FOCUS

AN S.F. WRITERS' MAGAZINE

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ANDREWS
BARNETT
COWPER
EVANS
FLYNN
KILWORTH
LAMMING
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RIDING
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·· writers' workshops
·· the editor's role
·· market reports
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·· letters

a BSFA publication

FOCUS
AN S.F. WRITERS' MAGAZINE

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Focal Point

Reader response to the first issue of FOCUS has been generally encouraging, although we haven't received as many letters as we would have liked. Does this mean that the majority of readers are silently satisfied with the magazine, or does it reflect a general lack of interest? Whatever the case, we want to re-emphasise that we'd like interested readers to write to us with their comments, suggestions, problems, or paeans of praise.

A number of points have arisen from correspondence received so far. A letter in Matrix 26 acknowledged that FOCUS could not be turned into a free 'teach yourself to write' correspondence school, but wondered how far the magazine, possibly with the aid of BSFA members already published professionally, would be prepared to go in that direction. This suggests there is a misunderstanding of what FOCUS has been set up to do, namely to become a forum in which writers at whatever level of attainment, and in particular writers at the beginning of their careers, can talk, write, exchange views, complain, or share experiences. There is value in such exchange. The emphasis of FOCUS is not the fiction that it chooses to print in each issue. If BSFA members require a fiction-magazine which treats submissions as if they are entries to a wordy slush then they should state so, and set up an appropriate publication. With regard to the selection of items of fiction for FOCUS, however, they simply reflect the personal preferences of the editors. Those stories that cannot be used will be sent back as quickly and as courteously as possible; but it must be emphasised that it is the function of workshops, and the BSFA Orbiter service (badly underused by young BSFA writers) to respond to manuscripts critically, to attempt to document a story's failure and success, and review its achievements and values. Nevertheless, one of the avowed aims of FOCUS is to showcase new fiction and to solicit critical response to the stories published. The two stories this issue show very different approaches to a similar theme, and comments on them would be most welcome.

There has been some request for an expansion of the small MARKET SPACE feature; always useful to writers, such a market-news section depends on market-news availability, and at the moment, in the UK, the market for short stories is practically non-existent. Besides, FOCUS runs on a six-monthly schedule and its use as a disseminator of market news must be questioned; we would refer readers to LOCUS and FANTASY MEDIA (not to mention MATRIX) for up-to-date market information. FOCUS, from the next issue, will try and look at established markets in a little more detail, whilst still reporting any 'hot-news' items.

The main article in this issue is "On Fiction Editing" by Richard Evans. A personal account of one SF editor's experience of four years working in the field, it offers several useful tips for the writer submitting a novel for publication, as well as giving rare insight into those commercial pressures which dictate how and why books are chosen by editors. The workshop process is looked at in a major feature that attempts to share both experience and an assessment of the values of such critical work-ins. Elsewhere we have an interview with Julia Riding, who has recently had her first SF novel published; it highlights some of the problems of combining a writer's work with the role of a housewife and mother. TALKING POINTS covers a number of divergent topics, from Richard Cowper's cautionary tale of the hazards of U.S. publication to Paul Barnett's riposte to Dave Langford's article in issue 1. Garry Kilworth concludes his two-part article on jargon, and Tony Richards offers another perspective on the difficulties involved for the writer who also has a full-time job.

We owe an apology to Doug Hill for the inadequate proof-reading of his excellent article on Children's SF, in FOCUS 1; deadline panic was the reason, but we make no excuses for having shirked our responsibilities. Lastly, our thanks to Andrew Stephenson for his excellent help, and endless typing, during the piecing together of this issue.

Rob Holdstock & Chris Evans

Contributors

GRAHAM ANDREWS *lives in Belfast, where he is employed as a Civil Servant. Apart from being a keen reader and collector of sf, his main interests are the cinema, music and astronomy. He was a contestant on MASTERMIND a few years ago, when his specialist subject was sf, and he is a member of the BSFA Information Service.*

PAUL BARNETT: *b.Aberdeen 1949. Spent a year at both King's College and University College London reading Maths, Physics and Astronomy. Left to try and change subject to English Lit., and worked at Dillons Bookshop for a year, then decided to move straight into publishing. Most recently he has been Commissioning Editor at David & Charles and then Webb & Bower, but has now gone independant, setting up Paul Barnett (Editorial), an Editorial Packaging and Consultancy firm.*

RICHARD COWPER *is the author of numerous science fiction novels, including THE TWILIGHT OF BRIAREUS, THE ROAD TO CORLAY and, most recently, PROFUNDIS. He was Guest of Honour at Yarcon in 1979. He lives in South Devon, surrounded by fields, woods and a large stretch of the River Dart. As Colin Murry he has also published general novels and two volumes of autobiography.*

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DAVID WINGROVE *was editor of VECTOR from December 1977 to August 1979 and has published numerous reviews and critical articles. He is presently reading English Literature at the University of Kent, Canterbury.*

On Fiction Editing

Richard Evans

This article was commissioned in a pub. I have in front of me a couple of dog-eared scraps of paper covered with the notes I made. One of them says: "Jacobean tragedy or amino acids?" What can this mean? An idea for an SF saga, perhaps, or a brilliant insight into the state of the nation? Perhaps all will become clear as the article progresses.

As I understand it the purpose of the exercise is to answer as well as I can the many questions that are asked by those in the SF world but not familiar with publishing, about the whole business of how, and more particularly why, books get published. Why his substandard reworking of an old Robert Heinlein story and not my infinitely superior and original novel?

I wish it were a simple question to answer, but it isn't; and there are so many variables that elements of what follow can be challenged or disproved by reference to other lists. But I can at least try to lay down some basic principles.

I ought briefly to make my own background clear. I've been directly involved in science fiction publishing for about four years. For the first eighteen months of that time I was co-editor of SF at Panther Books; for the next two and a half years I was SF editor at Future Publications, who produce the Orbit series; and I am now SF editor at Arrow Books. I've been reading SF since I can't remember when - but until I was employed in publishing it had no idea of the existence of fandom. I don't write SF myself, not since I read over a story I did write once.

I think that what follows can only be understood in the general context of SF publishing in this country. First of all, it is mainly a paperback enterprise. Only about four of the hardback publishers have regular SF lists. All of the paperback companies - and there were a dozen the last time I counted - have regular SF lists. This has two main consequences. One, there is a great deal of competition for the best SF, a point I'll return to. Two, in my view, too much SF is published in this country. This may sound perverse, and in an ideal world I would agree that lots of SF would be a good thing. But it's not that easy.

What are the major outlets in this country for paperbacks? Bookshops, obviously; however, the independent book sellers are not the major customers for paperbacks. The big customers are W.H. Smith, John Menzies (the two major retail chains) and wholesale firms, the largest of which, Bookwise, supplies Boots and Woolworths as well as a host of newsagents and tobacconists, all of which exist on fast turnover, particularly in paperbacks, and more particularly in paperback fiction.

Every month they, and all the independent booksellers, are faced with a deluge of new paperbacks - everything from the latest Harold Robbins to a Teach Yourself. They are deluged, too, with publishers' promotional material - posters, dumpbins, spinners, etc. And they must try to allocate shelf-space to something over 200 titles. In amongst all this are the science fiction titles - 20 or 30 of them.

SF, more than any other genre, is, I think, one in which anyone professionally involved must have both commitment and knowledge. I don't believe that this holds true to the same degree for romances or thrillers or detective stories. And I think it's true that none of the major outlets I mentioned above do have that knowledge, either at the centre or in the branches. What this means is that it's much harder to launch, say, a brilliant young writer's first book than it is to get shelf-space for a twenty-five year old novel by a 'name' writer, even if the latter has been rescued from a much deserved oblivion. Because, lacking any knowledge of the genre, and lacking the shelf-space to take everything, the buyer for the chains or the individual shop can only go on what he or she has heard of.

A further consequence stems from this overproduction. Too many books lead to fewer sales all round. I've talked to most of the sf editors in this country and the consensus is that with one or two exceptions per publisher, sales are depressingly low. The much-heralded SF 'boom' may have happened, but it has been spread too thinly over too many writers; and the fond hope that many of us had that the success of STAR WARS etc. would attract people to written SF seems to have been just that.

Unfortunately, one of the facts of life of paperback publishing is that there is a lower level below which it is uneconomic to print books at a price acceptable to the purchaser. That limit is around 15,000 copies; and many SF paperbacks sell less than that in the first six months after publication.

Gloom and doom: too many books, too few sales, booksellers who don't understand - why do we go on with SF? Of course, what I've described is the debit side. There are authors and books who do sell well and consistently; and there are booksellers (and not just specialists) who are enthusiastic and knowledgeable (there just aren't enough of them). It is possible to make a success of a new author. For any editor, the pleasure of seeing a new writer selling well is enormous. And for the paperback companies, if the SF list is properly conceived, it's a source of consistent, though usually not dramatic, sales. This consistency is important; where, for instance, sexy historical romances or OMEN-style horror novels might at the height of their popularity be selling in hundreds of thousands, they can and do slump to a mere fraction of that, often leaving the publisher not only with one failure but with a number of books, bought for large advances when the market was high which now cannot be given away. So SF's consistency is important. And there's one further point - most of the people who publish SF are in love with it and will fight to the death to keep an SF list going.

Having said all that, let's go on to the actual business of acquiring an SF list. There are five possible sources of books:

1) From the US, either direct from US publishers or through UK agents.
2) From hardcover houses in the UK.
3) By commissioning authors.
4) Manuscripts received from agents.
5) Unsolicited manuscripts.

All of these are part of the SF editor's job and the weight he gives them depends on the kind of list he is trying to build up. For a commercial paperback list 1) and 2) have traditionally been the most important; their major advantages are that they can provide authors and books with a proven track record. Here, the SF editor simply has to be knowledgeable about who is writing what at any given moment - because the major disadvantage is that all the other paperback publishers are on the same trail, and once a book is sought after by a number of paperbackers the price can rise to the point where it becomes unrealistic. (I am deliberately leaving out of this any detailed consideration of the "Big Name" authors. Of course the paperbackers vie for their books, and will pay large sums for them; the reasons are obvious, I think, and don't materially affect the rest of this discussion.)

Commissioning authors - 3) - is something I suspect will become increasingly common. Rather than wait for a novel to be offered by an agent of a hardback publisher, the paperback publisher will look out for new authors in the various magazines and anthologies whose work seems to have the qualities that the publisher wants, and ask if they are prepared to produce a synopsis from which a novel might be commissioned. This obviously avoids the inflated prices created by auctions, enables the publisher to tailor a book to the market, and gives the author a guaranteed income before he has spent a year writing the book. Of course, if the publisher is wrong...

Which leaves us with unsolicited manuscripts and manuscripts received through an agent. There are obvious advantages for both the writer and the publisher in having an agent, and I think it's true that your manuscript is far more likely to receive due attention if it's submitted by an agent than if it's sent direct.

But that's easier said than done. Increasingly, it seems to be the case that it's as difficult to get taken on by an agent as by a publishing house, so that many authors have no choice but to deal with a publisher themselves.

Now, every publishing house has its own method of considering unsolicited manuscripts (or the 'slush pile', as the Americans unflatteringly refer to them). In some houses a junior editor is deputed to go through them and make sure that anything which looks promising gets a reading. In others, the editors divide the manuscripts up. In others, editorial assistants or secretaries do the same. But in no house does every manuscript get read all the way through.

The reasons are obvious: one, there are too many; two, a good proportion are too obviously not worth reading or

totally unsuitable. Too many writers just don't do their homework in looking at publishers' lists and deciding which publisher is most likely to be interested in their work. That's where Jacobean tragedy and amino acids come in. At Futura I was offered manuscripts on imagery in Jacobean tragedy and on the chemistry of amino acids. Honest. And those are just two, admittedly extreme, examples: poetry, theses, memoirs, all come in to me when a two-minute browse through the Futura catalogue, or in any bookshop, could have told the writer that his book was not suitable for that list.

But there's a rather more subtle point here for science fiction writers, and one that involves more homework. Don't stop at just finding out who publishes science fiction - try to get an idea of what kind of SF they like. After all, each SF list is put together by an editor who has the same kind of predilections and prejudices as everyone else. By studying the lists, for example, you may find that publisher A is strong on hard science, B on space opera, and that neither seems to favour fantasy, while publisher C has a strong fantasy list. Look at the covers, blurbs, the advertisements in the trade press; they might tell you something about the publishers' approach, how they see their SF list; the covers and the ads are the publisher's selling devices and they should reflect what the publisher thinks is important and commercial about books. Look also at such details as length; if a publisher consistently publishes nothing over 192 pages, then your 120,000 word blockbuster may be doomed from the start - but if a list shows a bias towards long books then that's a hopeful sign. And, in the case of paperback, try to find out if the company publishes originals or if all their material comes from hardback or the States.

Armed with this kind of information you stand at least a fighting chance of getting your manuscript to a company who are actually looking for the kind of book you've written. Once you've chosen where to send it, make a phone call and find out who their SF editor is. It's a small point, but a manuscript addressed to a specific individual immediately removes itself from the 'Anonymous' pile.

