VOLUME 2 NUMBER 4 35p

SCIENCE FICTION MONTHLY

Brand new short stories from:
Edmund Cooper
Chris Morgan

Modern Master of SF: Isaac Asimov

Full-colour comic strip and Artwork from Alan Aldridge

Get your brushes ready, here comes the 2nd SF Painting Competition £200 worth of cash prizes


4
THE SIZE OF THINGS
NICK NOVA AND DIXIE DRAKE AND THE MASSIVE NURSERY INTO WHICH THEY HAD CRASHED, HAVE BEEN SUCKED INTO A MICROSCOPIC GALAXY. FASTER AND FASTER THEY ARE DRAWN IN TOWARDS THE CENTRE. HAVING SEEN SEVERAL MANIFESTATIONS OF THEIR OWN ROCKET! THEY . . . .
NICK!
DIXIE!
NICK, HERE'S A TINY KEY
. . AND THIS LOOKS LIKE THE DOOR FOR IT!
NOW WHAT?
. . . IT'S SO UNREAL!
IT'S . . BEAUTIFUL, BUT ABSOLUTELY ASTONISHING!
SO . . WHAT NEXT? WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?
SSHHH! I JUST HEARD . . .
LOOK!
NICK! WE'D BETTER GET OUTTA HERE!
SNAP!

SCIENCE FICTION MONTHLY

Volume 2 Number 4

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Vol 2 No 4

ALMOST half of this issue is devoted to Edmund Cooper in one way or another. Perhaps of greatest interest will be the short story *Jupiter Laughs* which is the first short story that he has written for fourteen years! It is a tale of alternative history which will be published much later in the year in an American anthology; this publication is its British debut. As well as this little gem, James Goddard, editor of the fanzine *Cypher*, has interviewed Mr Cooper and also prepared a critical commentary on his science fiction.

Other fiction comes from Chris Morgan, a young British writer, and Isaac Asimov who is under scrutiny this month as a modern master of sf.

And on the visual side Alan Aldridge and some of the characters from *The Butterfly Ball* have also found themselves included in this issue, just to make a change from spaceships and brain cells.

Next month there will be a three-page colour illustration by Jim Burns, but you'll have to fit the pieces together yourselves, which comes from Jack Vance's new trilogy *The Anome*, *The Brave Free Men and The Asutra*. Part Two of *SF on TV* by John Brosnan finally appears in print along with as many short stories as we can fit in and episode five of *The Size of Things to Come*.

Science Fiction Monthly Painting Competition Mk.II

This time last year SFM organised the *Visions of the Future* painting competition. The response was phenomenal and threw the editorial offices into such a state of disarray that it took until December to clear it all up. But it was worth it as those of you who bought SFM Vol 1 No 10, and subsequent issues which featured the winning artwork, will know. Judging the paintings was so difficult that the judges ended up awarding twenty-two prizes instead of the pre-arranged four!

Well, we've learnt from our mistakes and with the *SFM Painting Competition Mk II* we're offering one first prize of £50 and six second prizes of £25 each. We've also reorganised the rules a little and WE WILL NOT ACCEPT ANY ORIGINAL ARTWORK, you must have your work PHOTOGRAPHED and we will judge the colour TRANSPARENCY. All this is outlined in the rules below and it is imperative that you read and understand them before you submit any of your work.

Apart from the changes in the rules this competition is simply a re-run of *Visions of the Future* and all illustrations should be, in some sense, science fictional.

TRANSPARENCIES entered for the competition should be sent to the Editor, Science Fiction Monthly, New English Library Ltd, Barnard's Inn, Holborn EC1N 2JR, to arrive not later than 31 May 1975. Entries should be marked SFM Painting Competition Mk II on the top left-hand corner of the envelope.

Rules

1 All entrants must be over 15 years of age on 30 April 1975. Apart from this stipulation the *SFM Painting Competition Mk II* is open to all residents of the UK, Eire and the British Commonwealth as constituted on 1 January 1947.
2 Artwork, in the form of original paintings and drawings, will NOT be accepted. Entrants should submit good quality, colour TRANSPARENCIES of their work, either 35mm or 2¼ sq. in. slides.
3 No TRANSPARENCIES will be returned or acknowledged although no use will be made of them without the owner's consent.
4 All slides should be either marked with the artist's name and address or these particulars should be firmly attached to their entries.
5 All entries must arrive at NEL not later than 31 May 1975.
6 All work submitted must be previously unpublished and solely the work of the entrant, who warrants that the submission of the illustration and its offer to NEL for publication does not infringe any prior rights of any third party, whether contractual or otherwise.
7 Each entry will be carefully considered by a panel of judges, including the Art Director of New English Library and the Editor and Designer of *Science Fiction Monthly*.
8 The judges' decision relating to the award and the prize monies must be accepted as final.
9 Winners of the seven prizes will be announced not later than 31 July 1975 and entrants will be notified by post as soon as possible after that date.
10 On award of a prize the winners will grant to NEL all rights to the illustration (the form of publication being left to NEL's discretion). The award will be paid immediately and in full on signature of an agreement to that effect.
11 Apart from being considered for one of the seven prizes, all entrants of TRANSPARENCIES regarded as being of sufficient merit will be offered contracts for publication at the discretion of NEL. If the offer is accepted by the entrant, the TRANSPARENCY will be published at a future date chosen by NEL.
12 No illustration entered for this competition may be offered elsewhere until six months after the closure of the competition.
13 This award is not open to employees, their parents, spouses or children, of New English Library, Times Mirror or any subsidiary of Times Mirror.

Edmund Cooper wrote this short story in response to a request from an American publisher who was compiling an anthology of alternative histories. It went down very well with her and it should appear over there later this year. This is its first (and at present only) publication in England and it appears that it is the first short story to come from Edmund's pen for fourteen years!

JUPITER LAUGHS

The troop of horsemen moved slowly along the stony track through the desert. They were tired—all five of them—dead tired. They had done a lot of riding and a lot of killing. The killing had made them more tired than the riding. What kind of soldier could take any pleasure in killing kids that couldn't even walk, couldn't even sit up?

The sergeant sighed and glanced up at the night sky. Black, star-studded, peaceful. There was a big moon, too. It turned the desert into silver rocks and silver sand. The light was good enough to ride by, if you took it easy.

The sergeant looked back over his shoulder. That goddam star was still there. The bastard star that had caused all the trouble. But maybe there wouldn't have been any trouble if those three wise guys—bent fortune-tellers by the look of them—hadn't come to the city and stirred it up enough to get themselves admitted to the palace. Stupid bastards. Said they had been following the goddam star, said it was going to lead 'em to where a great king would be born. Stupid, stupid bastards!

Everyone knew the old king was nutty as a fruit cake. And mean. Real mean. Everyone knew it except those clever idiots with their fancy clothes and fancy ways. Maybe they thought they were on to a big con. Maybe they had been hoping to take the old devil for a hatful of gold. He was still cunning and vicious, but a bit simple-minded. Senile. It showed.

The star still looked as if it sat high over that god-forsaken town. Mercifully, the town was nearly a day's ride back there, hidden by the hills. The sergeant didn't want to see it, anyway. But he could still see it—in his mind's eye. And he could still hear it—the screaming; the shouting; the women offering themselves, anything, for the sake of their kids; their crazy menfolk trying to fight disciplined soldiers with hammers, knives, sickles, pieces of wood, bare hands.

But the king's soldiers did their thing, did what they were told to do. They slaughtered the kids—just like they were young suckling-pigs, which most of 'em were—chopped down enough of the men to discourage the rest, and had some of the women. They didn't have too many of the women. How the hell do you work up a woman when her old man has been knocked on the head and her kid's lying in its blood? But blood lust does funny things to men and women. The sergeant had heard that one poor bitch got herself screwed to death by a score of brawny heroes. They said that she was laughing herself silly and coming all the time.

Again, the sergeant sighed. It was going to take a lot of booze to wipe the memory of that night's doing. He shivered. Goddamit to hell, there wasn't that much booze in the world.

He noticed that someone had just come up by his side. The sergeant knew who it was without looking. The boy who used to be a shepherd. The bumpkin. But now he had whiskers and muscles hardened by a desert childhood. So now he was a man. And now he was a soldier. How old was he—16, 17?

'Hey, sarge. You think Herod's crazy? Some of the men are saying that he's flipped.'

'Yes, he's crazy. We're all crazy. We live in a crazy world. You take his salt-money like I do. We do what he tells us. Now, who is more crazy, boy, him or us?'

The bumpkin scratched his head nervously. 'I hadn't thought of it like that. . . But chopping all those babies—that was like—like a nightmare.'

'You didn't have to be a soldier, son.'

'What else was there for me?'

'You could have stayed with the sheep.'

'What kind of a life is that, sarge?' The bumpkin sounded hurt.

'What kind of a life is this, stupid? Did you have any of the women back there?'

'No, sarge. It—it didn't seem right. . . I mean all that killing and all.'

'There is hope for you yet,' said the sergeant with a thin smile. 'Now shut up and piss off.'

Just as the bumpkin was dropping back, the sergeant said, 'Mind you, Herod is really twisted. I know. I served him a long time. When he came to power, he butchered half the Sanhedrin, and then he started on the priests. After that, he chopped his wife, Mirianne, and then her mother Alexandra. . . I used to fancy her. She was a very fine lady. . . Now, so they tell me, he is about to thin out his sons. . . But he pays your salt-money, boy. Until you stop taking it, you are his man. Remember that.'

'Yes, sarge. Thank you.'

The outrider reported back.

'Three riders ahead, sergeant. Not horses, camels. They wear strange clothes. Not like our people at all. I didn't get too close. Thought you wouldn't want them to know about us.'

The sergeant was jubilant. 'Boyo, you've done well. Would they, do you think, be those black-hearted fancy men that came from the East to Jerusalem and set this whole thing going?'

'Can't swear to it, sergeant.' The man grinned in the moonlight. 'But I'm betting on it.'

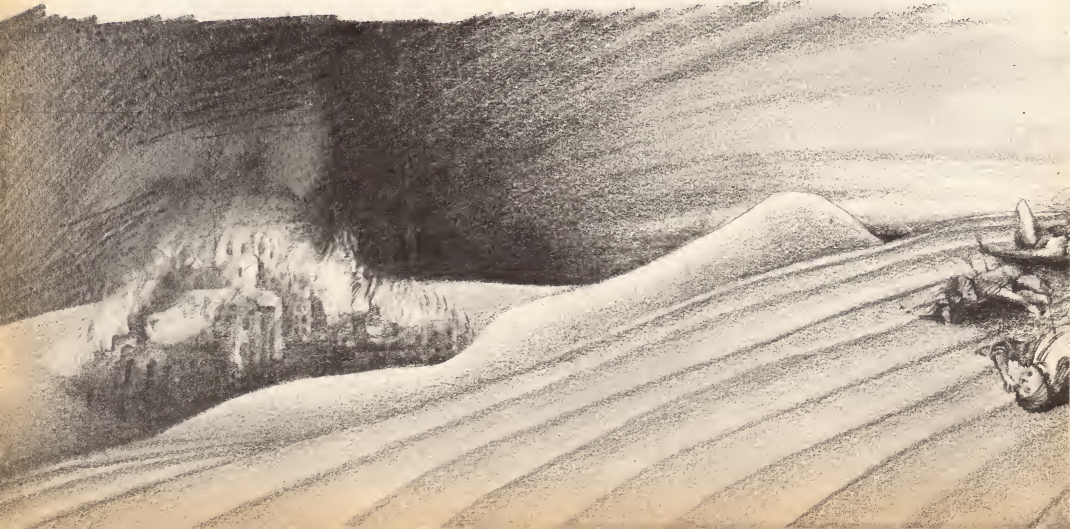
'If you're right, you'll be drinking at my expense when we get back to Jerusalem.' The sergeant held out his hand. The other riders came close. 'Any of you men enjoyed chopping the babies back there?'

No one answered. They, too, were loaded with memories they didn't want.

'That's what I thought. Maybe some of you had fun with the women. I don't know, and don't tell me. Women are one thing, kids are another. . . Anyway, there are three riders on camels some way ahead. Something tells me they could be the funny men who triggered the big party. Personally, I didn't much care for the party. So I say there is a score to be settled. Any objections?'

'Mind you, Herod is really twisted. I know. I served him a long time. When he came to power, he butchered half the Sanhedrin, and then he started on the priests. After that, he chopped his wife, Mirianne, and then her mother Alexandra. Now, so they tell me, he is about to thin out his sons.'

One man said nervously: 'Aren't they under the king's protection?'



David Field

'Soldier, you don't keep up with the news. They were supposed to take the brat they were looking for back to Herod. Herod is a great joker. Said he wanted to worship this new king of the Jews. Most likely, the old boy would have done his worshipping with cold steel. Anyway, these wise guys caught on and didn't take the kid back. So Herod blows his mind, and we have to drop all the kids in the area. Joke one, we didn't get the one that mattered. Joke two, the wise guys double-crossed Herod, which he doesn't like too much. So we do Herod a big favour if we take these guys out. It won't take long. After that, we press on with the mission. OK?'

The man scratched his head. 'If you say so, sergeant. Will this thing go in your report?'

'Depends,' said the sergeant. 'Depends on whether we fulfil the mission or not. Herod can be a very funny person. Any questions?'

There were no questions.

'Let's ride, then. Don't do anything until I signal. But when I do signal, make it clean and quick.'

THEY caught up with the Magi sooner than the sergeant had expected. He thought the wise guys might have spotted his troop and made a run for it. But they didn't. They didn't even look back until they heard the sound of hoof-beats on the hard ground. Then they reined in their camels and waited patiently.

'Good evening, sirs,' said the sergeant courteously. 'You are the very gentlemen who brought news of great importance to King Herod, are you not?'

'We are,' said one tranquilly. 'Do you have any message for us? We have a very long journey to make.'

'Sir,' said the sergeant, 'we are seeking the child you sought. Can you help us?'

In the moonlight, the Persian smiled a silver smile. 'I am afraid not. Our mission was a failure. It is sad. We are returning home.'

The sergeant also smiled. 'Sir, someone must have misled you. You are travelling south. This is the road to Egypt. The road to Persia lies to the north.'

'We thank you for this information. Perhaps you would be kind enough to escort us until we reach the correct route.'

The sergeant grinned. 'Marks for effort, but not on, friend. You are the rearguard. They are taking the kid to Egypt.'

The Magi glanced at each other. One of them was reaching for a short curved sword—surreptitiously, he hoped. Another was casually slipping his hand inside his robe. The sergeant noted these movements with some satisfaction.

The one who had already spoken still tried to keep it cool. 'Sir, you speak of matters we do not understand. Though I am sure it is not necessary, I beg to remind you that King Herod himself has approved of our journey. He would have given us the protection of his soldiers had we wished it. Now let us go in peace.'

The sergeant savoured this moment. 'Not on, friend. We found some shepherds. After a bit of encouragement, they talked. We know about you, about the kid you found. About this guy Joseph bar-David and his woman. . . Now Herod doesn't like to be crossed. I'm Herod's man, and I can tell you.'

The talkative one tried a last throw. 'Then may I suggest, sir, that you escort us to the King? We shall be pleased to explain to him what has happened.'

'No, you may not, wise guy. While you make with the funnies, the kid gets to Egypt—and Herod isn't going to laugh too much about that. Also, I got more bad news. You're not going back to Persia, or wherever you came from. 'You're not going anywhere.'

The Magi drew their weapons. Three curved swords—useful for carving, but not for much else—and toy daggers. The sergeant was pleased to see that none of his men had moved. Why the hell should they? They were trained soldiers—all except the boy.

'We are three against five. You may kill us, but some of you will not pass over us. There is still hope for the child of the star.'

The sergeant ignored him. 'You have a right to know why you are going to die. So I'll tell you and I'll make it fast. If you stupid bastards had kept your mouths shut we wouldn't have had to slaughter a townful of brats, you wouldn't be dying now, and we wouldn't have to chase the one that got away.' He spat on the ground in disgust. 'Why the hell did you have to tell Herod?'

'We thought he would be pleased to learn of the birth of a great King of the Jews.'

The sergeant roared with laughter. 'Don't you know that kings—even if they are sane—don't want to know about other kings?' He turned to his troop. 'These people want to play with their little swords. I wouldn't give 'em the satisfaction.'

'Arrows?' enquired a soldier.

'Arrows,' said the sergeant, 'and fast.'

The Magi tried to manoeuvre their camels, but the clumsy beasts lacked the fast reactions of horses. The sergeant shrugged and motioned to his men. Briskly they took their horses well clear of the camels; and then they reached for their bows.

One of the Magi had begun to charge, but two arrows stopped him—one in the face, one in the chest. He screamed and fell. Before he had stopped threshing about, the other two had joined him on the frosty ground, each transfixed. They rolled about and made horrible noises. The sergeant's professional eye told him that the wounds were mortal.

'Sarge, shall we finish them off?' asked the bumpkin anxiously. He didn't like the noise.

'Why waste arrows? You heard worse than that in Bethlehem. Now we ride south and finish the job.'

'Sarge, none of us liked killing the babies back there. Why do we have to go after this one? If you say we chopped it, we'll all back you up. It can't do Herod any harm now.'

'Boy,' said the sergeant, 'there is a nasty logic in human affairs.' He gestured towards the dying Magi. 'This trash isn't going to stir up more trouble. But what about those shepherds? You want us to go back and take them out? Maybe they already talked to somebody else. Maybe if we let the kid get to Egypt, somebody won't be able to resist telling Herod he wasn't so smart after all. . . No, boy, we ride south and finish the job. We earn our salt-money, and maybe a little extra. I don't like it, you don't like it, but that is the way it is. . . OK, you soldiers, move!'

One of the Magi was already dead, but the other two were still making sad noises and moving feebly. Steam rose in the cold night air from their death throes. The sergeant didn't look back.

THEY caught up with the man and the woman and her brat just about dawn. It seemed, somehow, significant.

The sergeant was red-eyed, saddle-sore, dead tired. So were his men. .

It was a pitiable sight, but the soldiers were too tired for pity.

The woman was riding a clapped-out donkey and trying to breast-feed at the same time. Judging by the squalling, that wasn't working too well. The man was leading the donkey. He didn't try any rough stuff. How the hell could he? He wasn't armed, his hair was grey, and all he'd got was blisters on his feet.

He just looked at the woman, let out a great sigh and said, 'I'm sorry.' Maybe there was nothing else to say.

The sergeant said, 'You know why we've come.'

The man suddenly looked very old. 'Yes, we know. . . I have a little money. Perhaps—'

'I'm sorry, friend.' The sergeant's voice was gentle. The soldiers hadn't heard him speak gently before. They were surprised. 'It has to be done. That mad old king is a mean bastard and he has a good intelligence network. Likely somebody is already following us by now to see that we do the job. So let's get it over with. . . Herod didn't say anything about killing people—only babies.' He turned to the woman on the donkey: 'Ma'am, if you give me that child and ride on, I swear to you it will be quick. No pain. I swear it. Then you and your good man can make your way to Egypt and start a new life. You're young. There will be—'

'Monster!' she flared. 'Pervert! Murderer! You will kill my child only when I am dead.' She clutched it tighter to her bare bosom, and the squalling got louder.

The sergeant didn't seem to know what to do. His men gazed at him expectantly. He was aware of their looks. They were all dead

tired and they wanted him to make an end of it.

He turned to the grey-looking man with the blisters, Joseph bar-David. 'Look, friend, we are going to pull back a little. Don't think you can make a run for it. But please try to persuade the lady. Make her face reality.'

The man looked up at the sergeant. 'Is death, then, the only reality?'

'Dammit to hell,' exploded the sergeant. 'She's your woman! Do the best you can for her. But make her leave the baby, then take her away quickly. We'll wait until you have gone. No pain. I promise.'

'What value would you place on the promise of a hired killer?'

