

APRIL 1996



# interZone

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106

**J.G. Ballard**

Special issue  
with his new story  
'The Dying Fall'

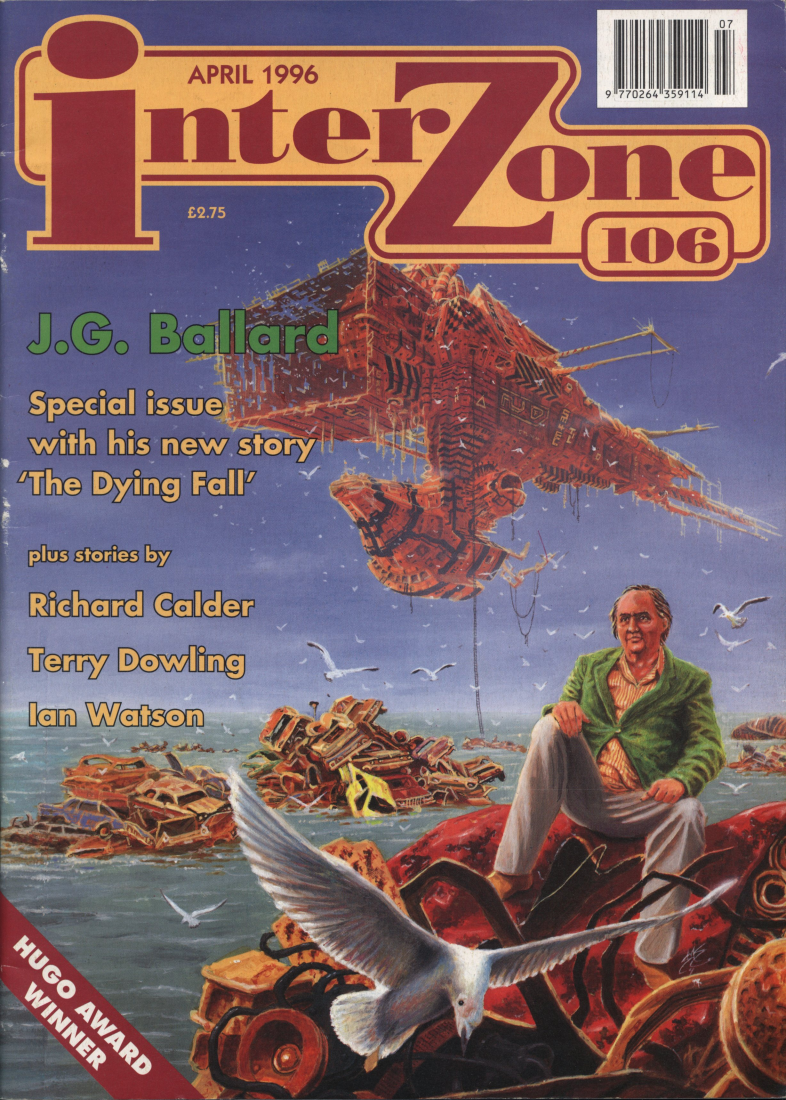
plus stories by

**Richard Calder**

**Terry Dowling**

**Ian Watson**

**HUGO AWARD  
WINNER**



No attempt is made here to list variant American editions of short-story collections; nor are "best-of" collections or short-story chapbooks listed. The following are Ballard's books as published in Britain in their "official" editions: if you have these 26 titles, then you have very nearly all JGB's writings which have appeared so far in book form.

- 1. *The Wind from Nowhere.*** New York: Berkley, January 1962, 160p. London: Penguin, April 1967, 186p. Novel.
- 2. *The Drowned World.*** New York: Berkley, August 1962, 158p. London: Gollancz, 1962 [i.e. January 1963], 175p. Novel.
- 3. *The Voices of Time.*** London: Gollancz, May 1963, 7p. (as *The Four-Dimensional Nightmare*). Collection: "The Voices of Time" (1960); "The Sound-Sweep" (1960); "Prima Belladonna" (1956); "Studio 5, the Stars" (1961); "The Garden of Time" (1962); "The Cage of Sand" (1962); "The Watch-Towers" (1962); "Chronopolis" (1960). London: Gollancz, 1974, 197p. (as *The Four-Dimensional Nightmare*): new edition, with "Prima Belladonna" and "Studio 5, the Stars" dropped in favour of "The Overloaded Man" (1961) and "Thirteen to Centaurus" (1962). London: Dent, September 1984, 197p. retitled edition, following the revised contents of the Gollancz 1974 edition.
- 4. *The Terminal Beach.*** London: Gollancz, June 1964, 221p. New York: Carroll & Graf, October 1987, 224p. Collection: "A Question of Re-Entry" (1963); "The Drowned Giant" (1964); "End-Game" (1963); "The Illuminated Man" (1964); "The Reptile Enclosure" (1963); "The Delta at Sunset" (1964); "The Terminal Beach" (1964); "Deep End" (1961); "The Volcano Dances" (1964); "Bilennium" (1961); "The Gioconda of the Twilight Noon" (1964); "The Lost Leonardo" (1964).
- 5. *The Drought.*** New York: Berkley, August 1964, 160p. (as *The Burning World*). London: Cape, May 1965, 252p. retitled, with revised text which subsequent editions have followed. Novel.
- 6. *The Crystal World.*** London: Cape, April 1966, 221p. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1966, 7p. Novel.
- 7. *The Day of Forever.*** London: Panther, September 1967, 141p. Collection: "The Day of Forever" (1966); "Prisoner of the Coral Deep" (1964); "Tomorrow is a Million Years" (1966); "The Man on the 99th Floor" (1962); "The Waiting Grounds" (1959); "The Last World of Mr Goddard" (1960); "The Gentle Assassin" (1961); "The Sudden Afternoon" (1963); "The Insane Ones" (1962); "The Assassination of John Fitzgerald Kennedy Considered as a Downhill Motor Race" (1966).
- 8. *The Disaster Area.*** London: Cape, October 1967, 206p. Collection: "Storm-Bird, Storm-Dreamer" (1966); "The Concentration City" (formerly "Build-Up," 1957); "The Subliminal Man" (1963); "Now Wakes the Sea" (1963); "Minus One" (1963); "Mr F. is Mr F." (1961); "Zone of

# J.G. Ballard

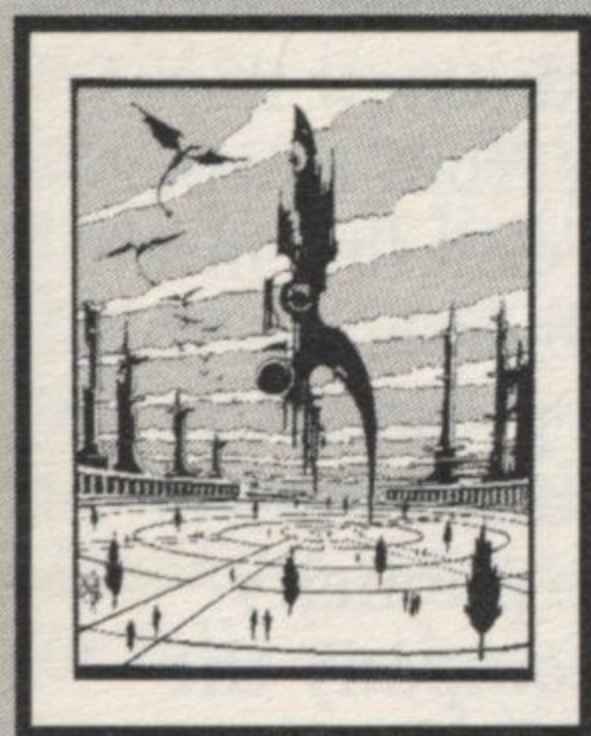
## A Simple Bibliography

Terror" (1960); "Manhole 69" (1957); "The Impossible Man" (1966).

- 9. *The Venus Hunters.*** London: Panther, November 1967, 158p. (as *The Overloaded Man*). Collection: "Now: Zero" (1969); "The Time-Tombs" (1963); "Thirteen to Centaurus" (1962); "Track 12" (1957); "Passport to Eternity" (1962); "Escapement" (1956); "Time of Passage" (1964); "The Venus Hunters" (1963); "The Coming of the Unconscious" (non-fiction, 1966); "The Overloaded Man" (1961). London: Granada, November 1980, 144p. retitled edition, with "Thirteen to Centaurus," "The Coming of the Unconscious" and "The Overloaded Man" dropped in favour of "The Killing Ground" (1969); "One Afternoon at Utah Beach" (1978) and "The 60 Minute Zoom" (1976).
- 10. *The Atrocity Exhibition.*** London: Cape, July 1970, 157p. Collection: "The Atrocity Exhibition" (1966); "The University of Death" (1968); "The Assassination Weapon" (1966); "You: Coma: Marilyn Monroe" (1966); "Notes Towards a Mental Breakdown" (formerly "The Death Molecule," 1967); "The Great American Nude" (1968); "The Summer Cannibals" (1969); "Tolerances of the Human Face" (1969); "You and Me and the Continuum" (1966); "Plan for the Assassination of Jacqueline Kennedy" (1967); "Love and Napalm: Export USA" (1968); "Crash!" (1969); "The Generations of America" (1968); "Why I Want to Fuck Ronald Reagan" (1968); "The Assassination of John Fitzgerald Kennedy Considered as a Downhill Motor Race" (1966). New York: Grove Press, November 1972, 157p. (as *Love and Napalm: Export USA*). San Francisco: Re/Search, September 1990, 127p.: new edition, copiously annotated by the author.
- 11. *Vermilion Sands.*** New York: Berkley, April 1971, 192p. Collection: "Prima Belladonna" (1956); "The Thousand Dreams of Stellavista" (1962); "Cry Hope, Cry Fury!" (1967); "Venus Smiles" (formerly "Mobile," 1957); "Studio 5, the Stars" (1961); "The Cloud-Sculptors of Coral D" (1967); "Say Goodbye to the Wind" (1970); "The Screen Game" (1963). London: Cape, November 1973, 208p.: revised and rearranged text, with one story added, "The Singing Statues" (1962).
- 12. *Crash.*** London: Cape, June 1973, 224p. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1973, 224p. Novel.
- 13. *Concrete Island.*** London: Cape, April 1974, 176p. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1974, 176p. Novel.
- 14. *High-Rise.*** London: Cape, November 1975, 204p. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1977, 204p. Novel.
- 15. *Low-Flying Aircraft and Other Stories.*** London: Cape, 1976, 191p. Collection: "The Ultimate City" (1976);

"Low-Flying Aircraft" (1975); "The Dead Astronaut" (1968); "My Dream of Flying to Wake Island" (1974); "The Life and Death of God" (1976); "The Greatest Television Show on Earth" (1972); "A Place and a Time to Die" (1969); "The Comsat Angels" (1968); "The Beach Murders" (1968).

- 16. *The Unlimited Dream Company.*** London: Cape, October 1979, 223p. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1979, 238p. Novel.
- 17. *Hello America.*** London, Cape, June 1981, 224p. New York: Carroll & Graf, August 1988, 224p. Novel.
- 18. *Myths of the Near Future.*** London: Cape, September 1982, 205p. Collection: "Myths of the Near Future" (1982); "Having a Wonderful Time" (1978); "A Host of Furious Fancies" (1980); "Zodiac 2000" (1978); "News from the Sun" (1981); "Theatre of War" (1977); "The Dead Time" (1977); "The Smile" (1976); "Motel Architecture" (1978); "The Intensive Care Unit" (1977).
- 19. *Empire of the Sun.*** London: Gollancz, September 1984, 278p. New York: Simon & Schuster, October 1984, 7p. Novel.
- 20. *The Day of Creation.*** London: Gollancz, September 1987, 254p. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, March 1988, 254p. Novel.
- 21. *Running Wild.*** London: Century Hutchinson, October 1988, 72p., illustrated by Janet Woolley. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, November 1989, 104p., unillustrated. Novella.
- 22. *War Fever.*** London: Collins, November 1990, 176p. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, April 1991, 176p. Collection: "War Fever" (1989); "The Secret History of World War 3" (1988); "Dream Carriages" (1990); "The Object of the Attack" (1984); "Love in a Colder Climate" (1989); "The Largest Theme Park in the World" (1989); "Answers to a Questionnaire" (1985); "The Air Disaster" (1975); "Report on an Unidentified Space Station" (1982); "The Man Who Walked on the Moon" (1985); "The Enormous Space" (1989); "Memories of the Space Age" (1982); "Notes Towards a Mental Breakdown" (1976); "The Index" (1977).
- 23. *The Kindness of Women.*** London: HarperCollins, September 1991, 286p. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, October 1991, 343p. Novel.
- 24. *Rushing to Paradise.*** London: Flamingo, September 1994, 239p. New York: Picador USA, May 1995, 239p. Novel.
- 25. *A User's Guide to the Millennium: Essays and Reviews.*** London: HarperCollins, January 1996, 304p. New York: Picador USA, May 1996. Non-fiction collection: approximately 90 short pieces, first published between 1962 and 1995.
- 26. *Cocaine Nights.*** London: HarperCollins, September (?) 1996, 7p. Novel (forthcoming).



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science fiction & fantasy

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### **Cover, interior illustrations and motifs by SMS**

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J. G. Ballard, who reached 65 at the end of last year, is the subject of our third "author issue" – the first two having been devoted to Brian Aldiss (issue 38, August 1990) and to Bob Shaw (issue 67, January 1993). Apart from his recent birthday, another occasion for the present issue was the appearance of Jim Ballard's first-ever non-fiction book, *A User's Guide to the Millennium* (HarperCollins, January 1996). That volume collects 33 years' worth of miscellaneous pieces on a host of subjects: literary, filmic, artistic and scientific. It struck us that all commentary on JGB's own influential body of fiction had been omitted (modestly) from the book, so we conceived the plan of bringing together a number of other non-fiction pieces by Ballard in which he does write about



## Interface

his own fiction. This was our idea, not the author's! But he kindly gave his permission, and produced a new short story, "The Dying Fall," which is his first to be written for any magazine in several years.

As we said in last issue's trailer, Jim Ballard has a big year ahead, with the David Cronenberg film of

*Crash* probably due for release in the summer or autumn, and a new novel, *Cocaine Nights*, coming from HarperCollins in September. For a few more words on both those subjects, see this issue's interview. We're pleased to celebrate JGB's significant achievements in advance of the publicity which will no doubt accompany the Cronenberg film (as it did the Spielberg film of Ballard's *Empire of the Sun* in 1987). Ballard is a writer whose reputation extends far beyond the science-fiction field; and yet, in our view, he remains rooted in sf – and he has been a strong supporter of this magazine from its inception in 1982. Special thanks to critics Roger Luckhurst and Takayuki Tatsumi, and to artist SMS, for rising to the occasion.

David Pringle

Dear Editors:

I was pleased to read Deirdre Counihan's letter in *IZ* 103; she managed to articulate something which I have felt for some years now. While sf is often quite daring in its use of experimental literary techniques it lags far behind in the field of visual imagery. A quick skim through my bookcase provides salient examples: J. G. Ballard's back catalogue is full of dreamscapes worthy of De Chirico or Max Ernst, but comes wrapped in hideous air-brushed still-life illustrations, evocative only of supermarket advertising or 1970s Athena prints in the waiting rooms of suburban dentists. Iain M. Banks gets pseudo-realistic spaceships and planets, like rejected production paintings from *Star Trek*, and Colin Greenland, whose *Seasons of Plenty* deserved the attentions of a modern Piranesi, or at least a Mervyn Peake, ends up with a lifeless space-floozie who appears to have been vacuum-moulded from a substance resembling Caramac.

These three approaches seem to be the only ones allowed to grace the covers of science-fiction novels. I have no objection to realism *per se*, although it seems a perverse approach to the worlds of the imagination, but for the most part it's not even technically competent. Ms Counihan blames this lack of basic skills on elitist art colleges refusing to take students who want to work in the field. Surely the truth is that when these students arrive, their portfolios bulging with spaceships and nymphets, any competent art tutor will attempt to divert their talent away from this visual cul-de-sac and onto a more challenging route?

There are many different ways of seeing and it is a pity that sf, the most eclectic of literatures, has lumbered itself with only one; like having your house designed by Richard Rogers and buying the furnishings at Laura Ash-

## Interaction

ley. I realize, too, that books with these covers sell and that publishers may be wary of more experimental approaches.

But what about *Interzone*? Would you be prepared to drop your Monthly Cover Spaceship in favour of, for instance, one of Dave McKean's hallucinatory collages? The interior illustrations have picked up a bit in recent months, but they still tend to be rather literal, and seem to be used only as fillers or decoration. There must be hundreds of young illustrators who would be glad to provide a bit of variety to your pages. Your readers seem happy for you to take literary risks perhaps you could begin to do the same with visuals?

Philip Reeve  
*Brighton*

Dear Editors:

Patrick Parrinder's article on the copyright mess (*IZ* 104) was interesting, although I'm not sure that he is right to blame it on the Beatles; as I understand it the genesis of the change to a 70-year period of copyright within the European Union was from another part of the pop world entirely...

However he is right in this instance to lay blame on the lawyers and accountants who will cream off most of the financial benefits, although there are – as is usual in these cases – enough problem areas to mean that not all copyright lawyers are satanic figures. I remember reading about the number of unauthorized "Snoopy" figures which make money for people other than Charles Schulz, and the reference to the Beatles might be due to the fact that their marketing rights were signed away for very small sums

indeed compared to the fortunes that were made for other people. But these have very little to do with printed books and stories, which is our particular cause for concern, and Patrick is right to be worried about the harmonization of copyright, particularly as those voices which usually rant about totalitarian European Union directives about the shape of carrots or the ingredients of ice cream have been conspicuously silent on this one.

The rationale, as I have seen it, for the term of copyright extending after a period of the author's death is usually justified by supposing a hypothetical writer who dies at the age of 25 leaving a wife and three small children just before his book becomes a bestseller. Clearly, in such cases, the interests of the author's dependents need to be protected. But there is a moot point whether these interests should extend into a second or third adult generation. As for how far the contents of the book are protected: well, we have at the moment the concept of the "authorized" or "unauthorized" biography in which the life-story of an individual may be written about by anyone who wishes to undertake it, subject only to the libel laws and the fact that a biographer who does not have the cooperation of the subject will have to balance the special insight cooperation gives against the freedom to cover areas which the subject might not wish to see exposed. It has been suggested, not altogether frivolously, I'm afraid, that the biography of a person consists of a kind of story in which that person holds copyright, but so far it remains possible (subject to the libel laws, as I've said, which is another can of worms) for biographies to be written. Sequels, I might argue, should be treated similarly.

Of course, many authors plan their

own sequels, and many books are written in episodic form: the trilogy is perhaps the default form of the fantasy novel. But it could well be possible to suggest a period of time after which a book becomes public domain: if I want to write a sequel to *The Time Machine*, why not? The book stands or falls in the market place on its own account, and if it compares badly to the original will be seen to do so.

The second point is the extension of the copyright period. The Intellectual Property Policy Directorate of the Patent Office issued an interesting consultation paper in December 1994 which explored several possibilities of implementing the EU directive on extending copyright, in particular looking at precisely how this directive could be implemented when copyright of many books has reverted to the public domain. Who exactly is the author's heir in such cases? Looking at Annex E ("Defining persons having acquired rights") to the document, there seems to be an option proposed that revived rights could remain with the general public "on the grounds that once a work has entered the public domain any member of the public has, arguably, acquired the 'right' (in a non-legalistic sense) to use or exploit the work, or at least the legitimate expectation of being able to do so." This seems to have been swept under the carpet. It would be interesting to see someone argue this in the courts but I am afraid that it won't be me.

Copyright after a certain period of time, which is designed to safeguard the interest of writer and dependents, is a monopoly which needs to be examined as we examine other monopolies. It is probably best to look at the difference between "dependents" and "heirs" in this matter, but clearly they are not necessarily the same moral concept. We are approaching a time when securing copyright will become more and more difficult, as those publishers who are exploring the possibilities of electronic publishing are realizing. This is perhaps one of the reasons why there is so much pressure to define and secure the territory while it is still there. Unfortunately, the people who seem to be losing at the moment are the reading public, who are denied access to texts while legal wrangling takes place, and today's writers, who are caught in the middle of a complicated network of legalities. I am sure there are writers out there who look at their contracts with the same dismay as do pop singers — but that, I am afraid, is another story.

#### Andy Sawyer

Librarian, SF Foundation  
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#### Dear Editors:

I thought I'd pen you a note on the strangely-named article "The Great Copyright Plot" by Patrick Parrinder. His own close involvement with H.G. Wells, and the degree to which he attacks the Wells estate specifically, suggests more than anything that he has had a bad experience with them somewhere along the line and is desperately trying to "even the score."

I won't reply to his article point by point, partly because it is not really coherent enough to support such a critique, but I would like to pick out two aspects that seem central to his theme.

Firstly he contends that the reason that Penguin US have published a cheap version of *The Time Machine* and Penguin UK have not is purely down to the copyright laws and the fact that the price difference is caused by the royalty payable to the Wells estate. This is of course nonsense on at least two counts. Firstly, I think most of your authors would be startled to find that the £3.39 per copy price difference was the sort of royalty they might expect from a book! If royalties were the only factor I suspect the price might have to grow to something nearer £1 at most.

Secondly, although Parrinder ignores the fact, there is obviously a world of difference between the "Penguin 60s" promotions in the UK and the US. My initial reaction when I read this was surprise as I could not see how *The Time Machine* (a short novel) could possibly fit in the small-format, 60pp, volumes in question. The answer is of course that it can't — the US book is actually a 92-page trade paperback (according to *Locus*) and hence physically dissimilar to the UK promotion. As the physical presentation is key to that promotion, it is clear that there would be no place for the US volume in the UK.

Indeed, the suggestion that the edition was excluded from the UK promotion simply because it was in copyright

completely fails to explain the fact that most of the titles in the original promotion were still in copyright, and that Phoenix (the UK publishers of *The Time Machine*) did actually publish an extract (all the format allows) of the book in their own 60p collection published last month.

The second point I object to is his rather disingenuous argument that equates the use of characters and settings from another author's books (as his second page of discussion opens) with the use of another author's ideas (as the discussion ends), clearly attempting to use the latter to justify the former. This again is clearly nonsense.

Parrinder's argument might be justifiable if the Wells estate were objecting to, say, Harrison's *The Technicolor Time Machine*, because it used the concept of a time machine first created (they might argue) by H.G. Wells. However, this is not the case. What Steve Baxter has done (very skilfully) is to write a very close sequel to the original book that re-uses characters, settings and even scenes from the book. This is something I feel an author (or his estate) deserves some control over.

I would challenge anyone, for example, to suggest that it would be "right" for another author to start publishing Discworld books without Terry Pratchett's permission and involvement. Terry has spent a lot of time, effort and skill building up that world and delivering a consistent high quality (witness the *Interzone* reviews of each volume) to his readers. If allowed to, Elmer T. Hack would love to "cash in" on that and it is undoubtably that, if he did, his revenues would be unfairly enhanced and Terry's would suffer.

There are ludicrous aspects of copyright and trademark law, but they are not the ones Parrinder cites, I am disappointed that you decided to publish such an ill-thought-out piece.

Phil Stephensen-Payne  
Leeds, W. Yorks.

## Bob Shaw, 1931-1996

We were extremely saddened to hear of the death of Bob Shaw on 11th February (as we were finalizing this issue). He died of cancer, just two days after returning from America and less than two months after his wedding there to second wife Nancy Tucker. He was 64, and had three children by his first marriage. As well as being a fine writer, Bob was one of the most popular individuals on the British SF scene.

As John Clute wrote in his *Guardian* obituary (17th February 1996), "Those who knew Shaw — and many hundreds of his readers had met him — loved him. He never

said a cruel word. He was extremely funny, deeply kind, visibly decent. He was too much-loved to fade easily."

Among his best novels were *The Palace of Eternity* (1969), *Orbitsville* (1975), *A Wreath of Stars* (1976), *Vertigo* (1978; republished in 1991 as *Terminal Velocity*) and the trilogy beginning with *The Ragged Astronauts* (1986). Among his most praised short stories were "Light of Other Days" (1966) — long optioned for film or TV: let us hope a production now goes ahead — and "Dark Night in Toyland" (1988). We were proud to publish the latter in *Interzone* (issue 26). Farewell, Bob.

Three years have passed since the collapse of the Tower of Pisa, but only now can I accept the crucial role that I played in the destruction of this unique landmark. Over twenty tourists died as the thousands of tons of marble lost their grasp on the air and collapsed to the ground. Among them was my wife Elaine, who had climbed to the topmost tier and was looking down at me when the first visible crack appeared in the tower's base. Never were tragedy and triumph so intimately joined, as if Elaine's pride in braving the worn and slippery stairs had been punished by the unseen forces that had sustained this unbalanced mass of masonry for so many centuries.

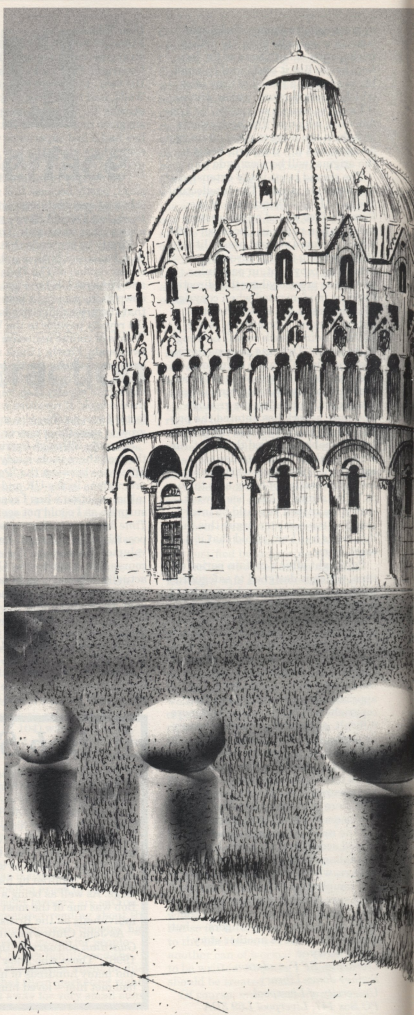
I realize now that another element – farce – was present on that day. By chance a passing tourist on the steps of the cathedral had taken a photograph of the tower as the crack reached the third floor and a tell-tale section of cornice began its fall to earth. The photograph, endlessly published throughout the world, clearly shows the four startled tourists on the uppermost deck. Three of them are leaning back on their heels, hands raised to grip the sky, aware that the ancient campanile has moved under their feet.

Elaine, alone, has already seized the rail, and is staring at the grass waiting for her nearly two hundred feet below. Using a magnifying glass, one can see that, true to her quirky and mocking character, she shows almost no alarm. Her eyes have noticed the falling cornice, and I like to think that she is already planning to sue the municipality of Pisa for neglecting the safety of its tourists, and is collecting evidence that in due course she will present to her lawyers.

The dozen or so tourists visible on the lower floors are still making their way around its canted decks, groping past the narrow columns as they climb the 300 steps to the roof. A father and his young daughter wave to the tourists below them, two Italian sailors in uniform play the fool for their girl-friends, feigning an attack of giddiness, and an elderly couple pause to rest after climbing to the first floor, determined to complete the ascent. None of them sees the falling cornice and the fine cascade of powdered mortar.

The only figure on the ground who is aware of the imminent catastrophe is a man in a white jacket and panama hat who stands at the foot of the tower, both hands raised to the marble flank. His face is hidden, but his arms are braced against the shifting stone, his back arched above his straining legs. We can see that in his desperate way he is trying to hold upright the collapsing tower that is about to obliterate him.

Or so everyone assumes. The newspaper caption writers, the commentators on TV documentaries, all commend the bravery of this solitary figure. Surprisingly, he has never been identified, and neither his hat nor his white jacket were found in the mountain of rubble that was



# The Dying Fall

*J. G. Ballard*



Illustrations by SMS

later removed, stone by stone, from the unhappy site.

But was he trying to support the tower or, rather, helping it on its way? I, of course, can answer the question, since I am the man in the panama hat, the husband at whom Elaine, in the last moments of her life, so triumphantly stares.

Needless to say, I fled to safety, running through the dust and the shrieking tourists as the ground trembled and a cataract of masonry fell from the air. A vast cloud of pulverized marble enveloped the square, and I remember stumbling past the horror-stricken waiters and taxi-drivers who gazed at this field of devastation – not only had the tower vanished, but it had taken their livelihoods with it. Had they known that I was responsible they would have lynched me on the spot, and to this day I have kept silent, still gripped by my guilt over so many deaths, all but one of them entirely innocent.

In a sense the destruction of the tower was inscribed days beforehand in our unhappy tour of Tuscany. Our marriage, problematic from the start, had grown increasingly fraught during the previous year. Elaine had married me on the rebound, to spite an unfaithful lover, but soon decided that her husband, a classics lecturer at a minor university, was minor in all other respects. I was losing my students in a ferment of curriculum changes that would eventually lead to the descheduling of Latin and Greek and their replacement by cultural and media studies. My refusal to sue the university, Elaine decided, was a sign of my innate weakness, a frailty that soon extended to the marriage bed.

Claiming that our union was unconsummated, she consulted a solicitor with a view to divorcing me, but was persuaded to make a last effort to save the relationship. Our marriage became a series of negotiated truces, in which I would yield more and more territory. Still hoping to salvage something, and return to the few weeks of happiness we had known after the wedding, I suggested a holiday in Italy. I had arranged to give three lectures at the University of Florence, which would pay for our air fares, and then we would be free to enjoy ourselves in the Tuscan countryside.

Elaine agreed, but only grudgingly – her first husband had been a modernist architect, and she always claimed to dislike the past, the territory I had made my own, and pretended to prefer California and Texas. But soon after we landed at Pisa airport and took the train to Florence her interest in the Italian renaissance revived in a way that I found almost mysterious. Once I had given my lectures she threw us into a hectic round of tourist activities. Tirelessly she insisted on visiting every church and baptistry, every museum and cathedral. I was puzzled by this passion

for the past until I realized that our visits to these historic sites had exposed yet another of my weaknesses.

As we took the creaking lift to the dome of Florence cathedral Elaine discovered that I was afraid of heights, a fear that I had never noticed in myself but which she immediately set out to maximize. Unsettled by the looming space below the dome, I could barely force myself from the lift. My eyes seemed unwilling to focus on the curving walls, and I felt my heart-beat fall away, leaving me on the edge of a fainting fit.

Gesticulating to Elaine, I refused to follow her around the narrow gallery. Scarcely able to breathe, I waited as she proudly circled the dome, calling to me in a insistent voice that embarrassed me in front of the other tourists. Yet as we left the cathedral she became strangely solicitous, holding my arm in a concerned and reassuring way. Far from deriding me, she seemed genuinely alarmed by my moment of panic.

Despite this show of affection, I soon noticed that our tour of Tuscany had become a series of vertical ascents. No battlement existed that we did not scale, no worn steps that we did not climb. At the Palazzo Vecchio, under the pretext of showing me the spec-

tacular view over the city, she forced me to lean through the very windows from which Lorenzo de Medici had suspended the strangled plotters against his rule. I saw Siena cathedral from the roof down, almost breathing my last in the confined bell-tower. And all the while Elaine would watch me with her affectionate and lingering smile, like an older sister observing a timid sibling. Was she trying to cure me of my fear of heights, or to rub in my sense of my own inadequacy?

A climax of sorts came at San Gimignano, that surrealist township of towers constructed during the 14th century by rival families within this independent city state. As Elaine moved tirelessly from one tower to the next, I retreated

to a café beside the cathedral with its macabre images of hell. All afternoon she gazed at the towers, admiring these symbols of an erect masculinity of which her husband was incapable, then sat beaming at me as the tourist coach carried us to Florence.

Three days later, when we arrived in Pisa for our London flight, I had been routed by Elaine's campaign. We were both eager to return to England, I to the safety of my university office, she to her solicitor. We had packed in silence, and reached Pisa airport with two hours to spare before our flight. Inevitably we found ourselves taking a taxi into the city. Reading from her guide-book, Elaine described the baptistry and cathedral in glowing terms, but I knew that our





real destination was the nearby campanile, this marble phallus that seemed to excite her even more than the towers of San Gimignano.

I stepped from the taxi and stared up at the dizzying structure with its dangerously canted floors. Without a word, Elaine strode away from me towards the tower. She paid her entrance fee and began to climb the steps behind two uniformed sailors and a father with his daughter. As she reached each tier she looked down at me with her affectionate but knowing smirk, her contempt rising with each successive storey.

I stood on the cathedral steps, still surprised by the steep inclination of the tower, some 17 feet from the vertical. Despite myself, I wished that the structure, tilting each year by a few added millimetres, would decide on this exact moment for its long-predicted collapse.

Then, as Elaine reached the penultimate tier, I found myself needing to touch the tower, to feel the unforgiving marble against my skin. I left the cathedral and walked across the worn grass where the tourists sat in the sun, waving to their friends high above them. Ignoring the ticket office, I strolled around the stone wall that surrounded the tower. I placed my hand on the antique marble, its surface pitted with the graffiti of centuries, its veins as marmoreal as fossilized time. The tower was both too erect and too old. I pressed against the massive flank, urging it on its way.

Eight storeys above me, Elaine had reached the roof and stood beside the panting sailors. Scarcely out of breath, she seized the iron rail and smiled down at me in her most implacable way, slowly shaking her head at my weakness.

Angered by her open contempt, I pushed again at the solid marble. The wall refused to yield, but when I lifted my hand I noticed that a small crack had appeared in the surface, running away from a discoloured node of crushed limestone. Curious, I pressed again, only to see that the crack had widened. It inched upwards at a barely visible pace, then darted forward, climbing the wall like a sudden fissure in a sheet of ice. Three feet long, it crossed a decorative moulding and rose swiftly towards the cornice of the first tier.

Laughing at this, I pressed both hands at the marble drum. Immediately the crack accelerated, and I heard a distant rumble, the dark groan of an awakening creature deep within the tower. The crack was now an open fissure through which I could see the shoes of the startled old man resting before he and his wife made their way to the second storey. A fine rain of dust and crumbling mortar showered my face. The entire tower was trembling against my hands, and a section of cornice fell through the air, followed by a

scatter of fragments each larger than my fist.

The Tower of Pisa was about to fall. I gave it one last push, both arms outstretched, and felt the tortured rumbling as somewhere the spine of this great edifice began to crack. I stepped back, aware that the building was about to collapse onto me, and then looked up at the roof, where Elaine was clinging to the iron rail.

The tower buckled, its columns spilling like skittled pins at a bowling alley. In the last moments, as Elaine was pitched over the rail, I saw her face falling towards me, and an expression of anger that unmistakably changed, as she noticed me far below her, to one of triumph.



A second Tower of Pisa is now rising on the site of the first, financed by the world-wide appeal launched soon after the tragedy. The structure, this time mounted on an immovable concrete base, has reached the third storey and already reveals the modest inclination designed into it. This tower, supported by a rigid steel armature, will never fall, and within a few decades most visitors will have forgotten that it is no more than a replica.

For me, though, the original tower remains as real as ever in my mind. I often wake from terrifying dreams as the tons of marble hurtle towards me. Then I remind myself that it was Elaine who died on that day. I remember the expression on

her face, the fierce pride that lit her eyes.

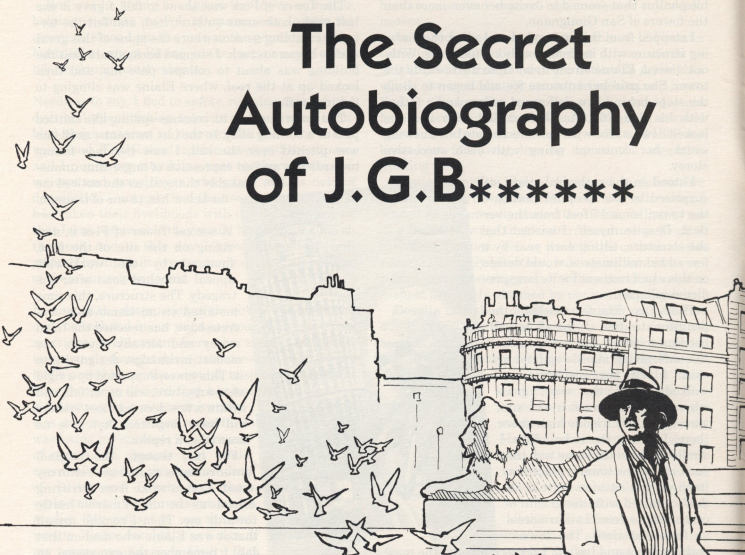
Did she feel that she had at last triumphed over me, and was happy to see me crushed by the cascade of tumbling columns? I remember the stones pelting my shoulders while I tried vainly to step back from the tower. At the last moment, as an amateur video-film reveals, the structure seemed to buckle, twisting itself in a desperate attempt to remain upright. It slewed away from me, sweeping Elaine, the collapsing masonry and the cartwheeling columns towards the ground by the cathedral steps.

I escaped, but that expression of triumph on Elaine's face still puzzles me. Had she seen me pushing against the tower and assumed that I was responsible for its collapse? Was she proud of me for hating her so fiercely, and for at last stirring from my impotence to take my revenge? Perhaps only in her death did we truly come together, and the Tower of Pisa served a purpose for which it had waited for so many centuries.

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J. G. Ballard last appeared in *Interzone* with "The Message from Mars" (issue 58, April 1992). Another story of his, "Report from an Obscure Planet," appeared almost simultaneously in an international magazine called *Leonardo* (April 1992). The above new piece is the first short story he has written since then.

# The Secret Autobiography of J.G.B\*\*\*\*\*



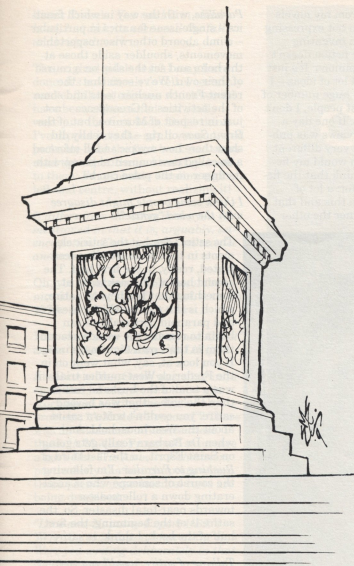
On waking one morning, B was surprised to see that Shepperton was deserted. He entered the kitchen at nine o'clock, annoyed to find that neither his post nor the daily newspapers had been delivered, and that a power failure prevented him from preparing his breakfast. He spent an hour staring at the melting ice that dripped from his refrigerator, and then went next door to complain to his neighbour.

