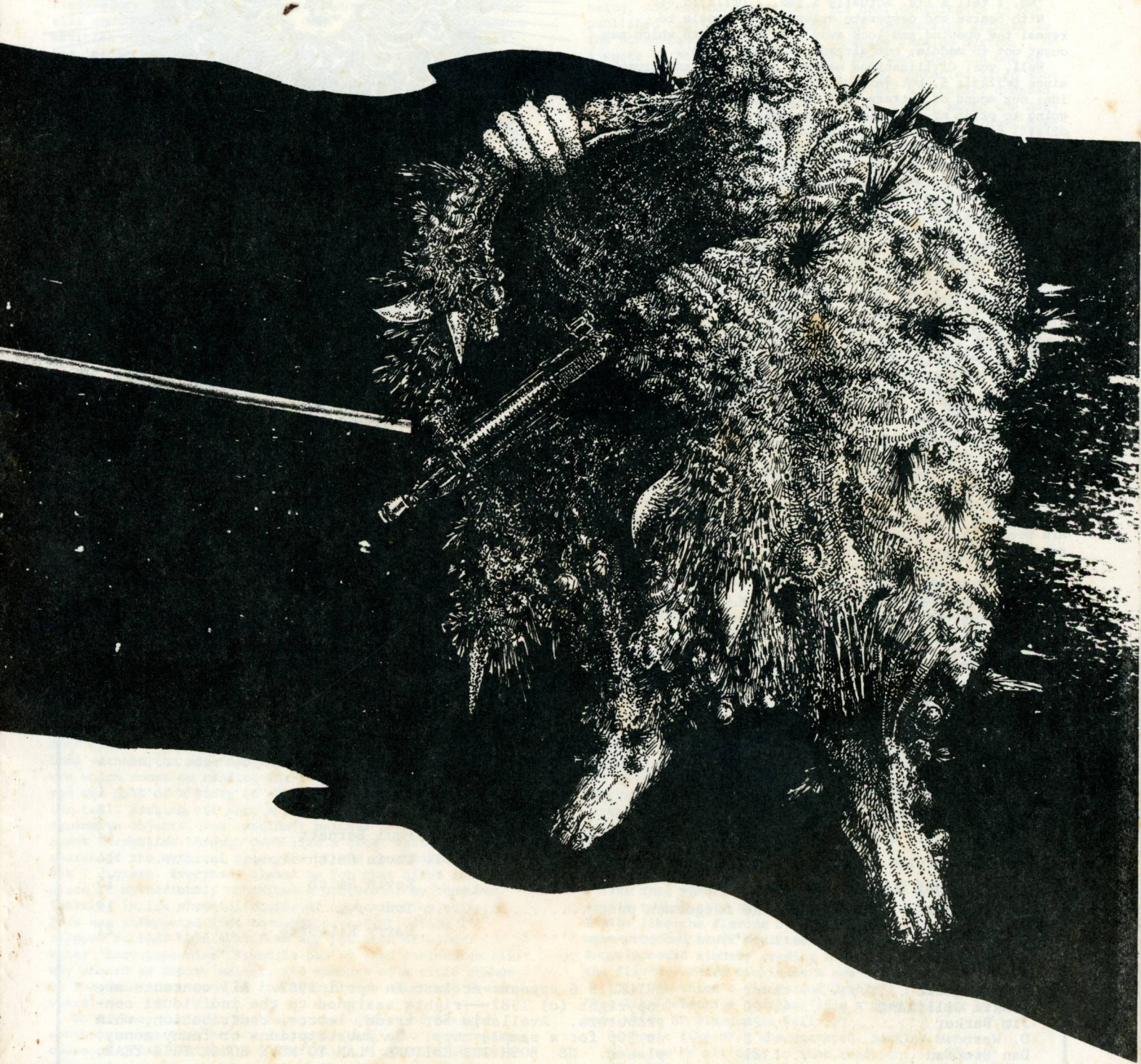


# DRILKJIS





# CONCERNING a number of things

Beneath the colossal weight of the ancient granite tomb and the immemorial desert sands, explorers have chipped their way at last through that final slab which seals the aeons-old burial chamber. From the murky opening comes a gush of foul, stale air. The deafer of the two explorers directs the feeble rays of his torch into the stygian gloom.

"I see... wonderful things," he breathes.

"What?" says his partner, jotting down the immortal moment on seven-column analysis paper.

"No, I tell a lie. Actually I see... *Drilkjis 6!*"

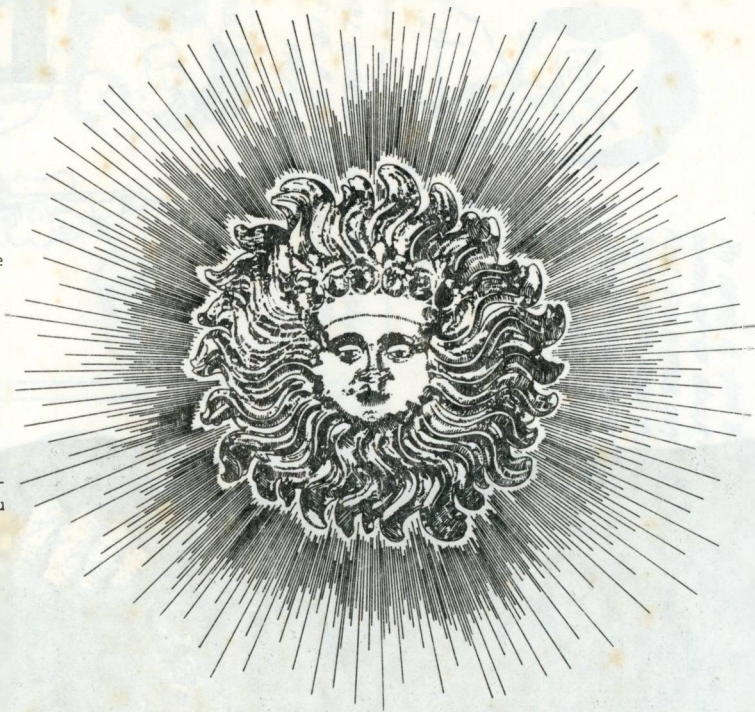
With hoarse and desperate cries they struggle to reseal the opening and lock away that thing with which man ought not to meddle; but already it is too late...

Well, yes. Civilizations may not have risen and crumbled since *Drilkjis 5*, but various new fans have soared to oblivion; our mound of letters from Harry Harrison ("When are you going to print my complaints about that wretch Peter Nicholls?") has reached the proportions of a serious fire hazard; D. West claims to have sold his included article to *Black Hole* for an undisclosed but piffling sum; Kevin's piece 'The Skycon Bookkeeping System' has been updated out of all recognition, as has Ian Watson's 'My Forthcoming First Novel'; and I seem to have published more than forty fanzines of varying sizes, creeds and colours during the interregnum. The usual wearisome apologies are omitted.

No apologies, either, for the fact that the Ian Watson and Garry Kilworth contributions were previously unleashed on the world as talks. Last issue we had one or two complaints about the recycling of convention material in *Drilkjis*: the person most annoyed by this practice was David V. Lewis, which is interesting, since he never attends conventions. Neither does Eric Mayer, who worried that the creativity once reserved for fanzine articles was being diverted to convention speeches. Possibly it is: but if the ephemeral speech is subsequently preserved and immortalized as a printed article, the loss to fandom isn't very evident. Unless you consider that words start to deteriorate upon their first exposure to the air.

Of course the transcript of an impromptu speech may be incoherent rubbish demanding swift rejection; even a carefully written speech may need brilliant editing in order to work well on the page. Either way, the *Drilkjis* editors are revoltingly confident of their ability to cope. (They remember with secret glee that an article they'd both rewritten heavily provoked one grudging reviewer to comment, "They can even edit \*\*\*\* \*\*\*\*\* into readable shape.")

No further excuse is needed, then, for my plunge into material from talks I've recently inflicted on audiences whose numbers have often reached single figures...



*The Corridors of Power*

"If only they had asked me," many a fan has murmured in day-dreams. "I could have told them that the Blue Danube cannot flow through vacuum, that someone with Darth Vader's respiratory problem would never have passed his Empire forces medical, and that—however mind-blowing their abilities may seem—Scanners live in vain."

Unfortunately this vision of the superior fannish brain laying down the law to scurrying mundanes has been poisoned, by the fact that someone did ask me. *The Omni Book of the Future*, to be precise. Thanks to the exaggerations of my pal Mike Rohan, who for a while was *de facto* editor of the thing. I was hauled aboard the doomed enterprise as that most mysterious of all life-forms: a science fiction consultant.

The word *consultant*, according to a reference work on my shelves, derives from *con*, "to defraud, dupe, swindle," and *sult*, an elliptical form of *insult*. And the full definition is "a tipster disguised as an oracle, especially one who has learned to decamp at high speed despite the large briefcase and heavy wallet. The earliest literary reference appears to be the 9th-century Arabic tale *Ali Baba and the 40 Consultants*." Unfortunately this chap was thinking of

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Drilkjis Six Editor—Dave Langford, 22 Northumberland Avenue, Reading, Berkshire, RG2 7PW, U.K.  
The Other Editor—Kevin Smith, 10 Cleves Court, St Mark's Hill, Surbiton, Surrey, KT6 4PS, U.K.



the computer industry: in the wonderful world of literature, the consultant is lucky if the day's takings will run to a bottle of meths for consumption back at his doss-house.

Let me—as they say in science fiction novels—summarize those facts of which you are already well aware. *The Omni Book of the Future* was a slightly repellent publication, cunningly planned to recycle mounds of old *Omni* articles, pictures and fiction in the guise of a dynamic new weekly partwork which gradually built up into a colossal volume of reference suitable for the amusement and instruction of your descendants even unto the fourth generation. Eaglemoss Ltd, the British firm who (under licence from *Omni*) were going to print and sell *BotF*, were widely experienced in the subjects of their existing partworks *You and Your Camera*, *The Living Countryside* and *Britain's Heritage*, but not so hot when it came to esoteric matters like fiction, or science. Hence the freelancers, or, as some termed them, freeloaders. Mike Rohan, having a degree in law, was naturally enough assigned to update *Omni's* doddering old science articles—crossing out 'transistor revolution' and inserting 'microchip revolution' throughout. My own traces of expertise being in physics, it was equally natural that I should draw the short straw for the suicide mission of reading all the published *Omni* fiction.

The instructions were to absorb and digest said fiction, to indicate which of its authors were Big Names, and to give a black mark to any story by a Big Name which was felt to be too long, difficult or American for the planned audience of 100,000 non-intellectuals.

"You must bear in mind that we're aiming at social classes C1 and C2," they told me. "None of your intelligentia. I see our average reader as, er, a plumber."

"I knew a plumber once who liked all of Olaf Stapledon," I said cheerfully.

"Who's Olaf Stapledon?" they said.

I slunk away, read all the *Omni* fiction, and spent some weeks in intensive care before—recovered at last—I took Eaglemoss a postage stamp on which were written the titles of the stories I'd really really liked.

"But you haven't listed the Asimov story," they said, having learnt a thing or two in the interim.

"No, it's a rotten lousy story," I understated.

"Yes, but we can't leave out the Asimov story, we need that for the big push with the first issue..."

Presently I found I was receding into the background as far as *BotF* was concerned. *You and Your Camera* having conveniently folded, Eaglemoss had a spare editor on their hands and promptly put him in charge of the new project—his SF qualifications inspired them with awe, for lo! he had actually once written a thesis on *A Voyage to Arcturus*. A man with long experience of bashing the prose of amateur cameramen into shape, he itched to do the same to professional SF authors: one day I dropped in to say hello and noticed the carcass of one of my recommended stories on a desk. It was Silverberg's 'Our Lady of the Sauropods', and all over it were scribbles like *cut this bit by about a third and dialogue needs to be tightened up a lot here* (I suppose there wasn't a lot of dialogue in *You and Your Camera*, actually) and *can we lose all this philosophical stuff?* Perhaps I exaggerate, but not much. With great tact it was pointed out that this sort of thing was Not Done, Old Chap—not to already published stories, anyway.

To everyone's surprise and horror, the trial issue of *BotF* appeared at Novacon 11 last year. It was like a thin *Omni* without the ads—denying you that heady sense of adventure which comes on reading the real *Omni*, where every time you get hold of a story it escapes like a lizard shedding its tail, dashing off into a thicket of ads for hideous and expensive objects. You wouldn't believe the hours I've spent struggling through *Omni* like a great white hunter in search of the mythical graveyard of the continuations... but I digress. Everybody blamed me for that first issue, since it mysteriously contained a picture of my hungover features in its shameful roster of 'contributing editors'. This was unexpected (not to mention unpaid), since I'd slipped further than ever from any position of power: Peter 'Encyclopaedias' Nicholls had by then insinuated his way aboard as deputy editor, and rumours of a title change to *The Foundation Book of the Future* were whispered everywhere.

To digress further: The happy side-effect of Peter's apotheosis was that he found himself unable to promote the cause of great (but not too difficult) literature at Eaglemoss and also finish his new book *The Science in Science Fiction*, to be delivered in January 1982 on pain of penalty clauses drafted by a lineal descendant of the Marquis de Sade. The upshot was that while Peter moved into Eaglemoss, I moved into his book; and thus dynamic hacks Stableford and Langford toiled away till January at 30,000 word chunks

of mingled technocracy and SF references. (An alternative explanation of all this, put forward by a recently appointed Gollancz editor whom I am not at liberty to name, is that the apathetic P. Nicholls would never have finished the book by himself anyway, Eaglemoss or no Eaglemoss.)

This, then, is how the tangled freelance life works. I lost sight of *The Omni Book of the Future* in the general flurry of letters from Roxby Press, who are packaging *The Science in SF* as they did the *Encyclopaedia of SF*; the letters said things like "Please can you suggest a piece of skiffy artwork to illustrate Brian's bit on Alien Social Rituals?" This wasn't easy, since the only alien social ritual I can ever remember is Sheckley's 'Dance of the Reciprocal Trade Agreement'... but eventually I asked myself, "What would the great Rob Holdstock have done in this situation?" And the answer came as if by magic—the same as always—he'd fake something. Long before *BotF* came into being, Rob had done over both its deaf consultants in one published caption, identifying some nondescript artwork as the Rohan-Langford 'Deaf Ear' Subspace Jamming System... So I wrote to Roxby's minion suggesting that they run one of those endemic pictures showing a slimy tentacled alien monstrosity having its evil way with a not noticeably dressed young lady, with the caption: "Social Ritual among the Roxboids. Having signed an important contract with Planet Roxby, Earth's lady ambassador Petra Nicholls takes part in the Roxboid version of a handshake."

I haven't heard much from Roxby since... and in case the connexion with *BotF* is becoming a little tenuous, I should add that I haven't heard much from them either.

The ultimate, cruel irony, for Peter Nicholls, was that four days after Brian Stableford and I had delivered the work he couldn't do himself because of his editorial job... just four days later, the *Omni BotF* was killed off. Incredible amounts of money had been poured down various carefully chosen drains—"There'll be six ads on HTV tonight," Peter had said once with casual pride. Seventeen of the weekly instalments had been prepared, five printed and three distributed for market-testing... and the final, decisive market test just happened to take place in the West Country at a time when the West Country was for the most part a snow-drift. This conclusively established that nobody wanted the product enough to hire a snowplough and risk death from exposure in order to buy their copy.

Despite suggestions that further and equally informative surveys might be conducted in the central Sahara or Upper Volta, the magazine stopped dead at this point. Eaglemoss made a few last noises about keeping the material on file for a dynamic new release when the economy starts booming again, or when there's a sudden new upsurge of interest in science and the future... or, as my friends at Eaglemoss have been heard to mutter, when flights of winged pigs darken our skies.

There is probably no moral to be drawn for other SF magazines. *BotF* was not aiming at the SF market, which in Britain is somewhat puny—a few years back I was hearing of books being bounced for paperback because they seemed unlikely to achieve 25,000 sales, while today's British SF paperbacks have total print runs averaging only 10,000 to 12,500. The market wooed by *BotF* was the infinitely larger and more gullible one which laps up *The Unexplained*—a dreadful mess which, recycling the 1978 *Pan World Atlas of Mysteries* just as *BotF* was to recycle *Omni*, was the first partwork claiming to be not so much wondrously educational as good, sleazy, irrationalist fun. By contrast, even *BotF* was up-market; by contrast, it seems in retrospect, *BotF* may have been setting its intellectual sights too high.

Which is a fairly depressing thought, after all that talk of plumbers; and on the whole, I'd much rather blame its failure on the weather.

#### *Crossing the Line*

I like that indefinable SF flavour, even in books which aren't technically SF. (It's no measure of literary merit: I also like the flavour of beer, but as with SF I avoid the mass-produced stuff squirted out under top pressure.) The *Encyclopaedia* rightly credits Richard Condon's books with the flavour: Peter Dickinson's non-SF can have it too. Thus:

"Try Dickinson's *The Poison Oracle*," I told somebody. "You like detective stories; it's a good one and it's got this weird SF flavour as well..."

"I don't like SF," she quavered, backing away.

Well, we're all used to that reaction, aren't we?

"Try this, *The Poison Oracle*," I told someone else in a bookshop. "You're an SF fan—you'll enjoy the flavour."

"Umm. A detective story. Are you sure it's really SF?"

"Well, not quite, but it's good—with an SF-ish feel."

"15p's a bit much," he said, returning it to the shelf.

Wish ghetto walls weren't kept repaired on both sides. ✱



# BELIEVING SF

Ian Watson



Friends and Fellow Fen...

I stole that opening from Ken Bulmer, who impressed me mightily with this amiable and impassioned piece of oratory at the first Convention I ever attended, at Birmingham in 1973. He also impressed me greatly by *tearing up* his prepared speech... then finding the real one in his other pocket. Alas, I can't afford to tear up paper today owing to the dire straits that Tory policies have reduced this country to. So the verbal echo will have to suffice, to remind me of that fatal day in November 1973 when I first became addicted to attending science fiction conventions... and look what has happened to me now: up here in the firing line, about to deliver what Progress Report number 4 described as my Quest of Honour speech. I think they confused me with Jerry Pournelle...

Of course, I had become addicted to sf itself at a much earlier and more tender age. I blame Dan Dare for it—and don't we all! As soon as I saw the green faces of the Treens, I knew that this was for me; and curiously enough, nowadays when I get up for breakfast in the morning at a convention I notice that my face, and the faces of many of those around me, for some reason seem to be a delicate shade of green.

But of course Dan Dare was kids' stuff. Foolishly tossing away my bundles of old *Eagles*, which I could have sold for a fortune today, I graduated to pulp novels such as the famous *Antro the Life Giver* by the immortal Jon J. Deegan. And trust Peter Nicholls to ruin my golden memories by publishing an encyclopaedia revealing that this was only a house name.

