground forward, eating through the concrete of the dwelling as though it were cheese, following the line of least resistance and tracking by keeping a probe touching the foundation wall. One of the Kids stood over her, brushing away the chunks of concrete that pattered into the cab. She glared at him. He smiled back.

"Why are you dressed so badly, when clothes are available to all?" she said, hoping to shame him.

"The supply of new clothes will run out," he said, with the dogmatic assurance of the fanatic.

"I'm sure that seven revolutionaries dressing well would not hasten the day," she said haughtily. It was best, she felt, not to argue any more about Outside Doors, and she was prepared to accept the Out-of-Stock Death Of The Universe theory as given. At least, until she got out of the whining, lurching machine.

Arctan smiled at her. "There are many more of us." She gazed around in alarm; there were seven crouching shapes in the cab, and the whirling drill-bits ran all around them like Ezekiel's wheel. Arctan saw her confusion. "We are merely the redright team of #600. Each group has six teams, one for each direction."

"What's a direction?" She thought she knew, but with mystics it was always better to check.

"Directions are for going places. If you want to go to a mezzanine, you go redright from a dwelling, or blueright from a gallery."

"I see that."

"And there are six principal directions. Blueright, redright, yellowright, greenright, upstairs and downstairs."

"And the others," she said, feeling uncomfortably close to talking about Outsides again, "are going in the wrong directions?"

"We don't know."

"You're going in the wrong direction, then?"

"Maiasa, you and I will find out together."

This was something she hoped to remove from the agenda. As she thought about it, the machine bucked from a minor gas explosion caused by a fractured pipe igniting from the frequent sparks of the diamond-tipped bits. Shadows brushed more concrete lumps away.

"What if," and she had to draw a deep breath and take the bull by the horns here, "The Outside Door is in a seventh direction?"

They laughed. "Now that," said her protector, the man who brushed away the lumps of concrete, "would violate the Four-Colour Map Theorem."

**M**aiasa was a sensible, level-headed woman. She had heard of the Captive Effect, and as the noisy, vibrating machine swiftly ate along the edges of the handsome dwellings, she briefly considered falling in love with Arctan. It would be most impractical inside the machine, but presumably



the machine stopped occasionally, for fuel perhaps. The Kids took turns operating the machine, which meant holding a dead man's handle and staring out front into a maelstrom of spitting, shrieking concrete. She found this wearing.

"Why don't you —" and here she again ran into a blank wall of unthinkableness, "why don't you just walk to, er, as far as you can go?"

Her protector raised his eyes to the cab roof. "Corridors are often curved. We may end up walking in a circle."

"The foundation wall may be curved also."

This drew a massed gasp from the guerrillas. "A foundation wall is the definition of straightness," Arctan chided. This was true, she knew, but there was something more, some Euclidean axiom her giggling teacher had stumbled over. But it didn't come to her; she felt that, frankly, falling in love had been a better idea. Topology, geometry, even current events, were often skimmed in the education of future Master-cleaners. She gazed at Arctan adoringly, for practice.

They carried on in this manner for several miles. Tired of the huddled shapes of the Grobbling Kids, Maiasa took to trying to catch glimpses of the inhabitants of the dwellings they damaged. Occasionally the machine took the wall off a dining room or staircase and the occupants reeled back, covered in dust. Even in her love for Arctan, she realized his was an anti-social quest.

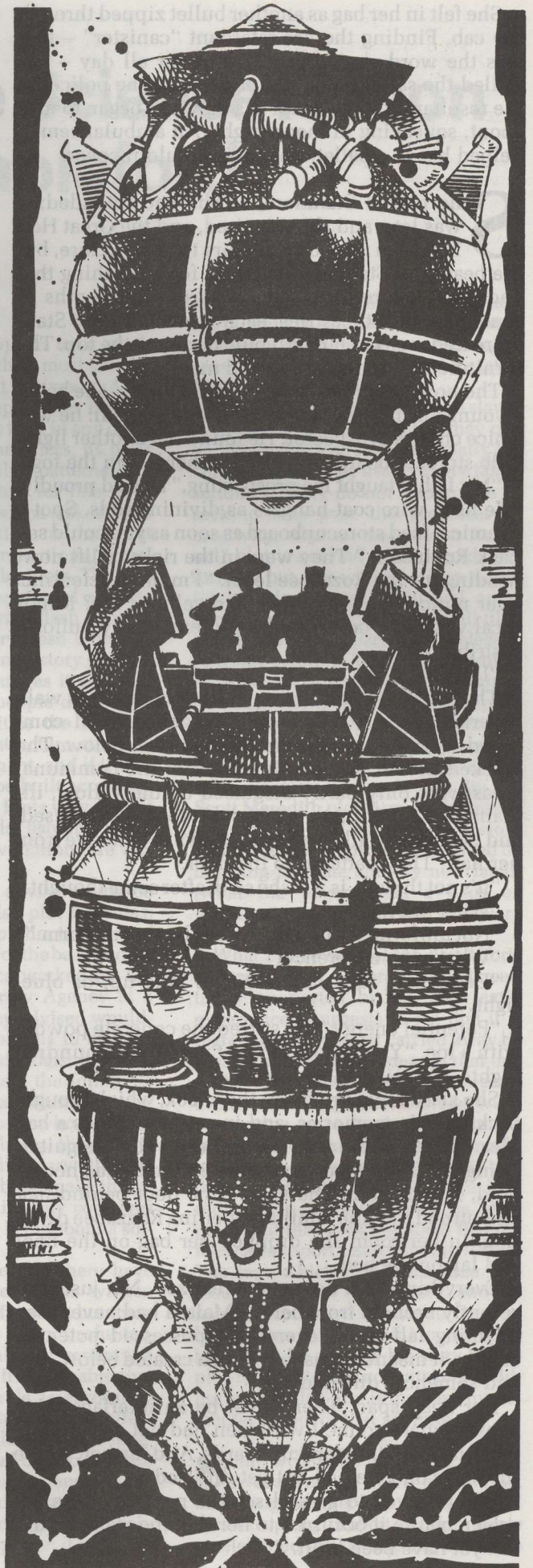
Without warning, the machine hit a pocket of rotten concrete, lurched and dropped a storey. Arctan was knocked from his dead man's handle and the machine's engine stopped. As he struggled to restart the machine, Maiasa knelt cautiously and looked out of the side window. Tourists were milling around, screaming. The machine had fallen into Stanmore Stately Home.

Maiasa lay down again, as Arctan cursed and swore. The Grobbling Kids of the #600 Redright Brigade issued contradictory instructions and panicked.

"Police!" shouted the one who had been her protector. And listening carefully, she made out the calm, measured tones of crowd-control officers shepherding the terrified tourists from the hall. Behind them, she knew, armed officers waited for their chance to move in. The Kids knew it too; three fled immediately, and there was a sound of automatic fire. The four remaining shrugged, with their hands palm uppermost, indicating helplessness. They had no weapons; no plans; and not much aggression, considering they were supposed to be guerrillas. Arctan pumped a gas pedal, and flooded the engine. He cursed. Maiasa put her head on the floor and waited.

There was another burst of gunfire, and a bullet penetrated the cab, ricocheting around in the confined space. The next bullet hit Arctan in the face. The others climbed through the window, and ran. No gunfire followed them. The police would net them and hang them. It saved on bullets. Ammunition storecupboards, for obvious reasons, were few and far apart.

Crying, Maiasa kissed her captor's ruined cheek. "It's not your fault," she said. "Schizophrenia is very common on the lower levels." He looked relieved; perhaps she helped him at the end. As his eyes glazed she murmured, "Well, you've found the Outside Door now, Arctan. The only one there is."





She felt in her bag as another bullet zipped through the cab. Finding the fire-retardant "canister" – that was the word she'd been looking for all day – she pulled the safety catch and threw it at the police. In the resultant fog, she leapt to safety and began to mill about, squeaking in mock fright. An ambulanceman helped her to a pallet, until she should recover.

She toured Stanmore, as she had intended; it was late, and she was tired, and the Great Hall had been closed for repairs to its structure, but the beauty of Stanmore made up for everything that had gone before. The artworks from the depths of time. Beautiful tapestries, each scene with the Stanmore trademark, a fanciful blue border at the top. The furniture of rare rosewood and maple.

The police sent her home with an escort, she being a young girl far from home. She was grateful: he was a nice chap, a prospector. He found her another light-bulb storecupboard; she had lost her bag in the fog.

"My father taught me prospecting," he said proudly. "He used wire coat-hangers as divining rods. Spot a chemical feed storecupboard as soon as you could say 'Jack Robinson'." They were in the rickety lift now, heading for the Rozzabee level. "I'm more scientific. Ever noticed how orderly the dwellings are? Minor local variation, but overall it's a remarkably uniform distribution."

"I hadn't."

They got out of the cramped lift and began to walk blueright. #6AA was a poor neighbourhood compared with the splendours she had seen below. The cracked plaster and peeling paint of the communal areas were only partly disguised by the yellow, ill-maintained light. At a greenright door they paused, and he thoughtfully brushed chunks of concrete from her hair. They pattered to the floor.

"It's not though, is it?" she said, after some thought.

"What knot?"

"Not uniform. It's homogeneous, but not uniform."

"What's the difference?"

"Everything falls down. Never falls up, or blue-right..."

"Potential energy." He stirred the concrete powder with a toe. "You've just brought it up over a hundred flights. It's going back down."

She kissed him briefly on the cheek, which brought back terrible memories, and in retrospect was a bad idea. He sauntered off. There was a valuable guitar-string and teapot storecupboard in the Beliac household, he had said. She locked the door behind her, and turned into the familiar-smelling Rozzabee dwelling. In her room she dropped her bag on the floor and lay on the bed.

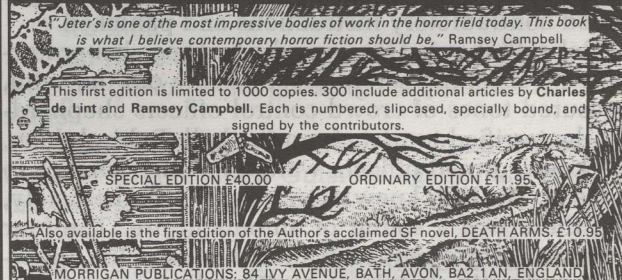
Everything falls down, she realized. Not just stuff recently brought from below. Maiasa had never seen anything fall up. If everything possessed potential energy, it meant it must have been created below, and had somehow diffused up.

Her head span. There must be an interface, high above, where council workmen had not yet brought material to fill the storecupboards. And further, where the ferroconcrete had not yet diffused.

She resolved to go and see the next day. She fell asleep before it occurred to her that the stairs would not yet have been built.

Lyle Hopwood lives in the East End of London but denies being a Yuppie. Born in Yorkshire, she moved south in 1976 "and made straight for Ladbroke Grove, home of T. Rex, Mike Moorcock (and Jerry Cornelius's mum), the Pink Fairies, Hawkwind, and of course drugs. Unfortunately they were all out." She settled for a degree in Molecular Biology from London University, and now works as a Haematology MLSO at the London Hospital in Whitechapel ("stomping ground of such luminaries as Jack the Ripper, the Kray Brothers, the Elephant Man, Fu Manchu and the Yuppie"). This is her first *Interzone* appearance, but she has had a couple of stories published in the semi-professional magazine *Back Brain Recluse*.

## IN THE LAND OF THE DEAD



K.W. JETER  
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PUBLICATIONS



# The Way to Write Science Fiction

## Brian Stableford

### Plotting a Science-Fiction Story

The overelaborate attention which most teachers give to characterization is usually complemented by a marked indifference to plotting. It is almost as if the business of constructing a plot were considered too vulgar to warrant consideration by the truly literary, although it does seem to be the case that the majority of readers are more interested in the plots of stories which they read than in any other aspect of them.

One objection which teachers of creative writing have to the business of plotting is that it is something that can be summarized very easily. A description of how an author goes about the business of characterization might be longer than the story, but an account of the plot is always shorter. Worse still, plots are very often conventional, reducible to formulas. Thus, the plot of very many detective stories can be summed up as: somebody gets murdered; the detective gathers all the evidence and uses ingenious powers of logical deduction to determine who did it. The plot of most romances is just as simple: nice girl meets ruggedly handsome man; their attitudes and circumstances seem bound to keep them apart, but they eventually get together, realizing at last that this is the one thing which will make their lives worthwhile.

The fact that one can reduce whole genres of fiction to fairly simple formulas seems to most literary critics to be a blanket certificate of worthlessness. After all, one of the qualities which great works of literature are supposed to possess is originality, and the originality which simply produces endless variations on a single theme seems substandard. Would-be writers, however, might care to bear in mind the fact that formulaic plots do work. In spite of their predictability they command the attention and the affection of many readers. People who do not care for them often speak scornfully of the kind of romances published by firms like Mills & Boon, mocking the rigid formula to which they are produced, but that derision does not prevent the millions of people who value the experience of reading them from buying and enjoying them.

At first glance, sf appears to be much less formulaic than most genres. Sf has many different settings, and the range of potential happenings in an sf story is much greater than in any other kind of fiction. Nevertheless, its plots do often follow familiar patterns, and there are good reasons for this. It is action and suspense which make stories attractive and exciting to the great majority of readers, and action and suspense are generated by plots. The plot is, in a way, the skeleton of a story, upon which the literary flesh is built. It may be the literary flesh which is responsible for making a story distinctive and beautiful, just as it is actual flesh which makes people distinctive and beautiful, but it is the skeleton which gives the story structure, strength, and power of movement, and if it is to do that, it needs to be built according to a certain set plan. Plots vary, just as the skeletons of birds, fish and mammals vary, but their variations are variations on a theme.

I would strongly advise would-be writers not to despise plot formulas, and to make what productive use of them they can. Some of the best-known sf writers in America worked for the Scott-Meredith Literary Agency at a time when the agency advised would-be pulp writers ambitious to become its clients to use a standard formula. The formula ran along the following lines: begin by establishing a sympathetic lead character who is faced with an urgent problem, then show how his (or her) preliminary attempts to cope with the problem make things worse, before he ultimately contrives by his own efforts to bring about a solution.

It is certainly true that there have been countless good stories written which do not fit this formula, but there is no doubt that it is a very useful formula which is capable of generating lots of good stories. It is arguable that nothing in the formula is absolutely necessary to the production of an effective story, but each element does serve a purpose. If your lead character is not sympathetic, you may alienate some readers; if there is no urgency about what he has to do your story is likely to lack pace and suspense; if he is not

at first frustrated the story may seem too facile; if a solution is not obtained as a result of his own efforts the reader identifying with him will get less satisfaction out of the climax.

Writers should never become slaves to formulas of this kind, but they can be invaluable crutches, especially for beginners, and they deserve to be taken seriously. They do not undermine or seek to take over the processes of creativity; what we mean by an "original" plot is not one which avoids the formula but one which sets up a particularly ingenious or unusual problem for which the characters will ultimately discover a particularly elegant or ironic solution. The capacity which sf offers for unexpected happenings certainly opens up much more space for surprising events and surprising endings, but if these do not become part of the hero's frustrations and achievements as mapped out by the Scott Meredith plot formula the reader may simply feel cheated – a story where the central problem is solved by dragging in some entirely new factor (what the jargon calls a *deus ex machina*) usually does not work very well.

What I have seen of the first efforts of would-be sf writers (and it is certainly supported by my own early experiences) suggests to me that it is regrettably easy to get carried away by a particular image or idea, so that one writes down a description of a bizarre event or a strange environment without paying any attention at all to the question of what kind of plot would make the best use of the idea. It is true that an sf story usually has an idea rather than a character as its focal point, but that does not mean that the idea can support a narrative on its own. The lens which brings the idea into focus is the plot of the story, and the hardest work a writer has to do – far harder than actually thinking up ideas to use – is in shaping his story to display his idea to best advantage. Providing an effective plot is the most fundamental aspect of that shaping.

Some writers do tend to be dismissive about the work of plotting, observing that there are only a handful of "basic plots." Robert Heinlein wrote a celebrated article offering advice to



would-be sf writers, in which he claimed that there were only three: "Boy Meets Girl," "The Little Tailor" and "The Man Who Learned Better." It needs only a slight adjustment of perspective to recognize that all three are variants of a single theme: the Success Story. The first features success in love, the second success in a career, the third success in coming to terms with the way of the world. One might add that there are other kinds of success story: "Who-Done-It?" features puzzle-solving success; "How The Hell Do I Get Out Of This Mess?" is the escaped-threat success story (which features very prominently in horror fiction). One might also point out that each of these plots has a corresponding "anti-plot" or "tragic variant" in which success is not attained.

Reduction of this kind should not, however, be interpreted as a dismissal of the problems of plotting as something unimportant or facile; it is really a matter of pointing out what we mean by the word "plot." What this kind of argument says is that the plot of a story relates to the projects which the characters in a story have, and to whether those projects will come to a successful conclusion or not. There are exactly as many "basic plots" as there are basic needs of human existence: the elementary factors involved in surviving and thriving. A useful method of trying to find a plot which will display your idea is to ask who might get hurt of the world were changed in the way that you imagine.

What plot formulas tend to leave out, curiously, is the reason why plots are capable of gripping the attention of readers and getting them "involved" in the story – which is perhaps the main reason why such a thing as fiction exists at all. What both the Scott Meredith formula and the Heinlein account of basic plots fails to mention, though it is in a sense the very essence of plotting, is the notion of moral order.

The world in which we live appears to have no inbuilt moral order. As St Matthew and everyone else has observed, rain falls on the just and the unjust alike. The wicked are no more likely to get struck down by lightning or by cancer than those who live like saints. This conflicts with our moral sensibilities; we feel that the wicked deserve to suffer misfortune and that the good deserve to be rewarded. It is because the real world perversely fails to punish the wicked and tragically fails to reward the good that people have speculated about an afterlife in which this failure will be decisively rectified.

The world of a story, however, differs from the real world in that the writer is there to guide the hand of providence. He has the power to reward his good characters and punish his wicked ones, and if he does not do so it is

because he has chosen not to do so. Chance plays no role in fiction – or, if it does (if, for instance, a writer decided to let the outcome of his story depend on the throw of a dice) it is only because the writer deliberately abandons his power of choice.

What happens in a story, therefore, cannot help but have some kind of moral significance. This is why the success of the hero of a story is uplifting: that success is the reward for all his cleverness and virtue. Readers love to see the villain of a story come unstuck and perish horribly, not because they are sadistic, but because they recognize the moral propriety of his extinction.

This is why people are not only willing but eager to read what is essentially the same plot over and over again – it is a ritual assertion of moral principle. This is also why most people prefer "upbeat" (morally proper) endings to "downbeat" ones (where the good do not receive the full measure of their apparent entitlement). Downbeat stories – tragedies – are intended to make us uncomfortable, by sharpening our awareness of the failings of the world we live in, and many people feel that they are all too sharply aware of that already.

**T**he plots of sf cannot help but be similar in kind to the plots of other kinds of fiction. The characters with whom we identify, whether they be human or unhuman, may have projects which are distinctive in detail – boldly going where no man has gone before – but they inevitably have the same kind of moral weight as the projects adopted by characters in Greek drama, Shakespearean tragedy, western films and romantic novels. It is true that our notions of what ought to count as good and what ought to count as evil are subject to negotiation, varying from society to society and over time, but the nature of moral questions does not alter, and there is a substantial cross-cultural consensus about the fundamentals of good and evil.

Having said this, though, it must also be said that there are some particular moral issues which are addressed more easily and more frequently by sf than by any other kind of fiction – and this is the main reason why I believe that sf is an interesting, worthwhile and important species of fiction. There are two issues which seem to me to be of cardinal importance.

One moral issue which sf writers often address in their plotting, but which writers in other genres rarely touch, is the question of how we should actually constitute a "moral community." To what kind of entities do we owe moral consideration?

In the real world, and hence in mundane fiction, this is an easy issue to

evade, the simplest move being to say that we owe moral consideration only to other people – this still leaves room for painful disputes about animal rights and the rights of embryos, but it narrows down the discussion to a point where we often do not inquire deeply into the underlying logic of our decisions. Only in sf can we produce moral dramas asking whether an animal with augmented intelligence, or an alien, or a sentient machine is worthy of moral consideration. By asking such hypothetical questions we can actually get to the heart of the question of what it is about an entity which entitles it to be the object of moral concern. There are some sf stories, like Robert Heinlein's "Jerry was a Man" and Vercors' novel *Borderline*, in which the case is actually argued out in a hypothetical court of law.

A second issue which is implicit in the plots of very many sf stories, but much less obvious outside sf, is the question of what constitutes "progress." It is not only individual people who have projects in which they may succeed or fail; people band together into groups, ranging from families and clubs to professions and nations, and these groups take on projects of their own in order to serve the needs and interests of the individuals within them. It makes sense to ask whether the whole human race ought to have a project, what that project should be, and what the chances of succeeding in it are. These are the questions which are involved in the concept of progress; they are questions which surface explicitly in many sf stories, and which are tacitly at stake in many others.

The resolution of a plot in an sf story is almost always concerned with more than the fates of the characters who appear in it; the story usually requires that its resolution bears upon the fate of the hypothetical world which is, in a sense, the true "hero" of the story. Sf is not just about good and bad people who may or may not get their just desserts; it is about worlds which might be better or worse than ours, and the prospects of changing them.

**I**t is still possible to make a career as an sf writer by writing costume drama, in which the only things at stake in your plots will be whether or not the protagonist makes a fortune, gets his own back on the bad guys and marries the prettiest girl around. There is a lot of that kind of costume drama in fantasy, too, though it should be pointed out that the best fantasy also has a particular moral significance of its own – indeed, the chief attraction of Secondary World fantasy is that it can bring moral issues into much sharper focus than fiction about the real world usually permits, often with



a literalized conflict between Good and Evil. I think that sf's handling of the moral issues with which it is most often concerned entitles it to much more serious consideration from literary historians and literary critics than it has so far received. It is interesting to note that sf plots and situations have come to play a significant part in modern philosophical arguments which try to grapple with such questions as how we ought to define a moral community.

Sciencefictional costume drama, which employs the Scott Meredith plot formula in its crudest form, concerned only with the fate of the particular characters in the story, can be exciting to write and to read. I would say to all would-be sf writers, though, that if you want to produce *real* sf then you must bear in mind while you are designing your plots that larger issues – up to and including the fate of the human race – can and should be a matter for consideration. The fate of a hypothetical society transformed by its adoption of a particular technology is something that you might require your readers to care about as much as, and perhaps more than, the fate of the particular individuals who figure in your story. All the best sf possesses this grander moral vision, though doctrinaire literary critics sometimes do not recognize it as a virtue, and sometimes regard it as a poor substitute for “good characterization.”

In my own work I have not always practised what I have preached in this book (though I have tried to be honest in identifying my failures). With respect to plotting, however, I have from the very beginning of my career tried to incorporate these larger issues in my work, even in the crudest of my works. The stories which I have written of which I am most proud – “And He Not Busy Being Born...,” “Sexual Chemistry,” “The Growth of the House of Usher” and *The Empire of Fear* – are all consciously and directly addressed to the question of what would count as a better world than the one we now live in, and I made every effort to be clever, original and provocative in formulating their plots around that question.

Although critics have sometimes claimed that I have a rather downbeat view of things (which I deny) I think that I am on safe ground in claiming that my story “Sexual Chemistry” not only has a happy ending, but that it has the only truly happy ending to which a science fiction story should aspire. At the risk of spoiling the surprise for readers who have yet to encounter it, the last two lines of the story are:

*They lived happily ever after.  
And so did everybody else.*

## The Economics of Science-Fiction Writing

The rewards of sf writing can now be immense. Sf novels can get into the best-seller lists, the stars of the genre can command advances in the hundred thousand dollar range, and there are at least half a dozen people who have become millionaires by writing sf. On the other hand, there are hundreds of reasonably productive and fairly well-respected sf writers who do not make a living wage out of it and probably never will.

The economics of publishing is such that publishers spend large amounts of money buying and promoting a handful of favoured titles each year, while tens of thousands more titles are put out at what is effectively minimum cost (minimum cost meaning that the publisher will not only not advertise your book but will pay you as little for it as he can get away with). The reason why things work this way is not because publishers have formed a vile conspiracy to make a few fortunate writers rich while keeping the rest poor; to a large extent it simply reflects reading behaviour.

The great majority of “potential readers” read less than ten works of fiction per year, perhaps reading only when they are on trains or on holiday, and what they read is largely determined by current fashions – fashions which publishers try to influence as best they can by advertising, aided by such free advertising as book reviews in newspapers and published best-seller lists. That minority of readers who habitually read two or three works of fiction a week is subdivided into tinier minorities by virtue of the fact that many such readers are genre specialists. They provide relatively small but relatively safe inputs of money into the marketplace, supporting works which need no advertising at all to support them. In economic terms “literary fiction” may itself be regarded as a genre, but in most publishing of this kind formularization of the product (which is done very efficiently by publishers like Mills & Boon) is likely to be more effective as a marketing strategy than trying to improve literary quality.

Whole genres can undergo shifts in fashionability as the size of the loyal minorities which they serve varies, and individual writers can occasionally break out of their genre strait-jackets to join the best-selling elite, but the logic of the situation insists that publishers should follow a policy of giving massive rewards to the few while being utterly miserly with the minority. In my more cynical moments, I have been known to suggest that in terms of economic theory, publishers stand in much the

same relationship to writers as pimps to prostitutes or drug-smugglers to the peasants who grow opium poppies. In all three cases the result tends to be that the middlemen grow rich while the people who do the creative work don't. This is probably unfair to publishers, but all writers feel bitter about publishers occasionally.

The current word-rates for sf short stories are in the region of £30 per thousand. That is what *Interzone* pays in Britain, and approximately what *The Magazine of Science Fiction* pays in America. Flat word-rates have fallen out of fashion in America, where payments tend to vary with the length of the story and the prestige of the author; thus, for instance, *Analog* pays 6-8 cents per word up to 7,500 words, dropping to 5-6 cents for stories over 12,500, and 4 cents per word for serials. There are a couple of markets which pay much higher rates – the people who sell to *Omni* and *Playboy* can get as much as \$2,000 for a short story, but they are, inevitably, the hardest markets to sell to.

It will be immediately obvious to anyone perusing these figures that there is no hope of making a living as a short story writer. A 6,000 word story will bring in something near to a (very moderate) week's wage, but the market is far too small to permit anyone to sell a story a week, or even a story a month. A story brilliant enough to catch the eye of the people who edit *Best SF of the Year* anthologies might sell twice, or even three times, and there may be hope of it being further reprinted in years to come, but the sad fact is that short stories will never pay the rent.

Advances on royalties paid to sf novel writers are very variable, and not advertised in the same way that word-rates paid by magazines are, so my information about the current state of play is largely based on hearsay and personal experience, but should not be too far from the truth. In Britain £1,000 advances are commonplace for books which are to appear as original paperbacks, and a £5,000 advance would be regarded (by the publisher!) as large and very generous. In America \$5,000 is probably the current standard for original paperbacks, though some publishers routinely try (and often get away with) offering as little as \$2,500. Well-established authors with a good track record of sales probably have little difficulty getting \$10,000 advances, but that would be unusual for a first novel.

This situation is complicated, of course, by the fact that a novel may well sell in Britain and America, so



that it will bring in two advances. However, if the first publisher who buys the book buys world rights (which will usually be the case for authors who are not represented by agents) they will keep some of the advance (usually 20%) if and when they sublease rights to a publisher on the other side of the Atlantic.

Further complications arise if a novel is to be published in hardcover as well as in paperback. The advance paid by the hardcover publisher will cover both sets of rights, but will then be supplemented by a further sum when paperback rights are sub-leased. However, the hardcover publisher will keep 50% of the paperback advance, and will usually treat the rest as royalties to be set against the advance which he has already paid you. For this reason, the extra money which will be earned as a result of having two editions of the book may take some years to materialize.

Generally speaking, publishers adjust the advances which they pay writers according to the amount of royalties which they expect a book to earn. Sometimes they are wrong – either a book may fail by a wide margin to earn out its advance, or it may sell well enough to generate significant extra royalty revenue. In the former case the author gets to keep the unearned part of the advance, but may find the publisher more cautious when it is time to make a deal for another book. In the second case the author will get the extra money which the book earns, but not very quickly – he is unlikely to see it for at least a year after publication, and if the paperback does not appear until a year or eighteen months after the hardcover three years can easily pass between receipt of the advance (which will itself be paid half on signature of a contract and half on publication) and the first cheque for additional royalties.

If we cut through this Gordian knot of complications to take a crude example, it is not unlikely that a first sf novel in Britain might receive £1,500 advance for British paperback rights, later to be supplemented by 80% of \$5,000 for US rights. The total earnings of the book might therefore be in the region of £4,000, which could be supplemented at some later stage by royalties and sums derived from the sale of translation rights, if the book proves successful. It will also earn a few pounds a year from Public Lending Right, provided that you take the trouble to register it. On this basis, an sf writer has to produce two books a year to live above the poverty-line, and it only requires one half-failure (a book which sells in one country but not the other) to make things difficult.