Surprisingly, his neighbour's house was empty. His car stood in the drive, but the entire family – husband, wife, children and dog – had disappeared. Even more odd, the street was filled by an unbroken silence. No traffic moved along the nearby motorway, and not a single aircraft flew overhead towards London Airport. B crossed the road and knocked on several empty doors. Through the windows he could see the empty interiors. Nothing in this peaceful suburb was out of place, except for its missing tenants.

Thinking that perhaps some terrible calamity was imminent – a nuclear catastrophe, or a sudden epidemic after a research laboratory accident – and that by some unfortunate mishap he alone had not been warned, B returned home and switched on his transistor radio. The apparatus worked, but all the stations were silent, the continental transmitters as well

as those of the United Kingdom. Disconcerted, B returned to the street and gazed at the empty sky. It was a calm, sun-filled day, crossed by peaceful clouds that gave no hint of any natural disaster.

B took his car and drove to the centre of Shepperton. The town was deserted, and none of the shops was open. A train stood in the station, empty and without any of the passengers who regularly travelled to London. Leaving Shepperton, B crossed the Thames to the nearby town of Walton. There again he found the streets completely silent. He stopped in front of the house owned by his friend P, whose car was parked in her drive. Using the spare key that he carried, he unlocked the front door and entered the house. But even as he called her name he could see that there was no trace of the young woman. She had not slept



in her bed. In the kitchen the melting ice of the refrigerator had formed a large pool on the floor. There was no electric power, and the telephone was dead.

Resuming his journey, B systematically explored the neighbouring towns, circling them all as he approached central London. He was no longer surprised to find the huge metropolis totally deserted. He drove down an empty Piccadilly, crossed Trafalgar Square in silence and parked outside the unguarded Buckingham Palace. As dusk fell he decided to return to Shepperton. He had almost run out of fuel and was forced to break into a filling station. However, no policemen were out on patrol or in their stations. He left behind him an immense city plunged into darkness, where the only lights were the reflections of his headlamps.

B passed a disturbed night, with the radio mute beside his bed. But when he woke to another luminous morning his confidence returned. After an initial doubt, he was relieved to see that Shepperton was still deserted. The food within his refrigerator had begun to rot; he needed fresh provisions and a means of cooking for himself. He drove into Shepperton, broke a window of the supermarket and collected several cartons of canned meat and vegetables, rice and sugar. In the hardware store he found a paraffin

stove, and look it home with a tin of fuel. Water no longer flowed in the mains, but he estimated that the contents of the roof cistern would last him a week or more. Further forays to the local stores furnished him with a supply of candles, torches and batteries.

In the following week B made several expeditions to London. He returned to the houses and flats of his friends, but found them empty. He broke into Scotland Yard and the newspaper offices in Fleet Street, in the hope of finding some explanation for the disappearance of an entire population. Lastly, he entered the Houses of Parliament, and stood in the silent debating chamber of the Commons, breathing the stale air. However, there was not the least explanation anywhere of what had taken place. In the streets of the city he saw not a single cat or dog. It was only when he visited London Zoo that he found that the birds still remained within their cages. They seemed delighted to see B, but flew off with famished cries when he unlocked the bars.

So at least he had a kind of companionship. During the next month, and throughout the summer, B continued his preparations for survival. He drove as far north as Birmingham without seeing a soul, then drove down to the south coast and followed the road from Brighton to Dover. Standing on the cliffs, he gazed at the distant shoreline of France. In the marina he chose a motor-boat with a full tank of fuel, and set out across the calm sea, now free of the customary pleasure-craft, petroleum tankers and cross-channel ferries. At Calais he wandered for an hour through the deserted streets, and in the silent shops listened in vain to telephones that never replied. Then he retraced his steps to the port and returned to England.

When the summer was followed by a mild autumn, B had established a pleasant and comfortable existence for himself. He had abundant stocks of tinned food, fuel and water with which to survive the winter. The river was nearby, clear and free of all pollution, and petrol was easy to obtain, in unlimited quantities, from the filling stations and parked cars. At the local police station he assembled a small armoury of pistols and carbines, to deal with any unexpected menace that might appear.

But his only visitors were the birds, and he scattered handfuls of rice and seeds on the lawn of his garden and on those of his former neighbours. Already he had begun to forget them, and Shepperton soon became an extraordinary aviary, filled with birds of every species.

Thus the year ended peacefully, and B was ready to begin his true work.

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J. G. Ballard wrote the above piece in 1981 for a French small-press magazine. It subsequently appeared in English in the poetry magazine *Ambit* (Spring 1984), but has not been reprinted since. As it is our favourite "vignette" of his, we thought it well worth reintroducing to readers here.

DP: You must have given hundreds, if not thousands, of interviews by now. So how do you feel about doing them after 30 years' worth?

JGB: I'm happy to do interviews. Part of the reason is that I do fair bit of book-reviewing... In fact, I have this collection of my reviews of the last 30 years, *A User's Guide to the Millennium*, just out; and one reason I was never enthusiastic about seeing them collected until now was because they're all very reactive – I'm reacting to other people's ideas and imaginations, and never really giving my own original notions. Whereas in interviews, of course, I can actually say what I think – not what I think about somebody else. If you want to see what I think about a large number of topics, look at the *Re/Search* book that came out ten years ago [*Re/Search: J. G. Ballard*, edited by Andrea Juno and Vale, *Re/Search* Publications, San Francisco, 1984]. Look at the conversations I had with Vale and Juno, or the interviews I've done with you and others. So, I'm quite happy to fly the latest kites; I always seem to have one or two kites to put up into the air.

One reviewer of the *Re/Search* book, referring to the very long interview in there, said that "the interview is eminently Ballard's medium." What do you think of a remark like that?

As opposed to my fiction, he means? Well, one can be totally explicit in an interview, say what one thinks about anything. I can give you my views on everything from the Common Market Agricultural Policy, to the future of NATO, to the Impressionist display at the Metropolitan Museum in New York, but to weave those topics into fiction would be difficult to do. Fiction is something quite other than mere opinion. In my interviews I express my opinions;

that's very different from my novels and short stories – I'm not expressing my opinions there, I'm inventing imaginary worlds. My fiction doesn't constitute a body of opinions. It's just that I've always had a lot of ideas – I know *nothing* about a huge number of topics! – and, like most people, I don't mind airing my views. If one day a book of collected interviews was published, it would give a very different impression of me than would my fiction. But I prefer to think that the fiction is what I'm here for: a lot of saloon-bar opinions on this and that are neither one thing nor the other.



Photo: Declan O'Neill

Some readers expected your last novel, *Rushing to Paradise*, to be full of "opinions" – because of the way it was blurred and trailed, as "anti-feminist" and "anti-Green movement"...

It's a gentle satire at the expense of the extremist fringes of the feminist and Green movements – but that's well overdue, isn't it? I have two daughters who have benefited enormously from the advances of the feminist movement of the last 30 years. They wouldn't be doing the jobs they are doing now, had they been in my generation when they were setting out on their careers. So, I support mainstream, middle-of-the-road feminism. But I was concerned, in *Rushing to*

*Paradise*, with the way in which fanatics – single-issue fanatics in particular – climb aboard otherwise respectable movements, shoulder aside those at the helm and set the ship on a course of their own. We've seen that: the recent French nuclear tests and some of the activities of Greenpeace – not just in respect of Mururoa, but of the *Brent Spar* oil rig – they really did show there how myopic and ill-informed a so-called environmental group with its finger on the pulse can be.

I think some people might disagree with the word "gentle"!

The satire? Yes, but the satirical elements in that book are all concentrated, really, in the first half. The second half of the book looks at something that lies beyond satire, which is the way in which obsessive and paranoid personalities can begin to remake the worlds around them in their own nightmare image. If you look at, say, what went on in the Frederick West murder trial – it was a trial of the husband rather than the wife – that was beyond satire: you couldn't write a satire about the West household. And when Dr Barbara really gets going on Saint Esprit, in the last third of *Rushing to Paradise*, I'm following the course of someone who is accelerating down a rollercoaster towards near-total disaster. So, the satire is at the beginning; the first half of the book, I think, is satire.

Talking of satire, would you say *Swift's Gulliver's Travels* has ever been an influence on you?

Yes, I'm sure it has. The first book in particular – enormously, I would think. That plus *The Ancient Mariner* are practically the foundation-stones of everything I've written. *The Tempest* also, for some peculiar reason, is a big influence on me; and *Robinson Crusoe*. Those are very important books – *Gulliver*, *Crusoe*, even the *Alice* books to some extent. One reads them at a very early age, and they shape one's view of what I would call the world of "alternative" fiction: non-naturalistic fiction that creates a parallel world which comments on our own. *The Tempest* is rather different, and *The Ancient Mariner* for that matter; but yes, they all certainly were big influences on me – much more than anything else. I can't think of anything else... the *Arabian Nights* tales, possibly.

The others have all been mentioned fairly frequently by critics (well, maybe not *The Arabian Nights*), and by yourself, in commenting on your work; but I don't recall many mentions of Gul-

J.G. Ballard  
interviewed by  
David Pringle

liver's Travels. You read it in childhood, but did you ever read the full unabridged text?

The original adult text? I may have done; it's so difficult to tell. I certainly read childhood editions which would have been abbreviated and really were just the first book. But I think I've dipped into the adult version, and probably read the first book and skim-read the other three. I must go back to them: I'm probably stealing right, left and centre, without realizing it!

*It differs from the other books you mentioned in that it is, arguably, science fiction. There is satire on science and scientists there...*

Oh, yes. Sunbeams from cucumbers – nice idea, that. That's very sf. A touch of *The Crystal World* in there...

*Your short story "The Drowned Giant" was a "take" on Gulliver in Lilliput...*

Absolutely. Yes, Swift was a big influence; and, of course, you know the story about solving the Irish baby problem, "A Modest Proposal"? There was an enormous influence there. I think "A Modest Proposal" saturates a book like *The Atrocity Exhibition*, particularly the last chapters where those pseudo-experimental tests are being described.

*"Love and Napalm: Export USA"? Were you conscious of that at the time? Were you writing deliberately in that Swiftian tradition?*

No, because I wasn't mimicking Swift's style or approach. But the notion of taking an utterly extreme and preposterous idea and treating it in a straight-faced way lies behind "Plan for the Assassination of Jacqueline Kennedy" and the Reagan story. All those weird laboratory tests that I set up – in which housewives were being shown atrocity footage – sounded, at the time, almost pornographic... They've done all that subsequently; it's absolutely bizarre! There's hardly a thing I invented there that hasn't actually occurred in research labs in the last 20 years. Because, of course, the tendencies I was satirizing in those pieces were the tendencies of scientists – particularly in the so-called soft sciences – no longer to take their subject matter from nature but to invent it themselves. This is where science and pornography begin to move on a collision course. Yes, Swift was a big influence; I mean, I hope he was; I would love to have been influenced by Swift in a positive way.

*Would you object to the word "satire" being used in connection with books like Crash, Concrete Island and High-Rise?*

# "Think of Ocean Liners, Art Deco Hotels, Midnight Blue Skies"



I don't think there's much satire in those, is there? What would I be satirizing? A slight hint of it in *High-Rise*; but none in *Crash*, I wouldn't have thought. But it's a long time since I read that ... I haven't read *Crash* since I read the proof, so I have scarcely any idea what it's really like any more. I'd probably be appalled if I read it.

*On the whole, I agree with your famously broad conception of science fiction – the idea that it takes in books like Gulliver's Travels and Crash...*

Well, I've been pushing it hard for years. I thought your comparison in *Interzone* of the western and science fiction was interesting ("Interface," *IZ* 99). I largely agreed with it. Where I would disagree is ... the difference is that the original west that inspired the western no longer exists, whereas, of course, science and technology are continually transforming the landscape in which we live. Were the 1940s and 1950s sf writers still working today – the people of the Sturgeon generation – their fiction (which was largely a naturalistic fiction, if you like, compared with today's out-and-out fantasy) would be filled with the world of microprocessors and PCs and e-mail and fax machines and the internet and all the rest of it. Science and technology are continually remaking the world, so they offer the writer a fresh inspiration, which the west, the actual west of the United States of America, no longer does because that world has vanished – I'm sure they round up their cattle using jeeps now. But I think you're right, in the sense that if one looks at *genre sf* (I haven't read very much, so I ought to keep my mouth shut, though ignorance has never deterred me from giving an opinion), it is for the most part out of touch with these developments in science and technology, it is dominated by formulas and conventions, and it has exhausted itself.

This was my objection to American sf in the 1950s and 1960s when I first started out, that it was trapped by its own formulas and was no longer responding to the actual changing environment in which we lived – which was just as full of scientific imagery as anything in *Astounding SF*, but which *Astounding* ignored. My impression of reading *Astounding*, later *Analog*, back in the 50s and 60s, was that the contemporary world that existed outside the pages of the magazine hardly ever crossed the threshold into it, except by a very roundabout route. It was all set in Campbell's invented future about a hundred years from now, on space stations and all that kind of

thing, whereas incredible changes were taking place in the world of the 1950s, which I, in my small way, was trying to track and respond to imaginatively. The world we live in now began in the late 1940s and 1950s: almost every element in our world today, with the exception of things like the internet, was being laid down then – jet travel, the consumer society, the motorway landscape, advanced new drugs, the TV and communications landscape. It was all being laid down then, but you didn't get any sense of excitement in that world, in the writers' minds, reading *Analog*. So I think your thesis is right, actually, in respect of *genre sf*.



*I was referring to the labelled product, rather than the wider field. But your broader definition of sf ties in with a book called Ultimate Island by Nicholas Ruddick, a critical study of British science fiction. It's intelligent, and Ruddick praises your work and H. G. Wells's. Taking the long view, he talks about the "island" motif, which he traces through British sf from its very beginnings, from Thomas More's Utopia in the 16th century. Much of it is set on islands, or uses islands metaphorically, from Utopia to Gulliver's Travels to The Island of Dr Moreau – to Concrete Island. And this book was published a year or more before you brought out Rushing to Paradise, set on yet another island! I noticed some of the reviewers of your novel used words like "utopian" and "Wellsian." So, although it wasn't labelled sf, all this suggests you're still in the area...*

Sure, fair enough: in the larger area. These are hypothetical arguments – you know, "how many angels dance on the head of a pin? Are they doing the bossanova or the tango?" If we could imagine *genre science fiction* not existing I think you would find that there would be a category of imaginative fiction that was interested in the contemporary world, filled with imagery of a scientific and technological nature taken from that world. I think it's that, in a way, that I've always been writing. Sometimes I needed to write *genre sf* in order to make a larger point, because after all I began in the 1950s and 1960s when it was extremely difficult, even in Carnell's magazines, to get over the barriers. Carnell, for example, did not at first want to accept "The Terminal Beach," and it had been turned down by quite a number of American magazines. I hadn't been able to place it anywhere; but after the success of *The Drowned World*, Gollancz brought out a collection, *The Four-Dimensional Nightmare*, and then they said "let's do another one if you haven't got a novel" – and I had this story, "The Terminal Beach," which I'd not placed anywhere in the States, and Carnell was sitting on it: I don't think he knew what to do with it, it didn't fit...

You've got to remember, there had been no New Wave: I get interviewed by youngsters who think that science fiction is the most wonderful medium there is because it's so open, you can do anything with it. They don't realize that back in the late 1950s, 40 years ago, or in the 1960s even, the doors were closed to experiment of almost any kind. I've said this many times: editors were very suspicious of stories set in the present day. I used to get letters from people like Cele Goldsmith – because I got quite a few stories rejected, you know – saying "maybe if you set it in the future this idea would be OK." They were very nervous of the *genre conventions* being dismantled in any way; if somebody removed a plank the ship might start to sink. People think now that *sf* is wonderfully open, you can write anything, a fiction inspired by William Burroughs and Kafka at one end, Gibson at the other, taking in Ray Bradbury on the way, or anything else you like, but that wasn't the case. Carnell sat on "The Terminal Beach," and when I told him that Gollancz were going to publish it, he said, "OK, I'll publish it first in *New Worlds*," which he did. So I am trying to say that I needed to use the *genre conventions* in the early days simply to get the stuff published, smuggling in my own little ideas as I did so. Gradually, of course, things opened out, particularly when Mike Moorcock took over *New Worlds*; then

I could write something much closer to what I wanted to write. But, funnily enough, writing within the genre conventions is good discipline.

*You're not the first writer to have mixed feelings about sf as a genre. H.G. Wells was approached by the early sf magazines, by editors like Earnshaw, but he brushed them off.*

Yes, I'm sure. I don't have reservations of that sort about genre sf, because I used to write it myself. I've always been proud to be called a science-fiction writer because I really do believe that sf is the true literature of our day. All I would say ... it sounds silly, but in a way the trouble with science fiction is that the wrong people have written it. It has largely been written by American commercial writers who weren't interested in expanding the possibilities of the genre at all; quite the opposite. They were like a successful small family business that doesn't replace its machinery because it happens to have a monopoly of its self-defined market. Some little firm in Yorkshire that makes a special kind of biscuit or fire-extinguisher which is successfully exported all over the world – why change it? Go on cranking out these rather dull biscuits or not very efficient fire-extinguishers as long as you can sell them, even though the actual market for these products is comparatively small. It's very difficult to shake a long-established small business that has turned its back on change, very difficult to shake it from its complacency. Genre sf was rather like that. But it's an historical accident. The problem is that most people from a literary background have no training in science whatsoever and have never been interested in science, or even in popularized science, which is really the subject matter of sf. There are very few English literary figures who've been interested in science, in the way that, say, Aldous Huxley was – Huxley was intensely interested, Auden I think too. If you read Auden's poetry, in particular the plays he wrote with Isherwood, they're filled with scientific imagery of all kinds.

*Talking of science, someone pointed out recently that in the 1960s you wrote a lot of short reviews of scientific books in the journal Chemistry and Industry...*

I went semi-freelance in something like 1961, when I'd been working at *Chemistry and Industry* for about three years. I went in on a two-day-a-week basis, and all those reviews were written in the office. They weren't reviews comparable to the ones that I've written since; they

were just notices that summarized recent books. They were merely reviews written from the blurbs – because the blurbs on these scientific textbooks are good, you know. So none of them was paid for, and none of them was in any sense a literary effort except, I think, for one on a book about dreams, where I felt free to offer my own opinions.



*Continuing to work in that area, if only part time, having these books pass through your hands, you must have been reading a fair amount of science and technology, up until 1964 at least. Did that serve to "ground" your imagination at that time?*

Of course. Remember, I read medicine for a couple of years, and at school I'd taken the then-equivalent of A-levels in science subjects. When I went to work at *Chemistry and Industry* I already had this science background, and as I've said elsewhere the offices of a scientific magazine are a wonderful information crossroads because every scientific organization in the world remotely connected to the subject in hand bombards you with a stream of publications, newsletters, leaflets, brochures, reports of conferences. I just devoured this material, it was wonderful ... because *Chemistry and Industry* covered everything from the pharmaceutical field to nuclear science. The material that arrived, which I would scan as a matter of routine, looking for news items, was rich in a hundred and one subjects.

But what I think of as the biggest change in my fiction is the fact that

I've stopped writing short stories, simply because there isn't really a market any more. Most magazines – yours is a rare exception – don't want fiction over 3,000 words. I hardly ever wrote a short story in less than 5,000 words, and many of mine were in the 7,000-to-10,000 range, where you begin to get the dimensions of a novel, or of a much longer sort of narrative. It's a long time since I wrote a

10,000-word short story; the market for those, as far as I know, is non-existent now. It means that I've no alternative, really, to writing novels; and of course many of these novels that I've written recently would have been long short stories 20 or 30 years ago. I think *Rushing to Paradise* would probably have been a long short story, slightly reminiscent of ... what was that one set in the Amazon jungles? "A Question of Re-Entry" ... vaguely reminiscent of that, a similar sort of central character (a man in the case of the short story). I think my river novel, *The Day of Creation*, would have been a long short story. It's possible that the novel I've just finished now would have been a short story. I don't mean that these novels aren't authentic novels – they are, clearly – but I didn't write many novels, really, until 1970. I'd been at it for quite a while, but I think I'd written three novels by 1970 – three novels in 15 years...

*Four, if you count The Wind from Nowhere!*

Well, we'll leave that out: that *should* have been done as a short story! The writer has to work within the constraints and conventions imposed upon him. The death of the short-story market is something I regret. I always felt I had a bit of a flair for short stories.

*I think you overstate the death of the short-story market. Brian Aldiss, for example, has had a couple of short-story collections out lately. If you look at the credits, his stories appear all over the place – original anthologies, strange magazines...*

Has he? Good for him. How is he, by the way? Is he well?

*Very well, when I saw him in August, at the World SF Convention in Glasgow.*

That's good, because he's 70 now, isn't he? That's excellent. I was terribly sorry to hear about John Brunner's death – that must have been a shock for everybody, including his wife, poor woman... Of course, he was much younger than Brian; he was younger than I am. A stroke – tragic. I get the

impression that he'd been very unhappy. Talking of markets drying up... as a novelist he'd found his particular market completely gone, hadn't he?

*He was the sort of mid-list genre writer who saw it drying up around him – as opposed to someone like Brian Aldiss, who goes on doing this, that and the other.*

Yes, much more versatile – highly versatile, in fact, Brian: his works cover an enormous range of subjects and topics. I'm glad he's still going strong.

*But the point is that writers like yourself or Aldiss can still get collections published.*

Oh, yes. My last one, *War Fever*, was made up of comparatively recent material. I'm not sure where all those things were published – some in *Ambit*, some in *Interzone*, various places, I can't remember in detail – but the thing about short stories is that one's got to cast one's mind into the short-story writing mode. At the time when I was writing most of my short stories I was thinking almost exclusively in those terms. I was as much a short-story writer as, say, Ray Bradbury was. I didn't think about writing novels; I'd get an idea and think, "that'd make a story!" I'd immediately see an idea in terms of short-story potential; whereas now, with a comparable idea, I think, "yes, I can expand that." I'm thinking in terms of a much larger kind of canvas. Without the ready market, particularly for the longer short story – because 2,000- and 3,000-word stories, some of which I've written lately, are too short, you can't really move inside that sort of length – without the market for the longer short story, there's no point in my casting my mind in that mode. I now think exclusively like a novelist, which is a pity but there we are – I'm 65, I've had a good run for my money. It may be that I'm now writing the sort of novels that I would have written had I never entered the genre of science fiction, if you see what I mean. If I'd begun as a mainstream writer, forced to adapt my particular kind of imagination to the needs and the conventions of the mainstream novel, I would probably have started out with books like *The Day of Creation* and *Rushing to Paradise* – and the novel I've just written.

*So, is the new novel in the same vein as *Rushing to Paradise*?*

Yes, it is. It's not set on a desert island or anything of that kind, but I suppose it's a social critique, in a way, like *Rushing to Paradise*. It's inven-

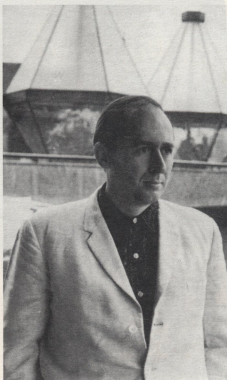
tigative. It's in some respects like my novella *Running Wild*.

*Ah, you're entering the crime field!*

Well, it's subject is crime – crime in its social, and possibly beneficial, roles as a sort of facilitator. I've cast it in the form of what appears to be a murder mystery. It's a crime story in the sense that *Running Wild* was a crime story. But that's just at first sight.

*Have you decided on a title?*

*Cocaine Nights*, and it's to be published in September 1996. My editor, Malcolm Edwards, and HarperCollins like the



J.G. Ballard c. 1970

Photo: Jerry Bauer

title, so I'm happy with it. Think of ocean liners, *art deco* hotels, midnight blue skies...

*If the David Cronenberg film of *Crash* is out by then, it's going to be a busy autumn for you.*

That would be a big help! I think the publishers are alert to that. Shooting was complete on *Crash* in mid-December. I talked to Cronenberg on the phone in late November, and everything seems to have gone very well. He's now editing the footage and they hope to have a print in time for the Cannes Film Festival in May. I hope it will be released in the late summer or autumn, but I have no hard news.

*A final question: Kingsley Amis died recently. I know he helped you in the*

*early part of your career. Do you want to say anything about him?*

I think he rendered great service to the cause of science fiction, with *New Maps of Hell* in 1960. He single-handedly brought a new readership to sf that would have ignored it but for his championing of the genre. He wrote regularly about sf in newspapers and places like the *New Statesman* (which was very influential in those days), and he talked up sf to publishers he knew. He certainly drew Victor Gollancz's attention to *The Drowned World* – in fact, the old boy didn't want to publish it as sf, he thought putting "sf" on its jacket would kill it – but I think Kingsley was right in a way to say otherwise. He rendered great services to the sf field in Britain, and certainly must have drawn a new readership to science fiction. I think his general approach in *New Maps of Hell*, which was that the future of sf lay in the field of social criticism rather than rocketry and space travel (although it was proved false, in that sf didn't move in that direction), was the right approach to take if he was going to draw in the mainstream readers of the *Observer* and the *New Statesman*, who were intrigued by sf if they could place it within an on-going social critique – you know, that modern sf had inherited its most important role from books like *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Brave New World*. That was the right approach to take, actually. Also, he played a very important role in the 60s as an anthologist: he and Robert Conquest, the historian, edited sf anthologies, and these helped to widen the audience for sf, because Amis very carefully picked the sort of stories that would appeal to mainstream readers rather than genre readers.

Later, of course, in the late 60s and 70s, Amis changed, and he became hostile to innovation of any kind. His hostility was exactly the hostility of, say, a jazz enthusiast who likes the trad forms laid down in the 20s and 30s and resents any attempt to enlarge the field – in fact he was a jazz enthusiast in exactly that same way; he loathed any sort of modern jazz, just as he really loathed the *Atrocity Exhibition* stories. He thought I was willfully destroying what talent I had. Of course, he may have been right! Who can say? And from then on, in the 70s, early 80s, he became totally blimpish in respect of sf. I don't think he read sf any more and had no ideas about it that made sense. As I think I said in one of my reviews, which I reread in the new book, he imagined in the 1970s that sf was dominated by writers imitating Robbe-Grillet. In fact the absolute opposite was taking place! But there we are.



# The Widest Windows onto the New:

*At the end of  
the 1960s*

*American sf writer  
and editor Judith*

*Merril left the USA for*

*Canada, donating her large  
collection of books and*

*magazines to Toronto Public*

*Library and giving up all her*

*activities in the sf genre. The  
department she endowed, now*

*known as the Merrill Collection, still  
flourishes (and has a subscription to*

*Interzone!), and Merrill herself still lives*

*in Canada. In 1992 the Canadian*

*magazine Aloud invited Jim Ballard to*

*write a short tribute to Judith Merrill,*

*which we're glad to reprint here.*

## *A Tribute to Judith Merrill*

*J. G. Ballard*

When I visited Toronto in 1987 to give a reading at the International Festival of Authors, I saw Judy for the first time in 20 years. I was delighted to find that she was the same fascinating figure I had got to know in London in the Swinging Sixties: strong-willed and combative, sensitive and astute, quick to quarrel and forgive, the shrewdest judge of fiction, fearless exposé of humbug and pretension and capable of surprising shifts into a positively feline femininity that could be quite disorienting. I'm sorry that she exiled herself from the USA at the height of the Vietnam war, when she might have had some influence for the good on American science fiction during its crucial years of change in the 1970s. And she and I might well have seen more of each other. But the loss to American sf was Toronto's gain.

Judy and I first met in London in 1966, but I'd been well aware of her powerful presence for the previous ten years. Late in 1956, soon after publish-

ing my first short story in a British science-fiction magazine, I heard that the story had been picked by Judy for her anthology of the year's best sf. Thirty-five years later I can still remember the thrill of excitement, the sense of amazement that every novice writer has felt at the first sign of critical approval.

But Judy Merrill, I soon discovered, was no ordinary critic. By the late 1950s science fiction on both sides of the Atlantic was almost totally ossified. Its great days of energy and innovation lay ten years in the past, and already sf was beginning to formula-rize itself and strengthen the ghetto walls that screened it from what was going on in the real world. As I found to my cost when I started submitting stories to the American magazines, the editors and fans were uninterested in science fiction's future but only in its past, in the safe certainties of inter-planetary travel, time machines and a comic-book view of the world that was virtually no advance on the Buck Rogers and Flash Gordon strips that I read as a child in 1930s Shanghai. One American editor alone stood out against this deliberate narrowing of science fiction's imaginative possibilities, and that editor was Judith Merrill.

During the dozen or so years of her *Annual Best Science Fiction*, years that coincided with my apprenticeship as a writer, Judy picked a number of my stories for her anthologies, but I would have devoured those precious volumes if she had never glanced at me. What impressed me about Judy's choice of the year's best short fiction and the copious editorial comments that seemed to place each story on a pedestal of its own, was that she saw sf as part of a larger imaginative world that extended well beyond the borders of the mainstream novel into the realms of politics and philosophy, theatre and the visual arts, psychology and the consumer society. She loved science fiction, as I did, for its energy and sheer gutsy newness, which had all the glitter and excitement of a line of concept cars at a motor-show and she saw that its sometimes naive but always visceral feel for the great issues of the day, for the pulse of change, gave it a range and flexibility that the traditional mainstream novel could rarely match.

More than that, Judy understood that science fiction's popular authority, in film, TV and advertising, allowed it to act like an easily convertible currency,

the agile host at a party who can find the informal links between strangers. In Judy's anthologies avant-garde writers from Michael Moorcock's *New Worlds* rubbed shoulders with Borges and Calvino and science-fiction gaffies like Robert Sheckley. Unlike the realist bourgeois novel, in the imaginative realm over which Judy presided there were no walls but the widest windows onto the new.

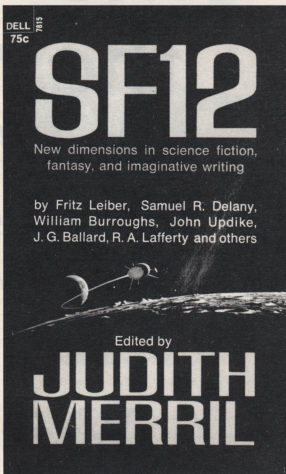
Given my complete agreement with Judy's views as she expressed them over the years in her anthologies, I looked forward eagerly to meeting her when she arrived for the first time in London in 1966. I was instantly struck by her charm, sharp intelligence and New York bite but what surprised me was that after ten years of agreeing with her every word across the breadth of the Atlantic, when we met in person we seemed to disagree vociferously about everything. I remember wonderful arguments with her that would last all day, carried on from one noisy pub to the next, from an exhibition gallery to the flat where she cooked a meal and on to the evening's party, arguments fuelled by what must have been all the distilleries in Scotland and half the vineyards of France.

When she left England after her final visit the light seemed to grow greyer, and when she gave up her anthologies and moved to Canada one of the few generous and thoughtful voices in American sf fell silent, with consequences that soon became evident. Science fiction in both the USA and Britain entered the most commercialized and retrograde period it has ever known during the 1970s, though happily the cyber-punk leap forward led by William Gibson in the 1980s

showed that sf can still renew itself. However it may be that Gibson and the cyberpunks were never writing science fiction at all, but, to their credit, an entirely new and free-standing form of imaginative fiction.

If so, then science fiction, as I suspect, is now dead, and probably died at about the time that Judy closed her anthology and left to found her memorial library to the genre in Toronto. I remember my last sight of her surrounded by her friends and all the books she loved, shouting me down whenever I tried to argue with her, the strongest woman in a genre for the most part created by timid and weak men.

**J. G. Ballard**



# J.G. Ballard's comments on his own fiction

Arranged chronologically  
by David Pringle

## **"Passport to Eternity"** (written 1955, published June 1962)

Of my 92 stories, "Passport to Eternity" gave me the greatest pleasure to write. This may seem surprising, as it is the one story that stands apart from all the others – this is out-and-out wide-screen super-science, wringing every variant I could conceive from the repertoire of interplanetary sf. In fact, the original draft was written well before the first science-fiction story of mine to be published. Just before I left the RAF in 1955 I tapped this out on a borrowed typewriter at RAF Booker, where cashiered air-crew sat around in underheated huts at a disused airfield. One of my regrets is that I have never written more stories like it.

– From *The Best of J. G. Ballard* (Futura, April 1977)

## **"Prima Belladonna"**

(December 1956)

"Prima Belladonna" is not only the first short story I wrote, but in many ways the best. The idea that I reached my peak with my first published story, and then went into a long decline, has a certain appeal to my sense of irony, and in a sense tallies exactly with the spirit of this story and the others collected under the title *Vermilion Sands*. For the chief characteristic of this desert resort, not abandoned but forever out of season, is that everything is over. Its past lies behind it, and nothing that can happen in the future will

*Seventeen of these comments come from The Best of J. G. Ballard, a 1977 paperback collection now long out of print (and likely to remain out of print). A further eight comments come from the similar French volume Le livre d'or de la science-fiction: J. G.*

*Ballard (1980), and have not appeared in English before now. The remaining comments are taken from a variety of sources, including anthology and magazine appearances of stories, newspaper articles and interviews.*

substantially change it again. It has come to terms with its past, and now lies there on its deck-chair beside a drained swimming-pool, somewhere in the middle of this endless afternoon. It's against this background that chimeras stir, fancies take flight.

I always felt very much at home in Vermilion Sands, and over the past 25 years have made a number of return trips to it. In fact, if I had to make a guess I would say that Vermilion Sands is what the future will be like, a place where work will be the ultimate play, and play the ultimate work. It's a place where nothing happens but everything is possible, and where the contents of the psyche pass freely through the barrier of the skull and take up residence at the bottom of the garden, to be cared for in that off-hand way in which the hero of "Prima Belladonna" cares for his singing flowers. And of course, nothing is so likely to attract the attention of the nearest off-duty witch than a well-stocked psychic garden.

Where is Vermilion Sands? Somewhere, I suppose, between Palm Springs, Juan Les Pins and Ipanema Beach. Vermilion Sands is very much

a beach resort, but needless to say there is no sea. The beach extends continuously, in all directions, merging with the beaches of its neighbouring resorts, extensions of the afternoon minds of its inhabitants. I look forward more and more to going back to Vermilion Sands, and this time staying forever.

– From *First Voyages* ed. Damon Knight, Martin H. Greenberg and Joseph D. Olander (Avon, May 1981)

## **"Escapement"** (December 1956)

This was my first science-fiction short story to be published in *New Worlds*, more than 20 years ago. Here conflicting temporal systems clash together and destroy themselves, as in an asylum where voracious clocks devour each other. Without any intention on my part, the story also presents a more or less faithful picture of the first year of my marriage.

– From *Le livre d'or de la science-fiction: J. G. Ballard* (1980; back-translated from Robert Loutit's French by DP)

## **"The Concentration City"**

(originally published as "Build-Up," January 1957)

"The Concentration City" was published in 1957, the year of Sputnik 1, and the dawn of the Space Age. Remembering the shiver of excitement that went through everyone then – far greater than anything we later felt even during Armstrong's landing on the Moon – it must have

seemed the worst time for a novice writer to turn his back on interplanetary travel and set off in a radically new direction, inwards into the mind and deep time rather than outwards into deep space. But right from the start – and this was only my third story – I was convinced that to survive science fiction needed to keep one step ahead of reality. If the Space Age had arrived for the rest of the world, for the science-fiction writer it was over. "The Concentration City" is the first story of what I termed Inner Space, the picture of a super-city that is almost literally an infinitely expanded brain.

– From *The Best of J. G. Ballard* (1977)

**"Manhole 69"** (November 1957)

"Manhole 69" is another inner space story. Here the subject is psycho-surgery, of a particularly sinister kind. In the ten years after World War II everyone was becoming more and more aware of the widespread increase of advanced techniques for the direct manipulation of the mind – brain-washing, pre-frontal lobotomy, the use of new drug-families such as the tranquillizers and synthetic hallucinogens. "Manhole 69" takes a look at what seems to be a responsible scientific attempt to eliminate the function of sleep. The title, by the way, is the name of a complex type of self-regulating manhole used in deep-level drainage systems which shuts off the flow when the pressure becomes too great.

– From *The Best of J. G. Ballard* (1977)

**"The Waiting Grounds"** (November 1959)

What particularly interests me about science fiction is the opportunity it gives for experimenting with scientific or psycho-literary ideas which have little or no connection with the world of fiction, such as, say, coded sleep or the time zone. But just as psychologists are now building models of anxiety neuroses and withdrawal states in the form of verbal diagrams – translating scientific hypothesis into literary construction – so I see a good science-fiction story [as] a model of some psychic image, the truth of which gives the story its merit. Examples are *The Incredible Shrinking Man*, *Limbo '90* and Henry Kuttner's "Dream's End."

In general stories with interplanetary backgrounds show too little originality, too much self-imitation. More important, the characters seem to lack any sense of cosmic awe – spanning the whole of space and time without a glimmer of

responsibility. It's just this sense of cosmic responsibility, the attempt to grasp the moral dimensions of the universe, that I've tried to describe in "The Waiting Grounds." Seen as a psycho-literary model, perhaps it represents the old conundrum of the ant searching hopelessly for the end of an infinite pathway around the surface of a sphere. "The Waiting Grounds" offers it a solution, implies that instead of crawling on and on it will find the pathway's end if it just sits still.

– From "J. G. Ballard, Middlesex" (*New Worlds* no. 88, November 1959)

"The Waiting Grounds" is among the few of my stories set on an alien planet. The idea that we in this solar system may be late-comers to a universe whose life is virtually over has always intrigued me, though given a cyclical view of things it may be hard to decide whether we are the last guests at a party or the first to arrive at the next. One problem which I had to face, like all sf writers, was how to describe the aliens. The answer, of course, is...

– From *The Best of J. G. Ballard* (1977)

**"The Sound-Sweep"**

(February 1960)

"The Sound-Sweep" is the longest of the stories I have written, and in some ways – especially in the relationship between the ageing opera star and the young mute sound-sweep – is more like a novel. Many of my short stories have been extremely long by the standards of the genre,

and I sometimes think that I began by writing novels in the form of short stories ("The Sound-Sweep," "Chronopolis" and "The Voices of Time"), and then went on to write short stories in the form of novels – *Concrete Island* and *High-Rise*. Perhaps if I have the time one day I will rewrite them all and get everything the right way round.