Presentation is important. Again, this may irritate some, but DON'T: send in handwritten or dog-eared manuscripts
: write long letters extolling the virtues of your MS, slagging others writers on the publisher's list, or offering grandiose rights in the event of a handsome offer
: expect an answer next week;

- (obvious, you say; but all the above happen with monotonous regularity) -

DO: send as clean a manuscript as possible, indicating the length, and including a short covering letter and a synopsis.

(Incidentally, there is absolutely nothing wrong with sending a synopsis and portion. It should be long enough to indicate to the publisher whether you can write and whether the story is both good and the kind of thing he wants.)

So what happens then? With any luck, and if you've followed at least some of the above, your work is looked at; and if a first glance shows that you can string a sentence together it will then be read, either by the editor or by an outside reader. It's still the case, at least in this country, that the percentage of unsolicited manuscripts accepted is low; but it does happen. I've yet to accept any science fiction from the slush pile, although there have been some near-misses. But I have accepted several thrillers from the slush pile. In one case, the manuscript sent in wasn't commercial, but the writing was so good that the author was commissioned to write a new book on a more commercial subject; in another case, a manuscript arrived, unheralded, from Canada - a 207,000 word monster that needed cutting and a lot of work, but still kept me engrossed for three evenings.

The next thing that happens after a decent or indecent interval is one of the following:-

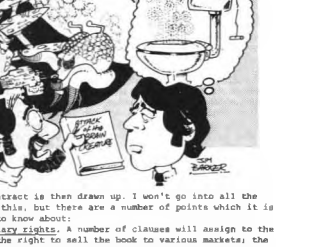
1. A rejection letter: this may blandly state that list is full, or may explain, at least briefly, why your work is being rejected. Publishers are often pusillanimous - many of us find it difficult to tell authors just how bad their work is, even when, in the final analysis, that would be the kindest thing to do.
2. A rejection that nevertheless encourages you to continue and perhaps asks to see further work.
3. A acceptance that is either unconditional or conditional on certain changes being made.

In the case of 1. or 2. it's back to the drawing-board; so now let's take case 3. through to publication date.

The editor has read and liked the book, enough to want to make an offer for it. He may have asked the production department to produce an estimate of its length, and probable cost, or he may be able to see that it's likely to work. He may have asked for a second reading. He will then take it to the weekly editorial meeting. This will usually be attended by the managing director and/or the editorial director, the other editors and perhaps (but not in all companies) the sales director. This meeting considers all the projects that the various editors wish to put up for publication. In some companies the meetings are rather like gladiatorial combat, in others more like the Spanish Inquisition (ever met an editor? ever heard about the shifty demeanour, the shaking hands, the compulsive lying?); but most are reasonably civilised, at least by Visigoth standards.

The editor will present the book: he will give a brief account of the plot; an assessment of the standard of writing and of the potential of the writer for the future; a view of its category within science fiction, and of its sales potential in the short and long term; and a proposal of the terms to be offered to the writer. He will be asked how the book fits in to the overall development of the list, and whether there is a likelihood of subsidiary sales (see below).

Assuming he is then authorised to buy the book, he will make an offer to the writer. This will be in the form of an advance against royalties which works as follows: the advance might be (to keep things simple) £2,000, of which the writer can expect a portion on signature of contract and further installments on delivery and acceptance of the manuscript, and on publication. This is just what it says - an advance set against royalty earnings, which are calculated as a percentage of the retail price of the book. In the case of paperbacks, standard royalties (I won't go into the business of higher or escalating royalties) are 7½ on all copies sold in the UK and 6% on all copies sold overseas (the lower royalty is because of higher costs and discounts in selling in export markets). So, if your book sells at £1 you get 7½p for each copy sold in the UK; and before you receive further royalties those 7½ pences have to add up to £2,000. Do the sums yourself.



The contract is then drawn up. I won't go into all the details of this, but there are a number of points which it is important to know about:

Subsidiary rights. A number of clauses will assign to the publisher the right to sell the book to various markets; the most important of the subsidiary rights are: the United States, translation, hardcover and book-club, serial and film. In each case agreement will be reached as to the author's percentage share of income from these sales: from a sale to an American publisher, for instance, the writer can expect to receive around 75% of the proceeds.

For the publisher, especially in the SF field, those sales can be vital. Launching a new writer is a difficult operation, and income from these sales can literally make the difference between profit and loss; the acquisition of these rights can often be the clinching factor in buying a book. This is an area of constant battle between agents and publishers; but for the unagented author, the publisher can play the part of an agent in selling his work abroad.

Royalty periods. There are two, ending at December 31st and June 30th, and the contract will usually state that payment will be made 60 days after the end of the royalty period. This can sometimes cause confusion: for example: an author knows that a subsidiary rights sale was made on his book in December, the contract was not signed, or the money not paid, until after December 31st. In the latter case, it could be that the £2,000 advance had not been covered by sales of the UK edition, in which event the unrecovered balance is

made up by a deduction from the subsidiary rights income. The book has now earned its advance, and future royalty statements will reflect this.

Reserves against returns. A paperback contract will have a clause which states that a stipulated percentage of the royalty due will be held as a "reserve against returns", for a certain period. You may find, therefore, that although your book has earned more than its advance, a proportion of the money now due has been held back. This may seem unfair, but it's an unfortunate necessity. The book trade, wholesale and retail, works on a sale-or-return basis, and the gap between the two can be quite a long one. So while in December it may seem that 40,000 copies of a book have gone into the shops, by April or May half of those may have failed to sell and been returned to the publisher who must then credit the retailer or wholesaler.

But that's to look forward to the time when the book is actually on the stands. First comes the agreement and signature of the contract. By this time the editor and writer have probably at least spoken on the phone and perhaps met. Now the editing begins.

It may be that nothing needs to be done but crossing t's and dotting i's. But that's rare. This is the time of argument and compromise, diplomacy (on both sides) and disappointment; and a lot of sweat. It can also be enormously enjoyable.

It sometimes comes as a shock to writers when editors approach them with suggestions for changes. These can range from minor matters of detail, consistency, or prose, to requests for major cutting, restructuring, new scenes or characters. There are so many elements involved that it's difficult to generalise about how it should work - if editor and writer don't hit it off personally, for instance, it's probably a doomed exercise from the start. But the editor is approaching with a fresh eye something the writer has been deeply involved in, and often he can see flaws to which the writer is blind. Ideally, I think, the editor's function is two-fold: first, to help the writer convey his exact meaning; second, particularly in the case of SF which is genre fiction, to help ensure that the book will make an impact with its intended readership.

It's often difficult for a writer to accept that a passage he's laboured long over and particularly likes is actually slowing up his story and may lose his reader. One writer, whose name escapes me, made it a rule to go through his manuscripts and strike out any passages he was particularly proud of; but few have that objectivity. The editor should be able to make it clear to the writer when a passage doesn't work, or when a character isn't strong enough, or even when the denouement of a book comes as an enormous disappointment after the superb build-up. And the writer should be able to make it clear to the editor when he feels that his own part in writing the book, his own vision, is being changed in a way he doesn't like. Both parties must know when enough has been conceded.

At which point the manuscript is ready. The costings are done on the basis of the final manuscript. Producing a book is a considerable investment; on top of the advance, the publisher must cost in the price of paper, setting and printing, cover artwork, binding, distribution and overheads. He must then deduct the discount to the bookseller, which in the case of large chains or wholesalers can be as much as 50%. The margins, as you can see, are small.

From the author's point of view, there will then be a long silence as the manuscript is set up in type. While that is going on, the editor sets in motion the selling of the book. He writes the back cover copy, briefs the art department, writes an information sheet detailing what makes the book special. A final estimate comes through, and on the basis of that, and on discussions between editor and sales departments, a print run is agreed.

I said earlier that there is a lower limit below which it is uneconomic to print paperbacks at a price the public finds acceptable and that a lot of SF hovers around this level. A first printing of a paperback should be sold out within twelve months. An average subscription (ie. the number of copies ordered by retailers and wholesalers for publication date) of an SF novel by a non-superstar is around 12,000: which is okay as long as the books move out of the shops and the shops reorder. Which takes us back to where we started. It's a hard life.

What can the publisher do to a) ensure good sales, and b) ensure continuing sales?

Science fiction does not normally lend itself to promotion on the scale of, say, Frederick Forsyth or Graham Greene. The cost of advertising on radio or TV or in mass-circulation newspapers and magazines is very high and is only economic on a large-scale with books which have the potential to sell in the hundreds of thousands - and, with the best will in the world, SF doesn't have that potential. It is possible to do a certain amount of advertising -

mainly in fan and specialist magazines; which is fine, except that you're reaching an audience which already knows about SF. What the publisher can and should do is make sure that review copies are sent out (the nationals don't review paperback SF, but local papers occasionally will) and that any opportunities for publicity are seized upon.

But the key factor in selling the book is the cover. The publisher has to strike a balance between producing a commercial cover and one that is faithful to the book. He has to try to produce something that is different enough to stand out from the crowd, but not so different that it doesn't appeal to the market. When I was first involved in publishing SF I reacted very strongly against the then fashion of putting Chris Foss lookalike spaceships on virtually everything. We launched an SF list without a single spaceship: the artwork was imaginative, true to the books, and rather upmarket. And it did not work. The covers were not liked either by the book trade or by the readers.

I still don't believe that spaceships should appear on everything. But I think that what was missing on those covers was that cosmic old sense of wonder: the feeling of scale, of distance, of strange and exotic situations. And I think you can be true to a book and incorporate those elements.

One piece of evidence for the importance of covers: a few years ago Futura began publishing a then-unknown (in the adult market) writer, Tanith Lee. Her first novel, the superb THE BIRTHGRAVE sold poorly. The second, THE STORM LORD, was originally intended to have a similar cover to THE BIRTHGRAVE until it was pointed out that this might result in similar sales. The original cover was scrapped and a new one commissioned from Peter Jones: he produced a remarkable and beautiful painting that had all those elements I mentioned and more. Sales were five times those of THE BIRTHGRAVE; the covers were then stripped from the remaining stock of the latter, and it was re-covered, again with a Peter Jones painting. It sold out immediately.

So the cover is done, the proofs corrected: the book is printed - and then it's all down to the publisher's sales force, and a weekly scanning of the sales figures to see how the book is selling, and whether repeat orders are coming in.

Much of what has been said is, inevitably, greatly over-generalised; and there is a lot more that could be said, about short stories, for instance; how important they are in learning the craft, and the sad shortage of outlets for them in this country. But what I don't think can be pinned down is in the end the crunch question - what qualities will make a publisher buy your book? Your prose style, your characterisation, the narrative pace, the setting? All of these, or maybe the right combination? There is no formula for writing good science fiction.

I was once sent a synopsis for a science fiction novel, accompanied by a letter saying that, if I preferred, the plot could be adapted to be a western, an historical novel, or a romantic novel. That sort of flexibility you can live without.

FOCUS - BACK COPY

FOCUS-1 is still available. It includes articles by Andrew Stephenson on 'Research', Chris Priest on 'Approaches to Novel Writing', Dave Langford on writing War To 2080, plus features on jargon, agents, blacks, and childrens' SF by Garry Kilworth, Maggie Noach, Ken Bulmer and Douglas Hill. PRICE 90p.

FORBIDDEN PLANET

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OPENS JULY 22nd * TEL: 01-836 4179 * OPENING TIMES 10a.m.–6p.m.

'What would they make of these?' I was thinking. It was a frequent thought of mine as I rummaged amongst those boxes. I would imagine the reactions of an alien to all of this, the surprise of a time traveller if he stopped to gaze at these laughable monuments to Man's progress. Things left by the outward tide. Some kind of elaborate joke.

Books and prints, records and the implements of households now safely embedded in the diminishing past. Like photographic stills, or flies in amber.

I always enjoyed looking at the 78's, studying their eccentricities: black, cotton-reel track scratched by the years. It was hard to believe anyone bore them any malice. The "unforgettable" sound of the Dick Hyman trio, I read from one label. My time traveller laughed at that. MGM and Parlophone, His Master's Voice and the Wembley Music Salon. So like people: neglected, if not maltreated.

It was at the bottom of that box that I found the album. At first I thought it was one of those special wallets they had for 78's - for opera and the classics. Instead it was a slim album of photographs. It seemed interesting enough: I knew several of the areas, though they had changed considerably with the years. Most of the Borough had been cleared of War damage in my youth: re-planted with high-rise blocks. A sterile seeding.

The album spawned curious memories - things long thought lost to recall. I remembered my spitefulness one day when, consumed with jealousy, I pushed my baby brother down a hill in the park. He had suffered little and I greatly. The guilt returned to sting me momentarily. It was an evocative thing, this album. I closed it, weighing it in my right hand, feeling it compressed beneath my gentle pressure, and decided I would buy it.

As I walked back to my apartment I was conscious of my own disquiet, of the numerous tiny flames of recognition that crept across the dry tinder of my memory. As each new recollection arose in me I was surprised by its strength and clarity, wondering at my past neglect of this febrile land of memories. Back in my room I sat at my desk and jotted down the details of each stray, returning thought as it occurred. When, hours later, I looked at the loose pile of sheets, filled with the imprecise recollections of my younger days, I was aware that the impulse to capture them had been more than simple nostalgia. It was as if I were being shown what I was; what had made me as I was.

