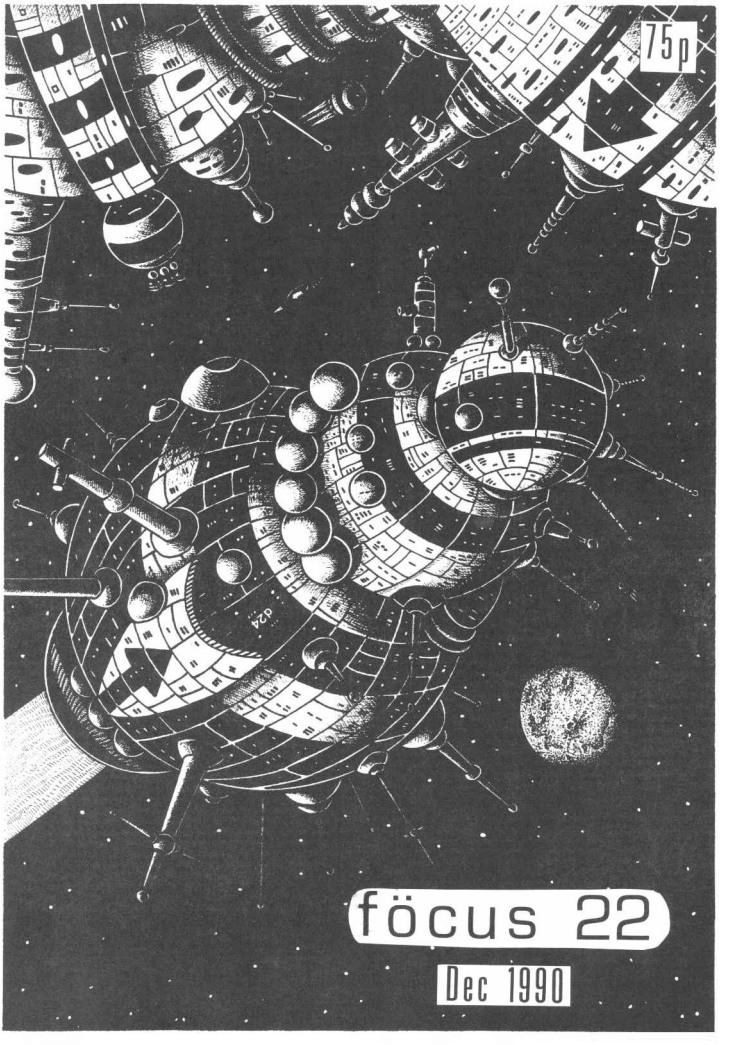
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# FOCUS

for SF writers
A BSFA Publication

**Issue 22 * December 1990**

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## ARTWORK

Cover by Dreyfus
Pages 3,4,5,11,15 -- Cecil Nurse
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Page 14 -- Andrew Green's computer


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Contributions: speculative submissions always welcome (because rare). Query first if you are uncertain, with some information about yourself and the nature of the essay you wish to write. Lengths 500-2000 words. Please enclose return postage if you want the MS returned. No fiction or poetry, except drabbles. There is no payment for publication.

Drabbles: a drabble has exactly 100 words (hyphenated words counting as one word), plus a title of no more than 15 words. Invented as a writing exercise by Birmingham SF fans, it deserves to become an artform in its own right, in my opinion.

Artwork: welcome. Send a sample and we can go from there.

# Editorial

Here are the bones of a thought experiment.

What if ... *everyone* was a writer? What if every literate person in the U.K. -- let's say 20 million of us -- wrote and published a book every two years? With increasingly sophisticated desktop publishing systems that can produce a professional product direct from a home word-processed disc, the time when this would be theoretically possible is fast approaching, if not already here. Let's call this two-years' production, whatever form it takes, a gunderloy vol. Each year would see 10 million vols of material published in the U.K. Assuming that the ordinary reader could handle one vol a week, 50 a year, the 'market' would be one billion vols per annum, or an average sale of 100 copies of each vol. The question that comes to mind is: how would people go about choosing which vols to read?

Let's imagine one species of literate person -- the gunderloy -- who skims vols to see what sort of thing they are, and whose own vol is a compilation of brief comments to this effect. Assuming that he is able to skim ten vols a day, 3500 a year, a minimum of 3000 gunderloys would be required to read every vol published, producing 60 years' reading per annum in gunderloy vols alone! It is reasonable to assume that gunderloys would have general or specific areas of interest, and that no person would need to peruse more than a few such vols a year to find everything that might conceivably be of interest to them (including references to the vols of gunderloys working in related areas).

However, a gunderloy can't really tell whether a thing is good or not relative to others of the same ilk, and perhaps wouldn't wish to, since in principle every vol has the same value (ie. two years' work by one person). Judgement of merit must be left to a different species, who we will call the proreader. A proreader can read (and review) one vol a day, 350 a year, without getting mind-blown. Typically, a proreader will have a selection of people that he follows religiously, having been turned on to them at an earlier time, spends a proportion of his time reading the vols of unfamiliar people, and another proportion reading the vols of other proreaders. Some may form 'Consortia of Recommendation', each recommending perhaps 3 vols out of the 350 they read in a year. At this rate (1%), it would be possible to produce a years' reading prospectus (for ordinary readers) out of any particular (biennial) gunderloy vol, though with 1500 such coming out every year, there would still be 1% millennia of recommended reading to choose from. Others may set themselves up as 'critics', only reading vols that have been recommended by other proreaders, and delivering themselves of judgements not only of the work but of the proreaders' judgements as well.

The fundamental problem would remain, that a proreader develops different standards and tastes from the ordinary reader simply because he reads more. Thus the ordinary reader would still find that they needed to double-check the recommendations. Perhaps a third 'level of comment' would develop, in which ordinary readers posted their judgements about the vols they had read (liked/disliked). For any particular vol, one might even be able to inspect a web of cross-references to other vols enjoyed by people who had enjoyed (or hated) that one.

So, what's the point? The point is the 100-copy circulation, on average, of each vol; equivalent to a fanzine. If everyone wrote a vol a year and read only one a month, this figure would fall to 12: family and friends. With the democratisation of publishing will come a flood of material from every (excuse me) Tom, Dick, and Harry. If we are not to become overwhelmed, lost, and disenchanted, unable to find anything we enjoy reading, or, conversely, if we are not to remain enthralled by the (economically constrained) mass market publishers and retailers, at the expense of the possibilities now opening up, we are going to have to think seriously about how we select what we read.

CN

## A Room with a Desk

# Without A Suit

THIS IS THE STORY OF A CONFLICT BETWEEN HOPE AND DISILLUSION. FOR THOSE WHO LIKE happy endings, hope remains alive.

My life with science fiction began in 1962, when I was eighteen. Reading books had always been the main pastime of my childhood, but when I discovered modern science fiction it was a revelation. I had shunned it until then because of the crude cover paintings, but the books themselves proved to be vastly entertaining, with ideas that were distracting and thought-provoking. I liked the *attitude* of science fiction writers. To paraphrase George Orwell: they were wonderful men who could tell you about the inhabitants of the planets and the bottom of the sea, and who *knew* that the future was not going to be what respectable people imagined.

I was in a respectable, humdrum existence, living with my parents and sister in a quiet country village, commuting to a dull job in an accountant's office in London, yet the books I was reading took the universe in their stride. "Take you -- add a million years of progress!" was the memorable blurb on a short-story collection by Robert Sheckley. After my own first eighteen years of progress I had an off-the-peg suit from Burtons, an overdraft, and a profoundly religious girlfriend who always said no. My job involved adding up long columns of figures. I was not hopeful for the remaining nine hundred thousand-odd years of progress, so my mind was elsewhere, out in the stars, travelling through time, seeing reality at a new and stimulating slant.

It wasn't long before I felt the urge to start writing science fiction, and towards the end of 1963 I wrote my first short story. Others quickly followed. I had never had the least wish to be a writer until then, but all through that winter I could think of nothing else. My ambition was simple: I wanted to be a science fiction writer who wrote science fiction (to borrow Bob Shaw's commendably straightforward phrase). Anxious to find out everything I could about sf, I made contact with other people involved with it. A fan letter to Brian Aldiss led me to the BSFA, and this in its turn to the weekly fan meetings at Ella Parker's flat in London. I got involved with fandom, and started reading fanzines. In 1964 I went to my first science fiction convention: Mike Moorcock, Tad Tubb, Ken Bulmer, Edmond Hamilton, Leigh Brackett, and a wavy-haired schoolboy called Terry Pratchett were there. It was heady stuff, very distracting . I was finished as an accountant!

It was around this time that Moorcock took over *New Worlds*, and the 'New Wave' came into being. My reaction to the New Wave was (and still is) complicated. On the one hand, I was still new enough to the discovery of science fiction to feel a persistent loyalty to the writers I had read at the outset; on the other hand, it was these very writers who were now being identified as out-moded, derivative, and irrelevant to the modern world. I was open to all ideas, and the New Wave propaganda started to take hold. In particular I sensed the truth in what was being said about derivative writing: I had been reading a lot of science fiction, and once I had 'used up' the classics I had had to look further afield. Many novels were second-rate copies of other books, and in the magazines of the day (notably *Galaxy*, *F&SF*, and the pre-Moorcock *New Worlds*) there was a pervasive feeling of creative tiredness. I liked what the bully-boys of the New Wave were saying: it certainly did seem time for a change. But there was yet another hand. I disliked almost all the fiction *New Worlds* was printing. There were altogether too many stories about turds, drugs, guitars, nihilism, and the appalling Jerry Cornelius. As time slipped by I felt myself becoming alienated from the New Wave: the propaganda took on a whining note, there was smugness afoot, rules were being made, attitudes were OK or not-OK. It all reminded me of my 'real' life (which was still just about going on): there were people telling what to do and think. In the end I fell out with almost everyone connected with *New Worlds*, and went my own way.