– From *The Best of J. G. Ballard* (1977)

**"Chronopolis"** (June 1960)

By 1960, when "Chronopolis" was published, post-war austerity was over and England was showing all the strains of the consumer-goods society – overloaded transit systems, ruthless competition for housing, soaring urban populations, and the sense that the whole of a city like London might seize up in a gigantic physical and mental traffic jam. One way of controlling a huge metropolitan population might be by rationing time as well as space, particularly as psychological control systems are so effective because they play on barely understood and paradoxical needs. In "Chronopolis" those who have overthrown one external tyranny soon substitute an internal one.

– From *The Best of J. G. Ballard* (1977)

**"The Voices of Time"**

(October 1960)

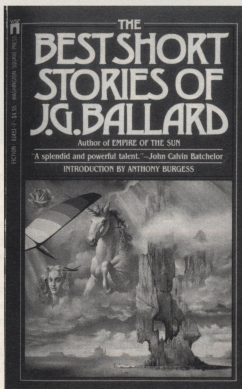
If I were asked to pick one piece of fiction to represent my entire output of seven novels and 92 short stories it would be "The Voices of Time," not because it is the best (I leave that for the reader to judge), but because it contains almost all the themes of my writing – the sense of isolation within the infinite time and space of the universe, the biological fantasies and the attempt to read the complex codes represented by drained swimming pools and abandoned airfields, and above all the determination to break out of a deepening psychological entropy and make some kind of private peace with the unseen powers of the universe.

– From *The Best of J. G. Ballard* (1977)

**"The Overloaded Man"**

(July 1961)

How far is everything one writes autobiographical? "The Overloaded Man" was the first story in which I described a modern marriage in more or less realistic terms, and it prefigures many of the relationships (or confrontations, more exactly) between men and women which appear in my later writing. I



remember my wife being outraged when she read this story, and rightly so – the marriage described here, like all those that follow it, has no basis in my own life. Yet from what forgotten experience stems this obsessive and often repeated image of the predatory woman and the husband retreating into his own mind?

– From *The Best of J. G. Ballard* (1977)

#### "Billennium" (November 1961)

"Billennium" was the favourite story of the late Ted Carnell, the editor of *New Worlds* who published more than half the stories in this book and made possible a new kind of science fiction – the New Wave. By the time he published "Billennium" in 1961 the vague murmurings of discontent from the old-guard readers that had greeted my short stories over the previous four years suddenly broke into outright hostility. Although this was the year of Gagarin's first orbital flight, sales of traditional science fiction were declining everywhere, and the emergence of a new kind of sf threatened the security of the ghetto.

– From *The Best of J. G. Ballard* (1977)

#### "The Gentle Assassin"

(December 1961)

For me, time is the ultimate mystery, stranger and more pitiless than the fears aroused in us by our sexual drive or the image of our own death. Its apparently linear flux, the almost Renaissance perspective which it seems to confer on our lives, finally reveals itself to be part of an immense curvilinear system around which we revolve like blind drivers thrown onto a freeway, constantly passing and repassing the points in space we have traversed an infinite number of times before. On this indistinct tracery our most profound desires and feelings take on the flickering brilliance of fireflies.

– From *Le livre d'or de la science-fiction: J. G. Ballard* (1980; back-translated from Robert Lout's French by DP)

#### "The Insane Ones" (January 1962)

"The Insane Ones" was one of the first stories I sold to the American magazines. Although most people assume that science fiction, like its main inspiration – science itself – is dedicated to change and experiment, American science fiction in general and its magazines in particular have always been deeply conservative, nervous of anything outside their rigid conventions. Appropriately, perhaps, "The Insane Ones" takes a look at fanaticism. Is the deranged assassin who murders a tyrant the only sane

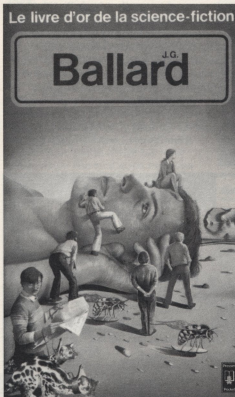
man in his society? Do we need the insane to perform justifiable and necessary acts we are too rational to commit?

– From *The Best of J. G. Ballard* (1977)

#### *The Wind from Nowhere*

(January 1962; originally serialized as "Storm-Wind," September-October 1961)

The cataclysmic story is particularly interesting because it shows how even a minor variation in one of the physical constants of the environment



can make life totally untenable – a corollary of the biological rule that the more specialized the organism the narrower the margin of safety.

Perhaps because of their climate, English writers seem to have a virtual monopoly of the genre, one or two of the contemporary ones producing almost nothing else. Analysing the author's hidden motives is one of the quieter pleasures of reading – and writing – science fiction, and from the deluge in the Babylonian zodiac myth of Gilgamesh, from which come Noah and the sign of Aquarius, all the way down to *The War of the Worlds*, the real significance of the cataclysmic story is obviously to be found elsewhere. "Storm-Wind" is no exception, and anyone wondering why I've chosen to destroy London quite so thoroughly should try living there for ten years. I'm only sorry that I couldn't call it *Gone With the Wind*.

– From "J. G. Ballard, Shepperton, Middx." (New Worlds no. 111, October 1961)

#### "The Garden of Time"

(February 1962)

Time is one of the great themes of all science fiction, and one that has dominated most of my own writing. With the exception of the time machine itself, it is one of the few subjects that requires no gadgetry, and the best time stories, those by Ray Bradbury or Richard Matheson, are as simple and mysterious as sundials.

– From *The Best of J. G. Ballard* (1977)

#### "Thirteen to Centaurus"

(April 1962)

By 1962 the first manned space-flights had taken place and it was clear that within a few years men would land on the Moon, and begin the first of the journeys that will carry us during the next few centuries to all the planets of the solar system. What interested me at the time, but seemed to be ignored by the NASA planners, was to what extent the experience of total confinement and self-immersion in a spacecraft would play into the hands of unexpected psychological impulses. Interestingly, in the last few years we have seen a glimpse of the hidden effects of space travel in the subsequent lives of many of the Apollo astronauts.

– From *The Best of J. G. Ballard* (1977)

#### "The Cage of Sand" (June 1962)

Science-fiction writers in recent years have usually disclaimed the gift of prophecy, at the same time showing a quiet pride when their predictions come true. "The Cage of Sand" was written a year after Gagarin's first flight and in the hey-day of Cape Canaveral, when hundreds of square miles of swamp and sand-dune were turned into the world's newest and greatest complex of communications and space technology. Even before the Space Age had begun I had a hunch it would be short-lived – basically because NASA and the Russians had left the imagination out of space, one mistake the sf writers never made. By the early 70s my prophecy bore fruit. The Space Age is virtually over. Large tracts of Cape Kennedy are now rusting and abandoned, the launch pads are deserted, for-sale signs hang over the empty supermarkets and motels. But there is still magic to be found there.

– From *The Best of J. G. Ballard* (1977)

#### "The Singing Statues" (July 1962)

This story belongs to the Vermilion Sands cycle. Vermilion Sands: a holi-

day resort of the mind, a kind of desert Riviera. Without exaggeration, I think our future will take this form – and not that of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* or *Brave New World*, despite the visionary power of these masterpieces. I imagine above all a country-club paradise, where leisure is the ultimate form of work, and work the ultimate form of leisure. Where is Vermilion Sands? No doubt somewhere between Palm Springs and Ipanema, between Miami and La Grande Motte.

– From *Le livre d'or de la science-fiction*:  
J. G. Ballard (1980); back-translated  
from Robert Louti's French by DP)

### "The Subliminal Man"

(January 1963)

Given the voracious needs of the modern consumer-goods society, who can blame the merchandisers for doing their best to keep up with us? The kind of psychological force-feeding that I describe in "The Subliminal Man" isn't that different from the efforts I was making at the time cramming large amounts of what seemed to be upmarket pet-foods down the throats of my three infants. Even the most extreme stratagem was, after all, for their own good. I mention this because I don't see the central character of the story as entirely a victim.

– From *The Best of J. G. Ballard*  
(1977)

### "A Question of Re-Entry"

(March 1963)

Few sights, since I looked up as a startled 14-year-old in a Japanese camp near Shanghai at a sky filled with hundreds of B-29s, have moved me as much as that of the Echo 1 satellite traversing the nights sky in the early 60s. The first of a series of huge aluminium balloons, it sped like a surfer through the star-sea, the first tangible evidence of the Age of Space. (It was sad, some ten years later, to point out to a neighbour the speeding light-point of the last Skylab mission, whose crew had been circling the globe for three months. "Who?" he asked, taking for granted that things moved in the sky. I knew then that the Space Age was over.) What interested me was the effect the visible satellites might have on the imprinted star-maps of migratory birds, or even ourselves. Albatross might roost in England in winter, some latter-day remittance man might find himself running half the Amazon...

– From *The Best of J. G. Ballard*  
(1977)

### "End-Game" (June 1963)

Whether it is conducted in a police station, a confessional or on the psychiatrist's couch, the quest for a guilty conscience has long been part of the arsenal of the qualified interrogator. Whether the subject is a victim of political terror, a believer or a mental patient, as soon as his unconscious accepts the notion of his own guilt (irrespective of his actual innocence – if these terms make sense), he knows that the chips are down: the victim, morally and psychologically, is forever at the mercy of the questioner. In "End-Game," I reversed this plan. It seemed to me that in daily life, far from believing ourselves innocent, we consciously take our guilt for granted. The competent interrogator will await the growth in his victim's unconscious of the idea of his own innocence before pronouncing his inevitable guilt...

– From *Le livre d'or de la science-fiction*:  
J. G. Ballard (1980); back-translated  
from Robert Louti's French by DP)



### "The Lost Leonardo" (March 1964)

I wrote "The Lost Leonardo" as a simple entertainment – without, however, taking its central character's problem too lightly. In fact, it found several readers – above all in the United States, where the story first appeared – who assumed that the painting I described in it, da Vinci's "Crucifixion," really existed. Some even tried to hunt it down in the museums of Europe. And I in turn was almost persuaded of its existence. Whenever I happen to visit the Prado, the Uffizi or the Louvre, I

almost expect to find it there...

– From *Le livre d'or de la science-fiction*:  
J. G. Ballard (1980); back-translated  
from Robert Louti's French by DP)

### "The Terminal Beach"

(March 1964)

"The Terminal Beach" was the last story of mine to be printed by Ted Carnell, and is for me the most important story I have written. It marks the link between the science fiction of my first ten years, and the next phase of my writings that led to *The Atrocity Exhibition* and *Crash*. What impresses me most now is that the story was ever printed in the first place – *New Worlds* was, after all, a wholly commercial sf magazine. These were the days before the modern literature departments had begun to erect their plywood partitions around the chafed elbows of science-fiction writers.

– From *The Best of J. G. Ballard*  
(1977)

### "The Drowned Giant" (June 1964)

*Gulliver's Travels* is a classic of imaginative literature. Personally, I have always asked myself what would have happened if Gulliver had been washed up dead, rather than alive, on the shore at Lilliput. In writing this story, I did not dream of producing a moral tale which commented on man's inhumanity and lack of pity. Even today I consider that "The Drowned Giant" deals above all with time, with the disintegration which affects even the most abstract universe. No system can defeat the entropy which is inherent in it. The fate of the giant seems to me particularly serene. Lying on a beach, at the edge of the tide, I sometimes imagine myself quite contentedly at home.

– From *Le livre d'or de la science-fiction*:  
J. G. Ballard (1980); back-translated  
from Robert Louti's French by DP)

### "You and Me and the Continuum" (March 1966)

The theme of sacrifice led me to think of the Messiah or, more exactly, the idea of the second coming and how this might take place in the twentieth century. In my version, which I would describe as a botched second coming, the Messiah never quite managing to come to terms with the twentieth century, I have used a fragmentary and non-sequential technique ... and have tried to invoke some of the images that a twentieth century Messiah might see. You'll notice that the entries are alphabetized.

– From story-blurb (*Impulse* no. 1,  
March 1966)

**"The Day of Forever"** (April 1966)

"The Day of Forever" is another favourite story of mine, for reasons I have never understood. Perhaps the young man running around those abandoned hotels reminds me of my own adolescence, and that strange interregnum in Shanghai in 1942, and again in 1945, when one side in World War II had moved out and the other had yet to move in. As a child among the Japanese military one had an extraordinary immunity, we moved like pilot fish in front of them as they wandered through empty apartment blocks and disused seaplane bases, peered into drained swimming pools with that deep melancholy all Japanese seem to have. This was my first story to be published by the second great editor of *New Worlds*, Michael Moorcock, and the start of a completely new chapter...

– From *The Best of J. G. Ballard* (1977)

**"Tomorrow is a Million Years"**

(October 1966)

Zones of transition have always fascinated me. Probably this is due to my childhood in the Far East, during World War II. War, invasion and occupation carried with them cataclysmic transformations of landscape and psyche. Like all high-water marks of experience, intermediary zones, armistices and interregnums seemed to be endowed with a peculiar power – a flight of steps descending into a

river, the refraction of a semi-submerged aircraft fuselage, the interval which separates night from day. I would like to live forever inside such zones, and perhaps I do so without realizing it. These are the landscapes which dream and nostalgia construct forever in our minds.

– From *Le livre d'or de la science-fiction*; J. G. Ballard (1980); back-translated from Robert Louti's French by DP)

**"The Recognition"** (Autumn 1967)

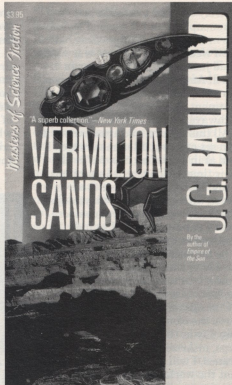
"The Recognition" expresses a cordial distaste for the human race – not inappropriately. The temper of the times seems to be one of self-love, if of a strange sort – Caliban asleep across a mirror stained with vomit. But perhaps the story also illustrates the paradox that the only real freedom is to be found in a prison. Sometimes it is difficult to tell on which side of the bars we really are – the real gaps between the bars are the sutures of one's own skull. Originally I toyed with the notion of the narrator entering a cage and joining the circus, but this would have destroyed an important point. The story is not in fact a piece of hard-won misanthropy but a comment on some of the more unusual perspectives that separate us. The most important characters, whose motives are a key to the story, are the young woman and her dwarf. Why do they take this dismal circus on its endless tour?

– "Afterword to 'The Recognition'" (*Dangerous Visions* ed. Harlan Ellison, Doubleday, 1967)

**"Love and Napalm: Export USA"** (July 1968)

At the end of the 1960s, when I wrote *The Atrocity Exhibition*, I was moved to measure the increasing – and above all sinister – part that science played in the creation of those enormous fictions which, more and more, governed our lives. We were all living inside an enormous nightmare novel. Scientists no longer took their subject matter from nature, but from their own fantasies, or from their fictionalization of nature. During the 60s the imaginary experiments I described, and the conclusions at which I arrived, became common currency in scientific journals.

– From *Le livre d'or de la science-fiction*; J. G. Ballard (1980); back-translated from Robert Louti's French by DP)

**Vermilion Sands** (April 1971)

The short stories that make up this collection were written between 1956 and 1970, and once they were published in a single volume I never returned, regrettably, to this genial playground. By sealing one's imagination between hard covers one can close the door forever on a still vivid private world. I'm glad that I began my career by writing short stories, when I was free to chase any passing hare in a way that is no longer possible, and without over-committing myself to a single idea. Fiction today is dominated by career novelists locked into their publishers' contracts like the prematurely middle-aged encumbered by mortgages and pension plans. Irresponsibility, especially the agreeable variety displayed in *Vermilion Sands*, has a great many neglected virtues.

One of the stories in the collection, "Prima Belladonna," was the first piece of fiction that I ever published, and I can still remember the thrill of receiving the cheque for £8. At last I was a professional writer, and my wife and I celebrated by using the money to buy our baby son a new pram. Pushing it past the department stores in Chiswick High Street, a hundred ideas in my head, I felt that I had found the philosopher's stone.

Looking back, it seems curious that my first short story was set in an imaginary beach resort as far removed from the grey, shabby Britain of the 1950s as one could go without actually leaving the planet. By 1956 I had spent ten years in England, but clearly had yet to put down any real roots. The notion of a future



entirely devoted to leisure is now commonplace, but it seemed less obvious in the 50s, as Europe dragged itself wearily into the post-war world. I had just spent nearly a year in North America, and had seen American prosperity unrolling across the continent like the new interstate highways.

All this leisure, of course, raises its own set of moral dilemmas, which I look at in *Vermilion Sands*. To fill their timeless days, the inhabitants of my desert resort divert themselves with a number of playthings. There are computers that compose poetry, sand-yachts and sound-emitting sculptures, which seemed to be fantasies in the 1950s but have long since come to pass. I trust that my other inventions, like the houses sensitive to their owners' moods, and the sculptors who carve the clouds, will soon follow. One day in the near future, perhaps, in Arizona or the south of France, I will wake up and realize that the world I longed for all those decades ago has taken concrete shape around me.

— "Sculptors Who Carve the Clouds"  
(*The Independent*, 24th  
October 1992)

#### *Crash* (June 1973)

*Crash* was an immense challenge, and writing it became almost a willed psychotic act. At the time I had three young children, and fate might have played a cruel trick on me.

As it happens, two weeks after finishing the novel I was involved in my one and only traffic accident. After a front-wheel blow-out at the foot of Chiswick bridge my car veered across the central reservation of the dual carriageway. It demolished a sign (I was later sent the bill for its replacement, and was annoyed to find that I had paid for a more expensive model, with flashing lights), rolled onto its back and continued along the oncoming lane.

Fortunately, I was wearing a seat-belt and no other vehicles were involved, though it was a close-run thing – petrol was pouring from the engine and the crushed roof had locked all the doors. Had I died there is no doubt that people would have said I was fulfilling the nightmare logic I had outlined in the novel.

But in fact I prefer to think of *Crash* as a cautionary tale, a warning against the deviant possibilities that 20th-century technology offers to the human imagination. Film and televi-

sion are saturated with a stylized violence that touches our imaginations but never our nerve endings.

Much of this violent imagery is drawn from technology – the car, the motorway, the airport, the modern hospital and high-rise building. The car crash, in particular, taps all sorts of ambiguous responses, as I found when I mounted an exhibition of crashed cars at the New Arts Laboratory in 1970, shortly before I began to

cars decided she could only appear topless, an interesting response in itself, I thought. She later wrote a damning review of the show in an underground paper.

I have never before or since seen a launch party degenerate so quickly into a drunken brawl. The cars were abused and attacked, as they were during the month-long exhibition, overturned and splashed with white paint. A woman journalist from *New Society*, then a bastion of approved thinking, was so deranged by the spectacle that she was speechless with rage.

All this, needless to say, I regarded as a green light, and I began to write *Crash*, which I think of as my best and most original novel. It is to the credit of my publishers and editors here, in Europe and the United

States that I had no difficulty in getting it published, and I look forward to the film to be directed by David Cronenberg.

— "Smashing Days on the Road"  
(*The Independent*,  
19th May 1990)



write the novel. The exhibition was a calculated experiment, designed to

test the novel's central hypothesis that a repressed fascination lies behind our conventional attitudes to technological death and violence, a fascination so obsessive that it must contain a powerful sexual charge. The three crashed cars were exhibited without comment under the neutral gallery lights, at their centre a telescoped Pontiac from the great tail-fin era.

To test the nerves of the preview audience, I hired a topless girl to interview the guests on closed-circuit TV. She had originally agreed to appear naked, but when she saw the

home at Port Lligat, and I noticed that one of the French ground-floor tenants, driven to a fury by cigarette butts thrown down from the upper floors, began to patrol the beach and photograph the offenders with a zoom lens. He then pinned the photos to a notice board in the foyer of the block. A very curious exhibition – which I took to be another green light to my imagination.

With short stories I do a brief synopsis of about a page, and only if I feel the story works as a story, as a dramatic narrative with the right shape and balance to grip the reader's imagination, do I begin to write it... For *High-Rise* it was about 25,000 words, written in the form of a social worker's report on the strange events that had taken place in this apartment block, an extended case history. I wish I'd kept it, I think it was better than the novel.

— From a postal interview conducted



by Thomas Frick, 1983 (published in edited form in *Paris Review*, 1984)

### The Unlimited Dream Company (1979)

I remember my dreams extremely vividly. Not only can I remember last night's dreams, but I can remember vividly almost every dream I've ever had. I've never really drawn on my dreams for my own fiction, but in many ways I think of my imagination as a writer as a continuation of the dream time.

*The Unlimited Dream Company* is set in Shepperton, where I live. It's about a young pilot who steals a light aircraft and crashes into the Thames, and in a sense dies, is drowned in his aircraft, but frees himself by an enormous effort of the imagination and through his imagination transforms Shepperton into a kind of Edenic paradise full of exotic plants and animals. In many ways I feel that, without realizing it at the time, I was writing a piece of my own autobiography – that it's about the writer's imagination, and in particular my own imagination, transforming the humdrum reality that he occupies and turning it into an unlimited dream company.

– From the script of the 22-minute

film *The Unlimited Dream Company* directed by Sam Scoggins (Royal College of Art, 1983)

### "Report on an Unidentified Space Station" (1982)

"Report on an Unidentified Space Station" is one of the very few stories that I have written to be set in that happy hunting ground of traditional science fiction – outer space. Out of some hundred or more of my short stories, which fill some ten volumes, this is only the third to take place in deep space. Perhaps the silence of those infinite spaces, which so terrified Pascal, has at last begun to get through to me. However, readers of the story will see that this is, after all, a special kind of space, far closer to terra firma than it might seem at first, and even perhaps to inner space itself.

The story is also one of the very few of mine to be directly inspired by a dream – in this case, a nightmare of extreme anguish, though I like to think that the mood of the story is one of serenity and peace, part of the difference, it may be, between dream and imagination.

– Introduction to the story (*Top Fantasy: The Authors' Choice* ed. Josh Pachter, Dent, 1985)

### "The Secret History of World War 3" (1988)

Ronald Reagan has been a long-standing interest of mine. My 1967 piece about him, "Why I Want to Fuck Ronald Reagan," later published in *The Atrocity Exhibition*, led to the first American edition being pulped at the orders of Nelson Doubleday. Yet a cooler reading of the piece, which virtually predicted a Reagan presidency, would have quickly confirmed all his admirers' real reasons for championing the then Governor of California. Reagan has always been a puzzle to the Europeans – how could a man so intellectually third-rate, so clearly incompetent, become chief executive of the world's most powerful and important nation? But the United States exists on a superior and altogether more advanced level to that of mundane Europe. There image is all, and Reagan's image, as it has evolved over the years from opportunist right-winger to national Granddaddy, reveals so much to us in our attempts to grasp the essence of American mass psychology.

– Introduction to the story (*The Orbit Science Fiction Yearbook Two* ed. David S. Garnett, Futura, 1989)

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# J.G. Ballard's Crash Course and the Year 1973

Takayuki Tatsumi

I started reading science fiction in the late 1960s, when *Hayakawa's SF Magazine*, the only professional sf magazine in Japan, began featuring the Anglo-American New Wave regularly. With the help of the distinguished translator/critic Norio Itoh, whose skilful translations include works by J. G. Ballard, Brian Aldiss, Kurt Vonnegut, Samuel Delany, James Tiptree, Jr, Cordwainer Smith and others, the Japanese sf community accepted the significance of the New Wave so keenly that writers like Koichi Yamano and Yoshio Aramaki began experimenting with Japanese speculative fiction, leading a heated controversy on the literary significance of sf. Yamano launched the heavily theoretical quarterly *NW-SF* (edited by Kazuko Yamada), and became known as a New Wave critic; his provocative essay "Japanese SF: Its Originality and Orientation" (1969), a scathing attack on contemporary Japanese science fiction, was edited by Darko Suvin and reprinted in the March 1994 issue of *Science-Fiction Studies* (tr. Kazuko Behrens). Aramaki showed some Ballardian influence in his early short stories such as "Soft Clocks" (1968-70), his hard-scientific reinterpretation of Salvador Dalí's surrealist paintings, which later was Englished by one of the original Cyberpunks, Lewis Shiner, and reprinted in the January-February 1989 issue of *Interzone* (tr. Kazuko Behrens).

The greatest Japanese appropriation of the New Wave, however, was by Yasutaka Tsutsui, the winner of numerous awards in sf and the mainstream, whose masterpieces include a Ballardian surrealist short story, "The Standing Woman" (1974; tr. David Lewis, *Omni*, January 1981), in which mammals melt into vegetables literally and figuratively. Tsutsui started his career as an sf writer in the mid-1960s, and during the 70s gradually came to transgress the generic boundaries between serious and popular literature. He established his own theory of "hyper-fictionality," which reflects back the nature of literary genres and foregrounds the fictionality they tried to

repress: "I do not find it accidental that from the 60s through the 70s, just while the post-surrealist mode nurtured British New Wave and North-American Metafiction and Latin American Magic Realism, I was making every effort to develop my own theory of hyper-fictionality without knowing those western literary experiments" (unpublished remarks made in 1991).

Of course, I'm not sure if what was going on in the early 70s in the Japanese New Wave movement made much sense to junior sf fans such as me. The Japanese formation of a science-fiction market in the 60s, begun by the monthly publication of *Hayakawa's SFM* from February 1960, owed much to the Golden Age of Anglo-American hardcore sf; major Japanese sf writers constructed their careers by following the examples of Clarke, Asimov, Heinlein, Sheekley, Bester, Bradbury and others. What the Anglo-American sf market developed between the 1920s and the 1950s had to be studied and emulated by Japan only in the 60s, too quickly and in too condensed a fashion. As with any movement in its high-growth period, Japanese writers attempted rapidly to assimilate and catch up with their Anglo-American precursors, skillfully reappropriating them. Thus, around 1970, we did not feel it to be a contradiction that we were attracted by both the moon landing of Apollo 11 and the Ballardian renunciation of outer space; in so far as "outer space" signifies an aspect of Americanism, we Japanese shared with J. G. Ballard ambivalent feelings towards the American Frontier Spirit and the space age. It is ironic that while we became fascinated with America through reading sf, it was also through sf that we found it necessary to criticize and defamiliarize that country later. Both the cult and the anti-cult of outer space constituted an Anglo-American cultural legacy that our own postwar Occidentalism drove us to acquire. In the early 1970s we did not yet anticipate the ascendancy of Pax Japonica in the 1980s, following Pax Americana in the previous decades, when

our postwar Occidentalism came to be matched by "cyber-Orientalism" on the part of American.

Therefore, when the Tokyo publisher Atelier Peyotl assigned me in 1990 to write an introduction to the Japanese edition of Ballard's *Crash* (tr. Kiichiro Yanashita, 1992), it seemed impossible for me to complete the task without rethinking the relationship between the original publication of *Crash* in 1973 and what followed it later. Indeed, when *Crash* appeared, as the first of Ballard's "technoscape trilogy," it struck us as the deepest insight into the advent of techno-erotics as they began to encroach on the inner space Ballard had persistently explored. And yet, re-reading the text from a 1990 perspective caused me to recognize an otherwise unnoticed literary historical coincidence: 1973 was the year of both Ballard's *Crash* and Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*.

Nineteen seventy-three saw the close of the Vietnam War, soon followed by revelations of President Nixon's Watergate scandal. Disillusionment and disorientation filled the political atmosphere of the early 70s, even as we gradually became unable to live without the spectacles, pseudo-events and sexual effects produced by media technology (as theoreticians like Daniel Boorstin and Guy Debord have explained lucidly). From this viewpoint, the coincidental literary "crash" mentioned above is highly symptomatic, since the British champion of New Wave describes an idiosyncratic hero, Dr Robert Vaughan, obsessed with committing double-suicide with Elizabeth Taylor in a car crash, while the American representative of postmodern metafiction characterizes the innocent protagonist Tyrone Slothrop as techno-sexually intertwined with the very mechanics of the V2 rocket. The more we look into both texts, the more apparent what they share becomes: that is, techno-sexual politics. In order to further investigate the crash-course between technology and sexuality in the 70s, Ballard reorganized what he had conceived as

non-linear condensed novels in *The Atrocity Exhibition* (1970) into the linear narrative *Crash*; and Pynchon completed the encyclopedic novel *Gravity's Rainbow*. It seems natural that the techno-sexual zeitgeist of the 70s inspired both writers and their innovative literary forms. Historically, one could claim, it is this coincidence between Ballard and Pynchon in 1973 that later gave rise to the Cyberpunk movement in the 1980s.

In retrospect, however, it seems that it was not only the Cyberpunks but also Ballard himself who felt it necessary to reconstruct the central topic of *Crash* in the 80s. Read again his mainstream bestseller *Empire of the Sun* (1984), which was published in the same year as William Gibson's canonical cyberpunk *Neuromancer*, and you will notice that this Booker Prize nominee shares something with *Crash*.

Firstly, both novels are exceptionally autobiographical for they share a main character called "James," created in the image of James Graham Ballard himself. Secondly, whereas *Crash* deals with a scientist obsessed with heterosexual double-suicide in a car crash, *Empire of the Sun* depicts a boy obsessed with international double-suicide in a kamikaze crash: "The fliers fascinated Jim, far more than Private Kimura and his Kendo armour.... Above all, Jim admired the kamikaze pilots.... Neither Private Kimura nor the other guards in the camp paid the least attention to the suicide pilots, and Basie and the American seamen in E Block referred to them as 'hashi-crashies' or 'screw-siders'.... But Jim identified himself with these kamikaze pilots and was always moved by the threadbare ceremonies that took place beside the runway" (*Empire of the Sun*, Chapter 23, "The Air Raid," Pocket Books, pages 198-199). Furthermore, Jim's deepest admiration for the bravery of kamikaze pilots makes him feel like "joining the Japanese Air Force" (Chapter 26, "The Cemetery Garden," page 216).

This episode carries us to our third point, that the analogy between the car crash and kamikaze crash was already predicated in the text of *Crash*. After his own car-crash experience, the narrator Ballard speculates on the disjunction between "my own body, the assumptions of skin, and the engineering structure which supported it," and recollects staring at the cockpit of a World War II Japanese Zero fighter aircraft at the Imperial War Museum: "The blurring perspex of the cockpit canopy contained a small segment of the Pacific sky, the roar of aircraft warming up on a carrier deck thirty years before" (*Crash*, Chapter Seven, Granada, page 58). Whenever we come across dead or failed pilots and astronauts in

Ballard's fiction, we are tempted to take them as representing his anti-outer space and therefore anti-American sensibility. But, rereading *Crash* together with *Empire of the Sun* will give us a chance to reconsider the status of dead pilots as not only ideological but also deeply erotic.

So far as Ballard is concerned, we cannot distinguish between Eros and Thanatos very easily. What is more, Ballard's techno-sexual rhetoric is closely intertwined with his international politics. While the allegedly techno-sexual novel *Crash* already concealed an international romance within the analogy between cars and kamikaze Zero fighter aircraft, the allegedly quasi-autobiographical *Empire of the Sun* contains an imaginatively techno-sexual implication in the depiction of the international friendship between the British boy and the Japanese kamikaze he admires so much. This is why Jim simulates double-suicide with the kamikaze:

For so long he had invested all his hopes in this young pilot, in that futile dream that they would fly away together, leaving Lunghua, Shanghai and the war forever behind him. He had needed the pilot to help him survive the war, this imaginary twin he had invented, a replica of himself whom he watched through the barbed wire. *If the Japanese was dead, part of himself had died.* (*Empire of the Sun*, Chapter 41, "Rescue Mission," page 363, italics mine)

In Japan, we have long been familiar with the postwar "queer" analogy – of the USA as the husband and Japan as the wife. Pax Americana has long feminized Japan. Ballard gives the old analogy a new twist by setting up a hyper-queer viewpoint of a British boy, who feels homoerotic sympathy with a Japanese kamikaze literally murdered or figuratively raped by the American army. When Jim realizes that "If the Japanese was dead, part of himself had died," it may be that he feels himself to have been raped by the Americans, who have already dropped the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

What complicates this catastrophe, however, is that the novel also implies that Jim will recover from the sense of loss sooner or later, and start over his life. Certainly Jim appreciates Japanese bravery, but he also enjoys being "raped" by a stronger high technology represented by the B-29:

"...the sight of this immense bomber with its high, curving tail convinced Jim that the Japanese had lost the war. ... Jim thought intently about B-29s. He wanted to embrace their silver fuselages, caress the nacelles of their engines" (*Empire of the Sun*, Chapter 27, "The Execution," page 236). Jim's homo-erotically interna-

tional romance with brave Japanese kamikaze turns out to have been intricately entangled with man's cybersexually fetishistic romance with sophisticated machines. Thus, while *Crash* is as international as *Empire of the Sun*, the latter is as techno-sexual as the former. They constitute a hidden diptych delineating our age, in which deeper investigation into multinational politics cannot do without deeper speculation into techno-sexual rhetoric (or vice versa). This assumption is further endorsed not only by cyberpunk (Gibson, Sterling, Cadigan) and technogothic (Calder, Park, Constantine) but also by Pynchon's fourth novel, *Vineland* (1990), which features contemporary cybersexual and multinational conflicts closely intermingled with supernatural martial arts and brainwashing technologies.

In view of Ballard's his texts – full of numerous American signs ranging from Ernest Hemingway and Elizabeth Taylor to Ronald Reagan and Elvis Presley – we have to be careful about characterizing the Ballardian ambivalence towards the United States. For the time being, nonetheless, we may say that it is through a looking-glass called "Japan" that Ballard feels it more comfortable to efface himself and create another interzone where his British body melts with his American fantasy techno-sexually and multinationally. This is where Ballard's own queer version of "Americanism" came into being, and where we Japanese readers feel greatest sympathy for his fiction, probably for other ambivalent reasons; Ballard's "Americanism" makes us keenly aware that we Japanese also ended up with our own imaginary "hyper-queer" version of Americanism unwittingly, however hard we seem to have studied American culture.

In conclusion, let us also note that the year 1973 saw not merely the coincidental publication of Ballard's *Crash* and Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*, but also of Kobo Abe's mainstream novel *The Box Man* and Sakyo Komatsu's hardcore sf *Japan Sinks*. In 1973, Ballard and Pynchon tried to speculate on the conflict between the UK/Europe and the United States, or between Americanism on the British part and Occidentalism on the American part, whereas both of the Japanese authors, Abe and Komatsu, focused on the effacement of individual or national identity respectively, eventually promoting the then-popular analogy between the Japanese and the Jew. For Japan to catch up with advanced countries and become more international, it seemed very seductive in the early 70s to accept and redefine self-effacement and

"diaspora" in a more positive sense. Looking backward, then, 1973 turns out to be the year when Anglo-American writers' discursive rape of Americanism coincided with Japanese

writers' creative reappropriation of Judaism, and ended up accelerating imaginary internationalism and proto-globalism.

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# Ballard in the Classroom

Roger Luckhurst

The late great Angela Carter told a wonderful anecdote from her days as a Visiting Professor in an American University. On the day Ronald Reagan swept into the White House in 1980, she gave her depressed students a short explosive text, an essay that purported to measure Reagan's suitability for the perverse investments of voters, "society's need to re-conceptualize its political leaders" through increasingly grotesque sexual fantasies. It culminated in an examination of Reagan's "profound anality." This was, of course, Ballard's notorious satire "Why I Want to Fuck Ronald Reagan." Carter reports that "on that November day in 1980 when a British science-fiction writer's mad notion came true, [the students] laughed until they cried ... and then they demanded: 'Who is this guy? He is one of your great writers! Why haven't we heard of him before?'"

I repeat this experiment every year with my students, although for slightly different ends. I use the version of the story reprinted by the San Francisco-based journal *Re/Search*, a version which prints the text on official Republican Party headquarters note-paper and which removes the title and any indication of authorship. Suddenly, the whole nature of the piece is transformed: I watch bemused faces oscillate between laughter and disgust, credulity and incredulity, and listen to heated debates about whether this is an official report, a secret psychological profiling of voter intentions (who will vote for Reagan because he is an arsehole), or else a piece of fiction. When I eventually tell them the title and the author there is a dim stirring of recognition: "Isn't that the guy who wrote the script for some Spielberg film?"

The point of this exercise is precisely to produce a sense of unease, a feeling of uncertainty, an insistence that the unexamined assumptions of

what constitutes the literary are not grounded in any essential element of a piece of prose, but rest in the security of having the edges of the text clearly marked. Take away the title at the top of the page, take away the signature at the bottom of the page, shift the context, and unexpectedly the simple category markers no longer work – students no longer know what they are reading: mimicry of a scientific language can pass off as the real thing.

That it is a Ballard text that produces this effect is also significant, and in some ways this exercise of dis-adjusting expectations can stand as an allegory for Ballard's relation to the academy. Ballard has often recorded his opposition to academics in interviews and elsewhere (in 1991 he sent back an invitation to respond to a symposium in the journal *Science-Fiction Studies* by dismissing us as "an over-professionalized academia with nowhere to take its girlfriend for a bottle of wine"), but the academy's treatment of Ballard has veered between puzzlement or silence or – even worse – merely passing praise. There is a growing awareness of Ballard's importance to any narrative about post-war British fiction, but equally a sense of unease about what to do with his strange and extraordinary novels and stories. The response of some of my fellow teachers to the fact that I am writing a book on Ballard uncannily echoes that of my students: discomfort.

Why is this? Well, in part, it is inevitably due to framings, to those categorizations that secure contexts in which to read literary texts. And Ballard, it appears, resoundingly belongs to science fiction. Perhaps even 15 years ago this would have been enough to explain the silence regarding his work: any history of English Literature as an institutionalized form of study reveals how Lit-

erature is constituted as a zone of minority "high" culture through the exclusion of majority tastes. Such exclusions intensify with the emergence of mass forms of culture, from the cinema and television to the modern development of genre literature – detective fiction, the spy novel, science fiction all determining their respective generic codes in the early years of this century. Cultural value accrues to that which defines itself in opposition to these popular forms: the "clerisy" of intellectuals (in Coleridge's term) serves to protect Literature from the influx of impoverished cultural expression.

This kind of answer, however, is no longer enough: students of literature today are taught to problematize such assertions of value, investigating the history and the (often insidious) sociopolitical uses of such claims. And in doing that, the field of literature has been transformed by the recognition that popular genre has its own complexity, its own history and codes, its own value. Students in my department now move comfortably from a class on Shakespeare to one on detective fiction or Mills and Boon or the "body horror" films of David Cronenberg.