Strangely, it was evening before I looked at the album again. There was a photo on the fourth page of a young boy on a bicycle. Behind him were the balconies of council flats I knew intimately: my old front door was in the top centre of that picture. The bicycle and the boy seemed familiar, a rear view that was slightly out of focus: as if the boy were slowing or, perhaps, just setting off.

I was certain I had another photograph of that place. Perhaps, from that, I would recognise the boy and discover whose album this had been. But when I had located it and compared the two it resolved nothing. There I sat, a boy in shorts on a Dawes cycle - so common for that time - my hair blonde and shorn in a crew cut. And I thought how strange it was that fairness turns to raven.

It was a pleasant experience, though, leafing through those pages - so familiar and yet so novel. So engrossed was I, in fact, that it was long past two before I realised my tiredness and climbed the stairs to bed.

I was late in to work the next morning and spent the day attending to the tiresome details of my commercial calling. There was nothing unusual about my mood - I had always harboured inchoate yearnings to be elsewhere, to be doing other than this pointless obeisance to the God of Paper-Shifters. Yet it seemed that a sharper sense of its futility had permeated my mood, making me intensely dissatisfied.

In the evening, before eating, I decided to 'walk out' my mood; a common habit of mine. Tracing the familiar route I stopped outside the shop and, sensing the strange magnetism it always held for me, entered its dim interior.

I seldom spoke more than a few words to the shopkeeper. I am, by nature, a recluse: I would rather turn my back than be offered a kind word. It is something I cannot help. If there is a Judgement Day I shall have much to answer for: such an accumulation of neglect. This time, however, I stood there in the archway that divided him shop from the backroom, and waited for him to look up from his newspaper.

I learned very little from him - a miserable harvest for my embarrassment - and eventually I left the shop, hurriedly, cursing my nature and annoyed at his indifference to my questioning. I stood there in the street for a long while, staring at the darkening sky as I calmed myself. The street was unlit and, in the gloom, became a depressing grey, unrelentingly austere. As I turned to go I realised that my hand had been resting on a box; one of several placed on the tables outside the shop. My fingers had closed about the leather cover of another album, identical but much thicker that the first. I searched the boxes for others, but finding none, went back inside the shop. Beneath a naked bulb I examined the first few pages and then, quickly, suppressing the desire to leave the album and quit the shop, I pressed a note into the shopkeeper's hand and waited for the change.

"Was this from the same crate as the others?"

He grunted his affirmation, his manner offending me. I found myself looking at him carefully as he counted the change into my hand. I studied the glistening patches of his skull, interspersed amongst the wisps of his unkempt, ginger hair. It was far too long for a man of his age. Did he find me as repulsive as I found him? Was the human equation as simple as Misanthropy? His grotesque head filled my thoughts as I returned, the album held firmly but forgotten beneath my arm.

The first album had aroused a vague, barely conscious unease in me. The second fed the hunger of that unease and implanted the first murmurings of fear. It was possible, with the first album, that it belonged to someone else. The second album, so clearly from the same source, dispelled my thoughts in that respect. There was one particular photograph that held my attention. A man is lying on the grass (I know this place - it is in the park, outside the gates of the Funfair), a book before him. He is smiling at the camera and the infant girl on his back (so pretty, her hair page-boy, her dress evocative of all summers past) smiles also. In the pram behind them a baby grimaces hatred at them both. The man is my father, the young girl my sister. In the pram I squat, malicious even then.

It was a simple composition, and in its simplicity I drowned. If I had ever seen it before I might, perhaps, have accepted its familiarity and ignored the malignancy of my own face. So young to hate it all.

But, as it was, I was deeply disturbed by it all. There was no rational explanation for the two volumes of photographs, nothing upon which I could firmly anchor my reason. Before my parents had died, my sister had inherited the family albums and I knew those with a familiarity born of an early narcissism. I had opened out the large dining table, so infrequently used since my mother's death, and laid out what copies I had of our old photographs. In the hours of patient comparison that followed I became obsessed with a single idea: that I had been chosen in some manner. Someone - and I had no conception of who it could be - had chosen me, had studied me carefully and photographically noted those aspects of my character that the more conventional 'snaps' had chosen to omit.

Had I, at any stage, been conscious of this observation? Was it just possible that one of my relatives, of my close family, could have put together these albums? I considered it carefully and considered that it was most unlikely. Somewhere, at some time, I would have seen them surely? But then, perhaps the nature of the photographs would have prompted the 'observer' to keep them from me and from my parents. All of the possibilities were unsatisfactory: none of them accounted for the fact that I was the focus - that these photographs were a condemnation of me, a documentation of my earliest acts of malice.

There was a small photograph in the first album - one that had curiously evaded my notice on first inspection. It showed me as a three-year old, hair bleached white and wispy by the sun, a pastel coloured romper suit enclosing my pudgy body. In the picture I am, at most, two feet from the camera, looking away to the left. My hand tugs at my father's arm, spiteful in its implied action, demanding the camera he holds. It is an ugly picture and my distaste then was only tempered by the shock of knowing when and where it was - of remembering that small, transient moment of malice.

There is another photograph, taken a few seconds before that one. In it the same little boy smiles and pokes a tongue between his lips, as if innocent, cherubic. Over his right shoulder can be seen a little girl (my sister) standing by a tent. Though she is distant, her distaste is obvious. But there is no sign of any other person, no evidence that someone else observed this scene. No tell-tale shadows, no hands intruding to give enigmatic form to the composer of these albums.

At first it seemed fairly obvious to me that it was a friend of my father's and that thought consoled me, momentarily allaying my growing fears, replacing the void with substance. But though that piece fitted the puzzle, the picture it formed made little sense, became surreal. It did not explain how the same person could have been admitted to so many scenes of familial intimacy and yet remained, to me, a stranger.

There were several more examples of photographs taken only seconds before or after a more familiar shot: that showed the smile cracking, the mask dropped and the demon leering out. And nowhere in the familiar studies was there a sign on my observer, a hint of his solid, factual existence.

'An alien', I jotted on the pad beside me, amongst the other hypotheses noted there, 'A time traveller'. I began to abandon the logical and consider the alternatives, not wishing yet to face motives and reasons. I had already faced the thought that if I were being consciously observed (if my malice were being studied) then perhaps my discovery of the albums was also part of that process. It had frightened me and I had shied away from it. It implied a yet further stage - one I could not contemplate without breaking down completely. The most basic questions were quite enough to assimilate. Further on that road lay madness.

I woke at eleven the next morning, stretched uncomfortably on the settee in the front room. The albums lay beside me on the floor, unshakeable evidence of the reality of the last two days. I tried to push them from my mind as I made myself coffee and telephoned work to tell them I was poorly and would be in later on in the week. These thoughts refused to be ignored, however, and challenged my habitual neglect. As I sipped at the bitter coffee I turned the pages of the smaller volume, sensing a returning nausea from the previous evening. I knew I would have to find from where the crate had originated. I knew that unless I unearthed some rational explanation I would never rest again. The photographs condemned me, challenged me to take stock of myself, to re-evaluate, and it annoyed me intensely to be so challenged, to have a stranger damn me with his impartial eye. And - if I were honest - it was also the first time I had ever genuinely felt afraid. Fear gnawed at me.

As if the fates conspired, the junk shop was closed when I called, and so I sat in the fish bar nearby and waited. It was nearly two when the owner finally appeared and, attempting to conceal my impatience, I waited another ten minutes before crossing the road to enter the musty shop. If the seed of paranoia had been planted, it had been sown deep, for I looked at him and contemplated, quite seriously, if it were he who were my observer. But the thought passed, dismissed by some more logical part of my mind, and between us we brought the remaining crates - four in all - up from the cellar.

Oblivious of his presence, I opened each in turn and sifted through its contents. Eventually I was in possession of eleven more albums, each horribly familiar in its dark green leather binding. Though the curiosity of the shopkeeper had been aroused, he was prompt to provide an answer to the single question that now haunted me, without demanding why I asked.

The house was one of a row of derelict properties being demolished to make way for further incursions of human attrocity: boxes for boxes. Without approaching the authorities I stood little chance of tracing the owner of the house I stood before, and so I prepared to leave. It was curious, however, that I experienced no disappointment and felt, rather, relief.

I was carrying the albums in an old mock-leather shopping bag I had brought with me to the shop. Placing the bag on the ground, I stared at the albums expectantly, as if their juxtaposition to the house would explain their mystery. And though I realised the inherent madness of my actions, I could only acquiesce to this small ritual before returning home. The senselessness of the gesture seemed somehow meaningful, as if it too were being observed.

It was only that afternoon, as I watched the rain pattern the window in tiny rivulets and prepared to study the albums, that I noticed they were numbered. The slimmest volume was imprinted with a '2', the eleven I had purchased that lunchtime '3' to '13'. As it seemed logical to assume that this was a chronological progression, I placed the volume marked '3' before me on the table and opened it at the first page. The hours slipped away.

Imagine re-experiencing your life: not as you remember it - not as the sympathetic mind has shaped it in memory - but as an anti-pathetic observer would see it. Imagine your sins paraded before you: the monochrome ghosts of your spite captured in all their objective ugliness. When you stop smiling and posing for the camera, will someone catch you snarling? Will the pose you assume when the camera turns away be the one you will admit to your future self? Or does the lie congeal in mind?

As the years of my life passed before me I realised the subtlety of my observer. It was not simple malice, as I had, at first, assumed. He had captured all the shades of my immorality. In the fourth album there is a picture of me 'spiking' a hedgehog with a cricket stump, my fact gleefully sadistic. In the sixth album (I was, perhaps, eight or nine in those photographs) I am caught cheating at Monopoly, my face a study in guile, my tiny hands grasping to control all that surrounded me.

Looking at the eighth album I was taken by the sudden, absurd notion that I had died and that this was hell - a place where past sins could be lived again, without hope of redemption, without possibility of change. Eternally captured - the damning aperture. I was consumed by my guilt, afraid to continue but too far too addicted to cease my morbid turning of the pages.

All the petty cruelties, the numerous deceits and betrayals: how keenly he focused upon them in those pictures. But there was a page in the final volume that best illustrated his art, that seemed to me perversely beautiful, even though I was the object of its scorning perfection. There are three photographs, mounted in a triangle. To the bottom left I am shown making love to Anne. Her face, almost against the lens, is contorted, as if in pain. Her lips are shaped as if to form a word. Above her my eyes are closed, my face marked with greedy pleasure. To the bottom right I am making love to Jennifer, and it is practically the same picture. Only the face of the girl has changed. My lustful oblivion exists in both - proud possessor of my own solipsist senses.

The apex of the triangle embellishes this simple message: in it I sit upon Anne's bed, her hand limply in my own as I profess my love, eyes tinged with crass insincerity. I remember the single word reply she gave me then the word her lips strive to form as I bury my flesh deep inside her, the word they all used: "bastard".

Remember well that day. Were you always so heartless? Did it always mean so little?

If I asked myself these questions, it was only because I no longer needed (nor, indeed, wished) to know who had so perfectly summarised my shame. I had accepted that whoever, or whatever, was studying me was intangible - some unimaginable supernatural or alien form. And yet, using contemporary photographic techniques? A part of me laughed at that, but accepted it once again. How else would I have been made to look at myself? By what other means than by this pandering to my self-obsession would I have been reached?

No, the nature of my tormentor no longer perturbed me, nor the absurdity of his medium. If he had observed me so closely in the past, it was certain that he watched me now, capturing my every expression on celluloid. So frail a medium. So damagingly effective. I paused and gave a weak smile.

"And send me a copy ..."

But it was only a surface reaction. Beneath it I had died. The mask had slipped and broken, never to be repaired nor replaced. I could no longer smile in deceptive innocence, no longer call it the day to my side and claim a vague pantheism to disguise my hatred of my fellow men. To be found naked and guilty by another is a horrible predicament. To be found so in your own eyes is intolerable.

Later, as I walked across the Common, each individual photograph came to mind; a still-life tabloid, like a zoetrope, its slow, stilted rotation illustrating the seasons of my bitter

moods, the various shades of winter.

Watch me closely, I thought. Watch me forever and keep me safe. I am your responsibility from now on, whoever you are. No one can make an ultimate judgement without accepting equal responsibility. And I smiled and walked briskly homeward.

On the mat by the door was a small white envelope, sealed but unmarked. I picked it up cautiously, shedding my irrational elation quickly as I felt the thin but obtrusive square of card beneath the paper. Under the reading lamp in the dimness of my study I looked at the photograph and realised how cruel it was, how little it left to me.

Feeling the draining listlessness of final despair, I climbed the stairs to the bathroom and stood there, pressing the photograph against the wall-length mirror, trapped in the infinite regression of the Predestined Moment. Trapped between two mirrors and corridors of self.