**M**any authors never get far beyond this level of advance, and there

are professionals of long standing who have to reckon on producing at least two books a year to get by. There are professionals who do not even reach this stage, whose work appears in only one country – if it is Britain they may well have to churn out six or eight books a year to earn the same amount as a copy typist or a shop assistant.

In the past there has usually been a stratum of the market even lower than the general gamut of genre publishing, where the real hackwork is done, and where writers have to turn out a book a fortnight in order to get by. My good friend Lionel Fanthorpe produced nearly two hundred books in the late 1950s and early 1960s for John Spencer & Co., who paid the miserly sum of £22 10s. per volume; they never bothered with contracts and they proceeded to keep for themselves all sums earned by American editions and translations. Even in the year that he managed to produce 34 books he didn't earn enough to give up his regular job. There were still publishers buying in hackwork (including sf books) at £100 per book in the late 1970s, and though I know of no one paying such rates at the moment I would be very surprised if we had actually seen the last of this publishing Third World.

These figures serve to explain why, although circumstances have forced me to be fully dependent on my writing income for five out of the last twenty years, I have always been anxious to avoid committing myself to full-time writing. As the amount of thought and effort invested in my books has increased their quality has improved, but the saleability of a novel depends at least as much on the state of the market as on its intrinsic merits, and when the boom which allowed me to get started was followed (as booms inevitably are) by a phase of contraction, better men than I found difficulty in keeping the wolf from the door.

I am presently employed as a university teacher. University teaching is the best profession to combine with writing because the vacations are so long. I have been doubly fortunate in landing such a job because I have been able to make the history of science fiction and other genres of fantastic fiction my main area of academic research, and have been able to make prolific contributions to the reference books which have sprung up to guide readers and librarians through the ever-expanding heritage of imaginative fiction. The word-rates for this kind of work are even worse than those for writing fiction – academic journals pay nothing, and it is not uncommon for reference-book contributors to be offered ten dollars per thousand words – but it has the advantage that one can reprocess the same information over and over again for different reference books.

Although I have become a reasonably hard-working writer, producing about four million words in the last twenty years and selling eighty per cent of them, my salary remains comfortably higher than my writing income. This experience leads me to suggest that would-be writers should not give up their day jobs unless that are (a) content to live dangerously close to the poverty line; (b) married to a highly-paid and very sympathetic spouse; or (c) already in possession of a huge offer for the paperback rights to their next book. For myself, I am living in hope that I might one day manage (c).

**T**he economics of writing involve costs as well as income. At a minimal level, one can get by with paper and a typewriter, but a serious writer has expenses which go somewhat beyond that. Typescripts once prepared have to be mailed out, and the beginning writer has to face the probability that most of his stories will be rejected, mostly more than once. As Britain is so short of paying markets this will mean submission to American magazines, which is both expensive and time-consuming.

I always airmail my manuscripts, sending a photocopy of the story with a statement that it is NOT a simultaneous submission (editors don't like authors submitting their stories to more than one market at a time, and often won't read a story if they think an author might be doing that) and that it can be thrown away if rejected. I enclose with such submissions a self-addressed envelope with enough American stamps on it to carry back an airmail letter notifying me of failure or success. This saves time, but means that I have to bear the cost of making a new photocopy every time I submit a story. It also means that I need a way of getting hold of US stamps. The advantage of the system is that I usually learn what happens to the story in a matter of weeks.

A beginning writer cutting costs to the bone, who sends a story surface mail, enclosing sufficient International Reply Coupons to have it returned by the same method, must also add to the time it takes to travel the time it is likely to spend in the magazine's "slush pile." The slush pile is where editors put stories by people they have never heard of until they have a spare moment to look at them (or, more likely, until someone else can be persuaded to have a look at them). In my teens, when I was in this position, it usually took nine months to get a reply from America, and several manuscripts never came back at all. Even now, though American editors do pay me the compliment of not dumping my submissions in the slush pile, they rarely buy a story from me, and it is diehard optimism rather than profits



which leads me to make irregular submissions to them.

Another expense which most writers face is agents' fees. These can be partly avoided by not having an agent, and for beginning writers there is little point in trying to get one – it is just as hard for unknown writers to persuade a worthwhile agent to take them on as it is to persuade a worthwhile publisher – but the writer who sells world rights direct to a publisher must sign over a percentage of American and translation rights to pay for the publisher's subsequent agenting endeavours. A writer sufficiently established to need (and be able to get) a decent agent will have to pay at least 10% of domestic income and 15% of foreign income for the privilege. Successful agents nowadays try to hike this to 15% and 20%.

The writer who takes advantage of all the facilities which modern technology provides will also face considerable equipment costs. It is still possible to bash out stories on a second-hand manual typewriter, but a great deal of the hard work can be taken out of writing by using a word-processor. All the writers I know who use such machines regard them as a god-send – they eliminate the hassle involved correcting errors with Tippex or strikeovers, and they make it possible to mess about with text as much as is necessary to get it into the required shape. Very few writers can produce a publishable first draft, and there never was a writer who couldn't improve on his first drafts. A word-processor allows you to alter your first draft as often as you like while producing it, and makes the job of editing it into a second, third or nth draft very much easier than retyping the whole thing.

The cheapest complete word-processing kit (the Amstrad 8256) sells as I write for about £400; a disc which will hold up to 40,000 words of text costs just under £3 and a cloth ribbon for the printer (similarly good for about 40,000 words before it gets grey enough to cause difficulties when photocopying) about £6. That same 40,000 words, printed in the double-spaced format required by publishers, will fill about 135 sheets of paper, which will cost about £1.35 to buy and about £6.75 to photocopy. It all mounts up.

**T**he rewards and costs still missing from the economic equation cannot be quantified; they are the satisfactions and frustrations which one gets from being a writer. As everyone knows, writers are supposed to suffer terrible agonies for their art, but they are compensated by being better able to pretend to be superior human beings.

The benefits you will get in terms of other people thinking well of you will

probably be mixed. People are certainly impressed by the aura of creative power which a writer may wear, but can easily demolish it with a few well-chosen questions. Bob Shaw has observed that the deadliest questions usually come as a pair: "Have you published anything?" (loosely translatable as: I've never heard of you) and "What name do you write under?" (loosely translatable as: I've definitely never heard of you).

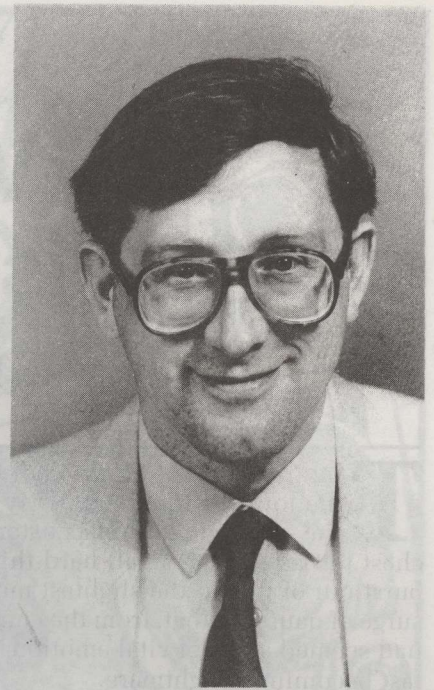
Sf writers can, if they so wish, enjoy the advantages and disadvantages of more intimate contact with their audience by going to sf conventions; there they have at least a slim chance of bumping into people who have read their work, but must face the probability that these will be hardened convention-goers no longer awe-struck by the mere presence of a writer, who will be only too eager to tell you what you did wrong.

There is, however, an incomparable sweetness in hearing someone praise your work; you have to be a bit of an egomaniac to force yourself to write in the first place, and egomaniacs are the only people who really get a full measure of delight from the applause of others. Some very famous sf writers, because they are in regular touch with their fans, get almost as much opportunity to exercise and increase their egomania as people who appear in minor roles (weather forecasters and the like) on TV.

The two most difficult problems which the habitual writer has to cope with are book reviewers and spouses. Some lucky writers have trouble with neither: they get only good reviews, and turn out to have married one of those rare people who fully understand that when the writer is physically present but mentally absent he is only doing his job, and intends no personal insult. Most writers, though, will ultimately have to suffer the hideous torture of a cruel review, and the hard task of explaining to an injured spouse that you aren't really subjecting them to shameful and uncaring neglect – at least, not intentionally.

In order to cope with difficulties such as these I would strongly advise all would-be writers to cultivate a strong sense of self-respect. You do not have to believe that you are a genius, and if you do manage to convince yourself that you are a genius you will almost certainly be wrong. What you will need – and what any of us can produce if we really think hard enough about it and work hard to produce it – is some piece of work which you can turn to in your darkest hour, and of which you can honestly say: "I did that – and nobody ever wrote anything like it before!"

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The above article consists of two chapters extracted from Brian Stableford's book *The Way to Write Science Fiction*, to be published by Hamish Hamilton/Elm Tree Books in April 1989 at £9.95. We are happy to report that since completing the above Brian has in fact given up his job as a university lecturer, having achieved a handsome sale of the paperback rights in his novel *The Empire of Fear to Pan Books*. He is now a full-time author once more, and we shall publish a new story by him in the next issue of *Interzone*.

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# William King

## Visiting the Dead

The train rattled on through the dark carrying me towards the funeral. My skull ached with the pressure of unaccustomed gravity, my chest felt as if some small hard thing were trying to burst out of it, and the slightest movement caused a surge of nausea. What, from the comfort of high orbit, had seemed a trip of vital emotional importance was fast becoming a nightmare.

I looked at the vital signs monitor on the wrist of the Frame and, to my surprise, none of the readouts were red. The slight whir of the servo-motors caught the attention of the carriage's only other occupant; a slim dark-haired girl who had been studying me discreetly in the reflection of the blacked-out window. She turned to look at me; our glances met. Embarrassed, she felt compelled to speak.

"Well, Aunt Jane, what do you think of Earth after all this time?"

"It's strange, Deborah. I'm not sure I like all of it." I attempted a gesture meant to emphasize my point but by the time the exo-skeleton shifted my arm, rotated my wrist and amplified my finger movement I had already spoken. The gesture and the heat took a lot out of me. I could feel gravity tug at me like the weight of my ninety-one years. I grimaced more in exasperation than pain.

"Oh, I'm sorry. This must be a hard time for you," she said apologetically.

I looked at her closely. She had long hair, a snub nose, wide blue eyes and rosy cheeks. She leaned back, pushing herself into the hard leather of the coach, studying the ceiling as she adjusted her tee shirt. I tried unsuccessfully to see some trace of my dead brother in her. I nodded, feeling the wide, cushioned neck brace of the Frame biting where it had not been adjusted properly.

"Come far?" I asked, most banal question of many between travellers. She twisted her head to one side to look at me before she replied. I think she thought I was mocking her.

"Just from Glasgow. Mother asked me to meet you at the airport." That courtesy must have cost her mother an effort. Sheena had never liked me.

"Been doing **field study**," she continued. "I don't know why they bothered to send me. It was just the same as the simulations."

"Ah, but how would you have known that unless they had sent you? Surely it wasn't the same?"

She gestured emphatically with her left hand. "Oh yes it was, exactly the same. In every detail."

I was impressed. Once, simulated experience had possessed a cartoon quality. Of course that was nearly thirty years ago, in the mid-twenties. Simulations were something I had given up when I moved to the Overtowns.

"How about touch and smell?" I asked. She gave me the sort of look you give a slow child.

"Of course," she said. "I forgot. Simulations are illegal in the Overtowns, aren't they? A decadent terrestrial vice."

"We have more important things to do."

"The starships? I saw a documentary on Gupta and Carmichael on the tube last night. Off to Barnards Star. Showed a lot of pictures of the ship. It looked really dull, just a big dumbbell. They set out ten years before I was born."

That would make her twenty-one. It's hard to tell these days; anti-agathics have come so far. Barnard probe left in '26.

"How old are you, if you don't mind me asking? You have the same look as those two, sort of smooth and old."

"Was born last century. 1967."

"You don't look it."

"Thank you. We have a good anti-ageing programme. Gene re-tooling, anti-agathics and so on. We need it for the starships."

She didn't look too interested. I searched for another topic of conversation.

"It used to be so cold here in the winter," I said. "I can remember when it used to snow sometimes."

She ran her hand through her hair and let out a long breath. "No kidding," she said. "Before the greenhouse effect?"

"Before that and the sea rising. Before the Central European desert. Rainfall was different."

The by-products of centuries of industrialization had caused the build up of heat. I wondered if those previous generations had considered the consequences. Mine hadn't.

"I've been in the simulations of it," she said. I was going to say that unless you had been there you couldn't know the difference but I remembered what she had said about the simulations. Maybe they really were that accurate.

We sat and talked all the way to the Portryan stop, exchanging information in the way only strangers on a train can. She told me to call her Debbie. At the stop a Grey Man inspected our tickets. I could not look him in the eye. I am not proud of my part in their creation.



The Castle was built by a returned explorer in the 16th century, a sprawling white pile covering many acres. It had a nasty annex built for the homeless in the housing crisis of '97, good air conditioning and, more importantly, facilities for the disabled.

Technically speaking a Frame is capable of taking stairs, but not many people I know would risk it. Ramps and lifts are safer.

My room was standard. If the blankets had not been tartan and the wallpaper had not had a discreet bluebell pattern it could have been anywhere on Earth from Tokyo to Timbuktu.

I debated whether to call my brother's family but put it off. They knew I was in town, Deborah had gone ahead. I made the call I could not put off, the one to my doctor. I plugged the extension cable from the Frame into the phone. As I talked it would broadcast its information to orbit. I dialled the number.

Nancy Chan appeared. She looked pale and tense, not her usual jovial self. "How is the suicide attempt coming along?" she asked.

There would be a three second delay throughout the conversation. It's a long way to the Trojan points. Even light can seem slow.

"Don't start that again, Nancy. I told you Brian was the last surviving member of my original family. I'll be damned if I miss his funeral."

"You could have watched it by remote. Just because he's dead doesn't mean you have to try and join him. You know how bad the political situation is getting down there. Heimdal Station reports massive troop buildups in North Africa, Turkey and what used to be Soviet Georgia. Looks like the big one."

The timelag suddenly seemed very long. My mouth felt dry. I shook my head.

"We've intercepted coded transmissions from Cairo, Tehran, Riyadh. All say the same thing. Troops been moving in from as far as Ethiopia and Pakistan. Looks like the hardliners have finally seized control in the United Islamic Republic."

I remembered a tube broadcast I had watched in the arrival lounge at Heathrow, a satellite propaganda show straight from Tehran. A lean Arab had been explaining in Oxbridge tones why biological research had to stop in Federal Europe. He had shown some horror shots of experimentation on clones, said the creation of soulless automata was the work of the devil. Two Canadian tourists had laughed; a Grey Man had stopped sweeping and smiled, pleased by the laughter.

I shrugged. "Surely it's not that bad."

"It is. It'll be Jihad, holy war. A delegation has just returned to Tehran from the Hague. Euro-parliament refused to sign the Ethical Science Treaty."

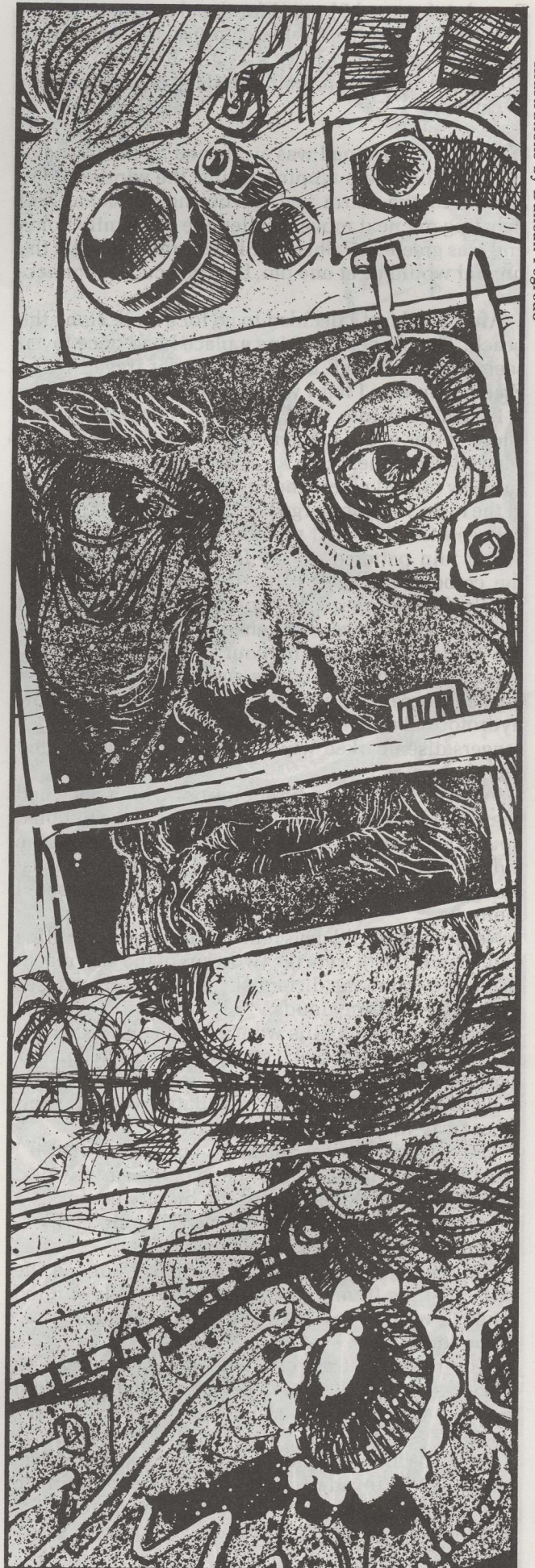
"I'm not surprised. Most of the European economy is based on Grey Men and other forms of vat labour. They won't give it up without a fight."

"Well the Council is putting out a warning. Any Overtowner who isn't back up in one week may have to remain on Earth if war comes. Too dangerous to run a shuttle down through the interceptors and anti-missile satellites."

"Thanks for telling me. I'll be seeing you, Nancy."

"Yeah. Take care, Councillor."

Nancy broke the connection. I decided to crawl from my Frame into the bed. It took a lot of effort.



Illustrations by Duncan Fegredo



For a brief second I longed for the clear, soaring freedom of the Overtowns. It was a useless feeling so I pushed it aside.

I drifted off to sleep, feeling as if my chest was about to cave in.

**N**ext morning I was awakened by the sound of a light rain tapping against the window. I lay in the warm bed, savouring my aches and debating my next move. I called the old family home and was greeted by Sheena. She informed me that the funeral would be at one pm, then she cut the connection.

After breakfast I decided to go for a walk along the beach. The chance of seeing a place I had once loved seemed to outweigh the discomfort of travelling by Frame. Anyway I felt I was becoming acclimatized.

I clambered into the Frame and lumbered to the shore. It was not as I remembered it. The old concrete seawall was gone, eaten away by the rising tides; the sea now flowed where the beach once had been. Part of the town was submerged. A bubble harbour nestled between the drowned remains of the two old piers. Warm rain pattered off my face and dripped down the carbon-fibre shell of the Frame. Palms swayed lightly in the breeze. Welcome back to Scotland, I thought. The shower slackened and died.

I studied the new harbour, superimposing my memories of the old. Where small fishing boats had docked, there were now pleasure hovercraft. A new hydrofoil sat where once great ferries had rested. Passengers disembarked while servile Grey Men carried their bags.

I walked along the new shorefront which once had been well above sea level, trying to ignore the tumbled houses and the fusty smell that came from them. Some kids on dwarf pachyderms raced exuberantly past along the remnants of roads where I remembered motorcars.

Nothing of the old days remained except the outline of the land. There were the two arms of the bay, reaching out to frame the distant sky, between them a sea the colour of stormclouds.

The slopes of the hills were bare of conifers, killed by acid rain at the end of last century. Imported palms had replaced them. On the hills were the mirror-bright condominiums where the population dream their lives away in Simulation.

The topography was the same but I knew that if I lived long enough even the shape of the earth would change, eaten by erosion and the hungry centuries.

"Aunt!" I heard a shout. It was Deborah. "Folk at the hotel said they saw you come this way."

She reined her pachyderm to a halt. I noticed the hairs bristling from its grey hide and its ugly stunted trunk. "I wanted to talk to you about something."

I nodded.

"I've never met anyone who has really been in space," she said. "I may never get another chance if the news broadcasts are right."

"War?"

"Might be. Border incident, some combatants opened fire on U.I.R. invaders. Turns out they were fifteen years old and unarmed. Tube just showed pictures."

She seem shocked and disoriented. I spoke as softly as I could.

"Those combatants wouldn't know any better. They would have been told to open fire on anyone crossing the border. They follow orders."

"Tube says that the kids were probably boy soldiers from the Revolutionary Guard, sent to provoke an incident. It would say that, wouldn't it?"

"Might be right. There's been a lot of tension between the United Islamic Republic and Europe recently."

Suddenly she pointed out to sea. I turned swiftly, almost overbalancing the Frame. I don't know what I expected - helicopter gunships maybe.

I saw them out in the deep water. A group of humanoids, leaping from the waves like dolphins, playing and throwing something large backwards and forwards. We watched them in silence until they sank beneath the surface and did not come back up.

"Swimmers," said Deborah softly. "When I was little we used to say that it was good luck to see one."

"When I was little there were no Swimmers, not like those." I looked back at her pachyderm, an efficient pollutionless mode of transport which fed on the palm leaves. The Swimmers were products of the same thing. Genetic engineering. My chosen career.

"Swimmers have a dome-city just outside the mouth of the loch. Its beautiful, but close up Swimmers don't look like us: more like seals."

Another intelligent race, one I hadn't seen before except on the tube. I felt as if the world had grown strange and that I had stayed the same. Once I had designed combatants, combat replicants, for the Pentagon. It was hard to reconcile the image of the frolic-ing Swimmers with the biological war machines that stand guard along the European border, waiting for the Jihad.

The Swimmers farm the Atlantic algae fields that help counter the ecological imbalance caused by the destruction of the rain forests. Like the Grey Men they are servants of humanity, happy but not free, variations on a prototype I helped create.

**W**e stopped at a café, sat drinking coffee inside a converted farmhouse. Grey Men waited on tables, smiled at customers, prepared food.

"Most of the old town is underwater now," said Deborah. I took a sip of the coffee. It was hot and frothy. It took me back briefly to my teenage days, drinking capucino and discussing all the burning issues.

"Fish probably swim in that old café," I said. Deborah looked lost. "A lot of the landmarks of my youth have gone."

"We sometimes swim there using artificial gills. Its mostly just walls and the outlines of streets."

Deborah was looking down into her cup. Some of the young ones I had seen earlier came in and sat down. They talked softly about the U.I.R. and what war might mean. There was tension in the air.

"What's it like up there in the Overtowns?" Deborah asked.

"Different. People are different. More purposeful. Have to be. Space is an unforgiving environment."

"My mother says that they are all dreamers up there."

I smiled. "No, the dreamers are all down here. Most downsiders are settling into a sort of apathy. Work done by AI, robots, constructs. You name it, anything but humans. Most of the population seem to be hooked



into the simulations."

"What's wrong with that?"

"Nothing, just that nothing new is being done by people."

"The big AI's are making far more discoveries than the Overtown scientists."

"Your machines are doing the important stuff."

"We made them. They look after us. Life's good."

This was true. In the secular states wealth was everywhere. Even in the United Islamic Republic the standard of living was high for most of the population.

"Anyway as soon as the machines find anything out they let us know. We can experience anything we want through the simulations. I can visit truly alien worlds, meet truly alien minds created by an AI. It's a lot more interesting than the boring pictures the probeship sends back."

"Yes, that's the problem. Those Downsiders who don't live in religious dictatorships are turning inwards, exploring fantasies instead of the real universe."

"That's your problem if you're not happy with it."

"Doesn't it worry you that your people may end up machine-dependent? That human evolution may have reached a dead end. Mankind needs challenges to grow. That's why we don't allow simulations or very smart AI's in the Overtowns."

"Progress hasn't stopped here. We're just taking a different path. One you don't like. You sound like the Fundamentalists. No offence."

It was an argument not worth continuing. Neither of us really understood the other. Deborah called for our bill. A Grey Man waiter brought it. He had happy, vacant eyes.

**T**he funeral was a lonely affair. The cemetery was high on a hillside. It had escaped the drowning of the town. The church had not been so lucky. I could see its spire rising above the sunken streets.

There were very few at the service. Those who had come were all old. Formal religion wasn't popular among the young here.

The minister was a woman. Without the benefit of anti-agathics she looked all of her seventy years. She conducted the whole service at the graveside. As her voice droned through the clichés of the eulogy my mind drifted to memories of Brian.

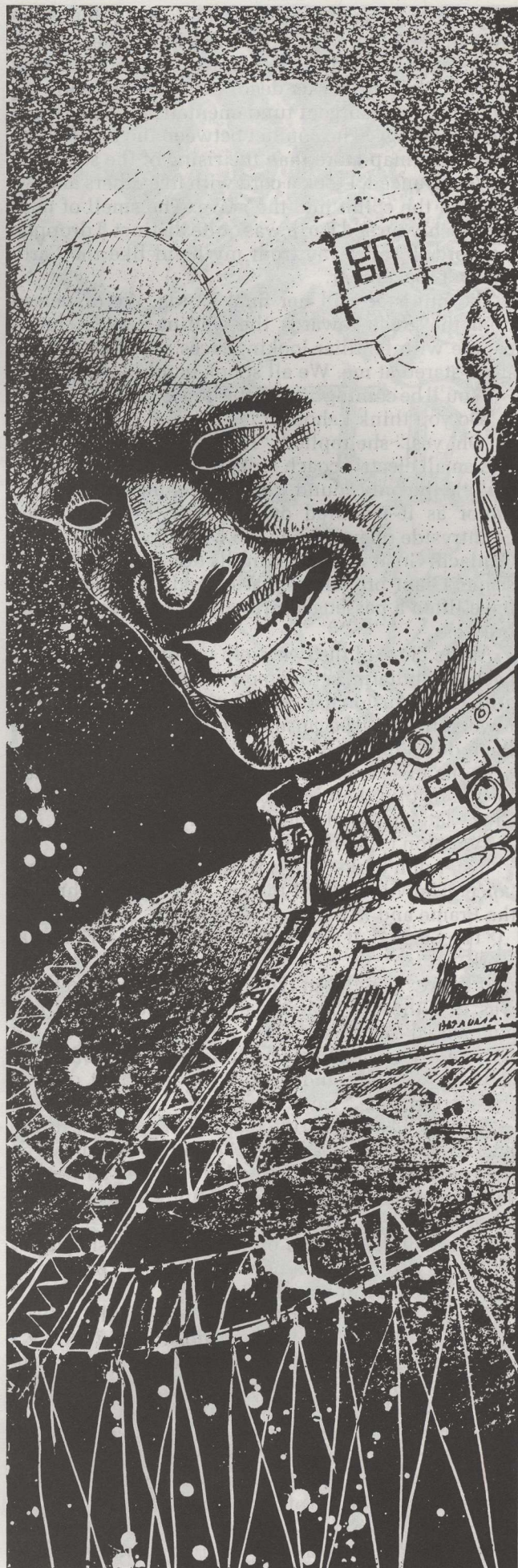
I tried to remember happy things but it was the horror of his last two years that haunted me.

The disease had eaten him away from within. It had taken the blurred lines of his face and pulled the thin bone structure out from below. The peculiar thing was that his face had re-acquired the lean angularity of his youth as death approached.

We had talked a lot over the tubelink as he lay in bed, discussed old times. We had gone over our old feud, decided it was silly. He had thought that I should have stayed behind, become a farmer. I had other plans. It had caused friction at the time.

Brian had felt that humankind should sort out its problems here on Earth before leaping into space. I couldn't wait that long. Of course Earth had sorted out its problems without help from either of us.

Cheap fusion, smart computers, genetic screening and the withering of the nation state had seen to that.





The transition had not been painless. Food riots, holy wars and partial economic collapse had been landmarks along the way. There were new problems now but the old world was dead, drowned beneath the twin tides of resurgent fundamentalism and advancing technology. The conflict between the two had redrawn the map more than the rising of the sea.

We advanced. I took a cord with five others and we lowered the coffin into the grave. The smell of mud and freshly turned Earth was quite distinct. I dropped the cord. It fell away from my hand like the Earth below a rocketliner.

The minister said her final words. We dispersed from the grave towards the waiting cars. A lot of people with familiar-looking faces and cold expressions stared at me. We all shook hands.

"You'll be coming back to the house," said Sheena.

"Do you think I should?"

"Oh, yes," she replied. "He'll want to see you."

A small electric coach took us back to the farm. For a while the only sound was the keening whine of the motor as it laboured on the steep hill road. The countryside opened up to the wide open moor of the Ganlach. Great white windmills dominated the landscape. Giant propellers that looked as if they could have lifted a passenger airliner aloft quivered in the breeze.