The man had guts. The sergeant looked at him with respect and, somehow, managed to control himself. 'I want no quarrel with you, friend. Just make your good lady see sense, that's all.' He turned his horse and motioned to his men. They rode back a little and dismounted.

The bumpkin fingered his bow nervously. 'Sarge, why did you let that character give you some lip?'

The sergeant glanced back at Joseph bar-David. He seemed to be pleading with the woman, or reasoning with her. Doing something constructive, anyway.

'Boy, that man is a man. Which is to say that he has courage. He's on a no-win basis. Let him try to sort it out.'

'Sergeant,' said one of the others. 'The woman is taking off. The man is coming at us.'

The sergeant sighed. 'OK They have decided to do it the hard way. Let's get the kid. Mount up.'

He hadn't intended to kill the man or the woman, only the baby. But somehow, they all three got killed. And the bumpkin. It happened very quickly.

The bumpkin, being eager, was first in the saddle, first off. The man, Joseph, leaped at him. It was a good leap. It was a great leap. Not what you'd expect from an unarmed man, an old man with grey hair.

The bumpkin, taken by surprise, was knocked off his horse and fell badly. The man, Joseph, picked himself up. The bumpkin lay still.

That goddam peasant, thought the sergeant dully. He should have stayed with his sheep. He glanced at the remaining members of his troop and saw that they were overtaking the woman on the donkey fast. He rode at Joseph bar-David.

Again that impossible leap. The sergeant was ready for it, his sword drawn. The horse wasn't. It reared. The sergeant came down on top of the man, Joseph. The sword passed clean through his body and deep into the sand. The sergeant got up groggily. His sword arm hurt. Maybe it was broken. When he could focus he looked down at the dead man. 'You poor bastard,' he said. 'Your goddam luck ran out.'

He pulled himself together in time to witness the last act of the tragedy. Some bloody horse soldier—he couldn't see which it was—loosed an arrow at the fleeing woman. She fell from the donkey like a rag doll. The soldier got two for the price of one. The baby was transfixed also.

A little later, there was the reckoning. The bumpkin's neck was broken and so was the sergeant's arm. And there was much blood on the sand where the man had died and where the woman and her baby had died. In death, they all looked very peaceful.

'Who hit the woman?' demanded the sergeant wearily, as someone bound arrows to his arm to stop it flapping about. 'No, don't tell me. I don't want to know. It's a bad day. That's all there is to it.'

'What about the bodies, sergeant? Do you want to take that kid back as proof that we—'

'Bury them!' snapped the sergeant. 'All together. The bumpkin too. . . Those wise guys—they really started something.'

'Well, it's over now.'

'Want to bet?' said the sergeant. 'Help me get on my horse. It's going to be one hell of a ride back to Jerusalem.'

VICTORIA Regina was riding in the state chariot to her coronation in the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus—still, after all those centuries, the richest, most impressive building in all Londinium. The enduring symbol of the Pax Romana.

It was a fine morning. Many people lined the coronation route. They were cheering well enough. But Victoria knew they were not cheering her. They were cheering the man who rode ahead of her in the gold chariot. The man wearing the imperial purple. Gaius Julius Augustus Germanicus Caesar, Emperor of Western Europe. The voices in the crowd had been bought by Roman gold—or by British gold that had found its way inevitably by tax and trade to the coffers of Rome.

The Romans had a simple system that worked very well. They did not enslave the people of the lands they had conquered. They gave them 'independence' and protected them—from each other, as the Romans had smilingly explained for centuries. Look, they would say, what Europe was like before the Pax Romana. As if what happened in Europe 1,500 years ago had any relevance to the situation today!

But the Romans—and any jumped-up Italian automatically qualified for Roman citizenship—had it all sewn up. They took their Protection Money—one fiftieth of a country's gross national product—and they controlled trade with their subtle tariff barriers. Also they had the big battalions.

Gaius Julius Augustus Germanicus Caesar turned and blew Victoria a kiss. The crowd roared.

Roman gold!

Victoria returned the blown kiss, as she knew she must. She wanted to cry. But the queen of Britannia was not authorised to cry on her way to her coronation. She knew her duty and she could speak fluent Latin. That was all that was required by her master.

Soon he would marry her off to some dreadful German princeling. That much her spies knew of Roman policy.

'One of the Magi had begun to charge, but two arrows stopped him—one in the face, one in the chest. He screamed and fell. Before he had stopped threshing about, the other two had joined him on the frosty ground, each transfixed'

If only Britannia could be free! Victoria was ambitious for her country. She felt she could make something of it—give it greatness perhaps—if only she had the chance. Why should it remain a poverty-stricken off-shore island whose only destiny was to maintain Roman prosperity? The seamen of this island were the best in the world—even the Romans acknowledged that much. They recruited as many Britannic sailors as possible for their own navy. Given a chance—even half a chance—this off-shore island could become a great sea-power, developing in time its own Empire. Perhaps, she thought wildly, it might still be possible to make some kind of alliance with the people of North America, the European refugees from the Pax Romana who were being busy forging themselves into a new nation.

Dreams, idle dreams. . . At breakfast, the Emperor had hinted that in the not too distant future Rome might mount an expedition to North America before its people became too strong. And before its liberal ideas became too strong.

When Victoria remarked that even the Roman Empire could not hope to last for ever, Caesar gazed at her with tolerant amusement.

'We Romans have an invisible ally, Victoria. So long as he endures, our strength will endure also.'

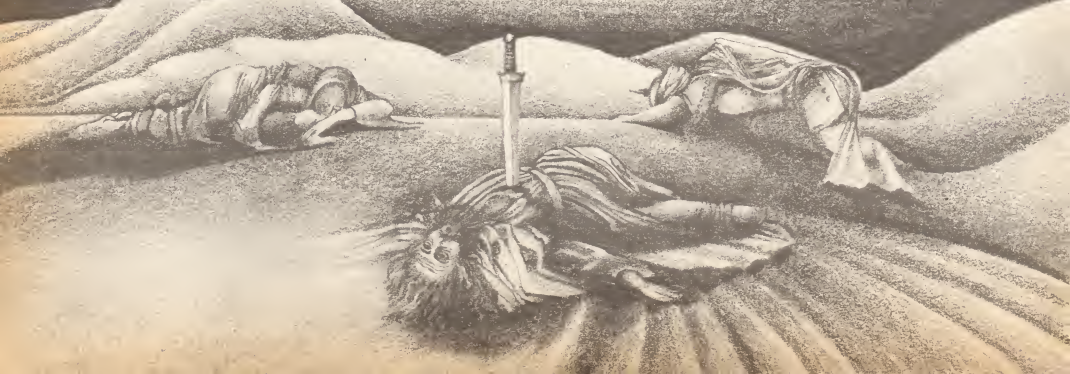
'Who is this powerful ally, Caesar?'

'Jupiter—who else? You know and I know that gods are only ideas and ideals, inventions of the minds of men. But ideas and ideals are powerful weapons. They motivate people, drive them. When we came into Europe, you—all of you—had only weak, tribal gods. Creatures of hate and fear and darkness. The Roman pantheon brought order and light. The tribal gods were defeated by determination and discipline—the ideals given to us by Jupiter. . . If you could have opposed us with a civilised god or gods instead of the crude imaginings of savage minds, history might have been different. Men will die for a symbol they believe is worth dying for. Our symbol was stronger than any of yours. Jupiter still laughs.'

Recalling the conversation as she rode to the empty ceremony in the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus, Victoria realised the truth of what the Emperor had said. Gods were symbols, and men craved for symbols. The gods of Europe had not been strong enough for the gods of Rome.

Jupiter still laughed.

And Victoria, shaming herself before her people, wept.




SCIENCE FICTION
NEW ENGLISH LIBRARY MONTHLY
Eddy Lowe
Eddy Lowe

Edmund Cooper is one of the mystery men of British sf. He never attends the social gatherings of the sf world, and maintains that he'd rather make love, play chess or walk in the beautiful woods which surround his isolated Sussex home. He is also one of the most entertaining and philosophically constant writers producing sf in Britain today. In another way too, he maintains a pleasing constancy, for over the last few years he has published two novels annually, an output sufficient to keep him in the forefront of contemporary British sf writers, and sufficient to keep his many readers, if not satiated, at least moderately happy

HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

The Science Fiction Novels of Edmund Cooper by James Goddard

WHEN I made the claim that Edmund Cooper was philosophically constant, it was no idle patter. A close look at his first novel, *The Uncertain Midnight* (1958), and his latest, *The Slaves of Heaven* (1974), and all of those in between, will show that his basic preoccupations and concepts as to 'things that matter', have stayed the same through the intervening sixteen years. This, to me, indicates a remarkable certainty as to the correctness of one's views, and an equally remarkable discipline of mind and sense of idealism, that few, if any, other major sf writers can claim. This is in no way meant to suggest that Edmund Cooper is a static novelist producing variations on the same theme or, in the *Dragnet* tv series sense, that 'only the names have been changed to protect the innocent'. Far from it. Each Cooper novel is a unique experience. Some are undoubtedly better than others, as is only to be expected, but not one of them even approaches near to being worthless or dismissible.

So what are these constants that make Cooper so remarkable? These things that have remained imbued in his nature from comparative youth to middle age? That's not as easy to answer as one might think; but having made this sweeping statement I'll try to set forth what I conceive to be the two major philosophical rocks on which Cooper's literary feet have remained firmly planted.

The first, and most discernible of these Cooper qualities, is a loyalty to species. He is aware of his own participation in the organisation of human families, and tries to offer crumbs of comfort and support whenever he can. Therefore, in even his most pessimistic novels (and most of them are optimistic anyway), the story always closes with a suggestion of hope for the future of mankind. He doesn't usually deal in invasions from outer space by hideous aliens, or any of the other multifarious forms of otherworldly threat with which much sf expects the human race to contend. Instead, machinery and gadgetry, almost always of man's own creation, are equatable with these horrendous forces in the novels of other sf writers. Both *The Overman Culture* (1971) and *The Uncertain Midnight* feature insidious, near-human androids very prominently. In the former they are *in loco parentis* in a computer—initiated attempt to re-introduce the extinct race of man. The androids also provide a complete back-drop society in which the young humans they have raised are expected to live and develop. The only problem is that the computer which runs the scheme has made no attempt to recreate a single historical period, and the world in which the children come to self-knowledge is an amusingly confusing hodge-podge in which Queen Victoria rides in a hovercraft, and Zeppelins over London are attacked by jet aircraft. The children realise something is amiss when they discover some history books in a derelict library, and from then on it's an uphill struggle to re-establish mankind as the masters and the machines as servants.

In *The Uncertain Midnight* the purpose of the androids seems much more sinister. Introduced at first to help mankind after the devastation of an atomic war, they now control their own destiny and keep the few remaining humans in an idyllic state of near-utopia. They seem ultimately intent on superseding their creators. There are malcontents, of course, and when a pre-atomic-holocaust man is discovered in a state of suspended animation he becomes a focus for the rebels' intentions to show who the true masters really are. In the following passage from the book, Solomon, the android who all but runs the country, is talking to the survivor Markham about the possibility of his becoming a 'battle-standard' for the Runners—the rebels who want man to become dominant again:

'Markham yawned. "Personally, I do not feel either like a battle-standard or an ideal. I feel like an ordinary human being—irritated by too much walking machinery!"

"Then I trust, sir, that you will not endanger yourself by allowing the Runners to idealise you?"

"But supposing I should?"

"Then, sir, it would be necessary to make slight changes in your personality—so that you would not be irritated by too much walking machinery." '

But fear not, for later in the book, after a terrible battle in and around London with android forces, the rebels, by now representative of humanity, live to reach for glory once again.

In *Transit* (1964) and *Sea Horse in the Sky* (1969), although the threat to the protagonists is not so obviously machine inspired, mechanical manifestations of a threatening nature are present. In both of these novels, a small group of people are displaced from Earth, and have to learn to live in and cope with a strange, new and hostile environment. That they ultimately come out tops, as in the previous two books discussed, is one of the main planks on which I rest my thesis of: Cooper=hope.

Transit, particularly, is representative of the Cooper philosophy. It contains all the ingredients. A group of four individuals is displaced from Earth by a device I won't bother to go into, it's only a convenience to aid the plot. We are shown them one by one inside a large machine, which turns out to be a spaceship, and they are probed and examined until we, and whatever force is behind the kidnapping, know something about them. Then quick change, they wake up to find that they have been deposited upon an alien planet, and quickly get themselves organised to make the best of the situation in which they find themselves. They gradually come to suspect that they are not alone, and eventually encounter a group of humanoid beings in a similar situation to themselves. It turns out that they and the alien group are taking part in a test designed to discover which of the two races is most worthy to inherit creation; and the conclusion is most satisfactory for mankind.

'The first, and most discernible of these Cooper qualities, is a loyalty to species. He is aware of his own participation in the organisation of human families, and tries to offer crumbs of comfort and support whenever he can'

'The issue involved is the ultimate domination of the second stellar rim sector in the second linear quadrant of the galaxy . . . there are two intelligent races at present on the threshold of spaceflight. To one of them must fall the ultimate responsibility for control of that area. Your own race and what you call the golden people are the two concerned. It was the object of the experiment . . . to determine which of the races possessed the most useful psychological characteristics. This has now been established . . . The results of the experiment are conclusive.'

Seed of Light (1959), *The Last Continent* (1970) and *The Tenth Planet* (1973) all, to some extent, have a parallel theme. The Earth is dying or is dead, as a result of radio-activity, inter-racial warfare, pollution and over-population. In all three novels the race is left in the charge of a few survivors. In *Seed of Light* the chosen few are shot into space, symbolic sperm, eventually to return to Earth in the distant past. In *The Last Continent*, they survive on Mars and build a flourishing civilisation, and in *The Tenth Planet* they go first to Mars, and when that society collapses they travel further afield in search of a new home, eventually discovering the tenth planet of our solar system. I'm aware that, through lack of space, I've made these three novels sound very similar; I would like, however, to point out that the flesh of the books is as different as potato and plum. Representatives of all three groups ultimately return to Earth with visions of hope, as this short quote from *The Tenth Planet* shows; a group of volunteers is leaving Minerva—the tenth planet—in a spaceship kept in mothballs by the founder of the colony:

'Perhaps, eventually, the other ships that Garfield Talbot in his wisdom had preserved would follow. Perhaps not.
But one, at least, would discover whether Earth, the third planet, would bloom again.
Suddenly, Idris had begun to believe in magic. When one flower dies, another is born.'

Sunspots cause a planet-wide lemming instinct in *All Fools Day* (1966), and a large proportion of the race commits suicide. The survivors are the crazy, the eccentrics and the oddballs, all of whom seem to be immune to the chemical imbalance produced in the human metabolism by the sunspots. They survive, and a black picture is painted of the struggles against deprivations caused by the collapse of society. Small disorganised groups of people come together, until, at the end of the novel, one of the chief characters remarks:

' "We've got a new civilisation going Pauline . . . We're back to square one . . ." '

Edmund Cooper's finest novel to date, to my mind, is *The Cloud Walker* (1973). It's possible to draw thematic parallels between this novel and Walter M Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz*; but this is not meant in any sense to suggest plagiarism. Cooper's treatment of the theme of the religion of anti-science is as distinct from Miller's as it is possible to get, and perhaps I'm doing you a disservice by even suggesting similarities between the two. In this finely crafted story of the rediscovery of heavier-than-air flight—symbolic of science in general in the context of the novel—we follow Kieron, a

carpenter's son, from youth to old age and great honour in the post-atomic-holocaust world of the Luddite Church. Kieron is a rebel, in the Church's terms a heretic, and misfortune upon misfortune besets him as he struggles to free the mind of man from the heavy chains of superstition. As the novel progresses, he singlehandedly leads the world from the bigoted enslavement of Ludd's church and primitive physical toil, to a new enlightenment and renewed hope for a better future. (It's interesting to note in passing, that this is just about the only Cooper novel which has a kind word for science: it's looked upon as an ally rather than an enemy, but in moderation.)

Five to Twelve (1968) is another fine novel which contains, apart from the obligatory degree of hope, the seeds of the other main Cooper constant that I wish to discuss briefly here.

Dion Quern is a genetic freak born in a sexually unbalanced world. As the result of new forms of birth-control, the proportion of male births has decreased drastically, until women outnumber men by more than two to one. Into this society, where men are chattels kept for amusement by the women, comes Quern, a man who is capable of passing on only the male hereditary factor to any woman who wishes to have a child by him.

'And there you have it, the other major concern featuring strongly in many of Edmund Cooper's books, the suggestion that the race must remain sexually balanced, and that men must retain their position of sexual mastery'

He is another rebel who struggles valiantly against what he sees as an evil society, but eventually he is forced to submit to the domination of the women, and they take steps to ensure that their own futures as masters of the human race are not thrown into jeopardy. But they reckon without the disrupting force of a rebel within their own ranks, and the novel, which in the early stages presented a distressing picture for the male of the species, ends on an upbeat note.

'"Dion," said Juno, "there was something they could not destroy. Something terrible, something glorious. They could not destroy the secret of your seed."

"My seed?"

"Your seed. The seed that is passed from generation to generation. You are a freak, Dion, a genetic miracle . . . you have double-Y chromosomes, and the pattern is somehow dominant. It is enough for you to know that you can only breed sons."

"Sons?" He gazed at her uncomprehendingly.

"Yes, sons. You gave me your seed, and the seed has produced nothing but sons . . . You have eight sons, Dion, tall and strong . . . And three of them have the dominant double-Y chromosomes. They too can breed only sons . . . So it seems that you have won the war . . . Your sons will breed more sons. And in the end, if we do not make any more mistakes, we can create a balanced world of men and women."'

And there you have it, the other major concern featuring strongly in many of Edmund Cooper's books, the suggestion that the race must remain sexually balanced, and that men must retain their position of sexual mastery. The same message, tempered with a warning, is extant in *Who Needs Men?* (1972) though, unusually for this author, the book ends on a sadly poetic downbeat note.

In the twenty-fifth century, the services of the human male have become sexually obsolete. Women have ensured the survival of the race by parthenogenesis and cloning. The few remaining men have fled for fear of their lives, and live in remote regions, such as the Highlands of Scotland, where much of the action of *Who Needs Men?* takes place.

The country is patrolled by highly trained bands of vindictive women exterminators, intent on nothing more than ridding the land of the remnants of this obscene and savage animal. One of the exterminators, apparently because of faulty training, falls prey to the charms of the chief of a wandering band in Scotland, and she becomes his woman. The rest of the story expands upon the idea that men and women are compatible and complementary, and not competitors. In the end, both the renegade woman, and the man, are killed by her former colleagues in what is the saddest, and probably most cynical ending in the whole of Cooper's writing:

'"Well, sow. It has been a long chase. Was it worth it for the pig that lies in the snow?"

"Yes, hellbitch, it was worth it."

* * * *

Someone else came out of the chopper. There was another laser rifle to worry about. But Rura was past worrying.

She held Diarmid. She held him close. She whispered tender words: "I will love you till—"

And then there was darkness. The darkness of forever.'

And that, basically, is it. A brief look at the work and the moral concerns of Edmund Cooper by one of his readers. I make no claims for the statements in this article, they represent my own interpretation only, and Mr Cooper is free to refute them if he will.

To summarise: I think two things are abundantly clear from reading the fiction of Edmund Cooper. One is that he feels that, ultimately, good sense will prevail. Man will see the folly of his ways, will cease to put trust in things that can easily turn from being boons to being blunders; atomic energy has two possibilities, either unlimited electricity, or the end of the species, which is it to be? And the second thing I read into his writing is that he is a great upholder of the status-quo. He likes things the way they are. He is against interchange between the sexual roles, he dislikes sexual libertarianism, and thinks women's lib is ultimately bad.

Just one thing more would I add. Whether you agree with Edmund Cooper's philosophies, or whether you find his undoubtedly idealistic view of the human race and sexual harmony hard to swallow, he writes his message well, and entertains without burying his narrative in deep-rooted pretensions. What more can any reader ask?