And science fiction? Science fiction remains tricky – not impossible – but tricky. It is still the case that the study of popular culture must be *legitimated* in some way, that is, as material studied not in itself but as it is seen to work over important cultural issues or anxieties: the romances of Rider Haggard as they help to constitute the boyish excitement and adult melancholy of imperialism; detective fiction as it elaborates modes of epistemological inquiry; Mills and Boon as it constitutes a matrix for the generation of feminine identities. Bits and pieces of science fiction's history work well here. The cultural critic Susan Sontag was the first to read the 1950s boom in science fiction disaster

movies as expressive of an overdetermined set of anxieties about nuclear war, bureaucratic alienation, communism and post-war gender re-alignments. William Gibson's *Neuromancer* has become the most academically discussed science-fiction book of recent years because it connects to discussions about that mysterious and frustrating cultural category, postmodernism. But as a whole, the genre of science fiction has not yet had produced for it what might be called an academic *protocol of reading*, a formalized way of directing students to what it is *really* about, beneath the surface. And without that protocol, all important "critical distance" is not attained: the "serious" student finds him- or herself elided with the *fan*. And we all know what fans are like. "Fans? Too mild a word. Rabids. Enthusiasts with foam round their mouths," as Iain Sinclair puts it in his novel *Radon Daughters*. In short, science fiction remains embarrassing. Is this, then, the discomfort that Ballard produces? And does this account for the antagonism between academia and the unique fan-base of science fiction?

In part, but we should also look to America, where the situation is somewhat different. Since 1973 the august academic journal *Science-Fiction Studies* has provided a space for informed discussion and the work of establishing a definition of science fiction protocols. *Extrapolation*, which began as a fan magazine, is now published by Kent State University Press. Important writers like Samuel Delany and Norman Spinrad hold teaching positions in prestigious universities. Hundreds of courses on sf run in departments across the country. Science fiction cannot be romantically declared "outside" the clutch of the academy. Yet even here, in institutionalized form, Ballard's position is precarious, uneasy. Ballard has never won a major science-fiction award and this finds reflection in the *problem* that he constitutes for the formalized study of sf. The nature of the unease was quickly set by the early reception of Ballard's first novels in the "global disaster" sequence. Novels clearly written within an identifiable sub-genre (after the novels of John Wyndham and John Christopher, amongst others), both James Blish and Algis Budrys used their reviews to warn readers of their perversion of the generic norm. Rather than the usual peculiarly comforting destruction of the old order followed by the eventual triumph of technology and the humanistic will to survive, here were texts that seemed to veer between passive acceptance of disaster and even (in *The Drowned World*, *The Crystal World* and stories like

"The Voices of Time") willed submission to death. As Ballard's experiments in the 1960s developed, Blish returned to the "stories" of *The Atrocity Exhibition* to muse that "the plain blunt fact is that we do not yet know what it is that Ballard is talking about." Once *Crash* arrived, everything was over: this was a text the science-fiction critic Peter Nicholls suggested was "advocating a life-style quite likely to involve the sudden death of yourself or those you love." This is a process a little like allowing a temporary visa to a strange visitor, initial unease, growing horror, and then a rapid march to the border for definitive expulsion.

If the section of the academy that considered science fiction worthy of study at first followed this line, the readings of Ballard's work have radically altered over the years, to the extent that critics like Warren Wagar and Gregory Stephenson now interpret the early novels not as concerned with literal death-wish, but as metaphorical attempts to transcend the mundane restrictions of bodily existence and quotidian temporality. All those stories of surrendering everyday logic to find a new existence "beyond" death, all those images of flight and transformation, are concerned with a triumphant assertion of re-configured life. At the same time, Ballard has been revived as a source for the emergence of cyberpunk, and has been connected to debates on postmodernism – especially so given that one of the key texts that set the terms of the debate over postmodernism, Jean Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation*, contained a chapter on Ballard's *Crash*. Rehabilitation, then? Hardly: the narrative of transcendence still relies on a perverse reading of perverse texts which do too much damage to the tenets of technology and humanism so central to science fiction, and the cyberpunkists and postmodernists really only have interest in *Crash* or, at a push, *The Atrocity Exhibition*. They have little to say about the rest of Ballard's work. That body of texts – huge, diverse, obsessional, perverse, repetitive – remains an anomaly, a problem, for science fiction.

I am outlining here a strange scenario. On the one hand, academics equate the name of Ballard with science fiction, a genre that has not as yet gained full legitimacy even in the expanded field of literary studies. On the other hand, Ballard is an uncomfortable presence in science fiction, at once central (since all histories of the genre must pass through the moment of the New Wave of which Ballard, as Moorcock once pronounced, was "The Voice") and marginal, perverse, aberrant. In the binary terms of sf/main-

stream Ballard exists to be located in one place only to be immediately displaced to the other side. What to do with his texts? What frames are available to render his work readable? Outside the "specialist" treatments of sf criticism, one strategy of containment is a process of selection: a text like *The Unlimited Dream Company* can suddenly emerge as a contribution to magic realism, an honourable genre (as Malcolm Bradbury suggests); better, *The Atrocity Exhibition* can be cross-referenced to other experimental fictions of the 1960s like Thomas Pynchon; better still, *Empire of the Sun*, as autobiography and war novel, can be safely considered outside science fiction and become the confessional piece which finally explains why a writer with such obvious talent began writing sf texts in the first place: it was the trauma of war which produced such strange behaviour. All of these strategies, however, desperately seek to insert Ballard texts into pre-determined non-sf genres; none do justice to his work.

The philosopher Jacques Derrida has argued that the institution of literary studies is one obsessed with "the whole problematic of judicial framing and the jurisdiction of frames." Perhaps I'm demonstrating that obsession; perhaps, too, I'm merely rehearsing that common complaint about science-fiction writers failing to be considered at their proper worth. But my little experiment with Ballard in the classroom is designed to make none of these points. Rather, his fugitive insertion into a course on Concepts of Literature aims to discomfort and disorient students not about how to distribute texts within frames, but about the very act of framing. Ballard has spoken about "the odd feeling I had of the Academy closing around me, of the plywood partitions of the Modern Literature department being erected around my desk." But what fascinates me about Ballard is not his simple evasion of these partitions so much as how his work exposes the operation of those partitions and the judgments they enable. We could not do without such frames, yet Ballard's work discomforts, I suspect, because his texts will not let literary or generic or value-frames do their work silently. They expose the laws of inclusion and exclusion, "high" and "low" literature, science fiction and mainstream, by the constant troubling displacement they cause. The point for me is not to attempt to fix the weird mobility of his work across and between categories or to salvage the anxiety this induces, but rather to track the peculiar effect this movement has on frames of judgment that are meant to be invisible mechanisms of determin-

ing a text's "proper" place.

This strange mobility can be no better exemplified than by a Ballard piece from the mid-1960s. In the transition from his quiet internal dislocation of the disaster genre to the "condensed novels" of *The Atrocity Exhibition*, Ballard produced a series of "adverts" for his new mode of writing, the name of the product being "J. G. Ballard." One of these "adverts" used as a slogan the apparently nonsense question: "Does the Angle Between Two Walls Have a Happy Ending?" But this question, one which recurs throughout *The Atrocity Exhibition*, seems to me to indicate Ballard's occupation of the "impossible" angle between frames, how his work hovers at the edge of categorizations at once inside them and outside them, producing intolerable anxiety (there can be no "happy ending"). Wouldn't this explain his simultaneous centrality and marginality to science fiction, the awkwardness with which the academy cannot resolve whether to treat his work as "serious" or "popular"? For the angle, the hinge, at once separates and connects two elements together, is the point of both articulation and disarticulation. The leverage Ballard gives in the classroom is to reflect back from the impossible perspective of the angle the machinery in which we all operate, by troubling it.

Such a strange object as the "Angle Between" advert is itself a "hinge" text, at once an anomaly and an object which invites abundant ways of thinking about it. As an avowedly commercial piece (Ballard insisted on paying the full advertising rate to the journals in which these adverts appeared: a pity *Vogue* rates were beyond him), it invites an equation between advertising and the commercial lines along which popular genres are produced. Being paid by the word is traditionally felt to sully the integrity of "serious" art. And yet as collages which occupy but subvert advertising semiotics, the adverts take their place in avant-garde practices which aim to disturb the separation of high art from commodity culture. If not as politicized as Heartfield's anti-Nazi posters, they match, tactic for tactic, Andy Warhol's outrageous attack on the institution of Art: anonymous, "factory"-produced materials which transform the authenticating signature into brand-name. Add these to the typographic collages Ballard produced whilst assistant editor of *Chemistry and Industry*, and the proposed "billboard novel" and these Ballard texts suddenly work alongside the radical art practices of artists like Daniel Buren and Jenny Holzer. Serious or popular? Commercial or avant-garde? And what kind of

text? Is the "copy" theory or fiction? "Fiction is a branch or neurology: the scenarios of nerve and blood vessel are the written mythologies of memory and desire. Sex: Inner Space: J. G. Ballard," reads the text. Do we place this inside the "fictional" discourse of *The Atrocity Exhibition* or outside as a theoretical statement of its aim? But this has been the perennial problem of reading such an unprecedented text. Colin Greenland has described it as "a minimal overlay of narrative gestures on a mass of theory," causing the exact same category mistakes felt by my students. And this is to say nothing as yet about how the advert's combination of iconic and verbal signs records how persistently *The Atrocity Exhibition*, impossibly, writes painting. That is, many of its paragraph titles are borrowed from paintings by Dali, Ernst, Magritte, Wesselmann and others, the action taking place, as it were, within the painterly frame — compacted, condensed, indeed Cubist as they are. When James Blish described the emerging "chapters" of *The Atrocity Exhibition* as "pieces of a mosaic ... going somewhere, by the most unusual method of trying to surround it, or work into it from the edges of a frame" he could not have seen how perfect a description that would become. *The Atrocity Exhibition* sustains its position at the edge of an overdetermined set of frames hovering between theory and fiction, visual and verbal, serious and popular, avant-garde and commercial, high and low, generic and experimental — in the angle between.

This might be taken as privileging T an atypical Ballard text, but if I have been concerned to show the problems with "housing" Ballard within literary categories, it is also necessary to think how the peculiarity of the space "between" and the oscillation between the permeability and impermeability of borders constitutes Ballard's most persistent thematic throughout his work. Think how often his fictions takes place in suspensive zones, in interstices where normal logics and causalities are held in abeyance: *Concrete Island*, a patch of waste-ground between motorways; *The Unlimited Dream Company*, a Shepperton strictly bounding Blake's magical transformation (whose borders expand and contract around him but forbid his exit); *Empire of the Sun*, the anomalous pocket of the International Settlement in Shanghai, its anachronistic colonial codes suspended in the peculiar vacuum between the end of the war and the beginning of peace. Think how often Jamie finds himself on the wrong side of the border: missing the round-up of European citizens, then finding it

impossible to surrender to the Japanese or be accepted by English prisoners; spending much of internment repairing the prison fences to keep people out not in, but then being sent by Basie "beyond the edge" of the camp. A story like "The Dead Time," set in the devastated margins of Shanghai, weaves between autobiography and fiction, taking place in the moment of transition between peaceful war and warring peace where the dead give life and life is deathly. And the global disaster novels take place, in effect, in the space between two catastrophes: long after variously specified global disasters, the dwindling populations that occupy this terminal zone await the second catastrophe of their own deaths, each profoundly disturbed by this intermissive state. It seems to me that the disturbance Ballard causes to categorization is redoubled by his fictions which elaborate on the disadjustment of occupying suspensive zones, the angles between.

All of which is to say that in working on Ballard's texts I do not wish to resolve the discomfort they produce in me, my students or my colleagues. To put Ballard into the classroom by championing his literary worth is not my intent; suitably, his work can never sit easily in the classroom, but hovers at its edge, endlessly productive in causing difficulty, unease and embarrassment.

Ballard's old friend Angela Carter was in some ways treated disgracefully by the universities. A difficult, awkward and stunning writer who refused orthodoxies and consistently embarrassed the academy with surprising texts has, since her death, had her rough edges smoothed over and been inserted into the canon. Her last book, *Wise Children*, thematized through the bawdy, vaudeville and outré bastard twins who narrate the novel, her tangential place with regard to contemporary literature. The North London intellectuals (and I am one of them) were bounded to the South by Carter, to the West by Ballard and to the East by the remarkable Iain Sinclair. I sincerely hope that "Ballard at 65" does not mark his entry into Literature: that would be too easy, not nearly discomfiting enough. May he remain a troubling presence on the margins, reminding us of the fragility of our literary judgments.

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**F**rom *Millennium of Movies!*  
(Microsoft-Grolier-Murdoch,  
Singapore 1999):

**CyberNaff:** Term first coined in *Interzone* 106 (April 1996) to describe definitive sf movie genre of the 90s, in which cinema attempts to evoke on screen the hipness and highs of information surfing by spurious recourse to flashy computer-generated psychedelia, ludicrous half-baked technologic, pompous affectation of social commentary on dangers of virtual experience, and cringemaking cod-Gibsonian dialogue of the "OK, slip on the 'trodes and jack in" school. See *Lawnmower Man*, *Brainscan*, *Johnny Mnemonic*, *Lawnmower Man 2*, *Virtuosity*, *Lawnmower Man 3: Revenge of the Lawn*, etc., etc. Mainly remarkable for the fact that *Strange Days* partakes wholeheartedly of the genre yet remains without much contest the strongest sf film of its decade. See review.

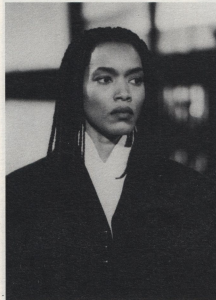
**Strange Days** (1995): There are several fine films here. One is simply a thoroughbred of sheer technical craftsmanship out of Kathryn Bigelow, director, by James Cameron, screenwriter and superbearing, easily the two most interesting people in Hollywood ever to have been married to one another. It's no belittlement of a deeply layered film to say that one of the many levels on which *Strange Days* satisfies is as a showcase for the pure virtuosity of a writer and a director with a dazzling command of medium and technique, both working at their absolute peak. Here the things about *Strange Days* that have tended to draw most comment – its "darkness," violence, genderedness – give a slightly misleading impression. I don't really understand why what's, amongst most else, an enormously high-quality rollercoaster movie in the authentic Cameron tradition should have hit the US box office so belly-first; but perhaps the first thing that ought to be said about *Strange Days* is that, quite aside from all else, it's a gloriously smart, speedy entertainment with an exhilarating confidence in its craft, and with a staggeringly convoluted plot packed with red herrings, conspiracies, McGuffins and wrong-footings that amply makes up in sheer quantity and pace what it lacks in actual sense.

Rightly or wrongly, though, the *Strange Days* that tends to get more noticed is the thoughtful, if unavoidably meretricious, science-fictional update of *Peeping Tom*, in which cinema takes a hard look at the appetites that sustain it and doesn't entirely relish what it finds. At the bargain cost of a dodgy plot device (portable black-market brain recorders as the new illegal high), *Strange Days* has a

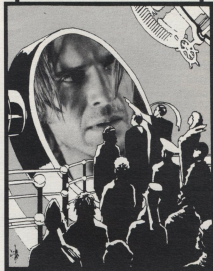
superbly-engineered metaphor for exploring the relationship between real life, memory, and entertainment, and forcing the viewer to confront some nasty images of sexual violence and snuff being peddled as thrills. But one of the key strengths is that the Gibson-pilfered SQUID set with its total-*verité* "playback" isn't simply an sf metaphor for film, but rather a distillation of what cinema only approaches – recognizing cinema itself as an early approximation to something richer and realer that one day (though hardly by 1999) will arrive to replace it, and which will address the deep desires for immersive virtual experience in a world plunging towards social and informational meltdown.

Now, aside from the CyberNaff element of immersivity, these aren't tremendously new ideas. They were thoughtfully, if a little clumsily, aired in Tavernier's 1980 *Death Watch* (and rather better in the novel on which it was based, D.G. Compton's *The Continuous Katherine Mortenhoe*). If anything, *Strange Days*' twin themes of voyeurism and escapism tangle in one another's way, as the complex moral and thematic focus progressively shifts from the problematic desire for extremes of experience ("Everyone needs a walk to the dark end of the street now and again") to the clearer-cut issue of substituting virtual experience for real. Thus Rafe Fiennes' sad, hustling lead tries to keep his act clean ("You know I don't deal snuff," he high-mindedly complains after we've shared his experience of the opening set piece) is himself both pusher and addict, shooting up between deals on his own recorded

Angela Bassett in *Strange Days*  
...at heart she's basically just a working single mom who happens to dress like a goddess....



## MUTANT POPCORN



NICK LOWE

memories of not-very-convincing sex with Juliette Lewis as an escape from the failures of his actual life. ("The trouble with you," explains Lewis's new proprietor, "is you assume that you have a life, when in fact you're just peddling bits of other people's lives, and the broken bits of your own.") It's disappointing that the movie cops out in the final reckoning by arguing, in effect, that the real moral issue isn't the virtuality of experience but its truth or fictionality, so that film, being made-up, still has the moral edge over playback, which pimps on actual people's actual lives and deaths. ("You know one way," says Lewis, "that movies are still better than playback? Because the music comes up, there's credits, and you know it's over.") *Strange Days* gets away with the material it does by wrapping them up in a suitably distancing and ironizing nest of audience frames, so that we watch (for example) the notorious serial kills through the eyes of the killer, through the appalled eyes of Fiennes and friends, through the camera of a woman; but all this contributes to a mounting sense of backing-off from what might have been a more dangerous film than it is.

In the end, though what does make *Strange Days* a genuinely fine essay in speculation, in defiance of its fairly incredible and at best nearly-new technological premise, is that it's genuinely interested in the future as future, rather than as a metaphoric extension of the present. *Strange Days* is, literally, dated from the start, its teeming plot virtuosically crammed into a single momentous day: the last hours of 1999, when the 20th century girds itself for the big

Auld Lang Syne and the planetary party that marks the arrival of the future. None of this has much to do with the main plot, which could happily (and, to be honest, more plausibly) have been located in, say, *Blade Runner's* 2026. But the themes gain enormously in immediacy from the proximity of this nearest of near-future settings – so much so that Bassett's '97 Mercedes, for example, is a cannily-borrowed prototype of a real '97 Mercedes – and the subtlety with which its world is extended from our own. Much of the shockwave-rider aesthetic of *fin-de-siècle* information culture, and the sf that feeds off it, lies in the nearness of the near futures it explores, the sense of the speed at which change happens and the vastness of the changes awaiting our world between here and (say) 31/12/99. And while it's arguable that the millennial setting is at base a rhetorical ploy to lay claim to greater topicality and significance than the film will really bear, the evocation of the last day of the world is so finely,

persuasively done that it disarms all reservations about its actual point.

*Strange Days* is an unusually strongly-written movie for its genre, a fact reflected in its untraditional ordering of the credits. The *Brazil*-like script history had Cameron lay out the basic plot, which was then passed to *Age of Innocence's* Jay Cocks for the main dialogue draft, and back to Cameron for rewrites. It's hard to judge how much of the layered, intricate quality of concept and plot is due to this unusual synergy of genre technician and literary craftsman. Cocks has disavowed any great interest in sf, while ideas have never been Cameron's strongest suit; but somewhere in the space between them something has gone remarkably right. One of the many kinds of intensely genre-specific pleasure you can only get from sf is the art of minimalist bluff: the awestruck shamelessness with which ludicrous premises are explained away with a single offhand line. And while Cameron himself has always been a

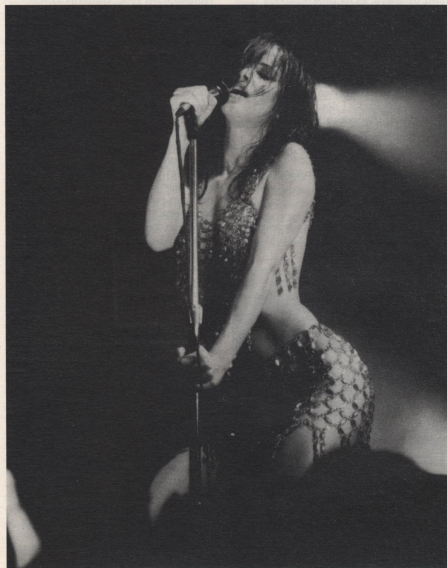
genius at shooting around the intellectual holes in his derivative and often downright silly premises, *Strange Days* is surely his finest hour.

This, after all, is a script that sets out to build a serious, gritty, and futurewards-looking film on the unpromising speculation that within less than four years any twerp with a bad jacket will have access to daft-looking beanies that record our brains on minidisc. How can that have come about? "It was originally developed by the FBI for interrogation of suspects, but it went underground." And that's all we ever hear – not a dicky-bird about, say, the underlying science (unless you count "Superconducting Quantum Interference Device," which might just as well be "Subnullitronic Quasimodular Jobba-za Doodah"). Brilliant. And it works for motivation holes, too: at the very moment I jotted "WHAT does Bassett see in this loser?" came a beautifully-crafted flashback lasting, I suppose, perhaps half a minute with only one significant line of dialogue, that answers the question neatly, precisely, and above all so fast that you never have time to think Hang on a moment...

Bigelow's own contribution is, however, considerable. For such an iconic figure, she's never filed terribly easily, but three convenient projections have tended to recur: Bigelow the long leggy girlie who writes and shoots like a guy, role model and fetish figure for all distaff film-makers who dream of making the boys' team; Bigelow the baffling genre-bender whose odd mixes of vampire and western, cop potboiler and femme drama, heist and surf movies share little obvious auteurial stamp beyond a disdain for the mainstream, an enthusiasm for high concept, and a refusal to take the easy path of wink-wink irony; and Bigelow the painter turned pulp merchant whose earnest, muscular treatments of exploitation storylines dangle themselves teasingly between art film and video filler. A serious, professionally ambitious woman writer-director whose gender is sometimes (especially in *Point Break*, which made more money than *Strange Days*) stamped on her work largely by the absence of visible signs of its presence, she's attracted comment in her past mainly for her technical skill with showy, virile action set pieces.

Well, this is certainly a specialism that *Strange Days* – a film, after all, peculiarly self-conscious about film – seems almost custom-made to promote. The playback sequences, in particular, proclaim a positively hybriatic virtuosity, given that their defining characteristic is to give a complete, no-edits, synaesthetic record of actual life (and death) experience, in explicit contrast to the feeble approximation

Juliette Lewis in *Strange Days* ...in which cinema takes a hard look at the appetites that sustain it and doesn't entirely relish what it finds...





offered by, say, movies. But while they're fun to watch, and the PoV tracks and hidden cuts make the best of an impossible brief, the results remain frankly rather clunky and unconvincing compared with the less flashy, yet wonderfully adventurous and assured, main action. It's not the most interesting thing about her, but she does direct violence well; and gender is, whether we want it or not, important. It's important to our response to the images of sexual murder to know that they were shot by a woman (so she can't be getting off on them, can she?).

More important, though, Bigelow is a far less classical, establishment kind of director than (for example's sake) Cameron; and *Strange Days* has profited immensely from her sharper sense of environment and style. Her taste in soundtrack, for one, has always been rather snappy compared with the very conservative gentleman Jim's. (KB it was in *Near Dark* period who, in a rare moment of outright tongue-in-cheek, stuck New Order in Spinal Tap wigs for a dino-metal video of "Touched by the Hand of God.") For *Strange Days*, we have Graham Revell and Deep Forest where Cameron might have settled for James Horner – to say nothing of a whole album's worth of toe-tapping top pop melodies dropped in by the likes of Skunk Anansie, Tricky and (bizarrely) Juliette Lewis sings Polly Jean Harvey. By contrast, I assume the largely-pointless Jim Morrison title, one of the very few weak things about the film, is Cameron's contribution – the song does get a token look-in, but only in a barely-recognizable clubadub cover "featuring Ray Manzarek" (inconspicuously).

In a film this information-rich, there are plenty of nits one could pick if so inclined. Some of the studiously cyberherp dialogue ("It's pure and uncut, straight from the cerebral cortex") is pretty laughable, and no amount of clever relationship-mirroring (as a key scene spells out, Mace:Lenny::Lenny:Faith) can paper over the utter incredibility of Fiennes, or anyone else, ever preferring the tiresome, whiney Juliette Lewis over the astonishing Angela Bassett character. (It's probably unfair to assume, as I'm afraid I do, that all Cameron scripts are about his ex-wives, but even if the Bassett figure isn't in any sensible sense based on the director she's still the most jawdropping of all Cameron's long line of fantasy girls. Not only is she long, black, and drop-down-dead with style coming out of her pores, but at heart she's basically just a working single mom who happens to dress like a goddess, burn a fab set of wheels, and totally kickbox every ass in range because it's the only way she can pay for the childcare.)



Ralph Fiennes and Angela Bassett in *Strange Days* ...the sheer number of false endings enjoyably destabilizes a raft of classical film conventions and certainties...

Overplotted *Strange Days* certainly is, with the ending looking as if it's been through one or two rewrites too many, and the identity of the key villain neither as dramatic nor as convincing as it might have been, after so many deft deflections of suspicion from this and several other candidates. It's nice that the crude conspiracy scenario is itself in the end a false trail, though maybe less happy that, after so many twists and teases in the conspiracy plotting, the LAPD emerges so unexpectedly – or rather not, given the degree of cooperation afforded – squeaky spotless. But the sheer number of false endings enjoyably destabilizes a raft of classical film conventions and certainties, and it's particularly gratifying to see the creaky old "all we have to do is get this McGuffin to the media" scenario

(such faith in free speech; it surely wouldn't happen here) subjected to a touch of Rodney King-inspired realism. By the time we arrive, somewhat to our surprise, at the post-shootout classical cliché clinch, this and any other conventional ending have been effectively deconstructed by the cascade of trapdoor endings that precedes. "Ain't nothing means nothing, man," comments the great Tom Sizemore upstaging machine on the final plot revelation: "the whole planet's in fuckin' chaos." A less great movie might have thrown that word about more.

Review ends. Click [here](#) to browse forward, or [here](#) to return to reality. (These links have been disabled in this unregistered copy.)

Nick Lowe

# New from Voyager

## Tired of living on Earth?

The climactic final volume of the *Mars* trilogy (following *Red Mars* and *Green Mars*). Early in the 23rd Century, Mars has been terraformed and is politically independent. Meanwhile, on Earth, terminal overpopulation, reduced resources and bitter nationalism causes many Terrans to view Mars as a potential escape. Mars cannot become dynamically utopian unless Earth does as well, so on Mars, a campaign is begun which will aid Earth through this difficult time in its history.

Kim Stanley Robinson will be appearing at Liverpool University (which offers an SF MA) and at venues around the country such as Liverpool, Manchester and Glasgow during April. Keep an eye out in local bookshops for further announcements!

**BLUE MARS Kim Stanley Robinson**

25 APRIL H/B £15.99

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The author of the award-winning *Mythago Wood*, Robert Holdstock, is one of Britain's top fantasy writers, having twice won the World Fantasy Award. Jack Chatwin's visions are vivid experiences of a world he believes to be in parallel with his own. He encounters an apparently primitive human couple, Greyface and Greenface, who are fleeing a terrible event in their own world, closely pursued by a bizarre enemy. When the glimpses of this strange realm affect Jack, his body *shimmers* and the distant sounds of the lost world can just be heard, emanating from his skin. But is this the past? The future? When only one of the couple finds the freedom they have hunted for, into Jack's world, he must in turn enter their world, a magical and illusory land, and reunite them. *Ancient Echoes* combines the enchanting and exotic world of mythology and the magical realism of altered states, and is a mesmerizing, psychological fantasy thriller.

**ANCIENT ECHOES Robert Holdstock**

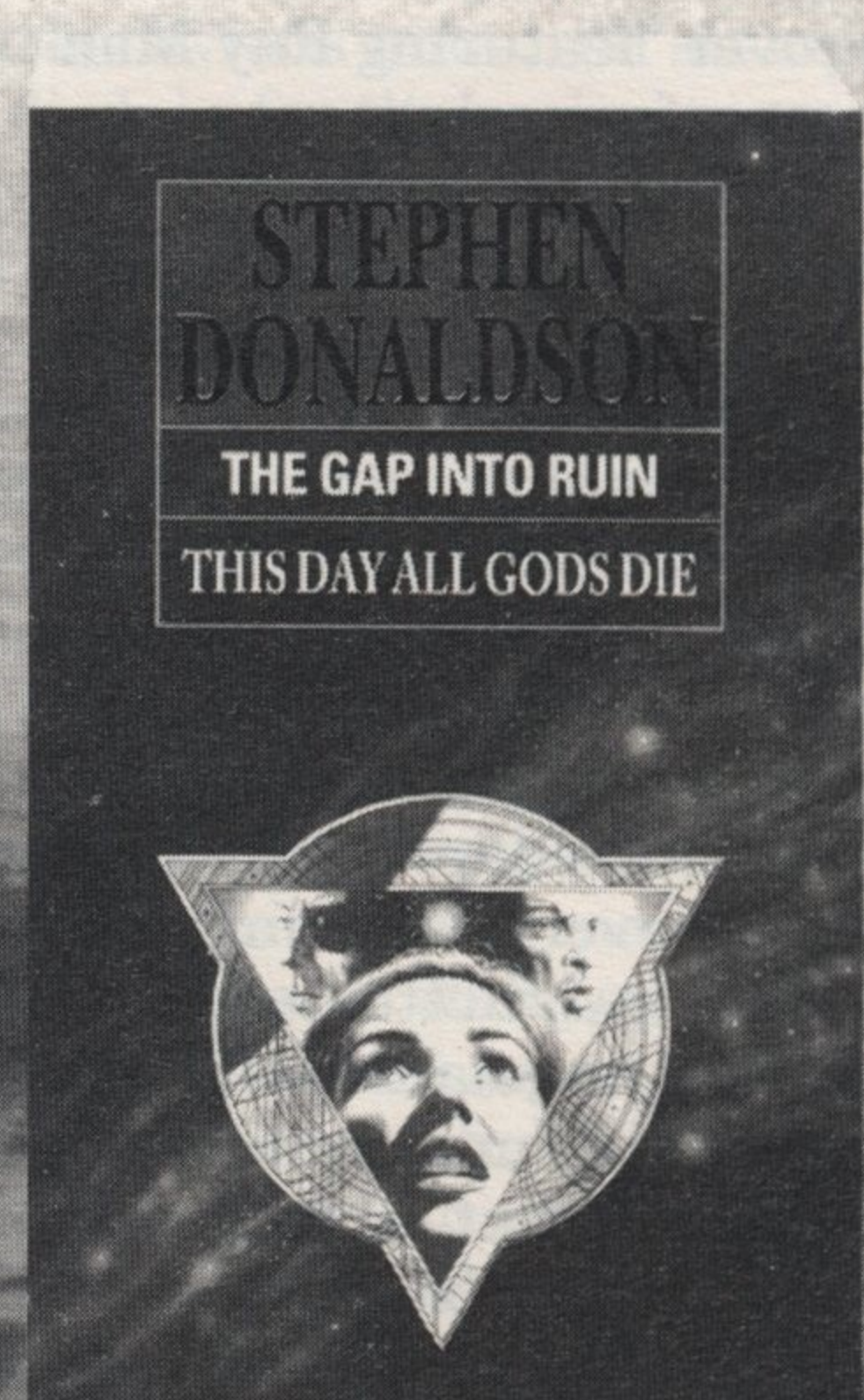
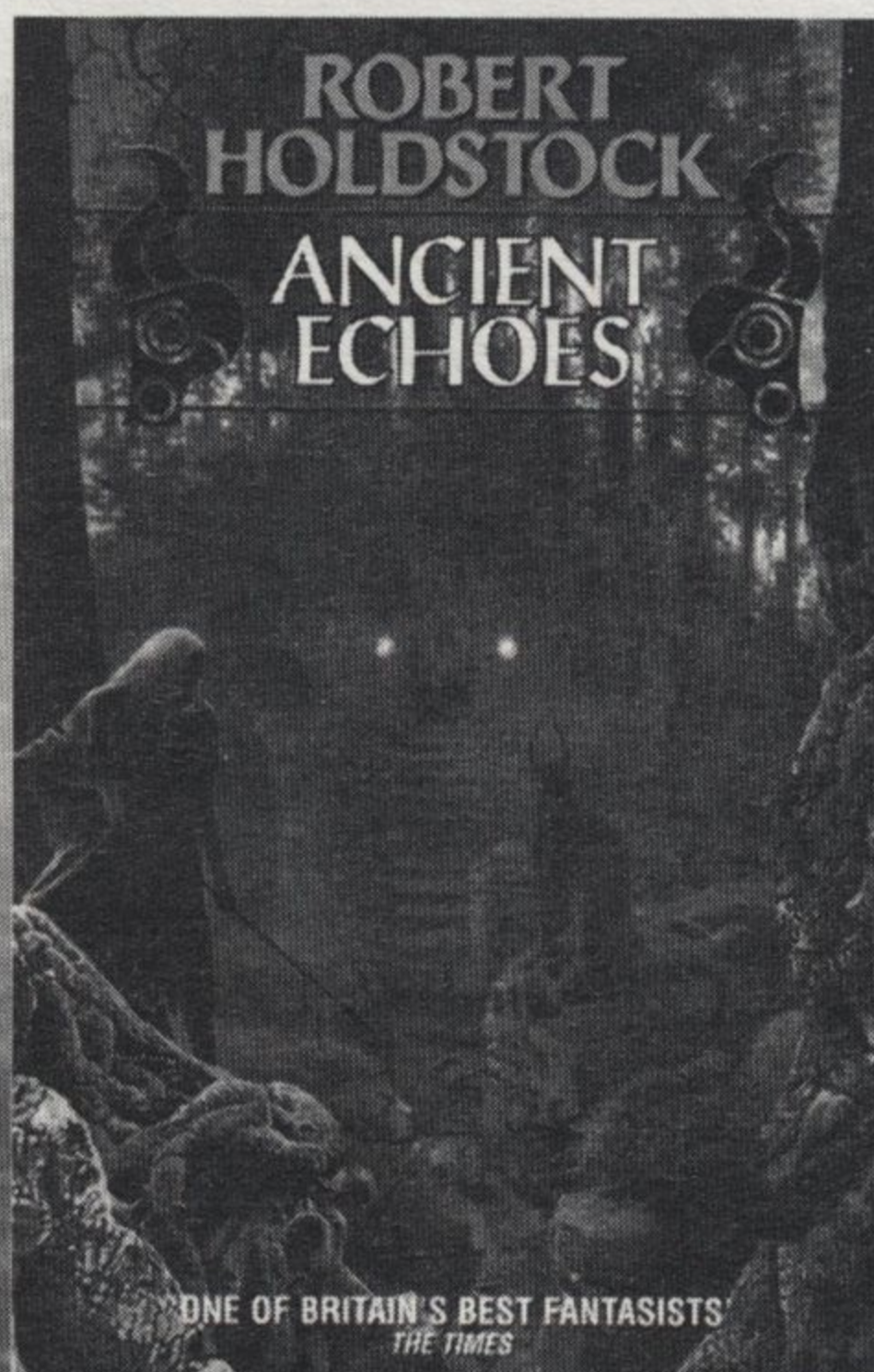
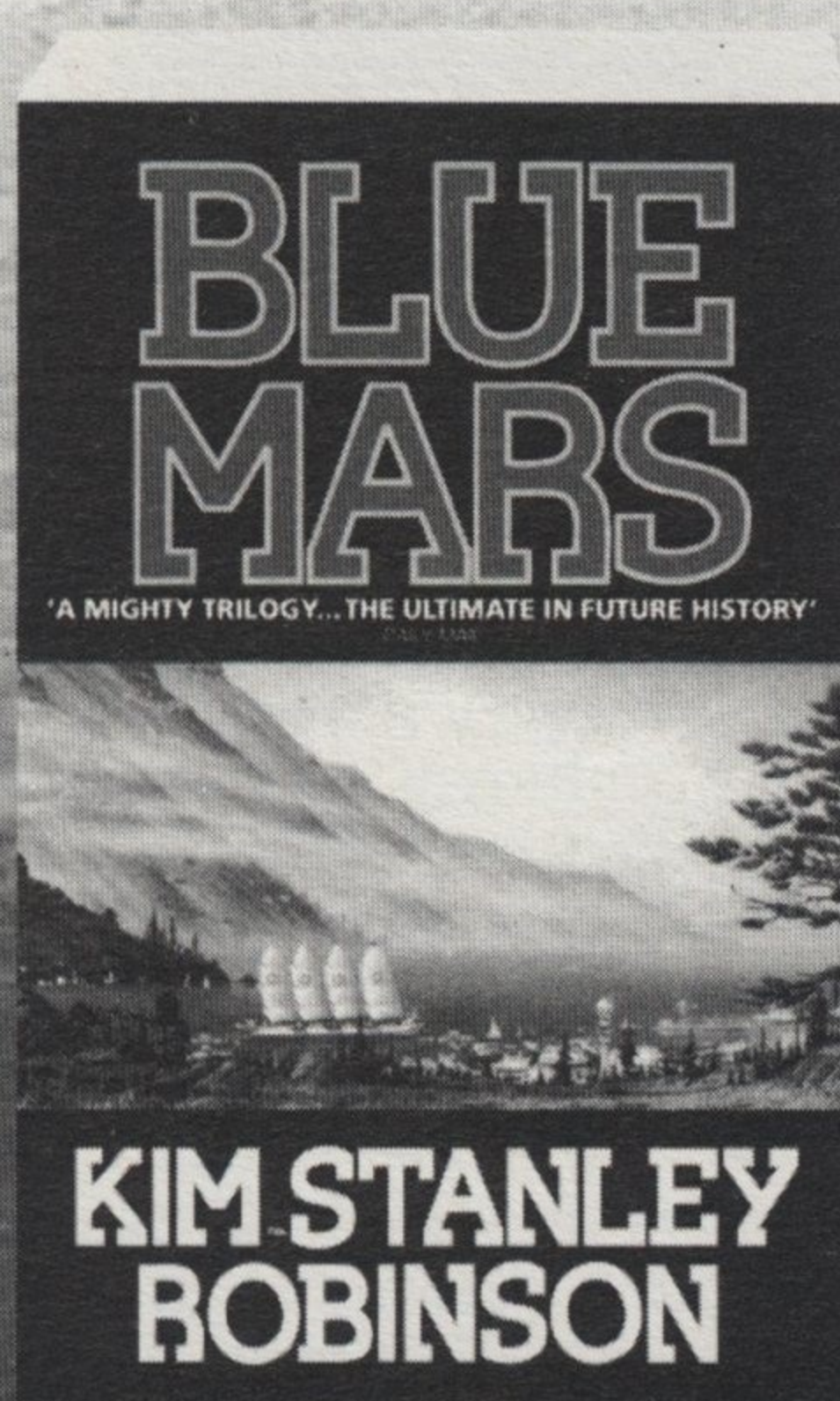
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*Time Out* said of the *Gap* series, 'As funky, grungy and down-and-dirty as space opera ever gets. This series has me hanging by my thumbs waiting for the next instalment.' Well, take the weight off those thumbs, because the darkly thrilling *Gap* series reaches its harrowing conclusion in this fifth and final volume. The crew of the *Trumpet* is in disarray. As they attempt to pursue *Soar* and her captain, Sorus Chatelaine, they lie fallow in space, all their hopes resting with Angus Thermopyle — once a bloodthirsty pirate, and now a cyborg working against his will for the United Mining Companies Police. They're considered the most politically rapacious force in human space and their leaders are caught up in their own potentially disastrous battle for power. This is life in an ever faster lane, with allegiances and agendas feverishly shifting as the options run out...