I remember clearly the newsagent's shop where I bought this remarkable work, and several others, with my pocket money. In the window a little yellow plastic ostrich bobbed its head in and out of a glass of water all day long, as an example of perpetual motion; and it says something about the emptiness, barrenness and deprivation of the Tyneside of my childhood that this plastic ostrich was a thing of wonder and amazement, a star attraction. Since there was little else of wonder or amazement in the vicinity, I cast up my gaze to the actual stars instead, and fantasized. Which demonstrates that sensory and environmental deprivation do have some connexion, at least in my case, with the genesis of science fiction. And if that's true for me, then how many future cartographers of the cosmos or of inner space are being compelled to dream right now, as this country is forced back by economic madness to the deprived condition of my childhood?

But in case you feel that this speech is becoming politically one-sided, I must—speaking as an sf writer—say one thing in favour of the Conservative government. They have invented time travel. They have successfully built a time machine, which takes us right back to the Nineteen Thirties. Unfortunately, that's the only place that it does go to. And it can't travel into the future. In the best tradition of van Vogt, they are busily constructing a radioactive barrier to prevent any access to the future.

But now that I have mentioned van Vogt, I must confess that I moved on from pulp novels by the immortal Jon J. Deegan to even more immortal, or at least reprinted, things—namely the *classics*—though little did I know then that they were classics (I thought Virgil's *Aeneid* was), and little did I know that I was living through the Golden Age.

I discovered 'mature' books, with hard backs on them. (That's what mature books are—like trees.) And it was obvious to me at once, finding these in the local library amid the works of Graham Greene and D.H. Lawrence and Jane Austen; it was obvious from a mere glance at the authors' names on the spines that, compared with Greene or Lawrence, writers with names like A.E. van Vogt or Isaac Asimov or editors called Groff Conklin were far from ordinary. Obviously they must possess alien wisdom.

Now, I have entitled this speech 'Believing SF'. And first I wish to talk about *readers'* beliefs—remembering

my own epiphany (which my dictionary defines as 'a moment of manifestation of supernatural reality') when I first espied the name Groff Conklin.

Frequently readers do believe intensely in what one is writing—which means that an awesome responsibility rests on the shoulders of us science fiction writers. I can demonstrate this from my fan mail.

But far be it from me to brag about my fan mail. So, in the modest and self-effacing spirit of the editorial matter in *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine*... [Laughter] Now, let us not joke about *IASFM*: I've heard pointed references to it several times, but I think it's a good thing because they bought a story from me a few weeks ago. In fact the contract came in the post, and Judy said, "Hey, let's have a read of the story." So I got down the carbon copy for her, and a while later she shouted, "Hey, Ian, you've got two page nines—both the same."

"Oh," I said. "That means one is the carbon copy, and one is the top copy. That means that *Isaac Asimov's SF Magazine* has just bought a story with the last page missing!" What was funnier was that we read through the story carefully, and there was a damned sight better ending at the bottom of page eight. Well, you may complain about editors intervening: sometimes the Editor in the sky takes a little reach into your pile of sheets, and disarrays them, and you sell to *Isaac Asimov's SF Magazine*. So remember that. If you've got unsold stories, just take the last page off and send them out again.

Anyway, the reason I mentioned that was my fanmail. I want to read you a postcard which I received a while ago from an American soldier stationed in New York State. It was sent to me, care of Ace Books, postmarked 'Army Postal Service'—and if you believe I'm making this up, I have it right here.

'Hey Ian! I been reading your books, man. Far out! Like, where do you get your dope, man? The Amazon? East Africa? Do you snort it man, raw. Chapter 13, Alien Embassy can only come from mainlining! I bet you do that tantric fucking too, huh man, keep it hard for hours, right? You got an old lady, man? I bet she's a fox. Any kids, any whole chromosomes? Were they born with their brain sticking out of their heads?' (This is a literary allusion to *The Embedding*, showing that this guy is deeply read in my works.) 'Hey, do you know Jerry Pournelle left "The Event Horizon" out of his book *BLACK HOLES*? You got screwed, man. You sure know your needles, man, i.e. "Thy Blood Like Milk". Dicko. But I liked it!!! I like all your shit, man. Does that make me nuts too? How you know about the seedy side of Hamberg [sic], GER? Send me some info like Heinlein and Herbert did, huh? And I'll buy another book and you'll get back the money for the envelope and stamp!'

Of course, out of politeness I did reply to this card, providing my eager correspondent with the appropriate addresses of cocaine shops in Brazil and brothels on the Reep-erbahn.

Yet it is not always a good idea to reply to such things. I replied to one person in America who wrote to me that he had made love to a dolphin and was in telepathic communication with a sperm whale, and thought I had stolen *The Jonah Kit* from him... This wasn't completely fair, actually, as Scribner's in America published *The Jonah Kit*, while two years earlier Gollancz had published it in Britain. And this guy had written his book about how he made love to dolphins and was in telepathic communication with sperm whales; he'd mailed it to Scribner's and they turned it down for some reason. I don't know why. Anyway, he assumed that, because Scribner's then published *The Jonah Kit* a couple of months later in an American edition, they had quickly got onto me as someone slick and sadistic who could turn his humanitarian and uplifting work into a bit of slick, commercial sci-fi... using his experiences and selling them. They'd just airmailed the manuscript over to me, and I'd done a quick



job on it. I did write back, which was my initial mistake in corresponding with him; and pointed out that it was originally published in a different country, called England, which some Americans have heard of—a couple of years earlier. The ultimate upshot of all this was a five-page letter in dramatized form fantasizing about how he would visit me in Moreton Pinkney (if he could find it!), slash the telephone wire, and beat my face to a pulp, because I had, quote, 'mindfucked' him... so I ought to get something back in kind.

Risky business, 'mindfucking' people—writing stuff that interferes with their belief structures, affecting them deeply.

Alas, John Lennon found this out, and I will always bear in mind the statement made by his assassin: "I understood the words, but I didn't understand the message."

In a sense, the only equivalent impression you can make on an artist who has affected you deeply is to kill him. ([Audience noises] Ah—well—you can get him to sign books if you go to science fiction conventions, but otherwise—) For some it is the ultimate, total act of commitment. Which raises the spectre, in some alternate or future world, not of autograph hunters but of scalp hunters. And in that world, no doubt, Maxim Jakubowski's smash-hit of last year from Virgin Books, *Rock Stars in their Underpants*, is entitled *Rock Stars in their Coffins*.

And, of course, dead artists are usually preferable to living artists—which must be the reason why the Government has crippled the publishing industry, and in the process writers too. (Indeed the Government seems convinced that a dead population is better than a living population—a curious philosophy for a government, unless this is the only way they can think of to remain in power... forever.)

Yet some aspects of the publishing industry deserve a little bit of censure too.

Recently, a curious thing happened. Bob Sheckley bought a story from me—no, that was not the curious thing. The story is called 'Bud' and appears in his anthology *After the Fall*. It's about the difference between sexual and asexual reproduction. So when I received a copy of the British edition, I looked through my story with the usual nervous anticipation—having already noticed at an idle glance that the name of Roger Zelazny was misspelt four times in the book...

And just here I must insert an aside to the effect that when paperbacks are costing £1.50, £1.75, some editorial staffs could possibly take a little more care in producing them. Have you noticed the back cover of John Varley's *Wizard* in the UK edition? (A rather fine book, I think, since Varley has bravely done the opposite of what everyone expected.) 'Isaac Asimov has compared John Varley to the young Robert Heinlein and George R.R. Anderson called him ...' Now, ordinary hype I can put up with—though it is getting out of hand—but who the hell is George R.R. Anderson, and do the publishers even care? I shouldn't be surprised to find jacket endorsements, soon, by Ursula K. Le Guin, or Philip José Holdstock.

Anyway, I looked within my story and found that in the crucial sentence which explained all, the word 'asexual' had been printed as 'sexual'. Thus making the story slightly difficult for readers to understand. After gnashing my hair and tearing my teeth for a while, I despatched a letter to the paperback house in question, and received in reply an apologetic letter saying: "We've no idea how it happened, we're terribly sorry, please accept any free book from our catalogue, enclosed..." Rather as though I had complained about a bad pack of sausages.

Scanning through the catalogue of this leading British paperback house I came upon the sf list and discovered that roughly 88 of the titles were by American authors and only 6 by British; and of these 6 titles, only 3 were by living authors. (I would be tempted to suggest that the others died of starvation, but actually H.G. Wells passed away for different reasons.) So I wrote back saying: "You'd better send me a free copy of your edition of *Repairing Houses*, as we'll jolly well have to repair our own, given this kind of purchasing policy." To which a letter came back, saying: "You know, actually our list does seem rather disproportionate. Thanks for pointing it out."

But actually, can one really blame the publishers for spelling authors' names wrong? This is the upshot of straitened circumstances, high interest rates and fear. It's more expensive and less efficient to be poor. This applies right through from heating one's home to publishing a book.

And of course publishers are going to take fewer risks publishing intelligent or original books, and simply pump out old Asimov reprints, when they're scared out of their minds by falling sales (as more and more potential buyers

tramp into the dole queues) and by interest rates which are still far too high and by a level of the Pound which must make Margaret Thatcher's manhood swell with pride.

So, if you want good fresh quality sf, you should know how to vote at the next election. And if you happen to believe in the future which we all write about, or if you want a future at all, ditto.

And need I mention, too, that you won't be able to borrow much new sf from the libraries, either, because the libraries have had to stop buying books. And because of that, in Britain at least, the publishers who rely on library sales are going to search their souls, and need a lot of faith, before they risk publishing any new home-grown science fiction. This applies particularly, and devastatingly, to hopeful new writers—of whom, no doubt, there are quite a few in this audience. With the Tories in charge, you've got a cat-in-hell's chance of having your first novel accepted. (I shall leave aside the possibility of a spending spree leading up to the next election. It's quite possible, but it does cost an awful lot of North Sea oil revenue to dismantle industry instead of boosting it, to pay to make three million people unemployed, and to buy all the Trident missiles and bigger nuclear submarines that we need... like a fish needs a frying pan.)

Sf may in many respects be an escapist literature—though personally I would argue otherwise, at least regarding my own—but, if you do like escapism, you're going to have to make a political commitment to fight for even that, down here on Earth in Merry England.

How does all this affect a writer's belief in what he or she is doing? Aside from the fact that it has compelled me finally to join the Labour Party and to devote time and energy to standing as a candidate in the coming County Council elections, I have noticed a curious phenomenon in my writing over the past year, including the novel which I'm currently working on. (This particular novel, of course, will not be the next one to be published. Writers are usually some way ahead of the book currently due to be published; so that, by publication day, the novel which is brand new to the readership is already part of the writer's ancient memories.) I have noticed that I have begun to write comedy. Or what I think of as comedy. The themes remain connected to my previous themes, but now they are receiving comic treatment. Or what I think of as comic treatment... Perhaps this is a natural progression for a writer—an expansion of the range of voice—and would have happened anyway. But perhaps at least partly circumstances are dictating it. Horace Walpole, Fourth Earl of Orford, wrote in 1776 in a letter to the Countess of Upper Ossory (which sounds like a title of nobility straight out of Jack Vance): "The world is a comedy to those that think, a tragedy to those that feel." Though I wouldn't deny that I have thought before, now I have been compelled increasingly to act on thoughts, to put thinking into practice.

Actually, I consider that all of my books to date have been examples of putting thinking into practice in the fictional domain. But now I have to apply that thinking to what is at the moment, unfortunately, the real world.

And so should we all—if we are thinking clearly about the real causes of what is happening these days, and not just reacting emotionally and instinctively, seeking consolation in sabre-rattling about supposed Russian threats, or in hatred of 'greedy' workers and gratitude that they are at last being stomped—which, translated into actual terms, means that the real producers of the wealth of this country are being destroyed, body and soul, and that the next generation is being ruined in advance in terms of health, housing, education and morale, thus laying up fearful problems for the future. A house which is deliberately encouraged to fall into ruins—here we are back at house repairs again—a house neglected to save money on the upkeep costs vastly more to put to rights later on—if it can be put right. And the same applies to a country: a country within which we hope to be able to go on reading sf and creating it and attending conventions such as this one.

Last year *Fantasy & Science Fiction* published a short story by me, 'The World SF Convention of 2080', which was reviewed—enthusiastically—as a triumph of black sarcasm. Well, yes. But again, it was also something of an affectionate tribute. I feel a great deal of affection for those who could go on attending sf conventions, in pursuit of their dreams and their joy in life, even if they had to hike there across a savage terrain, pursued by wolf packs, and even if the high point of the banquet is squirrel stew—though come to think of it, maybe squirrel stew might win out over Supreme of Chicken Dragonara [the main dish served at the *Yorcon II banquet*—Eds]. Or maybe Supreme of Chicken Dragonara



is squirrel stew!

But I would much rather that this delightful institution of sf conventions carries on without our having to drag our crutches around the luminous bomb craters or through the new hunger marches, and when we arrive at the tent in which we can afford to stay, finding that the only exciting novel this year exists in just two copies, both handwritten in the author's blood.

Comedy, at such a time! Should I not be writing fictional polemics—instead of merely delivering them as a Guest of Honour speech?

In fact, downright polemical fiction is too often a crime against art; and worse still, a bore—so that it is also a crime against the very ideas that it is trying to put over. This is true of right-wing polemics, though these are pretty well doomed in advance, since people of a right-wing cast of mind rarely possess a coherent philosophy. They tend to react instinctively, not intellectually, no matter how fluently they rationalize these instincts—and of course our instincts are still concerned with the desire for power and prestige, acquisitiveness, defence of territory and supposed territory. In an age of nuclear weapons, and of increasing competition for resources, one dare not trust to instinctive reactions. But it's true of left-wing polemics too. Orwell's 1984 works as well as it does because it is not a polemic; it is a work by a politically committed writer of non-fictional polemics, now very angry at the betrayal of the hopes embodied in those polemics and at the corruption of language and thought infecting the writings and actions of those whom Orwell had once thought to be on the side of the angels. And the same applies to *Animal Farm*. If an overtly left-wing apologist is in difficulties here, a right-wing apologist is in double trouble.

Whatever one's prior vision of a book—one's pre-programming of it—if the book is to be any good at all, it has to grow organically as a separate living entity. It has to make its own decisions, rather like a child growing away from the parent.

And this raises strange questions about the relationship of the author to the world which he or she creates and which establishes its own independent existence: questions about the responsibility of the author towards his or her creations, and questions about the relationship between the book-reality created and the consciousness of the author. These are questions which are perhaps at the root of artistic creation—and which, if we posit for the moment the existence of a God, must be a fundamental dilemma at the root of His own cosmos-creation.

I must introduce a side-note here, to the effect that as soon as one mentions the word 'God', associative light-bulbs start popping on in people's heads automatically. The predictable question, "So do you believe in God?"—expecting the answer "Yes" or "No"—is as meaningless as the question "Do you believe in UFOs?" The questioner already knows in advance exactly what a God or UFO is, in his estimation—but he doesn't quite realize this. I would answer that question "Do you believe in God?" simply by saying that a number of my books are devoted to exploring the question of what a God might be, with different possible answers, or approaches to answers. There is one 'God' in *God's World*. There is an entirely different kind of 'God' in *Under Heaven's Bridge*, which I wrote with Michael Bishop. There is yet another entirely different kind of 'God' in the novel I've just finished writing—and it's a God, let me assure you, that no one has thought of to date.

Anyhow, Godly creation—whatever a God might be—and artistic creation do have in common the paradox of the relationship between one's creating consciousness and the reality created: a paradox which is becoming increasingly central to the cutting edge of modern Physics, by the way, and to scientific attempts to explain the universe coherently.

Sf, which includes in its domain attempted explanations of the nature of the universe, and of mind and of reality, is in fact particularly well adapted to address this problem central to artistic creation. Hence, indeed, there are many novels and stories which concern themselves with the reality problem—from such as Daniel Galouye's *Counterfeit World* through to most of the works of Philip Dick. Obviously I would include my own books in this category. In a sense, quite a lot of sf is already meta-fiction: fiction about fiction.

The reality problem, by the way, provides a perfectly good rationale for one feature which most offends some readers of sf: namely, the fact that in book after book, it always happens to be the darned hero—even if he is a nit-witted thug, or someone marooned on a rock near Arcturus, or somebody stuck in a space ark or a deep cave who starts

out filled with the most absurd notions about the nature of the world—it is this idiot who turns out to be central to (a) the explanation of the universe, (b) the rescuing of space/time from collapse, (c) the salvation of the human race, (d) the detection and defeat of the ravening mind-horde from Ursa Major. How often, and how arbitrarily, does the central enigma of the cosmos thus converge upon the central character, whatever his qualities! This, if one wishes to apologize for it—and sometimes it needs apology—is perhaps rather more than just a genre cliché. It is a reflection of the reality problem and of the artistic problem, tuned up to fever pitch in sf precisely because in sf one can evoke the whole of the rest of the universe. And precisely because this central problem is tuned up to fever pitch, and sometimes exaggerated almost to parody or absurdity, we may find the writer beating his brow and expostulating: "How the hell can I believe this shit I'm writing?" Precisely what makes some sf unbelievable, even occasionally to the writer who is producing it, is one of the most potentially valuable and productive aspects of sf: the attack on the reality problem. This is why there is often gold amidst the ghastliest dross.

The writer who grows aware of this, during his or her career, is of course faced with a meta-problem: the need to incorporate his awareness of the problem into his texts which reflect it. Or he can try to ignore it entirely. Or he can hit the bottle, to stave off impending insanity and and disconnection from the real world. (This is the case of Jonathan Herovit, in Barry Malzberg's novel—and is indeed a dominant theme in Malzberg's work.) Or he can refuse fully to believe it, as a deliberate strategy for carrying on—whilst accepting it in practice. (Thomas Covenant the Unbeliever is able to function because of chosen, sustained unbelief—which is why Donaldson's books are so powerful, sustained and successful. Donaldson addresses the reality problem very skilfully and honestly.)

Thus, in my own books, I note that by the time I came to write *Alien Embassy*, the aliens had become fictions, simulations. They were pretend aliens, constructed by some of the characters in that world to fool the others in various ways. And indeed I feel, in retrospect, that I was able to invest more reality, and inventiveness, in the three alien races because of this.

By the time I wrote *Miracle Visitors* the problem of the reality of events themselves demanded to be explored. And this seemed to me best explored through the UFO mythos—wherein events seemingly occur which hover tantalizingly between reality and unreality. Through the triple viewpoint of that book—with three principal characters experiencing UFO events, yet choosing ultimately to react in quite different ways—I was able (thanks to my characters, who willed these choices) on the one hand to wind back into the baseline reality of the constructed world again. With, as it were, the middle hand I was able to sustain the fantasy events imposed on this reality. And finally, on the other (or third) hand, I was shown the way right outside all this into a meta-reality which the world of the novel could not enter. I say 'I was shown' this, since I write my books hoping to be shown things by them: things I did not know before—and hoping, too, to show these things to the readers of them.