In the photograph he looks tired as he holds the print against the bathroom mirror. Listless. His mouth gapes slightly and his left arm hangs loosely at his side. The photograph, reflected in the mirror, shows the tiny badge he now always wears, black against white on his lapel. Its word echoes back and forth down the worlds of the tunnel in which he stands.

"Nihilist," it reads.

Questions

Q: I saw a newspaper advertisement from a publisher seeking manuscripts, so I submitted my novel. Not long after, they sent me a contract in which they agreed to publish the book provided I paid them. I can just about raise the money (about £2000), so should I go ahead?

A: Yes. But do clear a nice prominent space on your mantlepiece so that your friends can come around and admire the book. Unfortunately this will be their only chance. They won't read any reviews of it, they won't find it in their library, they won't see it in bookshops, and they won't even find a paperback of it. They will be able to touch it, though, but get them to wash their hands first. Your copy will be rare...one of the four or five copies in existence.

Firms who publish books at the author's expense are known as "vanity presses", and it is vanity they pander to.

Difficult as it is to get a first novel published, if you do succeed you will have the satisfaction of knowing that it has passed the test of experienced and professional editors, who are prepared to risk several thousand pounds of the company's money on your book. Part of the money they risk is the advance they will pay you.

Vanity presses are not illegal, but they certainly operate outside the normal practices of the industry. If you have any remaining doubts, ask yourself this. Who, among your favourite authors, is published by the firm you approached? Any name you recognise? Come to that, have you ever seen any of their books anywhere? The judgements given by orthodox publishers are fair. So are their contracts. A fool and his money are soon parted...but who wants to be a vain fool?

Q: Is it true that an option clause in a contract - giving the publisher of your book first refusal on your next work of the same type - is just a formality?

A: The New York State Supreme Court recently ruled, in an action brought between two publishers on the issue of option-breaking, that an option clause is nothing more than an "agreement to disagree" and is legally unenforceable. It remains to be seen whether a similar judgement would be given in the UK, but yes, essentially an option is a courtesy. The option gives the publisher the opportunity to make an offer. It does not compel you to accept it.

Look at it from the publisher's point of view: they get a great novel in by a promising new writer; they take an interest in the writer, not just his book. Naturally they want the chance to be the publisher responsible for building his reputation over the years. An option to see and make an offer on each subsequent work gives them that chance. If they treat you badly on the first book, you can refuse their terms, and as long as you haven't agreed to accept any terms that are better than their first offer (and such clauses do exist), they can do nothing about it.

The danger of an option clause is that if a publisher offers a miserable inpromptu contract for a second book it's very tempting to accept; but you may have got a much improved offer from another publisher or even from your own if he had thought there was a rival demand for you. The fear is always: if I let two publishers see the book, the one with the option may lose all interest and withdraw their offer, leaving me back at Square One. If you have an agent, leave it to him/her; they are adept at handling such problems.

And don't forget, building a body of work with one publisher increases your chances of a) regular reprints and b) the books "selling each other".

Q: I have a full-time job but write fiction in the evenings and at weekends. I spend money on paper, carbons and so forth. Can I claim these expenses against my tax bill?

A: Certainly. In America it may be slightly different, but in this country you are allowed to offset all your business expenses against your income, and if your business includes writing... Declare both on your annual tax return, ideally with the ratification of an accountant. Keep all your receipts (for paper, ribbons, postage, research materials, etc.). Keep tidy and accurate accounts. Unless you're a self employed writer you will have to justify certain expenditure - such as a proportion of convention and 'phone costs. (Mind you, fulltime writers also have to justify these in the first instance.) Don't forget, you can't carry expenses over from year to year indefinitely - if you make your first sale after three years you'll certainly be able to offset some of your previous year's expenses against that income, but check with an accountant for just how much, and from how far back. As long as you can prove that the expenses were incurred in connection with your business as a writer (full- or part-time) they can be reckoned into your total annual income tax liability. The best way to prove you are in part-time business as a writer is to show evidence of a sale.

Q: I sent a story (plus s.a.e.) to an anthology. After nine months I'd heard nothing and on the advice of a professional writer wrote a short, polite letter asking the editor to either make a decision on my story or return it. It came back two weeks later without any covering note at all (in my envelope, whose flap was open and unsealed). I feel very angry at this treatment, but feel that the story had not actually been read and therefore had not been properly judged. Should I send it in again?

A: It depends very much on a) your priorities and b) the extent to which you intend to interpret every editorial error/lapse as a personal attack. Professional discourtesy is infuriating; but how do you know this wasn't just a case of "disorganised reply policy" and that to send the story in again as if nothing had happened wouldn't get it responded to immediately and courteously? There are quite enough persecuted writers in our genre, all trembling with self-righteous indignation. A thick skin, an ability to remain courteous in the face of the most appalling behaviour (although not in the face of "professional" misconduct) and a dogged determination to write and sell your fiction are all you need. So what to do? Cool down, submit the story elsewhere for the time being, in a month or so send something else to your rude editor, and then submit this story after a few months when moods may have changed and you may get more respectful consideration.

Q: I am considering using a pseudonym. How can I ensure that it stays a close secret?

A: You can't...and that's a cause of irritation to many writers. You pick a pseudonym for a reason, perhaps to keep different names for different genres; more usually, you want to conceal your identity because of the awful crime you are perpetrating upon the literary world. If that's your purpose, then you have the right to protection. Unhappily, sf has made something of a game out of 'pseudonym-unmasking'. A writer's pseudonym is privileged information, and naturally it is irresponsible to repeat it, and doubly so to print it. But don't depend on everyone who happens upon your true identity being trustworthy. It's really up to you to keep totally silent. Ideally, don't even tell the publisher your real name. In practice you may have to; but always deal with them under your pseudonym, thereby keeping the association out of the records. Publishers are the main source of leaks: editors get replaced; and the commitment to secrecy may not be passed on.

WRITERS' WORKSHOPS an overview

RANDAL FLYNN this way to heaven

One of the English poets, Shelley, I think, is reputed to have scrawled a message on the stone wall that terminated a dead-end alley. His message is the title of this article. Unfortunately, his university tutors were not amused by such low-brow blasphemy and he was expelled. The graffito seems to have been lost on his tutors, and possibly it meant nothing to him. To me it means that sometimes the only way to move ahead is through sustained confrontations with values and beliefs and habits.

For some people a writer's workshop begins and ends as a dead-end alley. It isn't for everybody. Most of what follows is my own reaction to the workshop hosted by Ursula Le Guin in 1975 in conjunction with the Australian SF World Convention. The actual location was the tranquil mountain slopes of the Dandenongs, about 40 miles outside of Melbourne.

It was bitterly cold in Melbourne in August 1975. In the evenings it would plummet dramatically to five degrees centigrade; it was so cold some of us thought it might snow (a friend and I had just driven 1200 miles from sub-tropical Brisbane). On the Friday night on which the workshop began all the attendees gathered at Booth Lodge. Ursula was not due till the following morning. The rooms were wonderfully warm and everybody was a stranger. But then a slow transmutation began: strangers turned into friends.

Piled on one of the tables were stacks of manuscripts, copies of stories we had all submitted as part of the selection process. Ursula had sent ahead a reading order. These were the three stories to be discussed next morning. In silence we all took copies of the stories. There was no general suggestion to do this, it was just done. And we sat about on sofas, on armchairs, and on the floor, reading and reading, and glancing at intervals over the top of the paper at each other.

The next day we were all life-long friends and had known each other for ages and ages, and for a long time to come.

At 9 o'clock on the Saturday morning, a solid breakfast inside us, we fought our way through thick mountain mists and assembled in the main room. There was frost on the outside of the windows. Perhaps it would snow. There was nervousness, but there was also camaraderie, however newly formed. A whisper went round: Ursula was here. A car had driven up a few minutes before. A small, brownish lady poked her head in and beamed at us and said she'd be along in a couple of minutes. She had an odd accent. Perhaps it was a writer's accent.

Ursula returned. She sat on the floor and lit a pipe and smiled again. She broke the ice. We introduced ourselves, our ages, our occupations (and preoccupations), our aspirations, and tried gingerly to explain why we were here. What did we think we could get from a workshop? What did we expect?

Ursula's role was generally known as Resident Writer. The Resident Writer presides over the fracas, seeks to organise the time, to offer aid and suggestions, to kick where necessary or to cajole, but never to dominate or foist her own technique. In any case, how do you communicate intuition?

The workshopping process was simple. We all sat around in a circle and told the author of the pre-chosen piece what we thought of it (having read it the night before and having sat up all night deliberating each turn of the screw). The author was not permitted to reply (i.e. be defensive) until the very end. The penultimate speaker was the Resident herself, summing up, emphasising comments already made, adding her own. The heap of gibbering aspiration was then free to sneer.

Of those present I was the youngest and possibly the most uninformed in the field of criticism. I sat in awe (and horror) as older, wiser hands spoke about Characterisation (for God's sake, what's that?), and about Structure, Motivation, Plot, Setting, Style, Atmosphere, Feeling, Visualisation, Conception, the Art of Writing (is that what it was, an art?). Never for a minute had I thought such things existed, and it still hadn't occurred to me that possibly I had already made some attempt at competence in these realms. (It was only about a year earlier that I had arrived at a conclusion that literally stopped me writing for months: I'd realised that there were two fundamental types of plot in the universe. There was the plot boldly and artificially imposed from above, the way Poul Anderson does it. He invents a few names, John, Tom and Jane, and then makes them do things, like chase after star treasures etc. Or there was the plot that grew of itself, starting from the imaginative creation or arrival of a life-given character and the results of his subsequent interactions with the physical and social environment, and with his own emotional nature. This was organic plot. I did not want to write the Poul Anderson plot because it was boring and I saw no point in making two-dimensional names-out-of-a-hat perform on an obstacle course. On the other hand, I knew I was not good enough to create real character. So I sat around and moped for months, convinced that character was plot and plot was character, but unable to do anything about it.

When I heard the word of my own inner turmoil, plot, I listened very carefully, only to discover that these wiser and older heads were faced with problems very much like my own. This was a stunning blow; it woke me up completely. My own battles with writing were not the unique experiences I had thought they were!

And not only similar problems, but similar causes. We were all here for the same reasons: a desire to write, a need to write. (How odd that there should be such a widespread compulsion. I wonder what causes it?) Writing was still a solitary business, but your conception of writing was enlarged by this new-found fellowship.

Discussing one particular story an attendee might have said something like this: "Apart from the individual motivations and self-justifications of the characters, their intense, almost obsessional interaction is the mainspring of the dramatic life of the story. However, this doesn't quite work since the author loses some of his/her control over the fringe characters and these, who should be so important as in a Graham Greene novel, fail because the image we get of them is too diffuse and intangible." Naturally, I didn't understand a word of it but I was nonetheless strongly impressed. It was said with sincerity and concern. The speaker was interested in the story and in the author and wanted to share insights that can only have arisen from his own authorial attempts.

Some of us, like me, often just said: "Well, I liked it a lot. I thought the main idea was great, really well worked out. The main character didn't quite work for me. But I liked it anyway." It was a while before some of us realised that no response, or the inability to make one, was itself a response. One or two sturdy souls would declare bravely and truthfully: "There's nothing I can say about this."

Ursula never attempted to tell us how to write. She would tell us things she had discovered in her own experience, she would clear up puzzles, and transmit some of the fundamental craft, the non-intuitive, grammatical level of writing such as hints on the handling of viewpoint, the differences between the active and passive voice, the lack of depth that might come from non-visualisation of scene or character: things that one learns in time, either inside or outside a workshop, as a carpenter learns which end of a nail to hit.

There was no lecturing, no dogma, only discussion, and on one occasion, drama. We enacted a science fiction situation. The majority of us had crash-landed on an inhospitable planet, no food, no water, no shelter. We encountered what seemed to be five aliens and attempted to communicate our needs. But the aliens seemed pretty thick. They kept on trying to organise us into groups of five and talked endlessly about 'breathing air'. This exercise at communication raised tempers, and generally convinced everybody that everybody else was too thick to communicate with a log. The aliens were a symbiotic group of five organisms, each unit of which could not survive alone. They had been trying to save our lives. We had merely ended up in confusion.

There were no more attempts at drama.

There were walks in the countryside, muddy sessions of totem tennis, interminable jokes about gronqs, small and

ubiquitous creatures that live in the dark. For instance: Grong With The Wind, Two Grongs don't make a Groight. There were singing sessions, readings from 'Egobert the Grong', and endless instalments of a continuous story that gradually became more illiterate and pornographic as the workshop proceeded.

Ursula became Ursula Le Grong (and later at the World-con received the coveted Grong Award) and all letters were sent to Gregrong.

The workshop lasted a week. It seemed like forever. Donne this time: "The World's Contracted Thus." It seemed that Booth Lodge was all that existed or had ever existed. Booth Lodge was the world, an intense microcosm. The one excursion I made to a nearby town was like an expedition into alien territory. Even the car was strange and we nearly reversed over a cliff, all for the sake of a toasted ham and tomato sandwich.