SCIENCE FICTION
NEW ENGLISH LIBRARY MONTHLY

Karel Thole

An Interview With EDMUND COOPER

By James Goddard

As individuals, the characters in many of your books lack the identity of singular people, and seem to be more representative of mankind in general; why is this?

Cooper: Well, it's legitimate of you to say that they lack, as it were, a great deal of variety—there are one or two characters I'll come to in a minute who do have this variety—most of them are similar types. Richard Avery in *Transit*, Matthew Greville in *All Fools Day*, John Marcombe in *The Uncertain Midnight*, are all, basically, the same kind of character, the same kind of matrix. It's got to be perfectly obvious to anyone that the person he knows best is himself. I know myself best, so I'm afraid that these are all pseudonyms for myself. They're how I think I might react, given these dreadful, intriguing, funny, banal or bizarre situations these characters find themselves in. It's easier to put *my* reactions down than to invent a character and put his reactions down. There are a lot of masquerading Edmund Coopers lurking around in my novels; which is why, frequently, American reviewers call me a male chauvinist pig.

A number of your recent books propound a point of view which is not only out of fashion with your fellow sf writers, but which is also in direct opposition to the way in which, according to the media, the world is going. With a few exceptions you have produced a body of work which is a fiction of optimism!

Cooper: I don't feel particularly optimistic about the state of society. As for being in or out of fashion, I've never even considered the prospect. I write the books and take the themes I feel I want to deal with. For example, *All Fools Day*, for me, is a failure. When I started out, my basic idea was to explore what we mean by the idea of sanity; everyone talks about being sane or insane, so I wanted to find out just what we meant by this. I hit upon the sf mechanism for knocking off all the demonstrably sane people, and leaving all the people I call *transnormals*, who were really the nutcases. I felt that if I analysed the behaviour of these transnormals, I would be able to arrive at some rough and ready definition of what was meant by the term 'sanity'.

I spent 65,000 words and nineteen months writing this novel, I think it had a little depth, but it was a total failure in terms of the original premise. I did not know any more about insanity or sanity at the end of the book than I did at the beginning. This is the point, you see, I take themes.

In *Five to Twelve* I took the theme of women's emancipation, taking it just a little further than it's now gone, and reversed the roles by taking it to the point where, OK, we emancipate them, they get this and that, but it's in the nature of human beings to always want 10% more. Then I introduced a science fiction mechanism that reduced the number of men, and therefore reduced their effectiveness, thus giving women a chance to become dominant. This was my theme, the plot was totally subsidiary; I simply wanted to examine what sort of society and people we would get if the roles were reversed.

Does this not suggest that you are rather anti the emancipation of women, you think they have a definite place in society, and should more or less stay in it?

Cooper: I don't think they should be kept in their place, and I'm not anti the emancipation of women, though I've been accused of being this; I've been accused of being a reactionary fascist beast, particularly by the Americans because there are so many women reviewers; time and again they call me a male chauvinist pig, or my central character—which is me anyway. The whole point is that the average cranial capacity of the human female is 125cc less than that of the average human male; what I'm saying is that on the whole they've got a smaller computer, and, granted that they are the same type of computers, the bigger computer is better than the smaller computer.

Let them have equal opportunity, I'm all in favour of it. I dislike this idea that they are blocked in the City. For example, if you are a woman, you just cannot get on the Stock Exchange unless you've been very lucky; in industry, if you are a woman, you cannot rise above a certain level unless you're very lucky. They're blocked for two reasons: one, because men are afraid of them, and two, a valid reason, because they consider that most women are going to get themselves impregnated, and move off shortly after they've mastered the job and got themselves a decent salary. My point is that, in equal competition, and let them have *totally* equal competition, let them compete against men, they'll see that they can't make it. We have had free education in this country for a great many years, but where are the good female mathematicians? Where are the good female scientists? Where are the female Beethovens, etc ? They've gone back home to wash the dishes and produce children. And that, generally, is a very simplified version of what I feel.

I'm all in favour of women, I love them. I do not want to subjugate them, I want to make love to them, I'd lay every attractive woman in the world if I could, OK, can't be done; I don't want to subjugate them by penis or by restrictions or by anything like that, I just don't think they can compete on the same terms.

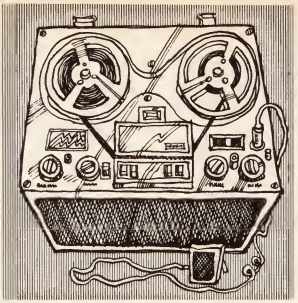
This question really stems from an earlier one to do with the optimistic aspects of themes in your books. You seem to emphasise the nobler aspects of the nature of mankind, you don't find many murderers or rapists in your books, with the possible exception of ***Kronk****!*

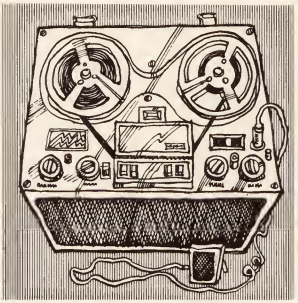
Cooper: With the exception of *Kronk*, with the exception of *Five to Twelve*, with the exception of *All Fools Day*, and that's three out of twelve of my published books; in those books you have murderers, rapists and cranks. I try to look for the good things in people, and to draw out the good things, and this is not dwelling on the nobler aspects in any women's magazine sense: I try to do it in such a way that I'm not presenting bloody great goody-goodies who are going to march spotless through my books. Most of my heroes have a sense of guilt, for either something they have done, or something they have omitted to do. Most of the women are imperfect, again, either for something they have done or omitted to do. So it's not as if I'm producing cardboard cutouts, they are real people, but they are not necessarily as nasty as you could get.

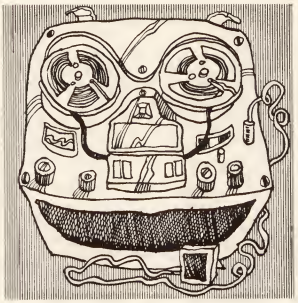
I'm not in the business of writing about nasty people. I am, I think, more in the business of manipulating ideas, and, generally speaking, I can do this more successfully if I have fairly well balanced people to go at. The odd crank creeps in. There are cranks enough in *All Fools Day*, the Brothers of Iniquity score pretty superlatively as the nastiest people you could get, because anything that's nice they totally abhor, and anything that's nasty they think is bloody marvellous. A whole chapter is devoted to what they did in the village of Ambergrieve, they raped, crucified, killed, disemboweled, shot to pieces, what more can you have?

Don't you think that sometimes, from a fictional point of view, the nastier a character is, the more interesting it is to follow him through a fictional narrative?

Cooper: Yes, I do; but then, you see, if I was going to concentrate on character to this extent, I think I would abandon sf and go into mainstream







Martin Venning

fiction. To me, sf is a literature of ideas, it's a genre in which I can explore possible themes. I see myself, and this is probably a bit grandiose, as a kind of Cassandra, I'm pointing out possible dooms. In *Five to Twelve* I'm pointing out a possible doom in terms of letting emancipation run riot. There is a little trigger mechanism that turns emancipation into domination and dictatorship. In *Kronk* I take much of what is already apparent in our very plastic civilisation, look at it through a magnifying glass, and bring it up 2x or 3x to see what kind of world it will produce.

We have a problem with delinquent children, we have problems with people being programmed to buy things they don't need by the whole philosophy of consumerism, we have people's minds being controlled by tv to the extent that a popular face on tv will for some time dominate the minds, attitudes and reactions of people who watch; the 'Alf Garnett' syndrome, things like this. These are the things that I'm hitting at, because I dislike them, I see them gaining ground; I'm a sort of latter-day frustrated messiah, perhaps a very poor one. I'm not interested in characterisation for its own sake, but only to the extent that it will advance the theme I'm currently playing about with.

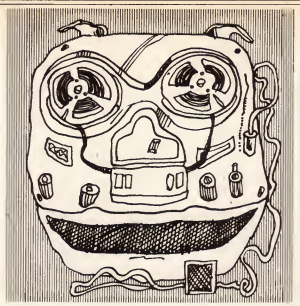
*A scene in **Transit** shows the humans, who are marooned on a planet being used by superior forces to conduct an experiment to find the most desirable master race, leaving their camp to destroy beings from another world in a neighbouring camp who have been attacking them. When they reach the enemy camp, they find it deserted. Then the mood changes from one of aggression, to one of pathos and mercy when the humans find a wounded alien. Here, the nobility and kindness, sympathy and understanding begin to seep through, and the warlike intentions are forgotten. It sounds as though you are saying that there is no such creature as mankind, and that humanity is the best. Would you agree with this interpretation?*

Cooper: No, I don't agree with that; it may seem like that and it may have come across like that, but if so, then it's a failure on my part. Basically, this book was intended to be an adventure story, full of suspense. We were talking of character just now, it was also to be a book in which, because there were only four Earth people involved, I could explore their characters. You may recall that these four people are transferred to this planet, I think it's seventy light years away, and we're given a picture of them.

One is an advertising executive who has dirty pictures in his case; another is a gin-sodden failed actress; the third is a very timid mouse-like secretary; and the fourth is a failed artist who has lost his first wife and more or less given up hope. Through this book I wanted to evolve their characters; I preface the book with a quote from Auden: 'We must love one another or die'. Richard Avery eventually learns to love not only Barbara, with whom he eventually mates, but Mary and Tom. They learn to have affection for each other, they develop compassion, and, as you quite rightly say, when they are provoked into attacking the alien camp, their compassion for the dying alien woman dissipates all their warlike intentions, and this comes across. When, at the end, they are evaluated, they are not evaluated because they are a master race, they are evalutated as superior because they have compassion.

Coming back to your question, I am prepared to believe that there are other races in this galaxy and in other galaxies which are probably superior to mankind. I do not think we shall have any contact with them on a strictly scientific level because of the time and space factors involved. I don't believe in faster-than-light drive, it's a load of hooey, a convention that we use. And, what is more, the different time scales involved can cause problems. You and I have personal time scales; then we have a historical time scale that covers the events of history; then we have a biological time scale that covers the evolution of life; each scale getting bigger and bigger. Then we have a geological time scale that covers the evolution of the Earth; then we have a solar time scale that covers the evolution of the solar system, and then we have a galactic time scale and a cosmic time scale.

In all this, the order of magnitude as we jump from one scale to another increases so tremendously that the chances of one race from one galaxy contacting another race from another galaxy, are far less than that of one man standing in the corner of a field and firing a rifle, and another man standing in the corner of another field five miles away and firing a rifle, and both bullets colliding. The order of magnitude of chance for this to happen is phenomenal, yet it is far greater than for contact between us and an alien species. So, this was simply a mechanism



for exploring what I felt to be desirable in mankind. If something was desirable, and we could master it, then we would be fit, not to become masters of the galaxy, but just to order our own affairs and look after our own house.

Despite that, you've got this alien race, the Golden People, who, apparently, apart from their warlike attitudes, have few or no failings as far as the novel is concerned, and you have the Earth people, who have a variety of actual failings, and yet still the Earth people with all their failings turn out to be the most desirable.

Cooper: This was sheer optimism. To tell the truth, the Golden People represent what for want of a better word I will call the fascist element, and the Earth people represent what I will call the liberal-democratic element. This may be wish-fulfilment, but I rather hope that the cultured and tolerant liberal-democratic element has sufficient staying power to triumph over the fascist element, without being too distorted in the process. So really it was an allegory, a very small-scale allegory, between the forces of liberalism and the forces of autocracy.

In outlook at least, many of your books seem to suggest, and I think this is borne out by something you said earlier, that you are not only anti-religion but are humanist, that you celebrate the godhead of man; any comments?

Cooper: I'm an atheist, God is an abstract noun, he's not a Father Christmas up there in heaven, he's an abstract bloody noun who has been exploited by men in order to exploit other men through centuries. More people have been killed by internecine wars in the Christian Church than in the First and Second World Wars put together. There have been more destruction and more misery created by the brotherly love that is promulgated by this dreadful religion than by anything else throughout history, it really is appalling. We've got it now in Northern Ireland. Surely any thinking person must feel that if that's what Protestantism is and that's what Catholicism is, let any sane society outlaw both, because they are death and destruction. And talking of male chauvinism, for centuries the Church has kept women in bondage. Women are unclean when they have babies, they have to go and be churched afterwards so that they are fit for human consumption again. They don't have rights, the Church has kept women in total subjugation. So I, male chauvinist pig that I am, want to grant them emancipation, and the Church is busy keeping them down. I want to grant them emancipation because I think they can't compete, the Church wants to keep them down because they think a source of ill-paid labour for the males of this world is useful to have.

I could go on and on about the Church and its relations to sexual attitudes, but I won't, I'll merely say that those idiots, like the Archbishop of Canterbury and this bloody fool who calls himself a Pope and sits in the Vatican, who say you can't have birth control—let's all die of starvation, are doing far more harm than Genghis Khan, Attila the Hun and Adolf Hitler all rolled up into one. People like Attila and Hitler were benevolent despots compared to these idiots who utter and pontificate, and say: this is the word of God, this you shall do, this you shall not do. When a war starts, the priests of England start praying for victory over the Germans, the priests of Germany start praying for victory over the English, and the priests of Italy start praying for insurance from both sides.

All sides saying God with Us!

Cooper: Yes, Got mit Uns, Got strafe England, God is love.

*I also sense something of the Luddite in your books, as, apart from the godhead of man, one of the recurring themes is the triumph of man over the self-created monster of his own technology. When technology, in the form of very superior machines (the androids in **The Overman Culture** and **The Uncertain Midnight** are good examples), threatens man, then these machines must be smashed. Ned Ludd would have been proud of you, but do you really think man is threatened by his own technology run amok?*

Cooper: We're getting too bloody clever for words, we're delegating more and more responsibility to machines; machines are allowed to make judgements, machines are allowed to take decisions. This was the theme I took in my first sf novel, *The Uncertain Midnight*, I took it to its logical conclusion, I went from computer to robot to android. I eventually gave the androids total electronic independence from man, and they therefore became competitors with man. I think this sort of thing is already happening, you start out with a simple thing like a computer, and the scientists who operate and programme this computer think, ah yes, if we link this computer

with another computer we get better results. Eventually you get an entire computer network, a great deal of data is fed into this, and it becomes very, very complex; I think it was Arthur Clarke who said, that if you connected all the telephone systems in the world, you would have an electronic brain that would do something very peculiar; he was joking, but he got the general drift.

The point is, the more complex you make these machines, particularly when you get to where individual men cannot comprehend the complexity of the things, there you've hit danger level. Once they cannot comprehend it, they are at the mercy of the system. You get strange things like people being credited with £2,999,999 in their bank account, and someone else being debited. Gordon R Dickson wrote an absolutely brilliant story about a man who failed to make a payment to a book club, I'm sure you've read this one, and eventually he ends up under a death sentence. Now this was a brilliant story, I took off my hat to Gordon Dickson; it's not that he was predicting anything, but by using that kind of distortion that is peculiar to science fiction he was showing the kind of danger we can expect by saying, OK, let the bloody machines do it.

You review books for The Sunday Times: *could you say something about this aspect of your work?*

Cooper: It scares me enormously, to tell the truth. The real reason I do it, and this is going to sound egocentric—it's not meant to be, is it's a form of self advertisement; my publishers don't advertise me too much, as people may have noticed. It's not advertisement in the sense that I'm using the columns of the *ST* to say, look, here's clever Edmund yet again, dreaming up the bomb, or assassinating this or building up that; it's simply that the name appears over a column of reviews. Those reviews, strangely, I try to do as honestly as I can. It's relatively easy to review a novel by, say, Asimov, Clarke or Aldiss, in that I know these writers intimately, and I can go through pretty quickly and say, oh yes, that's good, or that's bad. I know their idiom, I know their style, I know what they're trying to do.

The books that really terrify me are the first novels. I don't know Fred Smith, therefore I've got to read him from start to finish because although the first fifty pages may be dreadful, it may be that on page 51 he starts pulling brilliant rabbits out of the hat. I know this guy has put months of his life into this work, and he deserves my time to go through and see whether he's made it. So I try to do these reviews very honestly. I said that I know people like Aldiss and Asimov, this doesn't mean that I skip them, but when you are familiar you don't have to give it the deathlike concentration you have to with some writer whose work is totally unknown.

You say you're a novelist, and that as a novelist you write sf. Why do you write sf?

Cooper: I've written romantic women's magazine stories, I've written mystery fiction, I'm a novelist, I'm a writer, it's better to call me a writer, I know how to write things. It so happens that I like writing sf, I've written fifteen sf books now, there will be some more to come. I feel that, probably, I've exhausted, or am wearying, my readers, with many of my pet themes. I can't help thinking that I shall have to branch out and write other kinds of novels with other kinds of problems, in order to keep myself intellectually and emotionally alive. So, I am a novelist who, at the moment, happens to write sf, but I'm going to write other kinds of fiction too.

Why have you written so comparatively few short stories?

Cooper: I wrote the short stories when I was learning to write science fiction. When I knew how to write sf, I knew I could express far better in novel terms than in short story terms the things I want to say and do. There's another reason too, novels are very much easier to write than short stories. There are some very good short sf stories, but most of them are gimmicky and dreadful, that's because of the limitation of size, and the limitation of the market. Magazines like *Analog* for example, put a narrow limitation on their writers, *F&SF* and *Galaxy* impose a different kind of limitation.

Another thing that has bothered me is that from a reader's point of view far too many bad sf stories are being produced in far too many anthologies, and are being reprinted and re-used over and over again, to the undying and eternal shame of the authors, or to the benefit of their pockets. I don't want to get into this kind of little money-making race, I can make money out of writing the kind of fiction that I want to write, so I'm not too bothered about the science fiction short story. If some good theme comes to me, and I think I can express it adequately in a short story, then I'll do it, but I've got a mental block against them.

Can you speak at all on any sf writers you admire?

Cooper: I don't admire sf writers, I admire certain books. Take the case of Brian Aldiss, *Non-Stop*, I think, was an excellent book, *An Age* was an excellent book, *Report on Probability A* was rubbishy, it wasn't even sf, it was a wornout essay in metaphysical speculation. *Barefoot in the Head* was a psychedelic fantasy with no real value, *Frankenstein Unbound* certainly wasn't sf, it was fantasy masquerading as sf, with a great many loopholes. I think he's only written two very good novels; so, do I admire Brian Aldiss or not? No, I admire two of his books.

In the case of Arthur Clarke and Isaac Asimov the same criterion applies. Asimov was very good when he was writing his robot stories, there he was an absolute waymaker; but twaddle like Elijah Baley, and this idotic crap that's supposed to be cult stuff, *Foundation*, really and truly has nothing to do with sf. One sf novel that immensely impressed me was *Earth Abides* by George R Stewart, another was *A Canticle for Leibowitz* by Walter M Miller, and there was one by Mordecai Roshwald, *Level 7*, which struck me as a very good novel; I found these to be impressive novels, they set levels of excellence that very few other writers have been able to come up to.

Vonnegut's *The Sirens of Titan* is a superb piece of satire, his later satire, I'm afraid, is not quite up to that level, that is the best of the Vonnegut books. Bradbury, of course, doesn't write sf, he never did write sf, he's a sort of poetic fantasist who has more or less played himself out, he now does pastiches of Bradbury, just as Hemingway, at the end, did pastiches of Hemingway. These are the outstanding things that come to mind.

Science fiction still seems to be striving for a definition, just now you mentioned Asimov's ***Foundation*** *and referred to it as fantasy, whereas many would probably think of it as the epitome of sf. Have you a pet definition of sf, or a working definition of sf?*

Cooper: I have some working ideas, I'm not going to stand up and say definitions. Somebody once defined politics as the art of the possible: for my money, sf has got to be the art of the possible. If it becomes impossible and absurd, if it involves concepts, ideas, gadgetry, and so on, that really offend all the laws of science, and even offend human intelligence, then it's not sf, it's gobbledegook. A great deal of gobbledegook is passed off as sf these days.