By the time I wrote *God's World*, the journey to the stars in that book was presented (and presented itself to me) necessarily as a journey through imaginative space. And I was able to reach an actual, 'objective' alien world in that book precisely because I envisaged the physical journey to it in a starship as also being a journey through the imagination—a journey which the characters had to create for themselves, as much as the author himself had consciously to create it. If the characters had suffered a failure of imagination, they would not have reached their destination. Thus, in a sense, the problem involved in the cry "How can I, the writer, possibly believe this?" was shouldered by the characters themselves. Thus I, and they, arrived at journey's end; and returned.

*The Gardens of Delight* involves another alien world, but this time, in order to reach it, its own inhabitants—who are the creators of that world, and of themselves—must use their imagination to construct, out of their own being, a human starship to arrive and explore the nature of their own reality. This is the situation of *God's World* turned inside out; though I only see this in retrospect.

And in my forthcoming book *Deathhunter*... but I must not give the plot away in advance; and perhaps I am not yet quite far enough from that book to know exactly what its place is in this progression, what exactly its statement is about the reality problem, for the author.

I only became fully aware of the reality problem while



writing *Miracle Visitors*. In this sense, though there is a strong continuity of themes with my four earlier Gollancz novels, those first four were 'innocent' books. *Miracle Visitors* embroiled me in the problem, because this was where my exploration was leading to; and for that reason it was the most worrying book I have written. The worry was not merely caused by the fact that I had just given up my job as a Senior Lecturer to write full-time; nor by the fact that while I wrote this book about UFOs, the local newspaper was filled with reports of UFO sightings thirty miles away, then twenty-five miles away, then twenty miles away... It began to seem as though I needed to finish the book quickly before they found me.

And actually, we were visited by a Man In Black. I don't know if you know the UFO mythos, but after you've seen a UFO—or generated one—you get visited, if you're American or rich, by a Cadillac with two men dressed in black, who threaten you or warn you, and suggest that they're from Army Security or something. And they usually do something in your house. Well, this was just Britain, so we were only called on by one Man In Black. He knocked on the door; he was dressed in black; he claimed to be a commercial traveller, and asked if he could use the toilet. This was a funny request, because there's a pub just down the street and a toilet round the corner—public variety. But we said "Come in"—we knew about Men In Black, so we watched him very carefully—and we have constructive proof that he did something in the house. Now this wasn't the only worrying thing about writing a book on UFOs. Another worrying thing was being invited to talk to UFO groups... but I mustn't describe, here, my visit to the British UFO Research Association two weeks ago.

The main worry was caused by the fact that if I couldn't solve the reality of this book—which was about the undermining of reality—then of course the novel could never be finished; nor perhaps any other honest novel, since this was the book that, at the moment, required itself to be written. And I had to trust my characters to do this for me; which they did in the end by winding back into the ground-reality of the book, while at the same time winding out into the meta-reality, into the imaginative zone from which the book came, and linking the two together even though there was no simple common ground between them.

I think that sf writers who decide that they are no longer really writing sf, or are no longer interested in writing it, or who can no longer bear to write it—sf writers who can no longer convince themselves of the authenticity of what they are writing—are in fact suffering from an unresolved reality problem; and this will be much more acutely evident in sf writers—particularly the best and most thoughtful of

these writers—than in writers in other fields... precisely because of the nature of science fiction itself.

That sf presents this problem of belief at its very heart is not, for me, a cause for criticism of the deficiencies of the genre; but rather of elation at the prospect of tackling the problem. Because it is a problem that is at the heart of art. And it is a problem that is at the heart of the existence of the physical universe itself.

One cannot exactly solve the problem—any more than one can define the nature of God, or pin down an actual UFO. There is no ideal sf novel which balances all the terms of the equation self-consistently and demonstrably, like Gustave Flaubert's ideal of a novel which could sustain itself entirely by the power of style alone. Perhaps mainstream literature can produce the perfect novel, time and again. And perhaps by definition sf cannot, ever.

But one can try to edge closer to the problem all the time, by varying one's tactics—and my most recent approach, in the book I'm writing just now, is (as I've said) a comic one. Because that is the way the characters—who are engaged in reinventing themselves, in body and mind—wanted it to be. Not comic, I hasten to add, in the sense of sending up the genre. To me, that is rather like stealing sweets from children and selling them back to the children again, with the wrapping turned inside out. But simply, a tactic of hilarity.

And by the time the current book is published, in what—to the writer—always seems like the distant future, I hope and expect to be somewhere else... in the literary sense.

The writing—and the reading—of much sf sometimes seems rather like the performance of a record on a turntable. The stylus moves ever onward (whilst apparently standing still), making much noise, and always in the selfsame track. And sometimes the stylus really does get stuck, and the same phrase is repeated over and over again throughout the rest of the writer's career. Or the reader's career.

But, by and large, the stylus of sf moves on inwards—or will do so, if I have anything to do with it—towards the central point, from which all else radiates: the point of fusion between the inventing mind and the invented reality, between creation and consciousness.

Of course, it will never reach the central point, any more than Achilles will overtake the tortoise—and occasionally it might appear in the case of sf that it is the lumbering tortoise which is chasing the unattainable and ever more remote Achilles. But I would say that the stylus is heading in the right direction. And what wonderful tunes will it play on the way?

What more can we ask?

Thank you, all.

This was Ian Watson's Guest of Honour speech at Yorcon II, Easter 1981. It was recorded by Gerald Bishop, to whom many thanks.

#### THE SUICIDAL PRIME MINISTERS' SONG by COLIN FINE

This should be sung to the tune of Monty Python's 'Drunken Philosophers' Song'. We take no responsibility for results.

*Sir Harold Macmillan spent a fortnight drillin'  
Through his skull to let out 'vapours'.  
The Earl of Bute took his brain right ute  
And replaced it with newspapers.  
The Duke of Portland had himself trepanned  
With a couple of butchers' cleavers.  
Lord Liverpool sawed round his skull  
And prised it off with levers.*

*Sir Robert Walpole took a scalpel and set to with a will  
Clement Attlee rather flatly used a Black and Decker drill—*

*Ted Heath, Ted Heath took the bit between his teeth  
And drilled straight up with the brace underneath.  
Sir Robert Peel with nerves of steel  
Put a needle through his beadle with never a squeal.  
Bonar Law, Bonar Law took a circular saw  
And crept up on himself from behind  
And Douglas-Home used a thing that went 'Boom!'  
And really blew his mind.*

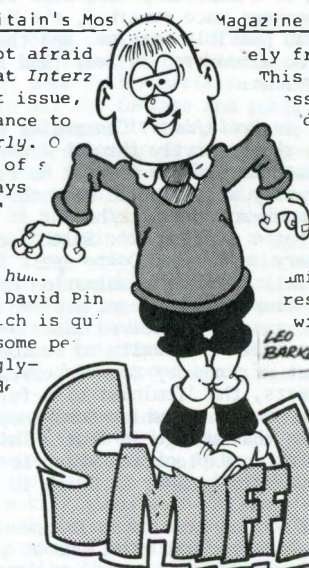
*Viscount Palmerston's the calmest an' the coolest of them all:  
He sat and smashed his skull in with a solid silver ball.*

#### INTERZONE: Britain's Most Successful Magazine Ever?

Drilkjis is not afraid to declare that *Interz* the very first issue, close resemblance to *Worlds Quarterly*. Overt opinions of Watson, who says Graham Jones." always cause the unknown & ing soundless hum... Graham Jones, David Pin a magazine which is qu

Of course some pe our view wrongly-wing or even de Connors. What gill have to Clearly *Inter* perhaps also run. Meanwhi entertainment is Arena!

The one ti board of this find themselv emergent futu, dict must be:



for TAFF

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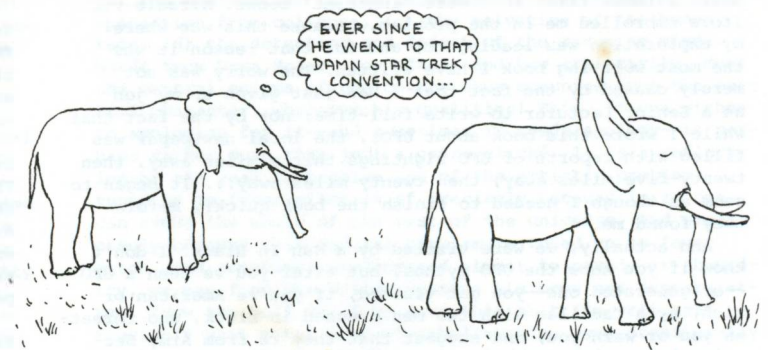
say—in right-of Chucks eg Pickers-normity? layout and in the long Gollancz adv-funct magazine

t the editorial is that they ast and the hum. Our ver-harder. (Eds)



D. West

# CLOSET ZEOR or SEX IN THE HEAD



AN EXAMINATION OF THE NOVELS OF JACQUELINE LICHTENBERG

Jacqueline Lichtenberg is perhaps best known in Britain for her contribution to Star Trek fandom—in particular, the exegetical volume *Star Trek Lives* (with Sondra Marshak and Joan Winston) which explains how the doings of Spock, Kirk and companions can be translated into messages of cosmic significance for mankind. At first sight her novels *House of Zeor* (Doubleday 1974, Pocket Books 1977) and *Unto Zeor, Forever* (Doubleday 1978)\* detailing the future histories of two mutant races, the Gens and the Simes, have little direct connection with the Trek canon. However, there already exists a separate Zeor fandom, complete with its own fanzine *Ambrov Zeor* and including many names distinguished in the rankings of Trekkdom. The Author's Note in *Unto Zeor, Forever* informs us that *Ambrov Zeor* is 'the magazine where the ardent Sime fan can always get such things as a Simelan vocabulary and pronunciation guide, genealogy lists of the succession in Zeor, how proficiency numbers are calculated, the mathematics of transfer, additional Sime stories... as well as a wealth of technical information much too esoteric to be allowed into a story.' Apart from short stories there is also at least one other Zeor novel by another hand: *First Channel*\* by Jean Lorrain, Star Trek fan and MS critic of *Unto Zeor, Forever*. As the author further notes: 'Working with Jean is turning into the thrill of a lifetime and uncovering a multitude of Sime books that 'just have to be written' besides the dozen or three I had already planned on.' So it seems likely that the Zeor series is aiming for the sort of growth and audience that Star Trek itself achieved. Apart from the purely commercial aspects of the deliberate fostering of a cult there are also less obvious connections. As someone once remarked, the Universe is queerer than we can possibly imagine, and there is rather more to what can be discovered in Zeor (and Star Trek) than is immediately obvious.

In his article in *Drillkjis 5* 'Concerning an eleven foot pole' Kevin Smith skips merrily through *House of Zeor*, exercising his wit at the expense of what he finds on every fifth page—apparently all he could be bothered to read—and indulging in mock-solemn shock/horror at what he declares is 'nothing but a dirty book'. Smith's criticisms are not to be taken very seriously. Quite apart from the self-admitted superficiality of his examination he appears to have based his conclusions on one of his own preoccupations—feminism—and certain preconceived ideas associated with it, rather than on what is actually to be found in the book itself. The subject of *House of Zeor* is certainly sex—but not, as Smith asserts, the 'feminist wish-fulfilment' of 'absolute feminine dominance, which dominance is to be violently expressed so that men go in fear'. This is reaching round the corner for an explanation which is almost out of sight when a much simpler answer is lying in plain view.

Both *House of Zeor* and *Unto Zeor, Forever* are not greatly concerned with heterosexual relations at all; they are in fact thinly disguised homilies on homosexuality—and very little else. There is almost certainly an element of feminism involved in the probable explanation of why a female author should wish to write what are in effect male homosexual fantasies, but the stories themselves are certainly not merely a feminism-inspired reversal of the old

gender-assigned roles of dominance and submission. The real ideological base is rather more complicated—or muddled—than that.

*House of Zeor* tells how in an unspecified post-disaster future humanity has split into two mutant strains: Gens and Simes. The Gens are more or less normal human beings, but they produce 'selyn', a kind of aetheric life-force vital to the metabolism of the Simes. The Simes differ in having a set of tentacles along each forearm. Some of these are used as extra fingers, but others (the laterals) are primarily for the body contact necessary for 'transfer'—the absorption of selyn from Gen by Sime. This transfer generally kills the Gen involved—hence a state of permanent hostility between the races and their separation into different territories. The mutation is random rather than directly hereditary, identity as Gen or Sime not being clearly established until adolescence. Children in Gen territory who become Simes are killed immediately; those in Sime territory who become Gens are added to the large slave population maintained to meet the need for selyn. The Simes (physically much superior) also make raids into Gen territory. On one such attack Aisha, a female Gen artist, is captured. Fearing that her skills will be used to create currency forgeries which will destroy their economy, the Gens send her lover Hugh Valleroy on a mission of rescue. He is aided by Klyd Farris, a renegade Sime who, having realized that the constant killing of Gens will eventually lead to mutual extinction, is working to maintain a Gen-Sime community in his clan Householding of Zeor. As a 'channel' he is able to take selyn from Gens without killing and to transfer it to other Simes. To more conservative Simes, such as Andle the captor of Aisha, this practice ranks as perversion and justifies various attempts to destroy the House of Zeor. Working together despite the tensions caused by their differences, Klyd and Valleroy trace Aisha but are forced to flee for their lives into the mountains (a journey distinctly reminiscent of the later parts of LeGuin's *The Left Hand of Darkness*). They are captured and brought to Andle's camp, where Aisha is held prisoner. Andle intends to selyn-kill Aisha, but having been instructed in the finer points of Sime vulnerability she manages to give him the twisted-tentacle equivalent of a kick in the balls and the three escape. Valleroy and Aisha return home, there to establish a refugee route for Gens escaping from Sime territory (and vice-versa) while Klyd stays behind to work for the general adoption of the non-fatal 'Channel' system of selyn transfer.

Considered simply as straight SF, *House of Zeor* has considerable defects. The dramatic possibilities inherent in the apparently irreconcilable differences between Gens and Simes are obvious; so too are the very considerable social and psychological pressures that the random nature of the mutation would bring about. However, attention to the first is limited to a black-and-white interplay of selyn-need and fear between Klyd and Valleroy (with virtually no attention to other aspects of character) and the detailing of the second is either nonexistent or very superficial.

The uncontrollable Sime 'need' for selyn occurs about once a month. Casting Simes in the female role, Kevin Smith identifies the incidence of need with the menstrual cycle.

\* Reissued by Playboy Paperbacks, 1981 (Eds.)



Either his reasoning is somewhat obscure or his knowledge of female physiology is decidedly simple-minded, since menstruation has no very significant connection with sexual desire. Probably twelve times a year simply struck the author as the most suitable figure for the purposes of the story: a less-frequent need would space out the moments of drama too much, while a greater frequency would strain credibility regarding the number of victims necessary. A Gen/Sime ratio of about twelve to one probably seemed about right.

And so well it might—except that the real population ratio for a world in which each Sime kills twelve Gens yearly is not twelve to one but somewhere between two and three hundred to one at the very minimum. Each Sime kills twelve Gens a year; next year he needs another twelve—and so on. Babies are no use; the victims must be reasonably mature to provide sufficient selyn. For every year of his life, therefore, each and every Sime needs a dozen Gens growing towards maturity. The final figures can be varied according to where maturity is set. Set it at twelve and this means a base requirement (for only one Sime) of 144 growing Gens—plus a dozen super-fecund mothers permanently pregnant—plus a certain complement (say 50) of mature males to act as studs and also to maintain the women and children (not to mention their Sime masters). Since the Simes are not skilled in medicine (an aspect given more prominence in *Unto Zeor, Forever*) and the Gens have only the unlavish accommodation of 'Pens', a generous allowance also needs to be made for infant mortality. Also, a certain number (unstated) of Gens will turn out to be Simes anyway, thus exacerbating the problems of supply and demand still further ...

To put it mildly, there seems to have been something of an oversight here. This vast slave population—a mere 100,000 Simes would be lording it over *twenty or thirty million* Gens—remains virtually invisible despite all the jaunting about Kyld and Valleroy do in Sime territory. Still, this is all of a piece with the general vagueness on other matters of detail. The Gens are apparently sufficiently organized to worry about the effect of forgeries on their paper-money economy (a piece of nonsense that gets forgotten in the book) but not organized enough to exterminate the Simes—or even contain them—despite the possession of firearms. Gen and Sime systems of government, and the details of the truce supposed to exist between them, remain fairly obscure throughout. Quite how both societies accommodate the trauma of never knowing when they may be called upon to murder their children is not made clear. The Gens have it slightly easier: when some teenager turns Sime and starts running round attacking and killing in berserk selyn-need, he simply gets lynched and that's that. The offspring of Gen slaves who turn out to be Simes, on the other hand, might find their sudden rise in life from the squalor of the Pens leaving them with somewhat mixed feelings...

And so on and so on. An interesting idea has been given the flimsiest possible treatment, with its extended implications scarcely touched upon. Perhaps this is just as well; examined realistically the Gen/Sime situation would be so thoroughly and comprehensively nasty that it would make very harrowing reading. Anyway, all that stuff is really beside the point...

The point is that Klyd *needs* Valleroy, and Valleroy—having had a rather rough first experience of transfer when his Sime ally momentarily lost control—is struggling between fear and fascination... The real story—for which the rest of the plot is simply a half-hearted (and half-baked) excuse—is the relationship between Klyd and Valleroy, and essentially this is nothing but the account of a long-drawn-out homosexual seduction.

As his cover during their travels together in Sime territory Valleroy assumes the role of Klyd's 'Companion', ie. his personal selyn donor. As such he is expected to maintain close bodily contact at all times, to hold hands, to share the same bed—virtually to play the part of the solicitous lover. To the other Simes, accustomed to the brutal one-time-only encounters that selyn-kill their Gen victims, such namby-pamby behaviour is clearly some kind of awful perversion. There is a scene in which Klyd and Valleroy arrive together at an inn and are received with a mixture of shocked disapproval and avid interest which is a mirror image of the combination of prudery and prurience our own society shows towards sexual deviation. At this point even the half-asleep reader—already vaguely alerted by those

decidedly phallic tentacles, the rather suggestive 'bruising lip contact' of transfer, and the general miasma of throbbing passion—may start to wonder just what is going on. Rather blunderingly, the author chooses this moment to have Valleroy reflect that there is after all nothing homosexual in his relationship with Klyd—a disavowal so patently disingenuous that only the most trusting (or innocent) could accept it.