The pressure that built up was tremendous. People were writing more, in less time, and with greater discipline than they had ever imagined they could. The Resident set several exercises. One evening about eight o'clock we entered the main lounge. Ursula was sitting cross-legged on the floor cutting up little bits of paper. "This doesn't mean that I'm at the end of my tether," she said (or she might have). "This is the Avram Davidson exercise." She made two piles of small paper rectangles, each of twenty pieces, one of nouns, one of adjectives.

"You each pick up a noun and an adjective and you must write a story about the two words, using them as the title, or if you can't do that, you must use them as the theme to your story." So we got stories called: Circular Atmosphere, Long Stone, Healing Grgy. Mine was Oily Graft. It was eight pm. Most of us needed to sleep (though one fellow had given up such a solitary pursuit). Breakfast was at nine am. At ten and for the rest of the morning we would be workshopping stories. Then lunch. At two pm the next day we were going to workshop these noun-adjective stories. For most of us that meant about four hours to dream up a story, characters, plot and resolution to fit a crazy title, not to mention writing it and perhaps re-writing it. Nevertheless, that's what happened and some of the stories were excellent, and they were all interesting.

We discovered in this exercise that we could write a story from start to finish in a few hours. We might never want to do this in practice, but the discovery also involved the disintegration of long-held, self-imposed limitations, and self-discipline. Maybe you gleaned the idea that to move ahead you had to confront such limitations.

Two more exercises were produced under similar conditions.

There were the single-change stories. In these we had to make one change in the present state of the world: physical, social or psychological. We would then illustrate the results of this change without actually mentioning it, and the readers had to guess what had been changed. One story postulated a world where people saw by infra-red, another wherein the female sexual genitals embodied in the male organism caused problems at puberty. One story, about a page long and brilliantly realised, portrayed a world in which the speed of light was about ten miles an hour. Villages a mere hundred miles apart were inaccessible to one another until the invention of a radio. One brother sets off on an expedition to the other villages and while he is gone, the other brother ages inexorably.

The other exercise was a shock: we had to write a love story. The immediate idea behind this was that science fiction never really dealt effectively or realistically with love. The reason being, of course, that characterisation in sf was usually of such a low order that love was not the only emotion suffering a fish-lens perspective (but strongly symptomatic of the whole problem). Ursula's comments on the results of this exercise were that she'd seen one love story and seventeen lust stories. (I wonder if it was the one about the many-tentacled octopi that succeeded.)

It was not all sunshine and revelation. Although there were no major personality clashes (outside the drama episode) some members were naturally reclusive or just plain shy. Criticism, especially from your peers, is never wholly pleasant: it's either too awful or too good. One or two people had not expected the criticism to plumb the levels that it did - perhaps they were used to the generous, bland opinions of friends. There was no destructive criticism. There was no 'getting back'. What did take time was the process of understanding the kind of criticism that was given. To most of us, at first, the best criticism had an unhealthy appearance of being a personal assessment, rather than an assessment of the story. Eventually, I suppose, it was understood that a story and its author are sometimes too close to be separated, that the politics of one may be the politics of the other.

Another problem with criticism at a workshop is knowing what to do with it, how much to accept, how much to reject, what to act upon. Most writers will avoid the inherent pitfalls instinctively. Others, perhaps younger or diffident, more easily swayed by wise authoritative tones will go to extremes of re-writing in accordance with prevailing criticisms. The line to be drawn is the line between what is one's own work and what is someone else's. No matter how you write a story, fast or slow, with patience or impatience, you know, somewhere in the back of your head, what is right and wrong for your story. You may have ignored it because you felt too lazy to fix it up, or you may not be completely aware of it. The role of criticism for the writer is to jangle those present but suppressed responses. Someone says to you: "I thought your use of the third person in section two completely destroyed the sense of realism and drama because it let me see the character from the outside. I was no longer in his mind. I didn't like it." And your first thought is: Of course! That's what's wrong with it. You knew it all the time and so you make the necessary changes. But if the criticism leaves you cold, does not strike some chord within you, then to make changes to your story is to write someone else's story. When a writer criticises a story it is, in a lot of ways, merely a description of how he, as a writer himself, would have tackled it.

What can a workshop offer you? For some it offers nothing (after all, Graham Greene never attended a workshop), and others will accomplish thier goals no matter what. To say that William Faulkner never went to a workshop and was still a great writer is a fatuous statement (he also worked 70 hours a week down a coal mine). Are we talking about artistic criteria? The problem is that people see workshops in too black a guise, they characterise them as mechanical, artificial. But in actual fact very few painters or writers did not attend workshops: in a generalised sense of the word. When a workshop is seen clearly, it is seen as a social phenomenon, as an interaction of differing creative personalities on all the emotional and artistic levels. In other words, most writers at one time or another have attended company and ideas of other writers. This is the workshop milieu.

Another criticism of the workshop process is simultaneously an attack on criticism: that workshops must treat the creative product from a reductionist viewpoint: that the story is broken down into bits like plot, setting, characterisation, style etc. of which each individual piece is meaningless. Their only importance is their interactive contribution to the whole.

But the reductionist process is not actual but linguistic, since the whole is largely inarticulable in that form (this is why writers employ a language that at first seems rather vague, such as the expression 'moving ahead' or 'the story is happening at last'). A reductionist list of diminutive categories is a list not of parts but of processes. To speak of such things as plot and characterisation is to speak conceptually, as we do when we talk of Eco, Id and Superego. The attack is merely confusion: the true point of concern rests with the Resident's discussion of this very argument. Too many young writers spend years compiling dull, exhaustive lists of Mr. Brown's apparel and physical traits in the belief that this is characterisation and that this is how you get it.

What are the advantages (and who will agree that they are advantages)? Well, the workshop elicits a recognition. You recognise within yourself the existence of a long-standing commitment to writing. A commitment total and compulsive, even obsessive at times. It had to be 'commitment': it had been hanging around for long enough, making huge demands on one's time and energies, convincing one that it was somehow good to spend long periods in one's room alone, causing uncool trouble (with parents because of lawns unmown, with teachers because of homework unfinished) for years. So long, in fact, that it had become part of one's inner environment, and never had the simple question been asked: Why am I doing

WORKSHOP GUIDE No.1 : Preparation of the manuscript is done with enthusiasm and under some pressure.

this? WHY AM I DOING THIS? Do I really want to? Such questions had gone unasked, the writing was simply done.

And the workshop made you aware. It brought you awake to the fact that writing was an activity - an activity distinct from all other activities. It was an occupation in its own right. It had value. You weren't suddenly aware that here was something you must dedicate yourself to: you discovered that you already had dedicated yourself. This was no frivolous hobby, it was the centre of your existence. It was not quite like washing dishes or mowing the lawn or cleaning the car. There was romance in it, and a feeling of being caught up in a vast dramatisation of life. You had become involved in something that was contained within the worlds of reality and imagination, yet which contained within itself the entire world, all the entire worlds of reality and the imaginative romance of reality. If you had been excited beyond words it would not have been ironic.

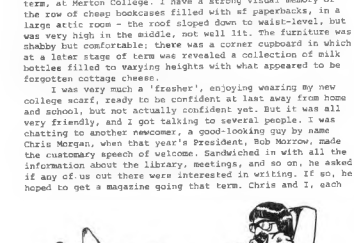
The workshop communicated confidence. This came from several factors. You discovered the value and the seriousness of what you were engaged upon; you found many others who thought this business of writing was important, who shared your ideas (to a certain extent), with whom you sometimes hardly needed words to be understood; you discovered capacities for self-criticism and self-discipline and somewhere in all the hectic, feverish writing and living and falling in love (you always fall in love at workshops; I'm not sure why) you found that the most important thing about writing is intuition, which means trusting yourself. Especially when it lets a character do something you hadn't expected or planned, or it suggests you change your ideas, change first person to third, change the whole bloody story. What I got out of the workshop that was for me important above all other things was not small questions of whether I was good or bad, whether I would sell or wouldn't sell, but an utter faith in myself as a writer, as one who writes.

DIANA REED
pieria: how it all began

In November 1979 the 25-th Pieria "SF Writers' Workshop" was held at Andrew Stephenson's home in Buckinghamshire. The Pieria one-day workshops are direct descendants of the Oxford SF writers' workshops begun in 1970 by Diana Reed; these workshops in turn grew out of the broader base of the Oxford University Speculative Fiction Group (OUSFG). We asked Diana for a personal reminiscence of the last decade.

Ten years ago last autumn I went up to Oxford. I'd heard, vaguely, of the existence of the Oxford University Speculative Fiction Group (OUSFG), and went to the first meeting of term, at Merton College. I have a strong visual memory of the row of cheap bookcases filled with sf paperbacks, in a large attic room - the roof sloped down to waist-level, but was very high in the middle, not well lit. The furniture was shabby but comfortable; there was a corner cupboard in which at a later stage of term was revealed a collection of milk bottles filled to varying heights with what appeared to be forgotten cottage cheese.

I was very much a 'fresher', enjoying wearing my new college scarf, ready to be confident at last away from home and school, but not actually confident yet. But it was all very friendly, and I got talking to several people. I was chatting to another newcomer, a good-looking guy by name Chris Morgan, when that year's President, Rob Morrow, made the customary speech of welcome. Sandwiched in with all the information about the library, meetings, and so on, he asked if any of us out there were interested in writing. If so, he hoped to get a magazine going that term. Chris and I, each



WORKSHOP GUIDE No.2 : The manuscripts are read with care and concentration in the relaxed atmosphere of the lounge.

giving the other courage, made diffident but affirmative noises. I think Rob was surprised; the rest of the room remained determinedly silent. Shortly after, when I came back with a story I'd written after a few front encounters with phenomenalism, Rob said that if I was that interested, I'd better be co-opted onto the committee.

OUSFG meetings were, and presumably still are, held weekly during term, on a Sunday evening. The Society owned a large collection of sf than most new students were likely to have had access to before. This collection was housed in the room of an undergraduate 'librarian'. Thus it was best if he was a friendly, sociable soul, not involved in major exams that year. He also needed a big room. OUSFG was not one of the university clubs that 'careerists' joined. The sort of uppity kids that non-Oxford readers are probably imagining with loathing at this moment joined the Union, the political societies, or the Oxford University Dramatic Society, and wrote for Isis or Cherwell.

At a cost of £6 for 300 copies, the first issue of the magazine got off the ground, typed by Sandra Burman, another newcomer who was the joint editor with Bob Morrow. Sandra also brought of a name for the magazine - 'Sfinx'. Besides Chris and myself, Dave Parsons was very much involved, as was Rosanna Corke, and another first-year, Jeremy Gilchrist, who edited the second issue. At this time I was the only person writing stories more substantial than an 'O' Level essay. All the same, we took Sfinx very seriously, and cleared our costs and made a profit.

One of the things that was most important to me around this time was that Bob Morrow took the trouble to read and edit, with real care, that little story I'd given him. My writing had never received that sort of scrutiny before.

At the end of my first year I took over the editorship of Sfinx, and between then and Christmas of my third year produced Sfinx 3, 4 and 5. Allan Scott came up to Oxford in my second year, October 1970, and was a doughty duplicator-wielder and much-needed contributor. Together we organised the first offset-litho issue, Sfinx 6, which, since finals were looming on my horizon, he edited. He was an excellent editor for the magazine, quite ready to take over at this point.

But it was in my second year that the OUSFG writers' workshop meetings started, organised by me. I discovered one snag in editorship - who edits the editor? Sandra had a large room at Lady Margaret Hall and had offered it to us, so we used her place at first. It was very informal - just a handful of friends getting together to hear and talk about each other's stories. By my third year (when I had a room in St Hilda's quite large enough for these meetings) we had things sorted out enough to draw in newcomers. I remember Dave Langford appeared early in the term with a story for Sfinx 5, and we spent most of one OUSFG meeting talking about it, cutting across the evening's book-borrowing and socialising time - making it even more necessary to keep the writers' meetings in business!

Chris Morgan, more in touch with the sf world outside Oxford than any of us, brought Rob Holdstock and Andrew Stephenson to one of the writers' meetings that year. We'd formalised things a bit by then. There was one absolute rule more or less from the beginning: no admittance except by story. Apart from that, we'd evolved a way of going round the room once for comments after a story had been read; the author replied immediately to each comment and a free discussion then followed. I do remember the atmosphere of that meeting quite clearly: the mutual assessment, the challenge of an outside standard, the discovery that we all had a lot in common.

Then came finals, and I left Oxford, and that was that. Allan kept on with the writers' meetings, as did Kev Smith in his turn when he took over Sfinx. I joined the BBC as a clerk, working for the Deputy Editor of the Listener, but was also Crossword Editor, and involved in a certain amount of sub-editing. I went back to Oxford a couple of times, but knew that was something that couldn't continue. Each year is a new generation, the end of the summer term a formal cut-off point: you go back as a ghost.

In London I made new friends, kept writing, and produced a short play I'd written for an amateur dramatic group. But a good time at Oxford is just a 'taster' - in my experience, you have to work hard and be very fortunate to eventually re-establish the same 'standards of living', not just materially but in terms of interest, involvement, companionship, and intellectual stimulation. Then, in the summer after I'd come down - on August 4th 1973, to be precise - came news of the first Pieria SF Writers' Workshop, which Andrew Stephenson had been organising in order to keep an Oxford-type meeting going. This was an important part of that spiral climb back. While 'researching' this article - ie. trying and failing to find copies of early Sfinxes - I came across Andrew's invitation to:

THE FIRST PIERIA CONFERENCE FOR PROSPECTIVE AND PART-TIME PROFESSIONAL WRITERS OF SCIENCE FICTION...