In *Five to Twelve* I'm talking about a possible future world dominated by women, far fetched, but possible. *Kronk* is far fetched, computerised religion, but also possible. In books like that there was nothing that could offend a scientist or any intelligent person; they were novels of the possible. But when you get faster-than-light drives, and I've committed this dreadful thing myself, it's impossible, it offends the laws of science, so it's not sf.

When Arthur Clarke stands up and says we're going to have matter transmitters, what he doesn't realise, brilliant scientist that he is, is that when you have two molecules trying to occupy the same space at the same time, you get an atomic explosion, so matter transmission is not possible. Arthur can argue, right, we'll have the matter receiver in a perfect vacuum, so that when we build up the stuff in it, no two molecules can occupy the same space at the same time; my answer is that you cannot get a perfect vacuum, not even in deep space; hence, out with matter transmission Arthur. As far as I am concerned sf is the art of the possible, not the art of the probable, not necessarily doomwatching, but just the art of the possible, speculation on what is possible, on what could be.

What do you think offers the most, the novels or short stories with pretensions to offering hard scientific extrapolation, or those more concerned with the soft sciences?

Cooper: The stories that deal with possible worlds, and the way they affect people, not the stories that deal with possible gadgetries. I'm not concerned that twenty-five years from now we will have an android that can perform X calculations per second, only uses so much current, will do all the washing up and will mind your baby as well. I would be far more concerned with considering the impact of this android on society. What happens if you get an android that can wet-nurse the baby? What kind of babies do you grow? This kind of thing.

So you would stress the soft sciences really, psychology, anthropology, things like that?

Cooper: Yes, the value of the science is only in that it will produce a certain environment that's going to affect people, I'm concerned with the effect on the people!

James Goddard is editor of *Cypher*, the amateur sf magazine, in which an extended version of this interview first appeared.

NEWS

By Julie Davis

POSTER OFFER

SFM Vol 2 No 5, out at the end of May, will be presenting details of a bargain poster offer. You can become the proud owner of two Bruce Pennington masterpieces, *Whipping Star* and *Green Brain* (both from Frank Herbert's books), as well as Tim White's tremendous illustration for *The Legend of GX-118* which appeared in *SFM Vol 1 No 11.* For full details see next month's issue.

Dracula Tour

If you're tired of Bognor Regis and you can't face Juan les Pins yet again, why not try a Dracula Tour? This year, between April and September, you could spend one or two weeks in Transylvania seeking out Count Dracula and learning the dance of the vampires. Two travel agencies, Sovereign and Sunquest, have each organised a tour and details of both can be obtained from: Mrs D Marchant, Easton Travel Bureau Ltd, 411 Mare Street, London E8 1HY.

ALLY PALLY CENTENARY

This year's Spring Bank Holiday falls on 26 May and if you're going to be in London over that weekend why not visit the Alexandra Palace in North London? Numerous events have been arranged to celebrate its first centenary and of particular interest to sf readers will be the exhibition put on by the Astronomical Society of Haringey. The display will include space equipment, telescopes and possibly a viewing platform, space models from Matt Irvine, photos and slides from David Hardy and possibly talks by Patrick Moore, Arthur Clarke and John Ebden, although this has not been finalised yet. There will also be another opportunity to see the SFM Painting Competition winning entries if you missed them at the ICA and SeaCon. The exhibition is open from 11 am to 6 pm and further details are available from Mary Chase on 01 883 9711. To get there, travel by tube to Wood Green and then take a W3 bus.

***The News** is a bi-monthly magazine produced by Robert Rickard full of the sort of information favoured and collected by Charles Hoy Fort. The publication is affiliated to the International Fortean Organisation which is continuing Fort's work; he spent over thirty years of his life collecting notes on anomalous phenomena that still baffle orthodox science. Fort condensed this information into four books, one of which is **The Book of the Damned,** and influenced many sf writers of the 1920s and '30s with his ideas.*

***The News** can be obtained from Robert Rickard, 31 Kingswood Road, Moseley, Birmingham B13 9AN; subscription rate per year of £2.10. Alternatively if you don't want to buy it, you may be in possession of some obscure Fortean knowledge which might fit into **The News,** if so send it to the same address.*

Errata: *The Paintings of EAJ Duffy* Mr Duffy's first name is Evelyn not Emlyn and his painting *The Last Dandelion* was submitted for possible showing at the Paris Salon and not the Paris Soir.

BOOKS

Suaine and the **Crow-God** by Stuart Gordon, *published by New English Library;* £2.95. A fantasy set in pre-Christian times which tells the tale of Suaine and his search to unravel the enigma of his existence; this involves a confrontation with the Crow-God and travel outside the realms of time. Stuart Gordon is the author of *Time Story* and *One-Eye.*

Time and Timothy Grenville by Terry Greenhough, *published by New English Library; £2.50.* **Terry Greenhough's work is already familiar to readers of SFM, as his short stories** *The Tree in the Forest* and *Wilbur* **have both appeared within these pages. This is his first** sf **novel and it takes us back to Earth's beginnings** *via* **Timothy Grenville** and **the superhuman force he discovers.**

Backdrop of Stars edited by Harry Harrison, published by New English Library; 40p. A collection of short stories from established authors; each accompanied by the author's comments.

Hook 4: Virility Gene by Tully Zetford, published by New English Library; 30p. *Hook arrives on a planet and stakes his claim on the newly discovered virility gene.*

Not Before Time by John Brunner, published by New English Library; 35p. *A new edition of this John Brunner collection.*

The Planet Buyer and **The Underpeople** by Cordwainer Smith, *published by Sphere;* 40p each. These two sf classics, written in the 1940s, receive their first British publication as part of Sphere's Science Fiction Classics series. Cordwainer Smith was only recently brought to my attention by John Radford in his article *Taking A trip (SFM Vol 2 No 2)* and consequently the availability of these two novels is more than acceptable. The story is simply that of a boy who buys the planet Earth, but he has to die before he can reach it. *The Underpeople* is its sequel and tells the tale of how the richest man who ever lived becomes the ally of the underpeople who have been mutated from animal stock to serve mankind.

Dangerous Visions edited by Harlan Ellison **published by Sphere. This classic anthology, which was first published in hardback over here in 1970, now appears in paperback. Sphere have published it in three volumes at 50p each, but you'll probably find that none of your favourites appear in the same volume and you'll end up buying them all. The anthology has quite a reputation, especially with Harlan Ellison saying this sort of thing about it: 'What you hold in your hands is more than a book. If we are lucky it is a revolution.'**

New Science in the Solar System: A *New Scientist* special review; £1. *Your interest in what's happening in our solar system may have been stimulated by the recent article by CD Renmore,* **Are You Alive (and Intelligent) Out There?** *which appeared in* **SFM Vol 1 No 11.** *If that's the case then you're sure to find that this collection of articles, produced as a well-illustrated glossy magazine, answers many of your questions. It takes stock of what we have learnt about the solar system during the past four years and 1974 in particular. That year saw the first visits to Jupiter, Mercury and Venus, and the first manned space observations of the Sun aboard Skylab. Each of these ventures is dealt with in an essay by an established expert and illustrated with NASA photographs. But, to return to the opening sentence, you'll also find an article by Professor Carl Sagan called* **Exobiology.** *It may be interesting to compare the findings in this publication with the views expressed in a forthcoming article appearing in* **SFM Vol 2 No 6** *called* **Life In Our Solar System.**

SF in the Cinema

The Land That Time Forgot
Reviewed by John Brosnan

Produced by Max J Rosenberg and Milton Subotsky. Directed by Kevin Connor. Screenplay by Michael Moorcock and James Cawthorn. Special Effects supervised by Derek Meddings. Starring Doug McClure, John McEnery and Susan Penhaligon.

There's a theory going around that the worse the economic situation gets the more escapist our films become. Perhaps that explains all the 'family entertainment' films that have been appearing and doing well at the box-office lately, such as *The Golden Voyage of Sinbad, Earthquake, Island at the Top of the World* and *Airport 75* (disaster films count as escapism because when times are bad people apparently enjoy watching other people who are having an even worse time). One thing they all have in common is spectacular visual effects, as well as hackneyed storylines and cardboard characters. Latest in the cycle is *The Land That Time Forgot,* a British production from Amicus, a company that has, up to now, specialised in making horror films.

Based very, *very* loosely on a novel by Edgar Rice Burroughs, it's about a group of people who discover Caprona, a long-forgotten land mass near the South Pole that is kept warm and habitable by volcanic activity. The group consists of one American, played by Doug McClure (which ensures that American audiences will be able to watch the picture without suffering from a crisis of identity), several British seamen and several German seamen, plus one token girl. It all takes place during the First World War and the means by which this diverse group reach the 'lost world' is a German U-Boat. Much of the first quarter of the film is taken up by the two factions fighting for control of the vessel (the U-Boat had sunk the freighter on which the hero and his companions had been travelling but had then unwittingly surfaced to recharge its batteries near the survivors' life-boats) before they decide to forget their differences temporarily and work together. Once in Caprona they find themselves menaced by prehistoric monsters and cavemen, but also find a source of crude oil which they refine to fuel their submarine. The film ends with the inevitable volcanic eruption which destroys everything and everyone, except for the hero, of course, and the girl.

One reason why the picture should be of interest to science fiction fans is that Michael Moorcock and James Cawthorn wrote the screenplay. Just how much of their work remains in the finished picture it is hard to say but one has a strong suspicion that there is very little. Apparently the whole volcano sequence wasn't in the original script and some of the dialogue is so laughable it's hard to imagine that Moorcock had anything to do with it. For example, the hero, in a lifeboat completely surrounded by fog, calls out for help to another lifeboat . . . 'Where are you?' yells one of the occupants of the second boat as he peers around at the dense fog. 'Over here,' replies the hero, unhelpfully.

Considered purely as a special effects extravaganza, the film is more interesting. There are a lot of model shots, mainly of the submarine and other sea vessels, which, though impressive, aren't really convincing (it *is* possible to be impressed by special effects while finding them unconvincing at the same time). The problem, as with any model shot involving water, is that you can't *miniaturise* water, so that no matter how fast you speed up the camera (which slows down the action) when filming a model boat ploughing through a studio sea, the effect remains unreal.

The dinosaurs, which play an important part in the picture, are also unconvincing. Ray Harryhausen's stop-motion animation techniques would have been ideal for this sort of story, but Harryhausen's methods are expensive as well as time-consuming so the producers chose an alternative system. This consists of small mechanically-operated models (puppets really) which are combined with shots of the live actors by means of front and rear projection screens — under the supervision of Charles Staffel. The dinosaurs, built and operated by Roger Dicken, are impressive in close-up shots but their movements in long shot, especially when they are seen walking, are very unconvincing. Use is also made of full-scale models — such as in the scene where a pterodactyl swoops down and picks up a man in its beak. That's not very convincing either — it's very stiff and you can see the supporting wires — but it's not every day you see a full-scale model of a pterodactyl in action, so one shouldn't really quibble. A full-scale section of a dinosaur's head and neck is used earlier in the picture when McClure and a seaman are attacked by one of the creatures as it looms up over the side of the sub's conning tower. It's a very well-edited and rather exciting sequence but is spoilt at the end when the head and neck, after being riddled with machine-gun bullets, flop at McClure's feet like a bundle of laundry dropped from a great height (the wobbling rubber teeth don't help either).

One of the best moments in the film comes just as the sub is surfacing in the lost world. McClure, looking through the periscope, is surprised by something that suddenly appears from the side and snaps at the periscope. It all happens so fast that the creature isn't seen clearly and one is just left with the impression of something with a long neck and lots of teeth — a simple shock device but an effective one.

The actors, though never required to do more in this type of picture than register amazement at things they aren't really seeing (which can't be easy), are adequate enough. Doug McClure, of *Virginian* fame, makes a passable hero and John McEnery is quite good as the captain of the U-Boat, though Anthony Ainley, who plays his second-in-command, rather overdoes the 'strutting Hun' routine. Susan Penhaligon, as the girl, spends most of her time spouting a lot of nonsensical biological theories. Her relationship with McClure is a strangely muted one, there are no romantic scenes as such, yet at the end of the picture she marries him . . . apparently for no reason other than that he is the only man left alive. At least in the sequence where she is being hotly pursued by a lustful caveman she doesn't trip and sprain her ankle — instead she runs straight into a bog, which is something new. But that's about the only surprise you'll receive in this picture.

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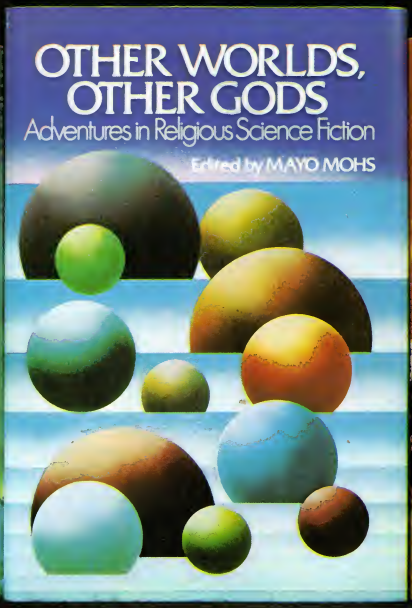

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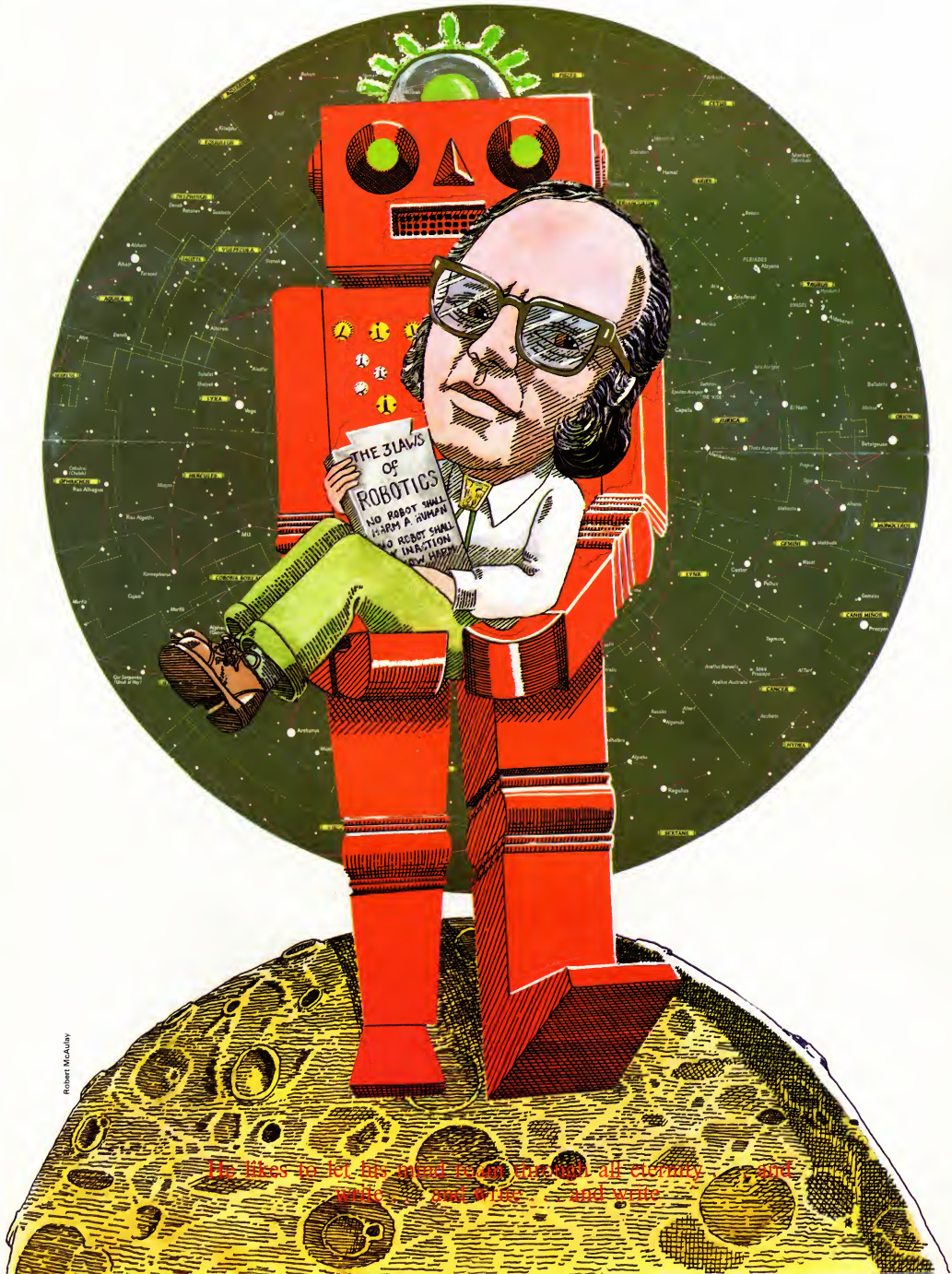


Robert McAulay

He likes to let his mind run through all eternity — and write, and write — and write

10: ISAAC ASIMOV

If computers ever take over the business of writing books, it is doubtful if they will ever replace Isaac Asimov—always supposing he is still typing at ninety words a minute, working ten hours a day, and caring nothing for holidays. For though he has foreseen the time when man may be succeeded by cybernetic brains, he cannot remember a day when he was not 'on fire to write'.

Six years ago, when he published his hundredth book, someone calculated that if he did not slacken he would have doubled his total output by 1980. Fortunately for his followers, not all of this is science fiction. Supplementing a long list of books on many aspects of science, there are encyclopedias and text-books, a biographical dictionary, a four-volume *History of North America,* even a two-volume *Guide to the Bible* . . . the life's work of one who, in his own words, has been content to sit at home and let his mind wander 'from the dawn of the universe to its end and from here to the farthest star.'

He will admit, however, that it is by his contribution to science fiction—especially his stories of Dr Susan Calvin's positronic robots and the concept of the Three Laws of Robotics—that he is most likely to be remembered by posterity. And if his more factual work may be reckoned of more immediate value, there is some significance in the fact that, like so many others who have enriched the genre, Asimov came to authorship through his activities as a science fiction fan.

Born in Russia near Smolensk in 1920, he was taken to America when he was three and his sister still a child in arms. They grew up in Brooklyn, where Isaac went to grammar school and helped in his father's candy store. At the age of 8 he gained his citizenship papers, and by 1929 he was reading *Science Wonder Stories,* having persuaded his censorious father that it would improve his education.

A remarkable memory also helped him to finish with high school before he was sixteen. He went on to Columbia University, resolved to become a chemist rather than follow the medical career his father had in mind for him. But it was not long before he was trying to make out as a science fiction writer, along with other founder members of the Futurian Science Literary Society of New York, among them up-and-coming editors Donald A Wollheim, Robert W Lowndes and Frederik Pohl.

Brimful of confidence, he submitted his early efforts—in person—to *Astounding* editor John W Campbell, who mingled his regrets with great expectations which Asimov duly fulfilled. But his first appearance, in 1939, was in *Amazing Stories* with *Marooned off Vesta,* a space-travel tale with a plot depending on a simple principle of chemistry. It was closely followed by *The Weapon Too Dreadful to Use,* in which he approached some of the moral aspects of interplanetary exploration to which he was to give further thought.

His first *Astounding* story, *Trends,* posed a situation in which space-travel might be retarded even when it became feasible. But Asimov was only one of Campbell's bright new company and he made no immediate impact. His first conspicuous success was in *Astonishing Stories,* a new magazine which had launched Frederik Pohl on his editorial career. *Half-Breed,* which told how 'Tweenies,' of mixed Terran-Martian blood, fought for recognition before migrating to Venus, was popular enough to justify a sequel. It between came *The Callistan Menace,* which escaped the fate of several other rejects that might otherwise have been resurrected in *The Early Asimov, or Eleven Years of Trying* (1972).