At the close of the twentieth century this area had been a windfarm, selling power back to the national grid. Cheap fusion had done away with that idea. The towers still stood because no-one had bothered to take them down. Polymer plastic has no value as scrap.

At the foot of one tower pink sheep, colour-coded for the insulin their milk carried, were watched by a Grey Man shepherd. I looked away.

"You don't like that do you?" said Sheena.

"No, I don't." I could not keep the edge out of my voice. The vibration of the car was passing through the Frame and making my teeth rattle.

"They love it. It's what they were made for, menial work."

"I know. That doesn't make it right." The sad thing was that the Grey Men really did love it. We had engineered them well. They were perfect slaves.

"There's no need for you to look down your nose at us. It was you and people like you that created those constructs," said Sheena.

"I know." Too late to uncreate them now. The future had rushed at us headlong. We go forward or we go under had been our slogan. Had we been so wrong? Times change. The slaves were happy and would not be so if freed.

My sensibilities were products of the last century and the citizens of the new age did not conform to them. Whose fault was that?

The coach pulled into the farmyard and the natural stench of the place filled my nostrils. Suddenly I wanted to run but it was too late. I was on my way to a meeting with my dead brother.

**T**he birds sang as I walked down to the stream. I knew I would find him there, lying on a rock, watching the fish. The grass crumpled under my feet and the copse of oaks was ahead, casting dappled shadows in the summer sun. I wore my nine-year-old body; my real one was in the Frame back at

the farmhouse, wearing an induction helmet.

Deborah had been right. The simulation was perfect; the illusion pumped directly into the brain could not be distinguished from the real world.

He was just as I remembered him at thirteen, lanky and awkward with a thatch of blonde hair and a smiling, rosy-cheeked face. No pain lines now.

"Hello," he said and smiled. I didn't smile back. I kept my distance. The experience was too disturbing. There was an aspect of nightmare about it.

"You're dead," I said. "I thought you said you would never let them record you. What happened, did you get scared at the end?"

He nodded. "Anything seemed better than death. It's for the kids too. They can visit me when they like."

He picked up a stone and lobbed it into the water. I watched the ripples. A dragonfly hovered above them.

"Of course I won't look the same to them. I chose this setting for you. Do you like it?"

I shrugged. "It's exactly as I remember it. So are you."

He smiled slowly. "Aye, it would be the same. The machine provides the big details out of my memory, the rest are filled in by your mind."

"That means it's not accurate. It's blurred. My memories have probably altered details of the original."

"What does it matter? How can you tell?"

I felt trapped. The echo of the question I had asked Deborah on the train rang in my ears.

"You're not Brian. You're just a computer program that thinks its him, a sub-program in whatever is holding this illusion together."

"No. You're wrong. I'm Brian. I remember every little detail of my life. I was recorded. They mapped my brain a bit at a time and transferred the results to a computer. I'm the same. I have the same emotions, the same reactions. I just live here now."

"No you don't. You're just a simulation. You're perfect in every detail but you're no more him than a photograph would be." I felt a coldness in the pit of my stomach, a growing sense of unreality and estrangement.

"I'm me," he said. "You have to believe that. All the emotions, the memories make me what I am. If I chose they could download me into a clone body and I would be back in your world. I would be the same person. The cell structure would be identical, my memories and personality would be the same. If that's not real what is?"

"What about your soul? Did they record that too?"

"Maybe. Anyway, I thought you were an agnostic?"

"I don't know. I'm confused."

He seemed to become desperate. "Souls? They were just the old way of explaining your personalities, our individuality. A superstition. All we ever were was software driving flesh. You know as well as I do that it can all be explained in terms of electrochemical reaction. Hell, you've built people. Biology and artificial intelligence research outdated the old religion."

"Software souls driving meat machines? Maybe science is the new religion."

"Look, we were brought up between two ages, the old explanations and the new. The last generation with a choice. The kids don't have the same problems



with these concepts as us. They don't have the same fear of death either."

"That's because they visit simulations where it seems the dead still live. The afterlife has invaded the real world."

"Look, maybe they're right. Perhaps this is the only form of immortality we will ever have. Don't you at least want to consider that?"

"No," I almost screamed. "I want to get out of here. How do I do it?"

"I'll get you out. You are wrong. I am me and I do care about you."

I saw only genuine concern on his face. I nodded, embarrassed. I hugged him and he felt real. Then I was back in my body, tied into the Frame.

"I have to get back," I said.

**D**eborah accompanied me to the station. All the way it looked as if she were trying to summon up the courage to say something. She carried my bag to the platform and we stood there. The silence grew. I looked at her expectantly. She stared at her feet, confused.

"You think he's gone forever, don't you? That's why you're sad." I could see it came as a revelation to her.

I stared at her, trying to find the words. What could I say? My brother was gone, dead as the hope of heaven. To her it did not matter. She could visit him, visit the dead. Perhaps one day the dead would visit her. A sort of resurrection is possible.

The fundamentalists think it is a mockery of the work of God. I'm not sure I disagree with them. They say that the new science glorifies Satan. If Satan is the absence of God as darkness is the absence of light then they are correct.

The fear of nothingness is a terrible thing. Almost anything is preferable. It is this fear that fuels the Jihad, the fear that we are mortal and the universe doesn't care. God is supposed to care. They hate the Grey Men because the constructs remind them that we are simply machines constructed from protoplasm. Do machines have souls?

I looked at Deborah and tried to find words. They did not come, so I stayed silent.

"You're not coming back, are you? Not ever."

I nodded. "If you ever want to come to the Over-towns, get in touch."

She shook her head. Abruptly she stuck out a hand. I took it gently, afraid that the Frame might crush it. We shook hands. "Saw it in a simulation," she said sadly. "Is that right?"

"Yes, perfect," I said. She smiled. I boarded the train. She waved as it pulled out of the station. I tried to wave back but the clumsiness of the Frame and the smooth acceleration of the mag-lev kept me from doing so until she was out of sight.

*Now war has come. The work of Satan is no longer to be tolerated by the believers. The godless and all their works are to be overthrown. This is the word from Tehran.*

*The armies of the righteous have swept through Spain and Greece but soon they will encounter the main strength of their enemy. Then they will die, finally and forever.*

*The believers see only the soft decadent face of*





their foe. They do not know what a terrible power they have roused, one that has sunk the lands and may raise the dead. The vats will spew forth a million combatants and nothing human can stand against them.

This struggle will determine the face of the new millennium. The believers think they shall win because they fight against Satan and for God. I believe the outcome will be different.

**William King** is 28 years old and lives in Stranraer, Scotland. He has worked as a civil servant and in computing, but is now attempting to write sf full time. The above is his first professionally published story, and he has another forthcoming in David Garnett's original anthology *Zenith* (Sphere Books, May 1989).

## COMMENT

# Taking Liberties

## Charles Platt

Cruising slowly past the shopping malls, palm trees, and freeway interchanges of Los Angeles, I can't help thinking that the pioneers who settled the American West must have had at least one thing in common with science-fiction readers. They dreamed of having enough space and freedom to invent a new way of life.

British visitors laugh at L.A. for being tasteless and naive; but the dream still survives, here, despite trashy buildings and creeping suburban conservatism. Personally, I don't find anything to laugh at in that. I'm all in favour of elbow-room, and the more freedom I have to pursue happiness in my own idiosyncratic way, without interfering with my neighbours or having people in authority interfere with me, the better I like it.

This is basically a libertarian outlook. Libertarianism flourishes in these spacious, sunny climes, and so does science fiction. Where the two forms coexist, we find libertarian science fiction – although, of course, this is not an exclusively Californian phenomenon. Robert Heinlein, L. Neil Smith, C.M. Kornbluth, F. Paul Wilson, and Eric Frank Russell are just a few of the authors who have used science fiction to dramatize libertarian principles in action. Russell's "And Then There Were None" is a classic in this respect, depicting a society in which government does not exist, and one free thinker can defeat an entire bureaucracy.

To this tradition must now be appended a new name: that of Victor Koman.

Koman defines **libertarianism** as growing out of "the nonaggression principle – the idea that no one has the right to initiate the use of force against others. That can be expanded to all sorts of far-reaching implications,

such as opposition to taxation and other forms of what we view as aggression, or coercion, by a group such as the government against the individual."

The term "libertarian" was coined to express a belief in personal liberty without compromise – an inalienable right that typically exists in opposition to the regulatory powers of the State.

Koman points out that this outlook is an import, "from John Locke and a lot of the other British free thinkers." But he suggests that the American Declaration of Independence summarized it best. "It said that it is the right of the people to alter or abolish any State that becomes destructive of the ends of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. The U.S. Constitution was actually the first Statist wedge, inculcating itself into the proto-libertarian American revolution. At that point, the long, slow process of government intrusion and Statist takeover began."

This deep-seated suspicion of authority has led Koman to an outlook that seems radical even to some fellow libertarians. He expresses it in science-fiction novels such as *The Jehovah Contract*, his most serious work to date, which presents a sympathetic portrait of a political assassin.

"I've always wondered what sort of person is an assassin," he says. "Does he have convictions? Does he have a moral stance? Or is he merely a hired thug? I decided to create an assassin with heroic motives, who only assassinates tyrants or would-be tyrants. He's an avenging-angel sort of person who attacks those who initiate violence."

It's always dangerous to infer too much from a work of fiction, so I ask Koman to what extent he endorses his protagonist's behaviour.

"It depends who's being assassinated. I think that all politicians, by

their very choice of profession (if you could call it that) are... well, they're asking for it. By their actions, they're admitting that what they want is power over other people. They may say 'Vote for me and I'll set you free,' but what they're really after is power, and therefore they're initiating violence. They are committed to theft, rape, plunder, and murder – the four functions of the State – and therefore the person who exclusively assassinates agents of government is behaving morally.

"At the same time," he continues, "because politicians are merely figureheads behind which the power-elite hides, assassination is ultimately futile, for it doesn't really affect the true centres of power. It does, though, provide employment for political observers."

*The Jehovah Contract* actually has a more playful tone than this suggests. The action is narrated in hard-boiled private-eye style from the viewpoint of a washed-up hit-man who takes on a seemingly impossible assignment when a deranged evangelist hires him to kill God. As he pursues this goal, however, he realizes that the world would indeed benefit if God could be banished from popular mythology. After all, divine will can only interfere with personal liberty.

**I**ask to what extent this is a serious message.

"My most important goal in writing is to entertain people, and I think that I find libertarian ideas – such as assassinating God – are entertaining in and of themselves. So I tend to keep the underlying philosophy veiled, and let the action and the conflict guide people to their own conclusions, which I hope will be identical with mine.

"At the same time, I see the ideas in fiction as being like an infectious virus.



If I can infect enough people with a new idea, they will be affected by that in ways they may not realize, and they will in turn pass on that idea to others."

Koman wrote *The Jehovah Contract* in 1978. During the next eight years, the manuscript was rejected by nearly fifty paperback and hardback publishers, mainly because of its atheistic message. I was happy to be able to rescue it from obscurity in my part-time capacity as science-fiction editor for Franklin Watts, who published the American hardcover edition in 1987. Subsequently, it won the Prometheus Award as the best libertarian novel of the year, and a paperback edition is forthcoming from Avon Books.

Koman's next novel, *Solomon's Knife*, tackles another controversial theme: the morality of abortion. The book postulates a new procedure that would enable a foetus to be transplanted from a woman who seeks to terminate her pregnancy to another woman who is infertile and desires children. This seems to circumvent the whole abortion debate, yet feminists and fundamentalists are depicted as being equally outraged by it, mainly because it threatens their positions of power as public figures. Here again, Koman portrays people in authority as being primarily motivated by money and power, rather than the pious ideals they profess to uphold; and the real hero is the individual who defies authority and follows her conscience.

*Solomon's Knife* will be published by Franklin Watts in the Spring of 1989. Clearly, it's intended as a non-category book with mass appeal. Does this mean Koman is moving away from science fiction?

"It depends whether you consider James Michener's *Space* a science-fiction novel. The book I'm working on now falls in that category. But I want to write all sorts of things. I want to write a pirate novel — pirates have always been my heroes. They were the renegades, the rogues, and in fact the freebooters, who looted government ships, were proto-libertarian. Their ships were not autocratically run. The people who did the work — i.e. pirating — received shares of the loot according to a very strict code. They signed contracts when they went on board, and some were also quasi-masonic in their setup, so that you had the Freemason influence, which was behind the American revolution, also being evident in piracy on the high seas."

Does his sympathy for villains reflect a rebellious childhood? Was he, like many science-fiction writers, a misfit who felt alienated at school?

"No. I was very much the so-so, okay kid in school. Sometimes the class clown, but never anything more daring than jumping off the second storey of a building to imitate Hollywood stunt men. My parents were of a very conser-

vative mould, but they never interfered with my goals or my desires. They encouraged me to think for myself."

In appearance, Koman is deceptively youthful (he admits only that he is "around forty"), with sharp eyes, a slim build, and shoulder-length, wavy hair. Meeting him for the first time, a friend of mine remarked that he looked a bit like Robin Hood.

"If there's any resemblance, it's not intentional," he says. "In fact, long hair is just basically what I can afford."

Pressed for more personal details, he states that he's married with one daughter, and when he's not writing, he's a house-husband, performing the domestic role. I sense he's not particularly comfortable divulging these details, and prefers to maintain a degree of reclusiveness. His phone is always answered by a machine, and for publication, he prefers to say only that he lives in the vicinity of Los Angeles. Does he keep a low profile because of his subversive politics? Is he living in fear of the authorities?

"The question of competence comes up," he answers drily. "Is the State competent to crush dissent? I don't really think so. I simply prefer not to be a public person. It's a personal desire of mine." He pauses. "At the same time, it doesn't hurt to play it safe."

His antipathy toward government extends even to a refusal to join the Libertarian Party.

"No one in the State can roll back the growth of the State. It's not in their interests. Anyone who enters the government or becomes part of the State with an idea toward reforming or reducing it is either corrupted or neutralized, and therefore no change from within is possible.

"Members of the Libertarian Party are under the delusion that if only we could get the right people in, things could be better. But the nature of the institution itself determines who gets into power. It's an obvious lie that anybody who wants to can become President. If you can scrape together \$40 million, and cut all the right deals, and sell the next four years of your presidency before you're even running, then you can possibly become President — if the ruling class, the power centres, agree."

So what does he suggest instead?

"Ideally, total absence of government. I'm an anarchist; I don't know how well that will read in the British press, but I am."

My inevitable response is that, outside of the wish-fulfillment scenarios in science-fiction stories, anarchy wouldn't work.

"But it already does work, because the State cannot permeate and control us entirely, so all that we accomplish in spite of the State is done in the

absence of it or in defiance of it. Therefore, human action without a State is possible. In fact, it's the *only* way human action is possible. The only way one can survive in a statist milieu is to perform acts that are consciously, unconsciously, or even inadvertently in defiance of the State."

In his scheme of things, would everything be legal?

"There would be no legislation, but there would certainly be order and codes of conduct, based on common law, tradition, things like that. But there would be no monopoly on the use of force, which is what the State is. Anyone would be able to defend himself or herself against crime on an ad-hoc basis as it happened, and any person who was found to have harmed another would be liable for restitution. And there are mechanisms that could arise in a libertarian society that would deal with that, either through insurance companies or protection agencies, private guard agencies, and so on. Some people are nervous about the idea of this kind of power in private hands, but it's obviously trivial compared with the megadeath possibilities we have with supergovernments that have a monopoly on force."

Koman expounds these views politely and carefully, speaking with genteel precision. He's nothing like one's mental image of a wild-eyed, oppressed, bomb-throwing anarchist. I can't help wondering what the factors were that helped to mould these beliefs.

"In the sixties, I fancied myself a William F. Buckley conservative. I never used drugs. It wasn't until I came to Los Angeles in the early seventies, where I ran into Samuel Konkin and J. Neil Schulman and the other inhabitants of the anarcho-village, that my thoughts crystallized into a more coherent design. Before, I would think, oh, 'People should be free, right?' and that was the extent of it. By learning the reasons for freedom, the logic behind it, I came to a more concise and precise reason for believing in human freedom and the evils of the State."

From the above, I think it's clear that Koman truly is a libertarian author. It would be a mistake, however, to conclude that his work is tiresomely political. His propaganda is sufficiently subtle not to distract from the characters and plot, and even where the polemic intrudes, it is provocative enough to be entertaining regardless of whether one agrees with it. To those of us who read science fiction in the hope of finding original, challenging ideas, this makes a refreshing change from the contemporary norm of heroic quests and space adventures. Victor Koman is, most of all, a lively storyteller who deserves the success he has finally begun to achieve. ●



# Rudy Rucker & Marc Laidlaw

## Chaos Surfari

**W**ay gnarly. Delbert stood barefoot on a shelf of slimy-sharp searocks, clutching a terrycloth towel to his pimply chest. Behind him was a sandstone cliff crowned with cottages, below him were dead fish, seaweed, discoloured water, and spit-bubbling crabs. One of the crabs had hold of a gooey condom; mindlessly the beast kept stretching and folding the rubber, now and again lowering its mandibles to taste the human salts that came oozing forth.

The sea, thought Del, has got to be the rudest place on earth.

Even though the surf was up, Del had stayed ashore today because of the red tide. Every so often the one-celled dinoflagellates would go on a breeding jag, and the ocean near Surf City would look and smell bad for weeks. Some of the older surfers said it was like the sea being on the rag, but it made Del think more of the time he'd vomited after eating reds, fried squid, and mucho red wine. Surf that shit? No way!

But Zep didn't mind. Zep... Zep would wade right out into the middle of the most gruesome scenes Del could imagine. He picked fights with cops; called bikers by names even their buddies didn't use; took drugs made by madmen; so right now, natch, Zep was out there carving tubes, unquestioningly accepting whatever liquid thrills Mother Ocean would serve up.

Well, almost unquestioningly. The catch was Zep's unique imipolex miniprocessing way-tech surfboard; the good stick Chaos Attractor. Chaos Attractor had a distinct effect on the waves; it was wired to a parallel nerve-port in Zep's ankle. The smart board was able to read the ripples that hit it, run a CAM8 cellular automaton simulation of the future ocean nearby, XOR the simulation against Zep's wishes, and eliminate the differences by pulsing out just the right antiripples into the sensitive chaos of the sea.

Zep had built the thing single-handedly out of stolen parts; in fact, the corporation that had built the CAM8 – a Silicon Valley outfit called System Complex – had placed full-page ads in *The Computer Shopper*, offering huge rewards for return of the device or any information leading to the arrest of the culprit. Fortunately, aside from Zep, the only person who knew the truth was Delbert.

**O**ut on the water, where the red-stained waves sluiced in between the curling rock pinchers of Blowhole Cove. Zep let out a brain-curdling scream whenever he created a particularly nasty wave. Looking at the big crisscross surf, Del knew

that Zep's wishes were wild and unfocused – no surprise, as Zep was righteously stoned. Zep had scored a humongous jay that morning from Dennis Sorentex, the chef at the Pup Tent where Del's girlfriend Jen worked.

Del had toked a few puffs himself, and now he began to imagine that the stinking redbrown ocean was awash with real blood, drained from the bodies of dead and racked-up surfers; yes, the ocean and the things in it were angry, and the waves were hit men out to extract vengeance from thankless air-breathers. Is this how you treat your mother, the ocean seemed to say? By building parking lots and condos on her sandy flanks? By dumping toxic waste and pesticides into the cradle, as if you're her only child? How dare you brag about your space probes when you know so little of what I conceal?

Del peered down from his slippery rock shelf at the sand six feet below. The retreating tide combed back the eelgrass, slicking it down like Brylcreem in a cholo's hair. Sea anemones puckered the scraggy wall like free-living anuses, punked out with bits of shell and broken glass. He realized he had to take a piss. Nobody around; do it.

Delbert aimed his steamy stream down into the eelgrass, hosing through the seaweed as if he were an archaeologist cleaning out a wreck. Something glinted; he tried to pee harder, but he'd run out of pressure. But there was something nestled in the weeds, something scummy with pink plankton yet diamond-bright.

A jewel! he thought. It's some kind of jewel washed up from the sea!

Zep screamed, his voice growing louder in a roar of surf. Delbert looked up and saw his best friend zooming toward him at the foot of a hungry wave. No time to watch Zep carve; in a moment, Del's newfound treasure would be lost in a cataclysm of spray. He leaped down to the sand and pushed the seaweed aside.

Del's fingers closed around the prize at the same time that the wave broke on his back and sucked him spinning into the deep. No way for now to tell which way was up, and already Del was out of breath. He clung hard to the shining ball he'd seized... confusion, a sharp jolt...

Beast, Logomartino, and Gidget. And there, on the shore, cheering and waving were Penny and Jen. "Penny," yelled Zep, waking up. "Hey, Penny!" "Zep! Let's fuck! I love you!"



All the other guys were there, too, bobbing around, surface. Del got hold of Zep and towed him to the sea's window, the truck rolled and farted out a great bubble against the windshield: Zep! Delbert jiggled out the side silence filled the cab of the pickup. A face pressed up red wine. They hit the water with a splash. An eerie the toilet bowl the night he'd puked up all that squid and windshield of the plunging truck. The ocean looked like Delbert was staring down at the water through the ran out of oxygen.

watery humming, still that same surf music, and then he maelstrom sucked the board away from him. He heard a it spinning. The black water scrambled his mind; the The water rushed up, and he hit it hard enough to set lines of his own strange halo.

tened into a safe glide. He felt as if they marked out the path; their paths curved over his head, their freefall soft- ing up, he saw the others getting sucked into the spiral of smooth matter, a sort of invisible gravity slide. Cian- Zep dug the nose of his board downward, shooting to get water was deep, but it was known for its sharp reef rocks. into the big basin of surf called Bitchen Kitchen. The feet up in the air, dropping down at the speed of gravity Beast, and the truck and the car were all five hundred And now Zep, Delbert, Gidget, Logomarsino, Kid

“Y’okay, dude?”

Del sat up, his head ringing, and stared at the waves. Where had he been?

“My board clipped you right across the skull,” Zep said. “Shit, man, I’m glad you woke up. I had to drag you out. That’s a nasty bruise you got.”

“I – look what I found,” Delbert said. He opened his hand and the crystal lay revealed. The world showed inside it, reproduced in miniature but badly warped. He brought it closer to his eyes, working to focus, wishing that his head didn’t ache so bad. There was movement down inside it, maybe brine shrimp, krill.

He seemed to hear a voice inside his head, a slithery whisper that said, *Look closer.*

Now he saw more clearly. A tiny gallery of moving faces lay within the crystal Superball. Inhuman faces; faces out of Zap comic. They had quivery tentacles instead of beards; beaks and mandibles where mouths should have been. Cold gray eyes, dark secrets. The slithery voice began to whisper words he didn’t understand, promising to reveal unguessed mysteries if he would only – would only –

“Del?”

“Sh! I’m looking!”

He was caught up in tracing the source of the faces, for they were set in a kaleidoscopic array, following some geometry he could hardly visualize. They seemed to sprout from the corners of a three-dimensional net of shimmering silver lines; the net formed pyramids and equilateral triangles, too many to see all at once. Some would vanish when others appeared. The whole thing could have been an illusion, some novelty hologram a sea captain had put together in his spare time. But he couldn’t tear his eyes from the depths. The faces twitched, crowding closer. They were like gargoyles crouched on the vertices of the hinged lines, guarding the hearts of the triangles. Guarding what, he wondered?

Very well then, the voice whispered. A glimpse.





"Let me see it, Del."

"I said wait!"

The gates of the net began to gape, permitting him some slight knowledge of what lay beyond those faces. His mind reeled with the insight. He saw an eye in a green pyramid, sitting on a plain very like the one he'd just dreamed of; but it wasn't a real place. It was a landscape in cameo — straight off the back of a dollar bill. His point of view shifted suddenly, and where the buck had been he saw a luscious naked blonde surfer girl, her hands cupping her breasts, one running down to play in her pubic curls as she winked at Delbert and began to approach. But then her tanned flesh went all white and flaky; she began to expand from the inside and her hair turned to shredded lettuce.

A burrito, Del thought. Jesus, that's the most delicious burrito I've ever seen. And the smell — heavenly!

He started to reach out for it, but something rattled in his hands. He looked down and saw a car key where the crystal had been; looked up and saw, waiting for him at the edge of an alien parking lot, a mint-green, mint-condition '48 Woodie. It was just like the car he'd seen in *Surf Serf* magazine last week, the boss Country Squire that belonged to the local silicon baron billionaire; it was the most beautiful car in the universe!

And poking out the car's open rear, perfect noses gleaming, were three fine surfboards — red, white and blue. He just knew that they would give him the ride of his life — like the Woodie, like that blonde girl.

As he approached the car, he could see that the back was heaped with cases of beer — all import stuff, powerful Australian lagers, which he could never afford. And there was a block of resinous green vegetable matter on the front seat, little glints of gold scattered among the leaves of tight-packed buds as big as his foot.

And standing on the dashboard, glowing no less brightly at noon than he would at midnight, was Jesus Christ himself, lending his aura of protection and respectability to even the drunkest surfari!

Then the weirdly angled walls snapped closed; the net swung back into being. The guardians leered out at him, as if daring him to seize their precious goods.

"Come on, Delbert, snap out of it!"

He blinked up at Zep. "I think — I think this is magic, Zep. I think I've found good luck."

Zep snatched the ball out of his hand, finally, and held it up to the sky, squinting at it with one eye.

"I don't know about that," he said after a minute. "I think it's just an ordinary plastic toy ecosphere. But look what's written on it."

He handed it back to Delbert, and showed him how when the light was just right you could see a string of angular letters scratched into the flattened base of the sphere.

**WRITE IN NOW!**

**P.O. BOX 8128, SURF CITY, CA**

**WIN BIG \$\$!**

"We gotta write in now," said Del, fondling the wondersphere. "Before someone else wins all the prizes. Did you see the Woodie, Zep? With the beer and the key and Jesus on the dashboard?"

"I don't see anything in there but reflection lines and little shrimp," said Zep. "This is one of those cheap plastic kits you order from a comic book to grow Sea Monkeys, man, which are in fact brine shrimp. Some feeb could easily have scratched that message on there simply for a goof. But hell yes, let's go over the post office. Penny. Penny'll be there." Penny was a bigbreasted girl with dark brown hair and a wild laugh; Zep thought about her a lot.

They threw Chaos Attractor in the back of the old Chevy pickup Zep had recently acquired and drove over to the Surf City post office. It was cool and empty in there, like a jewel-case, Zep thought, a jewel-case holding plump pearl Penny so cute in her blue-gray bermuda shorts, midhigh length with piping. Zep was all grin and buzzcut peroxide hair, leaning over the counter trying to think of something to say.

"I wish I was your underwear, Penny."

"You'd be too scratchy, Zep."

"Who has Box 8128?" asked Delbert. "I found this magic ball on the beach and it says to write Box 8128." The reedy sound of his voice annoyed Zep no end.

"Who has Box 8128?" answered Penny. "I'm not supposed to give out government information, Del." She gave her cute laugh and walked over to look at the post-office boxes from behind. "Oh, wow! It's Kid Beast!"

"That's a name?" said Del. "Is he white?"

"Isn't everyone white in Surf City?" said Pen, resting her arms on the counter and her breasts on her arms. "Kid Beast is a skinny punk who talks funny. You've seen him, Zep, he played drums for the Auntie Christs." She glanced around the empty room. "I happen to know his home address because I saw him go in there one time. 496 Cliff Drive."

"496 is a perfect number," said Zep.

"What is?"

"Like six is three plus two plus one; and one, two and three are the numbers that divide six. 496 is... whatever. Sixty-four times thirty-one.  $1+2+4+8+16+32+64+31+62+124+248$ ."

"How do you know that?" asked Penny.

"I went to college, baby. Santa Cruz UC."

"Let me see the magic ball," said Penny.

"We found it on the beach," said Zep, taking it from Del and handing it to her. "We saw things in it. You can keep it, Penny, if you'll let me tie you up and fuck you."

"Oh right."

She gave Zep a thoughtful glance.

"Hey, Zep, don't give it to her!" said Delbert. "That ball's got some kind of power — it's magic."

Zep sighed, pissed at Delbert for interrupting what had become a promising conversation.

"Why don't you go out to the truck, Del," he said. "I'll put a postcard in the Kid's box, then we'll swing by his house to make sure he pays up."

"You're trying to ditch me, aren't you? You want to steal my magic ball!"

"Yes. No. Here's your ball. Go on, man." Del went out to the truck.

Five minutes later Zep came out whistling, with a postmark stamped on his cheek like a government lipstick kiss. Penny had agreed to meet him at Bitchen Kitchen to watch the sunset later on. He would get another joy off Dennis at the Pup-Tent, unless Dennis



was sick again; then he'd score a bottle of wine and mellow out with playful Penny. Unfortunately, it was just past noon. Summer days were too damn long!

What am I doing out here? thought Zep. I don't even know what I want. It's that music moving me. I'm a fucking hero. A legend.