What did all this do to my interest in writing? It confused me! Without any particular background in literature (I was brought up in a house where the only books were the ones I had bought or borrowed myself), and without a complete education (I never went to University because I had believed the lie that accountancy training was equivalent to a degree), the only 'raw material' I had access to was in the books I read. The first stories I had written in the winter of 1963/64 were hopelessly derivative of American science fiction dating from the 1940s and 1950s. My next spurt of writing, from 1965 to 1967, was derivative of the New Wave, innocently taking on board all the hectoring and blustering from Notting Hill. I was able to sell a few of these stories, which at the time seemed to prove something or other, but the truth is that I was still extremely young and woefully inexperienced.

A pivotal event occurred at the end of summer in 1968. I lost my job, and decided to take the plunge as a full-time writer. I didn't have much to go on, just the same restless ambition. I settled down to the daily chore of writing: what I aimed to produce was one short story a month, and one novel a year, filling in the gaps with whatever hack writing I could pick up on the way. I was lucky: within four months of going freelance I managed to sell the outline of a novel to Faber. This was *Indoctrinaire*, which I wrote and delivered immediately after the contract was signed. Faber gave me £150 for it, and I deemed myself well treated. The following year I wrote and sold *Fugue for a Darkening Island*. In between, I wrote several of the stories that were collected a little later in *Real-Time World*.

**Christopher Priest** *says things like 'I believe the first step to creative liberation comes when you acknowledge that science fiction (in literary terms) is effectively worked out'* (Matrix 89). *Recognising a sentiment shared by many,* FOCUS *invited clarification from a man who has been saying it for 15 years.*

**Bibliography**

**Indoctrinaire (1970)**

**Fugue for a Darkening Island (1972)**

Real-Time World (1974)

The point is that this early fiction was influenced almost entirely by other science fiction. I had nothing else to go on. The problem was that my teenage infatuation with science fiction had just about run its course. The stuff I began with now seemed a bit old hat, and the New Wave was not for me. There remained a few science fiction writers whose work I greatly admired (and still do): Brian Aldiss, J G Ballard, Philip K Dick, John Sladek, a few others ... but these were all individual stylists, and I would reel back from their work feeling inadequate. All I could learn from them was that science fiction was flexible in form, and easily subverted: one might seem to be building with the traditional bricks while actually undermining the foundations.

Admirable though it was, such subtlety was than beyond my reach. It's difficult now, some twenty years later, to sum up a period of personal growth, but I felt myself uprooted. All my fiction to this point was unsatisfactory to me: it depended too much on other science fiction, and I was no longer so interested in all that. I was by this time reading more widely, and getting about more. I felt I was beginning to live at last, emerging from a rather hermetic background. Science fiction, as a primary source of inspiration, receded fast. I didn't plan this. I had worked through it and was familiar with the moves, but most of books now lacked the capacity to shake me, as once they had.

There's a three-year gap between *Fugue* and my next novel. This was my period of growth. I was increasingly uncomfortable with science fiction orthodoxy, but still ambitious and still excited by the ideas that science fiction makes possible. The novel that came out of this period was *Inverted World*, the closest thing I have ever written to traditional science fiction. A contradiction? I think not, because *Inverted World* is based on the sort of idea that brings a surge of happiness to the true science fiction fan ... but its very absurdity gave me an irresistible urge to undermine the whole story. This is why the novel ends as it does, with a kind of fanatical ambiguity. It was also the first time I had felt able to insinuate an autobiographical element into a story. The book meant something more to me than just its idea.

Inverted World (1974)

I took heart from this novel, feeling I had found a way of combining the usual tropes of science fiction with a subversive and personal practicality. I have followed this line ever since. The best example is probably *The Glamour*, which on one level could be said to be a fairly straightforward science fiction novel about invisibility, but which I see as an extended metaphor for memory lapse, shyness, failure to see, and so on. There are no powders or potions in *The Glamour*; people are invisible simply because no one ever happens to notice them, but for all that their invisibility is *functional*, just as it would be if they had taken the powder.

The Space Machine (1976)

SO FAR, I HAVE EXPRESSED ALL THIS IN TERMS OF PERSONAL GROWTH AS A WRITER. I HAVE never, so far as I can recall, taken any positive decisions about what I will write or how to go about it. I let the ideas unorganised for that. Instead, I have always followed my instincts. A book gets written because an idea occurs to me, or a situation intrigues me. Because I am the person I am, these ideas and situations tend to be fantastic in nature. I doubt this will ever change. The fantastic is intriguing, and the possibilities it presents to writers are endless.

A writer does not only write, however. Most of life is spent being distracted by other things, and several of these distractions have also had an influence on my attitude to science fiction.

I met other writers, for instance. As a young fan, recently turned writer, I was at first rather overawed to find myself mingling with famous authors. What surprised me, though, was that many of the 'big names' had made an accomodation with the very state of affairs I was in the process of rejecting: they treated science fiction as an orthodoxy, believing it to be the only reliable inspirational source.

I'll never forget my first visit to a Milford Writers' conference, where dyed-in-the-wool sf writers like James Blish were busy propping up their work with rules formulated by the past generation. I lost count of the number of times I heard Blish say, "Well, as DAMON KNIGHT says ..." or "According to THEODORE STURGEON's law" and "If you want to sell this to ANALOG you've got to ..." and so on. I didn't know literature had rules and laws! It was yet another reminder of my humdrum past. The big-name writers were trying to control everything, just as my accountancy bosses had told me what to wear to the office.



A Dream of Wessex (1977)

(Other writers were less prescriptive. I always listened to Brian Aldiss, for example, because what he said was not so narrow-minded. His attitude to writing is more liberal, more fun, more open to ideas and possibilities; you realise that he's read widely and takes his inspiration from the real world, not from some dodgy old novel by A E van Vogt.)

Then I joined SFWA: Science Fiction Writers of America. I was coaxed in by a friendly letter from Anne McCaffrey, then working as Secretary of the organisation, and I remained a member from the early 1970s until about 1978. I wrote a long article about SFWA a year later, partly because I was fed up with being asked why I had resigned, and partly because at the 1979 British worldcon I witnessed SFWA antics at first hand. I don't want to repeat myself (the article, called 'Outside the Whale', was reprinted in several places, and it went on and on for pages), but I see SFWA as a malign influence on science fiction.

An Infinite Summer (1979)

Most of the American science fiction writers you meet in person are extremely charming. I like their company: they are funny, practical, odd, independent-minded, generous. (Sexy too: I'm married to one of them.) But *collectively*, as they present themselves in SFWA, they are excruciating. The pages of SFWA publications are filled with foolishness, greed, vanity, self-importance, arrogance. SFWA members are obsessed with money, status, awards. They are conservative, xenophobic, narrow-minded, stubborn, and certain of everything. As a

writers' organisation SFWA represents the triumph of egotism and self-interest over common sense. It is no place for anyone with a concern for literary values, a wish to improve, or someone (like me) who is constantly struggling with indecision and self-doubts.

I became increasingly alienated by SFWA behaviour, and whenever I received one of their mailings I would read it with glum fascination, and feel depressed for days afterwards. It made me believe I was not, nor ever could be, *a real science fiction writer*.

I felt the same way about *Locus*. I started subscribing to this because I thought I should keep up with what was going on. There's no denying the fact that if you live and work in Britain you are on the fringes of the science fiction world. I wanted to know what was being published in the heartland, what other writers were doing there, and all that.

Instead I found the same glittering obsessions: money, status, and awards. *Locus* is filled with bragging. You find out how much money so-and-so got for his new novel, which books are likely to win the Hugo or Nebula, who the guest of honour is going to be at such-and-such convention. All this breeds an atmosphere of greed, envy, and financial ambition. You can't help it; I felt it myself. It's impossible to remain detached when you read about some twerp in California being paid $100,000 for an as yet unwritten Star Trek rip-off, when you've just been paid $2,500 for a book you've been slaving over for months (which is what I was paid for, eg. *Inverted World*).

And it's not only the money. You know that these deals are for rotten books written by hacks, but worse, that these are the successful books, the ones that people want to read.

So I let my subscription lapse, and after a period of convalescence I found that life started to improve. Now I am innocent of what is 'going on' ... but I am also one more stage removed from the centre of science fiction, less likely to be able to fulfill whatever expectations there are of the genre.

SFWA and *Locus* are influential in the American science fiction world (which means influential everywhere), but they foster avarice, vanity, and commercialism. These are corrupting motives, and by their own base preoccupations SFWA and *Locus* have done nothing to resist the growth of an equal moral corruption in the world of science fiction publishing. (To the contrary, I believe they have actually encouraged it.) SF was once neglected by viable, which means that all kinds of books could be published under the 'sf' rubric; now it has become incurably commercialised, so there is a dependence on expensive lead titles, and inexpensive backwork. The mid-list (where unclassifiable titles could be modestly published) has vanished. If a young Ballard, Dick, or Sladek were to appear now, it's difficult to see how his or her books could be published. Perhaps such a writer has appeared, and never made it into print; how will we ever know?

WHERE ALL THIS LEAVES ME TODAY IS NONE TOO CLEAR, EVEN TO ME. I FEEL THE LONG PERIOD that began in 1962 has been one of gradual disillusion. I no longer read science fiction, I don't agree with the self-deluding rules parroted by big-name writers, I see the genre as debased and exploited, I feel the general emphasis of the science fiction world has been gradually moving away from books (to costume, role-playing games, graphics, idiot TV shows, films with explosions and Arnold Schwarzenegger, etc), and where books survive all but one or two of the most successful ones are aimed low.

But ... disillusion with what?

What began me writing was an excitement with ideas, and that hasn't changed. I admired what I saw as 'good writing', and although my understanding of that nebulous phrase has shifted a few times over the years, it still matters to me. I liked the sheer novelty of science fiction, the flouting of respectable people's expectations, and that's still the same.