With new titles mushrooming on all sides, he had little difficulty in finding openings for his stories, which he was soon producing with a fluency he has maintained ever since. It was in *Super Science Stories,* also edited by Pohl, that the first of his robot tales appeared in 1940. Previously rejected by Campbell, *Strange Playfellow* passed almost unnoticed. But *Reason,* which marked his third appearance in *Astounding,* actually led off the series for which Campbell himself drew up, for Asimov's guidance, the now-famous Three Laws purporting to govern the behaviour of robots towards human beings.

And it was Campbell who, with a quotation from Emerson, prompted Asimov to write the story which finally made his reputation. *Nightfall,* which depicted the psychological effect of an eclipse on a world plunged into darkness only once every two thousand years, remains his masterpiece and one of the finest examples of modern science fiction ever conceived.

After that the name of Asimov ranked with those of *Astounding*'s leading contributors in the years when it was attaining to new heights of excellence. Prominent among these was Robert A Heinlein, who in 1942 helped him to secure a post in the US naval aircraft laboratories in Philadelphia. Weeks later Asimov married his first wife, Gertrude, of whom he later observed: 'She neither reads what I write nor offers advice, nor in any way . . . guides my professional life. Around the house, it's another matter.' Before they parted after thirty years, they had two children.

Next to his interest in science, Asimov was fascinated by history. It was his reading of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* that gave him the idea for a story about a new galactic empire emerging from the ruins of an earlier one. The notion appealed to Campbell so strongly that he urged him to make it a series which began in 1942 and stretched over seven years before being published in three volumes during 1951-53. Among the main stories in the series were *Foundation* (1942), *Bridle and Saddle* (1942), *The Big and the Little* (1944), *The Mule* (1945), and . . . *And Now You Don't* (1949).

Years later, in 1966, Asimov was given his second Hugo Award for having contributed 'the best all-time series' to science fiction, which some commentators consider to have been given an entirely new direction by the *Foundation Trilogy*. The vast setting, spanning centuries of future history, also formed the backdrop for three later novels: *Pebble in the Sky* (1950), *The Stars, Like Dust* (1951), serialised by *Galaxy* as *Tyrann,* and *The Currents of Space* (1952), serialised by *Astounding*. These were combined in 1961 in a volume titled *Triangle,* later published here as the *Isaac Asimov Second Omnibus*.

Associated with the series, too, is *The End of Eternity* (1955), reputedly the novel which gave Asimov the most pleasure in the writing. Rejected by the magazines, it tells how time-travellers changed the past to enable man to conquer the whole galaxy of worlds before they could be dominated by alien races. It is this prime concern with 'the interplay of human against human' rather than with encounters between men and monsters that makes the *Foundation* stories so engrossing.

Asimov's first hardback novel, *Pebble in the Sky*—also spurned by the magazines in its original form—appeared at a time when leading publishers were recognising the scope for science fiction. It received good reviews and was soon in paperback; so, with his reputation enhanced, he continued to produce full-length novels which the magazines were happy to serialise. *The Caves of Steel* (1954) was featured by *Galaxy* after editor HL Gold had suggested how the author might develop the idea of a robot detective while extrapolating on the theme of overpopulation—a menace with which, as a biochemist, he is as genuinely concerned as he is with the problem of planetary pollution.

The Naked Sun (1957), previously serialised by *Astounding,* continued the exploits of sleuth Elijah Baley and his android partner. Introduction of the detective story element into science fiction is another innovation with which Asimov has been credited; and how ingeniously he has worked this vein is evident from the collection of *Asimov's Mysteries* (1968) culled from *Fantasy and Science Fiction* and other magazines. His mystery novel, *The Death Dealers,* first published in paperback in 1958, was reissued in hardback ten years later retitled *A Whiff of Death.*

For more than twenty years young readers have been following the escapades of *David Starr, Space Ranger,* better-known to them as *Lucky Starr.* After he had made his bow in 1952, his further explorations were recorded in five volumes until 1958, since when they have been presented in various forms. Recent editions do not hide the fact that the author is Isaac Asimov, though previously the stories were by-lined Paul French. It is on record that the sole reason for the pseudonym was the author's hope that they might be adapted for television—coupled with the fear that the outcome might not be entirely to his liking.

A short spell in the Army interrupted Asimov's studies before he gained his doctorate in 1949 and qualified as instructor in biochemistry at Boston University School of Medicine, where he became associate professor in 1955, doing research in nucleic acid. By then his writings had become so popular that he was being acclaimed by the fans as a genius in the genre. Increasingly, however, the pressures of his chemical researches conflicted with his aspirations towards more useful literary work, and in 1958 he retired to full-time authorship while retaining his connection with the university.

So he came to extend his now impressive list of popular science books, several of which derive from the scores of articles he has contributed to magazines, from *Astounding* to *Intellectual Digest,* not excluding the *Ladies' Home Journal*. Among more than seventy titles he has piled up since 1952 are *The Wellsprings of Life* (1960), *Is Anyone There?* (1967), *The Stars in Their Courses* (1971) and *The Tragedy of the Moon* (1974).

Among a shelf-full of anthologies which Asimov has edited are the two volumes of *The Hugo Winners* (1962, 1971). It was in 1963 that he received his first Hugo Award 'for putting the science in science fiction'. In another anthology, *Where Do We Go From Here?* (1971), he examines the scientific validity of a selection of tales by leading writers—including himself—and sets questions to lure the reader towards further enlightenment. Repeatedly in his essays he contends that science fiction is important to the advancement of science, and he cites his own case as an instance of how it can influence the choice of a career.

Producing some six books a year, Asimov found little time or excuse to add to his own fiction, which continued to sell in several languages through the 1960s. Sales were boosted by the appearance of his best-known novel, *Fantastic Voyage* (1966), which was based on the successful film; contrary to the general impression, he did not write the original screenplay. Many of his stories were dramatised on radio and television. On this side, *The Caves of Steel* and *The Naked Sun* were included with others in the BBC TV series *Out of the Unknown*. And an even greater acknowledgment of his popular appeal was afforded when the BBC presented a radio version of the *Foundation Trilogy* in eight hour-long instalments in 1973.

The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction marked its seventeenth anniversary by dedicating its October 1966 issue to Asimov, who contributed a new story featuring his extraterrologist detective Dr Wendell Urth. More recently he has made occasional appearances in other magazines; but not until 1972 did a new novel emerge from his two electric typewriters. *The Gods Themselves,* an amalgam of three stories published earlier in *Galaxy* and *If,* pointed to the dangers inherent in scientific 'progress' and carried off a Nebula Award—by vote of his fellow Science Fiction Writers of America—as well as another Hugo.

The total of his bound volumes was nearing the 150-mark when Asimov made his first visit to this country in June last year, taking the precaution to travel by sea—he does not trust airplanes. Accompanied by his second wife, Dr Janet Jepson, whom he married in 1973, he hustled through a full week's programme during which he was installed as an honorary vice-president of International Mensa, mingled with admiring fans in London and Birmingham, and gave three chatty lectures.

Any day now, there could be a book about it . . .

THE STORIES OF ISAAC ASIMOV

These are listed in chronological order as published in the UK. Dates in brackets indicate USA publication. Paperback editions (pb) are included only where there was no previous hardcover edition. Titles published only in the USA and the *Lucky Starr* series (see above) have been omitted.

Novels and connected stories:

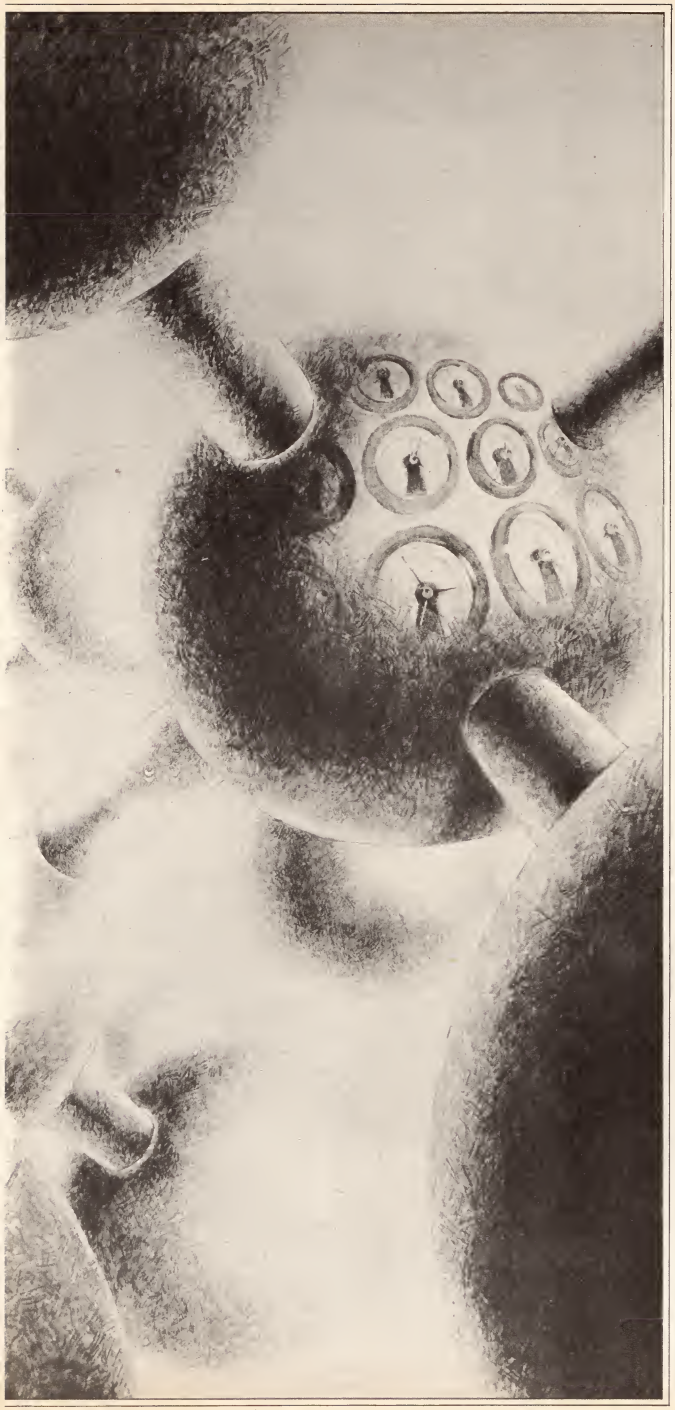
1952 (1950): I, Robot. **1953 (1951):** Foundation. **1954 (1954):** The Caves of Steel. **1955 (1952):** The Currents of Space. **1958 pb (1950):** Pebble in the Sky. **1958 pb (1951):** The Stars, Like Dust. **1958 pb (1953):** Second Foundation. **1958 (1957):** The Naked Sun. **1959 pb (1955):** The End of Eternity. **1962 pb (1952):** Foundation and Empire. **1966 (1966 pb):** Fantastic Voyage. **1967 (1964):** The Rest of the Robots (including *The Caves of Steel* and *The Naked Sun*). **1972 (1972):** The Gods Themselves.

Short story collections:

1960 pb (1957): Earth is Room Enough. **1963 (1959):** Nine Tomorrows. **1964 (1955):** The Martian Way and Other Stories. **1967 pb:** Through a Glass, Clearly. **1968 (1968):** Asimov's Mysteries. **1970 (1969):** Nightfall and Other Stories. **1973 (1972):** The Early Asimov. **1973:** The Best of Isaac Asimov.

Omnibus editions:

1966 (1963): An Isaac Asimov Omnibus (The Foundation Trilogy). **1969 (1959):** A Second Isaac Asimov Omnibus (Triangle).



Lucinda Cowell

The Pause

By Isaac Asimov

The white powder was confined within a thin-walled, transparent capsule. The capsule in turn was heat-sealed into a double strip of parafilm. Along that strip of parafilm were other capsules at six-inch intervals.

The strip moved. Each capsule in the course of events rested for one minute in a metal jaw immediately beneath a mica window. On another portion of the face of the radiation counter a number clicked out upon an unrolling cylinder of paper. The capsule moved on; the next took its place.

The number printed at 1.45 pm was 308. A minute later, 256 appeared. A minute later, 391. A minute later, 477. A minute later, 202. A minute later, 251. A minute later, 000. A minute later, 000. A minute later, 000. A minute later, 000.

Shortly after 2.00 pm Mr Alexander Johannison passed by the counter and the corner of one eye stubbed itself over the row of figures. Two steps past the counter he stopped and returned.

He ran the paper cylinder backward, then restored its position and said, 'Nuts!'

He said it with vehemence. He was tall and thin, with big-knuckled hands, sandy hair and light eyebrows. He looked tired and, at the moment, perplexed.

Gene Damelli wandered his way with the same easy carelessness he brought to all his actions. He was dark, hairy, and on the short side. His nose had once been broken and it made him look curiously unlike the popular conception of the nuclear physicist.

Damelli said, 'My damned Geiger won't pick up a thing, and I'm not in the mood to go over the wiring. Got a cigarette?'

Johannison held out a pack. 'What about the others in the building?'

'I haven't tried them, but I guess they haven't all gone.'

'Why not? My counter isn't registering either.'

'No kidding. You see? All the money invested, too. It doesn't mean a thing. Let's step out for a coke.'

Johannison said with greater vehemence than he intended, 'No! I'm going to see George Duke. I want to see his machine. If *it's* off—'

Damelli tagged along. 'It won't be off, Alex. Don't be an ass.'

George Duke listened to Johannison and watched him disapprovingly over rimless glasses. He was an old-young man with little hair and less patience.

He said, 'I'm busy.'

'Too busy to tell me if your rig is working, for heaven's sake?'

Duke stood up. 'Oh, hell, when does a man have time to work around here?' His slide-rule fell with a thud over a scattering of ruled paper as he rounded his desk.

He stepped to a cluttered lab table and lifted the heavy grey leaden top from a heavier grey leaden container. He reached in with a two-foot long pair of tongs and took out a small silvery cylinder.

Duke said grimly, 'Stay where you are.'

Johannison didn't need the advice. He kept his distance. He had not been exposed to any abnormal dosage of radioactivity over the past month but there was no sense getting any closer than necessary to 'hot' cobalt.

Still using the tongs, and with arms held well away from his body. Duke brought the shining bit of metal that contained the concentrated radioactivity up to the window of his counter. At two feet, the counter should have chattered its head off. It didn't.
Duke said, 'Guk!' and let the cobalt container drop. He scrabbled madly for it and lifted it against the window again. Closer.
There was no sound. The dots of light on the scaler did not show. Numbers did not step up and up.
Johannison said, 'Not even background noise'.
Damelli said, 'Holy jumping Jupiter!'
Duke put the cobalt tube back into its leaden sheath, as gingerly as ever, and stood there, glaring.

Johannison burst into Bill Everard's office with Damelli at his heels. He spoke for excited minutes, his bony hands knuckly-white on Everard's shiny desk. Everard listened, his smooth, fresh-shaven cheeks turning pink and his plump neck bulging out a bit over his stiff, white collar.
Everard looked at Damelli and pointed a questioning thumb at Johannison. Damelli shrugged, bringing his hands forward, palms upward, and corrugating his forehead.
Everard said, 'I don't see how they can all go wrong.'
'They *have*, that's all,' insisted Johannison. 'They all went dead at about two o'clock. That's over an hour ago now and none of them is back in order. Even George Duke can't do anything about it. I'm telling you it isn't the counters.'
'You're saying it is.'
'I'm saying they're not working. But that's not their fault. There's nothing for them to work on.'
'What do you mean?'
'I mean there isn't any radioactivity in this place. In this whole building. Nowhere.'
'I don't believe you.'
'Listen, if a hot cobalt cartridge won't start up a counter, maybe there's something wrong with every counter we try. But when that same cartridge won't discharge a gold-leaf electroscope and when it won't even fog a photographic film, then there's something wrong with the cartridge.'
'All right,' said Everard, 'so it's a dud. Somebody made a mistake and never filled it.'
'The same cartridge was working this morning, but never mind that. Maybe cartridges can get switched somehow. But I got that hunk of pitchblende from our display box on the fourth floor and that doesn't register either. You're not going to tell me that someone forgot to put the uranium in it.'
Everard rubbed his ear. 'What do you think, Damelli?'
Damelli shook his head. 'I don't know, Boss. Wish I did.'
Johannison said, 'It's not the time for thinking. It's a time for doing. You've got to call Washington.'
'What about?' asked Everard.
'About the A-bomb supply.'
'What?'
'That might be the answer, Boss. Look, someone has figured out a way to stop radioactivity, all of it. It might be blanketing the country, the whole USA. If that's being done, it can only be to put our A-bombs out of commission. They don't know where we keep them, so they have to blank out the nation. And if *that's* right, it means an attack is due. Any minute, maybe. Use the phone, Boss!'
Everard's hand reached for the phone. His eyes and Johannison's met and locked.
He said into the mouthpiece, 'An outside call, please.'
It was five minutes to four, Everard put down the phone.
'Was that the Commissioner?' asked Johannison.
'Yes,' said Everard. He was frowning.
'All right. What did he say?'
' "Son," ' said Everard, 'he said to me, "What A-bombs?" '
Johannison looked bewildered, 'What the devil does he mean "What A-bombs?" I know! They've already found out they've got duds on their hands, and they won't talk. Not even to us. Now what?'
'Now nothing,' said Everard. He sat back in his chair and glowered at the physicist. 'Alex, I know the kind of strain you're under; so I'm not going to blow up about this. What bothers me is, how did you get *me* started on this nonsense.'
Johannison paled. 'This isn't nonsense. Did the Commissioner say it was?'
'He said I was a fool, and so I am. What the devil do you mean coming here with your stories about A-bombs? What *are* A-bombs? I never heard of them.'
'You never heard of atom bombs? What is this? A gag?'
'I never heard of them. It sounds like something from a comic strip.'
Johannison turned to Damelli, whose olive complexion had seemed to deepen with worry. 'Tell him, Gene'.
Damelli shook his head. 'Leave me out of this'.
'All right.' Johannison leaned forward, looking at the line of books in the shelves above Everard's head. 'I don't know what this is all about, but I can go along with it. Where's Glasstone?'
'Right there,' said Everard.
'No. Not the *Textbook of Physical Chemistry*. I want his *Source-book on Atomic Energy*.'
'Never heard of it.'
'What are you talking about? It's been here in your shelf since I've been here.'
'Never heard of it,' said Everard, stubbornly.
'I suppose you haven't heard of Kamen's *Radioactive Tracers in Biology* either?'
'No.'
Johannison shouted, 'All right. Let's use Glasstone's *Textbook* then. It will do.'
He brought down the thick book and flipped the pages. First once, then a second time. He frowned and looked at the copyright page. It said: Third Edition, 1956. He went through the first two chapters page by page. It was there, atomic structure, quantum numbers, electrons and their shells, transition series—but no radioactivity, nothing about that.
He turned to the table of elements on the inside front cover. It took him only a few seconds to see that there were only eighty-one listed, the eighty-one non-radioactive ones.
Johannison's throat felt bricky-dry. He said, huskily, to Everard, 'I suppose you never heard of uranium.'
'What's that?' asked Everard, coldly. 'A trade name?'
Desperately, Johannison dropped Glasstone and reached for the *Handbook of Chemistry and Physics*. He used the index. He looked up *Radioactive Series*, *Uranium*, *Plutonium*, *Isotopes*. He found only the last. With fumbling, jittery fingers, he turned to the table of isotopes. Just a glance. Only the stable isotopes were listed. He said, pleadingly, 'All right. I give up. Enough's enough. You've set up a bunch of fake books just to get a rise out of me, haven't you?' He tried to smile.
Everard stiffened. 'Don't be a fool, Johannison. You'd better go home. See a doctor.'
'There's nothing wrong with me.'
'You may not think so, but there is. You need a vacation, so take one. Damelli, do me a favour. Get him into a cab and see that he gets home.'
Johannison stood irresolute. Suddenly, he screamed, 'Then what are all the counters in this place for? What do they do?'
'I don't know what you mean by counters. If you mean computers, they're here to solve our problems for us.'
Johannison pointed to a plaque on the wall. 'All right, then. See those initials. A! E! C! Atomic! Energy! Commission!' He spaced the words, staccato.
Everard pointed in turn. 'Air! Experimental! Commission! Get him home, Damelli.'