**THIS DAY ALL GODS DIE Stephen Donaldson**

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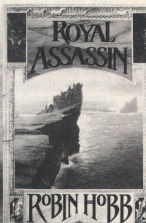
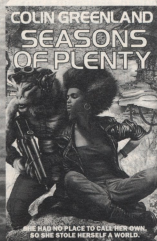
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# The Embarkation for Cythera

Richard Calder

The city rose from a shelf of permanent ice, a glass ocean surrounded by dawn-drenched glaciers. The neon-beaded highway snaked in and out of the Bentley's lights, the prismatic sheen of the road inducing a slurry of tiredness in my eyes, the desolation of McMurdo Sound viewed as if through lashes sodden with gasoline. Dahlia leaned across the upholstery, swung a thigh over my own and put the Bentley into fourth. Jarred, the glove compartment flapped open, spilling soiled underwear, make-up, a .22 auto, hypodermic, speculum and food-ration cards. Tall buildings rushed towards us – folds, waves and twists, the fractured planes and multiple trajectories of cosmogenic architecture that clung like monstrous, rococo vegetation to the more familiar overtures of the International Style – and then we were thundering through the abandoned ruins of the city limits. The car's heaters were insolent; they were downright wanton; the air seemed alive with the contrapuntal buzzing of flies. Dahlia, unconsolated, pressed herself against me, greedy for the other-earthly warmth which the rising sun would soon rescind. I felt the jellied deliciousness of a breast through her furs. My loins hardened. Had 15 years in His Majesty's secure institutions proved sanative? No; I had been free just 15 weeks and I was again her slave. On the dashboard I had pinned a photograph from the pages of *Vogue* or *Elle* that depicted a half-dozen sloe-eyed supermodels sprawling, lounging and provocatively draped amongst the grey, petrified ruins of

Auschwitz-Birkenau; and it occurred to me as I drove that the history of the modern world, my history, perhaps, was like one long frenzied act of coupling, its 21st-century orgasm all that I had known, no foreplay, just a timeless explosion of white heat, this checkmate of sex amongst the ruins.

"Spare me the dildonics; spare me the cojone-baloney," said Dahlia, in a *touché* to my thoughts, "just get me to a karaoke. Fast." Throughout late summer the light pouring over the glaciers and mountains had hit at too sharp an angle to warm ice or flesh; still we had had to run from the dawn; even now, as the continent rolled towards perpetual night, daybreak, however anaemic, signalled meltdown. I switched off the Bentley's lamps. All those movies, *A Princess of Death*, *Kung-Fu Nymphet from Hell*, *The Kingdom of Childhood*, *A Chinese Killer Virgin in LA*. Dahlia was accustomed to more torrid climes. "The sun's almost up. I can feel the UV disrupting my atomic structure." An anxious bass line started up inside my skull, found its way down my neck, along my arm until, transposed into a tic by my ghost's burgeoning incorporeality (she, one of the fibresphere's damned; a copy divorced from its original; fame evolved into a separate, alien form of life; a new morphology congealed out of the mediascape, the hyper-universe that interpenetrates our own) my fingers began to paradiddle against the dash. "Hurry. I'm starting to dissolve." Signs of habitation began to manifest themselves; became insistent. Frantically, I

began to scout for a place where Dahlia could disgorge.

Just as there are, in any city, karaokes that boast a catalogue of the damned – those illicit ghosts that constitute the fibresphere's dispossessed – so too, in McMurdo City, this frigid oasis at the bottom of the world, there were establishments where the patron, if less illicitly, then just as damnably, perhaps, might adulate, consort with, or simply wham-bam-and-thank-you-ma'am a favourite spectre, a refugee from Earth2.

I braked; the Bentley slewed, came to a halt. The sign (its neon just blinking out, the city suffused in an amber glow) read *Les Enfants Terribles*.

Touching Dahlia's face, my fingers disappeared into a luminous epidermis, her body waxing insubstantial, holographic. I felt dizzy. My heart began to palpitate as it did when I awoke with a panic, a night fright, thinking I was about to die, alone and friendless, still incarcerated in the chill environs of Boys' Town. I put a hand over my chest, trying to moderate my heart's overwrought gymnastics by an act of will.

I got out, passed between the karaoke's Doric columns; a boy tugged at my sleeve. "Don't you see the sign?" he said. Several other little pimps congregated about me until they blocked my way. "This is the kingdom of childhood," the boy continued, "the kingdom of love and of death. The ladies are resting. Try later. Try tonight." He was Algerian; Egyptian, maybe, like most of the boys in this slice of the continent; a demobbed soldier, a veteran of the North-South wars. I cast a backwards glance. Inside the car, Dahlia – trying vainly to cover herself as she deliquesced into a parallel world of intelligent light – was little more than a scintillant flock of submicroscopic machines, her clothes, even her flesh, already reassembled by The Wound. I looked up and down the street, contemplating violence. No cirriculumus that morning, only a merciless, hallucinatory sun that saturated the gulls and skuas milling about the garbage dumps, the shacks and deserted dives clinging to the roots of the organi-tech clad towers: jagged, inverted icicles cloistering those who – grown fat on unregulated oil and mineral exploitation, yet not fat enough to return home – continued to live on a diet of rapine, comforted by their other selves, the runaways of a world encoded within reality's mirrors. I had to gain admittance; about me all was dereliction; *Les Enfants* was probably the only operative karaoke in the Sound.

"I have an eidolon in the car," I said, "a princess of death, a girl called Dahlia Chan." Some of the beefier lads folded their arms across their chests, signalling their determination to keep me from entering. "You must have heard of her: she was big in Vientiane and Bangkok." But that had been many years ago; none of these boys was old enough to appreciate the High Camp of a cult property. "Me and Dahlia – we're looking for work." Peering over their heads I inspected a musty interior. Oblique rays of mote-filled light fell from high, stained-glass windows; the furniture was covered in sheets; I pushed my way through the

infant cordon – nylon doors swung open, closed; a second set of doors followed suit – passed a chain gang of surfers, datacapped, giggling-out on their vacs, little talent scouts seeking newly-emergent morphologies, these children resembling spacemen, the victims of a mad hairdresser's experiments, over-zealous electric chair quality-control engineers. I plucked an oily morsel from a half-demolished buffet of baby penguin and krill; breakfasted as I swung through 360 degrees, surveying. Framed, antique photographs of Sailor Moon and Dorothy Gale hung behind the ornate bar; there were photographs of derricks and mines too, roustabouts posing in the foreground. A banner read: *If you can't afford to tip, go back to the land of censorship*. Satisfied that *Les Enfants* provided suitable refuge, I retraced my steps; confronted the boys; exhaled a homicidal miasma into their contumacious faces. "I'm like you." I pulled off a glove, held up my thumb and revealed to them the mark of the paternoster. "I know what it is to live in fear." The pubescent hustlers fixed me with lowered, frosted brows; convened a parliamentary scrum.

My teeth and extremities throbbing with a brutal ache, my nerves overtaxed, ready to blow, I traipsed back to the Bentley, adjusting my jumpsuit's thermostat as its coils struggled to protect me from the 30°C cold. Before I could open the door, Dahlia, now wholly spectral, slipped impatiently through metal and glass; as she walked ahead, desperate to set herself behind the sanctuary of those kitsch, fake marble walls, I could almost hear The Wound calling to her, that locus in space-time where information became live, where the fibresphere bled into our own world; the site of sites that was everywhere and nowhere and which – her simulacrum disintegrating – was consuming her, deporting her piecemeal back to the collective images from which she had sprung.

"I know him," Dahlia muttered to the pimps, "really, it's all right. He's my driver. He's done time for me." One of the boys – the boy I had spoken with, their leader, it seemed – made a unilateral decision, broke off from the pack and led us through the karaoke's shrouded interior, through its VIP lounge – so like a raped jewellery box, all cracked mirrors, torn brocades, ruined fligree and silks, its treasure scattered, ruined – and up a flight of stairs. Skipping into a darkened room he gestured for us to follow; a dormitory of spooks – a dozen or more Translators glowing softly with interned fugitives from Earth2, children of the fibresphere who, like my own child, had outshone, sometimes outlived, their originals – stretched before us. The boy opened the lid of an empty coffin and Dahlia – a post-infinite number of tiny, dancing lights, a bright cloud of Heraclitian flux – lay down, closed her eyes. Within moments – the coffin's modem flickering – her dissolution stabilized; the warp between worlds, the limbo that would, come nightfall, allow her to re-access Earth Prime, cradled her. I leaned against a wall; slid down to the rubber floor. The boy sat opposite, his back against a Translator, the image of a tomb-robber's assistant.

"We go from karaoke to karaoke," I said, "worked most of the Antarctic Peninsula. Last place we hit

was Marie Byrd Land. You heard of *Kindertotenlieder*? We did two weeks at *Kindertotenlieder*."

"I've heard there was a mass suicide in Marie Byrd Land. Sometimes, you can't escape. The memories follow you. Are memories all that's following you, effendi?"

I clasped my jaw in an attempt to soothe my aching teeth. My machismo – such as it was – had evaporated. How could I tell them I'd broken parole? They might understand my crimes; they might sympathize; but I couldn't expect them to freely offer safe haven; like their ghosts, their refugee status in the city states strung along the Trans-Antarctic Highway was continually threatened by diplomatic pressure from top-side.

If only I could rest up. A little therapy, a course of Xanax, a few weeks on a beach...

The boy studied me with death-obsessed eyes. "Memories," I said. "Yeah – the witch-hunts, the abuse, the straitjacket on the imagination." Decadent, candyass whingeing, I knew, to one such as him. "But I guess it was tougher for you guys." A piece of shrapnel was lodged under his right cheek, gleaming like polished bone. Kids made such exquisite killers. Malleable; better soldiers than adults. Kidnap them; seduce them with ghosts; they'll do anything you ask. But if these children had become fundamentalists, then it was Hollywood, the *De Luxe*, the transnationalism of glamour, sex and money that they had dreamed of as martyrdom's prize; Islam never inspired such fanaticism. Paradise was for those who consumed.

"Sure is tougher. All you been done for is collaboration, eh? Our ghosts and we been through hell, man. Our masters told us we were going to get the goods" – an embarrassed hiatus – "told us we'd have more food than we could eat, just like the people on TV. And not just food. The life, man, the *life*. But it was all lies." How could they have ever hoped to win? The North held the world's purse strings; dictated to the South, gorging itself on the Third World's raw material and food. The child crusade had been chaotic, their battles resembling riot rather than strategy. How could they have successfully warred against the *conquistadores* of development, advertising and the media when they had so lusted after what they would destroy?

These boys and their masters had wanted a Northern life such as I had enjoyed; but they had been afforded only glimpses, the tantalizing simulacra of paradise; they had wanted it all.

I pulled off my balaclava. "Please, I need to sleep. I've been driving all night." I didn't want to be interrogated; I was tired of dissembling. As I thawed, my poker face was sure to crack, sure to combust like a leaky graveyard.

"Straitjacket on the imagination?" The boy had imitated my accent, assuming the cadences of "bibelot," the prêt-à-porter streehtowl of the *De Luxe*, the plummy, razorblade rhetoric of one raised in a world of corrupt elegance. He smirked, pressing his advantage. "All you ever had was a rap over the knuckles."

"More than that. I was a whipping boy for their

insanity." I sighed. "You know how the law is. I was evil, they said, but at the same time they thought I was a *tabula rasa* corrupted by too much surfing, too many violent *manga*. Now, I ask you, I'm either evil, that is, I have committed an evil act of my own volition, or else I'm innocent, and the blame lies in the hands of the image-world. But they wanted it both ways. I was evil because I was possessed; I was possessed because I was evil; and I had to be punished to drive the demon out. Positively *medieval*." They blamed the Dahlia videos. The videos and the Dahlia comics. The comics and the Dahlia site on the Net. And they blamed me. Blamed me for being *possessed*. There's that scene in *A Chinese Killer Virgin in LA* where... But they blamed children for everything in those days. Still did, of course, otherwise I wouldn't have been having this conversation with a fellow out-cast. "But I tell you, it wasn't Dahlia's fault." No; The danger wasn't in the fibresphere. It never is. The danger was at home.

Decadent? Candyass?

I too had been a killer.

I had always known that, some day, some how, I would have to kill my stepfather. It was a passion I had kept too long to myself; not out of shame, but because I always took such pleasure in knowing things, terrible things, unspeakable things, that other people would not even dare to suspect. Dinner was the hour when it became hardest to camouflage my secret. Suffering my stepfather's sarcasm, his hideous opinions, his cant, I would chew each portion of my meal into pap in an effort to restrain declaring myself. "*Stepfather*," I had wanted to say, "*not today, not tomorrow, and not even next week or next month, but some day, and surely some day soon, I will destroy you...*"

Dahlia had been my only friend.

I put my head in my hands; melting snow seeped between my fingers. "I've just got out of Boys' Town. What else do you need to know? I've done ghost wedding and I've been punished for it. I'm the same as you." Yeah, I thought ruefully, a murderer, and a pimp to boot. "Please, you must help." A surruration of voices; I looked up; several boys had gathered in the doorway.

"Sure," said their leader, loosening his greatcoat, playing to the mob, "everybody here mixed with The Censors. Everybody done Boys' Town, been deprogrammed, dispossessed. But how come you in the Town so long, effendi? You old, man, you old." My interlocutor would have been from the original Boys' Town, the POW gulag that wormed across the world's demographic-technological faultline, the cleavage that separated the Mediterranean, the Rio Grande, the Slavic and non-Slavic, Australia and Indonesia. As The Great Fear had spread, so had the gulag, consolidating itself along the borders of the young, overpopulated societies of the South even as it insinuated itself into the rich, geriatric societies of the North. I remembered TV pictures of the crusade, the ant-like armies of children, that, until recently, had surged upwards towards the borders of the developed world, wave after wave; children from Africa, Asia, Latin

America; I remembered how childhood itself had become stigmatized; from my Elsinore of Holland Park, London, I was taken to the encampment on Bodmin Moor where I was to spend the next 15 years, an eleven-year-old who, like so many others to follow, had provided governments with the excuse they needed to consolidate their authoritarianism.

"Yeah, I'm old," I said. I was 26. "I was there at the beginning, when quantum computers first went on line." When programs became streams of nanomachines, the nanomachines streams of quasi-particles and photons. "My family was one of the first to have a stepfather." A fat man, he'd been, a lank-haired, thin-lipped censor in a long black coat that resembled a soutane. *He's here to help*, my real father had said, after we had returned from Laos. *He's going to watch over you*. From protecting children from images to demonizing and persecuting them was – giving the nightly transmissions, the footage of global delinquency, the black and brown adolescent hordes committing atrocities on Europe's doorstep – perhaps but one short hop, a cosmogenic leap paralleling the leap to consciousness and flesh in the self-organizing universe of the fibresphere; perhaps protection and persecution had always amounted to the same thing: control. "They used us as an excuse to censor the world." I bit on my tongue, a part of me too eager to reveal how, one night, when my stepfather had surprised me as I gained veristic access to an intelligence – an enemy of my country, the ineffable Dahlia Chan – and was about to download her from The Wound, I picked up a screwdriver, skewered him through his throat, his chest, again, and again, and again...

I crawled over to Dahlia's coffin; her monitor had winked alive.

"Dahlia? Can you hear me?"

"I can hear you, Zane." Was that what I was calling myself this morning? So many names. Zane Weary. Max Moroder. Jack Pimpernel. So many towns... Dahlia's face compounded; looked at me from out of the white, featureless plain of limbo, her Eurasian eyes – like black pearls mounted in a gold-paisley surround branding the LCD with their scorching crescents. Had a version of her ever fought with the children of Laos, in the deadly, degraded countryside of once popped hills? Or had her dark skin prejudiced companionship, as it had similarly incurred the ostracism of the North? She would never say. "Do we have a job?" I looked across at pimp *numero uno*.

"Okay, you can have a job. Don't know yet if you're one of the boys, but you no infidel, that's for sure. But we can't afford no big money. Board and lodging, a few extras. Tell me, can she sing?"

"Like a phoenix." I took from my pocket some of my Dahlia: movie stills, autographed concert tickets, yellowing articles ripped from Laotian and Thai magazines, information which constituted the superprogram of her simulacrum; information infected with intelligent light – the souvenirs rippled with sentience; stilled – which, slow as we'd been this morning to thwart the dawn, had reabsorbed some of her fame. "See: she's a superstar." Some of the monitors on the other coffins lit up with tanned, Californian faces, for-

gotten extras, doubtless, said the snob in me, body-doubles and 15-minute starlets (soldiers being always indoctrinated with ghosts their own age; young ghosts, like young fighters, so infinitely malleable). "Different style, of course, to what you might be used to. But –"

"She Chinese," said a boy from the door, "why you no got *white* ghost." Pimp uno silenced him with a frown. Maybe he knew too well that white, black, brown or yellow, a ghost – like those they haunted – enjoyed, at best, a para-legal status; was, at worst, an outlaw.

"We could do with a little variety. How long can you stay?"

"Two weeks, three maybe –"

"And after that?"

I looked up, bemused. "Why," I said, "Cythera, of course. We're trying to find Earth3." And this time I wasn't dissembling. The boy grinned; there was laughter from the doorway.

"Yes," he said, "maybe you *are* like us after all." Even though linear history was over I still clung to the mythic possibility of its dialectic; for wasn't Cythera supposed to be a synthesis of Earths 1 and 2, a place where the join between the real and the artificial became seamless?

"Cythera?" said Dahlia. "I'm not sure any more if it exists. All I know is I want to go home." I kissed Dahlia's enpelled lips, my cheek brushing against the mangled skeleton of a spider that hung from a dilapidated web. As I withdrew, I saw that she was crying. "I don't mean I want to go back to Earth2," she continued, addressing the room. "All I remember of that is the persecution. The things they did to us over there." Her voice crackled with static. "Not that life's any different on Earth Prime." She was right, of course; existence, as I have learnt, is just one huge, inescapable prison; mirrors within mirrors within mirrors; children were being demonized in the image-world for consorting with "ghosts" whom – reciprocating our own world's prejudices – were considered to be as dangerous and as unreal as we considered the ghosts of the fibresphere; "ghosts," that is, such as myself; no escape; no matter how ingenious, an inmate would always find themselves, just at the moment of breaking through a wall, tunnelling beneath a fence, or bluffing a passage through the main gates, confronted by another prison, more cells, racks, corridors, halls and torments; and even after breaking through what might have seemed like an ultimate barrier, the last wall or fence that hemmed them from the outside world, they would soon discover that that mountain vista, that great city or that valley beneath a clear blue sky, was but another room, another prison within a prison within a prison, that that city, mountain range and valley were fakes, theatrical props, and that they would always be denied freedom unless they might step through a crack in time and space, step beyond those universes within universes entirely; step into Cythera. "I just want to go home – even if it's to a home I've never had."

I stared at the monitor. It was as if I had again first

accessed her on my quantum PDA, one sulphurous, tropical night on Avenue Lane Xane, ever after to dream that she would one day walk through the walls of my bedroom; that, like an angel, she had come to set me free; and if I had then recognized her as one who was at once nobility, elevation, beauty, life, I would later recognize her as one who was also an angel of death. Back in England, surreptitiously logging onto her site – watching her movies, hearing her songs, speaking to her – I knew my stepfather had to die. Dahlia had said so.

"It'll be dark all the time, soon," I said. "The winter's almost here. Daylight'll be for no more than a few hours. Then we'll find Cythera and we can be together always."

Each morning, finding myself in my bedroom, a datapac encasing my head, I had known that she was still on the other side, a vactress, a creature of the fibresphere, that a prick of a hypo in my neck, a rush of information – images enhanced by the little dream machines that twiddled the knobs and switches of my consciousness – had had me following a prompt.

I had had to download her; I had had to run away...

The future, even if mythical, was all we had; the past, too, was just another penitentiary.

I felt an arm under my own; as I was helped to my feet I discovered that I myself was crying.

"We all want to go to Cythera, effendi. I am Baptiste. Come I'll show you to a room."

Later, as I tried to sleep between spells of sneaking to the window, opening the chromium blinds to scour the streets for signs of pursuit, I lay on the mattress, trawled the cold, dark currents of my mind, all memories but one eluding me, from abyss to abyss the flux of selfhood but for that bright engram of patricide, lost.

When I awoke I was staring into the face of the man I had killed 15 years earlier. He stood at the foot of my bed, Raybans completing an ensemble of black robe and surcingle worn over heavy-duty thermoware; his natural rotundity, thus supplemented, presented a grotesque caricature, a dream-like exaggeration of the gross, ever-looming figure that had plagued my childhood; I closed my eyes; reopened; but unlike ghosts, dreams cannot so easily pass from world to world; my stepfather was horribly corporate and was levelling a double-barrelled handgun at my head.

"Sorry, effendi, you should have told us. Everybody here done time enough. We can't harbour no trouble-makers." Pimp uno withdrew to a corner of the room.

"I told you that watching so much violence would end in tears."

"I killed you."

"You *tried* to kill me." He pulled down his collar and displayed the scars of several puncture wounds. "No; I'm not a spook I've never had my 15 minutes of fame! But you cannot so easily be rid of me. Your stepfather will always be with you. Until the end of time." The fat galeiter laughed, turning to Baptiste. "Ran away when he was eleven. Picked up in under 48 hours."

"I, I –" My childhood stutter had returned. I groped, seeking a screwdriver. But the only screwdrivers were

in my stepfather's eyes as he turned to gimlet me with his stare; still he maintained his conversation with our audience of one. "Good parents. Rich too. His other father was an ambassador. Retired after we broke off relations with Laos and Vietnam. And both parents now dead. At least they've been spared further disappointment." He reached down towards my throat; but instead of throttling me he gripped the blanket and pulled it free of my hands; threw it onto the floor with an inquisitorial flourish, so that I lay revealed, as I had done similarly on other murky nights, naked but for my underwear, my secrets all his. Paralysis spread from my tongue to my body, my arms and legs; overcame me, as it would do when I was a child. "We publicized his crime as murder to bolster public support – to allow us to expand our surrogate parenthood. Would that you boys had had such a program: it might have saved everybody a lot of trouble. But with no one to keep you from re-sinching, well..."

"You not censor us here," said Baptiste, "you have no jurisdiction. Just take him and go."

My stepfather sat down on the bed, took a small torch out of his pocket. "And still playing with ghosts?" he enquired into my ear. "I expect better from a European boy." He prised open an eye and brought his own eye close. "Yes, I can see it. The alien. Still burnt into your retina. Still alive and well after all these years." Suddenly, he clasped me by the temples; shook my head. "Out, out demon. Thing of violence and pornography. Leave this child alone." He released me; I crashed back into the pillow. And then I felt a hand, cold, wet, against my thigh. "Return him to the purity of his original innocence. Let him be reintegrated into our family."

"Enough." Baptiste tried to invest his voice with such weight as he had displayed when talking with me. "You may continue this talk after you leave Antarctica."

"You realize I have the co-operation of your local militiamen?"

"You think they like helping you? Don't press luck. I want you to leave, effendi. Now."

"I want his ghost as well, you understand?"

"Dahlia – no!" I yelled. "On Earth2 she has a wicked ste, ste, ste, *stepmother!*" He grabbed my hair and pulled me into a sitting position.

"She has to be sent back. Even as I'm going to send you back to Boys' Town. She's an illegal." He stood up, pulling me with him. The gun behind my ear, he walked me to the door. Baptiste lead us into the corridor. From downstairs I heard his gang of pimps touting for custom:

"*Consensual hallucination - it's passé!*"

"*Welcome to ghost land!*"

"*Cyberspace gives way to fibrespace!*"

"*See the Creatures of The Wound!*"

"*Optikoids, self-assembled from the stuff of the fibresphere, from machines so small they are little more than points of light!*"

"*See the scintillant ones!*"

My stepfather grimaced. "Such depravity. There must always be rules of desire. A ghost is an enemy..."



All ghosts are enemies. They work for both sides. They work for anyone."

"The wars are over."

"Not *this* war." No; not this undeclared war against children. The Great Fear – the fear of children, their demonization – had too many uses. How long had I slept? I didn't know, but the encroaching winter, along with my wish to spend as many hours with Dahlia as possible, had meant that I managed to get little rest: two, three hours at most. Guestimating wildly, I prayed that Dahlia was near to projection. We reached the dormitory of the sleeping beauties; entered. "It's for your own good. We must exorcize her." The monitors swam with fractals. My stepfather gestured to Baptiste. "Which one is she?" The pimp walked towards a coffin and gave a wake-up call. Dahlia crystallized on the LCD.

"What's going on?" she said.

"It's my stepfather. He's come back."

"That jerk?"

"Khun Dahlia Chan," said he. "How many times do I have to destroy you?"

"I'm not the same version," said Dahlia. "I'm the star of *A Princess of Death*, *Kung-Fu Nymphet from Hell*, *The Kingdom of Childhood* –"

"Etcetera – Oh, I know, I know. I sent the simulacrum of your earlier years as a model back to Earth2 some time ago, didn't I? My, but you started early. How old is this version I'm talking to now?"

"She's 13," I said.

"You always did prefer older women. I expect the first thing you did when you were released was start hacking into forbidden sites, eh?"

"Leave him alone," said Dahlia, "he's my friend!"

"Couldn't even choose a white ghost. Had to find yourself a little girl from the South..."

My stepfather was unused to the diurnal rhythms of Antarctica. By the display at the bottom of Dahlia's LCD I could tell my prayers had been heard; he had overestimated the amount of daylight at his disposal.

"Leave him alone!"

The cyclic rhythms programmed into her zillion constituents that protected her from dissolution into the infected, ultraviolet radiation that encoded Earth2 within Earth1 – swung into projection mode. A stream of particles gushed from the coffin, circled the room as if it were a cyclotron as its mortal inhabitants raised their hands across their eyes. The stream cascaded from the ceiling, coalesced in the room's centre; became a pillar of polychromatic light. My stepfather loosed off both barrels of his handgun; the titanium bullets shattered a wall, exposing iron latticework. And then the pillar assumed the dimensions of a young girl. She wore the PVC catsuit that was part of her wardrobe in *A Chinese Killer Virgin in LA*. A domino hid her partiracial eyes (the pupils so big as to resemble the doll-like gaze of a shark); and across her back hung a curved, Laotian sword.

Biding her time, my ghost helped herself to a little *som tam* that had materialized as she had; waved her hand in front of her mouth in approval of the spiced, unripened papaya's causticity. She was an Isan girl and liked her food *phet-phet*. But just about every-

thing else about Dahlia had been eclipsed by the two to three years that had encompassed the *Chinese Virgin's* savage rise to power. Though I had watched the film a hundred-and-one times, what I knew about her amounted to a thumbnail sketch, the trivia of a glacial outerness. Mignonesque, with a pageboy haircut that accentuated a certain fickle, gamine lubricity and at the same time, an older woman's spleen, she possessed a sexual ambiguity so radical that it evaded all epistemological method, her identity irreducible to a simple *he* or *she*, but a thing-in-itself, unknowable, beyond the experience of the human mind; my ghost, the Chinese Virgin – "Billie Lotus" aka "Billie the Kid" – radiated a controlled, explosive ruthlessness, a sexual omnipotence, Billy who, at eight, had started her career as a beauty queen, but had – through the black widow's stratagem of copulating and then killing – quickly progressed through the ranks of LA society, buying friends and influence until she had achieved her present status as a queen of the underworld. The dormitory was so dimly lit and Dahlia now so fully projected, so misleadingly human, that I could only identify my spook by her gold-dusted eyes, her gold-lacquered cheeks and fingernails, the heavy gold chains that hung about her neck, the gold bracelets and rings that proclaimed, as did the Bentley with its personalized number plates double-parked outside – she had begged me to buy it – that she had arrived, that she was part of that elite for whom wealth, disregard for the law, sexual exploitation and depravity were the hallmarks of a gilded life; that she was untouchable and that all should fear.

"The beautiful Dahlia Chan," gurgled my stepfather.

"The *ineffable* Dahlia Chan," I corrected.

She was more than Billy the Kid; she was the supervillainess Mistress Dragonfly, the child-warrior Cerise Cerise. She was all her mid-career films. She was an aftertrace, a myth without a medium, a representation that had been copied so many times that it had become disassociated from its original.

Where was the original Dahlia? Had she really ever had an original, or had she always been so: a copy of a copy? A mirror within a mirror within a mirror?

My stepfather retreated into the corridor; Baptiste followed.

Dahlia unsheathed her sword; jumped into the air and bounced one, two, three times – off the dormitory's walls; ran after them, screaming.

I found myself alone amongst a posse of materializing ghosts: vactresses becoming actresses: the blonde, busty teenage vamps of a dozen B-movies that had inspired the children of the Third World to try to snatch what they had never had, the insubstantial glitter that, in the end, neither would nor could give them anything.

We drove out of McMurdo City as the fire from *Les Enfants* spread to adjoining buildings. Behind us, shacks and depots combusted, sparsing in terrific violence, spewing corrugated iron, splinters of steel and wood; flames began to lick their way up the pinnacled heights, lighting the faces of those who

screamed soundlessly from behind thick glass; and then the flames began to rouge the face of the sky. Thus artificially lit, the city seemed to be fluxing amidst a turbulence of intelligent light, that world encoded within the shimmering, atomic structures of magazine covers, advertisement hoardings, movie fly-posters, the screens of TVs, VCs and PCs; another universe, a hyperuniverse that interpenetrated our own, seeping from the receptacles of the mediascape, undisturbed by the disruptions of sunlight, when all deliquesced, when Earth2, diluted, was incapable of materializing, of bodying itself forth, of tearing open the membrane that separated the worlds.

The Wound was everywhere and nowhere; tonight, it bled generously; I tried not to think of the meagre hours that insulated us from the dawn, the zero hour when information would be sucked back into itself, when The Wound would cauterize.

Dahlia leaned against me, fully assembled, physical, real as this continent's big cold vacancy. "He's gone for good now. Relax."

"He came back – he said he would always come back."

"Forget him. It's easy. I've forgotten my step-mother."

I put my arm around her, my fingers running through the pelts of luxuriant furs that smothered her small, but prescient body. Forget him? It had been easier to forget my parents than my stepfather. In the rear-view mirror towers – white, glistening began to collapse, dripping like melting popsicles; the city exploded into light, just as reality had exploded some

15 years ago when the fibresphere had first infected us. "You saved me," I said.

"We saved each other. Always have. You rescued me from Earth2, and I intend to rescue you from Earth1."

"I'm your slave."

"You're my friend. I'll haunt you. I'll always haunt you."

"Promise?" The Bentley's cleated wheels rumbled against the heated surface of the highway. The black *nada* of the ice fields surrounded us; above, a diamond-riddled sky. I aimed the car at the horizon where Mt Erebus rose from the frozen bay, belching fumes.

"Promise."

"Where to now?"

"To wherever it takes."

To Wilkes Land? To Queen Maud? Or back to Marie Byrd, Ellsworth and the karaoke-rich Riviera of the Antarctic Peninsula?

The world was a cold place – no matter where you travelled, you suffered its chill. Dahlia swung a thigh over mine – time yet for dildonics, for cojone-baloney – and put the Bentley into fourth.

To Cythera, I thought.

**Richard Calder**, who lives in Thailand, is author of the novels *Dead Girls* (1993), *Dead Boys* (1994) and *Dead Things* (1996), all published by HarperCollins. When Takayuki Tatsumi refers to "cyber-Orientalism" in his essay on J.G. Ballard (see earlier in this issue) we suspect that he has Richard Calder's fiction very much in mind – a slim collection of his four previous stories from *Interzone* was published in Japan at Tatsumi's initiative.

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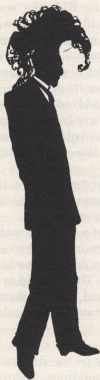
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# H O W T O B E A FICTIONAUT

## Chapter 19:

# Safety Check

Ian Watson

A central problem of being a fictionaut nowadays is the safety-check.

A fictionaut navigates the seas and oceans of narrative (not to mention lakes and ponds). But there are new rocks and reefs in those waters.

In the old days we only had spell-check and style-check programs in our word-processing software. Most creative writers worth their salt would ignore the style-check aspect, because the way a writer shapes a sentence is their signature. It's idiosyncratic, personal. That's their unique voice.

Look at James Joyce. *Dubliners* reads like a highly superior style-check collection – apart from that final big last sentence in “The Dead” about the snow falling faintly and faintly falling all over Ireland and his soul swooning slowly et cetera, which some subsequent critic said is the most perfect sentence in the English language apart from, perhaps, one word. I've always wondered which word that is.

When people talk about perfect sentences, it's as though there's some ideal, Platonistic collection of sentences in linguistic heaven which we can aspire to discover, rather like Michelangelo perceiving the ideal sculptural form hidden within the block of marble, just needing to be chipped out.

When I was younger I used to collect people's candidates for perfect sentences. Flaubert probably thought that his entire opus consisted of impeccable sentences, and Albert Camus has that post-Flaubertian character in his novel set in Algeria who is convinced that he'll produce a masterpiece – if only he can get the first sentence exactly right. He's been trying to do so for the past 20 years.

Old Alfred Lord Tennyson insisted with sublime Victorian eurocentricity that the finest bunch of words in

any language is a bit of the Tenth Idyll of Theocritus. The part about how pederastic Herakles loses young lad Hylas in a pond. Naturally I memorized this. *Tris men Hulan ausen, tris d'ar ho pais huparkusen, et cetera.* “Three times he called Hylas, three times the boy heard him, et cetera.” I used to fantasize that some patriotic Greek shipping billionaire might fund a big quiz prize. I'd be accosted in the street somewhere by his representative accompanied by a TV cameraman. To win I only needed to identify what Tennyson thought was the most perfect string of words. “*Tris men Hulan ausen,*” I would promptly recite.

Anyway, *Finnegans Wake* certainly isn't a style-check book, though perhaps for this very reason it's a bit hard to process through your head.

You might get style-checking imposed upon you by your publishers after you finish your piece of fiction, because that's the easy, automated, cheap way to copy-edit. Run a style-check, and this rejigs your prose in a trice. Sometimes it genuinely improves the flow. Alternatively it turns your text into cardboard. A metaphor check wouldn't let me to get away with this mixed metaphor, but you know what I mean.

The safety-check's a different kettle of fish. You're warranting your publisher, upon pain of indemnifying them until you go bankrupt, that what you write is utterly original, and doesn't violate anyone else's copyright, and doesn't quote anyone else's words without permission being secured and paid for. Nor must your text trample upon any toes. It mustn't offend against current definitions of obscenity, nor insult any special interest group, who might take legal action, nor defame any individual or institution which might be offended, or exploit real-life persons even disguisedly.

Quite a tall order.

No wonder most creative writers nowadays work in the fields of fantasy and science fiction, though even here mighty pitfalls loom, not least because nothing is ever totally original. I suppose if something is completely original, it might also be incomprehensible.

There's a problem of subconscious plagiarism. Thirty years ago, you read a story. Suddenly you come up with a brilliant idea. Unfortunately your brilliant idea is exactly the same as in that story, but you don't remember this.

In fact, about 30 years or 40 ago someone wrote a story relevant to this. I think the author was a woman, but I've completely forgotten her name and the name of the story. In her story lots of people all have the same wonderful dream, so they write it down as fiction and mail it to a magazine, which suddenly receives all these wonderful, moving, beautiful, and *identical* tales. Recently I was thinking of writing a story about memes – Richard Dawkins's "infectious ideas" (not a direct quotation, please note) – until I realized that this would basically be the same story that I'd read 30 or 40 years ago.

And then there is sheer coincidence...

Compared with not so long ago, nowadays there must be tens of thousands of eager fictionauts (many of whom, I hope, will be studying my advice). It's pretty much a cliché to say that science fiction and fantasy are genres which typically feed upon themselves and regurgitate and remix themselves. Because of this, coincidence is statistically likely. What's more, with supposedly new stuff always being the saleable doughnut (although admittedly often "in the great tradition of x, y, and z," for reader identification) the stale old stuff is out of print, and few fictionauts have read it. They have neither the opportunity nor the time. They may have had time to dip into clones of clones of old books and stories, but hardly into the originals. Thus the wheel can get re-invented a dozen times over (maybe in titanium instead of wood, but never mind). Similarities will abound.

This is where the safety-checker comes in.

Now that we all use quantum computers which operate thousands of times faster than the old silicon-chip machines, everything previously written has been scanned and stored. So while you're in the midst of writing a story, your safety-checker can continuously ensure that you aren't inadvertently echoing a pre-existing sentence or statistically significant phrase or a character name or situation or whatnot.

Furthermore, you wouldn't want to complete your own unique text and then discover that someone else had been busily writing something statistically similar at the very same time, would you? With quantum computers and the new data compression and Netting and Webbing, you and your safety-checker are on-line in real time while you're writing. Every word you write hangs out on the Net as you write it, notifying all fellow fictionauts' safety-checkers of what you're up to, staking your claim, as it were, and protecting you legally.

Suppose that you're a writer who can't get it all right the first time and who goes in for a lot of revi-

sions? Embarrassing, that anybody can scrutinize your first clumsy draft? Not really! Some fans might get a Peeping Tom buzz out of watching their fave author at work, but pros haven't the time to bother. Actually, this might distract us, influence us, contaminate us, lead us astray, or dishearten us about the quality of what we ourselves are producing.

Basically the on-going interaction of everyone's safety-checkers is more like a horde of smart lawyers negotiating with each other down in some basement out of sight. It isn't more often than every ten minutes or so that a window opens in your text, flashing a prohibition, and a helpful menu of alternative suggestions.

If you *do* revise a lot, you can hardly lay claim to whole swathes of variant sentences and phrases and story variations – dog-in-the-manger fashion. Maybe this is what some amateurs might get up to. Paranoia is one of the besetting faults of amateur writers. Fear of theft of their intellectual property (which probably is worth diddly in any event).

So therefore, one stored set of deletions is protected by your safety-checker in case you have second thoughts; but no more than that. If you have third thoughts and fourth thoughts, this means that the first and second thoughts are up for public grabs – supposing that some parasite is looking over your electronic shoulder, hoping somehow to compile a saleable text out of the discarded scraps from hundreds of admired authors whose novels actually get downloaded onto portabooks or private-pressed for collectors. That isn't a very likely route to success for the novice! The jigsaw method. Avoid it.