A science fiction idea always struck me as being something that could only be used once, that its novelty was real but that it ceased to be a novelty when you want back to it. This is why I have never written sequels, or taken on a trilogy. (It's also why I haven't written many books: each needs to be worked out from scratch.) I believed in the *literary* nature of science fiction: that the ideas and their effects worked by provoking the imagination of the reader with patterns of words and the images they contain, that there was no 'reality' behind the words, even a spurious one. (This is why I have always felt uncomfortable with non-abstract illustrations, with 'future histories', 'worldcraft', maps in fantasy novels, glossaries of funny words, people who put on costumes or create real-seeming (to them) fantasy roles. I know that 'literary' is sometimes seen as a dirty word in sf circles, but all these are non-literary responses to something whose only reality is metaphor.) None of this has changed in me, although my discomfiture increases with age.

Many times in my career I have wished aloud that science fiction did not exist as a separate category. True, I should not have started writing without it, but these days I see it as something that gets in the way. Never mind the expectations the label provokes in readers: all that's debatable. As I've grown up I've been distracted by the similarity of science fiction to what I really want to write. So have others: some people think I'm a would-be mainstream writer, while others write me off as just another sf hack. The reality is that I'm of science fiction, while not actually in it. My stuff is sf, and it isn't. I want to tell you about the inhabitants of the planets and the bottom of the sea, but I want to do it my way, not according to a set of rules made up by other people.

The Affirmation (1981)

The Glamour (1984)

The Quiet Woman (1990)

The Prestiges (forthcoming)

# The Milford Report

*It is a tradition of the Milford SF Writers' Conference UK that one participant write a 'report' about it. It is a sometime tradition of the BSFA to publish this report. This year,* **Stratford Kirby** *does the honours.*

JUST ANOTHER BORING DAY IN BRADFORD... I WAS GAZING OUT of the window watching early morning drizzle dampen marital disputes. I could hear a sparrow coughing. I followed the postman on progress. He was limping after years of being abused by Rottweilers, or vice versa. I staggered towards the letterbox, vaguely anticipating the ritual burning of another poll tax demand. Upon opening the letter, I was startled out of a hangover and dropped my matches.

"Dear Stratford, you are cordially invited to attend the 17th Milford SF Writers' Conference."

I re-read the invitation, billous with either excitement or food poisoning. Was it all a practical joke? Why had the whole of Milford been moved to Cheltenham? Could I believe Charlie Brown now owned The Square Hotel? Bugger it, I'd have to attend, if only to test the chair, David V Barrett, for comfort...

Sunday the 15th of September. Charles Stross was living close enough for us to share petrol expenses. He talked about computers and I fiddled with the strap of my crash helmet. It's not that I don't trust Stross' driving -- yes it is. I kept morbid thoughts of motorway death at bay by counting the money I'd borrowed from my ailing grandmother. I decided that with good luck and a few more NHS cuts, the debt may never have to be repaid.

My arrival in Cheltenham brought about a type of culture shock. Not a vomiting drunk in sight and pavements don't look the same when not decorated by burning mattresses. We walked into the hotel, were cordially greeted, and I succumbed to confusion. For starters, my allocated room had four beds and I knew indecision would force me to alternate between them throughout the week. After depositing eight copies of my story, I headed for the hopefully comforting familiarity of the bar. I wasn't comforted. Most of the writers had arrived. I felt misplaced, even with the friendly reception from Dave Hutchinson and the soon-to-leave Maureen Porter. Did everyone know each other, or was I being paranoid? Was everyone, excepting Hutch and Liz Sourbut, a southerner? Was everyone middle class? Had I dropped a cigarette end and were my underpants smouldering? I was glad I wasn't black.

After not eating a meal at a restaurant, I retreated into facetiousness. I think I annoyed a lot of people that night, especially Liz Holliday, whose room key I rather drunkenly picked up by mistake, which resulted in the unfortunate girl having to sleep on the lounge sofa...

At an obscenely early hour the following morning I had a close encounter with a cooked breakfast and a place mat depicting the heinoutingness vulgarity of somewhere called Beech Lane. My mouth was full of bacon and greasy apologies for Liz H's sleepless night. The proprietor, Charlie Brown -- good grief -- and his wife, Joyce, were highly entertaining, but even with cheerful banter I still felt awkward. I heard snatches of the ten writers' conversations and struggled with terms such as *weeede* and *remps*. I listened to Stross have verbal sex with computer phraseology. I didn't know what to make of the situation other than the best. This I attempted to do with the aid of a grilled tomato.

It was time to start reading. I believe the punishment for giving details of the stories read that week is to have your nipples torn off with a pair of rusty pliers and fed to a ravenous grizzly bear. After serious consideration, I've decided the bear can stay hungry. Suffice to say, that ever on that first day the standard of writing and criticism was very high indeed. It's also worth mentioning that I've never seen so many sadists under one roof -- well, not since I attended the annual meeting of the Northern Sadists Association...

I'd heard that silly games were to be played in the evening, after dinner. Silly games? A cement eating competition, perhaps? I was wary. What sort of games do writers play? I soon realised with disappointment that it wouldn't involve taking my clothes off. And yet, I enjoyed myself. Lager and laughter put me at ease. Chris Amies, whom I'd tagged as a fairly quiet chap, not only came out of his shell, he occasionally smashed the bastard thing to pieces. Mary Gentle, whose name couldn't be more unsuited, had a vicious streak as long as the Mi. Paul Kincaid extracted glee from painful scenarios like some sort of maniacal dentist. Hutch was living proof that old vaudeville stars never die, they just go to Cheltenham. Oh yes, in between bursts of graveyard cackling, Stross raved about computers. Ellen M Padersen and Liz S seemed at this stage a mite uncomfortable with such ginger-beer frivolities. Maybe *they* felt awkward? I found this encouraging and bought another pint. It was strange to sit in a boozy atmosphere and not be involved in a fight; so strange, in fact, that upon retiring to my room I felt inclined to give myself a severe thrashing...

Over the following days, a routine of sorts developed and I gradually attained a degree of self confidence. Constructively criticising three stories a day is as tiring as trying to force a large wildebeest into a small hole, though not as funny. I could say I saw grown men cry and wailing woman clutch infant manuscripts to heaving bosoms, but I'd be a bloody liar. I did see many different reactions to the stories discussed, and enjoyed the various responses of the writers whose turn it was to be blindfolded and strapped to the post. The over-riding attitude of all was one of utmost professionalism. Fay Sampson displayed an almost disturbing calm throughout and never once swore at Stross, not even when he dragged computers into the conversation for the millionth time and caused three nervous breakdowns. Hutch maintained a steady stream of witticisms and everyone secretly decided to humour the poor boy as failure to do so could have unbalanced an already precarious mental state. Towards the end of the week, a now talkative Liz S further confounded my preconceptions of her by giving an impressive juggling performance second only to that of the great Peregrin Caswell. As for Liz H, well, she was just plain confounding, brilliantly so.

Unusually, Stross was talking about computers when Mary and Liz H earned my undying respect by forcefully removing half of his clothing -- the bottom half. And it was by now apparent that David Barrett wasn't a chair at all...

Just as I was fully at ease with the situation, suddenly all the stories had been read, Paul's birthday had been celebrated, disturbingly bland Cheltenham's bookshops explored, and the hamster impregnated. There had even been a new award presented -- the Order of the *Bowel Movement*. Here's a clue as to who was the recipient -- Charles Stross. It must be stated that he was ultimately gracious and managed to keep virtually cool during the whole ceremony. But yes, it was all over. Maureen had returned and the tang of goodbyes was in the air. I still felt slightly the outsider though now the most obvious difference was that the others appeared to have an almost conspiratorial desire to wear prescription glasses. I've decided to stare at small print every night, waiting for the day of togetherness.

I went to say my farewells to the garish, plastic place mats and paid my bill, an usual and unnerving experience in itself. Saddened and actually wanting to meet these people again, I put on my crash helmet and climbed into Stross' car, substantially wiser, but not at all taller...

Now it's just another boring day in Bradford. I'm gazing out of the window watching early morning drizzle dampen marital disputes. Fuck that -- I think I'll do some writing. ■

# A Large Wildebeest

# MARKET SURVEY

## DECEMBER 1990

FOCUS sent out a questionaire, to which all the magazines listed below responded. Others which did not respond were omitted. These are U.K. markets only. Additions and updates will be carried in later issues. Competition news is being carried by *Matrix*.

### US Markets

*Scavenger's Newsletter* is a monthly listing of sf/fantasy/horror markets for writers and artists, with special emphasis on the small press. It is available in the U.K. from me (C E Nurse, 49 Station Road, Naxby, York YO3 8LU) sample £1.25; 6-issue sub £6. *Scavenger's Scrapbook* is a reference listing to be used with the Newsletter, available for £2.

American pro-zines (*Asimov's, Omni, Analog, F&SF, Amazing Stories, Weird Tales*) as well as the newszines *Locus* and *SF Chronicle*, can all be obtained from Fantastic Literature, 25 Avondale Road, Aveleigh, Essex SS6 8NJ.

Without exception, it is worth buying at least one copy of any magazine you want to consider submitting to. This cost will be very quickly recovered from postage saved by not sending inappropriate MSs. For example, £10 to the New SF Alliance (Chris Reed, PO Box 625, Sheffield S1 3GY) will buy the most recent copies of each of their seven member zines, and you'll know where you are! Also available from the NSFA, *Light's List of Literary Magazines* gives 200+ addresses for a broader lit scene, especially poetry.

While I'm making with the unsolicited plugs, I could mention *Skeleton Crew*, whose new editor did not reply to the questionaire but sent a freebie issue (Nov 1990). It featured two short stories (David Sutton, Stuart Palmer) and a short-short from D F Lewis, an interview with the ubiquitous Iain Banks by the equally ubiquitous Stan Nicholls, and an article on gaming by ex-FOCUS editor Liz Holliday. Submissions to Dave Reader, c/o Argus Specialist Publications, Argus House, Boundary Way, Hemel Hempstead, Herts HP2 7ST.