...this being a convocation of like-minded persons interested in assisting each other's writing by giving and receiving constructive criticism of work submitted for group consideration. Similar in outward form to the Writers' Meetings of the Oxford University SF Group, membership is by invitation so you lucky stiffs who receive this note had better look lively and reply pronto or you may miss out on a Good Thing.

It was good thing. It hasn't turned me into a selling writer of science fiction - and it would be hypocritical to say I wouldn't have been glad if this had happened - but then I haven't tried very hard to sell. At least my story-writing has continued and, I think, improved as time has gone on. The meetings provide a deadline, and a reason to write something that isn't work related. As my career has progressed my work has been varied and increasingly demanding, involving writing scripts and pamphlets, and producing and directing. Always with the discipline and restriction of a specialised target audience. Pieria provides an occasion for which I can write without compromise, on the themes I want to write about, with as great a depth and complexity as I think the idea needs.

In terms of 'wordly success', the effect of attending Pieria all this time has been a very useful sharpening of my critical awareness combined with awakening understanding and sympathy with the way writers approach their craft, and, I hope, the learning of ways of expressing criticism not as a hostile contradiction of the writer's work, but in terms of thinking through the problems with him; and perhaps, as an outsider fresh to the work, sometimes being able to help in the diagnosis of those problems, and even to spark off ideas for treatment. I don't claim that in my own work as a radio producer I am now capable of doing this with every script that comes in for me, but at least writers' meetings have given me some practice in trying!

That's how ten years of events that just grew out of each other led to me - rather than most of you reading this outline - being at Pieria 25 in late November of last year, in the company of such sf notables as Rob Holdstock, Andrew Stephenson, Dave Langford, Kev Smith, etc. Maybe you'd have hated it, anyway. The me of 1975 probably would not fit in with Pieria now, probably would not benefit from it, and would very likely dislike it, too. It's something that's evolved within a certain group of people, with deepening friendship and understanding. But suppose there's something in the idea of an sf writers' meeting that does appeal to you? The start is not necessarily to join a group that's already functioning, but to find people that you can talk to, who want to talk about the same things that you do, without being so far ahead of you that they don't respect you, or so far behind you that you can't respect them. From there on, it's up to you how much you want to institutionalise things. We find it necessary because there's so little time, with the group as large as it is and everyone living too far from each other for more frequent get-togethers. But as soon as you do put things on a formal basis, even to agree that you are going to talk about each other's writing, I think our single rule at the OUSFC writers' meetings - admittance by story only - helps avoid a number of potential difficulties. If you start by giving honorary memberships - your dearly beloved brain-child advanced as a guarantee that you won't start viciously carving up someone else's, and as a reminder of your own frailty - trust develops later. The moveable nature of Pieria, with a different host/chairperson for each session, has also functioned to prevent anyone feeling left out, or exploited, when it came to being boss or cook, while still allowing there to be a chairman keeping some degree of order. Beyond this, if there's a magic formula I don't know it. I hope we'll be celebrating Pieria 50 in a few years' time, and that I'll still be included, but there are no guarantees.

By the way, that name, 'Pieria'. On the Sunday morning after the first Pieria, we had a long discussion about what the meetings should be called. Andrew confessed 'Pieria' was only meant to be a joke, until we could think of something better. We'd didn't, and it stuck. If you'll take a third piece of advice, choose something less embarrassing for your group.

(Guest Editorial Note: that name has certainly elicited quite a number of wisecracks and blank stares over the years. We take comfort (some might suggest 'refuge') in the simple and indisputable knowledge that We Know Best, and grin and bear 'em all. For the curious - both of them - I could add that the joke was an eminently negligible pun... The Pierian Spring on Mount Olympus was the home of the nine Muses: Erato, Terpsichore ...you know, that gang. Well, there were going to be nine critics present; and, as I knew we'd spend most of the time musing over what we'd had submitted to us...

Forget it... A.S.)

BOBBIE LAMMING perspectives

Thinking about Pieria and the whole question of what such a workshop has to offer, the first point that occurred to me is that it gives a training in how to receive criticism - and that is crucial. Probably most writers have to learn to find a balance between ignoring criticism altogether and over-reacting to it. Ignore it, and one's writing can't develop fully as so many of its faults become fossilised; but over-react, and any casual comment can misdirect one's work down a blind alley - possibly for years. I've found that hearing reactions to my work from a group of other writers is helping me work out a balance so that I can benefit from criticism without being "thrown" by it. It is also helping me understand better the demands of the reader, and how to do what I as the writer want to do while still keeping an eye on those demands - in other words, how to be individual without being obscure.

Then - a workshop encourages experiment. It's so good to be able to try things out and be sure of an honest reaction. Did that comic bit come across as funny or rather wet? Was that love scene corny? Was that image too obvious? Who's going to tell you if not the other members of a workshop, all of whom are as interested as you in receiving an honest opinion? Without a formal frame-work through which to give their opinions I've found that friends are somewhat timid about criticising - and I am myself, which is tough on a writer, because nothing kills the will to experiment faster than lack of honest feed-back.

Another important thing about Pieria - it's fun. Writing is for the most part a lonely business, often destructively so. In my case, inspiration is subject to a sort of entropy and a piece of work can die on me - I decide it's terrible - when the real problem is that I'm writing it in isolation and have gradually lost confidence that what I want to say is actually coming through the words on the page. If I take it along to Pieria and hear reactions to it, then despite its many faults, that piece of work can miraculously come to life again. I can't help wondering how much fiction is abandon'd half-finished which would have turned out very good if only it had received encouragement at the critical time.

Allied to this, a workshop can save one from taking one's work too seriously. I suppose like many others, I tend to get rather tense about my writing, and too much tension makes for faulty judgement. Pieria, by offering a wide range of opinions (not to mention the odd flash of stunning wit), helps me adjust my perspectives, and I can feel what a good effect that has on my work - I simply start to enjoy writing more.

Speaking of perspectives, there is, too, the tremendous stimulation that comes from a gathering of people with similar abilities but very different talents, career backgrounds and personalities. It's exciting - and useful - to discover how many different ways there are of writing wall. Icons are smashed, likes and dislikes are questioned, reassessed... I find that at Pieria my mind gets stretched whether it wants to be or not: it's similar to a Yoga session: CAN be painful at the time, but feels marvellous afterwards.

Finally, I think that by attending a workshop, I've learned (I hope I have) something about the blind spots in my own writing (tediously favourite phrases, lazy words, etc.), through noticing such things in the work of others, and that in general I've acquired some sound critical apparatus to apply to my own work.

And the great thing is, a workshop that meets regularly provides a rare sort of continuity. It's an education to see someone tackle in one session a problem that was unearthed in their work at earlier session. This opportunity to watch other people develop their skills and to have a consistant level of criticism by which to gauge one's own development is invaluable.

« LOGISTICS »

One-day workshops, such as 'Pieria', are great fun and can be very useful. From our experience of running 25 meetings, here are a few suggestions for making the day run smoothly:
1) Limit membership. 8 or 9 people is ideal.
2) Pre-circulate 3 or 4 of the stories to all members.
3) Allow no story to exceed 4000 words in length (8000 if it is being pre-circulated).
4) Appoint a chairman who is prepared to be 'tough', and declare '30 seconds' and 'time up' during each 3-minute criticism spot.
Reading out stories, some advice: to go at a pace which will not dizzy the listener, a 3000 word story will take about 20 minutes to read; this is also the maximum time that attention can remain acute. Emphasis, a little acting, help a lot. Heavy, complex stories are best read early in the meeting. Alternate heavy stories with lighter, humorous pieces.
Pre-circulation: ideally, make a copy for each member. If this is too expensive, make one copy for each two members. To circulate one copy to three people can be dangerous; the third reader is quite likely to end up with about one day to read the story. Allow one week per reader, and circulate twoo weeks before the meeting. This keeps the story 'fresh in mind', whilst allowing time for two 'reads'. Take the responsibility for checking that all members have seen the script three days before the meeting.
Time: we suggest: reading, 20 minutes; note-taking, 1 min.; criticism (no author comeback), 3 mins. each; author response, 5 mins.; final round, 1 min. each; break, 5 mins. The word "PASS" to be used unless you really have something to add.
For EIGHT participants this adds up to 59 minutes.
For NINE participants this adds up to 63 minutes.
For TEN participants this adds up to 67 minutes.
If you start, therefore, at 12 noon, and allow HALF AN HOUR for tea, and ONE HOUR for evening meal,
With EIGHT participants you will finish at 9.21 p.m.
With NINE participants you will finish at 10.56 p.m.
With TEN participants you will finish at 12.40 a.m.
Those extra participants make a lot more difference than you'd think! And things never work as smoothly as this; stories sometimes take more than 20 minutes to read. Breaks take more than 5 minutes. Hold-ups occur as people use the loo. We have found that three things help to counter the waste of time: if you have nothing to say, say "Pass". Write out your minor quibbles and give them to the author. Limit your reading to 3000 words, and prepare a concise summary of any sequences that you miss out in order to do so.
Food: the organiser should ensure a) a substantial cold lunch of bread, cheese, ham, salad etc.,b) a cakes-and-coffee tea (approximately 5 p.m.) and a meal (approximately 8 p.m.). Too much coffee means more loo visits. After the evening meal, lighter stories get the best treatment. Catering is costly, so tell attendees what to bring: ham, cake, etc.

Week-long workshops: the UK Milford, originally organised by Jim and Judy Blish and based on Damon Knight's US Milford, has now run seven workshops. They do not involve any writing at the workshop, only criticism and discussion. The presence of two or three established, professional writers is essential. Confidence, honesty and a willingness to niggle at a story, no matter who the author, is essential. At Milford the mornings are devoted to reading manuscripts. At 1 or 2 p.m. the session begins, and three or four manuscripts are dealt with. Each participant has three minutes to comment on the story uninterrupted. The author has a five minute response and this is followed by a one-minute-each second round. Five minutes break. For a 15 person workshop, this amounts to 1 hour 10 minutes. The afternoon session should finish by 6.30. In the evening there is a scheduled discussion - anything from Style to Markets - and then a great deal of drinking, talking or (even) reading ahead. Some hints from our experience:
1) 4 copies of each script minimum.
2) Don't allow scripts to be removed from the reading room.
3) Large breakfast, small lunch, sport (eg, frisbee, table tennis) an hour before the session starts.
4) Find a small hotel, prepared to let you use lounge exclusively. Restrict talking in lounge during morning.
5) Chairman must enforce timekeeping ruthlessly.

MARTYN MORGAN learning the unteachable

The Arven Foundation Centre, Lumb Bank, is a solid stone house perched midway down the steep side of a partially wooded valley. Numerous week-long writing courses are held there during the year, including a Science Fiction Course which I attended this year.

The first workshop I was interested in was cancelled due to lack of interest. The Science Fiction Foundation of the North East London Polytechnic, who were running it, notified me of the cancellation and thoughtfully told me about Lumb Bank. Although I was not sure what to expect from either the workshop or the course, I knew that if there was a way of getting feedback about my work, I was interested. I also wanted to meet other writers and to share the experience of developing ideas.

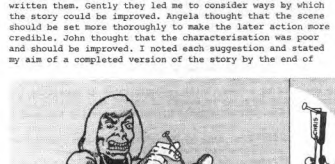
I arrived late Sunday evening, one day early, after stumbling down the steep drive past the house into the wilderness of the woods. Despite this, the wardens, John and Nadia, were quite friendly as they welcomed me in and allowed me to disrupt one of the two evenings of the week they have off.

People are supposed to arrive at Lumb Bank after 3.00 p.m. on Monday, so by the time the first members of the group began to arrive, I had spent the morning writing and the afternoon exploring the tiny paths which cross and re-cross the valley's stream. Between 3.00 and 5.00 p.m. people began to arrive, one from as far away as Plymouth; most came from the North. In total there were nine men, though one girl arrived later. The youngest of us was 19 and the oldest 30; two were teachers, two were students, two were unemployed, one was an engineer and one an academic. We spent the next few hours getting to know each other and the tutors, Angela Carter and John Sladek.

After the meal, the tutors suggested that each of us met them for an hour the next day to discuss our work so far and our objectives for the week. That first evening ended in the village pub, two miles away up the steep and pitted drive, which being neutral yet familiar territory probably helped us to get to know each other even better. For the rest of the week the wardens brought drink to us.

On Tuesday the work began. By 9.30 a.m. some of the group were already in the library, seated at the single large table, typing furiously with two or more fingers, while the rest were nervously or casually awaiting their tutorials. I felt compelled to join the people in the library by the thought that at the end of the week I might be listening to the work of others without having anything of my own to be read. The pattern established then continued throughout the week. Few words were exchanged in the library; to speak was a special shared break, and everyone seemed unwilling to create a disturbance. I found it surprisingly stimulating, rather than distracting, to work with two or three other people typing alongside me.