Personally, I sometimes do have a third or fourth thought, and then a fifth – which is the first thought, revived – and I find that in the interim I've become blocked from using that particular eloquent phrase by the sheer coincidence of one my peers keyboarding it in the meantime. This is the one sort of writer's block you need to adjust to serenely. You can get emotionally attached to your words, and it's a nuisance to find that they've become somebody else's while you paused for that chug of coffee.

Then of course your safety-check is watching out for such things as any names of real people or businesses which occupy the same niche in real life as your imaginary creations. It's pretty okay if the real Roswald Dybbuk of Baltimore is a policeman, but not if he's a funeral director and that's the same job and the name and the city as you chose for your villain who harvests adrenal glands from corpses in his care. Which is why so many characters end up having names like Yorg Thrinx or Princess Smaragdina.

Also, the safety-check keeps an eye out for unfortunate metaphors and similes which you might use in the heat of the moment, and which might get you into trouble. It's fine to write "as drunk as a skunk" because skunks don't have any pressure group representing them, keeping an electronic eye out for slurs, but beware if you write "as pissed as a newt" even in a British context – bearing in mind a certain heavy-weight politician of yore. Speaking of Britain, have you heard the one about the Welshman, the Scotsman and

the Irishman? It's far wiser to say the Venusian, the Martian and the Jovian. Readers will still get the point.

Corporations such as Coca-Cola® keep an eagle eye out world-wide for any lower-case spellings of trade-marked products. That's in case the word becomes common parlance in the public domain. Since a lot of registration marks look messy in a text, it's better to have characters swigging a can of Gloosh or Shug.

A fictionaut has no need to understand the workings of their quantum computer (though maybe a science-fictionaut ought to a bit better informed – or again, maybe not). So far as we're concerned the machine is essentially a de luxe typewriter. But one thing has occurred to me.

Namely this. On the motherboard, ions are trapped in electrical fields. Lots of microscopic lasers, operating at a particular range of vibrational frequencies, tease those ions so that they're neither up nor down as regards spin, otherwise known as angular momentum. The electrons orbiting the ions are in a mixed (a "superposed") quantum state. That's to say, they exist in a number of different states all at the same time. Hey presto, that's how your quantum computer can carry out different tasks simultaneously, just as if it's operating in a number of parallel universes concurrently – until the "collapse of the wave function" concludes the task.

Well now, what if some of the prohibition windows in your prose are on account of fellow fictionauts only probabilistically writing a particular phrase? In a parallel universe they *do* write that phrase, but in this universe they *don't*. Nevertheless, your poignant pet phrase still gets excluded!

And what if, in parallel universes, "ghost" fictionauts – who are variations upon you yourself – are writing virtually the same story? Scary thought, huh? You could end up by not being allowed to write anything unless you're really fast at it. This latter doesn't happen, because your own doppelgangers will "constructively interfere" with you. But I suspect we still occasionally lose lovely phrases due to other fictionauts *not actually writing* what we're busy writing.

*Fast:* that's the whole thing about quantum computers.

You'll recall how movies used to be made – with actors performing live in every scene. Of course, nowadays at the start of production the actors have body-scans, in the nude and variously clothed. The ciné-computer digitizes the actors, then it's just a question of simulating their performance (action scenes, love scenes, whatever) as per the virtual reality script. Preproduction still takes time – programming all the VR backgrounds from location footage – but the actual movie's a wrap within an hour or two. No continuity errors, nowadays. No fits of temperament on the part of the stars.

Basically you could feed in a portion and outline for your newest fictionautical saga and your computer could complete it pretty damn quick based upon your typical word frequency use and characteristic sentence structures. Then you'd fiddle around a bit. Fine-tune some of the characterization which your computer got

hopelessly wrong.

Machine-books are *not* valued by the perceptive readership. What's valued is craft-work. Personalized *haute couture* wordsmithing (though ideally for a mass market). I can't emphasize this too highly. Even if you're up against a deadline, never use a plot-generation program, even to help out for a few chapters. Believe me, it'll show. Artistry is what is admired. That's why I used to read a lot of Flaubert and James Joyce.

I think that's basically it as regards the safety-check. Prediction: the next generation of safety-check software is quite likely to look at what we call the "sub-text" of a book, as well – not just the obvious similes and metaphors but the latent implications of what you're writing. Your cultural and psychological mind-set. So I think I ought to say a few words in Chapter 20 about semiotics – the use of signs and symbols – though this is really master-class stuff, and impatient novice fictionauts can skip to Chapter 21: How to Campaign for Awards & Get Grants from Foundations.

Ian Watson claims that the above piece is "non-fiction," since it's extracted from his advice manual for writers "due to be published by Gollancz-Online in 2020." A little before that date, however, he has a new novel coming out in the old-fashioned paper format – *Hard Questions* (Gollancz, April 1996) – which he describes as a "technothriller about quantum computers."



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## ANSIBLE LINK



DAVID LANGFORD

I hereby cease my mocking of spinoffs from creations like Terry Pratchett's Discworld, with its endless trail of maps, stage and cassette and graphic-novel adaptations, t-shirts, ceramic figures, computer games, concordances, etc ... since I've just been correcting the proofs of my "own" *The Unseen University Challenge: A Discworld Quizbook* (Gollancz, real soon now). And – as Kingsley Amis remarked when leaping aboard the James Bond bandwagon – jolly good luck to me.

## PLANET OF THE VOLES

Arthur C. Clarke's latest has a gracious Foreword explaining that readers should be told exactly what they're buying here: a novel wholly written by the late Mike McQuay, based on a 2pp Clarke movie outline (also included). This foreword made little impression on whoever designed Gollancz's jacket for *Richter 10* by

ARTHUR C. CLARKE  
and Mike McQuay...

Neil Gaiman returned to England for the shooting of his tv series *Neverwhere*, and was interested to find the script full of things he didn't quite recall writing, like "SCENE 19 – Deleted." He began to think of his script-revising rôle as being that of a plastic surgeon called in after the axe-wielding thugs called Time and Budget Limitations had done their worst...

David Garnett unearthed a terrible truth in Michael Legat's *An Author's Guide to Getting Published*, which has a whole section listing the kind of books which aspirants should avoid writing since they can't be published commercially: "poetry or science fiction or treatises on unpronounceable compounds or a manual of Pig Sticking, or even an account of your package holiday..." Know your place.

Walter M. Miller (1922-1996) died in mid-January; reportedly he shot himself while depressed over illness and the fairly recent death of his wife. For a long time he had written nothing, but some years ago contracted with Bantam to produce a sequel to his classic *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (1960); several hundred pages were supposedly written, but Miller had been looking for a co-author to complete it. Despite long illness he is warmly remembered for *Canticle* and a handful of short stories including the Hugo-winning "The Darfsteller" (1955).

Charles Platt returned all stary-eyed from a visit to his Japanese publishers, Hayakawa, whose eagerness for sf he found untouched by the corroding cynicism of New York editors "who know all too well the disastrous commercial consequences if they publish intelligent novels that they actually like to read." He was also stunned that the editors bought him a ten-course feast out of their own pockets rather than on expenses ("Imagine the staff of HarperCollins doing that!"), and touched that their house magazine reprinted a Platt article on cryonics with "cute little cartoons showing my severed head being gripped by metal tongs and dunked in liquid nitrogen. The likeness was quite accurate..."

Christopher Priest was bogged and delighted to find he had indeed won the £3,000 James Tait Black Memorial prize for his nifty novel *The Prestige*. The presentation took place in Edinburgh late in January.

Robert Rankin, nameless spies inform us, has heard about the British SF Association Awards and dropped a subtle hint: "As a British writer of Science Fiction for the last 16 years, who do you have to shag at your place to get an award? Yours hopefully..."

Kaye Webb, fondly remembered by a generation for her editorship of the Penguin children's imprint Puffin (1961-79) and *Puffin Post* magazine (1967-89), died on 16 January aged 81.

## INFINITELY IMPROBABLE

1995 *Guardian* UK Top Sellers. No sf at all, except for media tie-ins... Labouring in the titanic shadow of John Grisham at #1 are: Stephen King, *Insomnia* #9; James Herbert, *The Ghosts of Sleath* #22; Terry Pratchett, *Soul Music* #24 and *Interesting Times* #25; Anne Rice, *Interview with the Vampire* #32 and *Taltos* #68; Charles L. Grant, *X-Files: Goblins* #40 and *X-Files: Whirlwind* #44; Doug Naylor, *The Last Human* #45; David Eddings, *The Hidden City* #62; Clive Barker, *Everville* #94.

**Awards!** Awards! The Arthur C. Clarke Award shortlist, for best sf novel published in Britain during 1995, comprises: Patricia Anthony, *Happy Policeman*; Stephen Baxter,

*The Time Ships*; Ken MacLeod, *The Star Fraction*; Paul McAuley, *Fairyland*; Christopher Priest, *The Prestige*; Neal Stephenson, *The Diamond Age*. The Philip K. Dick Award for best original US paperback shortlists the following: Shale Aaron, *Virtual Death*; Bruce Bethke, *Headcrash*; Greg Egan, *Permutation City*; Richard Paul Russo, *Carlucci's Edge*; Amy Thomson, *The Colour of Distance*; Elisabeth Vonarburg, *Reluctant Voyagers*.

**Publishers & Sinners.** John Brunner's obituaries aroused some new UK reader interest, especially in *Stand on Zanzibar*; Arrow Books say they will "consider" a reprint provided they receive 3,000 or more firm orders placed through bookshops.

**No Smoke Without Smoke.** The makers of *Gerry Anderson's Space Precinct* have freely used the word "outrageous" of rumours that they are planning to sack the series' producer, Gerry Anderson.

**Maison d'Ailleurs:** I was flooded with paper and e-mail petition forms concerning this unique sf museum, the "House of Elsewhere" in Yverdon-les-Bains, Switzerland, whose funding faced a 70% cut by the local town council. The petition deadline is already past... but donations would surely be welcomed by the museum's "Amis" group (resembling the UK "Friends of Foundation"); AMDA, case postale 3181, CH-1401 Yverdon-les-Bains.

**Crushed Again.** *Personal Computer World* magazine reviewed the CD-ROM *SF Encyclopaedia* and reckoned that the main flaw in its update of those 1.3 million award-winning words was the presence of... Too Much Text. "Text, text, and more text." *Voice of Emperor Joseph II*: "Too many notes, Herr Clute."

**Oops.** David Gemmell wishes to rebut the opinion (quoted in my *Interzone* 104 column) that one of his Alexander the Great books was better in its original MS than after the input of a Legend editor who allegedly wanted more fantasy content: "I have been extremely lucky with all my editors, and not once has undue pressure been brought to bear on me." Indeed, he points out, when he planned a fantasy Western, *Random/Legend* felt that the entire Western market was dead and gone, but still told him to "go for it!" ... hence his successful *Wolf in Shadow*.

**Thog's Masterclass.** "He glanced fleetingly down, with a prick of lust, at her shapely legs." (Peter James, *Alchemist*) "Ruben's left eyebrow twitched upwards, forcing a grunt past the plug of mince and potato that sounded vaguely impressed." (Alex Stewart, "Yesterday," in *Beyond*; may be partially deciphered by the understanding that the character is eating shepherd's pie.)

# The ICHNEUMON and the DORMEUSE

*Terry Dowling*

This time was different. This time on his way past the tombs, Beni turned left, ignored the guard Stones of the nearer mounds and headed down the path through the trees to the wide low tumulus where her tomb was.

He granted that the Stones had him, though nothing showed it. The tumulus was quiet under the hot afternoon sun, the trees, the grass barely stirred, the fields stretched away to meet the sky. The only movement was the heat shimmer on the other tomb mounds and the endless pull of the sentry Stones.

The Nothing Stones were neither stones nor quite filled with nothing, though that was the sense they gave, all 16 of them, low basaltic pillars two metres high, as wide as his shoulders, as deep as his thigh, standing in the usual henge circle around the foot of the tumulus itself.

Their onyx-black, outward-facing sides were filled with stars, converging points of light, and while Beni would not look into those glossy midnight fields, he knew that if he remained, if they didn't have him already, the darkling, star-ridden massebots would solve his mysteries, totes and sly conditionings and come to snatch him away, pulling, pulling, grabbing at sight and mind, close obsidian in the hot afternoon.

Always assume the Stones have you, Ramirez had said, told him now in memory, the greatest tomb-robber of them all, and Beni did so, leaving it to his auto-

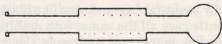
nomic tote systems to sort out. If they had him in a trance loop, he'd probably soon know. He continued through the perimeter henge, leaving the deadly megaliths at his back and headed down the access ramp to the black gulf of the doorway.

Doorway not door. None of the old tumulus tombs had ever had doors. Beni stood before the quiet, porcelain-smooth, darkened throat in the side of its vast, low hill and called out.

"Dormeuse! Dormeuse! You have a visitor!"

The words echoed against the ceramic, died. There was only stillness, silence again, smooth cool midnight before him, daylight and blazing summer behind.

Beni, tech'd and totes, wearing a flamer he'd been told he probably wouldn't use, carrying a metre-long touchpole over his back as nearly all tomb-robbers did, just in case, now brought up his wrist display, saw what the optics gave.



Classic plan clear and sure. Free of the Stones too, if he could trust the readings. It was the standard schema confirmed by all the survivors (most of all by Ramirez himself, one of the very few to make it back

totally unharmed) as the basic Tasthan design: stretch of corridor, peristyle hall, corridor, burial chamber.

Simple. Direct. Two hundred metres, 15, another hundred, then the ten-metre circular chamber: the classic Tasthan biocromlech. Simple. Linear. Very deadly.

For there would be traps, illusions, sensory and neural tricks. Standing there, Beni ran the latest figures again, unchanged, of course, since the last postings, but you never knew when new data might be collated and added – the town's comp systems were constantly at it. Outright death with bodies recovered still stayed at 12% of annual penalties, selective maiming and stigma – the “souvenirs,” 14% (but at least you returned), failure to return at all was still 63% (up 2% on last year's average – things did change), failure to enter the tomb but believing so, 11%.

Beni cleared that, studied the simplified plan again – spinal access corridor (axial, porcelain-smooth), vertebrate peristyle (handsomely corbelled, and otherwise featureless but for the 14 columns, seven to a side, and the intaglio relief on each of the back walls), more corridor, finally the central tholos, the skull chamber: unavoidable analogy and another of Ramirez's terms, just as he had been the one to revive the old names: tholoi, tumuli, henge megaliths, cromlechs, dolmens, going through the old databases, going on about Celts, Myceneans, Etruscans, whoever they were, much older peoples than the Tastans.

Beni flicked random selections, chance plan superimpositions, hoping to trick any tomb override. The defences were clever but they were old.

No change. The classic plan remained. No *apparent* change.

What would Ramirez do now?, Beni wondered again, again, putting it off, avoiding. And, finding that he was doing so, made himself take the first step, found the others easier, was soon leaving the square of warm daylight far behind. His cap-light struck out ahead, illuminating the corridor, the smooth and off-white walls; his footsteps echoed off the cool ceramic, carrying him into night, into the underworld of the vast low funerary hill.

“Dormouse?” he called. “You have company, Dormouse!” Called it over and over, as Ramirez suggested he do.

“Not so loud,” a voice finally said, and a host flashed on beside him, a startling mummiform of light, gaining resolution, female distinction. “I'm trying to sleep.”

She was lovely, as perfectly formed, idealized, as Ramirez had said she would be, the tall glowing enantiomorph intercept of an auburn-haired woman in middle-age or backtracked to about 45, with an open, pretty if not wholly beautiful face and eyes like blackest glass, but a gentle gaze all the same, with nothing like the cold arrogant manner of intercepts the grim-faced “souvenired” veterans back in town had told him about.

Beni glanced down at his scanner, glad to see the basic plan confirmed, even if not to be trusted, never to be trusted, and kept on walking. The intercept

“walked” with him, fully formed now, smiling like a curious servant, which is exactly what she was. It was. She.

“Someone has been talking to you,” she said. “You're too confident.”

“But new to this all the same. I need as much help as I can get.”

“I have much more experience. Listen. Turn round now. I'll let you go. Promise.”

Beni smiled. Even without the advice he'd been given, he would have found the offer unacceptable, though it actually did happen now and then. Sometimes did. Justified the old saying that even the tombs had a bad day now and then.

“Don't believe you. Won't do it. Thanks.”

The display flickered but held, his reader sorting, sorting, seeking any other valid plan, if only as a split-second glimpse.

“Last chance,” she said. “Keep going and I'll have you.”

“You probably already do,” Beni said, heart pounding, afraid and exhilarated, entranced by the image, forcing himself to talk down at his scanner display, avoiding the eyes. “The Stones'll have me if they don't already.”

“Do you know what souvenir I have planned for you?”

“Please, Dormouse. Do what you must, but enough of these threats.”

And sure enough, the intercept changed tack.

“You see no ethical problem with this, do you?”

Beni smiled at the shift, gave the rote answer. “There has never been a time where one age and culture hasn't plundered the remains of another.”

“But why? There's no wealth here. Nothing you can use. No gold, jewels or funerary possessions. Forget the rumours. Not enough precious materials in the circuitry and hardware. Certainly nothing accessible to you. No meaningful tech knowledge.”

“I know.”

“So why? Why do you use the term ‘tomb-robbers’ if...?”

“I prefer the ‘reasonable’ to the ‘threat’ mode, but could you bring on the next phase? I do need to concentrate.”

The phantom hovered, seemed to walk. “Such an arrogant young man. Someone has been talking to you. But I'd really like to know.”

Arrogant? Beni stared down at the display and considered it. Overconfident perhaps. Optimistic. Determined to be among the best. But hardly arrogant. “What have others said? Ramirez managed it. What did he say?”

“He was courteous but wouldn't talk to me as freely as you seem prepared to. He probably suspected a voice trap, some trance dislocation induced by word pattern, tone and timbre. You don't seem to fear that.”

“There were others though, Dormouse.” The maimed ones, he didn't add. Barlow, Deckley, Kylow, Soont, the others, all skilled men and women, all souvenired. “What did they say?”

“Again, not too much,” the phantom answered. “Concentration does that, I suppose. And fear. I



gather it is some emblematic thing, using the term 'tomb-robber' and all. You're stealing the chance to do it, aren't you? Stealing the privilege. The mystery of another age. Some said it's rites of passage. The tombs are here, they said. Intact. Penetrable yet at the same time impenetrable ultimately. One age scorning another."

"Scorning? They said that?" Beni found it hard to imagine any of those bluff or dour survivors back in town saying that. He was impressed anew. "But, Dormeuse, you're the one who must feel something like that surely. Scorn."

"A sentry profile can't. I'm just a print of my original; my job is to represent my occupant's self. Keep her safe. Or me, depending on how you view architectural psychics."

"But no body, I'm told. Just the stored personality index."

"Ah, little hunter. I recognize a question when I hear it. One age does plunder another. You, too, would have my secrets. Perhaps that is what you come for, the chance to steal knowledge of my day, get the old sentry intercepts talking. Yet such a risk. Death and injury on the chance of just a little something more about the Tasthan past."

A stab of youthful defiance surged up, made Beni want to stay silent then, but, like countless others before him, he did want to know. He had to ask. "Your body is here?"

"Curious and stubborn, like all who come calling. Why should I tell? Perhaps the people of my day did preserve the body as well. Or the head. Who knows? We may have had cryonics long before we could code personality. The others you spoke to said what?"

"Dormeuse, I'm new to this. A lot of the veterans in town won't talk to me. They only sell what they know. I can't afford them."

"But, little one, you're in this far. I know you won't believe me but you're past the Stones. You're very well prepared tech-wise, my systems show. You've accessed a third-level intercept response from me. I frankly didn't expect that. You have to have the advice of others."

Beni felt his heart pounding. Could it be true? In this far? Free of the Stones. Could it?

"Ramirez," he said, deciding she'd probably guessed it already. "One day he stopped on the way past my family's farm. I was in the orchard. I reminded him of a son he'd lost, he said. He told me things about the tombs. About your tomb. He was giving it up at last, he said, going away. But he told me of you, Dormeuse. Of all the tombs yours was the one, he said. He was an eidetic, as you probably guessed. Perfect recall. Helped him with variants in the tomb plans when there were some, but more with the characteristics of the intercepts, their features and mode changes. He drew your likeness for me. Your image's likeness."

"Why, Beni. Don't tell me you're infatuated? In love?"

"It's not that! It's complex. I was without a father. He was without a son. We just talked."

"Oh stop! Stop! Don't tell me. And I became mother

and wife! I love it. Midwife to hunters."

Beni clenched his jaws in anger. They walked in silence a while down the ceramic corridor, him concentrating on his plan readings, glancing up at the passage ahead, glancing back down, up, down, she flowing beside him, a spindle of light with eyes like onyx.

"You said it was complex," she said after a time, coaxing, sounding just contrite enough. Perhaps he had accessed a new mode from her.

"Then I don't know why I'm here. All my life it was what the best of us did. The tombs were something you couldn't ignore, how's that? I've walked past yours probably a thousand times. More than a thousand over the years. Yesterday I finally decided to try. Today I came out here again."

"Your point, little hunter?"

"Our own culture formed around the leavings of yours, Dormeuse, but yours keeps intruding. Your language has virtually replaced ours. Do you know how insufferable something like that is? Can you imagine how it's become for us? Competing with our past?"

"You're telling me, little one. I'm sure it's happened before. I seem to recall something about the European Renaissance being in effect a rediscovery of the wisdoms of earlier civilizations in Greece and Egypt. Though I believe that was a very positive thing, probably nothing as desperate as this."

Despite her disparaging words, Beni preferred this mode, this kind of directness. Ramirez had told him to push for it, that the host would treat him differently once he accessed it.

"My father died over in 37. Left our orchard one day, just upped and turned tomb-robber, tomb-visitor, whatever term covers it. It's what more and more of us do. Spent all we had on maps, comp and the best sentry tech he could get. I didn't find out till later! A neighbour came over and told me he hadn't come out of 37. I didn't even know he'd gone in, been planning it all those years. So I ask you: why would he do that? Why do any of us?"

"But I'm asking you that, little hunter."

"Don't call me that. I'm Beni."

"Beni. So as well as being in love you're in hate and loss. Potent mixture. Think of it though. I'm 500 years in your past, yet held accountable, made responsible somehow for a boy losing his father centuries later. And, marvellous paradox, without me, without the loss and envy, it seems your life, all your lives, would be lacking in purpose."

"That's not it."

"Would be meaningless."

"That's not it!" The cry was swallowed in the ebbing, flowing, warm ceramic night. The thief had stopped walking at last, stood grimly silent. The ghost hovered, drifted, spoke.

"Maybe not. But perhaps you fear so. All your people. So you come here and test yourselves, steep yourselves in the mystery, could that be it? Plunder us from time to time. Carry out acts of astonishing vandalism."

"I haven't done that." Beni started walking again,

drew the phantom along with him.

"No, Beni. You haven't yet. Thank you."

"Ramirez didn't."

"No. I agree," she said. "A lot don't. You're different to most. Ramirez was, both of you are, that curious blend of romantic and" – she said it very gently – "innocent. After something else."

Doesn't mean I won't though, he almost said, felt he should say it, a young man scared and confused. But didn't. "So what are we after then, Dormeuse?"

"Back to that, are we? Both wanting the same question answered."

"I'm afraid so." He continued walking, watching the scanner.

"All right. I allow you're motivated by the quest, by envy and reprisals against the past, the need both to have the past mysterious yet know it. I allow disenchantment, rites of passage, because it's there, all that. But we're generalizing. It doesn't tell me why you're here, does it? Why Beni is here as an individual."

Because I want to win, he could have said. Be up there among the greatest of them all: Ramirez, Calido, Asparan. But again didn't, feared sounding arrogant, brash, deluded like so many who came here. He *was* after something more. He was.

"You're being gentle with me, Dormeuse, so I'll try to find an answer. A real answer."

"Please do. And my name is Arasty. 'Dormeuse' means 'sleeping woman' in an ancient language. Which is what I am, just as you are ichneumon."

"I'm what?"

"Ichneumon. Another very old word. Means 'hunter' or 'tracker'. A small animal that used to hunt along river banks. Ate the eggs of crocodiles."

"Of what?"

"No matter. Beni and Arasty. We're here now and, yes, I'm being gentle because you are."

"But it's a mode as well. Tactical."

"Yes. It is." The black eyes glittered. "You could stop me?"

"I'm sure I can." Glittered.

"Yet the fact is you want us here."

"Oh, tell me why."

"Not yet."

"I'm curious. Tell me why."

"I need to concentrate."

For ahead, his cap-light's glow fell on something different at last, caught in strange verticals, made new shadows for his eyes and tech to fathom.

He had reached the peristyle hall.

Beni had expected it to be little more than a widening of the axial corridor, with the seven pillars on either side keeping the passageway's alignment from entrance-way to central tholos. But when he entered, he found it went back even deeper behind the smooth featureless columns than his stylized display suggested, just as the corridors were so very much longer than the plan showed. The walls shone with the same vitreous pallor as the corridor, but opposite each other in the centre of each back wall was the circular intaglio motif Ramirez had told him of.

The intercept appeared beside him while he stood

exploring one of the grooved mandalas with a finger.

"Know what that is?"

"Ramirez told me. It's a maze. The classic seven-ring design. The archetypal unicursal maze built round a cross and four points. Used by lots of ancient peoples, the Romans, the Cretans and Syrians, the Irish, the medieval Christians..."

"Yes, yes. So what is its significance? Did Ramirez tell you?"

Beni smiled. "A unicursal maze has a single path from the entrance to the centre. It looks complex but is really very direct."

"Why it appealed to the Tastans too."

"I'm sure."

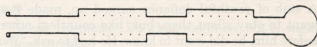
"Beni, I fear you're an optimist."

"What do you mean?"

"You see it as something complex being ultimately very simple. Like your comp reading there."

"So?"

"Why not a simple path made difficult. Look at your comp now." Beni glanced down, saw with a stab of alarm, panic, sudden terror, a new reading. He keyed randoms, saw only the new double-peristyle configuration.



"This does get interesting," she said. "Oh, by the way, 'ichneumon' also refers to a parasitic, hymenopterous insect that lays its eggs on another's larvae, using it as food for its own young as they hatch. Nice thought, yes? Little hunter." And she vanished.

Beni had been told this would probably happen, the host's hunt-mode surfacing, solicitous, caring, then cold, callous, vindictive, seeking to undermine any sense of hope.

He strode on, left the columned hall, plunged into the next length of corridor, just the tiniest dagger edge of doubt pushing through the confidence Ramirez had given him. What if there were a second peristyle hall? What if the tomb plan actually shifted, shunted him from one course to another, on and on? The mound was large enough.

Ramirez had spoken of it. It was a doubt he could still push aside. The tholos, the skull chamber, would be ahead. Not far.

The yellow cone pushing ahead became brighter, strengthening, whitening, as the host flashed in.

"Can we resume, Beni? You said that we want you here. Tell me why?"

Beni did not look at the intercept. He walked on, glancing at his display, then ahead, corridor, display, repeating that. He might have stayed silent, punished her for the trickery with the plan. But he sensed, just as Ramirez had told him, that it would probably be the worst thing to do. The tomb profiles liked to talk.

"It occurs to me, Arasty, that a sentry program

would want visitors to test itself against, that the self whose tomb this is would have designed the tomb so its sentry profile would be exercised, challenged, kept entertained and satisfied. It's what I'd do."

"That's a very smart observation. What made you think of it all of a sudden? Or was it also something..."

"I asked Ramirez about it that day in the orchard. Mentioned it before he did. We talked about what the tombs really were. He told me that your intercept, Dormeuse - Arasty - would appear at various times, run different modes..."

"And walk with you like this?"

"Not necessarily. Some intercepts did, he said. He also told me that whoever could code personalities and structure reality perception would not bother with ancient mortuary forms - corridors, burial chambers and such like - unless they were playing at something, *wanted* to invite plunderers."

"Again, very shrewd. He didn't say much when he was here but I miss this Ramirez. You're both right. We do want you here. We give each other purpose."

Beni watched his display for the slightest flicker, let his peripheral vision guide him. "We are your future. We let you exist in time."

"Empowering each other. Yes, Beni. I like that. Like the fish and the fisher. Here for each other."

"So let me get on with it, Arasty. You try to stop me. I try to reach the core chamber."

"And what? Put your name up there with Ramirez's. Scrawl it on the watch screen and hurry out again? Did he tell you he did that?"

"I don't believe you."

"Did he tell you what else he did? Everything he did? You said Ramirez drew my face. Did he love me too, do you think? This image from an ancient age?"

Which part to answer? She was distracting him with her intriguing remarks, possibly giving deliberate untruths to unnerve him. "I'm not sure what he felt. Fascination. Determination to see you as the person who made this. Set this up for the future. It makes for a sort of intimacy. Something very powerful."

"Intimacy. I'm flattered. I never expected this sort of well - kinship across centuries."

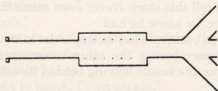
But Beni had stopped.

"What is it?" the phantom asked. "Worried that there's no core chamber? No second peristyle?"

"I should have reached it. Show me the plan. The real one."

"You've already seen it. Look."

Again there was the alarm, the panic, terror surging up.



"You continue to make it more interesting."

"It's all I have, like you say. The chance to chal-

lenge, be entertained."

Beni needed to talk it through. "One of the few things we learned from you Tastans was sealed compartment technology." He touched his scanner. "This can't be tampered with, so you've interfered with my perceptual processes."

He pressed a contact, randomized the grabs, sent surges through both equipment and self. He had practised this, did not flinch from the small electroshocks. The original tomb-plan came and went: single peristyle original, this new triple corridor display, double peristyle, single, double, triple - they flashed and flickered, cycled from one to the other.

It wasn't his vision then - unless it was misinformation at the brain's visual centre.

And when he looked at the phantom's face, saw the smile under the black glass eyes, he understood her simple strategy.

"I can't be sure now can I?"

Again, Ramirez's words were there. Allow that the Stones have you.

Beni sighed as if in frustration and despair, closed his eyes, accessed, believed he accessed, the neural link Ramirez had given him, actually given him, a parting gift surgically implanted in the town clinic, a legacy from surrogate father to surrogate son.

The single peristyle configuration - classic Tastan grab - sat in the light of his mind's eye. He was in the second length of corridor, so close to the chamber. He dared not linger over it in case she suspected. Again he sighed as if in frustration.

"Your decision?" she said.

"Excuse me?" Feigning bafflement, exhaustion, loss of resolve. Let her read those. The battle had been joined in earnest.

"On or back? I still may let you go. Perhaps with a souvenir as a reminder. Or perhaps none, provided you promise to come back and talk to me again. Keep me entertained."

Was that a possibility he dared consider? This intercept - this tomb, to make the distinction - did seem different from all accounts, rhapsodizing, showing whimsy, negotiating, pretending to, taunting like this, first one mode then another, just as Ramirez had told him she would be.

"I'm your little egg-stealer, remember. We continue."

"Hope is always beautiful," she said.

Beni didn't comment, strode on five, ten, 20 metres, surely into the tholos, but would not glance at his display now, nor at her, would not consult his link. He wanted her to court him, whatever came of it. This visit had to matter. But he was in the tholos, the skull chamber, he told himself. Had to be.

Finally she spoke, easily, losing no face by it, perhaps in a new mode, he couldn't tell, though her question suggested it.

"So, little hunter, have you ever wondered why there are only 85 tombs? The Tastan culture lasted seven centuries, at least 35 generations. Why only 85 tombs?"

He didn't understand all her words. Generations.

"Tell me."

"Guess."

"No more games."

"Entertainment, remember? There really are only my games here. I'll reward you."

"How?"

"Trust that I will. I'll give you a clue. We were not necessarily royalty. Not rulers."

It did intrigue him. "Another caste in your society?"

"In a sense. Go on."

Beni fought to think pressured by the changeless, vitreous dark by the unchanging yellow fan of his lamp showing not the tholos but only more and more corridor, its glow whitened by the added glow of the figure floating, standing beside him, seeming to.

Tholos, maze, wherever he was, the intercept really did seem to want an answer.

"Our culture is 500 years after yours," he said.

"Good. Yes?"

"But" – he hated saying it – "is debased by comparison. Technologically."

"Such finesse, little hunter."

"You belonged to a scientist caste."

"Wrong."

"A holy order. Priests. Sacerdotes."

"No."

"Criminals being punished."

"Fool!" She said it with incredible fury. The black eyes glittered. "Don't you know any history? What happened to our culture?"

Beni was stunned by her vehemence, the unconcealed contempt. It told him something he did not yet understand.

"You vanished," he said, and then, to show he did know some history, what Ramirez had told him, added: "Like the Mayans. The Anasazi. Your cities were abandoned, allowed to run down; most were reduced to slag by housekeeping programs..."

"So where did we go? Our millions? Our millions, Beni?"

What did she want him to say? And millions. The Tasthan millions.

"Into these tombs?" The certainty of it amazed him. "All coded in. Immortal. You're the guardians of your race! Eighty-five repositories but housing millions."

Arasty's expression may have been the result of holistic psychonic printing or just some simulated response selected from a housekeeping menu, but Beni saw what looked like genuine scorn, genuine revulsion. If it were a deception then it was a subtle one, something naked, seeming spontaneous, well beyond the disapproval and impatience it resembled.

What am I missing? Beni asked himself, and with it felt a conviction. She needs me to guess. It really is important that I do. But what did she – it – want him to say? He wanted to shout the question. Didn't dare now. All he could think of was to show humility, self-effacement, and hope for patience.

"Please, Arasty, help me more. This is important." He hoped the compliment, his respectful tone, would do it.

The phantom watched him sidelong with her dark eyes just as a human would, as if in fact a discrete

entity deciding, not a defence intercept scanning precedents, selecting options.

"You really have no idea, do you? A great culture, possibly the greatest the world has known, reaches a point where it dismantles itself, gives way to a simpler, let's say impoverished, less sophisticated successor. Why would they do it?"

"I can only think of two answers," he said quickly, honestly. "There was some enemy..."

"You could say that." The intercept's eyes flashed with interest. "Or?"

"You gained by it. It had to be progress. Something you saw as better."

And he remembered what she'd said – impoverished – and barely dared utter the words. "You became us!" Remembered what else she'd said: less sophisticated. "You simplified your culture, someone did, something, some ruling elite maybe, and became us..."

"Yes." There was something like madness in the phantom's darkling bits of eyes, something reckless and fervent, but Beni dared not suggest the tombs housed what remained of the Tasthan's dead insane. It was more. It had to be more. But he did not have to stumble over words to form a question. Arasty continued speaking.

"Some ruling elite, yes. An enemy, true, that culled our millions and our cultural heritage. Downgraded us all. To simple, immortal, happy folk like you..."

"Then..."

"Immortal. Happy ichneumon. But able to be maimed, killed by violence. With time to be curious, to ponder, to forget, to indulge. Happy, happy, happy ichneumon!"

"Then you're here..."

"Go on!" Madness spun in the darkness of the eyes.

"To cull us! Prey on us! To give purpose to immortal lives! They planned ahead. Saw we would need..."

"No!" The intercept had halted in blazing fury, actually flickered, flashed off and back again. The face was rigid with a rage and suffering held in such perfect suspension that Beni was faint with the involuntary numbing terror he felt welling up. The eyes, the black false eyes, held him.

"No, little hunter. No. See it our way. To give purpose to our thwarted lives. Some kind of revenge for those few among the elite, 85 out of all those many, to whom the genetic treatments did *not* bestow immortality. Who had helped cull and simplify, then found themselves without the intended blessing, left to die in the agony of exclusion from that. From you."

Beni saw the extent of the resolve, the old fierce hatred, that she would never let him go. He would never get to tell this story. Never even reach the central chamber. Or know he had.

"These aren't tombs. They're traps," he said, understanding, remembering the other meaning to her name for him, the insect leaving behind its offspring to feed.

"Yes, Beni. Traps to lure immortals curious in their long lives. A way of striking back at time."

And Beni felt the deep-down dread that Ramirez, some kind of Ramirez, tampered with, changed, or no

– just allowed to go back unharmed – was acting as a lure out there in the bright summer days, giving hope, keeping the dream alive in others, but part of the trap, knowing or unknowing. Pray Destiny it was unknowing. Such a small shrewd price to pay, letting one or two go free, letting others go back maimed. Let the tombs have a bad day and so keep them coming.

“Be merciful, Dormeuse. Arasty.”

“I am, little hunter. With you I truly am. Normally I grant the beautiful lie, tell those I am about to rob of life, light and limb, beauty, eons of youth, of how normally death is what makes lives, cultures, ultimately defines civilization. I remind them that it's right that immortals should reach a point of idle curiosity and need to be challenged, extended, tested. I tell them that whatever their fates individually, those I kill or hurt are helping maintain the tenor of life for all.”

“But you're actually culling.”

“Avenging. It's simpler.”

“Out of envy.”

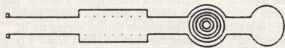
“Bad enough in life. But when it's all there is, all that's left, it fills the largest cup, becomes a vast power. I phrase it so they think they will be spared somehow. That they are different and special. To some I even suggest that their personalities will join mine in the tomb matrix. Then, when there is hope, when vanity and optimism is there in hints and the absolute conviction of ego, then I cripple and kill, then I bring them to the worst of hells, to such terrible insurmountable despair. You I have spared this anguish, Beni.”

“Spared me! By telling me the truth?”

“Yes.”

“But I can't believe you, can I? Not after what you've just said.”

“You really should. Look at your display.” Beni did, saw how simply, elegantly, the tomb's long-dead owner, this printing of her anyway, had expressed his dilemma.



A maze. He was in a maze. He did not know what to say. Arasty, the ghost of her, smiled. “Well?”

“Never be importunate, I was always told. Never beg.”

“I've told you I'm being merciful. I might listen.”

“All right. Don't kill me.”

“I won't.”

“Don't maim me.”

“I won't.”

“Let me return.” As part of the trap, he didn't say, refusing to go so far.

“Earn it.”

“I need to think. Concentrate.”

“Shall I leave?”

“You'd still be here. You're in the walls.”

“True. The tomb.”

“The trap.”

“The trap, yes. My personality is coded through all this. But it would be easier for you to concentrate.”

And the intercept vanished, took away her glow, left only dim yellow lamplight, tunnelling, vitreous, intimate darkness without her darkling eyes.