And also mention of *Millia*, a new magazine from the same stable as *Interzone*, taking as its theme popular category and genre fiction of all kinds, including of course sf/fantasy. Celebrity and best-seller oriented, it promises to feature writers never to be seen in the pages of FOCUS (unless we get there first...). If that's your sort of thing, then this may be your sort of thing. ■

### Amaranth

Amaranth Publishing Ltd. 325 Cannon Hill Lane, London SW20 9NG

'**Amaranth** is intended to be a vehicle for young, unpublished writers and artists. Clearly we would be foolish to reject out of hand the experienced contributor, but the genre is badly in need of an outlet for new talent, and we are hoping to be such.

'We are a predominantly Fantasy based publication, as opposed to SF or Horror. We get plenty of the other two genres submitted, but not enough true Fantasy.

Guidelines available; will be taking poetry from April 1991; also articles about the genre up to 3500 words; allow 4 weeks for a reply. 'Please give details of any previously published work when submitting material.'

- Bimonthly. Issue 2 out In Dec. 12,000 words of fiction per issue.
- Story Length: up to 4500 words. Serialisation considered for longer work, but well-stocked at the moment.
- Payment: to be arranged. Initially none; £15/1000 words in future.
- Will be buying period copyright.
- Sample £2; sub £11 per annum.

### Ambit

Dr Martin Bax, 17 Priory Gardens, Highgate, London N6 5QY.

'The Prose Editor of **Ambit** is J G Ballard and we certainly have published what people might describe as Science Fiction. Potential authors should be aware that **Ambit** is not a straight essay magazine and we are interested in stories of high literary quality. A third of each number is devoted to prose, a third to poetry, and a third to illustration. We strongly recommend an inspection of the magazine before submitting and would offer *FOCUS* readers a special sample price of £3.00 per copy.' [*Don't forget to mention FOCUS should you take this up.*]

- Quarterly. Latest issue #122. 3x5000 words of fiction per issue.
- Story Lengths: approx up to 10,000 words.
- Payment: £5/500 words.
- Buys (first British serial) rights.
- Sample £5; subscription £20.

### Argosies

Nik Morton, 48 Anglesey Road, Alverstoke, Gosport, Hants PO12 2EA

Takes 'any SF, fantasy, or horror/psychological. Really, the contributor needs to read a couple issues before trying on spec. I read *all* contributions and comment where possible. Encourage new writers and artists.'

Takes poetry, theme issues upcoming in 1991 LOVE and GODS; has stock up to #17.

- 3-4 times a year. Latest issue #13 (72 pages). 20-30,000 words of fiction per issue.
- Story lengths: up to 4000 words.
- Payment: £2/1000 words.
- Buys first British serial rights.
- Sample £1.75; sub £7/4 issues.

### B.B.R.

Chris Reed, PO Box 625, Sheffield S1 3GY

'**BBR** welcomes unsolicited submissions. Consult several *recent* issues to see what we are publishing. The preferred genre is experimental, non-mainstream, sf/fantasy/horror. We are particularly interested in material that is too adventurous or thought-provoking for big publishers to handle, but that is no justification for explicit sex and/or violence irrelevant to the story. Plot is of paramount importance. We receive too many stories that contain very good ideas which are weakly and loosely handled, especially with endings that are meaningless or irrelevant to the rest of the story.'

Guidelines available; no poetry; artwork is commissioned — send samples; comic strip stories considered.

- Quarterly. Latest issue #15. 25,000 words of fiction per issue.
- Story Length: 2000-10,000 words, longer if quality warrants.
- Payment: £5/1000 words.
- Buys (first British serial) rights.
- Sample £1.75; sub £5.30/4 issues.

### Chimera

Robert Haynes, c/o Asylum Magazines, 7 Walmersley Road, New Moston, Manchester M10 0NS

'There are no boundaries as long as it is intelligent and well written. Generally the stories we publish fall into the fantasy/horror/experimental headings. We have a particular fondness for the more surreal and non-linear stories.'

Guidelines available; no poetry; 28pp 50:50 comic strips: stories.

'In December we are hoping to produce a second publication called *The Dream Cell*, which will be A5 28pp and devoted entirely to short stories and poetry. It is being produced as we are receiving more stories than we could hope to include in **Chimera**. Conditions for submission and subject matter are the same as for **Chimera**.'

- Irregular, quarterly money permitting. Latest issue #4.
- Story Lengths: up to 2000 words.
- Payment: complimentary copy.
- Sample £1; no subscriptions.

### The Dark Side

Allen Lane, Maxwell Specialist Publications, 116-120 Caswell Road, London EC1V 7QD.

'We are a newly started genre mag and still fine-tuning our contents. At present we only publish one story an issue, hopefully with a chilling ending in the tail'. This may change, but we will not be carrying the same amount of fiction as *FEAR* or *SKELETON CREW*.'

No guidelines; no poetry; looking for interviews with well-known writers, film directors, and actors.

- Monthly. Latest issue #3.
- Story lengths: 1200-2000 words.
- Payment: £75.
- Buys first British serial rights.
- News-stand distribution.

### Demonic 13

Pam Creasis, 17 Pinewood Avenue, Sidcup, Kent DA15 8BB

'Horror fiction of all types: gothic, traditional, bizarre, surreal, macabre, slasher, erotic etc. *Original* work only -- must not have appeared elsewhere prior to publication in D13. No potted biographies of authors required with submissions.'

Guidelines available; takes poetry; writers should query before submitting.

- Irregular. Latest issue #4. Publishes 12 or so works of fiction in each issue.
- Story Lengths: 1500-3000 words preferred. Longer or shorter work accepted as long as story is good.
- Payment: complimentary copy.
- Sample £1.75; no subscription.

### Drum

George F. Townshend, 7 Weller Place, High Elms Lane, Downe, Orpington, Kent BR6 7JA

'We favour the more traditional types of Science Fiction but will consider the more experimental type of writing if the story is recognisably Science Fiction and has a strong plot. We prefer an upbeat atmosphere. Stories regarding current scientific developments and their effect on individuals/society would be welcome, but all kinds of SF will be considered. We welcome stories of planetary exploration etc., but the background of such stories should reflect current scientific knowledge. Simplistic stories of space pirates/ray guns are not welcome.'

Guidelines available; no poetry, seeking (and paying for) articles of general scientific nature, and b&w artwork. Response time 4-6 weeks; query after 3 months.

- Bi-monthly. Latest issue #26. 10,000 words of fiction/issue.
- Story Lengths: 2000-10,000 words.
- Payment: variable, up to £30/1000 words; on publication.
- Buys 1st British serial rights.
- Sample £1.75, subscription £10 (1 yr), £18 (2 iss).

### The Edge

Graham Evans, PO Box 1105, Chelmsford CM1 2SF.

Takes 'imaginative, intelligent, well-written, modern, experimental; all words open to various interpretations. We suggest people look at issue 4 and see what we mean by them.

'The **Edge** is likely to be difficult to break into for the 'new' writer -- we can pay a high rate and thus indulge ourselves by using writers we like to read ourselves (#4 has Di Filippo, Shirley, Moorcock, and Brooke). I'm not prejudiced either way, but it is fair to say that standards are high. We see ourselves as an international magazine, not just a British one that's sold abroad. The more submissions from the USA and elsewhere the better.'

Guidelines available; no poetry; responds quickly, within 3 weeks; generally does not comment on rejected MSs.

- Bimonthly. Latest issue #4. 20,000 words of fiction per issue, aiming at 40-50,000 next year.
- Story Lengths: 1000-15,000 words.
- Payment: £10-40 per thousand words, usually nearer £40.
- Buys first English-Language rights; definitely not interested in reprinting work already published in eg. the US.
- Sample £1.50; sub £5 for 4 issues.

### Exuberance

Jason Smith, 34 Croft Close, Chipperfield, Herts WD4 9PA

'**Exuberance** publishes science fiction, fantasy, and horror fiction. We are not necessarily restricted in what we publish. Experimental, challenging, and mood fiction will be considered. We also offer a greater opportunity to publish longer fiction by 'new' writers.

'We currently have a team of twelve artists working with us, and will be pleased to see work/portfolios by any interested artists.'

Guidelines available; no poetry.

- Quarterly. Latest issue #2 (Dec). 20,000 words of fiction per issue.
- Story lengths: 500-10,000 words, average 4000 words.
- Payment: 1/2p per word.
- Copyright reverts after publication.
- Sample £1.75; sub £6.50.

"So, where do you get your ideas from?"

He tried typographical experiments...

### Fantasy Tales

David Sutton (Associate Editor), 154 Station Road, Kings Heath, Birmingham B14 7TE

'FT uses all kinds of Fantasy stories, ranging across the whole spectrum of the genre. A typical issue might contain fiction in the categories of Horror/Supernatural, Psychological Terror, High Fantasy, S&S, or (low tech) Science Fiction. FT aims to provide its readers with an entertaining selection of fiction, containing good plots and strong characters. Previously unpublished fiction preferred, but we will consider reprint material from old or obscure sources. We use work by new writers as well as established names, though it can be a very difficult market for the new writer to break into.'

Guidelines available; takes short poetry; is overstocked and will reopen for submissions at the end of 1993. Response time 4-8 weeks (for those who ignore this information, I suppose.)

- Bi-annual. Latest issue #5. c60,000 words of fiction/issue
- Story Lengths: <1000-7000 words; up to 15,000 for 'high-profile' authors.
- Payment: by arrangement, on publication.
- Buys 1st UK & US serial, or 2nd serial reprint rights.
- Available from major book and magazine retailers.

### Flickers & Frames

John Peters, 299 Southway Drive, Southway, Plymouth, Devon PL6 6QN

'Traditional SF/Fantasy/Horror, no experimental. I have published the odd piece of poetry, but I'm not really into this form. I am also looking for well written articles on genre films/videos and books, and electronic (synthesizer) music. Interviews with authors, film directors etc., artwork, comic strips, cartoons, also considered.'

- Quarterly. Latest issue #11. Approx 2500 words of fiction per issue.
- Story Lengths: up to 2500 words.
- Payment: complimentary copy.
- Sample £1.25; Sub £4.50 for 4 issues.