The tutorials were held in a tiny room under the eaves. I entered nervously and sat before John and Angela, who rapidly put me at ease. I handed over my work of the previous day, a thousand word story; they both read it and, with admirable tact, considering how bad it was, they convinced me that it was not entirely hopeless as an outline. Angela described one phrase I had used: "My heart beat itself into a soufflé", as Chandlerian, and I instantly learned how vital it is to read things after you have written them. Gently they led me to consider ways by which the story could be improved. Angela thought that the scene should be set more thoroughly to make the later action more credible. John thought that the characterisation was poor and should be improved. I noted each suggestion and stated my aim of a completed version of the story by the end of



WORKSHOP GUIDE No.3 : One learns to accept criticism in the same spirit as it was intended.

the week. John and Angela concluded by saying that they would be available for consultation at any time during the week.

That day, as on most of the others, I went walking with two people who also needed a break. In the evening, after the meal, one cardboard box from the off-licence later, we began to talk. Even those who were intially shy began to be drawn into the conversation; the mood rapidly shifted from lighthearted to serious, then back again. It seemed that whatever topic was raised someone present could add to it or illuminate it. It was truly exhilarating.

The daily sequence of events remained similar during the rest of the week, with about half of the group working at any one time and the rest talking or walking. During the evenings John Sladek and Angela Carter read from their own work. Sheila McLeod visited us as guest reader on Wednesday. The same electric atmosphere created at these readings prevailed again when some of our own work was read on Thursday and Friday evenings. Two completed works were read, as well as a number of partially completed works, ranging from fantasy to straight fiction. Both of the tutors, John (the warden), and three members of the group read the stories we had produced. Only the youngest person there was nerveless enough to read his own work aloud. When my own story was read I was reduced to hysterical giggling. I felt a knife turn in my heart at every awkward phrase, every naive idea and every example of poor characterisation. Whilst re-writing it in my mind, I began to pray for the reading to end. Criticism from the group was kind but realistic, and I accepted it gratefully. What shamed me was the way in which my hysterical reaction continued, or even worsened, when other work was read. This was partly because I found it all too easy to empathise with the writer and partly because, with my sensitivity heightened, the stories' content (in one case a description of sex) became startlingly vivid. Much of the work read was good; one story in particular, about the history and future of utopias, was excellent.

The course did fail in some ways. Little sf was written, and a person specifically seeking an sf course could have been disappointed. Another failure was the way in which the readings came as a sudden shock. I don't think I am alone in that reaction because a couple of people would not submit their work at all and it is possible that good stories went unrecognised. The course might have failed in many other ways; in particular, if it had been fully attended, with eighteen people, some very valuable components of the week, such a friendliness and intimacy, could have been lost. The main failing must be common to all week-long courses of this nature: they are simply too short, and only so much can be done. Even the achievements of Lumb Bank required laudable efforts of patience, tact, and skill. Despite all this, I must conclude that for me - and I think for most of the group - the week was enjoyable and useful: a success. Seeds were sown, and, in the parable, some are certain to flourish.

MALACIA PRESS: TAIS TENG PORTFOLIO

Tais Teng is the nom-de-plume of a young Dutch artist, Thijs van Ebbenhorst Tengbergen, who studies biology, and is now a self-employed free-lance artist, producing book-covers, strips, paintings, letterheads and drawings. He is also a remarkable writer.

His style is highly personal, and his subjects are mythological and alien. Life and death play a large role in his work, as do light and darkness. Man is seen to reach out to the stars to make contact with the creatures that exist there. In those creatures and their ruins he finds himself again, and a symbol of his own past and place in the Universe.

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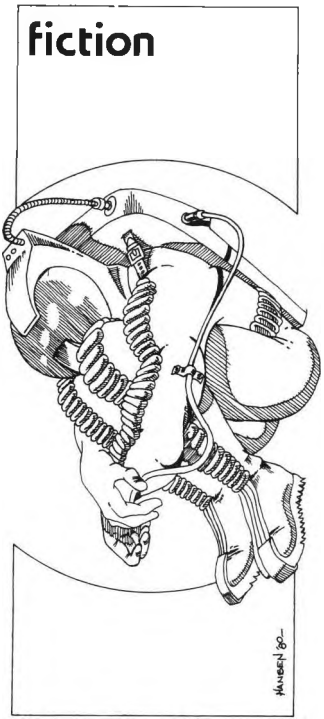

The Singularity Man

Graham Andrews

Identity: Malcolm Rayner. Status: zero.

Adrift in a paradoxical limbo. Alone - enveloped in the dark of a night that was not dark and not night.

Entity without form. Awareness - but no sensory impressions. Mind devoid of coherent memories.

A sea of silence - palpable, absolute. To Rayner, it seemed as if he had wandered that shoreless sea since the dawn of time, and that he would continue his aimless Odyssey for all eternity...

LIFE FUNCTIONS TERMINATED. The words streaked red across Rayner's rolling mind. Alien, incomprehensible. What is 'LIFE'? Memory responded -

- LIFE: Animate existence. Constituting an animal or plant before death ... DEATH? ... End of LIFE.

"Am I dead?" mused Malcolm Rayner, "Do dead men think?"

Negative. Insufficient data. However - "Cogito, ergo sum." Rayner recalled, from some deep dark cranny of his chaotic memory, "'I think, therefore I am'. But ... where am I?"

The ultimate question - what, if anything, lies beyond the borderline of physical existence?

Heaven - Purgatory - Hell? 'The sufferings of the damned'? Obsolete, medieval concepts - or so he had always believed.

But there just couldn't be ... nothing. That was a philosophical absurdity. Consciousness cannot co-exist with nothing - such a statement is a contradiction in terms. Rayner was definitely conscious, but there was nothing anywhere upon which he could bring that consciousness to bear.

The only resources with which he could evaluate - and escape? - this situation were those secreted within his own mind. And was that mind deranged, amnesiac or hallucinating?

Rayner experienced a strange mental dichotomy. Part of his mind insisted that he had become ..... attenuated, the molecules of his body stretched from time's beginning to its inexorable end.

He also imagined himself as an isolated speck of organic life floating in a perpetual ocean. The invisible 'waters' were warm and pleasant, lulling him into a gentle slumber with their sounding surges.

Rayner was suffused with an overwhelmingly sudden, irrational sense of well-being.

Death is not a destroyer, he realised. It opens wide the portal to a new existence. It is a pathway all sentient beings must traverse to find true evolutionary fulfillment.

The old cells are disintegrated, broken down into their protoplasmic parts and amalgamated with other, more complex biological structures. The mind is released from its corporeal trap to join the ubiquitous gestalt of the Universal Spirit.

Natural selection. Survival of the fittest. And it is only fair that the stronger should prey upon the weaker, the insignificant donate its knowledge and substance to a superior creature.

Atoms were created in primordial space to form elements, molecules and compounds - thus becoming the 'building blocks' of the universe. Similarly, single-celled life surrendered to the multi-celled and they, in turn, gave way to those beings higher in the evolutionary scale.

This is how the world developed - from slithering proto-life in the primeval ooze to Man's clumsy attempts at the 'conquest' of infinite space.

And death is the sacrifice that brings supreme peace and the ultimate triumph of the will.

"No!" Rayner cried, something within him recoiling in fear and disgust - awakening, protesting, "No, damn you, no!"

Yield, persisted the siren call, Surrender. Cease this futile struggle and be rewarded with eternal tranquility.

"Death wish," thought Rayner - or could it be his subconscious mind that wanted so desperately to survive that it was prodding him into some positive action?

Than a crimson glow illuminated this land of never-day and never-night. It coalesced into a cyclopean eye which drew his attention with hypnotic fascination.

Rayner gazed raptly at the angry red fireball, observing it through an iridescent haze, an auroral curtain of twisted reality. Reality - or illusion?

His concentration wavered. It would be so simple to relax and slip softly into oblivion - a state of utter Nirvana in which nothing and nobody mattered, except....

"Lucille!"

2a

The early afternoon sun shone warmly on Rayner's face. Through his lightly closed eyelids it shivered amorphously, a hot orange haze.

Rayner lay on a beach at Arenal, on the island of Majorca. He was enjoying the placidity of the reclaimed Mediterranean, with its mild tides, gently swirling surf and dazzling white sand.

Something gentle tickled his sunburned right cheek. He brushed at it idly. The splendour of his idyll seemed suddenly tarnished. There was something he'd been trying to push to the back of his mind, recently...

The tingling sensation returned. His eyes slowly opened and he squinted up at a short, buxom, raven-haired girl in a brief black bikini.

Lucille Stewart smiled down at him through the tangerine mist. She had full red lips and a generous mouth that was usually curved in the ghost of a smile, even when her features were in repose.

"Don't overdo the sunbathing, Mal," she reproached him in her low, sultry voice. "The sun can be quite fierce at this time of year."

"I'll be careful, Lucy," replied Rayner, with a welcoming grin. He patted the beach towel spread out at his side. "I hope you enjoyed your swim. Sit down and relax for awhile. We've got to catch the next Madrid shuttle - and I'm booked on the evening flight to Down Under."

"Down under?" Lucille was momentarily baffled, then her face assumed an expression of shocked comprehension, "You mean ... Woomera, Australia? The UNASA job? But aren't you taking over as Research Director of Stewart Aerospace? My father's arranged everything and I...."

Lucille's voice faltered and she brushed hastily at her eyes with shaky fingers.

Rayner scowled and shifted his gaze to the heat-hazed horizon. It was not in his nature to brook denial. Family legend maintained that his first articulate word had been a petulant no. His parents had met their deaths in the same New York-London shuttle crash, leaving him orphaned at the age of ten.

Rayner had since developed into a natural rebel who seldom - if ever - allowed personal feelings to influence his career decisions. Even his very real, warm relationship with Lucille had started as a coldly calculated ploy to gain the patronage of her wealthy father.

Damn! he thought angrily. Why can't Lucy be reasonable about this? She must understand that I can't allow myself to be sidetracked into a dead-end job. Sure, I could make myself a fortune working for Big Daddy Gil Stewart - but he owns me, body and soul.

He returned his attention to Lucille. Her face, like some small sunflower, seemed almost refreshed by the fleeting summer shower of her tears.

"Lucy," Rayner spoke to her downcast profile. "I won't be away for more than eighteen months. That isn't very long for either of us to wait. And when I do come back, I'll be rich and successful - independent of your father. For you and, dear - I've got to go cut there - for both our sakes."

Lucille threw back her dark-maned head and her blue eyes challenged his with an electric intensity. The sudden release of pent-up anxieties turned her delicately expressive face into a battleground of conflicting emotions.

"You mustn't go, Mal!" she exclaimed, in a cascading torrent of words. "Because I want a home - to have children - oh, darling, because most of all I want you!."

Rayner stretched out an arm to comfort Lucille, but she rolled away and struggled erect, face buried in her hands, sobs convulsing the soft arch of her shoulders. Little girl lost, he thought bitterly, so much for a century of Women's Lib and pop-con propaganda.

Rayner rose to approach her, but before he could utter a word she was gone, running like a startled deer into the lapping, white-capped waves. Then he was right behind her, his bare soles thumping the coarse wet sand.

Instinctively, Rayner knew that there could be no going back to the romantic idyll he had shared with Lucille. Already it seemed part of the dead past, a lost Golden Age. 'Parting is such sweet sorrow', but -

Farewells should be forever.

2b

It was like being born again.

Rayner's mind was afire with rekindled memories. He was suddenly blessed - or cursed - with the power of total recall. Every detail of his thirty-seven year old life was presented with hallucinatory vividness - from the fleeting innocence of childhood, through bittersweet adolescence to the failures and empty triumphs of 'maturity'.

Time heals all wounds. Scar tissue forms over lacerations, fractured bones knit themselves back to health, and the mind draws a protective curtain over the most traumatic emotional hurts.

After the initial, unexpectedly poignant shock of his separation from Lucille, Rayner had thrown himself into UNASA's rigorous training program and, later, he explored the multiplex realms of higher astrophysics at Project Springboard.

Springboard Station was a huge space-lab/observatory situated way beyond the trans-Plutonian asteroid belt. The project had a three-fold purpose; (a) to study the nearer stars with powerful telescopes and other sensitive devices in a search for Earth-type planets; (b) to design and build a practical interstellar drive and, (c) to mount manned expeditions to those new-found worlds.

During his first two-year hitch with UNASA's select Longreach Division, Rayner had applied the finishing touches to his abstruse mathematical theory of 'Superspace'.

Simultaneously, his physicist colleagues had conducted serious research into superluminal particles - tachyons, so-called 'imaginary' masses that sidestep Einstein and travel at faster-than-light velocities. When the two empirical findings were combined with Rayner's Superspatial math, a way was developed to breach the once seemingly impassable 'Luxon Wall'.

Our universe is 'subluminal' - slower-than-light - with possible velocities ranging from zero energy to infinite energy. The tachyon universe is superluminal, with possible velocities ranging from infinite energy to zero energy. Between these two universes is a buffer zone - the 'Luxon Universe' - with possible velocities confined to the speed of light, no more and no less.