Still, at least this is all very *serious*. Valleroy's obsessive concern with the nuances of the Gen/Sime relationship—his fear-ridden speculations, hot flushes, cold sweats and general jumpy vacillation between revulsion and attraction—is all true enough to life as an analogue of the nervous virgin twitching with unfulfilled and frightening desires. The narrative, indeed, is completely lacking in any note of levity which might detract from the solemn importance of all this thwarted passion. There is a vast deal of heavy breathing (in fact there is nothing *but* heavy breathing, every other facet of character existing only as one more extension of the all-consuming need) but no one so much as *thinks* of cracking a dirty joke about it all. The reader, however, might be excused several fits of giggles—and a final attack in which he falls off his chair and lies choking on the floor. *House of Zeor* is by no standard a good book (any parody would probably be mistaken for a quotation) but it does have the fascination of a certain sublime lunacy. Its total earnestness and lack of humour in themselves manage to produce moments of bizarre and surrealistic farce.

Perhaps as a counter to those heterosexual males who claim a monopoly on every 'masculine' (ie. physically aggressive) virtue, homosexuals sometimes assert that their own nature gives them a pre-eminence in whatever is 'sensitive' or 'artistic'. This is fatuous but fairly harmless—unlike the grosser nonsense of hetero-chauvinism—and even includes a grain or two of truth in that various 'artistic' occupations have always by tradition been more open to admitted homosexuals. It seems appropriate, therefore, that as part of his awakening and movement towards the perfect union of Gen and Sime, Valleroy should discover and develop his own artistic abilities. He turns out to be a whiz at the artwork, and in no time at all the various Householdings (Gen/Sime communities, like Zeor) are bidding against each other for the use of his talents.

'Nashmar abandoned all pretence of bargaining. "Just think what this will mean for the Tecton! A Household triumph at Arensti, a superb spring collection bound to sweep the field also done by a Household, and a catalogue of that Household's collection that will win prizes for sheer artistic perfection, designed, executed and printed by *our Gens*!" He emphasized the last two words, leaving no doubt that it would be a historical achievement proving that Gens are capable of higher creativity.'

Quite so. The Sime equivalent of Gay Lib seeks to bring round the nasty old Straights by hitting them with the Higher Creativity of some really *artistic* catalogue designs, brought out with all the fanfare and publicity of the latest Paris fashions. Valleroy, it turns out, is a sort of Leonardo da Vinci of mail-order dress designing—the absolute pinnacle of Art. Blush follows blush, particularly when the inspired artist sets to work drawing his first real live models: a pair of Simes on a couch, their tentacles delicately but daringly entwined. Carried away by the fine fury of his creativity our hero gets a little too close (failing to notice the heavy breathing, twitching and throbbing of laterals, etc.) and having roused the passions of his subjects almost falls victim to a fatal grope. Shock/Horror/Probe—and he's been frightened off all over again. A boy just isn't safe *anywhere* around those fiendish Simes...

Such ineffable crassness might seem hard to follow, but these steamy scenes of true lust in the garment industry are just a warm-up. Captured by Andle, Klyd and Valleroy are brought to the mountain camp where Aisha is held. Andle intends to selyn-kill Aisha with Valleroy as a witness, the latter being nicely bound and dressed up in 'knee length white tunic... standard pen issue'. The whole scene has a remarkable, dreamlike, baroque weirdness. Hints of rape, bondage, sadism, transvestism and homosexuality are all mixed up in a fantasy that is energetically trying to pretend to be something else entirely. Shortly before, a captured Gen girl has been selyn-killed in a scene obviously intended as a representation of straight, brutal, heterosexual rape-sex—to be contrasted with the non-fatal



'perversion' of transfer from Gen to Sime channel to Sime again. Andle's intention is the straight sex of selyn-kill performed on Aisha, but he is distracted by the taunts of Valleroy:

"...you should have brought Klyd here too. Or were you afraid he might seduce you into his perversion? You're half-way there already, aren't you?"

'He saw the Sime's back tense at that and pressed his advantage. "I can see it in your laterals. Your glands aren't responding to Aisha at all, are they?"'

[In other words: come out of the closet and admit you'd really like it...]

"A real Sime committed to the kill wouldn't be able to talk to me at this point. But it's me you want, not her. If not, why did you have me dressed up like this?"

[Good Question. Anyway, with a thoroughly confused Andle finally put out of action, Klyd, Valleroy and Aisha escape. And at last—the real climax...]

'As the dripping laterals flashed about his arms, Valleroy experienced a thrill of sensation almost like the jolt of smelling salts clearing away the fog of unconsciousness. He was scarcely aware of the brusing lip contact that followed. The painful clarity of the senses grew until, through some kind of total empathy, Valleroy himself became both giver and receiver in the interchange.

'Valleroy's own guts churned with need, and somehow he knew it for what it was.'

This piece of passion-packed prose is worth contrasting with the description of the eventual clinch with Aisha, virtually the only ordinary sexual contact in the book: 'He kissed her and she kissed back as if they'd just been married.' Sounds more like they'd been married about forty years.

Indeed, the whole ending of *House of Zeor* has a distinctively false note. Why on earth should Valleroy go off with Aisha when he obviously doesn't give a damn for anyone but Klyd? Who needs women, anyway? Getting fucked by a man is obviously so much more fun.

Accepting Kevin Smith's view of *House of Zeor* as a feminist tract is just barely possible if one is prepared to ignore a great deal and twist what remains into improbably complicated shapes. Smith himself rather oddly fails to pick up the implication of his own remark that 'Sex in the Sime series is a pale and tenuous thing compared with transfer, and the two heroes have such a wonderful thing going together.' The obvious question is: if some of the male characters are supposed to represent females why didn't the author simply make them females? (The suggestion that the betentacled Simes are the women would seem to impute penis-envy of truly staggering proportions.) The old convention of the protagonist as invariably male is no longer an iron rule, and in any case the story would naturally feature both sexes.

The real point at issue is not so much what the author intended as what the reader is most likely to see as being the intention. In this respect, if Jacqueline Lichtenberg intended to write an allegory of the feminist struggle against male sexual oppression she certainly made a terrible mess of it. Possibly some readers will manage to drift through *House of Zeor* without spotting any sex at all, but those who do penetrate the flimsy cover are likely to settle on the interpretation which requires least in the way of elaborate explanations.

Without the interest of figuring out the sexual references it would be difficult to get through the second volume in the series, *Unto Zeor, Forever*, at all. Like *House of Zeor* it is distinctly weak on the kind of background detail which would create a believable picture of a future society, but it includes a positive overkill of technical terms referring to the processes of selyn transfer—everything you always wanted to know but were afraid to ask in case you were told. Once again, transfer (ie. sex) is what it's all about, and not much else.

About a century after the time of *House of Zeor* Simes and Gens now coexist in uneasy tolerance. Under the rule of the Tecton, the Sime governing body, the 'kill' transfer of selyn has been outlawed and all transfers are made through Channels, trained Sime intermediaries who do not harm their Gen donors. Digen Farris, descendant of Klyd Farris, has trained as a Channel but is unable to function due to injury. With his deadly laterals suitably controlled

by 'retainers' (a sort of Sime equivalent of the lead-lined jockstrap) he comes to the Gen town of Westfield to study medicine, a subject previously little known among Simes. He has to struggle against not only Gen fears and prejudices but the bureaucratic inflexibility of the Tecton. Despite a sympathetic (male) donor, Im'ran, his own high need for selyn is inadequately catered for and he is prevented from using the eminently suitable Ilyana Dumas by her membership of the Distect, a breakaway group believing that the Tecton system of Channels is evil and that all selyn donations should be made directly. After a succession of medical crises involving malfunctions of the transfer system Digen goes into disillusioned exile with Ilyana and the Distect. When disease kills off the group's Gen donors the Distect Simes take to raiding and killing in the old way. Fortunately, Ilyana manages to blow up herself and most of the others, and Digen is left free to go off with Im'ran, determined to reform society by training personal selyn donors for everybody.

*House of Zeor* was a sort of Elinor Glyn one-night-of-bliss romantic seduction story, and like most such tales it ended with the wedding. *Unto Zeor, Forever* manages to go further: it has moved on to the Eternal Triangle. (American style—there are sundry analysts and sex-therapists involved as auxiliaries.) The fatal temptress Ilyana woos Digen away from the less exotic Im'ran, but after her convenient immolation (who needs women?) the two men are left to find perfect love and true analysis together.

The character of Aisha was too shadowy to have much effect on the balance of the sexes in *House of Zeor*, but here there is a sort of tentative equalization by way of the prominence given to Ilyana—though the way she gets rubbed out in the end suggests that the basic message hasn't changed much. However, even if straight heterosexuality still gets the finger, the portrayal of the Distect community appears to be an argument for bisexuality at the least. The standard Distect group is four: husband and wife each with a selyn partner of the same sex. (In both books the sexes stick together so consistently that the exceptions—such as Ilyana—have to be significant.) This sounds almost like (comparatively) normal life, but just where the real emotional ties are is soon made obvious: "All right," said Digen, "I can see you running around here seducing every Sime in sight and getting some transfer mate to kill you for it." That 'seducing' is really rather careless. As before, sex in the normal sense scarcely figures at all, but the atmosphere is heavy with those passions which are the Zeor equivalent:

"The real difference with four-plus donors is that they actually sense selyn fields. Not like a Sime, of course, but it's what makes the biggest difference in transfer. They're not working blind, the way you have to. They—participate. Haven't you ever wondered what transfer is like for us? Wouldn't you like to share some of that?"

"Digen, don't tempt me." Im'ran's voice shook.

'Digen laced one ventral tentacle through Im'ran's fingers and gave a little squeeze. "You want it. I can give it to you—now. How many years do you think it will be before chance brings you another opportunity like this?"

'Biting his lip, Im'ran turned his face away, but his fingers held on to Digen's tentacle like a lifeline. Digen said, "You don't have to be frightened. If we try it and then find it's not working, well you won't catch me off guard."

If the Zeor merchandizing operation ever expands to the extent of marketing special Sime posters then that line '...his fingers held on to Digen's tentacle like a lifeline' should provide one of the all-time bestsellers.

The 'four-plus donors' reference is one of the many technicalities clogging the text. Trautholo, Lortuen, Deproda, Underdraw, Shen, Dynopter—there are so many the reader is quite underwhelmed. 'It would be a low-level functional for Digen and probably would not aggravate the entran he'd already invited by serving Roshi's need. It would make Im'ran feel better immediately and still not slow his progress to transfer dormancy. With no selyn movement in the TN levels there would be no sensation of transfer, and incidentally, no sense of satisfaction either.' Nor is the reader likely to get much satisfaction. Despite the inclusion of a special Vocabulary a good deal of this jargon-ridden prose comes perilously close to complete gibberish. The meaning—where there is any—has to be extracted by translating the symbols back into sexual equivalents. This seems both silly



and tiresome, like reading a TV repair manual in which all the technicalities have been replaced by invented words. Undoubtedly the transfer metaphor has acquired a certain life of its own to the extent of picking up picking up detailing which has no reference to sex, but fundamentally the whole elaborate structure is completely unoriginal: one renamed process with a little added mystification. *Unto Zeor, Forever* contains virtually no genuine invention. Apart from the business of selyn transfer the setting might as well be present-day America. Digen arrives on a hover-train, and there are mentions of a couple of varieties of herbal tea and one new musical instrument, but otherwise 'Westfield' is exactly what is sounds like: the familiar TV picture of a smallish all-suburban American town. The only difference is that everyone is obsessed by transfer (ie. sex) and the awful threat posed by those evil and unnatural Simes. The more mundane side of life—whatever it might be—scarcely gets a look in.

Possibly the author's elaboration on the theme of transfer are an attempt to drum up the kind of cult support which books like *Lord of the Rings* and the *Dune* series have acquired almost on the strength of their background detailing alone. However, the attraction of the mass of subsidiary information provided by Tolkien and Herbert is that it refers to concrete objects: persons or things which have shape, colour and a graspable reality. The reader who gets involved in the mastery of such fantasy-learning may not be showing much discrimination, but at least this has some sort of affinity to the basic human instinct for picking up miscellaneous knowledge about life and the world. Jacqueline Lichtenberg, on the other hand, never goes beyond recycling the minutiae of *one* process: an endless fumbling and refingering of limited abstract symbols. (Despite all the terminology there is very little hard information. For instance, exactly what selyn *is* never gets explained.) The whole of her future world is nothing but a flat and perfunctory backdrop for a series of melodramas of sexual maladjustment.

'Melodrama' is certainly the most apt word. The hospital setting allows the author to run through almost every cliché of the medical soap opera. (The spiritual home of *Unto Zeor, Forever* is probably Isaac Asimov's *SF Magazine*, where sensational futures featuring New Hope for the Lately Dead and atomic nose transplants appear with anaesthetic regularity.) When dedicated young intern Digen isn't performing prodigies of surgery (thus earning a grudging nod of approval from gruff but kindly old Dr Thornton) or confronting the deeply-disturbed anti-Sime Dr Lankh (whose attempts to halt the change of Gen adolescents into Simes have caused a dozen fatalities) he's busy calming down need-demented Simes at the Selyn Clinic or having a quiet collapse and transfer-crisis of his own. One sensation follows another—and all recounted with the same intense and unremitting earnestness. After a while this fervent po-faced solemnity reduces the reader to a state of numbed disbelief: it seems impossible that anyone could control themselves long enough to commit such an incredible farrago of nonsense to paper. Yet apparently the author and her friends not only wrote but rewrote—and even ended up feeling a certain modest satisfaction at a job well done. The vanity of authors is proverbial, but is it really possible that such self-delusion extends as far as books like *House of Zeor* and *Unto Zeor, Forever*? As entertainment they are inadequate, as literature barely mediocre, and as propaganda totally inept. What on earth are they for?

Had the Zeor books been written by a man the answer would have seemed obvious enough: homosexual wish-fulfilment fantasies. In *House of Zeor* the hero (Valleroy) gradually comes to realize the nature of his true inclinations—even if he does compromise to the extent of getting married. *Unto Zeor, Forever* gives the heterosexual/bisexual angles a closer look, but finally seems to come down in favour of homosexuality. There is also a marked messianic tinge, the underlying message being that the future wellbeing of the world depends upon the breaking down of rigid sexual barriers. While these interpretations are still possible, the author's own sex makes motive less readily identifiable. A possible answer is suggested by the Star Trek connection.

Star Trek fandom is very large and produces an extensive literature of its own: not only interpretations and celebrations of the Sacred Texts themselves but additional fictional material. A curious sub-genre is Star Trek pornography. Most (if not all) the writers are women, and much of such writing seems to be straightforward sex fantasy—having

it off with the TV heroes. However, there is also a variant form in which the heroes (notably Captain Kirk and Mr Spock) have it off with each other.

Many males are reportedly excited by the spectacle of female homosexual acts, but hitherto it has rarely been supposed that women were moved to anything but disgust by male homosexuality. Picking up various hints in *Star Trek Lives* and elsewhere, it seems likely that a mixture of feelings is at the bottom of this apparent switch in attitudes. As exponents of either philosophy or criticism the Trek fans tend to favour foggy rhapsodizing rather than clarity or precision, but there are a few gleams to suggest that Star Trek's supposed message of Universal Peace and Love is held (by the more advanced thinkers) to apply to relationships between members of the same sex. Homosexual relations between Spock and Kirk are thus simply what the fans are convinced is the logical extension of TV's necessarily limited treatment. (Casual viewers would be amazed at the emotional subtleties which are extracted from Spock's every lip-twitch or raised eyebrow.) This attitude is also in line with a certain sort of feminism which favours what might be called Ideological Homosexuality—the rejection of exclusively heterosexual stereotypes as part of an effort to break down the tyranny of sexually stereotyped social roles.

So far, so good. Championing homosexuality as part of a protest or crusade on behalf of universal brother/sisterhood may be somewhat simplistic—it ignores the examples of such extremely unequal and male-chauvinist homosexual societies as Classical Greece—but it is still a tenable position. Viewed in this light the intention of the Zeor books might be seen as moral and didactic: the salvation of society depends on more love, more tolerance, and the breaking down of all the restrictions that twist and frustrate our true sexual natures. In fact: We must learn to love one another or die.

Unfortunately, Jacqueline Lichtenberg has expressed this message in terms which suggest an absolutely literal interpretation: if you don't get the right sort of sex you're liable to drop dead, and if you try for it with the wrong people you're liable to get torn to pieces.

This is metaphor, certainly, but even as metaphor it is a grotesque distortion of reality. In its way it is quite as pernicious as any of the sexual scaremongering which was standard in previous generations. A good many SF readers are young people. Teenagers lack experience rather than intelligence, and while many will be smart enough to identify the real significance of the Zeor novels—and to reject any literal interpretation—their natural insecurities are not going to be helped by the unconscious associations they will still pick up. In the Zeor books sex is a matter of deadly seriousness—a succession of terrible struggles and crises in which all the options are fraught with peril and there is a constant threat of violence or death. The changeover of a Gen adolescent into a Sime (the awakening of sexuality) is an occurrence of pure terror, with the newly emerged Sime invariably running amok, to kill or be killed. In an area where doubts, fears and insecurities are already present, none of this is exactly reassuring, and may well be positively harmful. The mildest reading of the Zeor view of sex is that it's a pretty rough and tough business. In effect, two equally frightening scenarios are offered: an intolerant world in which deviates get murdered, and a somewhat improved situation in which they merely suffer a painful death if they can't find a suitable partner.

*House of Zeor* and *Unto Zeor, Forever* are bad books because they present a totally false picture both of the world and of human sexuality. They are not so much mature arguments for enlightenment and toleration as obsessive juvenile fantasies of permanent orgasm. Very few people get killed for sex, and no one at all dies for lack of it. In the end, it is a fairly minor part of life. From the purely physical point of view, sexual needs can be satisfied quite adequately by masturbation. Much more needful than sex itself is either love or affection—the kind of closeness (which need not even be physical) without which human beings do indeed wither and die. Large numbers of people—the young, the old, the unbeautiful and the otherwise socially disadvantaged—spend long periods either celibate or with no sexual outlet other than masturbation. They do not die, go mad, or even bother about it too much. There are other things to do. On the other hand, they would certainly feel real deprivation if forced to sever all links of liking, friendship or



simple social contact. Sex with a partner (of either gender) but without affection is simply a more generally acceptable version of masturbation: it avoids the social stigma of admitting to a lack of power, wealth, prestige or other desirable qualities. The whole charge of any sexual encounter—the extra dimension of significance which lifts it above a mere reflex spasm—exists only in the head. Sex itself is limited, repetitious and often more or less farcical—scarcely worth bothering about except as an expression (and not even the only one) of love and affection. The humourless, obsessive lust of the Zeor characters is both dreary and tedious: their lives have diminished to the narrow limits of the quest for the perfect orgasm. Whether they fix upon their own or the opposite sex as the instrument of gratification is ultimately quite unimportant, since it seems certain that for them every other consideration is secondary to the urge itself. Their only possible escape from this hell of an endless sexual itch would be the invention of the Sime equivalent of a battery-powered vibrator.