Johannison turned to Damelli when they reached the sidewalk. Urgently, he whispered, 'Listen, Gene, don't be a set-up for that guy. Everard's sold out. They got to him someway. Imagine them setting up the faked books and trying to make me think I'm crazy.'
Damelli said, levelly, 'Cool down, Alex, boy. You're just jumping a little. Everard's all right.'
'You heard him. He never heard of A-bombs. Uranium's a trade name. How can he be all right?'
'If it comes to that, I never heard of A-bombs, *or* uranium.'
He lifted a finger. 'Taxi!' It whizzed by.
Johannison got rid of the gagging sensation. 'Gene! You were there when the counters quit. You were there when the pitchblende went dead. You came with me to Everard to get the thing straightened out.'
'If you want the straight truth, Alex, you said you had something to discuss with the Boss and you asked me to come along, and that's all I know about it. Nothing went wrong as far as I know and what the devil would we be doing with this pitchblende. We don't use any tar in the place.—Taxi!'
A cab drew up to the kerb.
Damelli opened the door, motioned Johannison in. Johannison entered, then, with red-eyed fury, turned, snatched the door out of Damelli's hand, slammed it closed, and shouted an address at the cab driver. He leaned out the window as the cab pulled away, leaving Damelli stranded and staring.
Johannison cried, 'Tell Everard it won't work. I'm wise to all of you.'
He fell back into the upholstery exhausted. He was sure Damelli had heard the address he gave. Would they get to the FBI first with some story about a nervous breakdown? Would they take Everard's word against his? They couldn't deny the stopping of the radioactivity. They couldn't deny the faked books.
But what was the good of it? An enemy attack was on its way and men like Everard and Damelli—How rotten with treason was the country?
He stiffened, suddenly. 'Driver!' he cried. Then louder, '*Driver!*'
The man at the wheel did not turn around. The traffic passed smoothly by them.
Johannison tried to struggle up from his seat, but his head was swimming.
'Driver!' he muttered. This wasn't the way to the FBI. He was being taken home. But how did the driver know where he lived?
A planted driver, of course. He could scarcely see and there was a roaring in his ears.
Lord, what organisation! There was no use fighting! He blacked out!

He was moving up the walk towards the small two-storey brick-fronted house in which Mercedes and he lived. He didn't remember getting out of the cab.
He turned. There was no taxicab in sight. Automatically, he felt for his wallet and keys. They were there. Nothing had been touched.
Mercedes was at the door, waiting. She didn't seem surprised at his return. He looked at his watch quickly. It was nearly an hour before his usual homecoming.
He said, 'Mercy, we've got to get out of here and—'
She said, huskily, 'I know all about it, Alex. Come in.'
She looked like heaven to him. Straight hair, a little on the blonde side, parted in the middle and drawn into a horse-tail: wide-set blue eyes with that slight Oriental tilt, full lips and little ears set close to the head. Johannison's eyes

devoured her.
But he could see she was doing her best to repress a certain tension.
He said, 'Did Everard call you? Or Damelli?'
She said, 'We have a visitor'.
Numbly, he stepped inside.
'In the living-room,' said Mercedes. A smile flashed momentarily across her face. 'I think it's all right.'

The visitor was standing. He had an unreal look about him, the unreality of perfection. His face and body were flawless and carefully devoid of individuality. He might have stepped off a billboard.
His voice had the cultured and unimpassioned sound of the professional radio announcer. It was entirely free of accent.
He said, 'It was quite troublesome getting you home, Dr Johannison.'
Johannison said, 'Whatever it is, whatever you want, I'm not co-operating.'
Mercedes broke in. 'No, Alex, you don't understand. We've been talking. He says all radioactivity has been stopped.'
'Yes, it has, and how I wish this collar-ad could tell me how it was done! Look here, you, are you an American?'
'You still don't understand, Alex,' said his wife. 'It's stopped all over the world. This man isn't from anywhere on Earth. Don't look at me like that, Alex. It's true. I know it's true. Look at him.'
The visitor smiled. It was a perfect smile. He said, 'This body in which I appear is carefully built up according to specification, but it is only matter. It's under complete control.' He held out a hand and the skin vanished. The muscles, the straight tendons and crooked veins were exposed. The walls of the veins disappeared and blood flowed smoothly without the necessity of containment. All dissolved to the appearance of smooth grey bone. That went also.
Then all reappeared.
Johannison muttered, 'Hypnotism!'
'Not at all,' said the visitor, calmly.
Johannison said, 'Where are you from?'
The visitor said, 'That's hard to explain. Does it matter?'
'I've got to understand what's going on,' cried Johannison. 'Can't you see that?'
'Yes. I can. It's why I'm here. At this moment, I am speaking to a hundred and more of your people all over your planet. In different bodies, of course, since different segments of your people have different preferences and stand- [illegible] appearance is concerned!'
[illegible]

Mercedes interrupted. 'He told me before you came that he was trying to cure us.'
'Who asked him?' muttered Johannison.
The visitor only smiled. He said, 'I was assigned the job a long time ago, but such illnesses are always hard to treat. For one thing, there is the difficulty in communication.'
'We're communicating,' said Johannison, stubbornly.
'Yes. In a manner of speaking, we are. I'm using your concepts, your code system. It's quite inadequate. I couldn't even explain to you the true nature of the disease of your species. By your concepts, the closest approach I can make is that it is a disease of the spirit.'
'Huh.'
'It's a kind of social ailment that is very ticklish to handle. That's why I've hesitated for so long to attempt a direct cure. It would be sad if, through accident, so gifted a potentiality as that of your race were lost to us. What I've tried to do for millennia has been to work indirectly through the few individuals in each generation who had natural immunity to the disease. Philosophers, moralists, warriors, and politicians. All those who had a glimpse of world brotherhood. All those who—'
'All right. You failed. Let it go at that. Now suppose you tell me about your people, not mine.'
'What can I tell you that you would understand?'
'Where are you from? Begin with that.'
'You have no proper concept. I'm not from anywhere in the yard.'
'What yard?'
'In the universe, I mean. I'm from outside the universe.'
Mercedes interrupted again, leaning forward. 'Alex, don't you see what he means? Suppose you landed on the New Guinea coast and talked to some natives through television somehow. I mean to natives who had never seen or heard of anyone outside their tribe. Could you explain how television worked or how it made it possible for you to speak to many men in many places at once? Could you explain that the image wasn't you yourself but merely an illusion that you could make disappear and reappear? You couldn't even explain where you came from if all the universe they knew was their own island.'
'Well, then, we're savages to him. Is that it?' demanded Johannison.
The visitor said, 'Your wife is being metaphorical. Let me finish. I can no longer try to encourage your society to cure itself. The disease has progressed too far. I am going to have to alter the temperamental make-up of the race.'
'How?'
'There are neither words nor concepts to explain that either. You must see that our control of physical matter is extensive. It was quite simple to stop all radioactivity. It was a little more difficult to see to it that all things, including books, now suited a world in which radioactivity did not exist. It was still more difficult, and took more time, to wipe out all thought of radioactivity from the minds of men. Right now, uranium does not exist on Earth. No one ever heard of it.'
'I have,' said Johannison. 'How about you, Mercy?'
'I remember, too,' said Mercedes.
'You two are omitted for a reason,' said the [illegible] a hundred others, men and [illegible]
[illegible] knowledge will not return, however. That is where you will come in. You and the others like you. You will re-educate the world gradually.'
'That's quite a job. It took fifty years to get us to this point. Even allowing for less the second time, why not simply restore knowledge? You can do that, can't you?'
'The operation,' said the visitor, 'will be a serious one. It will take anywhere up to a decade to make certain there are no complications. So we want re-education slowly, on purpose.'
Johannison said, 'How do we know when the time comes? I mean when the operation's over?'
The visitor smiled. 'When the time comes, you will know. Be assured of that.'
'Well, it's a hell of a thing, waiting five years for a gong to ring in your head. What if it never comes? What if your operation isn't successful?'
The visitor said, seriously, 'Let us hope that it is.'
'But if it isn't? Can't you clear our minds temporarily, too? Can't you let us live normally till it's time?'
'No. I'm sorry. I need your minds untouched. If the operation *is* a failure; if the cure does not work out, I will need a small reservoir of normal, untouched minds out of which to bring about the growth of a new population on this planet on whom a new variety of cure may be attempted. At all costs, your species must be preserved. It is valuable to us. It is why I am spending so much time trying to explain the situation to you. If I had left you as you were an hour ago, five days, let alone five years, would have completely ruined you.'
And without another word, he disappeared.

Mercedes went through the motions of preparing supper and they sat at the table almost as though it had been any other day.
Johannison said, 'Is it true? Is it all real?'
'I saw it, too,' said Mercedes, 'I heard it.'
'I went through my own books. They're all changed. When this—pause is over, we'll be working strictly from memory, all of us who are left. We'll have to build instruments again. It will take a long time to get it across to those who won't remember.' Suddenly he was angry, 'And what for, I want to know? What for?'
'Alex,' Mercedes began timidly, 'he may have been on Earth before and spoken to people. He's lived for thousands and thousands of years. Do you suppose he's what we've been thinking of for so long as—as—'
Johannison looked at her. 'As God? Is that what you're trying to say? How should I know? All I know is that his people, whatever they are, are infinitely more advanced than we, and that he's curing us of a disease.'
Mercedes said, 'Then I think of him as a doctor or what's equivalent to it in his society'.
'A doctor? All he kept saying was that the difficulty of communication was the big problem. What kind of a doctor can't communicate with his patients? A vet! An animal doctor!'
He pushed his plate away.
His wife said, 'Even so. If he brings an end to war—'
'Why should he want to? What are we to him? We're animals. We *are* animals to him. Literally. He as much as said so. When I asked him where he was from, he said he didn't come from the "yard" at all. Get it? He didn't come from the "universe" at all. His difficulty in communication gave him away. He used the concept for what our universe was to him rather than what it was to us. So the universe is a barnyard and we're—horses, chickens, sheep. Take your choice.'
Mercedes said softly, '"The Lord is my Shepherd. I shall not want."'
'Stop it, Mercy. That's a metaphor and this is reality. If he's a shepherd, then we're sheep with a queer unnatural desire, and ability, to kill one another. Why stop us?'
'He said—'
'I know what he said. He said we have great potentialities. We're very valuable. Right?'
'Yes.'
'But what are the potentialities and values of sheep to a shepherd? The sheep wouldn't have any idea. They couldn't. Maybe if they knew why they were coddled so, they'd prefer to live their own lives. They'd take their own chances with wolves or with themselves.'
Mercedes looked at him helplessly.
Johannison cried, 'It's what I keep asking myself now. Where are we going? Where are we going? Do sheep know? Do we know? Can we know?
They sat staring at their plates, not eating.
Outside, there was the noise of traffic and the calling of children at play. Night was falling and gradually it grew dark.

Alan Aldridge is the man behind the illustrations for *Butterfly Ball*. His style is distinctive and probably already familiar to you if you've seen either volume of *The Illustrated Beatles Lyrics*. His idea to revamp *The Grasshoppers' Feast and The Butterfly Ball* has provided us with an opportunity to present his artwork to you and enabled Roger Glover to make an album on the same theme. In this interview Roger Glover explains how the idea evolved.

An Illustrated Fantasy

BY JULIE DAVIS

Roger Glover is perhaps better-known to you as former bass-guitarist with Deep Purple. Since his departure from the group he has been devoting a lot of time to song writing and has now produced an album called *Butterfly Ball*. That name might ring a few bells with you if you remember back to 1973 when the book with William Plomer's verse and Alan Aldridge's illustrations first appeared. It was an enormous success and the publishers wanted to take the idea further, so the album is just one of the off-shoots from the original idea; also planned is an animated film, possibly developing into a TV series and a stage musical.

Alan Aldridge, the illustrator probably best-known for his illustrations of the Beatles lyrics, is the instigator of the idea and he in turn was inspired by William Roscoe. In 1807 this author/poet published a book called *The Grasshoppers' Feast and The Butterfly Ball* and when Alan came across a copy he had the idea of providing illustrations for it. He went ahead and in his typical style produced frogs, foxes, caterpillars, etc, etc; he then asked William Plomer to provide some new verses based on the original theme and they came up with the book *The Butterfly Ball*.

The theme of the ball is sheer fantasy and tells of the one day in the year when all the animals lay down their stings, put aside their teeth and celebrate; it's a day of peace. Roger has followed this theme in the production of the album; although the lyrics are not the same verses as in the book, they came from Roger's pen as did the music.

The Butterfly Ball album, to those of you familiar with Deep Purple, is a totally new departure for Roger; he explains this in terms of why he left the group:

'Deep Purple were incredibly successful, especially in America, in fact in 1973 we out-sold everyone including the Beatles and Frank Sinatra; we sold more albums than any other individual or unit. The paradox is that as a band we were very jaded because this enormous amount of success came well after we were fresh. When I first joined the band in 1969 it was a great band, bubbling with enthusiasm and producing fresh and original music. Gradually over the next five years we made it, first in Europe and then in America, but it was at that point that I decided to leave the band. I didn't want to stagnate too much just for the sake of making money. The band has been very good to me, I made a lot of money by it but I reached the stage where I considered it was doing me no good creatively, so I left. That's coupled with the fact that we were working very hard and I never had a chance to see my home.

'But *Butterfly Ball* has rejuvenated me. I started writing songs when I left Deep Purple, they were good but they weren't really what I left the band to do. *Butterfly* was a project. I had to write not only with a view to characterising in musical terms what Alan had characterised in artistic terms, but I also had to project those characters in such a way that they would become visual if the plans for producing a film are realised. So the music had to be strong in a live sense and fairly jolly and fairly all-embracing. There's no single style in the whole thing; it's close to the Beatles in many respects, and I consider the Beatles to be the one musical force that reached most people. I wanted music that would reach as many people as possible, so there are similarities at times. It's not a heavy album, it's not a jazz album, it's not a classical album, it's a music album.'

The idea of an album with a theme and with a number of singers playing different parts obviously brings to mind the Who's *Tommy*, but Roger has deliberately tried to avoid using big names on the album. So you won't find Pete Townshend, Rod Stewart or Maggie Bell but you will find a number of very good session singers whose voices are surprisingly familiar. Roger's criteria for selecting singers go like this:

'I tried to imagine what kind of singer should sing each character's part by just listening to the music and looking at the book, then I went out to find them. I didn't want famous people because they take it over and their character becomes too strong.'

Jimmy Helms and Eddie Hardin are both on the album along with the two new singers with Deep Purple. The main part is that of the frog and this is played by an American singer from a band called Elf which Roger produces. Roger was looking for character rather than good technical ability, as he says:

'The singers aren't selling points, I want the album to be its own selling point.'

SCIENCE FICTION
NEW ENGLISH LIBRARY MONTHLY

M J Parry

Conducted by THOMAS SHERIDAN

READERS' questions on any aspect of science fiction are dealt with in this feature. Send them to THE QUERY BOX, *Science Fiction Monthly,* New English Library Ltd, Barnard's Inn, Holborn, London EC1N 2JR. They will be answered as soon as possible

THE QUERY BOX

KANE, KULL AND CONAN
Can you tell me something about the author Robert E Howard? Have any of his books been published in Britain?
James Savage, Newtownards, Co Down, NI

Robert Ervin Howard (born 1906) was an American writer for the pulp magazines of forty to fifty years ago who was best-known for his contributions to *Weird Tales*, especially his stories of Conan the Cimmerian, a picturesque barbarian character who has become a cult figure. These tales are set in the prehistoric world of the so-called Hyborian Age, for which Howard fashioned an elaborate pseudo-history and geography.

Conan's bloody encounters with his natural and supernatural foes, as he battled his way to the throne of the kingdom of Aquilonia, were told in a series of fast-moving stories of which eighteen were published before Howard's tragic death—he shot himself in the Texas desert when his mother died in 1936. Years afterwards, several unfinished pieces were edited for publication by L Sprague de Camp and Lin Carter, and a Hyborian Legion was formed by Howard's fans.

Howard also wrote stories about Solomon Kane, a dour African adventurer, and King Kull, an exile from Atlantis who rose to power in the elder world—and served as a model for Conan. His interplanetary novel, *Almuric*, first serialised in 1939, was revived as an Ace paperback in 1964.

The Kull stories are assembled in *King Kull* (Lancer, New York, 1967). The Conan tales are available in this country in a series of ten Sphere paperbacks dating from 1973. Titles include *Conan the Adventurer, Conan the Conqueror, Conan the Usurper,* and *Conan of the Isles.*

PRIZES FOR PROFESSIONALS
What exactly are the Hugo and Nebula Awards and where could I obtain lists of the winners?
Christopher Johnson, Hertford.

The Hugo Awards are bestowed by the fans attending the World Science Fiction Convention for various achievements in the field. Details were given in this column in *SFM Vol 2 No 2.*

The Nebula Awards are given by professional writers to members of their organisation—Science Fiction Writers of America—for what they consider the best literary accomplishments of each year. They were first presented in 1966 for the best products of 1965—to Frank Herbert for his novel *Dune* (it also tied for a Hugo); to Brian Aldiss and Roger Zelazny for the best novellas, and to Harlan Ellison for the best short story. Zelazny also scored with the best novelette (but don't ask me how that differs from a novella).

Runners-up are included in a 'Roll of Honour' and all the prizes excepting the novel are presented in the annual *Nebula Award Stories*, published in New York by Doubleday and in the UK by Gollancz (paperbacks, NEL and Panther). Each volume has a different editor and carries a listing of the main awards to date.

The trophies are handsomely made in the form of a glittering spiral nebula embedded with a piece of rock crystal in a block of clear lucite. They were designed by the wife of James Blish from a sketch by Kate Wilhelm.

STRANGE FISH
Is Kilgore Trout an actual author or only a figment of Kurt Vonnegut's imagination—or a bit of both?
T Wallis, Horfield, Bristol

It is doubtful if Vonnegut had any living writer specifically in mind when he invented his now-famous character for his novel, *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969). Or, rather, enlarged on him; for he was actually conceived in *God Bless You, Mr Rosewater* (1965), in which Mr R attends the Milford (Pennsylvania) Science Fiction Writers' Conference, an actual event organised by Damon Knight, founder of the SFWA (see previous column).

At least, Professor Willis E McNelly of California State College, who has made a careful study of Vonnegut's work, refers to Trout as 'hypothetical'. And though I fancied I could detect traces of at least three actual writers in the character, the fact that he is so unsuccessful puts them all out of court.

It is much more likely that Vonnegut has employed the usual devices of authorship, building his characters out of actual people he has known and sometimes adapting their names—even to the extent of calling one of them, the American Nazi hero of *Mother Night* (1961), Howard W Campbell, Jr!

TREK MANIA
Having read *The Making of Star Trek,* I'd like to know if there are any other books about the television series?
S Penfold, Baldock, Herts

With fan clubs and conventions still going strong in the USA and mounting steadily elsewhere, the answer must be in the affirmative. *The World of Star Trek*, by David Gerrold, uses 276 pages of text and 64 pages of photos to supplement *The Making of Star Trek*, by Stephen E Whitfield and Gene Roddenberry, which has been selling since 1968.