Beni stopped, pretended to think, triggered his implant, saw again the plan of her tomb picked out in light, saw that he was at the central chamber, the structural heart of what this thwarted, predatory, former woman had become. Out of despair.

“Oh, Dormeuse, Dormeuse,” he murmured. “I am so sorry.” Imagining how it had to be, the 85 labouring over the final secret plan, the hate and loss in their hearts as all the others sailed blissfully on, away, abandoning.

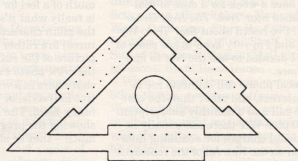
What choice then. What choice now. For them both.

“We can change this,” he said, resolved, striding on to his goal, though he did believe he was already there. “We can make a start here. Try to be friends. Let me try to be that, Arasty. At least try to be that.”

“Yes,” the tomb said, the walls, the night, as he strode on in his cone of yellow light into the endlessness of the hill. “And that is why.”

Outside the Nothing Stones pull and pull and will forever pull, drawing in the emptiness of infinity, the blackness of eyes made hard, so unforgivingly hard. She is punitive and spiteful and so so determined. It is all she will ever have.

Beni strides on with his young man's dreams – of success, of being different, better than the best, with his wonderful new dream of achieving something more, something new. He walks into night and does not see the final reading, does not know just how merciful she has been, that this time there is mercy, as much of it as there can ever be. He believes he can still be the greatest of them all. He still believes Ramirez is someone else.



**Terry Dowling** is one of Australia's leading sf writers (along with George Turner, Damien Broderick, Greg Egan, Sean McMullen and a few others). The above story marks his first appearance in *Interzone*. Best known for his future-Outback tales in the “Rynosseros” series – described as reminiscent of a blend of Cordwainer Smith and Jack Vance, but with a strong Aussie flavour – he also has an interest in a certain British writer: his 113,000-word MA thesis (University of Sydney, 1981) was entitled *Beguiled Into Crisis: J. G. Ballard and the Surrealistic Novel*.

# Science Fiction on the Internet

Nick Gassman

If I haven't got my head in a computer I'm either asleep, or playing football, or watching football (Arsenal actually). When I'm on the PC it's usually something to do with the Internet, and that's only partly because British Airways pay me to do so as an Internet consultant. Nice work if you can get it, although my girlfriend keeps mumbling something about getting a real life.

What I'd like to do in this article is to give you a feel for science fiction on the Net. There's too much to do a general survey, and it would take too much space if I gave detailed reviews of a number of resources, so I've dipped in here and there. I'd feel I've achieved something if, having read this, some of you think that maybe there's something in it for you and you ask "where do I go for a Net connection?"

I tear myself away from the PC at least once a week for a dose of real life called *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. I've heard about *Star Trek: Voyager*, and I'm very keen to see some of it, so I decided to use the Net to find out more.

A local phone call connects me to the Internet, and other than the cost of the call and a monthly subscription of £10 plus VAT there are usually no additional charges for accessing information on the Net. All of the resources described in this article are free.

The reason for the explosive growth in awareness of the Net over the last couple of years is the World Wide Web. The Internet itself is hardware – computers and comms links – and the Web is one of the applications that runs on it. On the Web you jump from one page of text to another by clicking on keywords, and it also incorporates pictures, video and sound. In my search for *Voyager* I accessed Lycos, which is a US-based database of Web sites. Each site on the Web has an address, called a URL, which stands for uniform

resource locator. The URL for Lycos is <http://www.lycos.com>.

At the Lycos search form I typed in the words "star trek voyager," and pressed enter. ten seconds later I was on the official Paramount site for *Star Trek: Voyager* (<http://voyager.paramount.com/VoyagerIntro.html>). First stop was sick bay – at least, there's a picture and text that tell me I'm in sick bay. From here I downloaded a video which contained a message from the emergency holographic doctor. He explains that the reason I know nothing about *Voyager* is because I've lost my memory. If I look around the site I'll recover all my lost knowledge, and can look forward to a return to active duty once I complete the questionnaire provided on the site. On another page there's a list of real people who have passed the test.

The site itself is quite good, although I didn't feel that I came away with much of a feel for the characters, which is really what it's about. The biogs of the main characters (including pictures) are rather brief. There is a nice picture of the starship, although in the crew photo I can't tell if one of the characters is a woman with a distinctive hairstyle, or an alien with a funny head. The list of TV stations showing the programme didn't help much – they're all in the US!

Another Internet application is the newsgroups, although the name is misleading. They are actually text-based discussion forums on a mind-boggling array of subjects – there are over 15,000 of them! I've been a fan of Douglas Adams since the original *Hitch Hiker* radio series, and one of my best-ever theatre experiences was a superb adaptation of this in a small Welsh theatre. In my humble opinion the *Dirk Gently* novels are some of the most brilliant imaginative fiction ever written. Anyway, what's Adams up to these days? Well, I happen to know that he's getting into digital

media, but that's another story. A good source of information is the newsgroup about him. There are also newsgroups for many other writers (science fiction and otherwise), and TV programmes, and film genres, and psychology support groups, and philosophies, and religions, and sports, and... well, lots of things.

In general, anyone with a Net connection can read and contribute to the newsgroups. Within each newsgroup there are usually a number of parallel debates, and [alt.fan.douglas-adams](http://alt.fan.douglas-adams) (that's the name of the newsgroup) was no exception. For a start there is some enormously detailed technical debate about the more obscure elements of his work, but of more interest to me was the fact that *The Salmon of Doubt* may be out some time this year. It was due to be a Dirk Gently novel, but Adams was having trouble with it, and wrote out Dirk Gently. There may be a Gently TV series, and Steven Spielberg might have the rights to a *Hitch Hiker* movie. You can also get Adams's e-mail address.

The oddest things spring up in these debates. In *Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy* there is a joke about how "belgium" is the rudest word in the universe. I found out that in the US version the word "belgium" is replaced with "fuck." Cor blimey, Mum. There is a lengthy debate about whether this is, or is not, a good thing, incorporating references to the nature of Americans and their sense of humour. The benefit of this sort of forum is that we get to hear (read) both sides of the story.

But science fiction on the Net isn't all *Star Trek* and candy floss. All (well, probably) tastes are catered for. Off to another of my favourite search engines – Alta Vista at <http://www.altavista.digital.com/> – and type in J.G. Ballard. At <http://www.cnn.com/~miki/index.html> there is "What I Believe" by Ballard. I've read some of his work, but I'm no expert, so I'm not

sure of the context of this piece [it appeared in *Interzone*, in 1984! - Ed.] but it is a series of statements that start "I believe in..." Whoever put the site together says "Part of Ballard's work is about our imaginations' capacity to make connections between widely disparate objects, to synthesize new forms; I've tried to reflect this by adding an ambiguous hyperlink component to his text. (And I hope he doesn't mind.)" The hyperlinks go to paragraph-length quotes from Ballard's work.

The Science Fiction Directory at <http://www.megamed.com/ronl/sf/authore/ballard.html> lists Ballard's work in chronological order. And then there's a site called "The Electronic Labyrinth" at <http://www.uaberta.ca/~kceep/elab.html> which introduces itself with: "The Electronic Labyrinth is a study of hypertext technology, providing a guide to this rapidly growing field. We are most concerned with the implications of this medium for creative writers looking to move beyond traditional notions of linearity and univocity." What's this to do with Ballard? There's an analysis of *The Atrocious Exhibition* within this context.

There is also a J.G. Ballard home page at <http://www.simons-rock.edu/~craigs/ballard.html>. Point Survey rates Web sites, and gives awards to what it calls the top 5%. This site is one of them. Point provide a brief review of the site. "The meat of this page is David Pringle's semi-annual newsletter on James G. Ballard, once considered a science-fiction author (*The Drowned World* and *The Wind from Nowhere*) and now regarded as one of the most important authors of the late 20th century (*Empire of the Sun* and *The Unlimited Dream Company*). The newsletter covers books by and about Ballard, and it's also a forum to discuss his work. Reports on forthcoming Ballard books, including his first non-fiction collection, are accompanied by rumours of screenplays for *Crash* and *High Rise*, two of his earlier speculative novels. Lists of collected short stories and plot synopses of his novels (only four of 15 are covered) add padding, but not much else." Hmm. David Pringle? Ah yes, there is a link from the Ballard page to some information about *Interzone*. There are also links to the Ballard newsletters, the synopses of the novels, and other Ballard resources, including a J.G. Ballard mailing list. To subscribe, send e-mail to [jgballard-request@simons-rock.edu](mailto:jgballard-request@simons-rock.edu) with the message: subscribe jgballard.

And what about this "rumour" of a screenplay for *Crash*? Back to Alta Vista for a quick search. At [http://www.pkbaseline.com/baseweb/s\\_inp.html](http://www.pkbaseline.com/baseweb/s_inp.html) there is a bucketload of

information about the film. This includes country of origin, film status (wrapped), U.S. distributor, international distributors/sales, production companies, telephone, producers, director (David Cronenberg), cast information, credits, publicity, begin shooting date, completed shooting date, location, synopsis, budget estimates (\$10m-\$13m).

I read some time ago about an on-line sf magazine. Could I find it? I did, and others too. I used the search program at the World Wide Web Virtual Library (at <http://www.edoc.com/ejournal/>) to look for on-line sf publications. It gave me the following list:

#### *Science Fiction Weekly*

*E-escape* - the digital journal of speculative fiction

*21st Century Magazine* - high quality entertainment and popular science magazine

*Cyberspace Vanguard Magazine of Science Fiction* - interviews, news, reviews, conventions, columns, etc.

*Quanta* - the electronic magazine of sf and fantasy

*Planet Magazine* - free online quarterly of sf, fantasy, horror, humour, poetry

*InterText Magazine* - a free, electronically-distributed fiction magazine.

*Scream Press / Whispers* - poetry, sf, zine reviews, art

*Century* - an impressive bimonthly of speculative and fantastic fiction

*Tom Cool's E-zine of Science Fiction* - a webzine of sf short stories and graphic art

A fair choice I thought. *Quanta* rang a bell, so I clicked on the entry and was taken to the *Quanta* home page at <http://www.quanta.org/quant/>. As ever, there was a range of choices. Back copies of the journal are available online, and there's a search engine that allows you to do a full text search of stories. Haven't you ever ploughed through back copies of *Interzone* looking for a reference in one particular story? A search function like this could be so useful.

The latest issue of *Quanta* was released in July 1995 and the previous one in February 1995, so it's not a frequent publication. Rather than waste the phone bill by reading it all online, I downloaded the latest PDF version. PDF stands for portable document format. It's a way of distributing properly formatted documents to a variety of computers, and is widely used. The software to enable reading and printing of the document is available for free over the Internet.

The publication was all fiction,

apart from the editorial. There were a couple of pieces of straight Virtual Reality-type sf that I enjoyed, and some more "challenging" stuff, of a sort that does appear in *Interzone* but which doesn't always appeal to my taste. The stories were well written, and the document well laid out (running to 22 pages), although the copy-editing could have been better in places. *Quanta* describes itself as "shareword," and if you enjoy the publication you are asked to send \$5, although for somebody in the UK this would probably mean sending cash in the post. There are methods of secure payment that can be used on the Internet, but they are not implemented on this site.

For those who want to know when the next issue of *Quanta* is out there is a self-registering e-mail list. Even better, the entire next release can be e-mailed to you in ASCII or postscript format (although, apparently, not PDF). And finally, for aspiring authors, *Quanta* does solicit contributions.

One of the possibilities offered by a site on the Web is that there is no need for separate editions of a publication. The journal can be updated when a good new piece of work arrives, and it doesn't even have to replace something that's already there. In his editorial Daniel K. Appelquist suggest that this is the direction he'd like to take *Quanta*, but he needs some help to do it properly. Another advantage of the Net is that this help could be provided from anywhere in the world - as long as it's reachable by e-mail.

After *Quanta*, I tried one more journal on the list, and ended up at *Science Fiction Weekly* (<http://www.mor-dor.com/sfw/>). This is more than just fiction, and offers links to News of the Week, On Screen, Story By, Other Cool Sci-Fi Stuff, Off the Shelf, Sci-Fi Site of the Week, Games, Mail, Submissions, Staff, Back Issues.

When I looked there was, among other things, a review of *Heavy Weather* by Bruce Sterling, and a link to what I thought was an interview with the author. It turned out not to be an interview, but a chance for readers to post the question they most want Sterling to answer. The top ten questions will be put to him in the interview, which will be published on the site.

Of all the applications that run over the Internet, e-mail has the greatest reach. E-mail can reach the networks that other services (like the Web) cannot. E-mail is not only used for one-to-one communication. There are mailing lists - at least 20,000 of which are easily accessible. With these, you subscribe yourself to the list (for free) by sending an e-mail to a defined address. Then, whenever

anyone on the list sends an e-mail to the communal address, that e-mail is redistributed to all the subscribers. It's amazing how soon you get to know people, and how a sense of community can be created with people you've never met.

When looking for e-mail lists I use the search engine at <http://www.lists.com/>. A search for "science fiction" gave me the following list (a search for other terms, such as "Star Trek," would have given different results):

SF-lit Science Fiction and Fantasy Listserv: mail the command information sf-lit to [listproc@loc.gov](mailto:listproc@loc.gov)

STWTF-L Gender Issues in Science Fiction: mail the command info STWTF-L to [LISTSERV@VMA.CC.ND.EDU](mailto:LISTSERV@VMA.CC.ND.EDU)

UK-sf The United Kingdom Science Fiction/Fantasy List: mail the command information uk-sf to [listproc@lists.pipex.com](mailto:listproc@lists.pipex.com)

UK-sf-books The UK Science Fiction/Fantasy Book List: mail the command information uk-sf-books to [listproc@lists.pipex.com](mailto:listproc@lists.pipex.com)

I thought UK-sf looked interesting, so I sent off the information request, and received this reply within minutes:

"Despite the recent apathy regarding sf in the UK from some broadcasting quarters, there has been a surprising number of successes too, both now and from the past. This list is dedicated to the Science Fiction and other Telefantasy that the UK has spawned. There are many gems from many years, quite a few of which are being repeated even now! A useful definition of Telefantasy was posted by one of our subscribers, Anthony McKay: A television drama containing aspects of science fiction or fantasy. British telefantasy is any telefantasy production MADE in the UK. Thus any drama containing examples of: time travel, ghosts, alternative futures, paranormal activities, science fiction, supernatural beings, etc, is telefantasy.

Some sf shows that could be discussed are: *Blake's Seven*, *Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, *Star Cops*, *Sapphir and Steel*, *Thunderbirds*, *Captain Scarlet*, *The Tomorrow People*, *Space: 1999*, *Survivors*, *Adam Adamant*, *The Prisoner*, *Day of the Triffids*, *She-Wolf of London*, *The Wanderer*, *Department-S*, *Danger Man*...

Please note that there are other lists on the listprocessor dealing with specific fantasy series: DRWHO-L (*Doctor Who*), RED-DWARF (*Red Dwarf*), FAB-UFO (Gerry Anderson's *UFO* series), FAB-L (Gerry Anderson discussion list). A companion list is available for the discussion of UK sf books

and authors; this is called UK-SF-BOOKS (original, eh!).

Through the black arts I found that as of mid-January this list had 199 subscribers, roughly 25% of whom appeared to be in the UK, with most of the rest in the US.

It will be clear by now that there are many different sources of information, and many different ways of participating on the Net. This is, of course, often confusing. A system designed to help with this confusion is the FAQ – Frequently Asked Questions. Not only are FAQs available on how to use the Net, but also on subjects to do with Life, the Universe, and, well, nearly Everything. FAQs usually take the format of an introduction, and a series of questions and answers. If the document is large enough it will be divided into sections, and if the subject is large enough there may be a number of documents.

There is (naturally) a searchable index of FAQs available at <http://www.cis.ohio-state.edu/hbin/search-usenet-faqs/form>. And so, (naturally) I search for "science fiction." The results included, but were not limited to the following:

Space FAQ

Mystery Science Theatre 3000 FAQ

SF-references-in-music List

Computer Science Technical Report Archive Sites

Astro/Space Frequently Seen Acronyms

Cryonics FAQ

Adventure Authoring Systems FAQ

Nonlinear Science FAQ

FAQ for rec.arts.books.reviews (December, 1995)

The Space FAQ is actually 13 documents, each focusing on a different topic. These are: Data Sources, Calculations, Planetary Probe History, Network Resources, Orbital and Planetary Launch Services, Interest Groups & Publications, Mission Schedules, References, Introduction, How to Become an Astronaut, Upcoming Planetary Probes, Controversial Questions, Addresses.

A search for "Star Trek" gave the following:

Star Trek Actors' Other Roles FAQ

Star Trek Ships: Television & Film

Star Trek Books-on-Tape

Relativity and FTL Travel – Introduction

Star Wars FAQ

Star Trek Episodes Guide

Stardates in Star Trek

Battlestar Galactica FAQ

Star Trek Comics Checklist

Star Trek Locations

Star Trek Book Guide

An Introduction to the Rec.Arts.StarTrek.\* Hierarchy

Klingon Language FAQ

The stardates FAQ is incredibly detailed and long – and probably contains more info than any general reference is likely to have. The reference to the rec.arts.startrek.\* hierarchy is nothing to do with captains and admirals, but is a guide to the *Star Trek* newsgroups.

The Internet is a rapidly expanding global social phenomenon. Nobody knows how many people use it (estimates from 20-60 million may or may not be close), but it is growing incredibly fast, as more and more people get online to do business and conduct their social lives. For the sf fan there is a massive array of free information and entertainment, much of which just isn't available anywhere else – and certainly not as easily available. Of course, it's not just about sf, for this article could equally as well have been written about many other topics.

The technology of the Internet is developing rapidly. It has already expanded the bounds of the possible. I'm looking forward to future possibilities with genuine excitement. Of course, we're looking to do some good things on the British Airways site at <http://www.british-airways.com>. With something as big as the Internet it's always difficult to know where to start, especially when, as is the case at present, the level of knowledge varies so widely between people. I've not tried here to explain everything, and there is a hell of a lot that I've left out. If there's enough interest I can follow up with more in-depth reviews, or general articles, or snippets – or what do you want? Let the editor know.

If you're interested enough to get connected and don't know how (try the Internet mags in the newsgang), then I can send you a document I've written with some guidance. I'll only send it on to people who send an A5 SAE, and I apologize now that I don't have the time to engage in correspondence. My address is 65 Dutch Barn Close, Stanwell, Staines, TW19 7NG (e-mail: [nick@netwiz.demon.co.uk](mailto:nick@netwiz.demon.co.uk))

**Nick Gassman**

*Typesetter's note: e-mail addresses consist of very long unbroken strings of characters that simply don't fit into our usual text measure, so they are broken here for typographic reasons. In use, they should be entered exactly as typed but without the line breaks. Happy surfing. PB*





REVIEWED

## Hyperion (Slight Return)

Paul J. McAuley

difficult levels, so Raul and Aenae, accompanied by an imperturbable and resourceful android, must navigate between portals of the farcaster system which Aenae is able to reopen, following the river which once ran through the worlds of the Hegemony.

The scenarios which the three face are ingeniously constructed, yet too often they are able to escape through a suddenly-revealed trapdoor, and one has the feeling that Simmons is not fully engaged with his characters as he manipulates them through an infinitely extensible plot which does no more than delay their arrival at their goal. Yet this is more than redeemed by the second strand of the plot, which follows the starship captain Father Fedrico de Soya and his loyal crew, who have been charged by the highest authority of the Pax with pursuing and destroying Aenae and her companions. Aenae can step easily from world to world by using the portal system; De Soya must pursue her through Einsteinian space, and each time he must be brutally resur-

rected because the acceleration required reduces his body to organic sludge. It is de Soya's suffering and growing doubt that lends a human dimension to the otherwise rather mechanical advancement of the plot; and it is upon his conscience that the novel ultimately turns. (Raul promises that he is not speculating when he relates de Soya's story, and it will be a trivial exercise for those who have read *The Hyperion Cantos* to understand how Raul can have gained de Soya's memories.)

Although *The Hyperion Cantos* ended with a fulfilling sense of closure, in *Endymion* Simmons has skillfully reopened its vast panoramas, hinting at greater vistas to come, and widening the theme of the possibilities of human transcendence within the frame of the vast history of the universe. Like its predecessor, *Endymion* is packed with sf devices which have been polished and refurbished with precise skill, evoking a densely populated history set against the backdrop of the universe. One cannot quite shake off the feeling that Simmons is employing his skills in service of a commercially rather than artistically inspired sequel, but there is always a sense of deliberate authorial distancing and a certain chill cerebralism in Simmons's narratives, and what matters more, the impulse or the finished work? How well he rises to the challenges he has set himself must await the second, concluding novel, *The Rise of Endymion*, but like his pilgrims, we travel in hope.

Were it not for the fact that the return of the grand gestures of space opera, deployed to explore the beginnings and ends of the universe, was a central feature of sf in the late 1980s and early 1990s (think Banks, Baxter, Bear, Benford, Brin, and we are not even out of the B's), one could make much of the pleasing symmetry of having to hand both *Endymion* and *The Wild* (HarperCollins, £15.99), which is the second volume of David Zindell's epic *A Requiem for Homo Sapiens*, itself a sequel to his sprawling cosmological space opera *Neverness*.

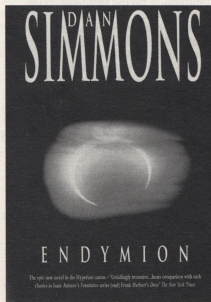
*The Wild* continues the story, begun in *The Broken God*, of Danlo the Wild, son of Mallory Ringess, the star pilot who became a god and vanished, and who is also the narrator of his son's story. It is becoming clear that Danlo's story is both a recapitulation and deepening of that of his father. *The Broken God* told of Danlo's apprenticeship to the Order of Mystic Mathematicians and Other Seekers of the Ineffable Flame and his elevation to the rank of starship pilot; *The Wild* describes his long quest from star to star as he searches for his father and for the Architects of the Universal Cybernetic Church, who have begun to dest-

Appearing as unexpectedly as a black monolith in orbit around Jupiter, and as pregnant with burgeoning intelligence, Dan Simmons's *The Hyperion Cantos* synthesized the best of all sf that had gone before it into one glorious, architecturally precise catalogue. Its narrative structure modelled upon Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, its subtext echoing Keats's unfinished poem on the fall of old gods and the rise of new, this fierce and densely imagined space opera followed seven pilgrims making their way towards the Time Tombs on the obscure world of Hyperion while the interstellar civilization of the Hegemony lurched towards Armageddon. At the end, the Time Tombs opened, their guardian, the fearsome Shrike, appeared and took a sacrifice, and the various factions of AIs living in the interstices of the FTL fatlines and farcasters which knit the Hegemony together agreed to spare humanity but withdrew their blessing, severing the lines of instant communication and wrecking the Hegemony forever.

As a Public Service Announcement, I should point out that *Endymion* (Bantam, \$22.95; Headline, £16.99) is not the sequel to *The Hyperion Cantos* but precisely one half of it – necessary because nowhere in the prof copypis this made clear. And while it is not strictly necessary to have read *The Hyperion Cantos* to understand *Endymion*, it is a book rife with echoes that deepen the doubled strands of its plot.

It is some 250 years later, and Aenae, the daughter of one of the Time Tomb pilgrims, Brawne Lamia, and her lover, a cybrid recreation of the poet John Keats, is about to emerge from the Time Tombs. Human civilization is dominated by the Pax, whose austere Catholicism bestows the blessing of physical reconstitution after death for its followers by use of cruciform symbionts which store human memory and personality. Aenae threatens their status quo because she promises a resynthesis between humanity and at least one faction of the AIs, who have discovered that there are "lions and tigers and bears" – advanced alien intelligences which may have malevolent intentions – in the vasty deeps of the Universe.

Accompanied by Raul Endymion, an ex-soldier and hunter's guide, who has been appointed as her bodyguard, Aenae flees from the forces of the Pax towards the rebel Ousters. *Endymion* is Raul's confession, written while he is incarcerated in an impenetrable Schrodinger Cat box in high orbit, awaiting execution by cyanide gas which will be released by the random decay of a radio-isotope. At one level, Raul's adventures with Aenae are little more than a glorified platform computer game, for as in a game one must advance through increasingly



## BOOKS



REVIEWED

roy the Galaxy star by star, and who hold the secret of the genetic plague which decimated the primitive people among whom Danlo was fostered.

Danlo adventures through a galaxy riddled and modified by ancient history and gigantic technologies, and wars between humans vastened into gods (whose brains are not merely the size of planets, but of thousands of planets scattered through ordered clusters of stars). But in a book crammed with wonderful visions that convey with an intensely felt joy the huge scales of space and time, Zindell never loses sight of the human figures that animate it. Danlo is not a warrior, but, like a zen master, leads by example and teaching, gaining power by contemplation and insight and wit rather than military conquest as he pursues his quest, aided only by a querulous computer program which is all that remains of what was once a star-spanning god. He is also at times something of a prig, for his calm certitude gives him a maddening superiority which is never properly challenged by the mere humans among whom he moves (nor by the wannabe gods he encounters, in one of the finest passages of a book studded with startling scenes, in the virtual reality lands of the dead), and the great loopy metaphysical meditations on quiddity and godhood and much else which interrupt the narrative sometimes verge on inflating into shapeless purple prose.

And yet the whole remains robust and vital, glorious and gaudy, dizzily baroque and bristling with fierce self-assurance, and fully engaged with the wonders it relates. Zindell's ambition appears to be nothing less than to show how it feels and what it means to become a god. He shows no sign of faltering.

**Nancy Kress's *Oaths and Miracles*** (Tor, \$22.95) is a biomedical thriller that ten years ago would have been full-blown sf, which like the book itself shows how far and how fast genetic engineering has come. It deftly weaves three storylines – an FBI agent investigating the links between the murders of a Las Vegas showgirl and a scientist; the scientist's widow discovering that her own life is in danger when she tries to find out about her husband's link with a biotechnology firm; and an ex-marine obsessed with rescuing his children from the cult his wife has joined – around a conspiracy involving viruses which the Mafia are developing into a highly selective assassination tool.

The beginning shifts rather too quickly between the viewpoints of dissolvable characters before settling down, and the ending is perhaps a little too untidy and open for its chosen genre, while the plot, although dexterous in its meshing of its various

characters' obsessions, is ultimately about as believable as that of a superior episode of *The X-Files* (with which *Oaths and Miracles* shares a dogged, weary paranoia). Would the Mafia, which thrives on extortion backed by demonstrable threats of violence, really choose to pour millions into research for a weapon which kills its victims so unobtrusively?

No matter, for Kress excels at depicting lives at the margin and at the end of their tether; not even the FBI agent manages to get close to the shadowy movers and shakers of the conspiracy. Her sympathetically drawn characters operate in a finely observed America of motels and Stop'n'Shops and trailer parks. Kress's portrayal of FBI procedures and the clutter of working laboratories is detailed and convincing, and the development and operation of the assassination virus is both plausible and ingenious. This is a thriller which eschews flashy glamour and the easy fix of a shoot-em-up finale. Framing its scenerio within the ethics of genetic engineering, it takes its subject seriously, and so should we.

**Chico Kidd** (and I will take some convincing that this is *not* a pseudonym) is an English writer whose first novel *The Printer's Devil* (Baen, \$5.99) is a literate and very English ghost story which wears its proclaimed influences, particularly that of M. R. James, with considerable élan. Alan Bellman, a roving campanologist, becomes intrigued by the historical mystery concerning the self-styled wizard Roger Southwell, whose tomb lies outside the bounds of the church where Alan practises bell-ringing. Alan's investigations quickly lead to his possession by Southwell's unquiet spirit, and it is left to his wife and the ghost of one of Southwell's victims, whose story is interlarded with that of the contemporary couple, to save him.

It's an engaging story with a fine eye for atmosphere and the mild eccentricities of English character. Although a little disjointed by the abrupt switch in viewpoint midway, it deploys considerable learning about campanology, alchemy, and 17th-century London with a finely judged touch and a plethora of tongue-in-cheek footnotes. A strong debut that's worth seeking out.

**Charles Sheffield** somehow manages to maintain a regular output of hard sf, saturated in traditional virtue, for both Baen and Tor. *The Ganymede Club* (Tor, \$23.95) is set in the same future history as a previous novel, *Cold as Ice*, and like its predecessor features Rustum "Bat" Battachariya, an overweight, reclusive investigator with the sharp mind of Nero Wolfe and the precise diction of (can it be?) Isaac Asimov.

It is set on (or rather in) Ganymede, a few years after a fierce war has destroyed the northern hemisphere of Earth. Two refugees, Lola Belman (hmm, could it be that Sheffield... no, surely not), a psychotherapist, and her computer-obsessed teenage brother, Spook, become involved in a mystery surrounding one of Lola's patients, Bryce Sonnenberg, who suffers from flashback memories of a life not his own. Their investigations attract the unwelcome attention of the mysterious Ganymede Club, which sends an assassin after them, and they must enlist Bat's aid to unravel the mystery of Bryce's true identity and the secret of the Ganymede Club.

It is a competent, fast-paced thriller which deploys its cliché elements (reclusive genius; teenage hacker; girl in peril; secret cabal) with skill, but it has the air of a formal exercise that could have been written any time in the last 20 years. Sheffield's underground colony is blandly sketched and underpopulated, and there's little of the crammed estrangement we've come to expect of cutting-edge depictions of the future, while the resolution of the mystery simply points us towards a sequel. Sheffield has done much better than this worthy but slightly dull effort; may he do so again.

**Also noted:** Jamil Nasar's *Quasar* (Bantam, \$5.99) starts with tremendous brio when a down-at-heel psychiatric technician, Theodore Kormade, is lured into a life-threatening contract to cure Quasar Zant of her addiction to electroneural stimulation. Zant is heiress to one of the wealthiest families in a city hermetically sealed against Earth's ravaged biosphere, and in her memories are secrets which threaten the status quo: and what Kormade learns endangers both him and his patient. *Quasar's* virtue is its speed, but in the frantic plot, larded with undigested lumps of psychiatric jargon, the initially sympathetic characters of Kormade and Quasar are reduced to one dimension as they are chased through stock sf situations, including a raving torturess and a secret society of mutants inhabiting the city's cloaca. In the end, the novel outruns itself.

**Paul J. McAuley**



## It Ain't Over 'Til the Fat Lady Gets Tossed Out of the Airlock

James Lovegrove

One great sf trilogy concludes, another begins.

With *Blue Mars* (HarperCollins, £16.99) Kim Stanley Robinson brings to an end an impressive feat of science-based world-building, a chronicle of over two hundred years of future history so immaculately realized that it has seemed, at times, to be the truth foretold. Of course they probably said much the same about *The Shape of Things To Come*, but Wells's speculations had more to do with his political inclinations and desires than with prescience. Robinson is not averse to utopian dreaming either, but his *Mars* trilogy grounds the utopian ideal in practical possibility and sets out a blueprint for achieving it, detailing the journey rather than the destination. This, combined with Robinson's depth of research in an awesome array of fields, his sinewy, allusive prose and his firm grasp of the flaws and foibles that add depth to character, works the miracle of making a dream appear not just worthy of pursuit but attainable.

For anyone who has read the preceding volumes in the trilogy, *Blue Mars* feels just like coming home. Michel the psychotherapist, Ann the geologist (as hard and as stratified with secrets as the rocks she studies), the scientifically brilliant but socially autistic Sax, Maya the irascible earth-mother, dark horse Nadia, the peripatetic and possibly mad Coyote ... meeting these characters again is like joining up with old friends after a long absence. The tie that binds them together as members of the fabled First Hundred who began the process of colonizing and terraforming the Red Planet also binds them to us. We have been with them ever since they landed on Mars and took their first tentative toddling steps out onto the low-g surface. We have observed their squabbles and shifting alliances, we have endured with them the struggle for independence from Earth in both *Red Mars* and *Green Mars*, and in *Blue Mars* we see them enjoying the fruits of the peace and prosperity they have laboured so long and hard to engineer. Impossibly advanced in years, their lives artificially extended, they are coming to grips with the fact that they have done as much as any human beings can ever hope to, and also coming to grips with a condition arising as a result of their prolonged senescence, namely that while their physical faculties remain unimpaired, their mental faculties are, alarmingly, starting to fail. They are living legends, responsible for founding a new civilization, one based on fairness, equality, justice, and care for the environment, one that is genuinely civilized, but what are they to do now when such a past is behind them, and

what is the use of owning such a past if their memory cells, unable to cope with three times as much information as they were designed to hold, are failing, and it is becoming harder and harder to remember anything?

The *Mars* of *Blue Mars*, with its elegantly designed townships and ship-towns, its huge expanses of unspoilt territory, the freedom for everyone to do pretty much as he or she pleases, a communal sense of working together for a greater good, and the opportunity for spectacularly adventurous leisure activities, is a virtual Eden, and therein lies the problem for its inhabitants. To the 20 billion denizens of a flooded, teeming, full-to-bursting Earth, the next-door neighbour planet is the Promised Land, the new America, and naturally every Terran wants to move there. Solving that problem and helping draft a new constitution for this New World occupies the surviving members of the First Hundred for most of the novel, giving them a focus in their declining years, a pin around which to fasten the crumbling fragments of lives made redundant by success and the rise of younger, brighter generations. Regrettably, the minutiae of political wrangling and constitution-drafting make for some patience-testing chapters, Robinson so caught up in his knowledge of systems of government and his (admittedly inspired) synthesis of history's more successful modes of democracy that he often appears to be overlooking one fundamental point, namely that the reader is possibly marginally less obsessed with the nitty-gritty of

the world-building process than he is and wants to get back to the characters and the story. Impressive these passages may be, but a pleasure to peruse? Perhaps.

But one can forgive Robinson such longeurs for the effusive, exotic brilliance that abounds elsewhere in *Blue Mars*. The chapters dealing with the return to Earth of Sax, Maya and Michel – and the first visit of Nirgal, a native-born Martian, to the cradle of humanity – are vibrant with both the nostalgia and the strangeness of the experience. After so long away, for the Martian colonists Earth has become the alien planet, the "Mars." The gravity is crushing, the colours painfully vivid, the air thick to breathe – all of which reminds Sax, Maya and Michel that the world they have helped create can never be another Earth and that therefore it must always be somewhere new, different and, they hope, better. Nirgal, meanwhile, seven feet tall, narrow-chested, bronze-skinned, is truly of another species, a human being who does not belong and cannot physiologically handle Earth – the paradox is reinforced when he contracts a potentially lethal pulmonary illness from an Earth virus and has to be hastily shuttled back to Mars. Going home has other drawbacks, as Michel discovers when a brief stay in his native Provence leaves him almost incurably homesick.

The question of home is one of the book's central themes – what constitutes home, whether a person defines his or her own sense of place or a sense of place defines the person – and the answer, Robinson suggests, is that home is not just where your memories tell you you belong but where the environment welcomes you and lets you be. It's another facet of the old nature/nurture debate. People are not simply the products of the commingling of their parents' genes but of where and how they were brought up. Thus when Sax attempts to restore the failing memories of the remaining members of the First Hundred, he isn't just trying to save them from disorientating mental blackouts and unwelcome peak experiences but, in effect, trying to recreate them anew, to remind them once again of who they are and what they have done and why they deserve to be proud of themselves and the society they have founded. If Sax can, with a few casual taps of a computer keyboard, bring about an ice age (as he does), or bring his friends, in effect, back to life, then science in Robinson's 23rd century has given men the powers of gods, but *Blue Mars* is telling us that divinity is worthless unless it is tempered with a sense of self and its close cousin, a sense of place.



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In contrast with the gloomy tone of much contemporary sf, *Blue Mars* envisages humankind brought, by its own efforts, willingly, to the cusp of a golden age, with fusion-propelled starships heading ever further from the solar system, piloted by men and women who may live to be a thousand years old. Peter F. Hamilton's *The Reality Dysfunction* (Macmillan, £16.99) takes off from there and projects us 300 or so years further ahead to a time when the golden age is in full swing and far-flung corners of the galaxy have been colonized by humans whom genetic engineering has rendered long-lived and physically perfect, god-like if not quite true gods. Biotechnology has made possible quasi-telepathic communication across the gulfs of space, and sentient spaceships ply the space-lanes, empathically linked to their human captains. The distinction between artificial intelligence and the human mind, between inorganic and organic, has become so blurred as to be all but meaningless. Disease is nonexistent, sexual promiscuity is rife, safe and enthusiastically endorsed, and you can drink almost as much as you want to without serious ill-effect.

From the moment *The Reality Dysfunction* begins, it is clear that Hamilton's joy in science-tethered flights of fancy is going to be infectious. The first chapter is pure space opera, all exploding starships and (literally) bone-shattering g-forces. Hurrah! But it is also clear that everything is destined to go Horribly Wrong. After all, as both Hamilton and Robinson are aware, there is nothing intrinsically interesting about a golden age. Perfection is boring to write about. Without conflict, where is the story? The creation or destruction of a golden age, on the other hand, offers meatier material to work with, and once Hamilton gets going dismantling his 26th-century status quo, *The Reality Dysfunction* really takes off. This happens about a third of the way into the book, which means there are 300 pages of scene-setting to get through first. Those 300 pages are vital, since you can't establish several different races and worlds and a huge cast of characters in just a handful of chapters, and they aren't dull – Hamilton knows better than most sf writers that a good, short, sharp shock of action can spice up even the plainest datadump – but they are there and they do have to be ingested and digested before the fireworks can commence.

Principally we are introduced to two main offshoots of the human race, the Adamists and the Edenists (the latter enjoying constant access to a consensual collective consciousness), and to two pivotal characters. The first is Joshua Calvert, who dreams of refitting and flying his father's ship, the

*Lady Macbeth*, and whose space pilot's instincts are matched only by his arrant precociousness. The other is Ione Saldana, beautiful young empress of the artificial satellite habitat Tranquillity, with whom Joshua has lots of splendidly athletic sex (with Ione, that is, not with the artificial satellite habitat, although anything is possible). The queen and the roguish hero are an odd couple as old as Malory, or perhaps as *Star Wars*, but in Hamilton's hands they are no mere cliché; they are more complex than that. Ione is in many ways reminiscent of Julia Evans, the multi-billionaire heiress and philanthropic businesswoman from Hamilton's previous trio of novels, the Greg Mandel books, but her power exceeds even Julia's. Thanks to her mental affinity with Tranquillity, Ione sees and hears everything that goes on within her realm, although this gift is always underplayed and sometimes humorously glossed. Joshua, meanwhile, is the archetypal reluctant hero, inspired to heroic deeds either by self-interest or in spite of his best interests. Space opera has always been about traditions, and Joshua and Ione are perhaps *The Reality Dysfunction's* only two stereotypes, but for all that Hamilton gives them engaging and credible personalities and handles well the uncertain pitch and yaw of their love affair.