Chaos Attractor picked up on his thoughts and sent waves of ambivalence through the tendril-sketched loops of the Moebius highway. The music kept playing over and over again, never quite starting into full song.

The highway was, of course, a vasty skein spun from the tentacles of the creature that had been a sultitan, that had been a girl, that had wrapped itself around the twin probability warp devices which Mr Gidget called the CAM10s. Though Zep's board held a mere CAM8, so awesomely stoked was his expanded consciousness that the highway was his to carve.

And carve he did. Cutting tighter and tighter turns he wrapped the roadcreature around itself, congealed its chaos into a waddy periodic line, wrapped the line around the two CAM10 point attractors, merged the point attractors into one, and then – with one last vengeful flick of his board, hand-broke the symmetry and renormalized the deadly sultitan and CAM-10s into nothingness.

**Z**ep found Delbert sitting in the front seat of the truck, staring into the float-ball as if he really were seeing all the weird stuff he'd said he saw. It worried Zep for a moment, bringing him down.

"You still seeing stuff, Del?"

Delbert shook his head. "They're not showing me, Zep. I have to be good...I have to do something special for them, I think."

"I hope you didn't get some kind of weird spacetime concussion, Delbert. I mean, it wasn't just any old surfboard that cracked you on the skull – it was Chaos Attractor. It might have knocked your brain into another dimension. You ever see that movie where the living brains come after a bunch of geeks? They're like brains with snaky whiplike spines for tails."

Delbert looked at him, a little trail of spittle running down his chin. A skinny stranger on the sidewalk ducked down and peered at them, then disappeared. There was something funny going on. Something weirder than plastic movie monsters.

All the houses near 496 Cliff Drive had flowers in their yards and little "Cottage for Rent" signs with ivy wrapped around the posts; all perfect except for number 496, which was an animal house, totally whipped to shit. A three-legged pitbull lay sprawled in the dust of the front yard, angrily barking. The dog's missing leg ended in a stub that looked...well, chewed. When the dog finally stood up to make its move, Zep kicked it over. It fell on its spine, whining. Using the magic ball for a knocker, he rapped sharply on the bungalow's front door.

Just then something began happening to the surface of the door. It was like someone was projecting a slide on it, a picture all made of dancing spots whose speckling created the face of a boy. The light flashes, Zep realized, were caused by tiny laser-rays darting out of the base of the ball in his hands. As soon as he'd taken the image in, the laser rays turned back off.

The bungalow door opened to reveal the same skinny dude the ball's lasers had just drawn. He wore hightop sneakers, jeans, and an old mod black suit-jacket with no shirt. His straight black hair fell into

his eyes. He wore faint black lipstick; or maybe he'd been sucking on a stamp pad.

"I'm Kid Beast. You here to audition for the new band?"

Kid Beast flung the door open and stepped back. The room gave off a foul tidal stink, as of a dozen starfish left in a hot car trunk through the length of an August day. Half a dozen aquariums bubbled along the walls and corners of the room, and another half dozen sat dark and stagnant, with occasional sulphur farts bubbling up through the murky scum. There was a drumkit and some amps.

"Come on in," said the Kid, picking up a carton of Friskees and pouring the contents into a black aquarium. The surface seethed with the frenzied feeding of several opalescent beaks.

"My friend found this ball on the beach," said Zep, holding up the sphere. "I think you want to pay a reward for it? I'm Zep."

The Kid glanced up through the hair in his face. "On the beach, huh? I'll bet. Gidget sent you, right?"

"Gidget who?" said Delbert, taking the ball and pushing Zep ahead of him into the Kid's house. "Did he manage the Auntie Christs? We love their stuff, don't we, Zep?" He broke into song: "I am the Auntie Christ! I look like Vincent Price! Wear black latex hosiery! Surfer girl is after me!"

The Kid flicked them a nervous smile. His front teeth were broken, blackened, in need of caps. Zep was suddenly certain he had seen this kid many times...on the streets, or hanging out in front of the 7-11 at two in the morning, talking to the strangers who came and went, hitting on them for cigarettes and beer money. He repressed the dishonest urge to give the Kid a comradely clap on the back and reassure him that everything was going to be all right. Kid Beast was like a five-car pileup just waiting for car number six.

"No, man, I'm talking about Tuttle Gidget, the chip billionaire. He had the Auntie Christs up to his place to play for one of his high society dinners. We were, like, supposed to be a freakshow. I bit a live squid... that was part of the new surfmusic act we were breaking in. You know, bite into it and wave my head around with the tentacles coming out..."

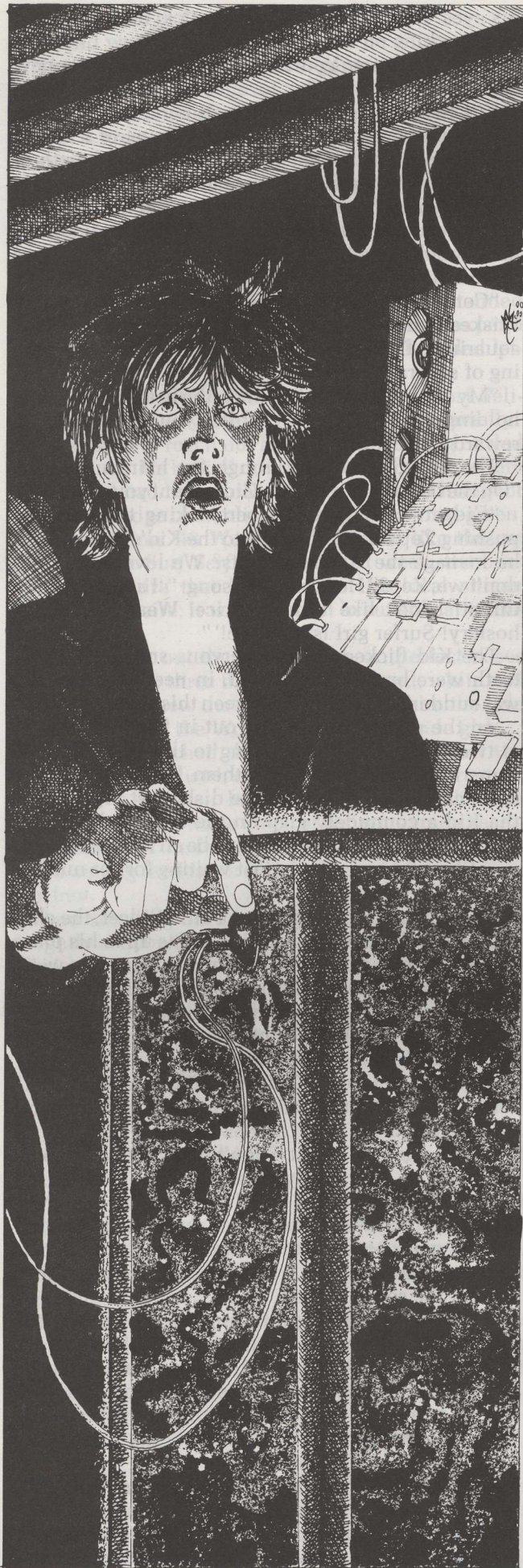
"Did you get to see Gidget's '48 Country Squire?" asked Del. "I bet this ball is from him and he wants to give it to me!"

"Yeah, I guess I saw it. I don't remember a lot about the evening. Somebody dosed me right before our second set and when I faded back in, the party was over, and the fucking band – my supposed friends – had all gone home without me. I was flaked out on the lawn and Gidget didn't even notice me. And then I heard the sounds. Wait."

Kid Beast started bopping around his living room, affixing little suction cups to the sides of his aquariums and hooking lengths of speaker wire to the suckers as he spoke. The wires all ran to a primitive mixing board, held together mainly by duct tape and rubber bands. Strange low noises began to ooze out of his speakers.

"It went kind of like this," the Kid was saying. "The sound was coming from his swimming pool, and I was seeing colours. Things like colour three-dee TV pictures...one of them looked like you, Zep, come





to think of it, and another was like your little friend. What's his name?"

"My name is Del. I want what's coming to me."

"For sure. Why should I see something like Delbert?" Kid Beast shook his head in wonder, his dirty bangs batting against his dark eyes. "Anyway I'm seeing like ghost images and I'm hearing this weird bubbling music from the pool. Check it out. I think it would be a great main sound for a new band."

Kid Beast fiddled with the dials on his deck, and the room reverberated with aquatic belchings and bubbings. He was mixing up the aquarium sounds, wrenching them into obscene configurations that sounded like some mad punker vomiting into the gulfs of outer space:

The music was blaring, a deep descending scale of bass notes that continually verged on some archetypal core of surf sound. The free-floating shells nautilus was singing high-pitched harmonies. Her tendrils were sweeping up and around in either direction, forming a vast figure-eight, an infinity loop, in the ether. The world below had vanished into mist. Zep started the long slide down, balancing on his feet now. The nautilus saw him coming and opened her beak.

Logomartino was firing away. His bullets streamed past the nautilus and past Zep, arcing up along the curve of the loop, warning back down again toward their origin. Mr Gidget screamed and one of the car doors opened and Logomartino went spinning, pushed by Gidget, into space. A mass of tentacles seized him and drew him down toward the crux of the figure-eight. Just as Zep thought the nautilus was going to devour him, she turned and swallowed the bodyguard whole. Zep streaked past, curving up toward the high end of the loop's far bulge.

**T**he Kid looked proud. "Like, it's so much uglier than anything any other group has got."

"What happened after you woke up at Gidget's?" asked Zep. "Did you get any more drugs?"

"Naw, man," said the Kid. "You're missing the point. The thing is, Gidget had somebody strapped to the diving-board, a chick. She had her head hanging over the end, and her long blonde hair dangling down. She was naked, arms and legs all tan, and you could see her T & A regions shining white in the dark. Gidget was standing over her on the diving board, wearing a wetsuit and holding a shimmering ball of light. Like that ball you have," he said, "which is the point of this story. Did Gidget send you after me?"

"I see her," said Del, smiling and peering into his ball. "I see the girl you're talking about. She turns into a burrito."

Kid Beast gave a short laugh. "How right you are. Cause then the whole pool started to bubble and shake, and this huge orange striped shell the colour of a Creamsicle rose out of the water. There was a godawful smell. The shell tilted back under the diving board. It had tentacles – slithery orange tentacles, a thousand of 'em. They reached up and started swarming all over that poor girl. When I saw that shit, man, I took off running."

Counterpoint to his narrative, Kid Beast had been playing a nightmarish soundtrack that sounded like the ruminations of fish-eaten sailors playing Wurlitzers in a drowned shopping mall. His story chilled Zep, but Delbert was in another world: totally obliv.

"Gee," he said, glancing up and tossing the ball idly



in one hand. "You think maybe we could get to meet Gidget?"

"What's the matter with you, Del?"

"I just bet he'd give me that Woodie."

"You really found that thing on the beach?" the Kid asked.

"Look for yourself," Zep said. "It's got a post-box number on it."

Kid Beast shook his head and refused to touch the ball. "This is some kind of trick of Gidget's. He wants to get that ball into my hands – like, maybe it will mark me, put a smell on me, so that tentacle thing knows where to find me. But no way, I'm not touching it."

"That thing you saw with the girl," said Zep, glancing down at his hands. "That was just a hallucination, right Beast? Put the ball down, Delbert."

"But...but what about the Woodie? And the girl? And the money and everything?"

"It's called bait, Del. Put the ball in the trash – you're better off without it."

But Delbert held the thing fiercely to his chest. "You don't understand, Zep. You're just jealous cause you can't see what I can see. I want what's coming to me!"

The Kid gave Zep an amused look. "Hasn't he ever seen any movies? Nobody should ever say that." He sidled over and slipped his arm around Delbert's waist with an androgynous smile. "So you want what's coming to you?"

"Don't take my ball!"

"I think you should give the ball to Gidget, Zep," said Kid Beast, letting Delbert go. "It's his anyway. Put the smell back on him."

"Shit," said Zep. He could see this turning into a full-on pain in the ass. He just hoped it didn't interfere with his evening's plans. "You mean, like, take it up to Gidget's place? He'd never let us in."

The Kid considered this. "Maybe not. But I know how to get in. I'd love another chance to hear that swimming-pool sound. I'll bring a deck, man, and sample it. Yeah. I'm glad you're here. I been scared to get back up there alone."

"See, Zep," Delbert said; he seemed to hear about every other word of what was said. "Let's go to Gidget's – he's got the Woodie and everything. He'll give me the reward! That's...that's what the little shrimp things want. They're telling me now, can't you hear them? They're telling me that Gidget wants to meet us. Especially you, Zep."

This was definitely the worst Delbert had ever been. To some extent, Zep felt responsible – it was his surfboard, after all, that had put Delbert out of whack.

"Okay, Del," he said. "I'll drive you up there. But we get in, give Gidget the ball, ask for the reward, and get out. That's it. In and out."

Delbert was pleased. He headed out the door toward the truck, hardly watching where he was going. The pitbull lunged, missed and fell over.

"Don't you want to be in my new band?" Kid Beast asked, upping the volume on his aquatic inferno for a last savouring second before switching off the power.

"I don't play an instrument," said Zep.

"Neither do I," said the Kid. "That's why I left the Aunties."

They drove through the narrow, winding hill streets

of Surf City, past an endless repetition of miniature pastel-coloured haciendas, each with a dwarf palm and a driftwood-and-bottleglass sculpture on the lawn. Zep didn't trust Delbert to drive right now, and Del wasn't interested in anything but the promises of his magic Sea Monkey sphere. Kid Beast sat between the two of them, giving out occasional directions, though Zep already knew the way. Who didn't? Gidget's mansion was a hundred-acre estate on the top of a big hill north of town.

"Stomp on these tentacle things!" Kid said. "I can't get out."

"Hang loose, Kid," Zep said. The surf music was flowing down his spine, into his hands and legs. He knew what to do.

Kid Beast made a muffled, grunting sound, battling a thinly writhing weave of bloodworm tentacles that kept trying to creep like a living Persian carpet down his throat. Zep grabbed hold of the thin black fin of his surfboard, Chaos Attractor, and tugged. The tendrils recoiled. Dragging the board after him, Zep knee-walked to the back of the truck and kicked the hatch open.

"Where the fuck are you going?" Kid cried. "Help me, man!"

Zep crouched down on Chaos Attractor. "I am." He gave himself a little push and out he went.

Zep kept thinking he saw pedestrians out of the corner of his eye. They'd pop out of nowhere and lurch towards the car. Zep would swerve, but then there'd be no one at all. It happened so often that he started to pick up on what seemed like a pattern. He only saw the ghost pedestrians at certain kinds of intersections, where the angles curved on hill streets; he decided it was some kind of optical illusion. That explained why the weird walkers all looked like Kid Beast. His eye must be playing tricks on him, flashing little glimpses of his passenger onto his retina and then somehow scrambling them with the crazy lines of the hillside. At any rate, Zep was glad when they finally got to the pink stucco wall surrounding Gidget's estate. It meant they'd left the narrow avenues behind.

Far ahead he could see the turreted roof of the mansion. The property wall held a wrought-iron gate decorated with dinosaurs. Long ago, when silicon was something that people were content to leave on beaches, the Gidget clan had made a tidy California fortune in oil. They weren't the sort of people who forgot a thing like that. Zep had read somewhere that they'd even put Tyrannosaurus Rex on their family crest.

"Right," said Kid Beast. "Honk four fast and three slow to make the gate open. Don't worry, there's only a few servants, and they stay in the house." Zep's horn was broken, of course, so the three of them had to scream "Honk-honk-honk-honk!" and "Hoonk-hoonk-hoonk!" like a pack of rutting dinosaurs. A wild-eyed wrought-iron pteranodon and a dainty diplodocus disengaged from a primordial French kiss, and the gate swung open with a wounded sound.

Water sprinklers ran continuously all over the estate, and the grounds were lushly overgrown with flowers and shrubs of all kinds. It was more like a jungle than a formal garden – like something in one of those lost world movies. Kid Beast sat up alertly,



shooting glances this way and that. They passed several side roads, and then Kid Beast pointed. "See the fork in the drive up there? The main entrance is around to the right. The pool and the garage are in back on the left. He's got a whole maze of roadways here. So now left. We'll just throw the fucking badluck ball in his pool, tape some sounds, and split."

Zep tried to steer left, but Delbert grabbed the wheel and yanked it to the right. Zep had a momentary feeling of being pulled in two, and then, dammit, they were tooling up the drive towards the big house. "Wrong way!" yelled Kid Beast. Zep hit the brakes and started to back up. He twisted around in his seat, staring out the pickup's rear window.

Just before he got back to the fork, a brilliantly polished '48 Country Squire Woodie came cruising out from the left fork of the road they'd missed. There were four people in the Woodie, one in back and three in front. At first all Zep saw was the beautiful blonde surfer chick sitting between the two guys in front. And then he noticed the face of the driver.

"God damn it," he whispered. "That's me!"

Before he could look at the others in the car, Delbert pushed past him, almost sending them off the road. "There she is!" hollered Del. "My car, just like the shrimpthings promised! Look, Zep, there's beer in back and that glow on the dash is Jesus, and there's three boards in back and everything! Don't let them get away!"

But they did get away... they disappeared around a clump of bougainvillea, their happy voices fading like radio static into the hiss of the sprinklers, the chunka-chunka-pffffff of lawn birds. Before Zep could decide what to do next, a plump man in shades and white suit came pooting down the drive in a golf cart. His suit was soaking wet and covered with what looked like lumps of algae and suet. None of these features impressed Zep as much as the fact that he was waving a machine-gun.

**"T**hat's Logomarsino, Gidget's bodyguard," said Kid Beast, sinking down under the dash. "Don't let him see me, man."

"What are you worried about?" Zep asked. "The guy's got an Uzi. Cheap piece of junk."

Del jumped out of the car and waved his ball at the bodyguard. "Hey! How about my reward?"

The man in the golfcart, startled by what must have looked like a threatening gesture, squeezed off a burst. The bullets whizzed overhead; but then, true to form, the Uzi jammed. After the shots, the man stepped out of the cart and stared at them, quivering visibly. "You're not real," he croaked.

"Yes I am!" Delbert said indignantly. "You're just trying to get out of giving me what I deserve."

"Y-you're not real and I'm not afraid of you. I'm not afraid. You're just duplicates, split-offs, echoes. I'm not afraid -"

There was a noise in the distance: four short honks and three long ones. The bodyguard whipped a keypad out of his coat pocked and jabbed a button. "Now *that's* real!" he said, and sped off downhill in his golfcart.

"I want my reward," said Del, plaintively. He started up the driveway to Gidget's house. Zep took the precaution of turning his truck around, and then

he and Kid Beast followed. On his way up the hill, Zep saw a couple more the fast false images among Gidget's jungle shrubbery - this time it was Del and the blonde girl. The images had a way of congealing out of flecks of colour. There'd be like dots of colour in the air and then they'd slide together in some filthy hyperdimensional way, forming a slightly grainy image of someone or something which would soon deconstruct itself into dots that drifted away like gnats. Zep saw the same scene over and over, more and more often, the closer to Gidget's house they got.

"Hey, Kid," he finally thought to ask. "You see what I see?"

"Naw," said Kid Beast. "I don't see none of those fussy demonic effects, dude." He slipped a crucifix from his pocket and gave it a furtive kiss.

Obviously Delbert was seeing the images, as he kept trying to talk to the ghosts, asking them, "When will I get what I have coming?"

"Stop saying that," warned Kid Beast, but now the mansion's great madrone doors were swinging open to reveal a trim taut figure, all sheathed in shiny black. He held a glowing crystal in one hand, and there was a static of false images crowded around him, like a ragged aura.

"Killer!" screamed Kid Beast. "Stupid dick!"

"Hell, Beast, the dude's wearing a wetsuit," said Zep. "How bad can he be if he surfs?"

Seeing the weirdness and richness of all this, Zep was also flashing that no doubt Gidget had a monster stash somewhere. A pile of coke like in *Scarface*, right, a mound that you could just lower your snoggering face right down into. A fucking sandpile, man. Just thinking this, Zep could see the coke - or maybe it was acidlaced meth - sitting on a silver tray on a little threelegged table right at Gidget's side. Zep gave Del a sharp jostle, grabbed the magic ball, and sprang first up the manse's marble steps.

Zep's ball and Gidget's ball picked up on each other. Little laser beams shot out from them, dancing off Zep and Gidget and the images around them. The billionaire frogman extended his one empty hand as a focus for the skittering beams, and within seconds all the little lines of light from Zep's ball had woven together into five brilliant strands, each one of them ending at one of Gidget's fingertips.

Then Gidget closed his fist and the ball flew forward into his palm, carrying Zep with it.

Before Zep knew what was happening, he was surrounded by that miasma of duplicate images which clung to Gidget like body odour; in fact, he was shaking the billionaire's hand while a wiry tycoon arm slipped around his shoulder and gave him a friendly squeeze, leading him through the big doors and into the mansion.

"Get out of there, man!" he heard the Beast calling.

"Gimme my ball, Zep, you weenie!"

But those were dim sounds, fading as he basked in the proximity of inconceivable wealth. Wealth, yes, it poured from the man. "Well, well," Mr Gidget was saying. "Did you come to see me?"

Zep nodded. The madrone doors slammed shut, leaving his friends outside. He started looking around for that tremendous stash; it was somewhere nearby, he was sure of that. Unfortunately, the harder he looked for it, the more elusive it seemed. He had to



play it cool, that was the important thing.

Beautiful surf music filled the sky.

Beast clattered into the truckbed with Chaos Attractor and Kid Zep smashed his elbow into the pickup's rear window; "Help him, Zep," cried Delbert.

"Help me, guys," he screamed, seeing them looking truck's jack.

She had hold of the Beast's ankle now, and he was waiting away at her impossibly fine tentacle with the

"I know, dude. And now she loves the Kid."

"She - loved me."

"You don't understand," Delbert began to blubber. "Sure she did. She wanted you to have her babies."

wanted me in a big way." "She wanted me, Zep," Delbert was wheezing. "She

**G**idget tossed the two balls from hand to hand jugglerstyle. "Yes, I've been missing my back-up sphere for several days. I sent it out on an errand, and I even feared it might never return. But I should have known better. These things pull the dimensions together so nicely, and all through the marvellous power of circumstance. There are no accidents, don't you agree? We were brought together for a very good reason."

"Definitely," Zep agreed.

"You sound so sure of yourself. I like that in a young man. And such a strong young man. A surfer, am I right? I thought so. I wonder, though. There must be more to you than sun and waves. What use would a simple surfer have for an advanced piece of computer technology like a half-million dollar Systems Complex CAM8 board?"

"You-you-what are you talking about, man?"

"I believe you know what I mean. Someone bombed and robbed the Systems Complex warehouse... six months ago, hmmm? Systems Complex is a wholly owned subsidiary of Gidgetdyne."

A picture of Chaos Attractor danced out of the little ball and began zooming around Gidget's head. A small figure stood on the board, a small lean image of Zep.

"Look," said Zep, giving up. "You want your CAM8 back? I've only been testing it out for you and Systems Complex, Mr Gidget. I've got it in my truck outside. In my surfboard."

"Oh no, no, no. The CAM8 is obsolete now. Six months ago I could have sold it, but now - now all any of our big customers wants is the new CAM10. The CAM8 board simulated a space that was little more than two dimensional, but the CAM10 can handle four dimensions, which means time. That's why it was so easy for it to find you."

"What... what does the CAM10 board look like?" Zep couldn't help asking.

"Like this," said Gidget, prying the base of Del's ball up to reveal a glowing red jewel. He snapped the base shut again and the hidden hinges disappeared. "What makes the CAM10 really unique is that it drives a holographic laser display."

"I've been noticing," said Zep. "But how did it find me?" If they could just keep talking, maybe everything would be OK.

"That's an interesting question. Do you know about chaos theory? Of course you do. Why else would you





have put the CAM8 in a surfboard. All right." Gidget was warming to his topic. "These machines are so information-theoretically rich that they act as strange attractors in the fact space of our reality."

"I'm keyin' you, dude," said Zep. "Dig it: I call my CAM8 surfboard Chaos Attractor!"

"You know, Zep," beamed Gidget. "Maybe our research end could use a mind like yours. Frankly I'd been planning to let Cthulhu out back place her new neonate in the CAM8 thief. But maybe —"

Beast and Delbert had been pounding on the front door, but now there was a gunshot and they stopped. Sound of feet running away. The doors opened and in came the same Uzi-wielding bodyguard he'd seen before. Oddly, his suit was clean and appeared freshly pressed, in distinct contrast to Zep's first view of it.

"Ah, Logomarsino. Have you taken care of our guests?"

"I'm doing my best, Mr Gidget. How about this bird? Should I tie him up and take him out to the pool?"

"Bag it, dude," snapped Zep. "I'm R&D. I'm a computer scientist. And who is this Cthulhu you're talking about? Cthulhu like in those way skunk Lovecraft books?"

"Well read, too," said Gidget. "I'm impressed. More or less like Lovecraft's Cthulhu. Maybe even the same, who knows. I suppose the poor man's brain was in some ways a chaotic attractor as strange as the CAM10."

Zep held on to the steering wheel as if it were a lifesaver. The pickup that had been a Woodie bucking in heavy turbulence, a froth of chaos surf. There was a burst of suction that cut off Delbert's screaming, and the primordial mollusc girl went flapping and wriggling out the window, throwing herself to the wind. She fell away from the car, but somehow evaded the pull of gravity, caught in the lines of force that had snarled pursued and pursuers somewhere outside of time.

"Hey, Del," Zep gasped. "Take the wheel."

Delbert grabbed the wheel.

A trumpet blast deafened them. The girl was still unfolding, her hair thickening into long prehensile tendrils; her body turning blackish green, unfolding and expanding. She seemed to be caught in a slipstream which drew her swiftly and steadily toward a point midway between the cars. As she hit that point, her whole nautiloid body shuddered. Her tentacles whipped out in either direction, half of them snarling in the bumper of Gidget's car, the other half clutching the fine tail of Zep's pickup, slithering over into the bed of the truck to rummage through empty beer cans and clam shells, feeling for Kid Beast.

**"Y**ou're saying that the CAM10 opened up some kind of dimensional door?"

"The creature we call Cthulhu has given me indications that it was already the CAM8 which drew her here. She appeared in my swimming pool one day. She is something like a giant nautilus. Our supercomputational net has simply become so sensitive that different levels of reality are able to tune in on it and realize themselves. But, Zep, we have a problem. Cthulhu here has been recursively impregnated and needs to birth a neonate every 49 days. The neonates enter the flesh of a human and grow there. I really don't want to sacrifice you but —"

A faint sound came from the mansion's rear door.

Delbert yelling and kicking at the back door. "GOD-DAMN YOU ALL, I WANT WHAT'S COMING TO ME!" Gidget and Logomarsino exchanged an evil grin. Here in the dimensional image zazz, Zep had to fight back an urge to smile with them.

A minute later they were all at the poolside, and Del's hands were tied behind him with rubber surgical cord. He was screaming for help, and then he was gagged, and then he was strapped nude to the diving board. The water was black and fetid, as if sewer pipes had backed up and filled it. Zep expected better of a billionaire.

Out, up, into the air two hundred empty feet above the sunglided surf. And then there's this like click, and the Woodie changes into Zep's pickup. It's just like Zep and Del and Beast in the pickup, with Chaos Attractor in back same as before, only the girl... is like coming apart, unfolding her hands and arms into feelers, and the skin down her back splits off —  
"It's the nautilus! She's the anti-gravity nautilus!" screams Kid Beast. And the sphere is shooting out rays at Mr Gidget's sphere and the girl unfolds her mantle and now Logomarsino and Gidget drive off the cliff too and —

**T**he pool water roiled, little pieces of garbage and algae all floating up like a small red tide plankton bloom, and in the centre of that flower appeared strands of greenyellow hair, then a face, a heartstoppingly beautiful California Girl face, ah, noble straight nose and lips thick enough to toothlessly peel a Sunkist orange —

"Hey," yelled Zep. "A girl!"

She slipped out of the pool water nude, holding a knife, a big black anodized diving knife; in an instant she was at the diving board, the great blade poised over Delbert's genitals. Delbert pleaded volubly for mercy. Zep covered his eyes. The poor little dude was about to get what was what coming to him.

There were sproings and a splash. Zep couldn't bear not to look. The girl had cut Delbert free and thrown away her knife! She was kissing his cheek! Before anyone else could react, Zep shoved Logomarsino in the pool. The Uzi had jammed again.

"Let's split, Beast!"

"Stop them," roared Gidget, but it was too late.

In a trice the chick and the three caballeros had run around the house onto the driveway. Where Zep's truck had been, there now sat the green '48 Woodie Del had been raving about all day. Zep would rather have had his trusty pickup, but there wasn't time to find it. They jumped in and burned rubber, slaloming down Gidget's hill, through the back streets of Surf City, and onto the Pacific Coast Highway.

The summer air beat in the windows. The ocean was on their left; the PCH was clear. It was late and calm and the sun was setting west over the slick tubes and all the fudds and foobars had gone home.