### The Gate

W Publishing, 28 Saville Road, Westwood, Peterborough PE3 7PR

'We are seeking intelligent, well written, original and innovative SF & fantasy. We are reluctant to lay down too many restrictions as our taste is very wide-ranging. However, overt horror stories, traditional ghost stories and hackneyed space opera and fantasy are less likely to catch our attention. Neither are we interested in Dragonlance-style D&D adventures or rehashed Neuromancer. Beyond that we are simply looking for good quality material running the whole gamut of speculative fiction.'

Guidelines available; open to persuasion about poetry.

- Quarterly, though troubled in the past. Issue 3 due this month. 30,000 words of fiction per issue.
- Story Lengths: 2-8000 words preferred; up to 15,000 words.
- Payment: £30/1000 words.
- Buys 1st British serial rights.
- Sample £1.80; sub £6/4 issues.

### Interzone

David Pringle, 124 Osborne Road, Brighton BN1 6LU.

Takes: 'sf of high quality. We are looking for innovative, entertaining, well-written and up-to-date science fiction and fantasy. We are unlikely to accept hackneyed space opera, SAS tales or traditional ghost stories... Please read at least a couple of issues of **Interzone** before you submit *anything* to us.'

Detailed MS submission guidelines available; no poetry; allow at least 2 months for a response.

- Monthly. Latest issue #42. 35-40,000 words of fiction/issue.
- Story Lengths: 2000-8000 words.
- Payment: £30/1000 words; on publication.
- Buys first English-Language rights.
- Sample £2.30, subscription £23 per annum.

### massacre

Roberta McKeown, BCM 1698, London WC1N 3XX.

'**massacre** is not interested in traditional SF genre fiction (ie. futurism, technology-based, etc.) but rather in 'weird' prose. It was founded to promote anti-naturalism (ie. anything not realistic), in the vein of dada, surrealism, & nonsense. Stories accepted to **massacre** are generally based on strong, developed human characteristics & personalities, juxtaposed with outlandish circumstances. Avant-garde criticism & parody also favoured. Unless you write in the style of Beckett, Flann O'Brien, or Frank Key, a previous inspection of the magazine is strongly recommended prior to submission. Only 2 unsolicited MS were accepted for issue 2 out of countless submissions due to unsuitability of material.'

No guidelines available; poetry not generally accepted; reads between Feb and Nov.

- Annual. #2 (Feb 1991) carries c21,000 words of fiction.
- Story Lengths: 1000-3000 words.
- Payment: complimentary copy.
- Issue 1 - £2; Issue 2 - £4.

### Memes

Morgan Jope, Flat 10 Sinclair Court, Park Road, Moseley, Birmingham B13 8AN

'**MEMES** is open to every kind of speculative fiction, although its preference is for the sort of work that opens up new territory in form and content -- cyberpunk, slipstream, metafiction, esoterica and glossolalic utterances of every kind. It seeks 'the offbeat, the dissonant, the fragmentary, the oneiric' above complacent mainstream storytelling. Writers who would stand an excellent chance of being published in **MEMES** would include: Philip K Dick, William Gibson, Olaf Stapledon, Stanislaw Lem, Jorge Luis Borges, Italo Calvino, H P Lovecraft, Misha, Ursula Le Guin, David Lindsay, J G Ballard, William Burroughs, Anna Kavan, M P Shiel, Don Webb, and Arthur Machen. Perhaps your chances are as bright as theirs...?

No guidelines; takes poetry.

- Bi-annual. Latest issue #4.
- Story Lengths: less than 1000 words preferred; up to 5000 considered.
- Payment: complimentary copy.
- Sample £2; sub £5/3 issues.

### New Worlds

David Garnett, West Grange, Ferring Grange Gardens, Ferring, W Sussex BN12 5HS U.K.

'In August 1991, Gollancz is to publish the first of four volumes in a new series of **New Worlds**, its first regular publication since 1976. I am to be the editor and will have control over the selection and buying of stories. Michael Moorcock, who retains the rights to the title **New Worlds** and suggested the new series, will act as consultant editor.

'Richard Evans of Gollancz intends to publish in B-format paperback at intervals of approximately eight months, so that the fourth volume will appear in August 1993, two years after the first one.

'With **New Worlds** I will be continuing the same editorial policy as *Zenith*. I intend to publish the best contemporary *science fiction* that is now being written. I don't want horror, I don't want 'fantasy'. Read *Zenith*, read *The Orbit Science Fiction Yearbook*, which may give you some idea of what I want -- and I'll know it when I see it.

'The deadline for the first volume is February 15, 1991. For the first book, I will make all decisions within a month. Then I will be open for MSs right through Feb 1993, although I cannot promise to respond as swiftly for the later volumes.

'Michael Moorcock, Richard Evans, and myself are all totally committed to make a success of these books. But we can't do it without you: what we need are the stories, the best stories.

'I look forward to reading them.'



- Story Lengths: 2000-20,000 words.
- Payment £45/1000 words on acceptance, as an advance against possible future royalties.
- Buying first world anthology rights.

### *Nova SF*

Adrian Hodges, 3 Ashfield Close, Bishops Cleeve, Cheltenham, Glos. GL52 4LG

Takes: "SF in its widest sense -- imaginative, progressive fiction that breaks new ground either in style or content."

Guidelines available; has a featured Poet with 2 pages in each issue; writers should buy a copy before submitting; overstocked, will reopen June 1991.

- Quarterly. Latest issue #3 (Dec). 20,000 words of fiction per issue.
- Story Lengths: no limits.
- Payment: complimentary copy.
- Sample £1.95; sub £4.50 for 4 issues.

### *Rattler's Tale*

Anthony North Enterprises, BCM Keyhole, London WC1N 3XX

"**Rattler's Tale** is designed to bring the fireside philosopher and storyteller together. Prefer twist in the tail. Mystery/crime/sci fi/horror/fantasy/satire/twists of fate. Also articles on paranormal/new age/ecology/crime/etc."

Guidelines available; no poetry.

- Bimonthly. Latest issue #7. 4000 words of fiction per issue.
- Story Lengths: about 500 words.
- Payment: £2.
- Buys first British serial rights.
- Sample free; sub £5 per annum.

### *The Scanner*

Christopher Janes, 4 Dover Road, East Cowes, Isle of Wight PO32 6AG

"We use anything in the SF, Fantasy, Horror genre that catches our eye, takes our fancy etc. We don't really want 'Star Wars' type stuff (unless it's comedy, satire, parody etc) nor do we use S&S (unless it is *really* good, or comedy etc)."

No guidelines; takes poetry; is overstocked and will reopen in about six months.

- Quarterly, in theory. Latest issue #10. Variable amount of fiction in each issue.
- Story Lengths: various.
- Payment: none.
- Sample £1.50; sub £5.50.

### *Works*

Dave 'M' Hughes, 12 Blakestones Rd, Slaithwaite, Huddersfield, Yorks HD7 5UQ

Takes: 'surreal; not strictly sf but must not be out of place when aligned with 'true' sf. I would prefer to think that **Works** caters more for pure imaginative fiction and new angles on the telling of such."

Writers should query before submitting; guidelines available; takes poetry. Is presently overstocked, and will reopen for submissions c. Dec 1991.

- Thrice-yearly. Latest issue #7.
- Story Lengths: under 4000 words.
- Payment: complimentary copy.
- Sample £1.50; subscription £5.50.

We asked the editors how many MSs they received, on average, each week.

Amaranth: 5-7
Ambit: 30-50
Auguries: 5-10
BBR: 15
Chimera: 1
Dark Side, The: 12
Dementia 13: 1-2
Dream: 20
Exuberance: 20-60
Fantasy Tales: 30
Flickers & Frames: 1-2
Gate, The: 2-3
Interzone: 50
[illegible]: 3
Memes: 1-3
Nova SF: 10
Rattler's Tale: 12+
Works: 5.


"How do you think up names?"

### *Xenos*

S V Copestake, 29 Prebend St, Bedford MK40 1QA

"**Xenos** is, partly, an attempt to provide a forum for writers of science fiction and fantasy (with a sizeable section devoted to constructive criticism on past offerings), and also a short story magazine aimed at the general reader with an interest in the broader definitions of the genre (which also includes, of course, the so-called 'hard' varieties). Therefore an important feature of **Xenos** is that acceptibility has very little to do with the *type* of material submitted. Anything will be considered: horror, fantasy, the occult, science-fiction of any shade. Anything except 'blood and gore' material. Any stories submitted will receive a decision, or at the very least a reply, within one or two days. The only valid editorial guideline is that literary quality, however defined, should be aimed at. Eclecticism, in a word.

What prompted me to initiate the magazine was dissatisfaction, as a writer, with currently available markets. I found many of the small presses too extreme and too amateurishly run (too much like comics) while the larger publications didn't seem to me to adhere to their stated principle of favouring new writers. And all, equally, seemed to take an unconscionable time rejecting material, and then for reasons that bore no relationship to submissions. I decided it was better to light a candle than curse the darkness. I aim **Xenos** at writers (on the assumption -- vindicated -- that most renders of SF are closet writers) and try to treat them as human beings rather than superfluous and faintly disagreeable adjuncts to the business of Publishing."

- Bimonthly. Latest issue #3.
- Payment: none.
- Sample £2; sub £11 per annum.

### *'Critiques'*

"Using mainly the published authors with whom **Xenos** has brought me into contact, *Critiques* involves giving writers a statement of how the reviewer considers, in his opinion, the book could be improved, both in terms of presentation etc., and also plot, characterisation, theme, and so on. Not a full-blown report, because it seems to me that no one knows a book better than its author, but a reasonably detailed indication of the directions the writer should move in to maximise the chances of acceptance, emphasising the perceived faults. For this, up to a length of c80,000 words, the charge is £45 (plus, of course, an SAE), more for longer work.

'There are several reviewers involved with *Critiques*. One is Walter J Smith, author of the sf/f books *Grand Voyage* and *Fourth Gear*, as well as romance and detective fiction. Not all have had books published, though all have been practising writers for years. Some act as publisher's reviewers. All, however, have at least one thing in common: they display a uniformly constructive, insightful, and sympathetic approach."