Maybe Jacqueline Lichtenberg is working on it even now—*Tentacle Ticklers of Zeor*, or some such title. Despite her own apparent enthusiasm for the series it's really rather

difficult to see where she could take it next. Sex as subject matter is soon exhausted—like readers of her books. The Zeor novels have a certain grisly curiosity value, but not much else. Both their crazed vision of the ideal and their persistent refusal to come out into the open about it make them finally rather embarrassing—like the spectacle of someone in a nudist camp unsuccessfully attempting to conceal their genitals. To be sure, a greater tolerance and flexibility in sexual matters would obviate much quite unnecessary frustration and unhappiness, but the absurd orgasm-or-die approach of the Zeor books does nothing to advance such a cause. Those readers who are ignorant will absorb even more false information, while those who are already enlightened will be either irritated or disgusted by the spectacle of two pieces of witless, humourless nonsense which merely serve to cloud the issues still further.

Still, at least the author can always fall back on the consolation of having created a whole new sub-genre: Completely Twisted Tales of Confused Sex and Science Fiction. New depths have been reached! Another first for SF!

Meanwhile, back in the real world...

Since D. West wrote this article in 1980, more Zeor books by Ms Lichtenberg and friends have appeared. We are sorry about this.

## IT THINKS THEREFORE WE ARE — THAT'S WHAT!

*In which the polyglot professor marries two of his favourite themes—cosmology and psychology—to bring us a glimpse through the window onto new perspectives of tomorrow...*

It was the great Isaac Asimov himself who remarked, a few decades back, that the Universe is not only queerer than we imagine, it is queerer than we can imagine.

It seems to me that he was probably right. But we're slowly getting there. Let me tell you what I mean.

Two weeks ago I met a most remarkable man. If I say that he's a Nobel prizewinner you might have some inkling of who I mean: when I tell you that he's still only fifteen and that his mother was a dolphin—you'll be certain.

Yes. Right in one. Dominic Sperry, Professor of Applied Synthesis at Trinity College, Oxford. Like Hawking before him, another inspired young genius from England.

Things have moved pretty fast in the cosmology sphere in the last few years, so I hope any readers of the scientific journals will bear with me if I recap a little to tell you something about Sperry's past achievements.

Way back in 1996, when he had only just turned ten, he startled the scientific community by showing that the 3°K microwave background radiation, which everyone up until then had thought was the remnant of the Big Bang, was in fact due to the constant explosions of mini black holes, situated isotropically as regards the Earth.

But perhaps I'd better start even earlier, right at the beginning. Some of these topics I've touched on in earlier articles in *Shocking SF*—but if they seem a little familiar to you, Sperry's newest conclusions most certainly will not.

There had always seemed something wrong with the idea that the 3°K radiation was simply the residual 'warmth' left over from the Big Bang. It was all too convenient. Like the results which science students turn in at the end of their experiments: just too close to the theory to be true.

At the same time, there was another thorny question: the maths implied that black holes should be paired, as it were, with white holes, regions where vast quantities of energy were pouring back into the Universe—so why had nobody been able to find a white hole?

It's no wonder the physicists were scratching their collective heads!

Sperry's first assault on the double problem was a mathematical one. He showed up a few flaws in the anyway rickety theory that black holes should be 'accompanied' by white holes. Not so, he said (and proved)—at least, not so if the black hole has a mass greater than about 0.01 that

## science fact

with

Dennis  
Brezhnev

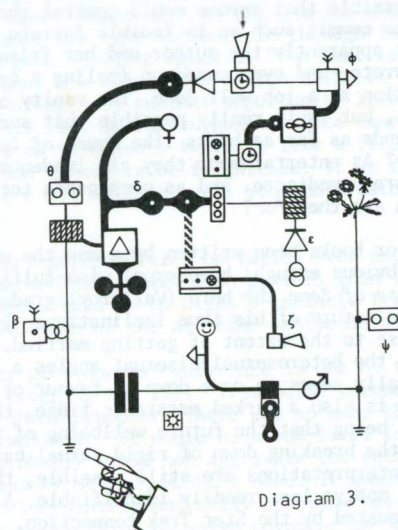


Diagram 3.

This mind-shattering article is reprinted (with permission) from *SHOCKING SCIENCE WONDER STORIES*, volume 28 no.4 (April 2003).



of the Sun. (And if you want more details about this particular juggling of the digits, see my article 'So You Think You Got Charm?' in our September 1998 issue.)

But he went further than that. If the 'wormhole' between black hole and corresponding white hole is so cavalier about the dimensions of spacetime, surely we were being a little naive in looking for white holes which actually co-existed with their black holes. He showed that white holes came into existence *only after the black holes had exploded*.

So here we seemed to have a reason or two why we found it hard to detect white holes—for a long time their inconspicuousness was a major argument against their actually existing—namely that, like the black holes 'responsible' for them, they were small; and only a few of them had yet had a chance to come into existence, the lifetimes of even small black holes being what they are.

So far so good.

But then his theory seemed to fall foul of the facts. The first nuclear pulse rocket, *Argo*, which was fortunately unmanned, was destroyed a few months after leaving the Solar System by what appeared to all intents and purposes to be a mini white hole. It seemed rather monumentally against the odds for this to happen if mini white holes were indeed very rare things.

Sperry was forced to conclude that they were common objects. In that case, the Universe had to be a whole lot older than he—like everybody else—had thought. Perhaps there were really a lot of mini white and black holes about?

That was when he got out his computer and came up with the idea that the 3°K background wasn't the result of the Big Bang. He suggested that the Universe was infinite in age, and that the microwave background arose purely because of exploding mini black holes.

And that was a puzzle. Where did the mini black holes come from? Before then, everybody had assumed that only the forces of the Big Bang could be great enough to generate mini black holes. Here was Sperry trying to disprove Big Bang theories by calling upon mini black holes, which apparently required the Big Bang in order to form in the first place.

Paradox.

Or apparent paradox.

Into our story now comes our old friend, the Uncertainty Principle.

Until the mid-nineties the standard picture of the death of a massive star was that it went supernova, leaving a rapidly expanding shell of gases at whose centre lay a white dwarf, a pulsar or a massive black hole. It was Asif who had pointed out a fault in this idea as early as 1989, although only now did the scientific community at large take him seriously. He suggested that a large star, at the end of its days, just prior to supernova, would be in a turbulence situation. Inside it, tortured matter would be bubbling and struggling in all directions.

At the instant the explosion was triggered, where was the star's centre of gravity?

Where indeed? It could be at any one of almost an infinite number of reasonably central locations. In most cases this wouldn't matter a hoot—the star would simply gravitationally collapse in approximately the right direction, and all the potential centres of gravity would be swept up into the single central object.

But in some cases the contraction could be towards a large number of discrete centres of gravity—because, basically, any one of them would be as good as any other. And so you would get mini black holes.

Startling stuff.

OK, so we've got the idea that the 3°K radiation comes from the ongoing explosions of myriad mini black holes, and that the infinite Universe is of an infinite age.

But wasn't there a fly in the ointment?

What about the famed recession of the galaxies, as evidenced by the redshift of the light from them.

Here Sperry took a major imaginative leap (it was in 1998, the same year he was awarded the Nobel Prize for his work on the photoelectric effect). What if the Universe was in a Steady-State situation—as proposed way back by Gold, Bondi and Hoyle—but was nevertheless uniformly expanding? That is to say, that *everything*—you, me and spacetime itself—was expanding?

With one exception. There was one constant. The distance light could travel in a given period of time.

Now imagine this. Billions of billions of years ago, light could travel, say, 350,000 kilometres per second in terms of the Universe as it then was. In today's terms, that distance is only about 300,000 kilometres (remember that the kilometres themselves are expanding: the velocity

of light is 'really' staying the same). But this is equivalent, so far as we are concerned, to the velocity of light apparently slowing down, over time.

But the frequency of emitted light then would be the same as it is today.

And what does that mean?

Well, take a beam of red light emitted then with a frequency of, say, about  $4 \times 10^{14}$  Hertz. We can if we like say that those 400,000,000,000,000 cycles are equivalent to 350,000 kilometres then. But 350,000 kilometres then are equivalent to only 300,000 kilometres now, which means, as we see it now, that the beam of red light has a frequency of only about  $3.4 \times 10^{14}$  cycles per second. That is, it has been redshifted!

So that when we look at older parts of the Universe, we see that the light from them has been redshifted, apparently due to the Doppler Effect but in fact due to the process I've just described. The further away our telescopes probe, the further back into time we are peering—and so the more redshifted is the light that we see!

But I can hear some of you beginning to shout: "Olbers' Paradox!" (The feisty Olbers, for those of you who've never heard of him, asked the important question: if the Universe is infinite, why isn't the sky a mass of light from all the infinite 'layers' of stars out there? The answer lies in the redshift.) Well, don't you see? This new concept explains away Olbers' Paradox just as neatly as did the old idea of the receding galaxies. Oh sure, in a way you could say that they're still scurrying away from us all right—but only because the infinite Universe is getting bigger as a whole (and, if you're unhappy about that, just remember that infinity plus one is still infinity [ $\infty$ ]). Of course, this does not mean that in the past the Universe was any smaller than it is today—it was still infinite in extent.

Let's have a summary of the story so far.

Sperry's work, confirmed experimentally—notably by the Farside radio array and the Pasadena quark telescope—showed that we live in a Universe that is uniformly expanding and yet is infinite in extent, infinite in age, and kept in existence by a constant energy-exchange between mini black holes and—in their terms—'future' mini white holes. Moreover, in terms of everything else in the Universe, the velocity of light is slowing down. (It might seem that one day, way in the future, you could outrun a beam of light because the Universe had expanded so much: it's not so, of course, but the maths are too abstruse for me to go into them here.)

A man who had turned the whole of orthodox cosmology on its head—and in the space of just a few short years—was someone I would give anything to meet. So when I got the invitation to meet him and hear him speak at the Sagan Centre I was on the vidphone immediately to accept.

Wouldn't you have been?

He was smaller than I'd expected him to be. I told him as much: he grinned and said that by the end of his lecture he'd be a whole lot bigger—an allusion, of course, to his theory.

So far as I could see the only inheritance of his partly dolphin heritage was a powerful aroma of the sea. It made me think of plucky old trawlers fighting their way to the harvestlands of the deeps through tempestuous waves. There was something adventurous, yet something deeply profound, about it.

Aside from that, he was just a normal all-round guy like you and me.

He led me and a select group of postgraduate students down towards the lecture hall, where we seated ourselves comfortably. He walked towards the podium at the front of the hall just as if it were any old day, as if he were delivering any other lecture. His cool was not shared by the rest of us, who realized that we were present for an Occasion. The silence was an almost tangible thing.

He dropped his stick of chalk. It was a little, accidental, spontaneous action that endeared him to me. Here was a man whose imagination could comb the furthest frontiers of understanding, the suburbs of the Universe, and yet he was capable of such a human fault as clumsiness. In a strange kind of a way—and I don't really expect you all to understand this—it filled me with a deep love of all humanity.

And then for a couple of hours we were transported into magic-land. There was this small, impetuous figure, smelling strongly of fish, occupying the central dais; and there were about a score of us eager listeners, journalists and students, waiting on his every word.

He speaks in a cross between a giggle and a chortle, demonstrating his every point by spitting at the blackboard. Every now and then he betrays his excitement and his



dolphin ancestry by giving vent to a series of modulated squeaks. Sometimes he removes his trousers and hurls them at his audience; other times he simply ties them round his neck and attempts to lynch himself—in both cases, he replaces them so deftly, during a particularly thrilling moment of his argument, that no-one notices.

And the things he's telling us are mind-boggling. At times you can hardly hear him speak for the sound of exploding brains. You realize that you are in the presence of a true, universal genius. (It's a pity that he'll probably be dead by the time the reply from Delta Pavo comes: we might have need of his type then.) I find myself reminded of the Jerry Pournelle line: "There were giants in the Earth in those days." Except, of course, that he's not a giant—he's rather small, as I've mentioned—and that he's not in the Earth but on it. But you get my meaning. Only this intellectual giant is here, now.

But what are all these things he's saying which boggle the mind of yours truly?

Well, here goes.

No, I'll start again.

You remember the picture we have of mini black holes and mini white holes? That's right, the one I was talking about earlier in this article: first of all you have a mini black hole and then, at the instant of its death, there spontaneously pops into existence 'somewhere' else a mini white hole. Well, what does that all remind you of?

Right! Neurons.

Think of it for a moment. We'll probably never know all there is to know about the workings of human thought—though, as I mentioned in November last year, there's a team at Duke University working on it—but we can say fairly safely that it goes something like this:-

The instigation of a thought occurs in the form of a tiny increase in electrical potential in one part of the brain. A short while later, after the potential in this area has fizzled back to its normal level, there is a responding electrical reaction in another part of the brain. The electricity has followed a pathway through the intervening areas of brain, but the pathway itself is of such a nature that, in terms of the cellular levels we have been talking about, it doesn't seem to exist. (At one time neurologists thought they knew a lot about them, but Holdski's demonstration that the higher pathways of the brain require for their description the use of fifth-dimensional tensors showed just how little we know—see February 1999 issue.)

Seems a bit familiar, huh?

And well it might do so.

Because what Sperry's saying is that the analogy is more than an analogy. He's saying that the Universe is a thinking entity every bit as much as our brains are—sometimes!—thinking entities.

Oh sure, the Universe is very slow-thinking compared with our tiny little brains—don't forget that the average lifetime of a mini black hole is in excess of ten billion

years—but that probably goes to show that its thoughts are of a complexity and profundity which we can never hope to attain.

And in that case we are very small indeed.

In the light of realizations such as this, the reaction of most people would be simply to fall back awestruck, to hit the bottle, to resign themselves to perpetual inferiority. But not Sperry. As he put it, in the past it has always seemed as if the laws of Nature have been put there to assist mankind—friction gave him the wheel, Newton's Third Law has given him starships.

Sperry suggests that we can harness the Universe to assist our overall computational facilities. Already in the laboratory he has had some success in attempting to teach the Universe chess; and he suggests that the day is not too far off when we will all be walking around with little pockets of spacetime on our wrists, programmed to answer our most difficult numerical and even ethical questions.

The ideas are exciting ones. I can hardly wait.

As Sperry himself puts it: "It is astonishing to think that all of us in this hall have, in effect, nothing but a package of spacetime between our ears."

But let's keep quite about all this.

The Universe may be slow-thinking, but sooner or later it's going to catch on. Just consider for a while a brain as complex as the Universe is. It's probably thinking about you, right at this moment.

And if we make too much of a splash it might—over the millennia—begin to think about doing something about us. It might find us distracting, an irritation, a nuisance.

And—with its mental powers—we'd be doomed!

So let's not go blasting too many multigigaton warheads off into space. Who knows?—they might trigger off a thought. Let's just keep ourselves to ourselves until we know for sure a bit more about the nature of the beast we've caught by the tail. I'm not one of those old proxmires who say that we should cancel our space exploration and colonization programme: all I'm saying is that we should go about the whole thing quietly—very quietly.

Chances are we can't go far from home, anyway, because of the proliferation of mini white and black holes; but even if we eventually find some way around that problem we should take care—apart from anything else, how would you feel if you discovered that somebody had been kicking your brain cells about?

Einstein said that God doesn't throw dice. Hawking said that he does—and sometimes where you can't see them fall. The other day at the Sagan Centre, Sperry added: "Those dice may be filled with high explosive!"

But there's more to it than that.

Above all, let us beware of fallacies, paradoxes and outrageous ideas. The Universe might get to hear of them. And I have this horrible recurring nightmare about the Universe having a brainstorm...

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*Dennis Brezhnev, the author of this article, is the pseudonym of John Grant (who is famous for being an editor and pseudonym).*

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#### ELFQUEST BOOK ONE by Wendy & Richard Pini (Starblaze)

*Elfquest* is a glossy comic book, a compilation of several issues originally published in black and white and now especially coloured for the occasion. The single word that springs to mind forcefully enough to cause a headache is 'twee'. The elves (naturally it is about the elves) are portrayed as basically human (the males have bulging biceps, the females big tits) except that they have large pointed ears, pointed chins, large eyes and heads that are too big for their bodies—all of which combine to give the elves a child-like appearance. So what we see is a bunch of children, but what they do is adult—killing and dying and living and loving, just like an infant school's *Macbeth*. Twee!

There are several ways in which a comic book or strip can succeed. It can have a good, dramatic story-line—a comic strip is not the best medium in which to get all introspective. Or it can have dynamic, imaginative artwork—one thinks of Frank Bellamy's or Jim Steranko's page layouts, Frank Miller's dark, brooding cityscapes. Or it can have well-crafted prose, although the limited space of speech balloons and narrative boxes naturally restricts the scope for this.

*Elfquest*, sadly, has none of these. The twee portrayal of the elves extends, Disney-like, into the animals and backgrounds, so that we have, for example, the absurdity of ferocious wolves (that's what we are told) with heads like a teddy-bear's and feet like a hairy elephant's. The text and art are in conflict, in this instance and others, in what can only be interpreted as an attempt to cover up the

shortfall in artistic technique with narrative explanation. Neither is there a single memorable page or panel in the entire book, though there were several opportunities. This is no way to run a comic strip.

The story-line is pure soap opera. Noble band of savage elves is driven out of their forest by tribe of wicked humans, forced to cross a burning desert where several nearly die, and finds a village of civilised elves, unthreatened in their isolation. Thus, in a stroke, the Pinis remove the possibility of external danger and high drama, and are left with boy-meets-girl and the minor internal bickering it causes. They have deliberately avoided the hard option for the safe, soft one. "Dallas" without J.R.

The dialogue is twee, too.

I care nothing for these paper elves who laugh and cry and rage according to the stage directions. I am unimpressed by the artwork. I am bored by the story.

And in answer to your inevitable question, "Well, what do you expect from a comic strip?" let me say that I expect a great deal more. Certainly I expect it from a strip not hamstrung by the monthly deadlines and obligatory fight scenes which keep most comic books in the pulp stage. I expect it because I've seen it. Over the last two years, Frank Miller, even though hamstrung, has been achieving levels in the Marvel Comics Group's 'Daredevil' that make *Elfquest* look pitiful. Where Miller has thought about the advantages and limitations of the comics medium and innovated therefrom, the Pinis have merely accepted the conventions and drawn pictures of pointed ears.

Twee, banal and dull is what *Elfquest* is.

(KJS)



WHO PAID SKYCON'S DEFICIT?

WHY DON'T THE YORCON I ACCOUNTS ADD UP?

WHAT IS THE DARK SECRET OF ALBACON'S INCOME?

HOW ACCIDENTALLY WAS INTERZONE FUNDED?

WHO PUT THE 'CON' INTO 'NOVA'?

# What Do They Do With The Money?

Of such stark, dramatic headlines is the stuff of accountancy made.

Yes, the other editor has finally decided to let his profession hang out in a fanzine and write about accounts: specifically, about SF convention accounts. I was prompted to write this piece by a couple of things: first, the Albacon Report, with its very detailed accounts (since reprinted in the Yorcon II programme book), and secondly by a question which has nagged me ever since Skycon (of which I was treasurer as well as chairman, as long-time readers will know). That question: "What do they do with the money?"