"Twist up a fuckin' jay, Del."

"For true."

The closemouthed girl watched, stroking Del gently on the upper arm. When he'd made the jay she took it from him and lit it with the Woodie's built-in butane lighter. She smoked oddly, just opening her lips far enough to slip the reefer tip in, and then exhaling the thick blue smoke sharply through her nose. She did



this three times and then she proffered the stick to Kid Beast in the back seat.

"Later," said he. "Right now I want this." He handed up a homemade CD. "This is the Auntie Christ's best sound."

Zep slotted the disc into the player. Del took a hit of the dope and passed it to Zep. Everything was wonderful. The water was beautiful; the red tide was gone. Stokin tubes were rolling in, breaking in long freight-train crashes. The energizing sound interlaced with the wasted plangent music wafting out of the Woodie's mighty soundsystem.

Zep smiled to feel the smooth running Woodie roll them along so well. The prepopuluxe studebaker shape of the car reminded him of a car he'd thought he'd seen an ad for when he'd been a little boy. A car that had wings tucked under its fenders so that if you jerked the right lever the car would zoom up off the crest of a hill, stubby and heavy as ever but with the engine roaring and making it fly and you driving with the steering wheel. Whoa dude. No way Gidget'd dare to chase them. Bitchen Kitchen would be boomin about now, just a little further on. One more mile, cut left onto the Point, and then they'd be carving for true.

**T**he four of them were awesomely well gunned, mused Zep, what with Chaos Attractor safe in back with the beer, not to mention the three bitchin new boards the Woodie had come with. What a car! Del had been right! This was magic, and no kind of *black* magic at all, as you could plainly see by the mildly glowing plastic Jesus on the dash.

"Hi, Jesus," said Zep. "Thank you."

Now they were past the cratersite of the San Diablo N-Plant and freewheeling down the long last slope before the road bottomed out and jogged right. The long slope down to the sea was empty.

Zep could see the Bitchen Kitchen parking spot down there past the jog, a beige patch between road and sharp cliff edge with the surprisingly distant ocean collaged in behind. Bitchen Kitchen, where the gnarliest nudists, perverts, and surfers hung, Bitchen Kitchen with hard and easy trails leading down to the beach.

Zep loved skidding into the lot here. It was a sport. Local legend said that if you gathered enough speed and went straight instead of left or right, you could actually shoot up off the low ski-ramp of the sheer bluff and, if the waves were right, splash down safe in a deep surgey kettle. A tourist called Tuck Playfair had actually done it in '68.

The blonde chick was all over Del now, she was unbuttoning his shirt and even putting her hands in his pants. Del had never looked happier in his life. Even Kid Beast in back was happy, though he couldn't stop staring nervously out the wagon's open back tailgate. All dudes present sensed this could be the start of a righteous and functional partnership.

"I tolk you," said Del, his voice actually choking up, so great was his joy. "I...I tolk Zep I'd get whak's c-coming to me. And right now—" Delbert fought back his emotion by raising the volume and the pitch of his voice. "Right now! Right now I'm getting what I've got coming to me! I mean, *dudes!* Whooooooo!"

The silent blonde girl slipped Del's shorts all the

way off, cast them to the winds and leaned slowly forward, finally opening her mouth. Kid Beast was still staring out the back, and Zep was watching the road, so at first only Delbert could see the appalling structures in the girl's mouth. There was something majorly wrong in there... instead of teeth she had like two hard cartilagenous skincovered ridges. Delbert started pushing her away, even as she strained forward, opening her mouth wider and wider and making a noise like Patty Duke playing Helen Keller by imitating a crazy person taking a shit. But this wasn't method acting.

"So what's your name?" Kid Beast asked. "And how did you ever get away from that big whacked-out nautilus in Gidget's pool?"

"Wuuuh. Uuuuunnnnnuuuunnnh. Nnnnnnggggggggh!"

"Wait a minute!" Delbert was saying. He sounded worried, but Zep was too polite to glance over. "Wait a minute! HEY ZEP —"

There was a popping noise far behind them. A sudden spiderweb appeared in the windshield's glass. "IT'S GIDGET AND LOGOMARSINO!" screamed Kid Beast. "THEY'RE COMING UP FAST" Another gunshot, another hole in the windshield.

Out of the corner of his eye, Zep could see the girl's mouth open wide and some like stiff tube or...beak... pushing out —

And Del is all, "AAAAAAAAAAUUUUUUUGHHH! WHAT ARE YOU —"

And she's, "EEEEEEEEK! WuRRaWuRRaWuRRa! YEEEEEEEEK!"

And Kid Beast is going, "FLOOR IT!" only the cliff edge is coming right up and now, before Zep can even get his foot off the gas, the girl snakes her surprisingly flexible leg over and mashes on his foot sending them —

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**Rudy Rucker** and **Marc Laidlaw** are both prominent sf writers in their native USA. The former is well known for his *White Light* (1980), *Software* (1982) and *Wetware* (1987), as well as his non-fiction books about mathematics (see the interview with him in IZ 20). The latter has written the novels *Dad's Nuke* (1986), *Neon Lotus* (1988) and the forthcoming *Kalifornia*. According to Marc, the characters in the above story "hail from a continuing series of collaborative pieces Rudy and I have done, the first of which will appear in *Synergy 2*, George Zebrowski's collection. They tend to pit burnt-out Californians against odd manifestations of higher mathematics."

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DAVID PRINGLE  
FOREWORD BY BRIAN ALDISS

David Pringle, author of the highly praised *Science Fiction: The 100 Best Novels* and *Imaginary People: A Who's Who of Modern Fictional Characters*, has written a much-needed, lively and authoritative guide to the top 100 English-language fantasy novels published since 1945. *Modern Fantasy: The Hundred Best Novels* is a book which will stimulate new interest in these modern masterpieces as well as appealing to all dedicated fans of the fantastic in literature.

The selection is a wide one, embracing stories of supernatural horror, heroic fantasy or 'fabulation' – all of them dealing with the marvellous, the magical or the otherworldly. The titles are discussed in chronological order of publication, and range from *Titus Groan* by Mervyn Peake, *Seven Days in New Crete* by Robert Graves, *Conan the Conqueror* by Robert E. Howard, *The Lord of the Rings* by J.R.R. Tolkien, *Dandelion Wine* by Ray Bradbury, *The Once and Future King* by T. H. White – to (more recently) *Cold Heaven* by Brian Moore, *Nights at the Circus* by Angela Carter, *The Witches of Eastwick* by John Updike, and *The Day of Creation* by J. G. Ballard.

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**GRAFTON BOOKS**



American science fiction is a goitre on the esophagus of true romance, says Brian Stableford, in words to that effect. It's not simply that American science fiction owns the language which English sf writers have to learn, losing their souls in the process, as Brian Aldiss has said, in words to that effect; what Stableford argues, in his fine and searching *Scientific Romance in Britain* (1985), is that an inherent distinction can be drawn between science fiction as created by American pulp writers from 1926 on, and scientific romances as created by H.G. Wells and written in Great Britain from the end of the nineteenth century down to the present day. To call *Childhood's End* (1953) a science-fiction novel is significantly (though not fatally) to misprision Clarke's long cool dream of twilight.

There is no precise definition of the scientific romance, or at any rate none that Stableford is willing to give in the long accumulation of studies of writers like Wells and Stapledon and S. Fowler Wright and John Gloag which makes up the bulk of his text; but a polythetic stab can be made at describing the form. The scientific romance – I'd suggest – tends to present to the reader a plot-structure more designed to open aperçus of cognition or contemplation than to enable its protagonists to triumph. To the reader accustomed to the cinematic/pulp felicities of the traditional sf novel, the protagonist of a scientific romance will tend to seem passive and morose and bespectacled and plump; not the man on the horse who saves the galaxy, but his scribe. The protagonist of the scientific romance will rarely tap the sources of kinetic energy available – if only remotely – in the text of which he/she is the "star." As the star, he may cast light upon the world, helping us to discern its grave structure, but no light will ever shine through him, he will never be transparent to the engine of the story. Never will the protagonist of a scientific romance drive the engine of the world, singing. Ultimately, he is not an engineer but a gaze.

The desiderium inherent in that gaze – remote, poetical, ruminative, melancholic, fin-de-siècle – infuses the archetypal scientific romance with a powerful sense of retrospection, a flow of these vistas, or aperçus, will gradually impart an evolutionary argument to the tale, a sense of (usually brooding) entelechy beyond our physical compass, for we are not super-heroes, nor immortal; but not beyond our awe at the rules which bind, from so long ago, just as in most science-fantasy novels.

Stableford's own *The Empire of Fear* (1988) is an almost perfect example of the scientific romance's strengths and weaknesses; its narrative

rhythms clearly violate any normal expectation of any normal reader of American genre novels about vampires, somewhat to its cost. But this is part of the bargain. In the case of Paul J. McAuley's *Four Hundred Billion Stars* (Gollancz, £11.95), it is less easy to judge if certain costs were in fact premeditated, or whether they were the inevitable consequence of an attempt by a writer in the scientific-romance mould to generate Yankee space-opera tropes; for it is certainly the case that McAuley is not much of a triumphalist.

At first glance, the plot has all the instamatic ebullience of the best American brands. Bursting into unsettled space, an expanding interstellar Terran hegemony finds an alien fleet resisting its advance, and hostilities begin. A few light-years distant, another planet shows evidence of alien terraforming activities, several aeons earlier. The space navy investigates! A female telepathic research scientist is commandeered across the parsecs to winkle out any traces of alien sentience. She soon comes to understand that the baboon-like native herders and the giant locomotive killdozer amoebas they harvest and munch are in fact different stages of the same species on time-honoured generic lines, and that near-adult imagos are being called to a great spiral tower in the centre of a caldera where immense squiggles of hieroglyphic runes are destined to transform them into fully adult ancient enemy alien males, on time-honoured lines.

So far, so good. It would seem. But the telepath cannot forget that she has in effect been kidnapped and lied to by the military, and that her superior officers are neither competent nor pure at heart. As in almost every scientific romance ever written, therefore, McAuley's protagonist progresses through *Four Hundred Billion Stars* in a state of profound alienation from the energies that empower the establishments of the world. Entirely typical of her generic origins in Wells and Beresford and Stapledon, she maintains a hostile indifference to the masculine kinetic web that operates her, willy-nilly. This may be "realistic" – though in a context of telepathy and FTL doubletalk spaceships and metempsychotic alien hooaws the point of this sort of realism may be hard to ascertain – but

it is not space opera. As the novel progresses, true to its schismatic nature we find that the protagonist's telepathy does her little good, because it gives her splitting headaches and cannot be controlled and brain damage results from its use. Nor does she manage to keep her unprepossessing lover alive on a field trip which is in any case almost certainly unnecessary for the plot, though it does enable us to see, in the scientific-romance mode. Nor does the novel itself exactly end in triumph for the masculine principle; the plight of the trapped aliens on the planet is dire, and worsens, and the war is almost guaranteed not to end soon, and the enforced interventions of the shanghai'd half-breed disaffected telepath have rescued virtually nothing from the shambles. But she has been a witness. Clearly it is sufficient for McAuley that she has witnessed – and that his readers have witnessed – something of the long slow grinding of the mills of the gods over millennia. Who should care that the plot itself is a snare, a circumbendibus into entropy?

So the book is an erosion, and almost perfectly represents the effects in general of the British scientific-romance imagination on the science-fiction format it so often tries to simulate, like a computer worm or virus which inhabits a program and devours it. Computer viruses are sarcasms from within the gut. So is this novel. Its effect on the reader – though at points bracing – is not altogether fortunate. We did not demand a space opera from McAuley, but it did seem we were getting one; once we had *Four Hundred Billion Stars*, it was not necessarily our good luck that it turned out to have been designed to eat itself sick.

Gwyneth Jones does not get less odd. Her adult novels – of which *Kairos* (1988), not reviewed here, is the most recent – increasingly turn the world to stone with their ungingv gaze, the slightly numbing offhandedness of their diction, the elisions of plotting through which the unwitting – the uninitiated – can too easily topple. There is an extremely strange sense in these recent titles that they are addressed to an audience which inhabits a magic circle of understanding with the author, and which doesn't consequently need the actual books; and that those outside that circle don't

# A Worm in the Opera

## John Clute



deserve them. None of this yet applies to the children's books Jones has published under the name of Ann Halam, nor does it apply to **The Hidden Ones** (Women's Press, £3.50), published under her own name, and one of the first young-adult books to be released by The Women's Press under its "Live-wire" imprint. It is a stunning little fable.

In a precisely captured South Sussex milieu of small towns on the verge of becoming Thatchervilles, young Adele edges her prickly, precarious, ambush-riden way towards adulthood. Her generally latent, almost totally uncontrollable powers of telekinesis have (it seems) helped break up her family, and have certainly caused behaviour on her part which gave the authorities sufficient excuse to institutionalize her. As a final chance, she returns to her father and his new wife; meets a lady scientist (who has in fact met her, to study her gifts); finds the ancient well that magicked her childhood (and perhaps shaped her powers) to be under threat from a Volvo-driving overreacher. The ensuing complications are of little real importance, and indeed the book ends in haste and disorder; what is striking, and intensely effective throughout *The Hidden Ones*, is the pungency of the verisimilitude. It is impossible not to believe every nakedness in Adele's whiplashed response to the world. As a creation, she is frighteningly present on every page of the book to which she gives such savage life. She stares right through the page. She does not turn you to stone.

**T**he protagonist of Tom Holt's *Expecting Someone Taller* (1987) runs over a dragon in the West Country. Before passing over the Ring of power and expiring, the dragon says it had been expecting someone taller. Trickling as it does through the text, this line generates a constant barely liminal hilarity that is the best part of the book. Pratfalls, and something of a plot involving Wagnerian gods and dwarf scowlers, ensue duly, but do not excite much interest in the course of coming to a loud slightly disheartened climax, mainly because the neb-bish hero (who is not tall) exercises invincible powers but really does not much care that he is subjecting the world to a goodness which flows, lambent and healing, over the souls of mortals and immortals everywhere. **Who's Afraid of Beowulf?** (Macmillan, £9.95), Holt's second comic fantasy, meritoriously reverses these credits and debits. The title is lame, but the book is fine. A young woman archaeologist, who loves her profession and who cares about the implications of that which she tumbles into, tumbles into a Viking burial pit where she finds, perfectly preserved, a longship

and its crew, and a king, and a wizard, and a couple of supernatural entities. Once awakened from magic slumber, they all respond variously to their initiation into the horrors of our century, and eventually work it out that their dark adversary – roundly defeated a millennium ago – has regained his powers, and has constructed the modern world in his own image. So there is some point to the squalls and pixillations which follow, and some real edge to Holt's nicely timed landmines of wit. The melancholia inherent in his sustaining premise – that the modern world can be explained as a genuinely evil practical joke on us helots – only makes the grace of his ingenious gamesplaying the more saving. He does not yet have the drive of a Terry Pratchett, but he is beginning to show something of the same glare.

A short note: Connie Willis's **Lincoln's Dreams** (Grafton, £2.99) has been received in the United States with something of the praise it deserves, and now appears in Great Britain, more than a year later but exceedingly welcome. Like Terry Bisson's *A Fire on the Mountain* (1988), which takes a radically different view of Robert E. Lee, *Lincoln's Dreams* obsessively reworks the great underground river of agenbite of the Civil War between the States. Her protagonist is psychically consumed – one might even say ridden – by a woman whose dreams are those of General Lee, not Lincoln, and their relationship has a pathos that is utterly convincing, strait-jacketed and uncanny and oneiric. The whole book gives off the timbre of a half-heard song by the early R.E.M.; it is constructed with a steely delicacy; it is tough and willowy, dense and aethereal. It is full of blood and death and severing; and it is as clear as air, and seemly.

(Last minute note: this notice was written before I knew of Richard Adams's new novel on the Civil War, composed as the autobiography of Traveller, General Lee's horse.)

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## Real Fantasy

### Paul J. McAuley

**M**agical realism is by now a well-worn buzzword in the literary mainstream: from Marquez to Los Bros Hernandez via Rushdie and Carey, it draws critical acclaim, wins prizes and huge advances, even threatens (hurrah!) to sweep away the tired campus and drawing-room clichés of English fiction. But despite all the fuss, its bastard first-cousin, fantasy, remains a quaint little backwater. After all, it's only escapist literature, isn't it? All those gold-foil embossed triple-deckers about dragons and Magic Rings and all-powerful lepers: so trite,

so embarrassing. Mere commercial hackwork, literary fastfood for students and unreconstructed hippies. Unlike magical realism, it has nothing at all to do with the human condition, with the real world. Right?

Well, partly right. For among the dumpbins of role-playing game tie-ins are fantasies that are firmly rooted in present concerns. The Women's Press science fiction series, for instance, has been the source of many radical re-thinks of fantasy tropes, none more so than Carol Emshwiller's **Carmen Dog** (Women's Press, £4.95), which concerns the picaresque adventures of Pooch, a beautiful young woman who was once a golden setter, in a world where women are all turning into animals, and animals are all turning, by degrees, into women. Pooch's mistress has turned into a snapping turtle, and when Pooch's master decides that Pooch will make an admirable substitute for his transmogrified wife, Pooch takes the couple's baby and flees to New York where she falls in love with opera, is arrested and condemned to death and escapes, falls into the clutches of a scientist obsessed with explaining the inexplicable, escapes again, defends her honour, falls in with revolutionaries and at last finds happiness through opera and (yes) marriage – and throughout maintains a wide-eyed prelapsarian astonishment at the strange ways of the world, and of men in particular. A wise, warm, witty book that has running through it like a steel thread a constant theme of moral indignation at male suppression of most aspects of most women's lives, *Carmen Dog* never resorts to simplistic polarity or polemics to make its point. A serious, funny fantasy which I highly recommend.

**L**ewis Shiner's **Deserted Cities of Heart** (Abacus, £3.99) is a fantasy as contemporary as last week's news, seamlessly combining scalpel-sharp dissections of American paranoid meddling in Central America, media culture and the rhetoric of third-world revolution with a transcendental vision of apocalypse as the current grand cycle of the Mayans (coincident with the New Age harmonic convergence) draws to an end. Mexican guerrillas, CIA-funded soldiers of fortune, a rock star desperate for spiritual enlightenment, his estranged wife and anthropologist brother come together in the ruins of a Mayan city deserted at the end of the last grand cycle. Guided by a tribal priest and a mushroom drug that sends him back in time to end of the last cycle, the rock star achieves an apotheosis and leads his followers out of a fire and volcanic eruption towards what may be the dawn of a new age (Shiner is a little vague about what form this post-apocalypse society might take, but perhaps that's just



as well). Despite some unreconstructed new age philosophy and unfiltered sixties nostalgia, it is very much a book of the eighties. Shiner has an unflinching eye for the convincing detail, and a stripped-down prose style that heightens the impact of his brutal scenarios. A serious information-dense fantasy, and a seriously good achievement.

**F**or a rococo variation on traditional fantasy themes we turn to Tim Powers, whose **On Stranger Tides** (Grafton, £1.95) is an action-packed convoluted tale of intrigue and magic set in a gonzo alternative history, very much in the tradition of *The Anubis Gates*. Here, the setting is an eighteenth century pirate-infested Caribbean where magic still works, the Fountain of Youth is somewhere to be found, and Blackbeard is a fearsome voodoo-adept as well as privateer. John Chandagnac, puppeteer and bookkeeper, voyages in search of the uncle who stole his inheritance, falls in love with the daughter of a mysterious professor, is captured by pirates and perforce becomes one of them. Rechristened Jack Shandy, he discovers that the professor plans, with the help of Blackbeard, to turn his daughter into a vessel for the soul of his dead wife, and Shandy's struggle to rescue her takes him through a battle with the Royal Navy, a grim journey to the Fountain of Youth, and into conflict with a ship crewed by the undead. Crammed with authentic and telling details, an intricate plot, and action handled in the best tradition of Robert Louis Stevenson (as long as you can overlook the strictly twentieth-century dialogue, plotting that slackens in the middle and a heroine who, no matter how often she swears and spits, is never more than a prize to be rescued), it more than does its duty as a good Ripping Yarn, guaranteed to enliven the dog-days of the post-Christmas season.

**A**lso to hand are the beginnings of two series by two major American fantasists. First up is Stephen King's **The Gunslinger** (Sphere, £6.99), the first volume of *The Dark Tower*. Although episodic (the five parts were originally published as separate novelettes in *F&SF*), it moves along briskly enough as the hero, half Elric of Melniboné, half Clint Eastwood, pursues The Man In Black across an enigmatic landscape that could be in the future, could be somewhere else entirely. Despite occasional lapses into mock-Gothic pseudery, King has achieved a creditable translation of Dark Ages mythopoetic vision into the desert landscapes of America's empty heart. But be warned, King speculates that at his present rate of composition this projected 3000 page epic could take 300 years to finish.

No such problem with Orson Scott Card: his epic fantasy, *Tales of Alvin Maker*, is already three volumes deep in the States. The first episode, **Seventh Son** (Legend, £10.95 or £5.95) has now appeared in Britain. It is set in the early nineteenth-century America of a vividly realized alternate history where the English Restoration and the American War of Independence never happened, and a kind of hedge magic is worked by the pioneering settlers. Alvin, the seventh son of a seventh son, is a powerful Maker of magic and, possibly, a Messiah. In the book's brief span Card effortlessly incorporates the premises of his alternate history while telling of Alvin's realization of his nature and powers, and of his first brush with the evil with which, clearly, he will be engaged for the rest of the series. Card writes with clarity and conviction as he engages with a thoroughly difficult subject (the problem of Evil), but his often sentimental folksiness may occasionally grate with British readers. I for one cannot take seriously his transformation of radical visionary William Blake into an itinerant Burl Ives-type folk-teller who becomes the mentor and spirit guide for the young Alvin. Let's hope that this type of whimsy is kept in check in further volumes, or it may overwhelm Card's serious intent.

**W**e turn from the protean templates of fantasy to hardcore sf's strict blueprints, whose fully-documented realism too often leaves little space for characterization. Like architectural drawings, the gleaming technophilic futures are generally peopled by stick figures, sketched in only to give us some idea of the scale of the monoliths that dominate them. Paul Preuss's **Starfire** (Simon & Schuster, £11.95) is a solid piece of extrapolative hard sf about the near-future American space programme which attempts to put some real people inside the gleaming technology. It is a valiant attempt, but sadly not one hundred per cent successful. After a gripping beginning, in which the hero effects a spectacular self-rescue and draws upon himself the bureaucratic displeasure of NASA, Preuss lets the narrative slacken almost fatally, losing his way in a morass of sub-*Dallas* type power struggles; and his handling of the hero's disgrace and alcoholic stupor, and renunciation of same, is too glib to allow the reader to feel anything. But be patient. Once launched into orbit, on a risky, near-disastrous mission to a sun-grazing asteroid, the narrative regains momentum. The motivations of the astronauts and their relationships with the hardedged technology are rendered with gritty convincing detail, and their predicament is gripping and realistic. Space exploration probably won't be exactly like this, but Preuss's account

suspends our disbelief. A pity the Earth-bound soap opera lets the space opera down.

#### Reference Section:

**Trillion Year Spree** (Paladin, £6.95). A revised paperback edition of Aldiss and Wingrove's entertaining, idiosyncratic, occasionally infuriating (although certain callow remarks about the current British sf scene have been modified) and altogether essential history of sf.

**Chaos** (Heinemann, £12.95). James Gleick's lucid account of the genesis and development of science's latest theory of everything. A fine introduction to fractals, disordered systems and nonlinearity. Destined to launch a thousand sf speculations.

**The Omega Point** (Corgi, £4.95). Once a backwater populated almost exclusively by obscure Russians, cosmology has inflated into one of the hottest areas of contemporary science. John Gribbin gives an elegant, readable and above all understandable account of the missing mass problem and the ultimate fate of the Universe. Recommended to all aspiring radical hard sf writers.

#### Video releases:

Steven King's **Maximum Overdrive** (CBS Fox) must be the world's most expensive home movie – he wrote and directed it, even has a Hitchcockian cameo appearance. Yes, it is that indulgent. The premise of hostile poltergeist aliens taking over the world's machines is good, but King doesn't appear to have the first idea of how to make a coherent storyboard, let alone compose a shot, and most of the movie is taken up with a bunch of trucks driving around and around a gas station. Emilio Estevez sleepwalks through his part, the rest of the cast ham it up to no good effect – and there isn't even much gore. Utterly missable.

Based on a George R.R. Martin story, **Nightflyers** (CBS Fox) is a slightly better bet, if only for the production values. A bunch of scientists pick the wrong spaceship to hire for their expedition and find themselves at the mercy of the ship's computer, which is patterned on the mind of the insanely jealous mother of the ship's captain. The opening is painfully slow and the acting (especially that of Michael Praed, who plays the Oedipal captain) is fairly dire, but the sets and special effects do capture something of Martin's gothic grand guignol tendency. Watch with the sound turned off.

(Paul J. McAuley)



# Graphic Gloom

Alan Moore may have stopped writing superhero comics but Titan won't let a little thing like that stop them reprinting them. Not content with the ongoing series of *Swamp Thing* reprints, we now have to delight us **Superman: The Man of Tomorrow** (Titan, £5.95) which collects behind a suitably mythopoeic John Higgins cover three Superman stories produced by the bard of Northampton in spare moments during his time at DC. As Neil Gaiman comments in his introduction, atypically for Moore these are stories not of darkness and pessimism but of light and heroism. They could almost be described as (gasp) upbeat. Moore himself admits to "goosey sentiment and affection" for this foremost of comics heroes; and the two final stories especially are steeped (though not cloyingly) in this, with all the wonderfully old fashioned motifs of the Superman legend – red kryptonite, Krypto the flying dog, Brainiac, Luthor and above all the obsession with lost Krypton, lost planet-womb – given loving attention in the familiarly revisionist Moore way. The tone can be summed up by the prologue to the last story in the collection, a tale of Superman's last days: "...This is an IMAGINARY STORY... Aren't they all?"

Still in the realms of Moore reprint land (but not for long – read on) we have the long-awaited **V for Vendetta**, by Moore and David Lloyd, a tale of a not-so-far-future post-nuclear-war fascist Britain, which began in 1982 in then-pioneering *Warrior* magazine, only to be left unconcluded for some years (to the extreme frustration of its readers) with the demise of that magazine. Until this year – when DC began to reprint in monthly format the *V* episodes so far, with a newly written conclusion already in the can and set to follow straight on when the reprints run out. So how does *V* shape up in 1989? It was an oddity to say the least in 1982 and even now it has a stern and chilling impact (though Moore comments, sadly, in his introduction to the first issue, how naive he had been to imagine it would take anything as massive as a nuclear winter to push Britain towards extreme right-wing government). Though the sf details and imagery of neo-fascism are very familiar – concentration camps, medical experimentation, the complicity of organized religion – *V* is still notable for its experimentation with narrative format: one chapter is set out as a song ("This Vicious Cabaret"), another is entirely captioned by fragments from background TV and radio; the effect is a harsh lyricism. Lloyd's originally black and white artwork is, unexpectedly, enhanced by sensitive colouring

in greys and sepias. More comment later when the mysteries secreted in the new material begin, finally, to unfold.

*V* represents the culmination of the latest chapter in Alan Moore's career, being (so he says, anyhow) his last project for one of the major American companies. Future Moore material will emanate from his own newly established operation, Mad Love Comics, whose first publication has just come out: the suitably titled anti-Clause (now Section) 28 cartoon anthology **AARGH!** (OK, Artists Against Rampant Government Homophobia. But I like the acronym.) Contents, contributed free to the cause by the cream of UK and US comics/cartoons creators, range from the reliably worthy to the genuinely entertaining, and certainly the £2 cover price garners more reward than just a glow of ideological self-congratulation. *IZ* readers may be interested in the debut herein of several mainstream sf people in the comics world; Geoff Ryman's contribution especially is sparse and moving.

Meanwhile, just to prove that not all British writers' work has to be dark, depressing or even worthy, one could look to **Zenith** by Grant Morrison and Steve Yeowell (Titan, £4.95), featuring a post-punk protagonist with powers of flight and super strength who'd (quite logically, it seems to me) much rather mess around as a pop star than get battered by baddies as a superhero. Fate has this strange way of conspiring against such ambitions though... Fun, fast and sharply written, *Zenith* is heavily derivative of Marvelman, 60s Marvel comics and almost any given issue of the *NME*, but doesn't suffer unduly thereby. It's also that very rare thing, a believably *British* superhero story: somehow it's that much harder to suspend disbelief in supermen without a backdrop of New World skyscrapers to suspend them against...