[*Enquiries to S V Copestake, address above.*]

Late Entry

### *Samhain*

John Gallidge, 19 Elm Grove Road, Topsham, Exeter, Devon EX3 0EG

Takes horror fiction.

- Bimonthly. Latest issue #24. Publishes 1000 words of fiction per issue.
- Story Lengths: up to 1000 words.
- Payment: none; a free subscription.
- Sample £1.80; sub £9/5 issues.

Receives 5-10 MSs a week.

**Advice Column**

# Write what you like!

WHEN I WAS ASKED FOR A SHORT ARTICLE ON WRITING FOR SMALL PRESS MAGAZINES IT PROMPTED the question: Is that really what I do? The answer is that in general I don't (this article is an exception).

Why write at all? I'm driven to write by an internal compulsion. I may not feel happy when I'm writing and sometimes it seems a real chore but, like climbing mountains, when it's done it brings a sense of achievement that nothing else can. Perhaps because of this I write only what I want to write. I rarely sit down with the purpose of producing a story or poem to fit a particular magazine. I get an idea which results in something I'm pleased with and then I attempt to find a magazine that will take it.

I'm quite sure it is possible to learn to tailor pieces that will find an assured market, but for me there's no satisfaction in that. Everything I write has to seem worthwhile for its own sake. If I didn't feel that what I'd written was of lasting value I'd throw it away. It's not ridiculous to aspire to the ranks of those who've achieved immortality (even an obscure and slightly dusty immortality) through their literary work, and if you fail it's better to have tried and failed than to have spent all your life watching television.

So my advice to any writer is: Don't study the market and then try to fit into it; write what you think is worthwhile, *then* research the market, see which editors might agree with you, and submit your work to them. You won't get rich quickly, if at all, but if wealth is your aim, don't waste time on writing!

We all get lots of rejections, most of them quite impersonal because editors are always short of time, and you should never be offended about that. Sometimes, however, there will be a word of explanation or advice. That should be accepted gratefully, considered carefully, and either acted upon or not according to your own judgement. Rarely will you receive a really cutting rejection, although I've had a few, ranging from the blunt advice to give up writing and stick to doctoring (bad advice since I'm not a medical man!) to the rather plaintive note that the editor wished he could teach me how to write but felt the task was beyond him. It is pointless to reply to such comments (although knowing this doesn't always prevent me doing so). If they cause you to re-examine your commitment to writing they will not have been wholly destructive.

However, I can see that this piece will deserve to be rejected if I don't try to include some practical advice for you to ignore.

To my mind ideas are the essence of writing. However elegant your prose, however literate your verse, if they are not fueled by ideas they won't go anywhere. I doubt whether many people can generate ideas by sheer mental effort. I can't. All the ideas I consider best have been gifts from my subconscious. These are numerous enough to provide ample material, if only I can remember them. Alas I too easily forget and so I make sure I've always got pencil and paper handy to jot them down or, if I'm driving, a portable tape machine to record them.

Stories and poems never come to me complete. I get the germ of an idea, a line of a poem -- the rest is hard work. Sometimes one idea or line is not enough to build on and I file it away until another comes. But in the end there is no alternative to chiseling the rest of the piece from the hard rock of the conscious mind.

I prefer poetry to all other literary forms because perfection in a poem is not an impossibility. A poem can be held whole in the mind, and cut and polished until it is as hard and fiery as a diamond. Never be content with getting a poem almost right. For me poems must always have rhythm, usually symmetry, and often rhyme, but there are more different poetry magazines than there are poetic styles so whatever sort of poetry you write you'll gain acceptance if it's good (and maybe even if it isn't).

Short stories can be almost perfect, the degree of perfection attainable being inversely proportional to their length. One of the difficulties with revising stories is that you can overdo it and lose the original freshness. I find that the hardest part of producing the kind of stories I usually write is making the denouement clear without overstating it. I too easily fall into the trap of making it so subtle that the reader thinks there is no proper ending, or so obvious that there is no surprise. Editors can give invaluable advice about this dilemma, but probably won't. Try the story on family and friends and then cross-examine them to see if they got the point. If most of them didn't, then make it clearer. If they all guessed it on page 1, then wrap it up a bit. If you're really lucky someone may suggest a better ending anyway.

"Character-building" in short stories is a real problem. I've frequently been accused of not developing character in a story, but I'm bored by stories that are full of padded people. (I have a button on my word-processor which is labelled "INSERT CHARACTER", but it doesn't work.) I like short stories to be about ideas, especially in the fields of fantasy and science fiction: character is secondary. Nevertheless characters have to be believable, their behaviour needs to be consistent, and they must be clearly distinguished from each other. Names are especially important in fiction. What makes Russian novels such hard going is that all the characters have names ending in -vitch (which is Russian for 'son of a').

John Light *compiles Light's List of Literary Magazines, and has been widely published in the small presses.* FOCUS *invited some advice from him, to accompany the Market Survey. This was the result.*

continued on page 14

**Full Face:**

# Jenny Jones

I WRITE THIS DURING THE STRANGE LIMBO BETWEEN publication of a first novel and receiving reviews or sales figures. Friends say they like *Fly By Night*, but as yet there's no indication how it's going down anywhere else. I'm disconcerted to find myself prowling round the local Waterstones, nervously trying to see if anyone picks it up... An odd thing to do. An uneasy, if enviable, position to be in.

I didn't plan it, any of it. It's just that writing has always seemed to me as natural a process as reading -- and reading is more like breathing than anything else. I was the child who regularly fell down stairs because she could never bear to put her book down. It continues: I read while brushing my teeth, while waiting in traffic jams and checkout queues. Clothes are chosen for the capacity and number of the pockets (is this a two or three book coat?).

I began to write because I wanted to live in various fictional worlds longer than my favourite authors ever allowed. My earliest efforts were devoted pastiches ranging from Rider Haggard to Ray Bradbury, via Georgette Heyer and Raymond Chandler. In adolescence, the fictional world often seems more attractive than reality: my friends located their books away when I came to stay...

As a student I found different fantasies, satisfying in other, varied ways: Melville, Dostoevsky, Hesse, Marquez, ... most important of all, Peake. All sorts of things were thrown at us: Heironymous Bosch, Revenge Tragedy, Grand Opera, Ancient Greek drama (a slightly unusual route into feminism, this last). I digest it all, the proverbial blotting paper. But it was essentially a passive process: apart from academic work, I wrote nothing.

A succession of low-key jobs left me free to investigate further. I was an average-ly competent scrap metal merchant in Medway for a short period, then a rather stressed and harrassed secretary to a classical producer at CBS records. This was disastrous in all respects, the only advantage being the acquisition of complete boxed sets of all my favourite operas and Mahler symphonies.

Commuting daily from the badlands of Essex to central London, I kept reading. There were erratic forays into Jung, Buddhism, feminism. It wasn't all heavy: there was a constant leavening of thrillers, whodunits, historical novels (especially Dorothy Dunnett) and straight fiction. In the end I made a good bookseller, able to identify with almost any customer's tastes. But strangely, since reading *Lord of the Rings* three times running at the age of 14, sf and fantasy seemed to have been left far behind, along with any idea of myself as a writer.

It was Stephen Donaldson who started it all off again. During the long nights with wakeful babies, I lived in the Chronicles of Thomas Covenant. Here was someone even more exhausted than I was. More than that, I was gripped by the obsessiveness and intensity of it, the mood and atmosphere of the thing. Donaldson's prose strikes me now as almost unreadable but at the time it was a revelation.

There was a sudden realisation that an entire sub-genre had grown up since Tolkien. I tested the water... and found, over and over again, cardboard characters, cliched situations and landscapes, maddening talking vermin (apologies to Michael Moorcock), ghastly gadzookspeak, horrible rehashes of Arthurian legend. (I preserve a particular and virulent loathing for this last. Mallory was fine, T H White and Mary Stewart also. Wagner best of all, but really, are there *no* other stories anywhere?)

Why should so much fantasy be so drab? The heroic ideal -- that an individual's acts or thoughts are decisive on a grand scale -- is surely not outworn, even now. Especially now. In Jungian terms, the absence of a mythic significance to our lives goes some way to explain the unhappiness of much of our society.

I decided to try it out, try to construct an adventure that worked on a heroic, mythic scale. This was with no view to publication. It was purely for fun, to see what could be made of it. The exercise books began to fill.

It had to be a fast action story, with a large cast of characters, on a wide geographical scale. I have a low threshold of boredom.

I decided to use the old (and stereotyped!) device of transporting a central character from our world to an alternative place. Such a device externalises one of the most basic facts of human experience: that everyone feels an outsider at some point or another in his/her life. Perhaps writers are particularly prone to this; I suspect it is true of everyone. And although my heroine has many faults, I hoped that this perspective would enable people to identify with her.

For people have complained that my heroine is unsympathetic. I stand by her. She has to be tough, to survive the dangers of this particular alternative world. Also she has to grow, and there's a long way to go. This is a trilogy and is as much a record of the maturing of Eleanor Knight as anything else.

It must be admitted here that I did not at first envisage a trilogy. I hardly knew that I had one book, let alone three. But the story it is based on belongs to Apollo, and I had always been fascinated by Greek myths. (There was also an eccentric teacher at my junior school who read Homer to us over and over again. The favourite playground game was "you be Athena, and I'll be Odysseus...")

A serious challenge to Apollo is never overlooked. To a very limited extent, *Flight Over Fire* is modelled on the three plays of the Oresteia. Volume I sets up the original conflict, Volume II is the working of revenge (I have a version of the kindly Ones there) and Volume III brings about a kind of resolution.

It became an obsession. I neglected family, friends, house, garden, and dance classes. I began to slide out of the employment agency I had started with a friend; I bought a word processor.

The driving force was to portray extreme experience, where one might find a truth. I hoped that, if my characters were pushed hard enough, far enough, there would be something of clarity, a still centre, uncluttered by the mundane considerations of ordinary life. I am not interested in sensitivity, or delicacy, or pale watercolour prose.