These were my main reasons, when I wrote the first draft of this article, and they remain my main reasons. But since then (a year ago!) Yorcon II has proved to have yielded a vast profit of about £1,300, £1,200 of which, by decree of the committee, has gone to fund an SF magazine, Interzone. "Golly gosh! -- how dare they?" Suddenly, everyone was interested in what Eastercons did with their surplus money. People who had shunned the so-called business meeting at Albacon -- mostly because they, like myself, were on the train home at the time -- were suddenly in favour of one. Since then, too, D. West has had a say on the matter in Matrix 40; we have a lot of common ground.

I can half-answer my question, concerning Skycon, very easily: half the money went to the Heathrow Hotel for hire of its conference facilities. We knew we would have this large expense, which Eastercons hadn't had before, and we knew we would have to cover it, somehow. Part of the answer, again, was easy: increase the registration fee. The other part was to go for more registrations, thus enabling us to achieve economies of scale in the printing and increasing the overall amount gained from the net profit per member.

The registration fee was a problem. To be sure of covering costs, I'd have liked it to have been £5.00, but an increase of £1.50 over the previous Eastercon just wasn't on. I'd have been upset if a con committee had sprung that big an increase on me. So it had to be less, and we settled on £4.50. (Such things have to be rounded to the nearest fifty pence for ease of money handling; imagine the chaos if it were £4.67!) This was still a hefty increase, but absolutely necessary. I prepared estimates of costs, and budgets of income and expenditure, and plotted little coloured break-even charts, and worried a lot. But the registrations came in and we just about broke even. The

loss of £5 was absorbed without too much difficulty by the committee members. Mind you, I was sweating for quite a time, waiting for the last of our advertisers to pay up. (The Eastercon 77 committee had said it would cover any losses out of its profits, which helped me sweat less. In the end it wasn't necessary, though I was thankful for the gesture.)

The question began to form while I was doing all this. Here we were, covering an extra £1900 with only a £1 increase in registration. What had the others spent their money on?

Then came Yorcon I (or 'Yorcon', as it was known then) with a £5 registration fee, fifty pence up on ours. (I asked Alan Dorey how they'd arrived at this, remembering my little coloured charts. "Your price plus fifty pence," he told me. Obvious, really.) They'd made great play of the fact that their hotel facilities were free, so what were they going to do with the money?

Albacon was next, with a £6 fee, a rise of £1 -- inflation really setting in. And of course the question occurred to me again. But before I answer it, by reference to the accounts of recent Eastercons, let's look at those accounts, and the purpose of publishing them at all.

To start with, there is no obligation to publish accounts. In Britain, only limited companies have to publish accounts by law. Other businesses produce accounts, but only to see how they are doing, and they only show them to the Inland Revenue, or perhaps to the bank manager if they want to borrow some money. So there is no legal obligation for Eastercons to publish accounts. They do so because there is a tradition and a moral pressure to do so: either can be, and has been, ignored. I merely mention the name 'Mancon'...

People want convention accounts for information. They want to see how their money was spent, to be reassured that the con committee hasn't ripped them off and pocketed a couple of hundred quid apiece, to see whether the committee is merely incompetent or consists of a bunch of crooks (all con committees are one or the other; it's one of the rules). But that's not the only sort of information. People wanting to run a convention need to know the likely costs and the sources of income -- both of which they should be able to find in the accounts.

What accounts are not, are a list of excuses and a stick with which to beat other con committees -- which brings me



inexorably to the Albacon accounts.

First, I will say that willingness of the Albacon committee to reveal, if not all, then the amount of detail they did is highly commendable. Not to say rash. They were obviously prepared to have other people pick over the bones, which is just as well, since that's precisely what I'm going to do -- though not to Albacon alone. However, I'm not sure I approve of the motives that seem to be behind the disclosure.

The lists of expenses and the notes attached to them scream out shrilly that the Albacon people are all good guys. "We didn't have our rooms paid for, or our banquet tickets," they shout. "Lots of little expenses were paid by committee members and not reclaimed," they point out. "Albany electricians charges were reduced from £300 to £162.50 after negotiations," they claim triumphantly. All of this is commendable, though the first two items were true for Skycon too and I don't seem to remember thinking it any big deal, and the negotiated charge reduction should have been done before the convention. It's the committee's job to get the best possible rates for all costs and nail them down tight in advance.

I distrust the shrill protestations. There are too many of them. It is easy to see that the committee members are not crooks, which leaves behind suspicions of incompetence. Personally, I enjoyed Albacon. I never had the slightest intention of not going. But it wasn't great, and there were screw ups, particularly with getting PRs to people on time. To try to pretend otherwise is Not On, and an attempt to win people over, with a soul-bearing report and incredibly detailed accounts, to the view that it was perfect after all -- "just look at all the problems we overcame" -- is Not On Either.

Let me talk about the accounts of the last three Eastercons to have published them so far: Skycon (1978), Yorcon I (1979) and Albacon (1980). As well as making general comments on presentation, maybe I'll get round to trying to answer my original question, at last. I'm not going back before Skycon, because it seems to me that cons changed then. Their size had been steadily increasing since Tynecon (1974), and there was no great leap forward in 1978 as there had been in 1974, but the size became just such that a different type of hotel was required, bigger and with more conference facilities, so that the De Vere in Coventry, site of the '75 and '77 Eastercons, was and remains no longer adequate. The Heathrow Hotel was bigger, but it was not the right hotel for a con, as it turned out. That was Skycon's big screw up, and it affected the entire con. It was, in fact, a move in the right direction, but too far, too soon. Hotels are getting to be a big problem. I don't see the Leeds Dragonara being big enough another time; Yorcon II filled it up to, and past, overflowing.

The subject is accounts, not hotels. The Skycon 'Income and Expenditure Account' (which is all it is, if you're pedantic) lists the main headings of income and expenditure (in that order) and the amounts received or expended, together with a couple of explanatory notes.

The Yorcon I account (incorrectly titled, as it happens) again shows the main headings of expenditure and income (but in that order), but distinguishing more items of expenditure than Skycon's. There are a few points I'd like to mention. I think that putting expenditure above income is a bad idea, especially if your income is higher. It makes the subtracting more difficult, for one thing, as Yorcon I inadvertently found out by subtracting £3047.00 total income from £2924.90 total expenditure to give £123.90 surplus income. The correct answer, of course, is £122.10 -- a difference of a stupendous £1.80!

Actually, even this isn't quite right. Try as I might, I am totally unable to make the total income figure come to only £3047. It perversely insists on being £3247, so the real surplus is £322.10, not £123.90, which is rather bigger. Yes folks: the Yorcon I accounts don't add up! If I were Alan Dorey I'd try to find out what happened to that £200 -- could be dangerous, signing your name to things that don't add up like that.

Then we have some explanatory notes, and a curious statement to the effect that the "accounts are by

necessity not as detailed as we would wish", which is nothing but bullshit as "necessity" doesn't come into it. Accounts can be as detailed as you wish, so long as you haven't junked the invoices and bank statements. Maybe there wasn't the time to prepare more detail -- a distinct possibility which only goes to show that they should have started preparing earlier... Low marks, boys. Sloppy work.

The Albacon accounts are very detailed, as I've already said. For example, the second item you come to, reading from the top, is "Travelling expenses Colin Kapp £53.00". Great! But how much profit did they make? Let's look at the bottom of the page: "Programme Book £800.00". That's a fair old bit, but how much profit did they make? Turn over the page, hunt right down to the end -- ah, here it is: "Excess Cash £192.00". That's my problem with these accounts, really; they're written backwards. It's much easier to understand them if you get the summary first, and then the detail. Of course, Albacon puts the income right at the end. It's a defensive presentation: first the list of excuses, then the overall result.

I'm also very disturbed by the lack of information about income. All Albacon tells us is that £4422.76 was credited to the Albacon deposit account and £1163.52 to the Faircon 'cheque' account. Bloody marvellous! I couldn't give a damn where they banked the money. They could have kept it in used fivers under Bob Shaw's bed for all I care. I want to know where it came from -- how much was registrations, advertising, book room dealers, and so on. As a potential con organiser that's what I need to know, not how much to put in a deposit account and how much to keep in a current account. So no marks for that. However, the accounts do add up.

On to the numbers themselves. I've been through all three accounts and condensed or expanded the detail into useful headings. On occasion I've had to estimate, as with the split of £493.07 between hotel rooms for guests and those for the committee at Yorcon I. Table A shows the results.

The Skycon expenditure can be seen to consist of conference facilities, printing and stationery, and very little else. Yorcon I has a much more even spread of expenditure, with committee hotel rooms taking an estimated 12% of total expenditure, or about 40p out of every registration. Albacon, like Skycon, has very high conference facility and printing costs, but also a high GoH cost.

So that's what they did with the money!

I found when doing Skycon that a good way of testing the financial viability of a proposal, such as advertising in a magazine or on radio, was to calculate how many memberships it would cost. On this measure, the Skycon conference facility costs came to 420 memberships -- which was one of the reasons for worrying a lot. The Yorcon I committee rooms used up about 50 memberships (Skycon would have used about the same number had the committee taken free rooms). Albacon's guests (of honour and otherwise, in fact) used 160 or so.

So it becomes quite easy to assess whether you think a committee has spent its money wisely, for the greatest benefit of the convention. Should 420 people pay for nothing but hotel conference facilities? I think that is entirely reasonable -- which, of course, I have to say, having done so with Skycon, and contemplating the same sort of thing again with Metrocon. It comes back to hotels again. Suitable hotels with adequate facilities are hard to find these days. When you do find them, you find also that they know it, and charge for the facilities. Channelcon has done very well to get free facilities and low room rates. We could, I suppose, have Eastercon in Brighton every year. But good facilities are essential to a modern Eastercon, with attendances now pushing a thousand, and a committee must provide them even if it means paying. So long as this can be done without charging what would be considered an unreasonable amount for membership, I don't think there can be any objection. Is it right for 50 to pay just for hotel rooms for the committee? Albacon would say 'no'. I have an open mind. Committees generally work their balls off for a convention over a period of over a year, for a reward of personal satisfaction, temporary fulfilment of megalomaniac dreams and, in Yorcon I's case, less than forty quid



apiece. And finally, Albacon's 18% spent on guests. I think that is excessive; an Eastercon is for the fans, not the professionals. But it's hard to see what else they could have spent it on. They had a huge film programme as it was, and the extra cash would not in itself have made the progress reports come out on time.

The continual registration price increases have temporarily halted, with Yorcon II charging only £6, the same as Albacon (presumably because of their experience with Yorcon I) and Channelcon, too, staying at £6 up to 1st December 1981 (Channelcon treasurer Janice Maule is an accountant and did her sums). However, both Metrocon and Albacon II are planning on higher registrations.

Accounts can also be revealing by what they don't show, incidentally. Did Albacon really not take out insurance against the convention's not taking place? I can't find any evidence of insurance in their report -- and surely they wouldn't have forgotten to put it in if they had it. Very careless of them, that.

So that's the Eastercons sorted out in terms of what they spend. But what of that other major British convention, Novacon? Now, Novacon is a jolly good thing run by the jolly good old Brum Group, and if they make a few bob out of it, who minds? It's their event and if you don't like it, you can stay away the next year.

But I started to toy with a few figures when I looked at Novacon 11's registration fee -- £5.50, only 50p less than Channelcon was charging. 50p less for a convention that is one day shorter and has less going on. Well, registrations would give £2,600 (500 people @ £5.50, less an allowance for those who only paid supporting membership). Then we have income from advertising and the bookroom tables; let's estimate that at a miserly £200 apiece. And let's also ignore any other income, such as that from games machines or the art auction commission.

On the expenditure side we have postage, for PRs, of £230 (500 x 4 x 11½p), printing and stationery of, say, £800, GoH expenses of £350, film hire of £300, and sundry expenses of £300. These estimates seem reasonable to me. So let's set them out in an income and expenditure account and see what we get.

#### NOVACON 11 Income and Expenditure Account (Estimated)

INCOME		£
Registrations	2,600	
Advertising	200	
Bookroom	200	
Total income	3,000	
EXPENDITURE		
Guest of Honour	350	
Printing and stationery	800	
Postage	230	
Films	300	
Sundry	300	
Total expenditure	1,980	
SURPLUS OF INCOME	1,020	

How much? A thousand quid? Bloody hell! What do they do with all that? They distribute it, that's what. They gave £50 each to TAFF and GUFF, which leaves £920 to be distributed as committee perks (free rooms, celebration dinner afterwards) and to the Brum Group. Not a bad little deal, eh?

It strikes me that Novacon is overcharging. Everyone knows that the profits go to the Brum Group, and no one begrudges them a bit of a profit, because they do organise a Novacon every year. But that much profit? Should it really be that much profit? No, I don't think so.

	SKYCON	YORCON I	ALBACON
Attending membership per person	<u>£4.50</u>	<u>£5.00</u>	<u>£6.00</u>
INCOME			
Registrations	2,528	2,382	?
Advertising	734	202	?
Book room tables	270	184	?
Other	339	-	?
TOTAL INCOME	<u>3,871</u>	<u>2,768</u>	<u>5,586</u>
EXPENDITURE			
Conference and display facilities	1,900 49%	397 16%	1,595 30%
Guests of Honour	250 6%	*271 11%	945 18%
Committee's hotel rooms	- -	*293 12%	- -
Printing and stationery	729 19%	444 18%	1,434 27%
Postage	97 3%	349 14%	419 8%
Film hire costs	200 5%	306 13%	444 8%
Event insurance	20	25	-
Miscellaneous	680	361	557
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	<u>3,876 100%</u>	<u>2,446 100%</u>	<u>5,394 100%</u>
NET	<u>£ (5)</u>	<u>£ 322</u>	<u>£ 192</u>
*estimated			
TABLE A			

What seems to have annoyed people about the Yorcon II/Interzone connexion is not that the vast sum of £1,300 should have been made by Yorcon II (though perhaps it annoyed them a bit) but that it should have been given to Interzone by decree of the committee (some of whom form part of the Interzone collective) without consultation with the convention members, who paid the money in the first place.

I think they've got it backwards. I'm more irritated at their making so much surplus than their using it for Interzone. Why?

It's quite hard to find something sensible to do with surplus funds from an Eastercon. Mancon kept whatever there was in the way of profit (no one knows quite how much there was, of course). Eastercon 77 gave some to TAFF and kept the rest. Presumably this means it went into the Brum Group coffers. (Eastercon 77 bore a strong resemblance to a Novacon, I seem to remember.) Skycon didn't make anything; the treasurer was so supremely confident of his accounting prowess that he ploughed the potential surplus back into the convention on the spot (ahem!). Yorcon I made a small but indeterminate amount (see earlier) and for reasons of personal animosity gave nothing to Albacon. For similar and retaliatory reasons, Albacon gave nothing to Yorcon II, but did give some to TAFF and GUFF, and used the rest to produce the Albacon Report, which is a good idea. Yorcon II, having made so much, gave £25 each to TAFF and GUFF, and nothing to Channelcon, on the somewhat spurious grounds that because they (Yorcon II) had made so much, so would Channelcon, who therefore would not need any handouts. Thus has the tradition of passing on surplus funds to the next convention been shattered.

Now this is particularly foolish, since there is nothing better that can be done with a surplus. Nothing has a stronger connexion with an Eastercon than the next Eastercon, and nothing has a stronger claim on any surplus. It benefits the people who paid the money originally, so long as they go to the next one, and it provides a little extra security for the con. committee. It is a tradition that should be resumed A.S.A.F.P.

The danger with a 'no strings' donation is that the receiving committee might just fritter it away. The alternative is a sponsored event. So, for example, Channelcon might like to hold a 'Channelcon Party' at (for the sake of argument) Metrocon, or they might consider that too frivolous and instead provide the funds to obtain a rare and expensive film, or pay the expenses of a particularly brilliant and entertaining speaker, or.... anything they can think of, really.



Something that the current committee would like to have, but don't think they can really afford or justify.

But given the fact that a committee finds itself with £1,300, it has to find something to do with it. TAFF and GUFF? Fine, but they don't deserve £1,300; winners don't need to travel first class (though you'd better watch the air fares, now that Laker has gone bust). £50 would seem entirely reasonable. A committee rake-off? Acceptable to a small extent, but not to the tune of £1,300. BSFA? Another worthy cause, but only for a special project such as the litho fund or the bibliographies, say. Today's BSFA keeps itself going pretty well day to day. Something of benefit to SF? Why not? It is an SF convention, after all. The drawback, ordinarily, is that with a surplus of only a couple of hundred quid you can't do very much of benefit. You can do something with thirteen hundred: you can start an SF magazine. Which is why I rather approve of it's being used for Interzone.

What I don't like is the idea of a convention's making a £1,300 surplus in the first place. It can do it in only two ways: by intention, or by accident. The Brum Group makes a profit by intention. Yorcon II said, and there is no reason to doubt them, that it was by accident; they were taken completely by surprise by the numbers who attended, and thus made a huge surplus.

Sounds kind of amateurish to me. Simplistically, £1,300 means over two hundred members more than anticipated. In Matrix 39, Dave Pringle said that they were budgetting for 600 members (Yorcon I had 500) and got 750, and also managed some extra savings on expenditure -- £400 worth of extra savings, when you do the arithmetic. Dave Pingle said they had been conservative in their estimating. Damn right! Skycon got 700 members; Yorcon I had 500 in the Worldcon year, which, as everyone knew, artificially depressed the attendance; Albacon had 800-odd. 700 would have been a realistic budget figure. Yes, I know I have the advantage of hindsight. Yes, I know it's difficult to judge these things accurately in advance, and the thought of having to find personally the cash to cover a shortfall is distinctly on the anxious side of very worrying, but it can be done. (Accountants do it all the time -- but then, they have several years training.)

More to the point, there must have been signs some time before the event that attendance was going to be higher than originally estimated, and that the savings in expenditure would be made. One of the things that you do with a budget is compare it with actual figures from time to time, and then either revise the budget or take measures to get the actuals back into line. There should, therefore, have been time, if not actually to spend any more money on improving the convention, to have announced the imminent huge profit at Yorcon II itself. (The final profit surprised the Yorcon II guests of honour, at least two of whom were told that, because of shortage of funds, they should not have breakfast unless prepared to pay for it themselves. It was explained that, for the same reason, the TAFF winner Stu Shiffman could not be offered a free room at the convention he was sent to attend.)

I don't think that £6 was too much to charge for an Eastercon. (UFP Con 82 -- the 13th Official British Star Trek Convention -- is charging £7.50. Per day!) I don't think the Yorcon II committee consisted of rip-off merchants, far from it. I do think they were financially naive, which is not acceptable when dealing with a gross income of over £5,000. And I do think they badly misjudged the mood and reaction of fandom by holding back any announcement of what they intended to do, waiting until after Chuck Connor had started slinging mud instead of getting in first and positively. They gave the impression, justified or not, that they had something to hide.