Required reading for aspiring TV scriptwriters as well as *Trek* addicts is *The Trouble with Tribbles*, Gerrold's own account of the development of the script he did for the series in 1967 which launched him on his meteoric career as a science fiction writer. Then there's *Star Trek Log 1* and *Star Trek Log 2*, each containing three adaptations by Alan Dean Foster from the current cartoon series. And probably more in the pipeline—all from Ballantine, New York.

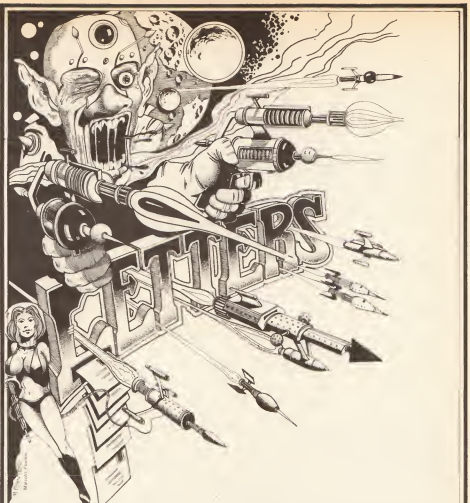
RHODAN—VIA ACKERMAN
Could you tell me what you know about the *Perry Rhodan* series; where can I buy any books or magazines based on this character?
G J Lewis, Swansea, Glamorgan

As you may know, *Perry Rhodan* originated in Germany and now has hundreds of thousands of fans all over the world. In the USA his adventures are published by Ace Books at the rate of two a month; the volumes include some short stories and a letter-column, just like a magazine. The editor is old-time science fiction fan Forrest J Ackerman, whose German-born ex-wife Wendayne translates the stories of Kurt Mahr and his collaborators.

Here, to date, four titles have been published by Orbit and Futura: *Enterprise Stardust, The Radiant Dome, Galactic Alarm,* and *Invasion from Space*. But watch out for *The Vega Sector*!

CINEMAGIC
Where can I get information about the special effects used in making science fiction films and TV plays?
Ross Mathieson, Preston, Lancashire

Consult John Brosnan's *Movie Magic,* published last December by Macdonald. And if you want to go into the history of the subject, there's a serious study by Paul Hammond on the pioneer screen trickster, *Marvellous Méliès*, available from Fraser in both hardcover and paperback.



. . . and after the holocaust a crazed cadaverous figure picked its way painfully over the blasted urban landscape. Madness flickered in its reddened eyes as its hands scrabbled frantically through the rubble searching for The Definition of Science Fiction.

Congratulations to K.J. Ward on an excellent contribution to the 'Yes, but what is it?' saga *(SFM Vol. 2 No. 1).* I'd like to venture my own views on the subject and to add weight to my opinions I quote H Dumpty, the renowned Victorian semanticist.

"When I used a word," Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less."

"The question," said Alice, "is whether you can make words mean different things."

"The question," said Humpty Dumpty, "is which is to be master—that's all."

So all you've got to do is call it Science Fiction and it is Science Fiction. Easy, isn't it? And anyway there's a nasty rumour going about to the effect that once the Nine Billion Definitions of Science Fiction are completed, the sky's going to fall on our heads.

George Stone (Watford, Herts)

I have bought your fine magazine since the first issue and enjoyed every one. Lately though, I have deplored the space you are giving to these 'Fandom' people. If this trend is to continue I will cease to buy your magazine.

I want to read good sf and not features about this lunatic fringe who have latched on to sf. They are a minority of your readership anyway and gave sf a bad name years ago.

Let the good sf and fine artwork continue please. That's what I buy your magazine for.

P Kingsbury (Sunderland)

I really must complain about the short story competition winner *Time & Again* by David James (SFM Vol 1 No 12). Apart from the hackneyed nature of the story in general, the closed time-loop idea was used in the story *Vicious Circle* by Alan Harley in *SFM Vol 1 No 2.* Not only that, the time-loop isn't even valid in *Time & Again.*

In *Vicious Circle* the protagonist is shot off into time *without* his craft because he has forgotten to replace an impulse cell in the ignition circuit, but in *Time & Again* Charlie puts on the helmet of the time machine, sets the controls to go back five minutes and presses the button. He is returned to the precise point in time and space which he had been occupying five minutes earlier, but without the time machine. This is still on the table and switched off. Yet, when the salesman demonstrated the machine he travelled with the machine firmly attached to his skull.

Admittedly David James was aiming at the closed time-loop ending, but a time travel story must be consistent or the whole thing collapses.

J Blackburn (Deighton, Huddersfield)

Winners of Crossword Competition No. 4

Science Fiction Monthly Vol. 2 No. 1 featured the fourth sf crossword competition and offered as prizes three copies of *The Eyes of Heisenberg* by Frank Herbert. The winners are the authors of the first three correct entries pulled out of the post bag and are as follow:

Richard Z. Schramm, 1 Shamrock Close, Tollesbury, Essex; H Olsen, 15 Stoddart Street, South Shields, Tyne and Wear, NE34 0JT; and Ian Covell, 2 Copgrove Close, Berwick Hills, Middlesbrough, Cleveland.

Solution
Across: 1 Count Brass. 4 John. 7 Verne. 10 Vogt. 12 Apogee. 14 Orc. 16 Anabolism. 17 Per. 18 ESP. 20 Amity. 21 Specter. 22 Las. 23 Into. 24 Idem. 28 UFO. 29 Tycho. 30 Era. 31 Ria. 32 Draco. 33 Tenn. 34 Early. 35 Carnell. 37 System. 38 Galactic.
Down: 1 Charles L. Harness. 2 The Pastel City. 3 Ring of Ritornel. 5 Octopi. 6 Norman. 7 Van. 8 Rob. 9 Eel. 11 Scry. 13 Eighteen. 15 Retief. 16 Apes. 19 Spa. 25 Dumarest. 26 Monobloc. 27 Radar. 29 Taurus. 36 All.

'In its mind it has an image of my master which it matches at once from its memory. It is a double image, a double memory, which persists all the time it struggles. Its parallel of my master has the rows of stinging tentacles, but is green and purple. Its parallel of myself is orange with a white stripe and moves between the tentacles without injury. These memory creatures seem to be immersed in water'

CLOWN FISH & ANEMONE

BY CHRIS MORGAN

Brent Armstrong

I squat on the top of a grey hill, beside my master, ready to display myself. I look around carefully, but in all that drab terrain there are few living things to be seen. Although it is midday and very clear, enabling me to make out the low hills on the other side of the valley and higher ground beyond, no animals stir, for it is too hot.

Along the slowly-descending ridge, a little way below the summit where we are, I can sense a family of small furry mammals in their burrow: being nocturnal, they sleep. Also, there are insects. A few are visible, fluttering here and there, or flying speedily past on quicksilver wings which part the air with a buzz and a blur. Many more insects are audible and doubtless more again crawl silently, but none of these possess sufficient mentality for me to sense them. This is of no consequence for insects are, along with the furry nocturnals, too small to be worth the trouble.

I look up into the air, scanning the hemisphere of purple sky sector by sector for the large birds which I know are hovering there. Half-invisible against the glare of the sun, a speck drifts, but the range is too great. Again I search the valley with my eyes, trying to identify the giant reptiles as they lie almost entirely submerged in the slow-moving waters of the river. Later in the day, when it is cooler, they will come out and climb the hillsides to hunt for food, each stirring up the dust with six massive legs until its wet hide is totally covered and blends with the greyish background. I can sense thirty-one of the reptiles. Perhaps one will see me and climb this hill.

'Still it descends, not quite overhead. Above its fiery part it shines silver with reflected light. Its body is tall, slender and pointed and it has no wings. It is neither bird nor insect'

I realise that during my introspection I have allowed the sunward side of my body to overheat. So I invert myself, letting the sun's rays fall on my cool areas, which are now blue, while shielding my hot, fully-energised parts, which are now a bright red. Only my legs and my narrow, greenish, equatorial ring are not

sunlight-responsive. At once the bright redness starts to dim.

It is time for refreshment. I extrude four limbs, move to my master's flank and reach inside, imbibing a carefully prescribed quantity of liquid. I walk around my master's quiescent form, raising only minute amounts of dust. This manoeuvre is simple because the sun is at its zenith and I do not have to revolve to allow for any degree of inclination. I return to my original position and survey the valley, hills and sky. Nothing has altered.

I wait.

Looking again at the sky I see a bird, far up but almost overhead. Instead of being black against the sun's flare of brilliance it shines with its own seed of light. An unusual bird. Slowly it descends and I hear its deep-throated call. An exceedingly noisy bird. It descends further, its seed of light growing, coming into a fiery bloom such as no bird I know can produce. Its thunder shakes the ground, drowning all other sound. Clouds of insects, alarmed, take to the wing. In the river thirty-one reptiles move uneasily, rippling the water. Closer, six furry mammals shiver in terror. Even my master stirs . . .

Still it descends, not quite overhead. Above its fiery part it shines silver with reflected light. Its body is tall, slender and pointed *and it has no wings*. It is neither bird nor insect. Standing upright it floats down towards a riverside meadow. It is very large. Long before it touches the ground it throws up dust. Small birds rise from beneath it, scattering. Two fly the wrong way in their haste, are caught by the flames and flare up briefly. Several of the submerged reptiles swim downstream, away from the disturbance, their hooded eyes alone protruding above the surface of the water.

I realise that a circular area covering half of the meadow has been blackened by the flame. The silvery part of it touches the ground and the flame is suddenly extinguished. With it, the terrible roar of sound dies away and silence returns: it is a more complete silence than before; it is a hiatus during which the insects and birds are recovering their voices.

I watch this thing of silver, puzzled. I see that it has extended four short, stiff legs from close to its base, which keep it balanced, its point towards the sky. It is a creature completely new in my experience. From my observation I can glean no indication of its reason for coming here, of its capabilities or of its likely behaviour. I can sense nothing from it. I cannot classify it as I can all other living things. I am perturbed.

Even as my eyes are fixed upon it, the creature moves, a hole opening in its side. A bright yellow thing of irregular shape emerges, lowers itself to the ground by some means which I see but do not comprehend, and moves away slowly. This yellow thing travels jerkily on two limbs: it is a separate creature from the silver one. I arrive at this conclusion because there seems no alternative, not from any previous knowledge.

Now I sense it. The yellow creature's mental aura is amazingly strong and vibrant, pulsing with thoughts on a number of different levels simultaneously. Its thought patterns are complex but also they are different, strange, almost meaningless to me. I do not think the creature can sense the probing of my mind; even so, I am a little frightened of it. I withdraw.

I watch as the yellow one moves without pausing to the edge of the blackened area. There it stops and bends, letting its highest part come much closer to the ground. With its two short limbs it breaks off the branch of a brown bush, inserting this into itself. Presumably it is feeding.

It moves onto other types of vegetation, taking a portion of each. Staying just outside the burnt area it walks in a circle, carrying leaves and branches with it. Now it returns to its silver companion, disappearing inside. I reach out for its mind but cannot sense it.

I try to work out the implications of the presence of these two creatures. The yellow one is only a little smaller than the reptiles; it will make a good meal for my master. The silver creature is much larger, perhaps too large, and it has a fearsome flame, a terrible voice. I reason that if I entice either of them to this hill, so that my master can feed on it, the other will follow, for they have a close relationship. *They* are two dissimilar creatures, yet have a close relationship. *They. We . . .*

A revelation comes to me: they are like my master and me. The yellow creature lives within its silver master, emerging to collect food. There are obvious differences, but the symbiotic dependence is clear enough.

The yellow one re-emerges, walking towards the river, and again I can sense the multi-layered complexity of its alien thoughts. It stops at the bank, looking around. Not far away there is a stirring among the reptiles. I sense this and am reminded of what poor, shallow mentalities they have in comparison to this yellow one.

It backs away from the bank. One reptile, hungrier or more stupid than its fellows, emerges from the water, although the sun is still half-high. The yellow creature moves slowly towards its master. The reptile follows, quickening its pace, stirring up dust. The yellow one also moves faster, then it reaches the edge of the burnt ground and stops. Its dark green hide dripping water, the reptile darts forwards, jaws agape. The yellow creature avoids this attack easily, its jerky, two-legged movements proving to be surprisingly quick. They are both very close to the silver master now, dodging in and out of its lengthening shadow.

There is a small burst of flame, this time from the yellow creature. The reptile is knocked backwards. It rolls over, so obviously dead that I do not bother to confirm this by sensing. Long arms extend themselves from the silver master. The reptile's body is drawn inside it. The yellow one follows.

In the heat of the middle afternoon I invert myself and settle down again to consider these events. I reason that the yellow one has lured and despatched its prey with practised ease. It seems not to possess my chromatic variety, nor my talent for sensing, yet despite these drawbacks its performance has been one I could not improve upon. It has obvious intelligence. When I display myself and lure it towards our hill it will be wary. It will be more demanding, more satisfying prey than birds or reptiles.

But why should I regard it as prey? This thought puzzles me more than anything else. All living things are prey, are potential food for my master, except the smallest of creatures, which I ignore. It has always been so. The only other exceptions have been our divided halves, on those rare occasions when my master and I have managed to synchronise our dividing times so as to produce an identical and viable symbiotic pair; and even then one pair has always moved away swiftly to find its own territory rather than risk a dispute. On those limited occasions there has been a truce, without thoughts of 'prey' or of 'food'.

And now a similar situation has arisen. The new creatures are clearly not of the same kind as either my master or myself, yet they enjoy a parallel relationship. I feel that we and they are somehow related if only through a common purpose and a high level of intelligence. Can such creatures, then, be prey? I am unable to decide. I need more facts, more evidence upon which to base my decision. Certainly, though, we cannot occupy the same small area.

I look down and see that the yellow one is emerging for the third time. Quickly I extrude my maximum number of limbs—twelve—and begin to dance about, turning round and over to display my colours to their best advantage. Against the grey hill I am blue, green, red, green, blue, green, red, green . . .

The yellow creature sees me and stops.

I turn once more (blue, green, red, green, blue) then stop.

It starts to walk in my direction. I begin my spinning dance again. Even while I am moving so fast I watch its approach, noting how it comes slowly towards me, seeing how easily its two legs propel it across the rocks and dusty scree. As it advances up the slope both its physical appearance and its thoughts become clearer.

In its mind are many images, superimposed, conflicting, ever-changing. Each thought is much briefer than those of other creatures, yet so much more sharp and colourful that I am able to recognise certain images. But mixed up with scenes of the present are memories, mostly so strange that they are meaningless to me. The yellow one is constantly relating the present to the past, comparing each new thing it sees with something old and familiar. My image it relates to a dim memory of a rounded object of many colours, spinning upon a pointed base and held up only by gyroscopic force. Apparently it does not notice my master. This is good.

The body of the yellow one is peculiar. It appears to use its two longer limbs exclusively for walking and its two shorter limbs for manipulation. The dome set on top of the body is presumably the head, though it has no eyes or orifices visible. Seen from behind, this dome is yellow, like the rest; seen from the front or side it appears to be at least partially reflective and of no fixed colour, like water. The closer the creature approaches, the more unusual this feature becomes; the sun shines on this dome but it has also the blackness of shadow about it.

I do not know how I should behave towards this creature. I have no experience to draw on. I have no plan. As an automatic reaction I gently stroke the synapses of my master, coaxing him into semi-awareness, alerting the muscles of his body for impending action. It is a precaution only: I have no intention at present of treating the yellow one as prey. I have no intentions at all at present.

Observing and sensing, I wait.

The distance between us diminishes; I see now that it is more than twice my height. A few body-lengths away it pauses and I halt my movement: we confront each other. Its brain patterns are changing faster than before, the images blurring so that I cannot identify them. But my view of the puzzling dome is improved. I am able to see inside it. More than ever it is like looking into water, for the dome is somehow transparent. Can there be a creature inside this yellow one in the same way that *it* is sometimes inside its master?

It comes forward by two limb-movements. Now two more. It is coming too close; I sidle backwards to a position alongside my master. I do not feel it to be threatening me, but it is very tall.

In its mind it is still comparing my image with those of its experience, flitting from one memory to another. My master's image appears

'I try to work out the implications of the presence of these two creatures. The yellow one is only a little smaller than the reptiles; it will make a good meal for my master'

in its mind now, but only as a shapeless grey mass which it does not appear to see as an entity, but as part of the hill.

Again it advances, and I retreat, positioning myself on the far side of my master from the yellow one. If only it would stop moving we could, perhaps, communicate. But with its limb-movement it brushes against my master.

I extend all my limbs and spin in an attempt to warn the yellow one, to drive it back, to save it—but I am too late. At that first touch my master's rows of tentacles have sprung up to envelope the creature and inject it with the venom at their tips. The yellow one struggles with all four of its limbs and almost breaks free. In its mind it has an image of my master which it matches at once from its memory. It is a double image, a double memory, which persists all the time it struggles. Its parallel of my master has the rows of stinging tentacles, but is green and purple. Its parallel of myself is orange with a white stripe and moves between the tentacles without injury. These memory-creatures seem to be immersed in water.

The yellow one disappears in the midst of my master's waving tentacles; the mental image is cut off. My master feeds.

The sun drops down; the shadows lengthen. I squat in my former position beside my master, inclining my body to catch the maximum amount of sunlight. I watch the river and the sky. There is no need, now, for me to lure a reptile up the hill. Not this day.

I wait.

It is morning. As the first rays of sun strike the hill's summit I stir myself and go to my master for refreshment. I reach inside but the liquid is different. There is little of it and the taste is strange.

Something is wrong. I try to sense what it is, but can sense nothing at all from my master's mind. That is what is wrong. My master is dead. I investigate the flaccid, unmoving tentacles. I find part of the yellow creature, not ingested. I find places inside my master which have been burnt by flame. I find pools of liquid where these should not be. There is no doubting it: my master is dead, killed by the yellow one even as he killed it.

Here I am, a servant with no master, squatting on the top of a grey hill. In the valley below, not far from the river, is the silver master. It is without a servant to lure food to it. I cannot sense its mind, but then I could not sense the mind of the yellow one when it was inside there.

I will go down into the valley and offer myself as servant to the silver master. Together we may survive.

'A shadow fell across the membra ledge. The pulsation stopped suddenly and he felt the loss, the cold and the sudden sense of fear. There were two tall strangers in the mouth of the cave. Bipeds with the power of motion. Not of this world'

Write-Off The Planet

by Ernest Hill

The moist air of the cave softened and soaked the tissues of his long, thumb-like body. His roots drew in the nourishing minerals from the rock face and he grew. One inch in thirty days. Thirty travel periods of the sun across the arch. Growing. Growing. Outwards and over. He had already outstripped the other membrons, hanging leech-like or extending themselves upwards, aiming for a distant mate. He moved towards the ring-shaped membra, plump round collars of peristaltic-rippling flesh, rising and falling, out and in, pulsating on the shelves and ledges where the sunlight passed steadily by day and the light of the two moons at night.

He did not know why he had chosen her, the one membra among a hundred others on the opposite of the cave. Every membron made his choice, sometimes near at hand, sometimes a few feet away on the same rock face, but rarely so far across the wide opening to the other side. There were many of his tribe already joined, quivering in a life of unremitting ecstasy, hooped over and drawn into the rippling collars of their mates. Others were growing as fast as the mineral salts became available, looping outwards, criss-crossing other loops. A tangled tracery of group yearning, impatient with the long years necessary for their growth.

Occasionally, very occasionally, they fought. Some membra, fickle or confused, turned the search-light of her magnetic magic from some slow-growing membron to another either faster or less far away. Never too near. Tribe did not mate with tribe. When they fought, it was in terrible, agonising turmoil, lasting sometimes for years as they grew, turning and twisting around each other until one, crushed and weeping in his conceptual being, succumbed and died.