There was no scheme, no chapter by chapter mapping of events. I knew what the last scene would be, that was all. And as it progressed, things began to draw together. 'Only connect' said E M Forster, and to my amazement, that was what started happening. I can remember the moment when a major piece of the jigsaw fell into place and I recognised that this was something different, a story that was worth telling.

I read excerpts at the local Writers' Circle. Although slightly bamused -- we've never had anyone writing *fantasy* here before -- they were very encouraging. Don't spend time polishing, they said, send it off. It's got something. An enthusiastic editor will tell you what needs altering...

I sent the first few chapters to an agent, who returned it saying that she thought it had a future, although her agency did not handle fantasy. She suggested I try Headline, who were known to be building up a fantasy and sf list. I sent the whole thing to Richard Evans, in his brief incarnation as commissioning editor there, before he moved to Gollancz. He rescued the MS from the slushpile, and offered advances on that and the other two volumes.

My first book. The first publisher I had approached. It's not supposed to happen like that. I still occasionally wonder when I'm going to wake up.

There was a change of gear. Richard did indeed, with considerable and constructive tact, tell me what needed altering. The advance, although by no means anything out of the ordinary for the first book of an unknown novelist, meant that I had to give this all a rather higher priority. I resigned from the employment agency and called myself 'writer' on my new passport.

I evolved techniques and methods. It was fun; it still is. In a first draft I write a minimum of 1000 words a day. This is the really exciting bit, closer to reading than anything else. I do it to find out what happens next. It may be rubbish; but it's rarely wasted. It's often necessary for me to explore dead ends before I know for sure that there's really no way out.

Because nothing is planned in detail, the only advance work on each chapter is a list of the characters concerned. Then I stare at the list. The mind ranges around. Sooner or later someone gets bored and begins to move. A directional arrow is added to the list. All that's needed then is the weather and we're away. There's a lot of weather in *Flight Over Fire*.

Usually, I'm so eager to get at the word processor (it lives in the sitting room, with the TV and two children...) that there's no question of writers' block. I'm generally overspilling with the urge to get on with the story. But sometimes there's a problem with it, and desperate measures are needed. The most serious cases require a heavy dose of music -- Sibelius's 4th symphony, David Byrne's Catherine Wheel, Duparc Mélodies or anything by Steve Reich -- *one* glass of red wine and/or a bath.

Although rewriting is not thrilling in the same way as a first draft, it does hold considerable fascination. Basically what you're doing is struggling to shape some wilfully intransigent raw material into something smooth, elegant, and totally spontaneous. It needs (but doesn't always get) the concentration and skill of a craftsman. It takes time and patience, and even then doesn't always work. But it's bloody marvellous when it does...

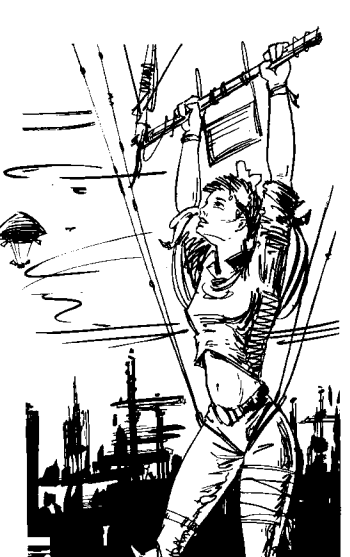
And although at this stage writing does not seem to be a route to fortune and fame, I cannot imagine ever wanting to do anything else. To be required to sit and think of the most interesting things one can seems to me quite wonderful. I'm hugely fortunate to have a husband who is prepared to do the actual bread-winning while I indulge this obsession.

There are other side benefits: the introduction to fandom via the BSFA was an eye-opener. All that previously unsuspected activity, gossip, and information... I tried it out at Chronoclasm and made many friends. I look forward to Novacon next (*now last*) month.

And back to reading. Geoff Ryman, William Gibson, Terry Pratchett, Colin Greenland, Gene Wolfe, Storm Constantine, Neil Gaiman, Iain Banks, Paul Park, Mary Gentle, in no particular order, have all kept me up late at nights recently. I've been introduced to comics and graphic novels and may write a story for Redfox.

Someone told me once that everyone knows at the age of fourteen what they ought to do when they grow up. At fourteen, I was reading science fiction and writing fantasy. Nothing's changed. There's just been the odd distraction on the way. ■

Fly by Night, *Vol I of Ms Jones's trilogy* Flight Over Fire, *is published Headline 1990. Vol II,* The Edge of Vengeance *is forthcoming.*



**DRABBLE**

*THE PHILOSOPHER FROM OUTER SPACE*

*When I crush an insect, I sometimes feel a sort of*
*... grief ...*
*An insect is so unimportant, it seems a shame*
*... to cease ...*
*so suddenly, so accidentally. My colleagues tell me insects do not feel pain, that sentimentality about insects is*
*... foolishness.*
*The vibro-cryo-tronic projector is to humans as my boot is to an insect. I test the analogy, but I do not feel*
*... grief ...*
*As its bulk beneath me shifts, targets, eliminates, I feel only a sort of*
*... glee ...*
*I am well trained. I know humans are not innocent of pain, but to feel sentimental about humans is*
*... unwise.*

*Cecil Nurse*

Continued from page 11

Careful choice of names can of itself set a scene or delineate a protagonist. Name a temptress Delilah, and you need say little else about her. Call the Galactic Emperor Bill Bottomley and however hard you try to convince your readers that he is a ruthless tyrant, they won't believe you. Alien sounding names are needed for alien races but don't use names like Kbb and Pttdu. Even Vance couldn't make them anything but irritating, because they're unpronounceable, slow up the reading, and leave the characters unidentified.

When you've written your piece, leave it a while and then reread it in two different ways (or three if you can think of another one). First of all, forget how clever and exciting it is: scan it for mistakes in spelling and punctuation; for sentences that are too long or too short; and for words that have been used again and again. Don't leave these chores to the editor, who is more likely simply to return your manuscript unread. Once you've eliminated all the mistakes and all the infelicities, try to reread the story with a fresh mind to see if you still find it satisfying. Get the manuscript typed, preferably on a word-processor, (double-spaced on one side of the paper only) and then read it yet again -- it is amazing how many hidden mistakes are glaringly obvious once they've been typed. If after all this rereading you are beginning to find the story boring, perhaps it is.

Do I need to remind you to keep a copy of your work? If the editor doesn't lose it the post office will -- eventually. Always include a stamped addressed envelope with your script. Most magazines run on a very tight budget and will not answer if you don't. Submit your work to only one magazine at a time. This requires patience, but will save you making enemies of too many editors. If you don't hear within a reasonable time (I usually allow six months), write to the editor to see if your work is still being considered or if it or the reply are lost in the post. If you still don't hear, cross the magazine off your list (and let me know so that I can cross it off mine). When submitting stories, one at a time is best. With poems I think three at a time is about right.

Once you find a magazine that likes your work, try to establish a good steady relationship with the editor. Reward the magazines that publish you by sending them your 'best' work before you try it elsewhere. Don't overwhelm them, though. Not many editors will want more than two of your stories awaiting publication at a time -- those that do are usually just hoarders who stockpile scripts until their magazine dies.

If you submit to a magazine a piece that has been published before, tell the editor so. Not all magazines publish only new work, but all editors like to know. Make sure, too, that the copyright reverts to you after publication, otherwise you won't be able to try for republication.

To finish, I'll repeat what I wrote at the beginning: Write what you like. That's not self-indulgence: it's artistic integrity. ■

## True Stories

# 'What I'm Trying To Say Is This...'

On days when I can't get started at all, I head up my notepad with those desperate words, and try to work out just what it is I am trying to say.

Occasionally I succeed.

Sometimes it is easy. I just put pen to paper and whole paragraphs pour out in a steady stream. Other times, although I seem to be getting what I want on to the paper, I find I am leaving gaps as I go along, spaces for phrases I can't quite grasp, like dropped stitches waiting to be picked up later.

Nobody makes us write. It is something we need or want to do. There are probably as many different needs or wants as there are writers. What is interesting to me is what happens when the two are incompatible.

Some years ago, I sent my youngest daughter to High School in California between 'A' levels and University. She was part of President Reagan's scheme for the international integration of teenagers. It was suggested by the organisers that we choose an area as much like our own as possible, to avoid the Mormon or Southern States, for example. It made sense, and California seemed ideal.

Not so. Kate lived for six months in a township which was strictly and entirely born-again Baptist, and where every social and work activity was controlled by the church elders. Despite this, uniformed Narcotics Agents patrolled the school campus because of the high incidence of drug abuse. It was like life on another planet, in fact, with Kate as the visiting alien.

### Val Whitmarsh

Some days after her return I was out shopping. The first words of an account of her experiences fell into my mind. I scrabbled in my bag. A pen but no paper. I tore into a shop, and almost ran to a coffee bar. The feeling was extraordinary. All I had to do was write it down. The sentences dropped out of the end of my pen as if to dictation. Three cups of coffee later, I read it over and knew it was exactly what I wanted to say. Kate corrected a few details, and I pushed it through the door of the local paper. Printed the following week, it covered a third of the page and there were no alterations.

I wasn't either surprised or grateful: I had a local story with lots of interesting facts.

The problem, I find, starts when I am asked to do something that is beyond my capabilities because it is creative. Newspaper reports aren't creative. As writers we use the same words whether we are being creative or not. At what point do we separate the two sides of the coin?

One day last year, I was pleasurably mulling over the fact that *Writer's Monthly* had awarded me first prize in their science fiction writing competition, published the story, and paid me for it.

The telephone rang. The editor of WM was on the line.

"Hutchinson's are after you!" she said, gleefully.

"What?"

"The publishers. An editor wants you to ring her. She likes your story."

Somewhat taken aback, I rang the number. The voice at the other end was brisk. "What I want you to do," she said, "is write me the synopsis of a space opera."

"Excuse me?"

"Give me a strong hero or heroine, and lots and lots of Galactic Action."