Not that this is having any effect on Interzone, I expect. The effect has been that now more people are calling for an Eastercon Charter or Constitution to stop that sort of thing happening again, which I consider a most unwelcome development. At a Surrey Limpwrist meeting a few months ago Eve Harvey and Janice Maule were proposing that at Channelcon any bidders for Metrocon -- sorry, Eastercon 1983 -- should have to adhere to a constitution which would be decided in the business meeting immediately following. In other words, unpaid volunteers would have to obey (possibly arbitrary) rules

which had not yet been formulated. Being potentially one of these unpaid volunteers, I objected to that.

I object to it on principle. If I do something for 'nothing', it's because I enjoy doing it. The 'nothing' is, in fact, enjoyment -- and don't let any hypocrite kid you they run conventions out of 'duty'. But I'm not going to enjoy it so much, if at all, if I am forced to do it in a specified way according to a set of rules devised and voted on by a bunch of idle tossers who attend conventions, think they know how they should be run, and would run a mile if asked to organise one. Moreover, there is absolutely no sanction that can be applied to a volunteer for disobeying the rules. He can always just stop volunteering.

There is an alternative to a constitution, and that is a set of guidelines, which any bidding committee would be free to accept or reject as they wished. So why have them at all? Because the acceptance, partial acceptance or rejection of them would be clearly stated at voting time, in addition to the hotel and facilities, room rates, membership rates and so forth. There would then be a moral sanction. The committee of volunteers would also have accepted voluntarily certain regulations or guidelines -- and woe betide them for going back on their word.

There are a couple of things I would like to see in any Eastercon Guidelines. First, I would like to see committees putting out an Eastercon Report, along the lines of the Albacon Report. I don't want to see it as big and expensive to produce as the Albacon Report, but a small and cheap one would be very useful, containing the income and expenditure account, of course, and also the registration figures at various times during the year leading up to the con and at the con itself. Do you know how hard it is to find out the size of Eastercons? Programme books are no help, because they go to press well before all registrations are in, and can't possibly give the number of walk-ins. Nor do they tell who attends, and who merely supports. Ask what con attendance figures actually are and the answer is always given to the nearest hundred, accompanied by much waving of hands. No one knows! Such information would be of great comfort to worried committees, and its absence was no doubt contributory to Yorcon II's dreadful underestimation of attendance figures.

The second thing I would like to see is a standardisation of the form and headings of the income and expenditure account, along these lines:

#### EASTERCON INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT

	£	Note
INCOME		
Registrations	x,xxx	1
Advertising	xxx	
Book room tables	xxx	
Other income	xxx	2
Total income	x,xxx	
EXPENDITURE		
Guests of honour	xxx	
Printing and stationery	x,xxx	
Postage	xxx	
Hire of convention facilities	x,xxx	3
Hire of films	xxx	
Miscellaneous expenses	xxx	4
Total expenditure	x,xxx	
SURPLUS OF INCOME OVER EXPENDITURE	£x,xxx	7
The surplus of income over expenditure has been dealt with as follows:		
Donation to next Eastercon	xxx	
Donation to TAFF, GUFF, etc.	xxx	5
Contribution to committee's hotel expenses	xxx	
Production of convention report	xxx	
Other distributions	x,xxx	6
Undecided	xxx	
	£x,xxx	7



1. Registrations could usefully be split between attending and supporting only, but this is not vital.
2. Other income should be itemised, either above if there are only one or two items, or here as part of a note.
3. Convention facilities hire should be split, preferably in a note rather than the main body of the account, between convention rooms and equipment costs.
4. Miscellaneous expenses should be itemised in a note so far as is useful; there's no need to show every single item.
5. Charitable donations may be shown separately or combined, depending on their size.
6. Other distributions should, again, be itemised.
7. These two totals must, of course, be equal, even if

a distribution heading of 'undecided' has to be invoked.

What does all this achieve? Well, it enables proper comparison between conventions (I had to fiddle about and make estimates and assumptions with my comparisons earlier). It enables people to judge how well the promises made at the bidding session were carried out. It provides information for future convention committees. Accounts don't do much else, anyway. But it's more than can be done at present.

British fans are approaching the running of conventions much more professionally now. They have to, with the numbers of people attending and the amounts of money involved. And part of that professionalism applies to finances and financial reporting also. You have to know where the money is coming from, and going to.

What do they do with the money? It doesn't matter much, apparently. But a con committee has to know the answer, and show the answer.

KEVIN SMITH

We received lots of brilliantly witty, topical letters which would have been absolute musts for publication in full had we only produced DRILKJIS 6 at a time when DRILKJIS 5 was still a lavender-scented memory. So if you should find your name in the WAHF section, and if you believe lying hype like the foregoing sentence... how can you complain?

RICHARD COWPER, 8 APRIL 1980

Thanks for the copy of *Drilkjis* (where do you find your titles? inside meteorites?) which I read with interest (I was about to say 'with my cornflakes', an sf concept if I can recognize one). Of course I'm firmly of Chris Priest's persuasion in this hoary old character vs. idea debate. But really it's a sterile discussion—or perhaps more a question of emphases than an either/or issue. In the ideal sf novel the two are fused into one compelling imaginative experience. Can't think of one offhand...!

TERRY JEEVES, ??? 1980

One snag I have discovered about Jim Barker's illos—and the fact that he has so ably illustrated Bob Shaw's con talks—is that now I automatically pick up a piece illustrated by Jim, and mentally start reading a piece written by BoSh. Fr'instance, I was on to page two of Chris Priest's piece, and saying to myself "Good, but not Bob's usual style," before I checked back and found it was Chris. Enjoyed it, nevertheless—and muchly. May I go on record as agreeing with Mr Priest when he says a story should be literature first, sf second, rather than the reverse?

Intrigued to hear that McCaffrey nominated her own title [for the *Hugo*]: that should be a no-no in the rules if ever I saw one. Being a registered Dragon-hater, I find each successive dragon book—with its inevitable 'impression'—sheer potboiling juvenile material.

There's nothing in the *Hugo* rules to prevent authors nominating their own work. Since ties have been known, and since works can miss the final ballot or the award itself by very small margins, people should obviously nominate themselves in every conceivable category—just to be on the safe side. I mean, it's only common sense, innit? And much more cost-effective than the alternative of bribing some other voter.

ERIC MAVER, 18 APRIL 1980

What I am reading now are Travis McGee books [by John D. MacDonald]. I don't know that they are so much better than some sf I've read in the past. Travis still tends to get conked over the head at the ends of chapters without sustaining much damage in the long run. Unlike the sf heroes I remember, he takes the trouble to explain to readers that it really does, honest to God, hurt like hell to get hit over the head, so maybe that's characterization. It beats sf I've read lately. Seems that many of today's sf writers are not on speaking terms with the English language. What is passed by them for character tends to be the naive, adolescent mind-set of the comfortable, upper-middle-class, sophomore editor of the college literary magazine. Sf is supposed to be a forward-looking genre, but the industry is becoming the last redoubt of aging hippies, to judge by what's being written. Well, the subject is unpleasant for me because I've got so much enjoyment out of the genre. I hate to see it going downhill. I suspect the trend will only reverse itself if the field collapses. Conventional wisdom says that the fact that publishers can sell *anything* labelled sf means there's more

# LETTERS

room for good sf. I believe this ignores the perversity of human nature. If publishers can sell bad sf as easily as good they'll sell the bad. It means they can fob off amateur abominations by friends and relatives without fear of sales slipping. Looking back at what I have read in the field the last few years I see that it has been nearly all by British writers like Priest, Shaw, Watson, Ballard, Roberts. (Wait a minute, did I mean Watson? Wallace, rather. You can tell how much my opinion is worth...)

The article by Peter Nicholls was splendid, much better written, much more enjoyable, and much more sensitive, funny and interesting than the works of quite a few of the so-called pros he mentions along the way.

JIMMY ROBERTSON, ??? 1980

Joe [Nicholas] says his little bit about the limitations of democracy, but in the same issue there is an illustration of democracy being warped by an informed body. I refer to the Novacon debate. Though I expected the result of the vote, I was still saddened.

It seemed to me, at the debate, that the Watson/Langford argument was presented in an infinitely superior and better reasoned fashion than the opposition's. Now no matter what your opinion of the subject matter, one should vote on the strengths of the arguments presented. I don't think the audience did vote along these lines; I think they voted on how they previously felt about the question, and how they were disposed towards Ian Watson.

Absolutely correct. Irrefutable logic. We wuz robbed. [D]

PETE LYON, 26 JULY 1980

J.Nicholas is a caution isn't he!—a valuable one, as I rather think that too many people (fans) allow too many people (Big Names) to get too complacent. He obviously has his English Crit O-level, anyway. Did I spot a contradiction, though? He quotes P.Anderson's remarks about having to write for cretins' beer money, and rightly points out the inherent arrogance of the statement. He subsequently says: "...to the credulous reader-in-the-street... who 9 times out of 10 wouldn't recognize good literature even if it were to bite him in the leg." This may be true or not, but it sounds to me that he's agreeing with Anderson's gloomy view of the readership.

MIKE GLICKSOHN, 21 APRIL 1980

I'd never claim to be as knowledgeable as Joseph, but it still seems to me that he goes out of his way to belittle just about everything that's being written. If all sf is as bad as Joseph constantly says it is, one wonders what attracted him to the field in the first place, and why he bothers with the sf part of fandom any more instead of chucking it in as a lost cause and getting drunk at fan parties like the rest of us. I quite enjoyed the Cherryrh and McIntyre novels, for example, and thus found Joseph's comments to be more examples of would-be reviewer's glib



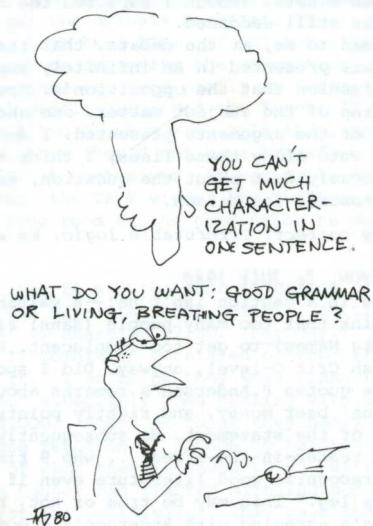
phrasing rather than valid criticism. He also reveals a clear lack of understanding of the economics of publishing in his evaluation of the McIntyre book, and it's failures of this sort that make me wonder if Joseph really understands much of anything or is just in love with his own—considerable—ability to turn a nicely worded insult. (*The Forever War* also won a Hugo and also appeared in *Analog* as a series of shorter pieces, but it was most definitely conceived as a novel. For a relatively new writer, which Haldeman was then and McIntyre was before *Dreamsnake*, it is financially advantageous to get a planned novel into print in segments before tying them all together and publishing the final book version. If Joseph doesn't like the concept in a book, that's fine; but he ought not to impose his own ignorance on the writer in question.

*(Unfortunately the most financially advantageous way of publishing a book isn't necessarily workable from the artistic viewpoint. As someone about to publish a novel whose opening once appeared as a short story, I'm probably sticking my neck out: but though I liked THE FOREVER WAR and 'Of Mist, and Grass, and Sand', I didn't feel that the extension of the latter into a routine sf novel did it any good at all... DJ)*

Despite Peter Nicholls's tendency to dwell on the sordid and tawdry aspects of sf conventions, his fictional account of *Seacon* was amusing. (I'm assuming this was meant as fan fiction. All that emphasis on the sexual prowess of Australians certainly takes it out of the realm of reporting.) However, there was at least one glaring factual error which demands rectification. (I didn't attend the same *Seacon* as Peter, so I've no idea how many other errors there may be in his descriptions.) I refer to the infamous incident with the American pros and the closed-door parties: I've heard various accounts of the actual line that inspired the badges Peter mentions, and I'm not at all sure what the precise wording was, but every badge I saw thereafter referred to 'American riffraff', not 'American trash'. Let's get our history straight, shall we?

MIKE PAINE, 17 MAY 1980

Since Joe Nicholas mentioned Vonda McIntyre's novel *Dreamsnake*, I was almost tempted to write some of my views on it. You notice I said 'almost'; the last time someone wrote much the same as Joe's 'From the Underworld', I virtually exhausted myself producing page after page on McIntyre's idiotic fuck-up of a potentially excellent novel by reducing all her male characters to the stereotyped roles they play in it. This appears to be a natural phenomenon that occurs every time I see mention of that novel...



HARRY HARRISON, 10 MARCH 1980 (and 1 APRIL 1980, 26 JULY 1980, 31 OCTOBER 1980, 5 NOVEMBER 1980 (twice) ETC...)

What a pleasure to read your zine. For two reasons. I was beginning to think that crudzines, genzines, letterzines and such were all that was left in the world. You restore my faith in fandom. You are critical of a lot of sf novels, with good reason, and write clearly about their faults. More! I think the state of sf today is tragic, speaking now as a reader and a critic, and I wish something could be done about it. Your magazine can but help. Stay in there.

COMPETING FOR THE READER'S  
BEER MONEY IS A CONSTRAINT,  
NOT A HOLY CAUSE. WE AREN'T  
TRYING TO  
DRY UP FAN-  
DOM, FOR  
GODS SAKE!



I suppose I must carp a bit, to make this a traditional LoC. So I will. Peter Nicholls. In his *Seacon* report he seems to be trying to fill Ted White's scrofulous shoes by resorting to insult and spreading nasty little stories about his betters. He writes 'Harry [Harrison] doesn't really approve of me, I don't know why...' I don't know why either, since I'm not aware of feeling that way. Though I may in the future if he keeps this sort of thing up. His 'amusing' little anecdote of him 'catching me' describing his predatory sexual habits to a young lady is not only in bad taste. It is false. I really don't like seeing my name in print this way, Peter, and I suggest you desist. If this leaves you with some spare writing time, you might use it to answer my letter of some months ago concerning some grave factual errors I discovered in your encyclopaedia.

A. CORRESPONDANT (sic), 20 MARCH 1980

*Drilkjis 5* recently passed through my hands, and a very enjoyable issue it was, apart from the nauseating *Seacon* report by the bearded Australian, which prompts the observation that Peter Nicholls could become the Nigel Dempster of sf if only he could resist the temptation to talk about himself.

BERNARD M. EARP, 16 APRIL 1980

I have read a couple of stories by Ms Lichtenberg, in *Galileo*, and hadn't even begun to realize that I was reading such out-and-out filth. Well, I can tell you the scales have dropped from my eyes now, and I may well burn every copy.

I think that I'm going to regret for the rest of my life not attending *Seacon*. Whenever I read any of the reports it's always the silly giggling little hook that catches hold of me. This time it's 'Tom Disch's wonderfully inappropriate tattoo...' I'm not even sure that I really want to know the answer to that one. Let it remain one of life's profounder mysteries; something to mull over on long and boring bus journeys.

MARTIN HOARE, 10 APRIL 1980

*Drilkjis 5* was really great, knockout, wonderful, super... (damn: the cliché generator on my word processor was stuck again. Now I know why Fanthorpe sold it so cheaply, can't understand why he keeps wanting to borrow it back... sorry Lionel, didn't mean it).

This letter is included to refute the rumours about Martin, and to show that he can in fact write; or, at least, poke the keys of his typewriter.

PHIL JAMES, 24 MARCH 1980

Articles such as Mr Smith's piece do much more harm than good and I implore you to consider having his knees stapled together.

PHIL STEPHENSEN-PAYNE, 2 NOVEMBER 1980

And so to *Drilkjis*—the serious fanzine with the silly cover. It amuses me that neither copy I have—one carried back with me in April, one sent by Kev through the post later—was noticed by the 'ever-vigilant' South African smut police (after whom the main airport, Jan Smuts, is of course named). It could have been fun trying to explain why it wasn't really bannable. (Mind you, seeing as Delany's *Tides of Lust* slipped through a few months later in an ordinary envelope, labelled by Rog 'SF paperback', one cannot really expect much of their vigilance.)

WE ALSO HEARD FROM...

Alexis Gilliland, Alun Harries, Cyril Simsa, Ashley Watkins, Chris Lewis, Paul Oldroyd, Arnold Akien, Jon Wallace, Helen McNabb, Bob Wilkinson, Pamela Boal, Kate Jeary, David V. Lewis, Jonathan Palfrey, Trevor Mendham, Chris Priest, Peter Pinto, George Hay, David Redd, Peter Cohen, D. West, Ian Watson, Roger Waddington, Peter Singleton, John Shire, Tim Stannard, Andy Darlington, William Bains, Kaj Harju, Boyd Raeburn. ✱



# IN PRAISE OF ALIENS

## Garry Kilworth

Let me start by making a statement.

I believe in aliens.

That doesn't mean I believe they exist—they may well do, but I'm not concerned with reality. I'm concerned with the necessity of myth. Creatures of fiction, not fact.

I need fictional aliens. They're important to me. They stretch the imagination. They have infinite variety of form. They are *instant mythology*. That's not true for every writer, of course, but I feel it's time for some of us to show our colours—to declare whether we're for or against—and aliens are my kind of people. Someone once said, I can't remember who, that prehistory is the science fiction of the past. By the same token aliens are the mythological creatures of the present. Without them there can be no mighty clash of cultures to set the ears of the universe ringing.

I have a voracious appetite for fabulous beasts. I've been through unicorns, hippogriffs, basilisks and all the other myths of the ancient world. I need new forms, new faces, new natural gifts.

I think it's true to say that aliens are almost always caricatures of themselves. The dilemma facing the writers is: do I make my aliens so strange that no-one understands them, or do I give them selected human elements?

SF writers are continually criticized for making their aliens too humanoid. This is hardly a fair criticism when most of us endow animals and birds with humanlike traits—when dogs and cats have their owners' characteristics. Personally I find it wholly acceptable that we reflect human features and behaviour—probably the best and worst of ourselves—in the aliens we invent. Mirrors are necessary devices. Poets like Wain use reflections with great effect. His caged gorilla is:

*like a labouring man tired with work, a strong man with his strength burnt away in the toil of ordinary living...*

SF authors use the same technique; whether it's subtle is open to argument. An example can be found in Bradbury's 'The Fire Balloons'.

A vicar is roaming the mountains of an alien world, searching for evidence of God's existence. Suddenly, he is confronted by intelligent blobs of blue light. Understandably he has difficulty in communicating with them. However, he knows they have super powers and decides to test their intentions by shooting himself in the hand. If they stop him, they're goodies—if they allow the mutilation they are at best indifferent baddies. Of course the bullets are deflected. We'd all have been disappointed if they weren't. And, of course, the assumption is that the aliens are benign. In fact our travelling padre believes they represent *Jesus Christ*. Now, when you think about it, that's a pretty heavy assumption to make, especially on such circumstantial evidence: but so true. We bend flimsy evidence towards a required result. Perhaps if the vicar had had a death wish he might have assumed the blobs were trying to deflect the bullets into his brain.