Finally, a brief and dazzled nod across the ocean to the latest Bill Sienkiewicz extravaganza to arrive in Prestige format, namely the bizarre (title and otherwise) **Stray Toasters** (Marvel Epic Comics, \$3.50 monthly). Sienkiewicz has transformed over the past decade from clone-like Neal Adams copyist to artistic innovator on such unnotable titles as *New Mutants* and *Moon Knight*, until in recent times he has reached the dizzying heights of being himself routinely plagiarized and being allowed to write and draw as obscure a series as he likes. Unlike Miller's comparable epic, *Ronin*, though, *Toasters* shows grave signs of being commercial, featuring in its first issue a lavish quote of bare bodies and innovative violence (death by electric toaster?). Notwithstanding, it's still excitingly weird; this reader boggled, hit over the head by a miasma of film-noir plot, psychodrama, postcards to

Hell and reified hangover demons, still trying wilfully to work out how innocent young boys, nude psychiatrists and toast and jam fit together. Can't wait for the next ish.

(Lilian Edwards)

## Fantasy, Etc.

I usually try to start my column with the "best" of the batch and continue in descending order. However I found it quite impossible to decide upon an order of excellence for this issue. What we have here is a collection of fine books which between them show the best qualities of all aspects of modern fantasy. Your personal choice can only depend upon how you like your fantasy to be served: mythological, scholarly, horrific, anthropomorphic, heroic, humorous, psychological.

**The White Raven** by Diana L. Paxson (NEL, £12.95) retells the story of Tristan and Isolde (or rather of Drustan and Esseilte). The author has built up a compelling picture of the Celtic world at a period of transition between legend and history, both from historical studies and from other historical fantasists. The result is a society which rings true in both customs and manners: whether interweaving the mediaeval Mummings' Play with mid-winter ceremonies; tying in ley lines to the Great Marriage; or the rather cheeky use of the sailor's song from Wagner's *Tristan*. Drustan and Esseilte themselves unfortunately remain rather shadowy figures. This may be because they are seen through the eyes of Esseilte's companion, Branwen. It is Branwen who dominates both the story and the carefully created world.

There are more attempts to understand and use Celtic themes in **The Celtic Art Source Book** by Courtney Davis (Blandford Press, £14.95). On one level this is a book of line drawings for others to adapt and use, but they are also discussed as symbols, carrying both meaning and power. Celtic knots symbolized the thread of life; spirals symbolized growth. Among the illustrations and dissertations are stories from Celtic myths and legends (both ancient and modern). A fascinating book on all levels, but the pictures themselves, intricate and brightly coloured, are what count and I cannot praise them too highly.

Characters from Celtic folktales, among others, are transferred to America in **Faerie Tale** by Raymond E. Feist (Grafton, £11.95). A family move from California to New York state and discover that their property includes Erle King Hill, around which some very strange things start to happen. The Wild Hunt is seen, and leprechauns, and changelings, Puck, and



a "Bad Thing" out of anyone's nightmare which hides in the dark corners of the children's bedroom. Not so much a horror story as a "terror" story, as creatures of perilous beauty and inhuman evil invade a world of chicken take-aways, 4th July parades and satellite TV.

There is homespun American legend in **The Heavenly Horse from the Outermost West** by Mary Stanton (NEL, £6.95). The horse in question is the apaloosa who comes to the Bishops' farm to find the last mare with the genes to carry on the breed. This is a clever, well written book, a cross between *Black Beauty* and *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*. The author has created her own mythologies to tell a novel allegory of the battle between good and evil. Allegory is a risky business, but she never allows its mechanics to detract from the story or from the very human, or rather equine, dilemmas of the characters.

Supernatural horses of a different kind are in **Arrows of the Queen** by Mercedes Lackey (Legend, £2.99). These are the Companions who choose their own riders who are to become the Queen's Heralds. The Herald is a cross between an ambassador, a travelling judge, a secret agent...and may develop psychic talents, besides having a profound empathy with the Companion. A slighter book than the others in this batch, but very enjoyable, especially for the detail of the social and academic life of the Collegium where the young Heralds are trained.

Humour in fantasy is a very personal thing. When I read Terry Pratchett's *Colour of Magic* I was rather disappointed: amused, yes, but I had been led to expect more. Well, I have more than paid for my heresy in reading **Wyrd Sisters** (Gollancz, £10.95). There is probably little point in trying to pick out the parts that had me weeping with laughter, but Pratchett is master of a wide range of humour. There are one-liners which you might miss if you do not pay attention, such as the castle which was built "by an architect who had heard about Gormenghast but hadn't the budget"; and themes which occur as welcome refrains such as the storm which "practiced for hours in front of a glacier." However Pratchett's best creep up slowly and cumulate until the whole book is one single joke. I was slow to identify the dwarf Hwel and Vitoler's company but then amazed, as well as amused, at his audacity and skill.

My last book is really out of place, even among such a fine selection of fantasy novels. This is because **Haunting Women** edited by Alan Ryan (Avon, \$3.95) does not wholly belong to the genre. It is true that some stories do have a supernatural element, such as "The Shadow Third" by Ellen Glas-

gow and "Heartburn" by Hortense Calisher, and others could be described as psychological horror stories, such as "Loopy" by Ruth Rendell and "Hell on Both Sides of the Gate" by Rosemary Timperley. However others, such as "The Cloak" by Isak Dinesen are haunting only in so far as their themes and imagery "haunt" the reader. What we have is a collection of beautifully written short stories, by some of the finest women writers of the past 100 years, which I cannot praise highly enough. I was delighted to find that the much-praised "Yellow Wallpaper" deserved its reputation, and was chilled to the heart in reading "Simon's Wife", by Tanith Lee. My only disappointment is that my copy came in proof form... I shall have to buy a copy myself in order to lend to friends!

(Phyllis McDonald)

In Piers Anthony's **Vale of the Vole** (NEL, £6.95) a winged centaur, a cute ogre and a vole with a lisp save the Kiss-Me River from an invasion of demons. It's so good-natured, fluffy and just plain whimsical it makes you want to kill something.

**The Sleeping Dragon** by Joel Rosenberg (Grafton, £2.99) sees a group of American D&D players waking up inside the fantasy world. Your starter for ten: name me a novel featuring Dungeons-and-Dragons players where they don't. If you can stand the isn't-it-awful-for-the-poor-boys-to-have-to-listen-to-the-girls-being-raped scene (and that's a big if) it's OK.

Better than OK, Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman have invented, in **Forging the Dark Sword** (Bantam, £3.50), a world where everything runs on magic, where field magi get just enough access to power to drudge in the fields and technology is a secret and forbidden art. There's an intelligent idea or two here, enough to make the rest of the promised trilogy worth waiting for. Could we have some female characters in part two, though?

No such problem in Claudia J. Edwards's **Bright and Shining Tiger** (Headline, £2.99), a glorious wish-fulfilment fantasy told by a first-person female hero, Runa, a "wielder of power." She settles in an abandoned castle and, with a handy passing hero, defends it against all comers. The characters have histories - I had to check to make sure this wasn't the middle of a trilogy (it isn't, but I wished it was).

**Drink the Fire from the Flames** by Scott Baker (Legend, £3.50) is described as "The first book of the Ashlu Cycle" - well, there wouldn't be room in a mere trilogy! In an ancient pseudo-Egypt, Moth is initiated into not one but two tedious craft mysteries, as a potter and a smith...and the book ends with him being accepted as an initiate

shaman. I've heard of perpetual students, but this is ridiculous.

And finally horror. I think I have too irreverent a sense of humour to read horror novels. With Michael Falconer Anderson's **The Covenant** (Hale, £10.95) I never got over the two tourists killed by rampaging dancing stoats. John Skipp and Craig Spector's **The Scream** (Bantam, £3.50) is cleverly and obviously patterned like Heavy Metal music, an adrenalin high for the strong-stomached misogynist. If page 187 doesn't make you vomit, and if the fact that the slithery gooey demon is called Mother doesn't make you Scream with laughter, you'll probably enjoy it.

(Wendy Bradley)

After ten years of amateur status, **Fantasy Tales** (Robinson, 99 pence) is coming out twice a year as a paperback magazine. The first issue retains something of a small-press feel, with a deliberately crude horde of D&D orcs on the cover (courtesy of Chris Achilleos) which suggests that the editors are staying with the specialist market for the moment. The contents tend to confirm this: a mixture of naturalistic horror and supernatural fantasy that includes a whimsical Dunsany pastiche by Lin Carter (all honour to his memory, but he never could write) and a real, classic stinker of a vampire tale by Guy N. Smith. Both, I think, are designed to be tittered over by the cognoscenti, but they may seem a little puzzling to the general reader.

The rest of the magazine is never less than interesting. My favourite tale is another Dunsany rip-off - by Darrell Schweitzer - which actually, unbelievably, catches some of the old master's magic. I liked most of the fantasy in the magazine, but confess to less of an interest in the horror stories. But I welcome *Fantasy Tales*, and wish it every good fortune. Meanwhile, **The Best Horror from Fantasy Tales** edited by Stephen Jones and David Sutton (Robinson, £11.95) is a mixed bag. There are excellent stories here, from well-known writers and comparative newcomers, but there are also a few that seem to have been included primarily as nods to the old *Weird Tales*. If like me, you have a nostalgic liking for pulp, you'll certainly enjoy this anthology.

(Andy Robertson)

I have been warming to Harry Turtle-dove and his Videssos Cycle. However, Book Four, **Swords of the Legion** (Legend, £3.50), falls short of the standard of the superb third volume. The morally impossible position of the central characters in that episode has been resolved, and the more interesting of the rival heroines fades from sight. Although there is a lot of well written and constructed action, the



series, which appears to have ended, does not quite live up to its potential: the ending is satisfactory, but lacks power.

**Arthur and the Grail** by Hubert Lampo and Peter Paul Koster, with an introduction by Colin Wilson (Sidgwick & Jackson, £15.95) is a magnificently lavish introduction to the realm of Arthuriana. The central ingredient is the photographs, most of which reflect the mood of the piece, rather than depict particular sites etc. The text itself is necessarily constricted by this emphasis on the visual, but is very adequate as far as it goes. Wilson is not unduly credulous about the legends, but avoids the dry over-scepticism of some scholarly views. Worth thinking about if you can afford it.

(Peter T. Garratt)

**Return to Eden** (Grafton, £12.95) is the third in Harry Harrison's "West of Eden" trilogy – the one about an alternative present-day Earth populated by intelligent dinosaurs as well as human beings (which still strikes me as a great idea). Although the science, society and language of the "Yilane" remain fascinating, I thought the plot was rather weak, with several apparent reruns of earlier situations. Overall, I liked the book, but Mr Harrison should now call it a day with the "Eden" series.

(Norman Hills)

## Recommended for Collectors

J. G. Ballard's **Memories of the Space Age** (Arkham House, \$16.95) contains eight atmospheric stories: "The Cage of Sand" (1962), "A Question of Re-Entry" (1963), "The Dead Astronaut" (1968), "My Dream of Flying to Wake Island" (1974), "News from the Sun" (1981), "Memories of the Space Age" (1982), "Myths of the Near Future" (1982) and "The Man Who Walked on the Moon" (1985). All deal with "space-travel" themes (if indirectly) and two are previously uncollected anywhere. This is a beautifully produced hardcover volume with black-and-white photographic illustrations by J. K. Potter and a full-colour Max Ernst cover ("Europe After the Rain"). Also in hand by J. G. Ballard is the first-ever US edition of his 1981 satirical sf novel **Hello America** (Carrol & Graf, \$17.95). It has not been updated (hence no references to George Bush, Michael Dukakis or Jesse Jackson), but its humour remains especially pointed for a US presidential election year and it will be interesting to hear what American reviewers made of it.

Scott Bradford's **The Secret Life of Houses** (Unwin Hyman, £11.95) has

nine sensitive stories of the fantastic (three of them, "The Flash! Kid," "Unmistakably the Finest" and "The Dream of the Wolf," reprinted from *IZ*). Bradford ("the most original voice of the new generation of California writers," according to Brian Moore) has recently sold a novel, *The History of Luminous Motion*, to Knopf in the USA and Bloomsbury in the UK, so this first volume of his may well become a collector's item. Grab it while stocks last. The above books and other small-press and overseas collectibles, such as Dennis Etchison's horror collection **The Blood Kiss** (Scream/Press, \$22.50, also illustrated by the remarkable J. K. Potter) and John Brunner's history-of-CND novel **The Days of March** (Kerosina, £14.95), should be available in the UK from certain specialist sf-and-fantasy dealers – Andy Richards, 136 New Road, Bedford, Feltham, Middx. TW14 8HT, is one that I particularly recommend.

(David Pringle)

## Ken's Mighty Mop-Up

(We asked Ken Brown to review about 97 sf books. Here's the result – Eds.)

First, two contrasting books about super-computers that rule the world. In **Lords of the Middle Dark** by Jack L. Chalker (NEL, £2.95) society is controlled by the "Master System," programmed to preserve the human species at all costs. Most people have been shipped out of the solar system so that no one natural disaster can wipe them all out. Earth, with a greatly reduced population, has become a cross between a theme park and a tribal reservation. All land has been returned to the nation that held it before the age of European expansion, and technology is limited to whatever their ancestors would have been able to produce in about 1400. This background is the only interesting thing about the book. The plot starts to go downhill early on when we learn that the programmers have left a manual override to the system which can only be activated by – you guessed it – certain cunningly-wrought gold rings. Our heroes, a bureaucrat on sabbatical with the Hyiakutt native American nation and the psychopathic daughter of a Mandarin, are obliged (by some very strained coincidences) to go on a quest to obtain these plot tokens. When they have them all, they will rule the Galaxy. The novel is marred by unpleasant scenes of violence and rape.

Barry B. Longyear's **Sea of Glass** (Arrow/Legend, £3.50) could be set in the past history of *Lords of the Middle Dark*. Early in the next century, the Compact of Nations, a poverty-stricken

amalgam of the USA and the so-called West, is ruled by MAC III, which is taking over the world in order to destroy the poor, starving and uneducated so that the rich may live. Parents are limited to one child per couple, illegal children are condemned to slave camps. Thomas, torn from his parents at the age of seven, is abused and brutalized in such a camp and takes on board the entire world-view of his persecutors. He becomes a follower of the science of "Disciplinary Projection" (better known to us sf addicts as "Psychohistory") and is convinced that a world war is necessary to reduce the population. The only glimpse of the human feelings that he might have had is his obsession with old movies – particularly sf and British war films. As an adult he commits a terrible crime in order to gain a chance of a normal life, and become a puppet of the MAC III. This is another horribly violent book, with a number of scenes of rape which, for me, made it difficult and unpleasant to read. I found myself wondering whether the author is supporting or satirizing some of the extreme triage policies his characters put forward. (Satirizing, I hope: anyone who keeps on bringing the reader's attention to *Bridge on the River Kwai*, *Soylent Green* and *THX 1138* cannot, surely, approve of the totalitarian conditions of this vile future America.) To be honest it's not all that good but at least Longyear seems to be getting better with each novel he writes.

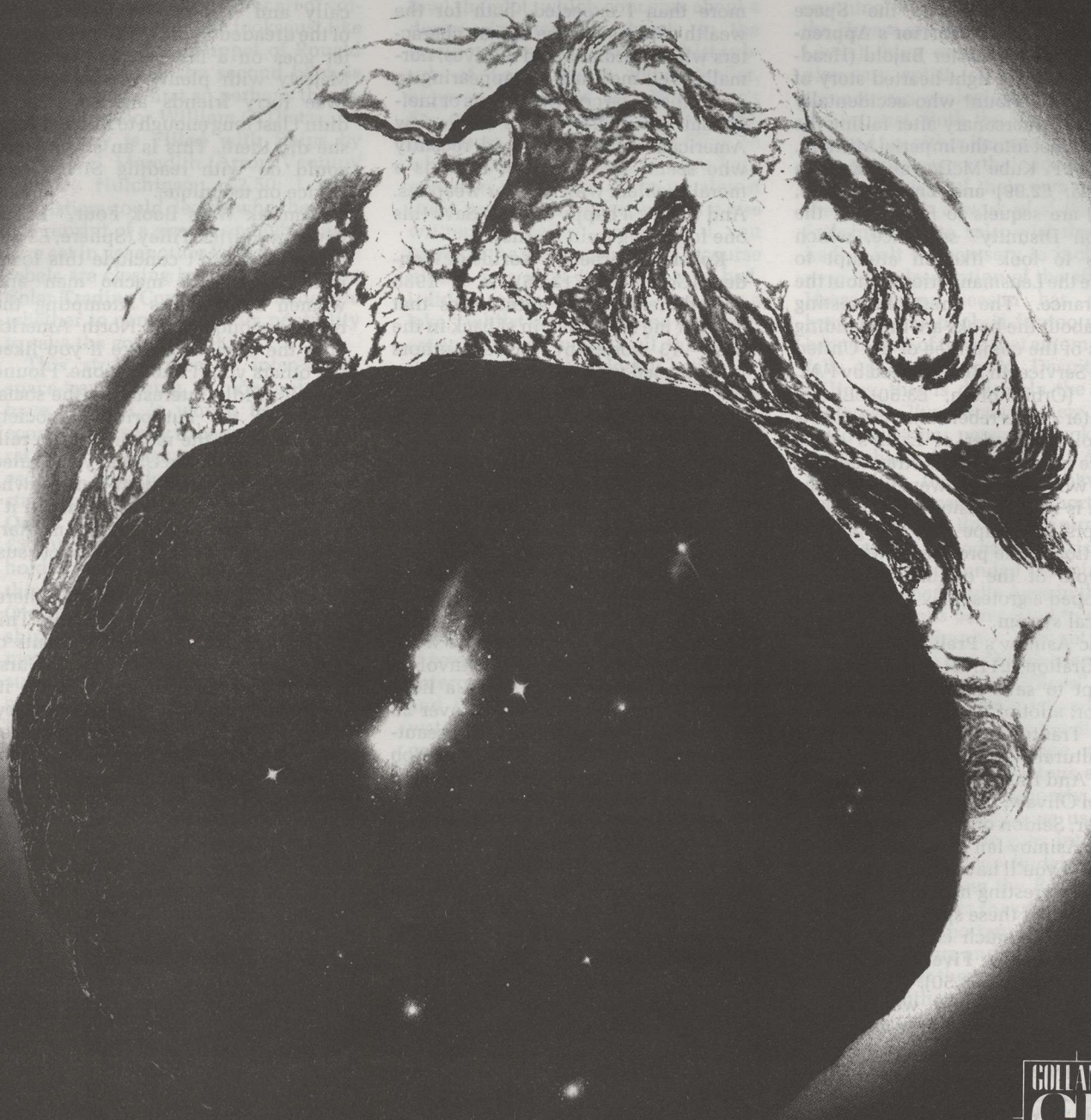
That's more than I can say for Piers Anthony. **Ghost** (Grafton, £2.95) is a goulash of time-travel paradoxes, psychological mysteries and the author's characteristically bumptious sex-scenes. The rather indulgent conclusion takes place in a region of the universe where anything the characters imagine becomes reality. Their relationships are symbolized as a chess game, which becomes a kind of masque – vaguely reminiscent of Anthony's much more substantial 1969 novel *Macroscopic*. Every time I pick up a book by this author I hope that it will be the really good one I keep on half-expecting. This certainly isn't it.

Christopher Hinz's first novel, **Liege-Killer** (Methuen £3.50), is set two centuries after war has rendered Earth almost uninhabitable. Nearly all surviving humans live in orbital colonies, dominated by political and religious institutions dedicated to suppressing military technology. A bio-engineered assassin frozen before Armageddon is woken up and set loose. The good guys are forced to take unusual steps to hunt the murderers. Both the science and the plotting are flaky at best, but I enjoyed the book.

**Toolmaker Koan** by John McLoughlin (Orbit, £3.99) is one of those sf books that is about ideas rather than



# GREG BEAR ETERNITY



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people. In this case the idea is the Fermi Paradox, roughly: "If anyone is out there, why haven't we heard from them yet?" Perhaps intelligent life (for the purposes of the argument, anything interested in exploring the Universe) is very rare; or interstellar communication is very difficult; or maybe any intelligent species will acquire the power to wipe itself out at the same time as the ability to communicate. McLoughlin looks at the third possibility. Soviet and American space missions fight to be the first to contact an apparent visitor from outside the solar system against the background of an imminent world war. This is not a brilliant book, but it's got some of the latest ideas on the history of life on Earth, the author knows something about evolution, and it builds to a spectacular crisis.

Meanwhile, back at the Space Opera-House, **The Warrior's Apprentice** by Lois McMaster Bujold (Headline, £2.99) is a light-hearted story of the son of a Count who accidentally becomes a mercenary after failing the exams to get into the Imperial Military. Michael P. Kube McDowell's **Enigma** (Legend, £2.99) and **Empery** (same, £3.50) are sequels to *Emprise* in the "Trigon Disunity" sequence, which begins to look like an attempt to rewrite the Lensman series without the exuberance. The most interesting thing about the books are the standing orders of the committee of the United Space Service. In **Rebel's Seed** by F.M. Busby (Orbit/Futura, £3.50) Lisele, daughter of the rebels who overthrew the political order of Earth's space Empire in *Star Rebel*, is stranded on a world where a colony went wrong. The action is in the tension between their attempts to escape and the gradual revelation of the process by which the survivors of the original settlement developed a grotesquely authoritarian political system.

Isaac Asimov's **Prelude to Foundation** (Grafton, £11.95), seems to be an attempt to save the phenomenon of Trantor; a lot of the absurdities of the 1940s Trantor (remember the twenty agricultural worlds?) are explained away. And Hari Seldon gets to meet R. Daneel Olivaw. If you haven't heard of Trantor, Seldon or Olivaw then you're not an Asimov fan from way back and I doubt if you'll have much use for this mildly interesting novel.

The best of these space operas – not that there is much competition – is Melissa Scott's **Five Twelfths of Heaven** (VGSF, £3.50). The plot is hackneyed (a young woman who wants to be a spacepilot in a man's Universe goes from planet to planet escaping from various enemies and fighting an evil Empire) and the fun is entirely in the "explanation" of faster-than-light travel and interstellar navigation in a framework of alchemical and astro-

logical symbolism, contained in arcane books and tables. I look forward to the sequel in which I fully expect to learn that a woman can not only be a pilot but also a Magus.

And now a pleasant surprise. **The Moon Goddess and the Son** (Grafton, £3.95) by Donald Kingsbury is a very long corporate saga, a sort of Sidney Sheldon or James Clavell of the near future. It starts now, or rather last summer, with political manoeuvring to get the Shuttle back in orbit, and follows a think-tank of the rich and famous (and quite a few sf fans) as they devise a space and diplomatic strategy for the early decades of the next century. Another strand, told in flash-forward, concerns a young girl who runs away from an abusing father to the space colony being planned by scientists in the main plot. I enjoyed it far more than I expected, both for the wealth of ideas and the human characters who act from mixed motives, normally well-meaning yet appearing to each other to be cruel, heartless or ineffectual. Kingsbury is one of the few American authors I've read recently who seems to know that there is a moral problem with nuclear weapons. And there's a happy ending. Save this one for a long train journey.

**Robert Silverberg's Worlds of Wonder** (Gollancz, £12.95) is a 1988 embodiment of the anthologies that first got me interested in sf back in the 60s – 13 stories by various authors interspersed with the editor's ideas on the technique of writing. Silverberg makes no secret of being – or having been – a technician. He reckons there are rules to writing and that a reasonably intelligent, hardworking and literate person can write well enough if they follow them. Of course he claims that his selected authors (and he himself in recent years) have transcended these rules, but the editorial material is basically about how to write passably decent and saleable stories without much emotional or artistic involvement. As an anthology, it is a little redundant: all the stories are over 20 years old (the most recent is the beautiful "Light of Other Days" by Bob Shaw) and most are readily available in other collections. I suspect that there aren't that many *Interzone* readers who've never come across Cyril Kornbluth's "Little Black Bag" or "Hothouse" by Brian Aldiss. "Scanners Live in Vain" by Cordwainer Smith survives a lot better than most of the rest of the stuff.

However, there are some otherwise unavailable stories in **Beyond Lies the Wub** (Gollancz, £12.95) which is only volume one of the complete short stories of Philip K. Dick. He seems to have become the Jimi Hendrix of sf; as soon as he died almost everything he wrote was re-released. It's a pity he couldn't have borrowed against future

royalties in his lifetime, I'm sure he could have done with the money. These 26 stories were written in 1951 and '52, and from his first professional sale (the wonderful "Roog") he seems to have had already developed his obsessions with perception, individuality and justice. The frankly rather simple (even crude) style of these early stories (such as "Colony," "Paycheck" and "The Variable Man") already points the way to the neighbourly weirdness of the novels. If I had to pay for one of these two collections it would be the Dick.

In **Taflak Lysandra** (Avon, \$3.50) L. Neil Smith suffers terribly from the fear of saying "said." From two facing pages at random we have "insisted," "agreed," "told," "snorted," "answered," "pushed her glasses back," "sighed," "observed," "stiffened comically" and "laughed," all used in place of the dreaded S word. The title character goes on a mission to the planet Majesty with plenty of more-or-less twee furry friends and enemies. I didn't last long enough to find out what she did there. This is an author who could do with reading Silverberg's advice on technique.

"Amtrak Wars Book Four," **Blood River** by Patrick Tilley (Sphere, £3.50) probably doesn't conclude this long-running saga of macho men and women from Texas attempting the brutal reconquest of North America after the Bomb. I'm sure if you liked the others you'll like this one. I found myself mildly interested in the social set-up of the authoritarian society based around the remains of the railway system and the US navy and ruled by a hereditary President-General who gets to father all the children, but it's too obviously a caricature of military and corporate America of today to suspend my disbelief.

Hal Clement's **Still River** (Sphere, £3.50) is much more interesting. This is typical Clement – five students of different species are on a field course on a mysterious planet to study its wind patterns, geology and chemistry. That's all there is to it. Conflict between characters is kept to the minimum, the antagonist is the planet itself or rather their ignorance of it. As they learn more, so does the reader. My memories of 'A' level chemistry are only just enough to keep my head above water, or rather ammonia. I suspect that many readers will find it tedious and uneventful. I liked it very much, but I'm a sucker for this sort of stuff.

**Double Planet** by two eminent British science writers, John Gribbin and Marcus Chown (Gollancz, £10.95) is another example of "hard" sf, dealing with unlikely-sounding plans to divert a comet which is approaching an impoverished after-the-bomb Earth ruled by a corruptly benevolent Soviet bureaucracy in the name of the "Re-



united Nations." I would have enjoyed it more if there were more details of the comet itself. After finishing the book I don't know the comet's chemical composition and I don't even know its mass – one character refers to it as "a trillion tons" (big) but on page 114 it's 10 to the power of 18 tons – big enough to splatter the moon all over the solar system and still wipe out life on Earth. That might not be a problem in most novels, but it's a big oversight in a story that turns upon the science.

You can probably guess what the "Sam McCade, Interstellar Bounty Hunter" series is like from the titles of the first two: **War World** and **Imperial Bounty** (NEL, £2.99 each). McCade, cashiered from the Imperial Navy for refusing to fire on an unarmed ship, is sent on various hush-hush missions to save the Empire. The only good thing about them is the gross cover art of volume one – Sam McCade looks just like the Spitting Image puppet of Ronald Reagan. Actually the second book is better than the first so perhaps there's hope for author William C. Dietz.

**The Sky is Filled with Ships** by Richard C. Meredith (Arrow/Venture/Century Hutchinson, £2.50: I wish publishers could decide who they are) is a reprint of a simple enough adventure set in yet another Federation – the rebels are closing in on Earth and the Solar Trading Company has to decide whether to compromise its neutrality to save the government.

This strange idea of inter-stellar space-travel being a monopoly (I'd have thought it would be the last economic activity to be subject to central control, because you can always escape – how do you recover a stolen starship?) also appears in **A Matter of Oaths** by Helen Wright (Methuen, £3.50) where the Guild of Webbers holds the balance of power in a thousand-year-old war between the Old Empire and the New Empire. A ship accepts Rafe into its crew, his memory wiped by the Old Emperor, supposedly for breaking his oath to the guild. Of course, he turns out to be both innocent and not what he seems. There is one nice touch: the emperors are normal (even inadequate) humans who have somehow become immortal and unaging. They got to be emperors almost by accident, as scum rises to the top: if you live for five thousand years, sooner or later you'll hold all the important jobs and inherit all the property.

**Triplet** by Timothy Zahn (Legend, £3.50) has demons from another dimension meeting high-tech robot users in a world full of ancient six-sided artefacts left by mysterious builders, which you can only get to through a teleporting tunnel that leaves your clothes behind. I'd have suspected Piers Anthony of writing this one except that there's almost no sex in it and it isn't at all funny. Perhaps

there is a fantasy role-playing game behind it somewhere.

**The Starry Rift** by James Tiptree, Jr (Sphere, £2.99) has three connected stories set in the same future world as *Brightness Falls From the Air*. All the characters (except one particularly nasty pirate) are positive, there are no enemies except misunderstanding. The third and longest, "Collision," is typical, an almost cuddly first-contact tale with a happy ending. One suspects these may have been intended as juveniles. I liked them.