It took me six weeks. By that time I felt that I knew what I wanted to say. I had it all carefully plotted out on sheets of A4 paper sellotaped together and divided into 20 chapters. I introduced characters with machiavellian care, started global warfare, and livened up the sinking middle section with an interesting concept or two. I created a whole new universe, an intrepid heroine with a dark secret, and a hero willing and able to save mankind from certain destruction.

It began to read like Mills & Boon in Outer Space. Despite murder and devastation, I didn't feel a thing. The characters didn't so much lack depth as seem to be operating in another time dimension. The mayhem in which they were assisting hardly affected them at all. A sinister robot unexpectedly developed a strong line in wisecracking leprechaun-Irish, and died at his post (movingly, of course) in order to save the heroine as she fled across the Galactic war zone.

The hero began to look and behave like Mel Gibson...

I blew up a few space colonies and filled the black rim of the Universe with horrifically-disordered creatures. Gaudily costumed, they strolled across outposts spinning in darkest night like the gentlest of '60s hippies. Way out of sight, man.

I began to have nightmares in the three hours sleep I was allowing myself. I abandoned the synopsis and trimmed out the first few chapters. 'Banal' was probably the most descriptive word for them. It was all a matter of cognitive dissonance. I could *see* the great arched corridors of the manifacal Birth Registry, but they resembled our local Town Hall. I could *feel* the menace of outer space, where the planets rolled unendingly in their multi-hued dust jackets, but I could not encompass total nothingness and squeeze it on to my sheet of paper. Mel Gibson skipped along the empty walkways of a doomed rocket, zapping his gun with all the charisma of a comic book character.

I retyped the synopsis and posted it at dawn. I hoped never to see or hear of it again.

Dismally (after all, I was a writer, wasn't I?) I began to prepare the synopsis of a non-fiction book based on a long-planned but only partly-researched project.

Nothing came from the publisher. 'Solomon's Acorn' had vanished into a Black Hole. Somewhere in London it was being examined by coldly thoughtful eyes, and balanced against recent trends and publishing costs.

But a publisher is a publisher. I sent off the second synopsis, adding a cautious note to the effect that although the first one wasn't, probably, acceptable, how about this?

A reply crossed with the second parcel. It was a kind letter. My ideas were out-of-date, socio-political, and not required. Included were two copies of books by Orson Scott Card. What she'd like to see me try, urged my editor from her distant desk, was commercial space opera of the metaphysical genre. I could write (she said) which was a plus point, as you either can or you can't, so would I think about it?

The implication was clear. You can or you can't. I could. So I could produce the goods. Couldn't I?

I read through my first three chapters, and threw them away.

My family was disappointed. They hesitated, frowned, and said carefully. "But you should, shouldn't you? You were asked."

I didn't want to. I didn't have anything to say, and still haven't. Not a spark, not the merest original thought has come into my head since.

Very occasionally I meet other writers. When I relate this story they stare at me in shock. Perhaps you are reading this in shock, too, and thinking that if you had had my chance you would have taken it. All I can say is that I want to do what I want to do, and what I don't want to do is write what I don't want to write. Perhaps I'm not a creative person, after all, because when the second synopsis was also rejected, I extracted part of my research and it was accepted by *The Guardian* newspaper.

Can 'creativity' be manufactured on demand? It is a shame that of all the people that editor had to pick, it had to be me. Tough luck that my one and only published SF story was the one she read. One thousand words I could manage. Seventy thousand, I could not.

One lesson I learned, though. I hadn't realised that publishers read what we're written, seeking new writers. So get into print, and one day you'll be turning your own imagined universe into words that will fill the pictures in your head.

My own day is yet to come... ■

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*DRABBLE*

*HASHBY'S FIRST CASE*

*A crinkled woman entered Chief Inspector Hashby's office, put out her cigarette, and sat in the proferred chair.*

*Hashby coughed twice. "So you're the gal who's lost the umlaut?"*

*"That's right."*

*"Fraulein Deutsch of Cologne."*

*"That's right."*

*Hashby stood, removing from his pocket a magazine.*

*He said, "Do you know what this is?"*

*"No."*

*"It's a science-fiction magazine. It used to be called Focus. Fraulein Deutsch, if you can identify the editor of this magazine then I think Grantham CID can return to you the umlaut."*

*Deutsch looked at the picture on the inside front cover, and yelled, "That's him!"*

*Steve Palmer*

# Exercomp 3

From FOCUS 21: **Write a 50-70 word plot summary or blurb of a book, short story, or trilogy, including the following five words: *megacyte, crimson, hopping, euphoria, industry.* Then add a title that uses none of these words.**

There were eight entries.

* * *

**A BLOODY BUSINESS**

Alphega Inc., the monolithic corporation of the Venus-based biochemical industry, has received an anonymous ultimatum: hand over a secret plasma formula or random batches of its multi-million dollar synthetic blood products will be contaminated with a trigger virus dedicated to transmuting human red blood cells into a deadly crimson megacyte.

Three ex-employees are under suspicion.

Planet-hopping Euphoria Maxim, independent ace security operative, has seventy-two hours to unmask the blackmailer.

*Judith M Johnstone*

* * *

**DESERTS OF VAST ETERNITY**

A senile infrared star where yellows and blues are long forgotten and orange has merged into crimson.

A dying world where amoeba-like megacytes survive mysteriously by their industry against increasing entropy.

Are exist the last remnants of a daring expedition, drugged into euphoria to avoid the reality of their plight.

Their galaxy-hopping explorations are finished, only dreams remain.

But Ed Jong swears the crashed spacecraft looks strangely changed...

*Peter Lancaster*

* * *

**THEY SEND TERMINAL CASES TO DISNEYLAND**

When Naf is born, no-one notices the crimson megacyte cruising his bloodstream, and, as he grows up, he realises he is unsuited to the local industry of slate mining. Then the story really takes off as we see his terror on being abducted by aliens, then his euphoria at being taken on a world-hopping tour of the galaxy, before the heart-wrenching transformation that ends both his life and the story.

*Daniel Buck*

* * *

**CLOUD OF MEMORY**

Crag-hopping above boiling clouds, the euphoria Megan feels in her first command of a scout craft changes to fear as she lets its fragile disc slip below to a world lit only by frequent but erratic flashes of crimson lightning. There rhomboidal cavities grind against each other with unceasing industry. Into them, Helen had vanished, her innocent childhood memories absorbed by the geomorph, projected into the minds of the mother ship crew -- with comic effect. But Megan dares not permit the megacyte access to her knowledge: for as a child she'd been naughtier than Helen -- much, much naughtier.

*Andrew Green*

* * *

Singing eerily the hell-blade whirled into action!

*The Saga Of The Crimson-Eyed Warrior Continues*

Wandering through a time warp Eric the Inebriate and his faithful companion Balder Birgut are hop picking in rural England. But their hopping holiday is disturbed in more ways than one by lovely Euphoria Jarre who leads them on a dangerous quest.

Only Eric and his ever-thirsty sword Bjornswiller can save the Kentish brewing industry and civilisation as we know it from

*The Curse Of The Melt-Munching Megacytes Of Maidstone!*

**ALE-IEN**

Soon to be a major film starring Arnold Schwarzenegger and Danny Devito.

*Liz Robinson*

**BOOK 1 OF THE REDDISH-COLOURED AMPHIBIAN ON A POGO STICK** by Dave Addings

In this book a young knight goes on a quest to seek the wisdom of a fabled creature called the crimson hopping frog (presumably the amphibian of the title) in order to find a cure for the strange plague of euphoria sweeping the land. To help him the knight has a magic megacyte (I don't know what it means either) and a harmonica.

The author has obviously not put much industry into this book and I shouldn't bother with it.

*Zoë Page*

* * *

**CYBERDEATH BONDAGE SQUAD — ON VACATION**

The crimson zombie flesh eaters are hopping mad. Industry is sabotaged: there is a megacyte bomb in the King's lavatory; and the Golden Doughnut goes nova in 24 hours!

So, where's Smegwinkle -- Satan's Swordsman, and Grand Wizard of the Throbbing Green Schlong? He's 'out to lunch': bombed-out on Madame Trembler's Linctus of Euphoria. Whoops !!!!!!

An hilarious, blood-lusting, pelvic-thrusting, roller-coaster SF SEX and SPLATTER extravaganza!

HUNGGA-BUNGGA!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

*Gary Mackie*

* * *

**INTO THE ONTOP OF**

The Industry sells Euphoria: nothing else will do.

The customers are demanding, are always right, and are sick of it. Literally. Something has contaminated The Product. Psych-defenses have been breached, and The Megacyte is on its way back. Fusion has begun in the city, the suburbs will be next.

Elgin Crimson, Vice-President of Hopping, Inc., holds the key to the future. There's only one problem -- he has to die to use it.

*John Dean*

* * *

**Comments:** Peter Lancaster describes this exercise as 'teasing out the different meanings in the five words and creating contexts for them'. One could also see it as 'finding a subject which allows one to use the (purposely awkward) selection of words'. In judging this competition I find myself looking at two things: whether the writer succeeds in establishing a meaning for the neologism 'megacyte'; how smoothly the words are incorporated into the flow of the blurb or review.

The winner of Exercomp 3 is *Andrew Green*. NSFA Voucher on its way.

**EXERCOMP 4:**

**A CHANNEL TUNNEL, HURRAH!**

A few people have complained that exercomps are rather trivial and irrelevant to the practice of writing. Meanwhile, Bruce Sterling, in a review of David Garnett's *Zenith* anthology in NYSFR #13, wonders why there are no British sf stories about, for example, the Channel Tunnel (little realising just how tedious the subject really is). Responding to this, Exercomp 4 is surely a true creative challenge:

*Write a TV news report featuring (or mentioning) the 'Channel', circa 2045. 100-500 words.*

**FIRST PRIZE:** a copy of Keith Brooke's first *Keepers Of The Peace*, kindly donated by Gollancz.
**The Runner-up:** will receive a £5 NSFA voucher.
Deadline: March 9, 1991.