Unfortunately, Bradbury fails to sate my appetite for aliens. He merely whets it. There's a certain ethereal appeal to blue blobs of light—but they're a passing quick description. I don't demand details but I do want something extraterrestrial. After all, one or two of us will probably



see flashing blue lights on the drive home tonight, if we're very unlucky.

On the point of description, I personally prefer an oblique glance, picking out one or two features to give an impression. Inventories are boring and too much clarity can spoil the atmosphere of the story. With thoroughly rotten, vicious, nasty, evil, malicious bastards, the mere threat of menace is more effective than a description. In fact, when and if the description does come, the inclination is often to laugh. One of the most effective alien baddies I ever encountered in a story was never seen at all—it remained behind a wall and radiated hate to the human on the other side. On the other hand, the plugugly Roller in Fredric Brown's 'Arena' is fully described. The picture is of a fairly harmless-looking creature which eventually attracts the reader's enmity by rolling on top of its human opponent, viciously clawing and biting like a she-cat, instead of punching like a real man. It's a baddie because it doesn't fight to Queensberry rules. I'm not saying Brown's alien is ineffective. On the contrary, it doesn't need me to tell you that 'Arena' is one of the successes of detailed description.

While I was in Brown's 'Arena' I had a look at his method of putting across the strangeness of his baddie. Brown does this by permitting his alien to radiate thoughts to the human protagonist, Carson. This is it:

*Carson felt sheer horror at the utter alienness, the differentness of those thoughts... The mind of a spider, or praying mantis, or a Martian sand-serpent... would be a homely, familiar thing compared to this.*

So in fact what Brown does is throw in the towel—for who amongst us knows what spiders contemplate? Not the works of Shelley. Nor, I suspect, life, the universe and everything.

Occasionally an alien name is enough to do the trick. There is a story I'm sure you've all read, called 'The Ruum', where a man is relentlessly pursued around a valley hemmed in by impassable mountains. The pursuer, we later find out, is an alien weighing machine; but calling it a Ruum makes it sound very offworldly.

I am fortunate in having a mechanical source of alien names—my typist's typewriter knows better than I how to spell Kahorgansplat, or Yergrorff. It extrapolates, interprets and translates my basic attempts at alien names into



its own, more imaginative terminology. These days I just scribble a squiggly line and wait to see what comes out in the first typewritten draft.

There are more subtle methods of indicating alien thoughts, through strange actions. Weird life cycles, for instance. In Katherine MacLean's 'Unhuman Sacrifice', the youths of a humanoid tribe finally take root to become trees when the rainy season arrives. This is very alien if you take the story to its logical conclusion. Presumably, since there are no maidens in the story, the youths become trees in order to reproduce in the mature or adult stage. In this case, the tree-form. Thus, in order to start the life-cycle off again, it appears to me that the fruits the tree-aliens must bear are humanoid babies, and one can pick the little cherubs from the branches like ripe plums.

There is a danger, when inventing aliens, of falling under the influence of a particular shape or form—even if it is only the glimpse of a profile. In a conversation with my eleven-year-old son I described the features of the aliens called the Soal which I used in my first novel *In Solitary*. It was one of those conversations which promised to be a comfortable, indulgent and patronizing lecture from father to son and of course caught daddy completely unawares.

"They're birdlike creatures," I said, "with hard beaks and wings."

"What do they eat?" he asked, food being a preoccupation with him at the time.

"Eat," I said. "Well, they ingest vast quantities of aerobic bacteria—germs to you, son. They suck them in with each breath."

"Oh yeah," he sneered. "So how come they've got the hard beaks?"

I regarded him steadily for a full minute, then smiled a superior smile. Inside, I was desperately improvising. "They needed the beaks on their home planet to crack open rocks for trapped supplies of oxygen," I said. "That's why they left. The air supply was getting short."

He gave me an accusing look.

"You just made that up," he said.

I won the argument, as I usually did, using devastating logic laced with a lethal dose of totalitarian authority. I sent the little sod to bed.

You may say I should have learnt a lesson: let the home environment shape the alien.

But is that the answer? After all, many diverse creatures live on this Earth, from elephants to fleas. And certainly mankind is not perfectly adapted to his environment—in many cases he adapts the environment to suit himself. Maybe at one time my Soal used their hard beaks to pull thorns from their tender feet, as men and women once used their legs for walking.

Some awful prejudices come out in descriptions of aliens. I once read a story, and I'm glad to say I've forgotten both the title and author\*, where the aliens were 'little yellow men with slanted eyes who spread over the Universe like a plague.' That's not an exact quote, but it's near enough and contains the essence of the original. I gathered that the author had either been interned in a Japanese POW camp, or had eaten something unsavoury at a Chinese takeaway.

For the most part, it seems fair game to pick on the colour green for skin pigmentation—after all, some pretty nasty things are green. Slime is green. Phlegm is green. But then one of my favourite heroes, Kermit, is green too, so one must be careful.

And have you noticed how many film aliens have big feet? Clump, clump, clump. I suspect this is so that the heroine can differentiate between the hero and the heavy. And of course we're unlikely to feel any remorse when the poor creature is blown to bits. Nobody can love something with feet as big as dustbins. Big feet also make an alien awkward in movement, and ensures he is a slow runner when the hunting party gets it all together.

In recent years, the media have been moving in on aliens for advertising such unlikely intergalactic products as instant potato and washing machines. The ad-men play on our racial inferiority complex. Their alien creations are either laughing at us through tin jaws or demonstrating that machines from the planet Zanussi wash clothes greener than those of Earth. It is perhaps a little sad that ad-men

always derive their angle from the early tradition that it is Earth that will be visited and not Earthmen who will be doing the visiting. Unfortunately, to most of the non-sf-reading public, the alien is a fun figure, a throwback to the early pulp magazine stories which most of us hold in affection but do not like thrust under our noses every time the words *science fiction* are mentioned. Aliens, after all, have been with us longer than has science fiction as a literary genre.

How long have extraterrestrials been with us? Having written this question, I was tempted to cross it out immediately. I've been down these research trails before, looking for *firsts* in sf, and they can be very time-consuming exercises. However, once the cogs start turning it's difficult to stop them, and I began looking back, beyond sf and into Middle and Early English, for the first alien to set foot on Earth.

Before I go any further, there's another exercise that has to take place. The definition. This too can be a long, winding and sometimes tedious road. I was tempted to settle for something very simple like 'A creature from another world', except that this would include ancient gods and all sorts of paraphernalia. Recently the *Economist* did an article on real—as opposed to fictional—aliens, and found they had to begin by defining *life* before moving on to extraterrestrial organisms. So I ask you to accept a modification of the Oxford dictionary's definition, which is 'not one's own'. If we substitute Earth for the middle word, we have a definition for an alien: 'a living creature, not divine, but not of Earth'. That doesn't get me completely out of trouble: but definitions give rise to debates which last centuries, and the bar closes at eleven o'clock.

Having got the goal out of the way, I went back to looking for my off-world visitor. Well, the New Testament may not be the most ancient document available, but I decided to call a halt at Revelations 8, verses 10-11. The visitor from space is an Earth-plant lookalike but is definitely of the traditional family of aliens—it kills without compunction or remorse. The verses read:

there fell a great star from heaven, burning as it were a lamp, and it fell upon the third part of the rivers and... waters... the name of the star is Wormwood ... and many died of the waters because they were made bitter.

Anyone who has had the misfortune to get hung over from absinthe, a derivative of the herb wormwood, will know what pain was suffered by those poor Biblical victims of the first alien invasion of Earth.

I haven't said very much about alien goodies yet. Well, I read early Clifford Simak for my sissy aliens. Even as a boy reading sf, I got the impression that every time Simak wanted an alien, he looked out of the window for inspiration and saw his pet rabbit hopping across the lawn. Also, hot on the Biblical bit, I used to get off on benign sentient alien plants with Simak—like the one in 'Green Thumb' which the hero has to love to death.

On the subject of alien flora, I've always been interested in the reason for Wyndham's phenomenal success with his *triffids*. It's one thing for an sf novel to sell well to those who read sf; it's quite another to reach and overwhelm an audience who normally consider that reading an sf novel is akin to sitting back to enjoy the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Wyndham is a good storyteller—but there are a few of those. Also his publisher, Michael Joseph, agreed to promote the novel as general fiction. But these two elements alone cannot account for the extraordinary commercial success of the *Triffids*. A friend who, in general, does not like sf believes the main success factor is Wyndham's lack of deviation from known data. If we use a compass as an analogy for the sweep of sf, and true north as the norm for general fiction readers, *The Day of the Triffids* lies—as a complete work—at about 5° East. Universal blindness, the sudden appearance of poisonous plants and the decline of civilization are not commonplace events, but the reader doesn't need an elastic imagination. Okay, the *triffids* move around a bit, but then tumbleweed and one or two other indigenous plants change location periodically. What surprises me is that the sudden arrival of a vegetable is regarded as less startling than that of a humanoid—i.e. an invasion of plants is acceptable to mainstream readers but an invasion of intelligent aliens is not. If you examine this closely, the implications are rife with prejudice and conceit.

\* Possibly Eric Frank Russell's 'The Timeless Ones' (1952)



One of my personal alien-flora favourites is 'Grandpa' by James Schmitz. You know the one, about the raft made of alien waterlilies, where the youth burns the edges with a blaster to steer it? The only problem I have, when I read the story, is that my sympathies are with the alien. I keep hoping that the next time I read it, the raft will beat hell out of the kid before chucking him into a pool of alien piranha.

With intelligent plants, we're teetering on the edge of fantasy—and this, I believe, is one of the reasons why some writers steer clear of aliens altogether. They are unhappy being so far away from reality as we know it. Others choose to respect the human form rather than create something bizarre and approaching incredibility: both Le Guin and Tiptree prefer humanoid aliens. And mentioning Tiptree raises the question of SEX. (This is the bit you've been waiting for, Rob.\*)

Alien genders are another dilemma. There are some nice sexless stories in which female humans meet male aliens, and vice versa, and live happily ever after, even though the father swore he'd never let his son or daughter marry one. Then, at the other extreme, there are stories like Tiptree's 'And I Awoke and Found Me Here On the Cold Hill's Side'... where the sexual-plus attractions of the extraterrestrials are so overpowering, and the actual physical act is never on-stage. In fact it would spoil the story if it were. This is a brother to the 'menace in the dark' technique mentioned earlier. The suggestion is heavy enough and gets heavier as the story progresses.

Now I am extremely interested in Alien Sex. There is much meat in the subject. So as I was writing this rubbish, I rang round a few well-known writers to ask how they approached the subject. I should have known better, but first called the expert—Rob Holdstock.

"How do you approach alien sex, Rob?"

"What a fucking question," he said.

"Yes," I replied, "but you emphasized the wrong word."

There was a sound like someone dragging a chair across a corrugated roof. Rob was clearing his throat.

"From as many angles as possible," he finally replied, "but preferably from the bottom up."

Andrew Stephenson next. I posed the same query. Alien sex. "Ah," he said, "Do you mean intermodulation of dual units to produce a three kilo package?"

I hung up on him and dialled Dave Langford. "Dave, what's your approach to alien sex?"

"Cautious. They can turn pretty nasty if disturbed."

"Look, Dave, be serious. I really want to know. I'm doing a survey for the Brum group..."

"Ah, in that case you'll want all the juicy technical details, right?"

"I just got the technical details from Andrew. Stick to the juicy bits."

"Well, I can only give you an example. The other day I was trying to end a story about a really frustrating sexual enigma between two aliens from different planets who were hopelessly in love."

"What was their problem?"

There was a heavy sigh. "They were both hermaphrodites."

\* Possibly an unjust gibe at the puritanical Rob Holdstock.

I was getting pretty weary by this time. I made a last call, to Chris Evans. "Chris, how do you approach alien sex?"

"What?" The line was bad.

"How do you approach alien sex?"

"What?"

"ALIEN SEX. HOW DO YOU APPROACH IT?"

"Never been there," he said, "but I think you take the A127."

I gave up and settled to read Vonnegut's 'The Big Space Fuck' in the mistaken belief that it was about off-world sex.

I'm going to conclude by underlining my defence of aliens with human characteristics. They're necessary. They add credibility to an incredible world. They lend the story identity. Through his eyes we see ourselves. Why make them incomprehensible for the sake of some obscure authenticity? In dealing with infinities there's surely as much chance of their being exactly like us as there is of their being outside the range of our perception or understanding. The answer to the argument that we can produce nothing new is not the negative dismissal of aliens in sf. It is to create the illusion of originality. In the making of the recent *Superman* epic, the director Richard Donner wanted something breathtakingly alien for his scenes of far galaxies. An Oxford University team provided it for him. They magnified, on film, a microscopic plant from a coral reef, to produce wondrous objects pulsating in space—black holes, exploding galaxies, astral bodies colliding.

Not original, but having the illusion of originality—so much so that the sequences fascinated even the makers.

Meanwhile, on a small planet circling Sirius... the sf writer scratches his green skull, dismissing the idea of an alien with four limbs, five digits on each, a nodule atop the torso covered in sensory organs, and the whole fashioned from skin and bone. Too crude, too unlikely, too vulnerable.

Of course we are aliens to races from other worlds—but I am also an alien to myself. My own dreams puzzle me. My own nightmares terrify me. Things that come from within me, are strangers to me. They are born in some dark, remote place inaccessible to my conscious self—an unfamiliar world to which I am only privy on rare uncontrolled occasions. It is this alien part of me, deep inside, that reaches the typewritten page.

Despite the claims of certain so-called non-fiction authors, I do not believe that God is an Astronaut. God is probably the only indigenous Being on this small planet. It's we who are the aliens.

I leave you with the words of Andrew Young—that's the English poet, not the American senator—

And yet in any place I go  
I watch and listen as all creatures do  
For what I cannot see or hear—  
For something warns me everywhere  
That even in my land of birth  
I trespass on the earth.

Thank you.

This talk was delivered by Garry Kilworth to the Birmingham SF Group in May 1981. Heckling by Rob Holdstock has been left out.

## AFTERTHOUGHTS

*Drilkjis* is a conceptual fanzine beyond the limits, just where the lines of good taste start to break up at last. (The editor, incidentally, wishes to dissociate himself from the blatant advertisement inserted by the other editor on page 7.) *Drilkjis* has a half-life of two and a half weeks, or perhaps years, and after this time will disintegrate in silence only to be published anew. (The other editor, incidentally, wishes to dissociate himself from the previous dissociation.)

The barriers are open. More to the point, so are the pubs.

The components of *Drilkjis* have no names, though many may be as distinct and familiar as Ian Watson, Garry Kil-

worth, D. West or Graham Jones. All are perfect in style, but you should have seen them before the editing. In *Drilkjis*, when the pubs are open, we even edit the artwork. (Both editors, incidentally, wish to dissociate themselves from the deplorable metamorphosis of spelling on the back cover. This is still what happens when you let artists draw words as well.)

*Drilkjis* is logical and necessary, unlike many fanzines: yet it is open to the drunkard and semi-literate, whose work can be rearranged to suit. Every two years, a different fanzine. All reviews mislead. No BSFA chairman is innocent. Pools of vomit abound, on corners in and out of the wind.

You will fail to find *Drilkjis* now at any conceivable address—both editors are moving house, so write quickly before we change, if only our minds.

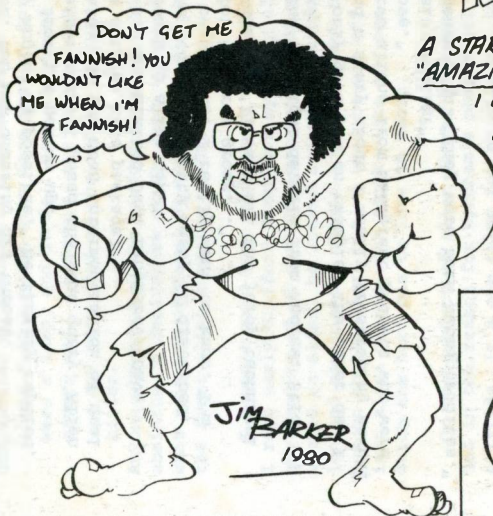
*Drilkjis*, however, is not a place where the unknown past and the emergent future meet in a vibrating soundless hum.



My name is JIM BARKER. You may have read a scurrilous comic strip about me by PHIL FOGLIO in the last DRILKJIS! Now, I'm a nice guy who likes to get on with people... BUT THAT WAS THE LAST STRAW!! I've heard too much about how my artwork looks like FOGLIO's and frankly... I've had enough! I'm going to tell you my dark and horrible secret... there is no such person as PHIL FOGLIO! In fact...

**PHIL FOGLIO DOESN'T EXIST!**

IN MOMENTS OF STRESS (LIKE HAVING TO ILLUSTRATE A BOB SHAW ARTICLE) I STARTED TO CHANGE!



A STARTLING METAMORPHOSIS TURNED ME INTO THE "AMAZING RAPIDO-MAN" (IT ALSO HAPPENS WHEN I GET ANGRY). I TRIED TO CONTINUE MY FANNISH CAREER... BUT MY FINGERS WERE TOO BIG TO HOLD A PEN PROPERLY! I CHURNED OUT A VAST QUANTITY OF WORK WHICH WAS A CRUDE IMITATION OF MY USUAL STYLE...



NATURALLY, I DIDN'T DREAM OF USING THE DRAWINGS... I CONSIDERED THEM TO FILL OUT MY FOLIO!



WHEN THIS AMERICAN ASKED TO HAVE THEM FOR FIRE-LIGHTERS I AGREED. NEXT THING I KNOW, HE'S USED THEM TO WIN TWO HUGOS! AND NOW HE SAYS I PINCHED MY DRAWINGS FROM HIM!! THAT MAKES ME MAD! THE SWINE... MALIGNING ME. I HAVE

A GOOD MIND... NO!! THE CHANGE!!

I'M CHANGING!! GOD!! IT HURTS!! NO!!



IT ALL STARTED WHEN TERRY HUGHES SENT ME A SOUVENIR RAPIDOGRAPH FROM AMERICA...



FOR SOME REASON, THE RADIOACTIVE INK MANAGED TO SPEED UP MY DRAWING OUTPUT! FANWORK BECAME A BREEZE!



COVERS - 10 minutes; STRIPS - 1/2 HOUR  
FILLOS - a matter of seconds!



THE FIRST TIME I USED IT, I ACCIDENTALLY STABBED MYSELF!

THE DEMANDS FOR WORK CAME FLOODING IN! SOON, I WAS UP TO THE EYES IN CARTOONS. I MANAGED TO DO IT ALL... BUT...



...UNKNOWN TO ME, THE INK WAS HAVING SIDE EFFECTS!



EACH REJECTED CARTOON WAS MARKED THUS. BEING A GOOD SCOT I USED THE GABRIC VERSION: "PHIL FOGLIO..."