**Free Zone** by Charles Platt (Avon, \$3.50) is deliberate parody, with a map, a cast list, a data-flow diagram showing the fates of the characters and even an alphabetical list of story elements – it claims to have "almost all the major themes that have occurred in sf." It's almost impossible to describe (or follow) the plot, which concerns about a dozen simultaneous threats to the world in general and an anarchist suburb of Los Angeles in particular, between Christmas and New Year's Eve 1999. Set firmly in a media world, references to other books, to films, to whatever was supposed to have happened in the sixties, occur on almost every page. I was left feeling that it was written to deflect criticism. I can imagine the author saying: "Of course it's not very good, it's meant to be bad, I didn't really mean it, it was only a joke," whilst secretly hoping that readers approve and enjoy. Well, this reader thinks Rudy Rucker does it better.

Finally, three books from the Hodder and Stoughton/NEL series of "Isaac Asimov Recommendations." **Agent of Byzantium** by Harry Turtledove (£2.95), **Pennterra** by Judith Moffett (£3.99) and John Barnes's **The Man Who Pulled Down The Sky** (£2.99) are all novels by newish writers that appeared in the USA a short while ago. Each comes with a little introduction by Asimov, and all three are rather good. The Barnes has a typical 1980s sf scenario: industry, science and free enterprise have migrated into space and Earth has become a rural backwater. If you can put up with all the people who spend an unrealistic amount of time telling each other things they should already know, it repays reading. Saul Pareto, an economic historian, is sent from some high-tech paradise in the outer solar system to raise revolt on Earth, oppressed by the inevitable Orbital Republics. Social Democracy (called "Prattism") is punishable by death, the political line is enforced by ERACA, the "Economic Rationality and Anti-Collectivist Act," which amongst other things, makes it illegal to help a friend out of debt (that would be a distortion of the free market). When the revolution comes farmers and shopkeepers commit atrocity after atrocity as they use their legitimate ends to justify ever

more arbitrary means, yet in the end power returns to a new set of bureaucrats and foreign governors. Saul is faced with hard moral choices throughout rather than comparatively simple problems of effective action – this is something that all three books in this series have in common.

Moffett's **Pennterra** takes place on a world settled by a small group of Quakers who cannot "in conscience" expand out of their original village and displace the native alien inhabitants, who they call "Hrossa" after the Martians in C.S. Lewis's *Out of the Silent Planet*. When the main body of humans arrive they are warned that any attempt at conquest will undoubtedly lead to disaster, yet neither the Hrossa nor the Quakers can tell them what form destruction will take. Moffett resists all temptation to explain anything, we never find out whether the Hrossa are inhuman Theists (as in Lewis), hive animals, servants of a planetary spirit, or the products of some strange ecological engineering in the far past. Both the Hrossa and the humans are either ignorant of or incapable of expressing their ideas of God and their view of their own place in the world. As a work of sf *Pennterra* feels incomplete. I also wish the author hadn't felt it necessary to include an over-long description of the effect the Hrossa mating season has on the humans: this book is far too good to become one of those that automatically falls open at page 155. Despite these failings, this is definitely the best of the novels I've discussed here.

However my personal book of the season has to be Turtledove's *Agent of Byzantium*. It could easily have been sold as historical fiction – short stories set in a parallel Roman Empire where Muhammad becomes a Christian so Heraclius's refounded Empire survived into the Middle Ages in the West and the Franks never tried to create a new Western Empire... you get the picture. The hero is a "Magistrinos," an agent of the "Master of Offices" in Constantinople, who gets involved in various escapades leading to the discovery of gunpowder, the telescope, vaccination and so on. It's frivolous and formulaic, but it's done properly. Turtledove doesn't short-change us with a stage Byzantium; he goes into detail, even about theology (judging by the quantity of writing the Romans have left on the subject they thought it was much more important than all the art and architecture and military prowess we remember them for). I love the idea of an sf author who is familiar with Late Roman bureaucracy almost as much as characters who yell "I've never accepted that council as Ecumenical!" at each other in pubs. This book is not going to change your life, but it is genuine fun.

(Ken Brown)



# Books Received

## October-November 1988

The following is a list of all sf, fantasy and horror titles, and books of related interest, received by *Interzone* during the period specified above. Official publication dates, where known, are given in italics at the end of each entry. Descriptive phrases in quotes following titles are taken from book covers rather than title pages. A listing here does not preclude a separate review in this issue (or in a future issue) of the magazine.

Adams, Douglas. **The Long Dark Tea-Time of the Soul.** Heinemann, ISBN 0-434-00921-0, 246pp, hardcover, £10.95. (Unclassifiable humorous novel, sequel to *Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency*; first edition.) 10th October.

Aickman, Robert. **Cold Hand in Mine: Eight Strange Stories.** Robinson, ISBN 0-948164-59-X, 252pp, paperback, £3.50. (Horror and ghost-story collection, first published in 1975 [although Robinson has the bad habit of not revealing such basic bibliographical information].) 27th October.

Aickman, Robert. **The Model.** Robinson, ISBN 0-948164-69-7, 138pp, paperback, £2.95. (Fantasy novella, first published in the USA, 1987? [as usual, Robinson don't tell us its provenance].) 27th October.

Aldiss, Brian. **Ruins.** Arrow/Arena, ISBN 0-09-953650-1, 95pp, paperback, £2.50. (Non-sf novella by a well-known sf writer; first published in 1987.) 3rd November.

Alexander, Marc. **Ancient Dreams: Part the First of The Wells of Ythan.** Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3025-0, 338pp, paperback, £3.50. (Fantasy novel, first edition.) 1st December.

Anderson, Michael Falconer. **Black Trinity.** Hale, ISBN 0-7090-3465-2, 256pp, hardcover, £12.95. (Horror novel, first edition.) 24th November.

Anderson, Poul and Karen. **The King of Ys 2: Galliceneae.** Grafton, ISBN 0-586-07342-6, 429pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1987.) 3rd November.

Ansell, Bryan, Mike Brunton and Simon Forrest. **Realm of Chaos: Slaves to Darkness.** Illustrated by Ian Miller, Tony Ackland, John Blanche and others. "Suggested for mature readers." Games Workshop, ISBN 1-869893-51-4, 277pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Fantasy gaming manual, supplement to *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay*, etc.: first edition; contains a great many fine Ian Miller black-and-white illustrations.)

Asimov, Isaac. **Fantastic Voyage II: Destination Brain.** Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20025-8, 480pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1987.) 17th November.

Asimov, Isaac. **The Moons of Jupiter.** "The fifth Space Ranger novel." Hodder/Lightning, ISBN 0-340-49110-8, 142pp, paperback, £1.99. (Juvenile sf novel, first published in the USA as *Lucky Starr and the Moons of Jupiter* by "Paul French," 1957.) 17th December.

Asprin, Robert. **Another Fine Myth.** Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-962750-7, 200pp, paperback, £2.50. (Humorous fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1978.) 8th December.

Ballard, J. G. **Running Wild.** "A Hutchinson Novella." Illustrated by Janet Woolley. Century Hutchinson, ISBN 0-09-173498-3, 72pp, hardcover, £5.95. (Psychological mystery story, a sequel of sorts to "The Object of the Attack" [*Interzone* 9]; first edition.) 3rd November.

Bear, Greg. **Beyond Heaven's River.** Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-04089-0, 256pp, paperback, £2.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1980; this edition appears to be revised.) 8th December.

Bear, Greg. **Eon.** Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-954710-4, 504pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1985; first UK 'A' format edition of this major work.) 17th November.

Bishop, Michael. **Philip K. Dick is Dead, Alas.** Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20151-3, 411pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA as *The Secret Ascension*, 1987; an entertaining alternative-world tale about the late Phil Dick and his *bete noire*, Richard M. Nixon.) 17th November.

Blaylock, James P. **The Digging Leviathan.** Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20175-0, 333pp, paperback, £3.50. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1984; one of David Pringle's choices for "the 100 best" modern fantasies.) 20th October.

Blaylock, James P. **Homunculus.** Illustrated by Ferret, with an introduction by Keith Roberts. Morrigan, ISBN 1-870338-40-5, 244pp, hardcover, £11.95. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1986; this is the first world hardcover edition of a Philip K. Dick Award-winning novel [already published in the UK as a Grafton paperback]; there is a simultaneous signed "special edition" with a postscript by the author priced at £40 [not seen]).

Borges, Jorge Luis, Silvina Ocampo and A. Bioy Casares, eds. **The Book of Fantasy.** First English-language edition, with an introduction by Ursula K. Le Guin. Xanadu, ISBN 0-947761-44-6, 384pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Fantasy anthology, first published in Argentina as *Antología de la Literatura Fantástica*, 1940; now considerably expanded with the addition of such stories as J. G. Ballard's "The Drowned Giant" [1964].) 24th November.

Bova, Ben. **Millennium.** [2nd edition.] Methuen, ISBN 0-413-18630-X, 296pp, hardcover, £11.95. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1987; actually, it appears to be a revised edition of a novel originally published in the 1970s, though the publishers don't tell us that.) 3rd November.

Bradley, Marion Zimmer, ed. **Sword and Sorcery 3: An Anthology of Heroic Fantasy.** Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3107-9, 285pp, paperback, £2.99. (Fantasy anthology, first published in the USA, 1986.) 3rd November.

Busby, F. M. **Young Rissa.** "Volume One of the Rissa Kerguelen Saga." Macdonald/Futura, ISBN 0-7088-8272-2, 177pp, paperback, £2.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1977.)

Butler, Octavia. **Adulthood Rites. Xenogenesis: 2.** Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-04238-9, 277pp, hardcover, £11.95. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1988.) 27th October.

Carroll, Jonathan. **Sleeping in Flame.** Century Hutchinson/Legend, ISBN 0-7126-2357-4, 244pp, hardcover, £10.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition [?]; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen].)

Carter, Brian. **Nightworld.** "Magical and moving as *Cold Moons* and *WaterShip Down*." Arrow, ISBN 0-09-958660-6, 354pp, paperback, £2.99. (Animal fantasy novel, first published in 1987.) 8th December.

Cawthorn, James, and Michael Moorcock. **Fantasy: The 100 Best Books.** Xanadu, ISBN 0-947761-24-1, 216pp, hardcover, £9.99. (Critical study, first edition; recommended fantasies from *Gulliver's Travels* to Tom Holt's *Expecting Someone Taller*;

although Moorcock's name is on the title page, all but the last two entries appear to have been written by Cawthorn.) Not actually received for review, a copy was purchased in a general London bookshop on 21st November (the specialist sf and fantasy dealers didn't have it, and it seems to have been published just as invisibly as most of Xanadu's product).

Chalk, Gary, and David Kerrigan. **Mean Streets. Prince of Shadows One.** Hodder/Knight, ISBN 0-340-42390-0, 64pp, trade paperback, £3.99. (Juvenile fantasy gamebook, first edition.) 17th November.

Cherryh, C. J. **Wave Without a Shore.** Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-04045-9, 247pp, paperback, £2.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1981.) 8th December.

Clark, Karen. **The Synthetics.** Merlin Books [40 East St., Braunton, Devon EX33 2EA], ISBN 0-863303-428-4, 52pp, paperback, £2.95. (Sf novella by a new British author [born 1960]; first edition; it's dedicated "To all shy, sensitive people").

Coney, Michael. **Fang, the Gnome.** "Volume 3 of the epic fantasy series *The Song of Earth*." Macdonald/Futura, ISBN 0-7088-8231-5, 345pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1988.)

Constantine, Storm. **The Bewitchments of Love and Hate: The Second Book of Wraeththu.** Macdonald/Futura, ISBN 0-7088-8274-9, 411pp, paperback, £4.50. (Sf/fantasy novel, first published in 1988.)

Cooper, Clare. **Ashar of Qarius.** Simon & Schuster/Sprint, ISBN 0-671-69932-6, 160pp, paperback, £3.50. (Juvenile sf novel, first edition.) 10th October.

Cooper, Louise. **Inferno: Book 2 of Indigo.** Unwin, ISBN 0-04-440157-4, 241pp, paperback, £3.50. (Fantasy novel, first edition.) 18th November.

Cramer, Kathryn, and David G. Hartwell, eds. **Christmas Ghosts.** "Classic Christmas ghost stories by masters of the art from Charles Dickens to Ramsey Campbell." Robinson, ISBN 0-948164-90-5, 284pp, trade paperback, £5.95. (Supernatural anthology, first published in the USA, 1987.) 27th October.

Dean, Martyn, ed. **Dream Makers: Six Fantasy Artists at Work.** Text by Chris Evans. Dragon's World/Paper Tiger, ISBN 1-85028-067-3, 127pp, hardcover, £14.95. (Large-format art book, with work by Melvyn Grant, Michael Kaluta, Julek Heller, Berni Wrightson, Chris Moore and Charles Vess; first edition.) 24th November.

Delany, Samuel R. **Tales of Neveryon.** Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20270-6, 335pp, paperback, £3.50. (Fantasy collection, first published in the USA, 1979; this is the first UK edition of the opening volume in the "Neveryon" sequence, and it appears to be revised.) 17th November.

Dever, Joe. **Freeway Warrior 2: Slaughter Mountain Run.** Illustrated by Brian Williams. Arrow/Beaver, ISBN 0-09-957710-0, 350pp, paperback, £2.50. (Juvenile sf gamebook, first edition.) 8th December.

Dick, Philip K. **Beyond Lies the Wub: The Collected Short Stories of Philip K. Dick Volume One.** Introduction by Roger Zelazny. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-04407-1, 404pp, hardcover, £12.95. (Sf/fantasy collection, first published in the USA, 1987; first of a four-volume set with the stories arranged in chronological order of their composition; some are previously uncollected.) 10th November.

Dietz, William C. **Imperial Bounty.** "Sam McCade rides again." Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-48774-1, 278pp, paperback, £2.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1988.) 1st December.



Emerson, Ru. **In the Caves of Exile: The Second Tale of Nedao.** Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3159-1, 310pp, paperback, £3.50. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1988.) 3rd November.

Estes, Rose. **The Price of Power. Greyhawk Adventures Book 2.** Penguin, ISBN 0-14-011140-9, 316pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1987; another from the TSR, Inc. stable.) 14th November.

Evans, Christopher, and Robert Holdstock, eds. **Other Edens II.** Unwin, ISBN 0-04-440154-X, 269pp, paperback, £3.95. (Sf anthology, first edition; original stories by Brian Aldiss, Scott Bradford, John Clute, Colin Greenland, M. John Harrison, Gwyneth Jones, Garry Kilworth, Tanith Lee, Michael Moorcock, Josephine Saxton, Ian Watson et al; it could almost be an *Interzone* collection!) 18th November.

Farren, Mick. **Their Master's War.** Sphere, ISBN 0-7474-0269-8, 295pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1987.) 8th December.

Fonstad, Karen Wynn. **The Atlas of the Dragonance World.** Penguin, ISBN 0-14-011142-5, 168pp, trade paperback, £9.99. (Fantasy atlas based on the world created by Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman; this is the US edition, published by TSR in 1987, with a UK price label.) 17th October.

Fowler, Christopher. **Roofworld.** Century Hutchinson/Legend, ISBN 0-7126-2451-1, 344pp, trade paperback, £5.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; a simultaneous hardcover also exists [not seen]; this is a first novel by a British author who is not the Chris Fowler who used to edit the BSFA's journal *Vector*; it seems to bear some resemblance to Terry Gilliam's film *Brazil*.) Late entry: September publication (?) received in October.

Garnett, David S., ed. **The Orbit Science Fiction Yearbook 1.** Macdonald/Futura, ISBN 0-7088-8292-7, 336pp, paperback, £4.99. (Sf anthology, first edition; the first new British-edited "year's best sf" to appear in a long time; it contains 13 stories [including one, by Richard Kadrey, from *IZ*] plus essays by Aldiss, Clute and Garnett; highly recommended.)

Gemmell, David A. **Last Sword of Power.** Century Hutchinson/Legend, ISBN 0-7126-2327-2, 275pp, £11.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen].)

Gordon, Stuart. **The Hidden World: The Second Book of the Watchers.** Macdonald/Futura, ISBN 0-7088-8273-0, 352pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf/fantasy novel, first published in 1988.)

Grant, Charles L. **For Fear of the Night.** Macdonald/Futura, ISBN 0-7088-4032-9, 277pp, paperback, £2.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1987.)

Gribbin, John, and Marcus Chown. **Double Planet.** Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-04357-1, 220pp, hardcover, £10.95. (Hard sf novel, first edition; expanded from a 1984 *Analog* story by Gribbin solus.) 10th November.

Hambly, Barbara. **Immortal Blood.** Unwin, ISBN 0-04-440244-9, 306pp, paperback, £3.50. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1988.) 18th November.

Harrison, Harry. **Return to Eden: Book Three in the West of Eden Trilogy.** Illustrated by Bill Sanderson. Grafton, ISBN 0-246-12613-2, 400pp, hardcover, £12.95. (Sf novel, first edition; there appears to be a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen].) 20th October.

Harrison, Harry. **The Stainless Steel Rat's Revenge.** Bantam, ISBN 0-553-17395-2,

196pp, paperback, £2.99. (Humorous sf novel, first published in the USA, 1970.) 2nd December.

Herbert, Frank, and Bill Ransom. **The Ascension Factor.** Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-04373-3, 381pp, hardcover, £12.95. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1988; sequel to *The Jesus Incident* and *The Lazarus Effect*, largely written by Ransom after Herbert's death.) 27th October.

Herbert, James. **The Fog.** New English Library, ISBN 0-450-02607-8, viii + 234pp, hardcover, £12.95. (Horror novel, first published in 1975; this edition contains a new foreword by the author.) 20th October.

Holdstock, Robert. **Lavondyss: Journey to an Unknown Region.** Illustrated by Alan Lee. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-04374-1, 367pp, hardcover, £11.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; sequel to the World Fantasy Award-winning *Mythago Wood*; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen].) 27th October.

Jodorowsky, Alexandro, and Jean "Moebius" Giraud. **The Incal 2. Titan.** ISBN 1-85286-107-X, unpaginated, trade paperback, £6.95. (Sf graphic novel, first published in France [?], 1984-85.)

Jones, D. J. **Souls of the Universe.** Merlin Books [40 East St., Braunton, Devon EX33 2EA], ISBN 0-86303-418-7, 62pp, paperback, £2.95. (Collection of sf/fantasy stories and verse by a Welsh writer; first edition.)

Jones, Gwyneth. **Kairos.** Unwin Hyman, ISBN 0-04-440163-9, 260pp, hardcover, £12.95. (Sf novel, first edition.) 18th November.

Jones, Stephen, ed. **Fantasy Tales, Vol. 10 No. 1.** "A paperback magazine of fantasy and terror." Robinson, ISBN 0-948164-85-9, 102pp, paperback, £0.99. (Horror/fantasy collection, first edition; relaunch in book format of a small magazine which has been appearing approximately twice-yearly for the past decade.) 27th October.

Jones, Stephen, and Jo Fletcher, eds. **Gaslight and Ghosts.** Illustrated by Michael Foreman and others. 1988 World Fantasy Convention/Robinson, ISBN 0-951389-26-3, 258pp, hardcover, no price shown. (Souvenir anthology given to all members of the World Fantasy Convention; first edition; a handsome volume with original contributions by James Herbert, Diana Wynne Jones, Clive Barker, Garry Kilworth, Ian Watson, Robert Holdstock, Terry Pratchett, Lisa Tuttle and others.) 27th October.

Jones, Stephen, and David Sutton, eds. **The Best Horror from Fantasy Tales.** Robinson, ISBN 0-948164-73-5, 264pp, hardcover, £11.95. (Horror anthology, first edition; good-looking, illustrated selection of stories from the first ten years of the small-press magazine.) 27th October.

[Kane, Bob.] **Batman versus the Penguin.** Titan, ISBN 1-85286-093-6, unpaginated, paperback, £2.95. (Strip-cartoon compilation, first published in 1966; no. 3 in the "Caped Crusader Classics" series.)

Kellogg, Marjorie Bradley, with William B. Rossow. **Reign of Fire.** "Concludes the story begun in *The Wave and the Flame*." Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-04342-3, 382pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1986.) 10th November.

Kilworth, Garry. **Abandonati.** Unwin Hyman, ISBN 0-04-440255-4, 162pp, hardcover, £12.95. (Sf novel about the homeless and abandoned, first edition.) 18th November.

King, Bernard. **Death-Blinder.** Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-48490-4, 226pp, paperback, £2.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; follow-up to *Starkadder* and *Vargr-Moon*.) 1st December.

King, Stephen. **Nightmares in the Sky: Gargoyles and Grotesques.** Photographs by f-stop Fitzgerald. Viking Studio Books, ISBN 0-670-82307-4, 128pp, hardcover, £15.95. (Book of architectural photography with a 30-page text by King; first edition; it also carries a dollar price [\$24.95].) 24th November.

Kirchoff, Mary, ed. **The Art of the Dragonance Saga.** Penguin, ISBN 0-14-011141-7, 126pp, trade paperback, £9.99. (Fantasy art book based on the world created by Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman; first published in the USA, 1987.) 17th October.

Koontz, Dean R. **Oddkins: A Fable for All Ages.** Illustrated by Phil Parks. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-0112-9, 183pp, hardcover, £12.95. (Juvenile fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1988.) 14th November.

Lackey, Mercedes. **Arrows of the Queen.** Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-962540-7, 320pp, paperback, £2.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1987.) 17th November.

Langford, David. **The Dragonhiker's Guide to Battlefield Covenant at Dune's Edge: Odyssey Two.** Drunken Dragon Press [84 Suffolk St., Birmingham B1 1TA], ISBN 0-947578-01-3, 142pp, hardcover, £9.95. (Sf and fantasy parody collection, first edition; there is also a "De Luxe Edition" at £24.95 [not seen]; hilarious stuff, and the first publication from this new small press.) 17th October.

La Plante, Richard. **Tegné: Warlord of Zendorf.** Sphere, ISBN 0-7474-0092-X, 354pp, trade paperback, £4.99. (Pseudo-Japanese martial-arts fantasy novel, first edition; a debut novel by an American-born, British-resident writer; soon to be filmed starring the author, who has a black belt in karate.) 8th December.

Lee, Tanith. **The Dragon Hoard.** Arrow/Beaver, ISBN 0-09-957160-9, 169pp, paperback, £1.75. (Juvenile fantasy novel, first published in 1971 [Lee's first novel].) 29th December.

Lee, Vernon. **Supernatural Tales: Excursions into Fantasy.** Introduction by I. Cooper Willis. Arrow/Arena, ISBN 0-09-957520-5, 222pp, paperback, £2.99. (Ghost-story collection, first published in 1987; "six fantastical stories" by a writer [real name Violet Paget] who died in 1935.) 3rd November.

Levack, Daniel J. H., with Mark Willard. **Dune Master: A Frank Herbert Bibliography.** Meckler, ISBN 0-88736-099-8, XX + 176pp, hardcover, £27.50. (Illustrated bibliography; a handsome production with extremely full annotations; first published in the USA, 1988.) 7th November.

Mann, Phillip. **The Fall of the Families: Book Two of the Story of Pawl Paxwax, the Gardener.** Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20191-2, 416pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf novel, first published in 1987.) 3rd November.

Martin, George R. R., and Lisa Tuttle. **Windhaven.** Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-04395-4, 315pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1981.) 10th November.

Meacham, Beth, ed. **Terry's Universe.** Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-04282-6, 245pp, hardcover, £11.95. (Sf anthology, first published in the USA, 1988, as a tribute to the late Terry Carr; contains new work by Benford, Le Guin, Leiber, Silverberg, Wolfe, Zelazny and others.) 13th October.

Meredith, Richard C. **The Sky is Filled with Ships.** Arrow, ISBN 0-09-961860-5, 184pp, paperback, £2.50. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1969; "Venture" series no. 20.) 17th November.



Moffett, Judith. **Pennterra**. "An Isaac Asimov Recommendation." Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-48491-2, 382pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1987.) 1st December.

Moorcock, Michael. **The Champion of Gathorm: The Chronicles of Castle Brass 2**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20555-1, 127pp, paperback, £2.50. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1973; eighth printing.) 3rd November.

Moorcock, Michael. **Count Brass: The Chronicles of Castle Brass 1**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20532-2, 150pp, paperback, £2.50. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1973; ninth printing.) 3rd November.

Moorcock, Michael. **The Quest for Tanelorn: The Chronicles of Castle Brass 3**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20533-0, 144pp, paperback, £2.50. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1975; sixth printing.) 3rd November.

Oakes, Terry. **Classic Tales of Horror**. Souvenir Press, ISBN 0-285-62854-2, unpaginated, hardcover, £6.95. (Pop-up book based on the well-known horror yarns of Shelley, Stoker, Poe, Irving and Leroux.) 20th October.

Paget, Clarence, ed. **The 29th Pan Book of Horror Stories**. Pan, ISBN 0-330-30481-X, 238pp, paperback, £2.50. (Horror anthology, first edition; contains a reprint story by Stephen King, but the remainder appear to be original tales by little-known writers.) 2nd December.

Paxson, Diana L. **The White Raven**. New English Library, ISBN 0-450-42379-4, 411pp, hardcover, £12.95. (Historical fantasy novel based on the Tristan and Iseult legend; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen]; first published in the USA, 1988.) 20th October.

Pini, Wendy and Richard. **The Complete Elfquest Graphic Novel. Book One: Fire and Flight**. Titan, ISBN 1-85286-114-2, 159+7pp, trade paperback, £8.95. (Fantasy comic strip, first published in the USA, 1988.) 17th October.

Pratchett, Terry. **Mort**. "The fourth Discworld novel." Corgi, ISBN 0-552-13106-7, 272pp, paperback, £2.99. (Humorous fantasy novel, first published in 1987.) 11th November.

Pratchett, Terry. **Wyrd Sisters**. "A Discworld novel." Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-04363-6, 251pp, hardcover, £10.95. (Humorous fantasy novel, first edition.) 10th November.

Priest, Christopher. **The Affirmation**. "VGSF Classics 29." Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-04283-4, 213pp, paperback, £2.99. (Sf/fantasy novel, first published in 1981.) 8th December.

Roberson, Jennifer. **Track of the White Wolf. Chronicles of the Cheysuli: Book Four**. Corgi, ISBN 0-552-13121-0, 408pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1987.) 2nd December.

Rohan, Michael Scott. **The Hammer of the Sun: The Winter of the World Volume Three**. Macdonald/Futura, ISBN 0-7088-8271-4, 509pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1988.)

Rosenberg, Joel. **The Sword and the Chain: Book Two of Guardians of the Flame**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20129-7, 271pp, paperback, £2.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1984.) 3rd November.

Ryan, Alan, ed. **The Penguin Book of Vampire Stories**. Penguin, ISBN 0-14-010987-0, 621pp, paperback, £4.95. (Horror anthology, first published in the USA as *Vampires: Two Centuries of Great Vampire Stories*, 1987; famous bloodsucking yarns

from Byron and Polidori to Ramsey Campbell and Tanith Lee.) 17th October.

Schoell, William. **Stay Out of the Shower: The Shock Film Phenomenon**. Robinson, ISBN 0-948164-79-4, 184pp, trade paperback, £6.95. (Film criticism, dealing with "splatter movies" from Hitchcock's *Psycho* onwards; first published in the USA, 1985.) 27th October.

Scithers, George H., and Darrell Schweitzer, eds. **Tales from the Spaceport Bar**. Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-48909-4, 235pp, paperback, £2.99. (Sf/fantasy anthology, first published in the USA, 1987.) 3rd November.

Sheckley, Robert. **Hunter/Victim**. Methuen, ISBN 0-413-19450-7, 238pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf novel, first published in 1988.) 17th November.

Shepard, Lucius. **The Jaguar Hunter**. Foreword by Michael Bishop. Kerosina, ISBN 0-948893-367-0, 429pp, hardcover, £13.95. (Sf/fantasy collection, first published in the USA, 1987; this differs from the US edition in that it drops "R & R" [since incorporated into Shepard's novel *Life During Wartime*] and adds "Solitario's Eyes," "Delta Sly Honey" and "The Exercise of Faith"; there is a simultaneous "Collectors' Edition" priced at £40 [not seen].) 8th December.

Shiner, Lewis. **Deserted Cities of the Heart**. Sphere/Abacus, ISBN 0-349-10001-2, 307pp, paperback, £3.99. (Quasi-sf novel set in a Central American war zone; first published in the USA, 1988.) Late entry: published late summer [?] but not received by us until November.

Shwartz, Susan, ed. **Arabesques: More Tales of the Arabian Nights**. Pan, ISBN 0-330-30506-9, 324pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy anthology, first published in the USA, 1988; original "Arabian Nights" tales by Tanith Lee, Andre Norton, Harry Turtledove, Gene Wolfe, Jane Yolen and others.) 2nd December.

Silverberg, Robert, ed. **Robert Silverberg's Worlds of Wonder**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-04355-5, 349pp, hardcover, £12.95. (Sf anthology, first published in the USA, 1987; well-known stories by authors ranging from Henry Kuttner to Bob Shaw, interleaved with copious biographical and critical musings by Silverberg; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen].) 10th November.