He only knew that he loved her. Knew too that there was food enough in the rock face; that he was young and would reach her in time. He felt strongly, when the sun's rays passed over her, the agonising surge of her desire. He knew that she, three yards away, was his alone. That she would always be his. She would wait. Rippling. Opening and closing the pink bud collar of her love. How long would it be? One inch in thirty days in summer. Dormant in winter. Perhaps three years to the apex of the high cave arch. Another three down the archway to the other side. To the ledge of his beloved. Less if the rain years came. If it rained, the water would seep in, bringing food to his roots, the cave air would become moist and his skin would soften. He could, if his strength held out, lower the trajectory of his approach and shorten the distance, but this would require time to grow the muscle needed to sustain the span. It needed thought and care. Too flat an arc and he might sag and miss her altogether.

He gave up all previous thoughts about the infinite, the meaning of life, the significance of the yearning growth of entities in a cave. He concentrated all his being on extension, direction and his love for her. The shaft of sunlight entered the cave mouth on his own side, moved over the archway of the roof and travelled down to fall upon her ledge. She pulsated, radiated and he felt the drawing, clutching, tremulous appeal of her desire. A shiver passed up his stem, urging the tip onwards on its upward curve.

'Oh my love! The tender power that fondles, coaxes and elongates the substance of my being and draws me to my goal like misty rays rising to the sun! Wait, my beloved! The years will pass. The wide earth will turn around its glowing sun, tilting in the elliptical orbit of its path. The sunlight will be lower in winter when the angle of the tilt is more pronounced.'

He did not ask himself why or how it was he knew all this. How it came about that he, a sentient entity, rooted to a rock face near to a dank cave mouth, was fully aware of regular events outside the solid walls. He knew that there were other caves. Occasionally, although rarely, he felt the searching, wandering ripple of some lonely membra far away, pulsating in her shaft of light, calling, seeking a returning pulse of welcome that was deined her in some developed grotto where all available membrons were already safely paired.

He felt a deep sense of empathy with such lonely, random calls. He knew how he would feel if he should miss the ledge and dangle helplessly until the salts gave out and summer came, humidity lessened and, drying, he shrivelled slowly in his stalk and died.

A shadow fell across the membra ladge. The pulsation stopped suddenly and he felt the loss, the cold and the sudden sense of fear. There were two tall strangers in the mouth of the cave. Bipeds with the power of motion. Not of this world.

'There they are!' the Professor said. 'We call them membrons. Curious, don't you think?'

He felt the ripple of the sound waves, not in the air but through it, and he understood the message of the voice.

'Fungi?' the Colonel asked, without much interest.

They were covered in some insulating material not naturally occuring on any world, made by themselves by external processes. Even their heads were shrouded in transparent bowls, bowls that should have been their mates, but were not. They had no mates nor power of growth towards them. They were made of flesh, the upper part inside the bowls, and the hard external casing was similar in construction to his own body but the rest was different, coarser, fed by a circulating fluid and drawing its nourishment from a central sac. They were strong, strange, dangerous, the sensitivity of their membron-like upper material stunted by over-concentration upon movement; doing rather than thinking; dwelling on the immensity of life; living; feeling.

'No, not fungi. The characteristic of fungi is saprophytic feeding. These are plants with roots penetrating the porous rock.'

'And that is all we have on this planet?' the Colonel asked.

'As far as we have been able to ascertain—yes. Apart from these curious, pale plants, always near to the mouths of caves, there is no other form of life anywhere.'

'And no oxygen at all?'

'No, none. Only methane. One would not expect oxygen without vegetation of some sort.'

Oxygen was the air they needed for their survival. They had brought it with them in containers on their backs. The harsh vibrations he had heard were not their own voices. They had extraneous mouths cupped against their throats. The false mouths quivered like the voices of crying membra and yet the calling was not the same.

'So we can write it off? Not fit for colonisation. No minerals that are not readily available elsewhere?'

'Nothing to speak of. Only the membrons.'

'What's so special about these things? You said they were curious. They look like pale sticks of asparagus. Are they edible?'

'I've no idea. But they have a curious faculty.'

'What's that? Being able to live in an atmosphere of methane?'

'No. That is not unheard-of on other planets. What is fascinating about these plants is their ability to communicate.'

'Communicate? How do you mean, Prof? They can talk?'

'No. Not talk. But they can transmit certain information to each other.'

'You're not kidding?'

'Not at all. Allow me to demonstrate. You see that rather sturdy specimen over there? He will grow until he has reached one specific female. When he has done so, the tip of his stem will be drawn down into her orifice and they will exist by a mutual mingling of the rock salts from each other's roots.'

'I don't get the point about communicating, Prof.'

'I'm coming to that, Colonel. I should like your full attention for one small experiment. When I strike the male with this probe, I want you to observe the reaction both of all the other males and also of one specific female—the one this specimen will already have chosen as its intended mate.'

'Okay, Prof! I'm all attention!'

Arrrrh! the agony of the blow! The horror! The quivering of the flesh! The pain! The physical pain. The mental anguish in the knowledge that growth on one side is inhibited! How shall I reach her now? How shall I direct my path up and over the cave roof with a wounded side? My love! My love! My love is crying, pulsating, calling, calling, opening and closing her orifice. Glowing pink in all the inner fibres of her weeping, sentient core! I will still come, my love! It can be done! A crooked and tortuous path over the arch and a long curve around the wall! Years longer, but I will come. Wait, my love.

'You're durned right, Prof! The stem trembled like a live thing! And the other white stalks shivered like corn in the wind! All over the wall! I never saw a think like that before! How's it done?'

'I should very much like to know. My team and I have experimented in a number of caves but so far we have come to no positive conclusion. If there is contact, there must of course be a means of contact. One might look for a vibration, an ejection of spores, perhaps; even some sort of radar beam, like a bat. But even with the most sensitive equipment at our disposal we have been unable to trace any connection at all.'

'I didn't see any reaction from the females, Prof.'

'No. Neither did I. That is strange. In every cave, so far, where a male has been struck, one particular female in its vicinity has reacted violently. This chap appears to be a loner.'

'Prof! Some of the stems are quite long. There's one there joined up with a female a good yard away. Do you think the thing might be aiming at the other side of the cave?'

'Hardly likely, I should think. The nearest female on that wall is a good three yards away. I doubt any membron could grow that far in its life span.'

'It's worth another try, Prof!'

'Okay. We'll give it a whirl! Keep your eye on the other wall whilst I give it another bash!'

Arrrrh! It is the end, my love! My stem is broken. I can no longer control my growth. My beloved. My beloved. I can only hang uselessly and wait for death. Turn your beam from me, my beloved! There are other membrons on all the walls. There are others without mates. Do not fade out your light and wither! Live for me when the sun shines on your rock again!

'That's the one! Look, Prof! She's going out and in like a concertina! And get an eyeful of that too! She's going pink inside!'

'They do that, yes. Very interesting. I should like to give these phenomena a lot more study.'

'No time for that, I'm afraid, Prof. If we're writing this planet off, it's time we were moving on to the next one on the list.'

'Yes. Regrettably, we must be on our way. These things are only oddities, they have no importance in the terms of our mission. Just the same, I'll give it one more tap before we go. Now—that's odd!'

'The female didn't move at all that time. And her pink light's fading.'

'Not a single movement! Just a white collar of cold, gristle-like material. As if somehow, because the mate was struck, she turned herself off and died. But that's impossible.'

'Yes. Fanciful. It would be outside the bounds of reason. One would have to believe there was not only contact, but some bond . . . It is probably because the sun has moved on. I have noticed they are always more active when the sun shines.'

'It's not important, Prof. Our job is to look for more important things than telepathic plants.'

'Yes, you're right, Colonel. Let's get back to the ship.'

'Goodbye, my love. We shall live on together on some ledge or wall of time where the sun shines forever through a crevice in the eternal rock.

Hanging grotesquely from his anchoring roots, the membron died.


WHAT TH-
OOOF!
NOW WHAT NICK? ONE MINUTE WE'RE IN THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE AND THE NEXT..
LET'S TRY AND FIND OUT!
HERE'S THE ANSWER DIXIE, WHEREVER IT CAME FROM!
DRINK ME
NICK!! WE'RE SHRINKING!!
SOMEHOW, I THOUGHT WE WOULD!
HUH!
WRITTEN AND DRAWN BY WILLIAM POYNTER
K! THERE'S ARDEN — INDA WEIRD! HOW DO WE ET IN?
IT'S SEEN US!
IT'S MOVING.. IT'S COMING CLOSER...
TUNE IN NEXT MONTH!

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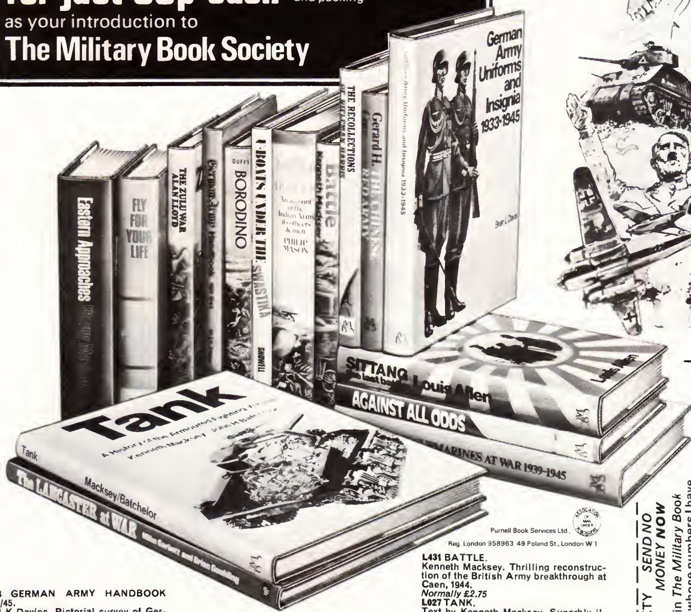

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4
THE SIZE OF THINGS
NICK NOVA AND DIXIE DRAKE AND THE MASSIVE NURSERY INTO WHICH THEY HAD CRASHED, HAVE BEEN SUCKED INTO A MICROSCOPIC GALAXY. FASTER AND FASTER THEY ARE DRAWN IN TOWARDS THE CENTRE. HAVING SEEN SEVERAL MANIFESTATIONS OF THEIR OWN ROCKET! THEY . . . .
NICK!!
DIXIE!
WHAT TH-
OOOF!
NOW WHAT NICK? ONE MINUTE WE'RE IN THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE AND THE NEXT . .
LET'S TRY AND FIND OUT!
NICK, HERE'S A TINY KEY
. . AND THIS LOOKS LIKE THE DOOR FOR IT!
NOW WHAT?
NICK! THERE'S A GARDEN — IT'S KINDA WEIRD! BUT HOW DO WE GET IN?
HERE'S THE ANSWER DIXIE, WHEREVER IT CAME FROM!
DRINK ME!
NICK!! WE'RE SHRINKING!!
SOMEHOW, I THOUGHT WE WOULD!
HUH!
WRITTEN AND DRAWN BY NIGEL DOUGLAS POYNTER
. . . IT'S SO UNREAL!
IT'S . . BEAUTIFUL, BUT ABSOLUTELY ASTONISHING!
SSHHH! I JUST HEARD . . .
LOOK!
SO . . WHAT NEXT? WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?
IT'S SEEN US!
IT'S MOVING . . IT'S COMING CLOSER . . .
NICK! WE'D BETTER GET OUTTA HERE!
SNAP!
MATCHES
TUNE IN NEXT MONTH!


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Brent Armstrong

devoured her.
But he could see she was doing her best to repress a certain tension.
He said, 'Did Everard call you? Or Damelli?'
She said, 'We have a visitor'.
Numbly, he stepped inside.
'In the living-room,' said Mercedes. A smile flashed momentarily across her face. 'I think it's all right.'

The visitor was standing. He had an unreal look about him, the unreality of perfection. His face and body were flawless and carefully devoid of individuality. He might have stepped off a billboard.
His voice had the cultured and unimpassioned sound of the professional radio announcer. It was entirely free of accent.
He said, 'It was quite troublesome getting you home, Dr Johannison.'
Johannison said, 'Whatever it is, whatever you want, I'm not co-operating.'
Mercedes broke in. 'No, Alex, you don't understand. We've been talking. He says all radioactivity has been stopped.'
'Yes, it has, and how I wish this collar-ad could tell me how it was done! Look here, you, are you an American?'
'You still don't understand, Alex,' said his wife. 'It's stopped all over the world. This man isn't from anywhere on Earth. Don't look at me like that, Alex. It's true. I know it's true. Look at him.'
The visitor smiled. It was a perfect smile. He said, 'This body in which I appear is carefully built up according to specification, but it is only matter. It's under complete control.' He held out a hand and the skin vanished. The muscles, the straight tendons and crooked veins were exposed. The walls of the veins disappeared and blood flowed smoothly without the necessity of containment. All dissolved to the appearance of smooth grey bone. That went also.
Then all reappeared.
Johannison muttered, 'Hypnotism!'
'Not at all,' said the visitor, calmly.
Johannison said, 'Where are you from?'
The visitor said, 'That's hard to explain. Does it matter?'
'I've got to understand what's going on,' cried Johannison. 'Can't you see that?'
'Yes. I can. It's why I'm here. At this moment, I am speaking to a hundred and more of your people all over your planet. In different bodies, of course, since different segments of your people have different preferences and standards as far as bodily appearance is concerned.' Fleetingly, Johannison wondered if he were mad after all. He said, 'Are you from—from Mars? Any place like that? Are you taking over? Is this war?'
'You see,' said the visitor, 'that sort of attitude is what we're trying to correct. Your people are sick, Dr Johannison, very sick. For tens of thousands of your years we have known that your particular species has great possibilities. It has been a great disappointment to us that your development has taken a pathological pathway, a destructive pathological pathway.' He shook his head.
Mercedes interrupted. 'He told me before you came that he was trying to cure us.'
'Who asked him?' muttered Johannison.
The visitor only smiled. He said, 'I was assigned the job a long time ago, but such illnesses are always hard to treat. For one thing, there is the difficulty in communication.'
'We're communicating,' said Johannison, stubbornly.
'Yes. In a manner of speaking, we are. I'm using your concepts, your code system. It's quite inadequate. I couldn't even explain to you the true nature of the disease of your species. By your concepts, the closest approach I can make is that it is a disease of the spirit.'
'Huh.'
'It's a kind of social ailment that is very ticklish to handle. That's why I've hesitated for so long to attempt a direct cure. It would be sad if, through accident, so gifted a potentiality as that of your race were lost to us. What I've tried to do for millennia has been to work indirectly through the few individuals in each generation who had natural immunity to the disease. Philosophers, moralists, warriors, and politicians. All those who had a glimpse of world brotherhood. All those who—'
'All right. You failed. Let it go at that. Now suppose you tell me about your people, not mine.'
'What can I tell you that you would understand?'
'Where are you from? Begin with that.'
'You have no proper concept. I'm not from anywhere in the yard.'
'What yard?'
'In the universe, I mean. I'm from outside the universe.'
Mercedes interrupted again, leaning forward. 'Alex, don't you see what he means? Suppose you landed on the New Guinea coast and talked to some natives through television somehow. I mean to natives who had never seen or heard of anyone outside their tribe. Could you explain how television worked or how it made it possible for you to speak to many men in many places at once? Could you explain that the image wasn't you yourself but merely an illusion that you could make disappear and reappear? You couldn't even explain where you came from if all the universe they knew was their own island.'
'Well, then, we're savages to him. Is that it?' demanded Johannison.
The visitor said, 'Your wife is being metaphorical. Let me finish. I can no longer try to encourage your society to cure itself. The disease has progressed too far. I am going to have to alter the temperamental make-up of the race.'
'How?'
'There are neither words nor concepts to explain that either. You must see that our control of physical matter is extensive. It was quite simple to stop all radioactivity. It was a little more difficult to see to it that all things, including books, now suited a world in which radioactivity did not exist. It was still more difficult, and took more time, to wipe out all thought of radioactivity from the minds of men. Right now, uranium does not exist on Earth. No one ever heard of it.'
'I have,' said Johannison. 'How about you, Mercy?'
'I remember, too,' said Mercedes.
'You two are omitted for a reason,' said the visitor, 'as are over a hundred others, men and women, all over the world.'
'No radioactivity,' muttered Johannison. 'Forever?'
'For five of your years,' said the visitor. 'It is a pause, nothing more. Merely a pause, or call it a period of anaesthesia, to that I can operate on the species without the interim danger of atomic war. In five years the phenomenon of radioactivity will return together with all the uranium and thorium that currently do not exist. The knowledge will not return, however. That is where you will come in. You and the others like you. You will re-educate the world gradually.'
'That's quite a job. It took fifty years to get us to this point. Even allowing for less the second time, why not simply restore knowledge? You can do that, can't you?'
'The operation,' said the visitor, 'will be a serious one. It will take anywhere up to a decade to make certain there are no complications. So we want re-education slowly, on purpose.'
Johannison said, 'How do we know when the time comes? I mean when the operation's over?'
The visitor smiled. 'When the time comes, you will know. Be assured of that.'
'Well, it's a hell of a thing, waiting five years for a gong to ring in your head. What if it never comes? What if your operation isn't successful?'
The visitor said, seriously, 'Let us hope that it is.'
'But if it isn't? Can't you clear our minds temporarily, too? Can't you let us live normally till it's time?'
'No. I'm sorry. I need your minds untouched. If the operation *is* a failure; if the cure does not work out, I will need a small reservoir of normal, untouched minds out of which to bring about the growth of a new population on this planet on whom a new variety of cure may be attempted. At all costs, your species must be preserved. It is valuable to us. It is why I am spending so much time trying to explain the situation to you. If I had left you as you were an hour ago, five days, let alone five years, would have completely ruined you.'
And without another word, he disappeared.

Mercedes went through the motions of preparing supper and they sat at the table almost as though it had been any other day.
Johannison said, 'Is it true? Is it all real?'
'I saw it, too,' said Mercedes, 'I heard it.'
'I went through my own books. They're all changed. When this—pause is over, we'll be working strictly from memory, all of us who are left. We'll have to build instruments again. It will take a long time to get it across to those who won't remember.' Suddenly he was angry, 'And what for, I want to know? What for?'
'Alex,' Mercedes began timidly, 'he may have been on Earth before and spoken to people. He's lived for thousands and thousands of years. Do you suppose he's what we've been thinking of for so long as—as—'
Johannison looked at her. 'As God? Is that what you're trying to say? How should I know? All I know is that his people, whatever they are, are infinitely more advanced than we, and that he's curing us of a disease.'
Mercedes said, 'Then I think of him as a doctor or what's equivalent to it in his society'.
'A doctor? All he kept saying was that the difficulty of communication was the big problem. What kind of a doctor can't communicate with his patients? A vet! An animal doctor!'
He pushed his plate away.
His wife said, 'Even so. If he brings an end to war—'
'Why should he want to? What are we to him? We're animals. We *are* animals to him. Literally. He as much as said so. When I asked him where he was from, he said he didn't come from the "yard" at all. Get it? He didn't come from the "universe" at all. His difficulty in communication gave him away. He used the concept for what our universe was to him rather than what it was to us. So the universe is a barnyard and we're—horses, chickens, sheep. Take your choice.'
Mercedes said softly, '"The Lord is my Shepherd. I shall not want."'
'Stop it, Mercy. That's a metaphor; this is reality. If he's a shepherd, then we're sheep with a queer unnatural desire, and ability, to kill one another. Why stop us?'
'He said—'
'I know what he said. He said we have great potentialities. We're very valuable. Right?'
'Yes.'
'But what are the potentialities and values of sheep to a shepherd? The sheep wouldn't have any idea. They couldn't. Maybe if they knew why they were coddled so, they'd prefer to live their own lives. They'd take their own chances with wolves or with themselves.'
Mercedes looked at him helplessly.
Johannison cried, 'It's what I keep asking myself now. Where are we going? Where are we going? Do sheep know? Do we know? Can we know?'
They sat staring at their plates, not eating.
Outside, there was the noise of traffic and the calling of children at play. Night was falling and gradually it grew dark.