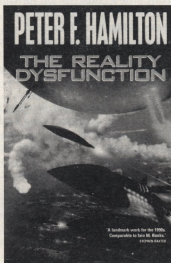
Joshua and Ione are the book's emotional core, its Lancelot and Guinevere, its top-billed stars, but there are several other characters of equal significance and a host of sup-

porting players, far too many to enumerate here. The action centres on a frontier planet, Lalonde, and follows a group of recently arrived colonists as they travel upriver to their new home and, inevitably, towards a heart of darkness. Initially the evil resides in the soul of Quinn Dexter, one of the group of convicts conscripted to serve as the colonists' workhorses, but it soon manifests itself physically in spectacular fashion. What is inadvertently unleashed on Lalonde by a complicated confluence of events is a force which, gradually at first but with increasing rapidity, makes it obvious that not only is the golden age at an end but there is every chance that a new dark age may be imminent. Hence the overall title for the trilogy, *Night's Dawn*.

It is hard to discuss *The Reality Dysfunction* without mentioning its size. At 950-odd pages, it is a behemoth; more accurately, it is one third of a behemoth which, when completed, will run to approximately one million words. Size, as we all know, isn't everything, and 950 pages without real substance and badly written are 950 pages which would better have been left blank or, preferably, as tree. Happily *The Reality Dysfunction* has all the substance Hamilton's mighty imagination can give it. For evidence, look no further than the chapter describing the homeworld of the Ly-cliph, an alien race so bizarre that they simply *must* exist somewhere out there, or to the battle scene in the closing chapters where near-indestructible knights in armour duke it out with armed-to-the-teeth cyborg mercenaries who lob nuclear devices around like hand-grenades. As for the writing, it is as dense and as detailed as we have come to expect from Hamilton, not to mention as gorgeously rich in sesquipedalianism. Indeed, it seems as if Hamilton is on a mission to employ every single word in the English lexicon at least once in this book, and no doubt the few recondite terms he has failed to include this time will turn up over the course of the next two volumes.

*The Reality Dysfunction* is an epic in the traditional sense of the word – big, brash, sweeping, hyperbolic, exuberant, thunderously enjoyable – the sort of book Tolstoy would have produced had he availed himself of a bucketload of LSD before settling down to write *War and Peace*. As for *Night's Dawn*, if it continues with the grand vistas of the far future, the pyrotechnical prose and the good-against-evil fulcrum of the first volume – and there is no reason to suspect that it won't – then, though a far cry from the cool, analytical intricacies of the *Mars* trilogy, it will amply fill the void Robinson leaves behind.

James Lovegrove



A landmark work for the 1990s, comparable to *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*.



Alpha and Omega: an intriguing first novel, and, alas, a final one.

In "No Longer Touch the Earth" (*Interzone* 72) I paid a flying visit to an alternate universe structured around Aristotelian cosmology. In Aristotle's rigid and stultifying universe, an immobile Earth is surrounded by nine principal spheres, concentric and transparent, enclosing each other onion-fashion. The innermost sphere is that of the Moon; the outermost, beyond the fixed stars, is the sphere of the Prime Mover who keeps the whole machinery turning. The universe actually contains no less than 54 spheres, some to account for the complex motion of the planets, and some are cog-like "neutralising" spheres which turn in the opposite direction to the planets: for, remarkably, to Aristotle this mechanism was no mere geometric model, but the actual physical reality of the world.

In my story I posited an Earth essentially like ours at the centre of such a universe. Then – I figured – apart from the abstruse speculations of astronomers, the bizarre nature of the universe would make no difference to history (until Scott and Amundsen walk to the South Pole, and discover a huge crystalline axis... but that is, literally, another story).

In *Celestial Matters* (Tor, \$23.95), Richard Garfinkle – a writer from Illinois, new to me – makes a much more thoughtful and intensive exploration of the Aristotelian world. And he goes further than I did, in accepting the rest of Aristotelian physics. In the sub-lunar region, matter consisted of combinations of the four elements – earth, water, air and fire. The planets consist of a fifth element; its natural motion is circular... Garfinkle's story is essentially a hard sf adventure, the plot deriving pretty rigorously from the physical rules of this setting.

The date is approximately 400 AD, by our calendar; but history has diverged. The Greek Empire has persisted for a thousand years, and has spent much of that time fighting an inconclusive war with the Middle Kingdom of Asia. Now, a spaceship sculpted from Moon matter has been built to voyage through the spheres, and return with the ultimate weapon – a piece of the Sun itself. Aias, the scientist-hero, is assailed by Middle Kingdom saboteurs, and must fight his way against extraordinary odds to reach, at last, a resolution that chimes satisfactorily with the physical and philosophical basis of the novel.

The strength of the book is the physics, which is beautifully worked out and confidently depicted. For example, the characters seek water from the wood of packing crates:

"There is a great deal of water in wood. All we have to do is remove the

earth from it. We can use air-silver and fire-gold for that. Clovix! ..." And I loved the glimpses of the spontaneous-generation labs.

The social and ideological aspects of the universe are less well developed, however. Although there are passing references to the classical gods, there is little sense of how it must be to inhabit a universe which is, so obviously, the artefact of a superior Being. The characters – confident scientists and engineers – are sometimes suspiciously modern in their outlook and language: their world-view consists of making gadgets and running projects and *doing things*; the feel is often more of modern Americans than Aristotelian Greeks. The overall effect of this lack of depth is to reduce the novel, at times, to a ride around a spectacular Aristotelian theme park, rather than a sample of a genuinely different world view.

We have the additional complication of a history which diverges significantly from ours, from around 300 BC. In a manner reminiscent of Paul McAuley's Leonardo in *Pasquale's Angel*, Aristotle forsakes philosophy for a semblance of modern, experimental science. The resulting weapons technology enables Alexander the Great to wage still greater

wars – thus initiating the conflict with the Middle Kingdom – and to avoid his early death. But it was not clear to me how Aristotle's conversion derived, if at all, from the differing nature of the universe. After all, *our* Aristotle believed the world was all spheres anyhow, and *he* did not become an antique Edward Teller; so why should Garfinkle's? And it seemed to me that the Greeks would have needed a major cultural transformation to adopt the precepts underlying a modern scientific method, and the source of such a change isn't clear.

A basic "rule" of satisfactory alternative history is that all changes depicted should flow from a single alteration. Of course all such rules are there to be broken, but I fear in *Celestial Matters* we see the consequences; the multiply-changed nature of history becomes rather arbitrary and confusing. (And, incidentally, I was left wondering what happened to Christ, in this universe...)

This is a first novel, and the strains sometimes show. The opening is rather muddled, indirect and dialogue-free; once the setting narrows down to the Moon-matter ship, and its remarkable voyage, Garfinkle is more assured. A more serious disappointment is the non-visual nature of much of the prose. What attracted me to Aristotle's universe was its stunning visual beauty. Sadly we get little sense of this, in the course of Garfinkle's much more extensive voyage: how does it *feel*, to sail through the thin air around the Sun, and peer down through the shimmering shells to Earth, thousands of miles below? Sadly, we have to guess.

These criticisms aside, however, I can recommend the book. It is an interesting and original adventure set in a genuinely "other" universe; I look forward to Garfinkle's future excursions.

So, from first to last.

Mike McQuay, who died in 1995, was a US writer whose core themes were set out in his first novel, *Life-Keeper* (1980): a tough, Chandleresque, streetwise hero – male – strives to overcome the corrupt forces of the world in which he finds himself (in this case an Orwellian fake-war scenario, designed to keep the citizens under control). McQuay returned to similar scenarios in subsequent books, but perhaps achieved his greatest success with *Memories* (1987), an ambitious time-travel novel, which won the Philip K. Dick Award. McQuay also produced thrillers and young-adult fiction. An author of 35 novels, he was a writer of considerable command and energy, and he will be missed.

Richard Evans, Gollancz editor, is a

## Alpha and Omega

Stephen Baxter



long-time supporter of McQuay who bought several of his books for Headline, including the complex near-future novel *The Nexus* (1989), which Evans praises highly. And McQuay's last work is a Gollancz project: **Richter Ten** (Gollancz, £15.99), credited as by Arthur C. Clarke and Mike McQuay. This novel was developed from an 850-word movie outline by Clarke, with Clarke subsequently overseeing the development of McQuay's material.

*Richter Ten* is a near-future novel of earthquakes: their consequences, prediction and, perhaps, prevention. Lewis Crane is a child when his parents are killed by the LA earthquake of 1994. Thirty years later he has developed a new theory of quakes, based on worldwide data-pooling and a kind of eco-earthquake holistic philosophy of the Earth.

Crane has a vision of avoiding quake damage by precise predictions – and perhaps, in the longer term, preventing quakes altogether by stitching together the continental plates with huge fusion blasts (!). This, it seems, is the core of Clarke's original idea, and it is traditionally Clarkeian: the possibilities of science and technology turned rationally, on a worldwide scale, to the betterment of mankind. (Remember the asteroid watch in *Rendezvous with Rama*?)

But *Richter Ten* is much more McQuay's book than Clarke's. And so Clarke's vision is thrust into a typical McQuay near-future scenario. The world – in particular America – is run by Chinese-controlled corporations, uniformly corrupt, and America is splitting along religious and ethnic fault lines. This is the arena in which Crane, metamorphosed into a McQuay competent-man hero up against the odds, must struggle to achieve his vision – and struggle he does, against a background of bigger and ever more devastating quakes.

The research into earthquake science and lore, I guess largely by McQuay, is fine, well delivered and focused. And this is no simple thriller; McQuay explores with much intelligence the deeper ethical consequences of powers like quake prediction. It's a little hard to see how all this could be made into a hit movie, however. The multiple catastrophes keep the pages turning in the novel, but they tend to diffuse the sense of threat; the great disaster movies – like *Earthquake* itself (1974) – focused on the impact of a single dramatic event. Still, an *Earthquake* updated with modern special effects would be intriguing...

Although much of the well-worked-out near-future scenario seems squarely aimed at flaws in the modern American psyche, and is the more pleasing for that – the suffusion with

drugs and IT, the social collapse, nothing growing except under parasols, the Chinese corporate legos projected on the Moon – I did feel uneasy at times with the depiction of non-Americans, who are pretty uniformly shown as loathsome and corrupt: "Liang Int [a Chinese corporation] owned it all and ran it all... including the so-called Government of the United States of America..." "The Germans ... exhibited the kind of authoritarianism that made her father fear a concentration camp was being built around every corner..."

Such language is a long way from classic Arthur Clarke. The book also sometimes descends to the sentimental: "Lanie [one of the world's top information technologists] ... had to laugh at herself. Being a thoroughly happy bride and mother-to-be must make her giddy!" (bleagh!).

I have to admit, too, to a deeper problem with the basic Clarkeian idea. I'm not at all sure that stitching up the plates would be a good idea anyhow! – for we may need the geology. Many of the major elements needed for the biosynthesis of cell components are absorbed, on long-enough timescales, by surface reservoirs on the Earth. So we need crustal rocks to be recycled to release biogenic materials back into the atmosphere. Earth's active plate tectonics makes this long-term cycling possible; stopping it would be a seriously dumb idea, if we want the Earth to stay habitable over million-year periods or more! Knowing this drastically reduces our sympathy for Crane – perhaps he really is a Mad Scientist – and we have, reluctantly, to cheer his opponents who, for whatever venal motives, obstruct his more grandiose and foolish schemes.

But these cavils are minor. *Richter Ten* is lively, exciting and competent. It is a satisfactory fusion of Clarke's vision with McQuay's crackling style. And, more than that, the book contains some fine and thoughtful passages: McQuay's remarkable depiction of the solitary confinement of one character, late in the novel, is particularly memorable. This novel is triumphantly a Mike McQuay book; it seems destined to sell well, and to bring McQuay's name, fittingly, to a wider audience.

Stephen Baxter

## Johnny Who?

David V. Barrett

HarperCollins are really going to town on William Gibson. There was the "Special Tenth Anniversary Edition" in hardback of his first novel, *Neuromancer*, in late 1994, and now there's not only Terry Bisson's novelization (£4.99) of the film *Johnny Mnemonic*, scripted by Gibson and loosely based on his original short story of the same name, but also a glossy book (6"x9" pbk, £7.99) with the script, the short story, and 16 pages of stills from the film. Is it all worth it, one asks oneself. Well, the novel's not bad, but I seriously can't see anyone buying the script.

There's something curiously old-fashioned about Gibsonian cyberpunk, whether written by him or by Terry Bisson. Most other cyberpunk gives a feeling of the near-future; the resonances in *Johnny Mnemonic* are all of the near-past, particularly of our perceived reality (no doubt quite different from the actual reality) of 1940s gangsterland. Gibson/Bisson's Yakuza – baddies of the good old-fashioned sort: inscrutable and slant-eyed – are simply the Mafia; their suits are just as sharp, their internal discipline and "honour" just as strong, their weaponry just as vicious, their dispensing of death just as brutal. Even their position in society is analogous: "A hush fell over the lobby as they came through the revolving door, one after the other; then the rattle and hum resumed as everyone pretended not to notice who, or rather *what*, had just entered. Yakuza. Those it is never wise to notice... Everyone in the lobby knew who they were. Everyone knew they were looking for someone and everyone hoped it was someone else. Everyone in the lobby avoided eye contact with them..." (pp 21, 38; references are to the Bisson noveliza-



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tion except where otherwise stated).

Perceived reality: the image we have of the Mafia from all those black & white films we saw when we were kids. Classic B-movie land. Films that were so bad they were almost good.

The film of *Johnny Mnemonic* is so bad that it's almost good. I'm still not sure how seriously we're meant to take it, or whether it was intended to be an over-the-top spoof. Most of the acting is as wooden as an old chairleg; much of the dialogue is straight out of those B movies. The film shouts *Cliche!*

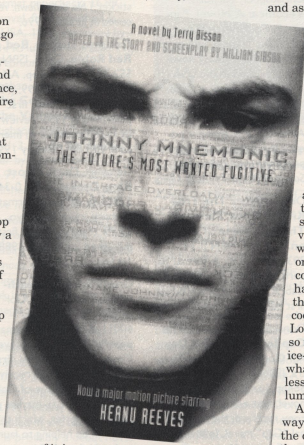
Problem is, a lot of that cliché is in Bisson's book as well. One could understand lines like "It's a long shot but it's better than no shot – so let's get moving!" or "What fresh hell is this?" (pp 102, 168) being in the film for a quick laugh, but they're not actually in Gibson's script; they only have the effect of making the novel look like hack work, and Bisson ought to be better than that, surely. Unless it's a deliberate B novel.

The story's much the same in the script, the novel and the film; Bisson in his novelization, and Robert Long in his film, have made only a few minor changes. As in Gibson's original short story, to which the film and novelization bear a slight resemblance, Johnny is a courier; corporations hire his brain to carry data from A to B. (As someone who once worked for GCHQ and NSA, I'd've thought that triple-encryption over a shielded comlink would have been more secure, not to mention more efficient and a damn sight faster, but never mind; one mustn't quibble with the basic plot device.) He's been given a doll of data nicked from Pharmakom by a couple of scientists-with-a-conscience; only trouble is, it's twice as big as his spare brain space, and "if the upload volume exceeds your storage capacity, synaptic seepage will kill you in two or three days" (p 19). His other slight problem is that Pharmakom have hired Yakuza to get the data back; his head will do, in a cryogenic organ transporter.

Fighting to keep his head on his shoulders, Johnny meets up with Jane, a neurally-enhanced fighter who saves his life for 50 grand. Most of the rest of the story is fight and chase, chase and fight, and it really doesn't matter much whether the baddies are using sawn-off shotguns and piano wire or missile launchers and monomolecular filament. Fairly late in the story we all discover what's in Johnny's head: the cure for NAS, Nerve Attenuation Syndrome, a sort of super-twitchy Parkinson's Disease caused by all the electronic crap we're surrounded by – "NAS is about information overload, man! All the electronics around you,

poisoning the airwaves. Technological fucking civilization!" (p 132). (It's not such a fictional idea: real-life electricity authorities are finally having to admit that people who live under power cables get sick.) Pharmakom, being like all drug companies money-grabbing blood-suckers, were going to hang on to the cure; the scientists-with-a-conscience had wanted it released (they end up dead, of course).

Fight and chase, chase and fight, and a lot more of the same, right up to the fairly predictable end. A bit too much of it, really, and some



of it in the film just a tad too nasty. The fact that there are 45 stuntmen and women to only 36 characters (and half the latter are tiny bit-roles) says something. It says this is an action film, with only the odd half-second here and there for introspection. The book doesn't have much more.

The one beauty of the film – and here it's so good it's brilliant – is that we can be shown what Johnny sees when he goes into cyberspace. (Bisson does his best, but it's inevitably diffi-

cult to convey such a visual concept in words.) The special effects really are something special – but don't go to see this film if you're in the slightest epileptic; I hope cinemas publish a warning to that effect.

One other scene stays in the mind: the station concourse filled with NAS patients and volunteer doctors and nurses – it's like *M\*A\*S\*H* times fifty. It's the one bit of humanity in the film. It works.

Johnny has another problem: to make space for all the data, his own longterm memories have been displaced. He has no memories, beyond the occasional flash, of his childhood, his upbringing. It's this background memory, of course, that makes us into the interesting adults we all are – and Johnny ain't got it.

Johnny's personality problem (*viz.* a complete lack thereof) is accentuated in the film. In the book, as early as page 79, Bisson gives us: "Jane was bent over with her back to him, and as he approached her it dawned

on him, for the first time, that the black-clad female fighting machine that had rescued him was – a pretty girl. Almost pretty, anyway. Nice butt in tight jeans..." In the film, he doesn't seem to notice her butt or anything else until shortly before the end – though she clearly has the hots for him from fairly early on.

This is one of the unbelievable-abilities about the whole thing: the extent to which total strangers, living in a hard, vicious world, go out of their way to help this nerd. Okay, once they realize that his head contains the cure to NAS, they have a real reason, but before that, were the gorgeous Jane, the cool doctor Spider, and the hip LoTek gang-leader J-Bone really so flowing with altruism for this ice-cold, emotionless jerk who, for whatever good plot reasons, shows less vivacity than the average lump of concrete?

Also somewhat unrealistic is the way the good guys fight almost to the death with the villains, then in the next frame pick themselves up from the floor with neat and tidy hair, and no sign of the scrap except for an artistically-placed trickle of blood on a cheek. In the final fight sequence, just after Jane has unnailed herself from a cross, the script has the stage direction: "Jane climbing support to broken scanner. An amazing feat, considering her condition" (*Script*, p 114).

Yup. Gibson knew he was writing a hack B movie.

David V. Barrett

The following is a list of all sf, fantasy and horror titles, and books of related interest, received by Interzone during the month 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.

Anderson, Poul. **The Stars Are Also Fire**. Tor, ISBN 0-330-34707-1, 562pp, A-format paperback, cover by Vincent DiFate, £4.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1994; this is the US paperback edition with a British price added, distributed in the UK by Macmillan/Pan.) 23rd February 1996.

Baxter, Stephen. **Ring**. Voyager, ISBN 0-00-648221-X, 443pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in 1994; third in his "Xeelee" trilogy; reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 93.) 19th February 1996.

Brin, David. **Stardite Rising**. Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-372-7, x+460pp, A-format paperback, cover by Fred Gambino, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1983; an "Uplift" novel, and a Hugo and Nebula award-winner, the text here follows that of the revised 1993 Bantam US edition.) 1st February 1996.

Cadnum, Michael. **The Judas Glass**. Carroll & Graf, ISBN 0-7867-0239-7, 310pp, hardcover, \$22.95. (Horror novel, first edition.) March 1996.

Campbell, Ramsey. **The Influence**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-5075-8, 312pp, A-format paperback, cover by Larry Rostant, £5.99. (Horror novel, first published in 1988; this edition contains an interesting new afterword by the author.) 22nd February 1996.

Carmody, Isabelle. **The Gathering**. Scholastic/Point, ISBN 0-950-5415-X, iv+284pp, C-format paperback, cover by Tim Edmunds,

£8.99. (Juvenile horror novel, first published in Australia, 1993.) January 1996.

Carroll, Jonathan. **The Panic Hand**. HarperCollins, ISBN 0-00-647929-4, 240pp, A-format paperback, £4.99. (Horror/fantasy collection, first published in 1995; reviewed by Pete Crowther in *Interzone* 99.) 5th February 1996.

Chadbourne, Mark. **The Eternal**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-06138-3, 381pp, hardcover, £16.99. (Horror novel, first edition; proof copy received.) 11th April 1996.

Christopher, Nicholas. **Veronica: A Novel**. Bantam Press, ISBN 0-593-03998-X, 322pp, trade paperback, £8.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA [?], 1996; proof copy received; it appears to be a literary fantasy-cum-love story, by "one of America's pre-eminent poets"; the author has written a previous novel called *The Soloist* [1986].) 4th April 1996.

Dexter, Susan. **The True Knight: Book Three of The Warhorse of Esdragan**. Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-39345-7, 323pp, A-format paperback, cover by Ciruelo Cabral, \$5.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition.) 1st January 1996.

Donaldson, Stephen R. **The Gap Into Ruin: This Day All Gods Die**. Bantam/Spectra, ISBN 0-553-07180-7, 564pp, hardcover, \$22.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; the fifth and final "Gap" novel, following *The Gap Into Madness: Chaos and Order*.) May 1996.

Donnelly, Joe. **Incubus**. Michael Joseph, ISBN 0-7181-3979-8, 442pp, hardcover, £15.99. (Horror/suspense novel, first edition; proof copy received.) 28th March 1996.

Everman, Welch. **Cult Science Fiction Films: From**



**The Amazing Colossal Man to Yog—Monster from Space**. Virgin, ISBN 0-86369-987-1, 255pp, very large-format paperback, £14.99. (Illustrated A-Z of minor sf movies, first published in the USA, 1995; the

word "cult" in the title seems to be synonymous with "bad"; the vast majority of the titles covered are semi-forgotten B-movies, although George Lucas's *THX-1138* and Michael Crichton's *Westworld* are both included [they seem out of place alongside the likes of *Santa Claus Conquers the Martians*]; this is the American, Citadel Press, first edition with a British price sticker.) No date shown: received in January 1996.

Gallagher, Stephen. **Red, Red Robin**. Corgi, ISBN 0-552-14293-X, 412pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Horror/suspense novel, first published in 1995; reviewed by Pete Crowther in *Interzone* 92.) 8th February 1996.

Gemmell, David. **Ghost King**. Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-37902-0, 287pp, A-format paperback, cover by Royo, \$5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the UK, 1988.) 1st January 1996.

Green, Simon R. **Deathstalker Rebellion**. Gollancz/Vista, ISBN 0-575-60011-X, 568pp, A-format paperback, cover by Steve Crisp, £5.99. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; "Vista" is the name of Gollancz's new mass-market paperback imprint, which this title will be helping to launch in April.) April 1996.

Harris, Steve. **Black Rock**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-06140-5, 447pp, hardcover, cover by Steve Crisp, £16.99. (Horror novel, first edition.) 21st March 1996.

Hill, Douglas. **Galactic Warlord**. "The Last Legionary, Book 1." Macmillan, ISBN 0-330-26186-X, 127pp,

A-format paperback, cover by Chris Moore, £2.99. (Juvenile sf novel, first published in 1979; the three sequels — *Deathwing Over Veynaa* [1980], *Day of the Starwind* [1980] and *Planet of the Warlord* [1981] — are reissued simultaneously at the same price, all with covers by Moore; if you're looking for good space opera for kids [say, ten-year-olds] look no further...) 12th January 1996.

Hobb, Robin. **Royal Assassin: The Farseer**. Bantam/Spectra, ISBN 0-553-37563-6, 595pp, trade paperback, \$13.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; sequel to *Assassin's Apprentice*; "Robin Hobb" is a pseudonym for an American woman writer who has published a number of fantasy novels and one sf novel under her real name.) May 1996.

Horwood, William. **Journeys to the Heartland: The Wolves of Time, I**. HarperCollins, ISBN 0-00-649694-6, 610pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Animal fantasy novel, first published in 1995; first of a series, the second of which, *Wanderers of the Wolfways*, should be out in hardcover by now [but we haven't received it]; Horwood has also written two recent fantasy "sequels" to Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows* — *The Willows in Winter* and *Toad Triumphant* — although HarperCollins did not choose to send those to us for listing in our "spinoffery" section.) 5th February 1996.

Hudson, Stephen. **Almost Human**. Minerva Press [10 Cromwell Place, London SW7 2JN], ISBN 1-85863-322-2, 188pp, small-press paperback, £7.99. (Sf novel, first edition [copyrighted "1995"]; we're told nothing about the author, but this is probably a debut book by a new British writer.) No date shown: received in January 1996.

Jones, J. V. **The Baker's Boy**. "The Book of Words." Warner/Aspect, ISBN 0-446-67097-9, 516pp, C-format paperback, cover by Darrell



Sweet, \$12.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; J. V. Jones [Julie Victoria Jones, not to be confused with Jenny Jones] is a new British writer, born 1963, now living in California; this American publication has been sent to us by Little Brown/Orbit, who are planning a UK paperback-original edition in April 1996, priced at £5.99.) *Late entry: 1995 publication, received in January 1996.*

Kellow-Harris, David Paul. **Spirit Rescue.** Minerva Press [1 Cromwell Place, London SW7 2JE—yes, the address differs slightly from that given in the Hudson title, above], ISBN 1-85863-541-1, 285pp, small-press paperback, £7.99. (Horror novel, first edition [copyrighted "1995"]; we're told nothing about the author, but this is probably a debut book by a new British writer.) *No date shown: received in January 1996.*

Laymon, Richard. **Body Rides.** Headline, ISBN 0-7472-1511-1, 377pp, hardcover, cover by Steve Crisp, £16.99. (Horror novel, first edition [?].) *22nd February 1996.*

Laymon, Richard. **Island.** Headline, ISBN 0-7472-5099-5, 504pp, A-format paperback, cover by Steve Crisp, £5.99. (Horror novel, first published in 1995.) *1st February 1996.*

Lee, Tanith. **Reigning Cats and Dogs.** Headline, ISBN 0-7472-5008-1, 304pp, A-format paperback, cover by Mark Salwowski, £5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1995; reviewed by Chris Gilmore in *Interzone* 102.) *22nd February 1996.*

Le Guin, Ursula K. **Four Ways to Forgiveness.** Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-06301-7, 229pp, hardcover, £15.99. (Sf collection, first published in the USA, 1995; proof copy received; it contains four linked novellas, all set in the "Hainish universe" of Le Guin's earliest published fiction.) *9th May 1996.*

Little, Bentley. **Dark Dominion.** Headline, ISBN 0-

7472-4196-1, 505pp, A-format paperback, cover by Simon Dewey, £5.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA [?], 1995.) *22nd February 1996.*

McDowell, Michael. **The Amulet.** HarperCollins, ISBN 0-00-616269-X, 316pp, A-format paperback, £4.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1979; this was the author's first novel: he has written a good deal since, though not much of it seems to have been published in Britain.) *22nd January 1996.*

McHugh, Maureen F. **Half the Day is Night.** Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-362-X, 352pp, B-format paperback, £6.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1994; reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 91.) *1st February 1996.*

Monahan, Brent. **The Blood of the Covenant: A Novel of the Vampiric.** Hodder & Stoughton, ISBN 0-340-66081-3, 311pp, hardcover, cover by Chris Moore, £16.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1995; we've not heard of this writer before, but apparently he has produced several novels, including such titles as *Satan's Serenade* and *The Book of Common Dread*; this new book is a sequel to the last-named.) *15th February 1996.*

Nylund, Eric S. **Pawn's Dream.** Hodder & Stoughton, ISBN 0-340-66707-9, 345pp, hardcover, cover by Mick Van Houten, £16.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1995; this is probably a debut novel by a new American writer.) *15th February 1996.*

Palmer, Stephen. **Memory Seed.** Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-376-X, 405pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; a debut novel by a new British writer, born 1962.) *4th April 1996.*



Preston, Lincoln. **Relic.** "Alien meets Jurassic Park in New York City." Bantam, ISBN 0-553-40940-9, 442pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Sf/horror novel, first published in the USA, 1995; a thriller about a monster on the loose in a big-city museum, it has been optioned as a movie by Kennedy-Marshall Productions; "Lincoln Preston" is a pseudonym for Douglas Preston and Lincoln Child.) *8th February 1996.*



Pringle, David, ed. **St James Guide to Fantasy Writers.** Contributing editors Mike Ashley and Brian Stableford. St James Press [835 Penobscot Building, Detroit, MI 48226-4094, USA], ISBN 1-558-62205-5, xvi+711pp, hardcover, \$95. (Alphabetically arranged bibliographical and critical guide to some 420 fantasy authors; first edition; this was the labour of approximately three years, and contains essays by about 50 contributors, including K. V. Bailey, Mary Corran, Ian Covell, Shira Daemon, Don D'Amassa, Chris Gilmore, Paul Di Filippo, John Grant, Robert Irwin, Edward James, David Langford, Paul McAuley, Kim Newman, Stan Nicholls, Andy Sawyer, Darrell Schweitzer, Lisa Tuttle and Gary Westfahl—plus the sterling husband-and-wife teams of Chris & Pauline Morgan and Paul Kincaid & Maureen Speller.) *January 1996.*

Rawn, Melanie. **The Ruins of Ambrat: Exiles, Book One.** Macmillan, ISBN 0-333-65033-6, 678pp, hardcover, cover by Michael Whelan, £16.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1994; we listed an unbound proof copy of this a couple of issues ago and commented, "yes, it's 922 pages long"; well, that was the proof: the finished copy is over 200 pages shorter, presumably due to re-setting in smaller type.) *23rd February 1996.*

Roberts, Nora [Robb, J. D.]. **Naked in Death.** "An Eve Dallas Investigation." Hodder & Stoughton, ISBN 0-340-66689-7, 306pp, hardcover, cover by Bob Warner, £16.99. (Sf/crime novel, first published in the USA as by "J. D. Robb," 1995; the first in a series, it concerns a 22nd-century New York murder case; the publishers seem to have boobed: according to the cover and spine the by-line is supposed to be J. D. Robb, a pseudonym, but it says Nora Roberts on the title page — and according to cataloguing rules, the title page is what counts; Roberts is a prolific crime and romantic writer ["over 80 novels"]; but this may be her first venture into sf.) *15th February 1996.*

Silva, David B. **The Disappeared.** Headline, ISBN 0-7472-4794-3, 439pp, A-format paperback, cover by Bob Corley, £5.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1995.) *1st February 1996.*

Simpson, George Gaylor. **The Dechronization of Sam Magruder.** Introduction by Arthur C. Clarke. Afterword by Stephen Jay Gould. St Martin's Press, ISBN 0-312-13963-2, xix+134pp, hardcover, \$18.95. (Sf novella, first edition; proof copy received; Simpson, a distinguished paleontologist who died in 1984, left this tale among his unpublished papers: it concerns time-travel to the age of the dinosaurs, and its interest resides in the fact that it was

written by one of the greatest authorities on the subject.) *January 1996.*

Smith, Steven R., ed. **Folklore, Fable & Fantasy.** Gale Press [PO Box 6561], St Paul, Minnesota 55165, USA, ISBN 1-880090-19-8, ix+263pp, C-format paperback, \$14.95. (Fantasy anthology, first edition [copyrighted "1995"]; it contains 17 stories by writers, including Jayne Harris, Ronale Stevens and Patricia Telesco, completely unknown to us; some of the authors use enigmatic one-word pseudonyms such as "Rebel," "Kalioppe" and "Qusil"; this has been imported by Gazelle Book Services Ltd., Falcon House, Queen

Square, Lancaster LA1 1RN, and is on sale in the UK at £13.50; Gazelle also sent us some other books from the same publishing house, such as *Ghosts of the Air* by Martin Caidin [same price], but as these all seemed to be accounts of the allegedly true supernatural, rather than fiction, we have not listed them here.) *No date shown: received in January 1996.*

Sneyd, Steve. **Flights from the Iron Moon: Genre Poetry in UK Fanzines & Little Magazines, 1980-**



1989. Hilltop Press [4 Nowell Place, Almond-bury, Huddersfield, W. Yorks. HD5 8PB], ISBN 0-905262-12-3, 128pp, paperback, cover by Harry Turner, £2.50. (A-Z

"gazetteer" of persons, titles, fanzines, etc., in British sf/fantasy poetry of the 1980s; first edition [copyrighted "1995"]; it contains a wide selection of brief verse extracts, all interspersed with Sneyd's running commentary; also available on computer disc in various formats: enquire of the author at the ad-

dress shown.) *No date shown: received in January 1996.*

Spruill, Steven. **Rulers of Darkness.** Coronet, ISBN 0-340-64940-2, 390pp, A-format paperback, cover by George Smith, £5.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1995; we haven't heard Spruill's name in a long time: he used to write sf novels about 15 years ago.) *15th February 1996.*

Wurts, Janny. **Warhost of Vastmark: The Wars of Light and Shadows, Volume 3.** Voyager, ISBN 0-00-648207-4, 563pp, A-format paperback, cover by the author, £5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1995.) *5th February 1996.*

Carney, Jessica. **Who's There?: The Life and Career of William Hartnell.** Preface by Verity Lambert. Virgin, ISBN 1-85227-514-6, 245pp, hardcover, £15.99. (Biography of the first actor to play "Doctor Who" in the BBC TV sf series of that name; first edition; the author is Hartnell's granddaughter; needless to say, most of the book is not about Dr Who but about Hartnell's long career on stage and in film, from the 1920s; an interestingly representative 20th-century British actor's career.) *15th February 1996.*

Cartmell, Andrew. **Warchild.** "The New Doctor Who Adventures." Virgin/Doctor Who, ISBN 0-426-20464-6, 310pp, A-format paperback, cover by Jeff Cummins, £4.99. (Sf television-series spinoff novel, first edition.) *15th February 1996.*

Emery, Clayton. **Final Sacrifice.** "Magic: The Gathering." Bantam, ISBN 0-7522-0217-0, 312pp, A-format paperback, cover by Allan Pollack, £5.99. (Fantasy spinoff novel, based on a trading-card game; first published in the USA, 1995; it's copyright "Wizards of the Coast, Inc.": according to a note about the author, in the back of the book, he has written a series of "Robin and

*This is a list of all books received that fall into those sub-types of sf, fantasy and horror which may be termed novelizations, recursive fictions, spinoffs, sequels by other hands, shared worlds and sharecrops (including non-fiction about shared worlds, films and TV, etc.). The collective term "Spinoffery" is used for the sake of brevity.*

Marian" stories for *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine.*) *18th January 1996.*

Emery, Clayton. **Shattered Chains.** "Magic: The Gathering." Bantam, ISBN 0-7522-0744-X, 278pp, A-format paperback, cover by Kevin Murphy, £5.99. (Fantasy spinoff novel, based on a trading-card game; first published in the USA, 1995; it's copyright "Wizards of the Coast, Inc.") *18th January 1996.*

Golden, Christie. **The Murdered Sun.** "Star Trek: Voyager, #6." Pocket, ISBN 0-671-53783-0, 277pp, A-format paperback, £4.50. (Sf TV-series spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1996; this is the American first edition with a British price sticker.) *1st February 1996.*

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spinoff novel, first edition; this one features the Marquis de Sade as a character [!].) *15th February 1996.*

Parkin, Lance. **Just War.** "The New Doctor Who Adventures." Virgin/Doctor Who, ISBN 0-426-20463-8, 257pp, A-format paperback, cover by Nick Spender, £4.99. (Sf television-series spinoff novel, first edition; this is one a debut novel by a new British writer: he wrote it while "studying for his MA in Post-War English Fiction.") *18th January 1996.*

Platt, Marc. **Downtime.** "Doctor Who: The Missing Adventures." Virgin/Doctor Who, ISBN 0-426-20462-X, 263pp, A-format paperback, cover by Paul Campbell, £4.99. (Sf television-series novelization, first edition; it's based on Platt's own script for an "original video drama"; there are eight pages of black-and-white photographs; it doesn't seem to feature the Doctor himself, but his sidekick characters, Brigadier Lethbridge-Stewart and Sarah

Jane Smith; it also features Charles Dodgson ["Lewis Carroll"], a Tibetan monastery and a Yeti.) *18th January 1996.*

Rigelsford, Adrian. **Classic Who: The Hinchcliffe Years, Seasons 12-14.** Bantam, ISBN 0-7522-0749-0, 128pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Large-format, copiously illustrated guide to several seasons of the "Doctor Who" BBC TV series in the 1970s; first edition; Philip Hinchcliffe was producer at the time, and this book celebrates his contribution.) *1st February 1996.*

Smith, Dean Wesley, and Kristine Kathryn Rusch. **The Long Night.** "Star Trek: Deep Space Nine, #14." Pocket, ISBN 0-671-55165-5, 274pp, A-format paperback, £4.50. (Sf TV-series spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1996; this is the American first edition with a British price sticker.) *1st February 1996.*

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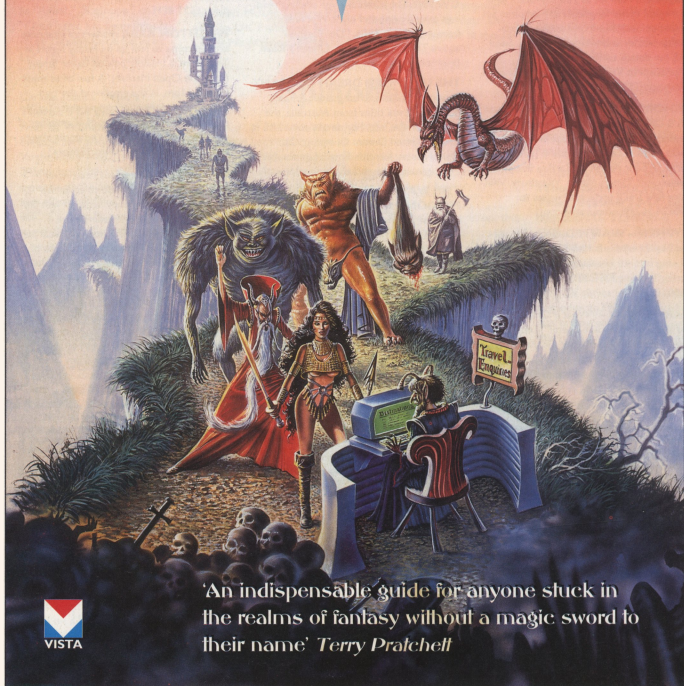
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