Smith, Cordwainer. **The Instrumentality of Mankind**. Introduction by Frederik Pohl. Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-04167-6, 238pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf collection, first published in the USA, 1979; "Cordwainer Smith" [Paul Linebarger] died in 1966: this is the first British edition of a "clean-up" collection of his works, all of which are now in print from VGSF.) 10th November.

Smith, Guy N. **The Master**. Arrow, ISBN 0-09-956530-7, 208pp, paperback, £2.50. (Horror novel, first edition.) 8th December.

Spedding, [Alison]. **The Streets of the City: Book Three of A Walk in the Dark**. Unwin, ISBN 0-04-440148-5, 338pp, paperback, £3.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition.) 18th November.

Stanton, Mary. **The Heavenly Horse from the Outermost West**. New English Library, ISBN 0-450-49059-9, 352pp, trade paperback, £6.95. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1988; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen].) 17th November.

Sterling, Bruce. **Islands in the Net**. Century Hutchinson/Legend, ISBN 0-7126-1662-4, 448pp, hardcover, £11.95. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1988; a major new

work.) Late entry: September publication (?) received in October.

Tilley, Patrick. **The Amtrak Wars Book 4: Blood River**. Sphere, ISBN 0-7474-0000-8, 362pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf novel, first edition [?].) 3rd November.

Tilley, Patrick, and Fernando Fernandez. **Dark Visions: An Illustrated Guide to the Amtrak Wars**. Sphere, ISBN 0-7474-0270-1, trade paperback, 64pp, £5.99. (Glossary-cum-picture book to accompany this "futureworld adventure epic"; first edition.) 3rd November.

Turtledove, Harry. **Swords of the Legion: Book Four of The Videssos Cycle**. Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-958940-0, 394pp, paperback, £3.50. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1987.) 17th November.

Volsky, Paula. **The Sorcerer's Lady**. Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-960720-4, 264pp, paperback, £2.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1986.) 8th December.

Wagner, John, and Brian Bolland. **Judge Dredd vs the Dark Judges**. Titan, ISBN 1-85286-109-6, unpaginated, paperback, £2.95. (Sf comic strips originally published in 2000 A.D.; No. 1 in a small-format "Judge Dredd" series; first book edition.)

Warrington, Freda. **A Blackbird in Twilight**. "The fourth in the Blackbird sequence." Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-48908-6, 387pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition.) 3rd November.

Watson, Ian. **Evil Water and Other Stories**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20193-9, 222pp, paperback, £2.99. (Sf collection, first published in 1987; two of the stories originally appeared in *Interzone*.) 20th October.

Watson, Ian. **Meat**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3130-3, 246pp, paperback, £2.99. (Horror novel, first edition.) 3rd November.

Weiss, Margaret, and Tracy Hickman. **Dragonlance Chronicles: Dragons of Autumn Twilight, Dragons of Winter Night, Dragons of Spring Dawning**. "Collector's edition." Penguin, ISBN 0-14-011540-4, 1032pp, trade paperback, £7.99. (Fantasy omnibus, first published in the USA, 1988; contains a new introduction by the authors; the individual novels date from 1984-85.) 17th October.

Williamson, Chet. **Lowland Rider**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3158-3, 342pp, paperback, £3.50. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1988.) 1st December.

Wolfe, Gene. **Storeys from the Old Hotel**. Kerosina, ISBN 0-948893-29-X, 299pp, hardcover, £13.95. (Sf/fantasy collection, first edition; there is a simultaneous "Collectors' Edition" priced at £40 [not seen]; 30-odd of Wolfe's more obscure stories, including many short-shorts.) 8th December.

Wolfe, Gene. **The Urth of the New Sun**. Macdonald/Futura, ISBN 0-7088-8268-4, 372pp, paperback, £4.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1987; highly recommended sequel to Wolfe's masterpiece *The Book of the New Sun*.) Late entry: September publication (?) received in October.

Wood, Bari. **Amy Girl**. Sphere, ISBN 0-7474-0075-X, 346pp, paperback, £3.50. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1987; it carries the inevitable cover commendation by Stephen King.) 17th November.

Zahn, Timothy. **Triplet**. Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-962450-8, 369pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1987.) 17th November.



# interzone

## BACK ISSUES

All back issues except Nos. 1, 5 and 7 are still available from 124 Osborne Rd., Brighton, BN1 6LU, UK. They are £1.95 each (£2.50 each overseas). Please make your cheques or postal orders payable to *Interzone*. Contents of back issues:

**2:** "Memories of the Space Age" by J.G. Ballard; "Seasons Out of Time" by Alex Stewart; "The Third Test" by Andrew Weiner; "Angel Baby" by Rachel Pollack; "Cantata '82" by Tom Disch.

**3:** "The Dissemblers" by Garry Kilworth; "Overture for 'A Midsummer Night's Dream'" by Angela Carter; "No Coward Soul" by Josephine Saxton; "Cheek to Cheek" by Nicholas Allan; "Saving the Universe" by David Garnett.

**4:** "Calling All Gumdrops" by John Sladek; "The Caulder Requiem" by Alex Stewart; "On the Deck of the Flying Bomb" by David Redd; "After-Images" by Malcolm Edwards; "The Quiet King of the Green South-West" by Andy Soutter; "The Ur-Plant" by Barrington J. Bayley.

**6:** "Something Coming Through" by Cherry Wilder; "The Monroe Doctrine" by Neil Ferguson; "The Views of Mohammed El Hassif" by John Hendry; "Radical Architecture" by Roger Dean (art feature); "Angela's Father" by L. Hluchan Sintetos; "Kitecadet" by Keith Roberts.

**8:** "Unmistakably the Finest" by Scott Bradfield; "The Electric Zoo" by Chris Jones (art feature); "Dreamers" by Kim Newman; "Strange Memories of Death" by Philip K. Dick; "Experiment with Time" by M.J. Fitzgerald; "McGonagall's Lear" by Andy Soutter; "What I Believe" by J.G. Ballard.

**9:** "The Object of the Attack" by J.G. Ballard; "The Gods in Flight" by Brian Aldiss; "Canned Goods" by Thomas M. Disch; "Synaptic Intrigue" by Richard Kadrey (art feature); "The Luck in the Head" by M. John Harrison; "Fragments of a Hologram Rose" by William Gibson; "Spiral Winds" by Garry Kilworth.

**10:** "John's Return to Liverpool" by Christopher Burns; "Green Hearts" by Lee Montgomerie; "Soulmates" by Alex Stewart; Photographs by Ian Sanderson; "Love, Among the Corridors" by Gene Wolfe; "The Malignant One" by Rachel Pollack; "The Dream of the Wolf" by Scott Bradfield.

**11:** "War and/or Peace" by Lee Montgomerie; "Cube Root" by David Langford; "Fogged Plates" by Christopher Burns; "Rain, Tunnel and Bombfire" by Pete Lyon (art feature); "The Unfolding" by John Shirley & Bruce Sterling; "Kitemistress" by Keith Roberts.

**12:** "The Bob Dylan Tambourine Software. . ." by Michael Bishop; "Little Ilya and Spider and Box" by Paul J. McAuley; "The Fire Catcher" by Richard Kadrey; "Laser Smith's Space Academy" by George Parkin (comic strip); "A Young Man's Journey to Viriconium" by M. John Harrison; "Instructions for Exiting This Building. . ." by Pamela Zoline.

**13:** "The Man Who Walked on the Moon" by J.G. Ballard; "The People on the Precipice" by Ian Watson; Interview with William Gibson; "If the Driver Vanishes . . ." by Peter T. Garratt; "Escapist Literature" by Barrington J. Bayley; "Rhinestone Manifesto" by Don Webb; "Randy and Alexei Go Jaw Jaw" by Neil Ferguson.

**14:** "When the Timegate Failed" by Ian Watson; Interview with Clive Barker; "The Compassionate, the Digital" by Bruce Sterling; "Finn" by Sue Thomason; "Patricia's Profession" by Kim Newman; "The King of the Hill" by Paul J. McAuley; "The New SF" by Vincent Omniaveritas; "Caverns" by David Zindell.

**15:** "The Winter Market" by William Gibson; Interview with Bruce Sterling; "The One and Only Tale . . ." by John Brosnan; "The Vivarium" by Garry Kilworth; "A Multiplication of Lives" by Diana Reed; "Goodbye – and Thanks for the SF" by Allen A. Lucas; "The Ibis Experiment" by S.W. Widdowson.

**16:** "And He Not Busy Being Born. . ." by Brian Stableford; art feature by Jim Burns; "The Protector" by Rachel Pollack; "Sex Change Operation Shock" by Gwyneth Jones; "The Brains of Rats" by Michael Blumlein; "His Vegetable Wife" by Pat Murphy; "The Cup is the Wine" by Josephine Saxton; Interview with Iain Banks; "The Final Episode" by Shirley Weinland.

**17:** "Freeze-frame" by Gregory Benford; "Jingling Geordie's Hole" by Ian Watson; Interview with John Shirley; "Sound-spinner" by D.C. Haynes; "Hard Work" by Thomas M. Disch; Interview with Gene Wolfe; "Future Fish" by Barbara Hills; "Adam Found" by Simon Ounsley.

**18:** "As Big as the Ritz" by Gregory Benford; "Screaming of the Beetle" by SMS; "Boiled Alive" by Ramsey Campbell; Interview with M. John Harrison; "Paths of Dying" by Simon Ounsley; "Fountain of Time" by Peter Lamborn Wilson; "Mind Vampires" by Greg Egan; "When Jesus Comes Down the Chimney" by Ian Watson.

**19:** "The Second Third of C" by Neil Ferguson; Interview with Gwyneth Jones; "A Dragon for Seyour Chan" by Paul J. McAuley; "The Next-But-One Man" by Kim Newman; "Assyria" by Christina Lake; "Goodbye Houston Street" by Richard Kadrey; "The Xeelee Flower" by S.M. Baxter.

**20:** "Love Sickness, Part 1" by Geoff Ryman; Interview with Rudy Rucker; "Sexual Chemistry" by Brian Stableford; "Foresight" by Michael Swanwick; "A Gift from the Culture" by Iain M. Banks.

**21:** "Krash-Bangg Joe" by Eric Brown; Interview with John Crowley; "Dop\*elgan\*er" by Garry Kilworth; art feature by Ian Miller; "The Philosophical Stone" by Ken Wisman; "Layers of Meaning" by Brian Stableford; "Love Sickness, Part 2" by Geoff Ryman.



22: "The Only One" by David S. Garnett; Interviews with J.G. Ballard and K.W. Jeter; "The Decline of Sunshine" by Cherry Wilder; "The Boys" by Charles Stross; "Memories of the Body" by Lisa Tuttle; "Among the Wounded" by Christopher Burns; "The Good Robot" by SMS; "The Girl Who Died for Art" by Eric Brown.

23: "The Giving Plague" by David Brin; "Karl and the Ogre" by Paul J. McAuley; Interview with Karen Joy Fowler; "Artefacts" by Christopher Evans; "Famous Monsters" by Kim Newman; "Something for Nothing" by S.M. Baxter; "Scatter My Ashes" by Greg Egan.

24: "The Growth of the House of Usher" by Brian Stableford; "Heartland" by Karen Joy Fowler; Interview with Thomas M. Disch; "The Time-Lapsed Man" by Eric Brown; "Animator" by Alex Stewart; "Lux in Tenebris" by Phillip Mann; "Salvage" by Julio Buck Abrera; plus Charles Platt on Britain, etc.

25: "The Long Fall Home" by Paul Preuss; "Lost Bodies" by Ian Watson; Interview with Terry Pratchett; "Babel" by Christopher Burns; Thomas M. Disch on Whitley Strieber; "Our Lady of Springtime" by Peter T. Garratt; "Blit" by David Langford; "Mirrors and Burnstone" by Nicola Griffith; plus Clute, Lowe, Platt, etc.

26: "Dark Night in Toyland" by Bob Shaw; "Wyrd Sisters" by Terry Pratchett; Interview with Leigh Kennedy; "Face Lift" by Susan Beetlestone; "Stop Evolution in Its Tracks!" by John Sladek; Christopher Priest disagreeing with Charles Platt; "Big Trouble Upstairs" by Eric Brown; "The Agony of Suburban Knowledge" by Johnny Black; "In the Dream-Time" by Charles Stross; plus Clute, McAuley and Stableford.

27: "Tommy Atkins" by Barrington J. Bayley; Roz Kaveney on Brian Stableford; "To the Letter" by Bob Shaw; "Before I Wake" by Kim Stanley Robinson; J.G. Ballard on his favourite sf movies; "Driving Through Korea" by Ian Lee; Interview with Kathy Acker; "An Eye in Paradise" by John Brosnan; "Soft Clocks" by Yoshio Aramaki.

# Inter- action

Dear Editors:

Christopher Priest's article "Peoria My Destination" (IZ 25) seemed at first very much at one with statements made by other British sf writers in the last 10 or 15 years. Then the phrase "There is no such thing as 'science fiction'" leaped off the page and pretty well set the tone for the rest of the article. Because what Chris Priest then proposed to discuss has nothing to do with modern sf and everything to do with his attitude towards linear narrative stories that entertain. He pinpoints with precision the very elements that aggravate him – "a tightly resolved plot, a car chase and a gun fight, lots of special effects and stunt action (etc.)." He says "the public's taste for pap is an appalling constant," before ending by portraying Charles Platt as a spokesman for the just-plain-folks of Peoria who don't go for that depressing Brit stuff. All of which is beside the point, since Platt was more concerned with the morbidity and the air of surrender of most British sf. Unfortunately, Priest perceived this as a direct attack on those narrative modes that have dominated "high" British sf since the early '70s.

Charles Platt, though, was bang on target (in IZ 24): melancholy and pessimism are deeply ingrained traits in UK sf, and are closely related to the

science/art split in British society. There still exists in this country a social stratum of people who consider themselves very well educated and highly cultured because they know nothing about technology. The tragedy is that the High Art/Lit. Establishments are composed almost solely of these scientific illiterates – their dead hands lie heavy throughout our culture and perpetuate the dichotomy between science and art.

Until very recently, "quality" sf in this country was modelled – consciously or otherwise – on a number of acceptable elements: society as something to be fled; an offhand technophobia; a studied despair ("Breakfast in the Wreckage of Hampstead"); and the rejection of plot. Artfully introverted novels and beautifully precious short stories rendered almost directionless by the absence of story – the mannered prose that might have turned stories into exceptional, outstanding experiences had become an end in itself.

Don't get me wrong: I have a great love for sf of that brand and calibre, but it is entirely misleading for its admirers (and practitioners) to say that only it can lay claim to the lustre of quality. It's wrong to deride tightly resolved plots, car chases, gunfights, FX or whatever, as mindless pap: like many other ingredients, these are fictive materials that lack meaning until imbued with it by a creator. In sf this is doubly so and demands a technological literacy, an appreciation of the beauty inherent in science.

It seems to me that writing fiction

for publication is a commitment to communicate, and I believe that it is our duty to somehow reach the wider audience and prove beyond any shadow of doubt the power and relevance of modern fantasy and sf (not to mention their ability to excite and entertain). These are activist sentiments, but I make no apology for them because the dominance of pessimism must be broken. I am by no means proposing the adoption of fixed grins and Mickey Mouse optimism, but at the very worst I'd rather be desperate than despairing.

**Michael Cobley**  
Glasgow

Dear Editors:

I have an idea: let's stop this damaging use of the term science fiction to cover so many diverse pieces of writing. I propose two separate genres that can go their separate ways from now on, thus putting an end to the internal wrangles that blight the single genre at this time.

The first will be called, say, Other Worlds Literature, for literature it will be. Its writers will use the future as a device only, a setting that says something about the present. Its writers may invoke science and technology, but always realizing that science is not a panacea for all the world's ills. Thus armed, the writers will not produce wild scenarios where Mankind and his trusty companion Science conquer the universe and live happily ever after. They will sometimes produce optimistic fiction, but with an edge of caution... Often they will disappoint Charles



Platt by being unreasonably frank about the state of mankind and producing "doom-and-gloom" stories, but they will carry on regardless, pitying him for being afflicted with a sunny American disposition and unreasonable optimism.

The second we should call Wanker Fiction, after its writers' and readers' habit of indulging their outrageous fantasies. Unlike real writers, the writers of this sf are not bothered by the "rockets and he-men" image of the genre – in fact they are flattered by it. They are under the illusion of writing about the future, and they have their own peculiar god who will guide us to a free and prosperous future relieved of pain and effort. This god called Science is invoked as fantasy writers invoke magic. This sf is very popular with adolescents (of body and mind); it titillates with tales of courageous heroes who pilot their huge phallic ships beyond the limits of credulity to defeat predominantly hostile alien races...

**Ian Williamson**  
Bradford

Dear Editors:

During World War II the stormtroopers (Sturmabteilung) were the German battlefield troops, while the SS (Schutzstaffel), amongst other duties, ran the extermination camps. However, all the German soldiers, whether they were in the SA or the SS, justified their actions by the same argument – they were only "following orders." It is this aspect of the fascist mentality, the individual's unquestioning duty to obey authority, that is symbolized by the swastika (Hakenkreuz). *This symbol cannot be subdivided and applied to just one aspect of the Nazi state.*

In *Interzone* 26 Charles Platt writes: "[David] Drake sometimes wears a swastika belt buckle, not because he's a neo-Nazi, but because he feels sincere admiration for the honour and heroism of stormtroopers." Is this statement artful or just naive?

**David Greenwood**  
Luxembourg

Dear Editors:

"Dark Night in Toyland" (IZ 26) was hardly what I expected from Bob Shaw. The emotion didn't work for me, but when it comes to ideas Shaw can teach others a trick or two. "Dark Night" has several good concepts that he puts to excellent use as springboards for philosophizing. The central realization, that God is important not at life's beginning but at its end, I found almost staggering. Unlike many authors in the genre, Shaw knows what to do with his ideas, how to plot stories around them.

Terry Pratchett's "Wyrd Sisters" was a hoot! I doubt if I got more than a fraction of the jokes on one reading, but I found it hilarious for all that. Moreover the plot had a cohesion often lacking in humorous writing. This was a genuine story, not just a string of gags. I have now added a "Discworld" novel to my list of required reading.

Susan Beeston's "Face Lift" did nothing for me, I'm afraid. It seemed like a story with nowhere to go. I like John Sladek and I love surrealist art, so "Stop Evolution in Its Tracks!" was very welcome indeed, easily the issue's best story. With Sladek we enter a new universe in which the logic of the old is stood on its head. The way in which surrealist masterpieces are incorporated into the story is sheer brilliance, culminating in the so-apert image of Magritte's "Time Transfixed." Let's have more from Sladek and soon.

It seems to me that Eric Brown has a limited range but within the territory he has staked out as his own he has he operates superbly. "Big Trouble Upstairs" has a protagonist who is telepathic, amoral and a lesbian. Not a nice girl, at least by conventional standards. Opposing her is that murderous fiend Walt Disney, the personification of good old family entertainment... This unlikely pairing adds zest to a conventional shoot 'em up story and distracts from the eyesore of an instant love affair (simply add water and stir). Good entertainment from a man who knows

what he's doing.

"The Agony of Suburban Knowledge" by Johnny Black had an intriguing title, but the story itself lacked real substance. I found it to be more a case of "ennui" than "agony." "In the DreamTime" was similarly disappointing: I haven't liked anything by Charles Stross, and this cyberpunk mish-mash didn't change my mind. The story was tiresome, which was a pity as it might have been really good if Stross had thought things over more thoroughly and developed his ideas properly. I am left with jumbled impressions instead of solid concepts.

**Peter Tennant**  
Thetford, Norfolk

Dear Editors:

In over two years of *Interzone* subscription this is the first time I have felt the need to write a letter of comment. Being on the BSFA magazine chain, I tend to go for months without seeing a US magazine and then – like last weekend – there is a deluge of A5-sized packages through the door. After one *Amazing*, two *Asimov's* and one *Analog's* worth of intensive reading I then had *Interzone* 26 to contend with. And what a relief! Yes, there were some good stories in the American magazines (along with lots that weren't) but it was a real pleasure to read "In the DreamTime" and "Face Lift" – although perhaps it's unfair to pick out individual stories from what is the best issue I've seen. Charles Platt was right, at least, to point out that there is a difference between the British "types" and the US "types" of sf – both in what is written and in what the editors select. Long may that difference persist! I like the American magazines, but I would choose *Interzone* every time if such a choice was forced on me. Thanks for a couple of good years.

**Keith Brooke**  
Beckford, Gloucs.

## WRITE TO INTERZONE

We enjoy receiving feedback from our readers, and we hope to publish a lively letter column in each issue. Please send your comments, opinions, reactions, to the magazine's main editorial address. We may not be able to reply to all letters, but we do read them and may well be influenced by them.



**Sherry Goldsmith** writes: "Interzone is the ideal place for writers to experiment with a British/American fusion. Its new distribution deal with the leading British chain W. H. Smith may tempt *Interzone* to abandon some of its post-grad worthiness in favour of more visceral stories. Its new bimonthly schedule could well mean renewed attempts to do for sf what punk did for rock 'n' roll." Well, right on: we're all in favour of "visceral stories." And **Paul Kincaid** opines: "Let's face it, we've had *Interzone* for years, but one swallow does not make a summer, particularly a swallow which seems intent on flying south for the summer [what does that mean, Paul?]. Despite its frequent protestations, *Interzone* does have a house style. There are stories which you automatically know are *IZ* stories, but that style, with its twin planks of new wave sensibilities and cyberpunk enthusiasm, is flying in the face of British sf. You need only to take a look at the novels which British sf writers are producing, and the short stories that are appearing elsewhere, to recognize that a somewhat different tone and sensibility is more common."

I think he's wrong, but would many of our readers disagree with me? Let us know. And if you want to read many more such opinions, as well as all the latest fanish news, try a subscription to *Critical Wave*. The sub rate of £3 I quoted last time is now out of date. Because of a promised new "vastly improved production method" editors Steve Green and Martin Tudor have hiked their six-issue rate to £5. Subs should be sent to Critical Wave Publications, 33 Scott Rd., Olton, Solihull, W. Midlands B92 7LQ.

## WORD-PROCESSING SINS

I gave some general advice to aspiring authors last time, and it occurs to me that I ought to add something here about word-processing. More and more people in Britain have Amstrad

PCWs or IBM PC-compatibles (it seems that any home which can afford a television set or a video recorder can now afford one of these electronic beasts), and consequently an ever higher proportion of the unsolicited manuscripts which reach us are word-processed rather than merely typed. Well and good; they usually make for clean manuscripts, but they can also give rise to a number of minor irritations. Five basic points have struck me: (1) Writers with word processors often fail to keep their printer ribbons black (perhaps these are apt to grow faint more quickly than traditional typewriter ribbons did): we'd appreciate it if authors could attempt to achieve black print – if you can't afford to buy new ribbons on a frequent basis, try spraying your old ones with a "penetrating oil" such as WD40 (available from garages and hardware shops). (2) A related point: many people send us word-processed MSS which have been printed out in high-speed "draft mode," and again these are an eye-strain which reduce your chances of making a good impression on us – please get into the habit of switching your printer to "high quality" or "near-letter quality" when you're producing submission copies. (3) Remember to switch off your word processor's "right-hand justification": editors hate justified manuscripts because they often have ugly gaps in the lines which can confuse typesetters. (4) Kindly separate your continuous-stationery paper: people sometimes send us manuscripts in which the pages are still fan-folded and joined at the perforations – this strikes us as the height of laziness and puts us in a dangerously grumpy mood. (5) Put numbers on your pages: word-processing beginners seem to have difficulty in learning how to get their software to page-number automatically – if you can't crack this problem, please number your pages by hand, in ink. Oh, and one last entirely trivial point: if you have a word-counter there's no need to try to impress us by giving an absurdly precise word count – you can round to the nearest ten, or for that

matter the nearest fifty.

## WRITING SF

In issue 25 I commended **Christopher Evans's** book *Writing Science Fiction* (published by A. & C. Black). Now, less than a year later, another such volume is about to appear. *The Way to Write Science Fiction* by **Brian Stableford** (Elm Tree Books) should make ideal reading for many of the hopeful young writers who send us stories. Stableford's dozen chapters are full of level-headed and witty advice (we print a couple of them as an article in this issue of *IZ*, but they're not necessarily the best – almost any two chapters would have done admirably). So I can recommend the book very warmly indeed: it covers some of the same ground as the Evans volume, but it goes further. Please do rush out and buy a copy.

The **London Literary Society** has asked us to mention its short story competition, which carries prizes of £1,000, £500 and £250. It's open to writers of original short stories (of a general nature – not specifically sf or fantasy) between 1,500 and 5,000 words in length. There is an entrance fee of £3.50 per story, and the closing date is 30th July 1989. For more details, write to David Johnson, London Literary Society, 27 Old Gloucester Street, London WC1N 3XX.

We've also been asked to mention a residential sf/fantasy writing workshop, sponsored by Lincolnshire and Humberside Arts, which will be held in Horncastle, Lincolnshire, in March. It's expected that the tutors will include **Lisa Tuttle** and **Iain Banks**. If you're interested in participating, write urgently for further details to Geoff Swallow, Literature Film and Media Officer, LHA, St Hugh's, Newport, Lincoln LN1 3DN. I don't have exact dates for this event at our time of going to press, but I'm told it's probable you'll still have the opportunity to enrol if you're reading this in February 1989.

(David Pringle)

# COMING NEXT ISSUE

In *Interzone* 16 (Spring 1986) we published several stories which dealt in surprising and imaginative ways with the battle between men and women. Now we present THE SEX WARS REVISITED, more sf and fantasy stories which deal with the subject of sexual relations, gender roles, etc. – with fine contributions from Greg Egan, Karen Joy Fowler, Garry Kilworth, Phillip Mann and Brian Stableford, among others. Also, we begin a new series of critical essays on "The Big Sellers." Plus all our usual features. Out in April 1989!



# interzone

SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

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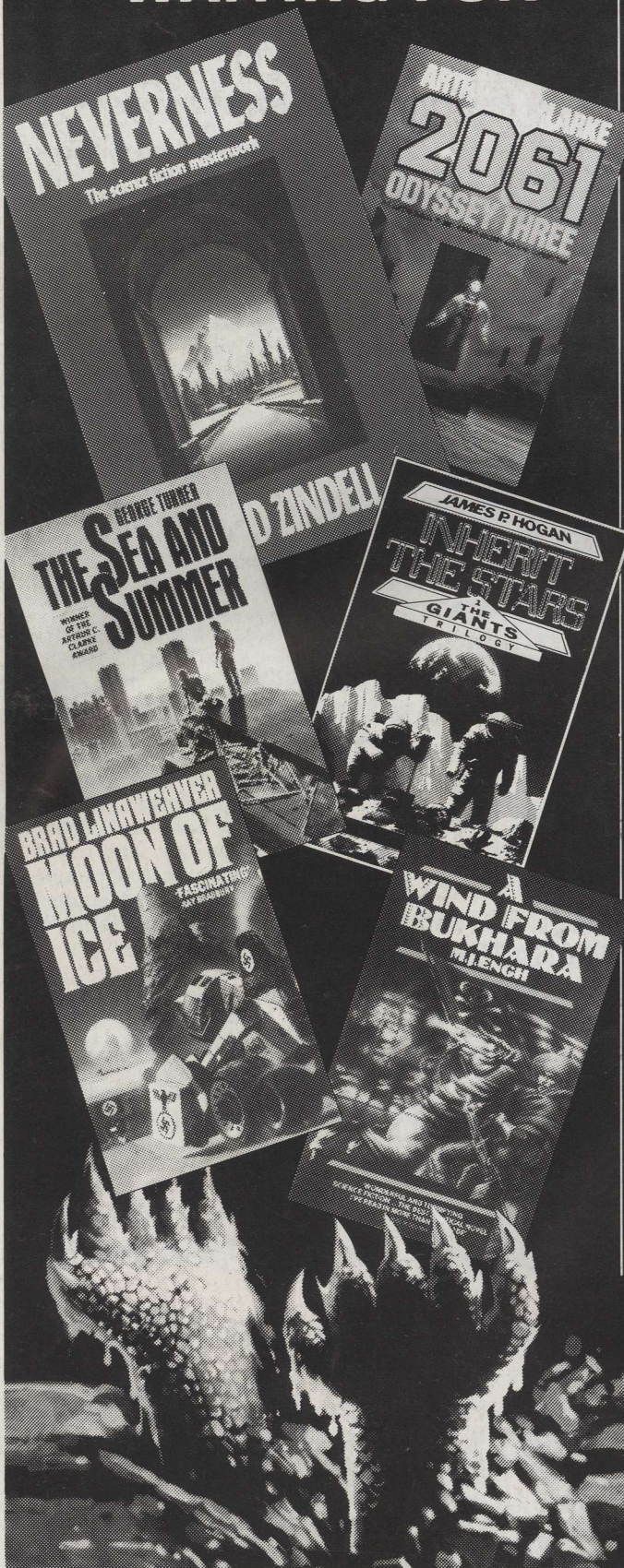
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