The scientists at Springboard Station had taken advantage of a loophole in the Luxon Wall. Atoms from 'normal' space were converted directly into tachyons, so that a material object, i.e., a spaceship, could be transferred from one side of the Wall to the other side without having accelerated past it.

Once safely inside the tachyon universe, a spaceship already travelling at an appreciable fraction of light-speed would find itself going at many times the velocity of light. It could journey to a distant star in the space between two successive heartbeats, then revert to 'normal' matter and be once again in our own universe.

However, the tachyon universe was still very much of an unknown quantity.

Springboard Station's technical personnel settled down for long years of intensive research and development, converting mathematical abstractions into operational hardware. Meanwhile, Project astronomers detected possible terrestroid planets orbiting both components of the binary star Alpha Centauri, only 4.3 light-years distant from Earth's sun.

Rayner's vital contribution to the runaway success of Project Springboard had made his professional reputation. He was also financially secure. His high salary, virtually untouched by taxes or living expenses, gathered spectacular interest in UNASA's banking system.

The only thing which had somehow eluded him was personal happiness.

He discovered success to be less rosy and satisfying than he had always imagined it to be. Yet his energy did not flag and his scientific output remained as phenomenal as ever. The difference now, was that emotional interest had died a fatiguing hand on him, and he was haunted by lingering memories of Lucille.

At first there'd been fairly regular correspondence between himself and Lucille - but her cassettes came ever more infrequently, and ceased altogether after she finally realised that Rayner had abandoned any ideas he'd ever entertained about marriage.

It was not long before Lucille married Bryant Fleming III - typical Organisation Man, and the heir-select to her father's corporate empire. There but for fortune... Rayner had mused, more than half regretfully.

Thereafter, Rayner had become something of a recluse, disdaining Earthside leave while he hopefully prepared himself for a proving flight in Hermes - the prototype tachyon-ship.

On previous, unmanned trials, the drone tachyon-ships had wafted away toward Alpha Centauri at the precise moment when the tachyon-shift should have operated. The only snag was that, despite the sophisticated automatic recall devices, most of the tachyon-ships had failed to return.

Little additional information was gleaned concerning the Centaurus star-system and its tantalizing family of planets. Eventually, communications scientists would develop a form of tachyonic radio, enabling vital data to be telemetered back to Mission Control with no perceptible time lapse. For the present, however, interstellar explorers would belong to a genuinely 'silent service'.

Nevertheless, UNASA was forced by public (and governmental) opinion into mounting a one-man mission to Alpha Centauri. Rayner volunteered for the job, and he was immediately accepted.

Initially, everything went according to plan. The Hermes moved outwards from the Solar System at a steady one-gravity acceleration, then gradually boosted its velocity to the point at which conversion to the tachyonic mode became viable.

As the seconds ticked by toward transmission through - no, past - the Luxon wall, Rayner grew increasingly apprehensive. But when the actual moment of conversion came, it proved to be strangely anticlimactic.

One imperceptible fraction of a second, Rayner was here - the next, he was there - with no sensation of displacement whatsoever. Instruments informed him that the Hermes was now travelling at x-times the speed of light, but according to the evidence of his own senses, nothing had changed.

Already Rayner was completely cut off from contact with Springboard Station and Earth itself. After Breakout, he would be the farthest-travelled man in history - and the most vulnerable. If intelligent life existed on the Centaurus planets, would he be welcomed as an ambassador - or destroyed as an alien intruder?

Flight-time was practically instantaneous. But when the Hermes re-entered normal space, Rayner found himself in -

Bedlam.

'I remember the best of the past.. I remember not worth forgetting...'

The first shockwave had struck the Hermes with piledriver force. It gyrated in an epileptic frenzy while Rayner grimly fought the controls - but the main drive didn't seem to respond. The telltales registered power consumption at the extravagant rate of maximum emergency thrust, but whatever maelstrom held the Hermes in its grip was implacably strong.

One sector of the heavens looked perfectly normal, with the usual bright panoply of stars - but directly ahead of the stricken Hermes, space itself resembled a seething mass of spilled black ink.

"It's a goddamned black hole - I must be light-centuries off course!" exclaimed Rayner, then his voice faltered to a broken whisper as oblivion claimed him, "But then, where the hell am I?"

With amnesia gone, timelessness stopped for Rayner - and sensation returned. Touch - somehow he sensed movement - therefore, spacelessness had also ceased. A red haze cleared from about his brain. Touch returned first, then sight.

Slowly and painfully, Rayner hauled himself upright in the padded contour seat. The cabin was in darkness, but with the ease of long practice, he activated a switch - and the auxiliary lights flickered fitfully on.

Dazzled by the sudden glare, he had to blink before peering at the forward view-screen.

Outside the Hermes there was nothing but darkness. There was no air. No stars. No universe, even. He was nowhere that anybody could describe or easily imagine.

He could have been in the day before Creation, when nothing of any kind had been made - except Rayner. Or he could have been in the day after Armageddon, when everything had been destroyed - except Rayner.

Then Rayner became aware of a faint nacreous glow that gave the impression of spanning infinite distances. The 'sky' was not entirely featureless. Innumerable tiny black dots - motionless, and distributed in a seemingly random manner - speckled the fantastic firmament.

Rayner compared these dark objects to stars - the whole panorama resembled a spectral photographic negative of the Milky Way galaxy.

Rayner was forced into deducing the most difficult of all possible things for a normal man. There was nothing to be done. So he was doing nothing - to be prepared for when something could be done.

Surrounding every black hole is what mathematicians termed the 'event horizon', inside which all the ordinary laws of physics break down. Nothing that is within the confines of this zone can ever escape out into the universe at large. All matter that is sent backward to remain locked always about the star. That is why it is called the event horizon - nothing happening inside can ever be witnessed by an external observer.

Rayner was marooned in a malignant microcosm. And when he arrived at the very heart of the black hole - its singularity, where the gravitational forces become infinite - he'd be crushed out of existence completely.

Orthodox theory held that these tidal forces increase indefinitely as the singularity is approached. Rayner's body would be elongated out to infinity and - simultaneously - its volume would be constantly reduced as he fell owing to the uniform compression prevailing at the centre.

But orthodox theory also maintained that an astronaut captured by a black hole will already have been killed long before he reaches the event horizon, never mind the singularity. Calculations 'prove' that a man of average weight and physique need only be a hundred kilometres away from a black hole before he is pulverized.

Nevertheless, Rayner was still very much alive, and, he grated savagely - "To hell with theory!"

Whistling in the dark - almost literally. Rayner was living on borrowed time, and the Grim Reaper was about to foreclose .....

Rayner knew that the most effective safeguard against despair and ultimate insanity was to think constructively about something ... anything. The first thing that came to mind was his own research program, which had confirmed the existence of 'Superspace' - a region that is like another universe alongside, or within our own.

According to Rayner's mathematical conjectures, gates to-and-from Superspace may exist everywhere, in the depths of interstellar space, the gulfs between galaxies - and even in the Solar System itself. However, it is well-nigh certain that such gates can only occur in black hole singularities.

Superspace is the dimension into which all the matter in the universe may eventually disappear,

swirling down a celestial funnel like water gurgling out of a bathtub..."

"But that can't be the whole story," mused Rayner, thinking out loud, "Physical laws decree that that the total amount of matter in the universe has got to remain constant, therefore matter must appear as fast as it disappears. Matter might re-emerge into another universe through a 'white hole' abruptly after disappearing down a black hole in our own universe."

Rayner lapsed into a pensive silence as his disciplined, logical mind carried this line of reasoning a stage further.....

There may even be a close link between black holes and the mysterious quasars - relatively small, incredibly distant bodies only a few light-years in diameter, that radiate more fiercely that a million-million Suns combined. Many astronomers have suggested that quasars are, in fact, gigantic white holes at the opposite end of a 'wormhole' from an equally gigantic black hole in another part of the universe.

At this point, Rayner's mind took leave of logic and soared into the realms of pure fantasy. Suppose - just suppose - that some ultra-advanced galactic civilization had devised a method of blocking gravitational affects so as to utilize wormholes as interstellar 'highways', building a far-flung cosmic empire in the process?

"And how does the wormhole hypothesis affect the future of the universe?" Rayner asked himself. "What prospects of immortality does it hold forth?" Continuous Creation ... Has the universe been expanding throughout all eternity without exceeding its present limits because the wormholes set up a closed circuit effect, transmitting matter back into the primordial 'cosmic egg' - or velm - to begin the process of expansion all over again?

The only hope of immortality may lie in such an oscillating universe. Nevertheless, everlasting life will not be of the commonly imagined kind but one in which there can be no relation at all between one cycle and the next owing to the tremendous scrambling of matter in the collapsed state.

It has even been speculated that true personal immortality may be attained by falling through a black hole singularity into its other dimensional counterpart. However, it may not be until the atoms of an astronaut and his spacecraft have been compressed out of all recognition at the singularity that the lock-gate opens and permits the matter to pass freely through Superspace.

Ruefully, Rayner discarded the idea of using Superspacial gateways as escape hatches to other universes as a wild impossibility, unless ....

No problem is beyond solution - given sufficient reliable data and enough time in which to work. Science lives by this basic premise. Without it, science withers and dies.

Even in this bitter extremity, Rayner could not ignore such a challenge to his scientific abilities. But he was perilously short of both data and time - especially the latter.

Then .... of course! - Rayner cursed himself for a fool. He had been overlooking the obvious solution.

There is one kind of matter that is inherently capable of escaping from a black hole - tachyonic matter. And the Hermes was designed to convert itself and everything aboard her into tachyons and thereby circumvent the light-speed barrier.

But Rayner knew that he must follow the line of least resistance by taking the Hermes straight through the singularity to whatever hypothetical para-universe lay beyond it. Any attempt at reversing the crippled tachyon-ship would be doomed to certain failure and total annhilation.

It was a colossal gamble - but one that Rayner would have to take.

The Hermes continued to plummet like a pebble cast down into a bottomless crevasse. Falling, falling ... ever deeper into the irresistable 'gravity sink'. The singularity itself became visible in the forward view-screen as a convoluted vortex of turbulent tidal forces and scintillating ions.

"There's no such thing as a second chance," mused Rayner as he programmed the on-board computer for imminent conversion to the tachyonic mode. But he hoped against hope that this cynical assertion had no foundation in fact.

Somehow, Rayner had to make amends for a squandered life.

"But I'm alone here. How can anyone do good all by himself? It's impossible!"

If only he hadn't been so ruthlessly egotistical in dealing with his fellow human beings - most of all in his abortive relationship with Lucille...

Lucille was a highly intelligent girl, but not an intellectual like Rayner, given to cold, systematical, logical thinking. An emotional, caring girl, she based her entire life-style on instinct and intuition. No doubt she had made a loving wife and maternity would have suited her.

"If only I'd understood," lamented Rayner, as his eyes blurred with a sudden misting of tears, "Lucy, darling - wherever you are, I'm sorry...."

But Rayner had one consolation. His failure to return should - hopefully - force UNASA into cancelling any further manned sorties into the tachyon universe until its nature was more clearly understood. A random factor may operate there, making accurate navigation within its continuum difficult, if not impossible. The nearest known black hole is 6,000 light-years distant from Earth, in the constellation of Cygnus - therefore Rayner and the Hermes had been hurled at least that far.

In any case, the future of Mankind lies among the stars. Once having set foot on this infinite road, he must not - dare not - retrace his footsteps to take refuge in his Earthly cradle.

Rayner had always accepted this credo as a basic act of faith, but now his entire being came alive to its magnificent implications. A virile, advancing culture cannot be confined to the surface of a single planet - to remain in cosmic isolation means spiritual stagnation and a protracted, ignoble death.

Even the Solar System itself must one day become uninhabitable. Long before then, however, Man will have found sanctuary on a plurality of worlds. And, taking the very long term view, perhaps humanity - or its evolutionary successors - may even somehow survive the heat-death of the universe.

On a more personal level, Rayner was poised at the threshold of a huge new world, standing before him like a great, eternal riddle. The contemplation of this world beckoned to him like a liberation.

At a point seemingly devoid of hope, Rayner had found a contentment he had never before experienced. To know the end of everything could be near and yet not to tremble at the prospect - that, he told himself with sudden pride, showed true courage, because there was no one here to applaud his moral victory.

There was still nothing but the familiar tight little cabin of the Hermes - which had become Rayner's private 'agutted cage'. Outside was ... nothingness ... or rather, something that by its very nature was imperceptible to human senses - like the blackness lurking within one's own subconscious mind. But soon ...?

The decisive moment arrived. Malcolm Rayner made peace with himself, humanity and whatever gods there be - then he recited an ambiguous epitaph - his final words in this, our universe -

'TO FOLLOW KNOWLEDGE LIKE A SINKING STAR
BEYOND THE UTMOST BOUNDS OF HUMAN THOUGHT.'

EXCUSE ME WHILE I LEAVE THE ROOM

an interview with Julia Riding

by Andy Sawyer

Julia Riding's first novel GABION was recently published by Robert Hale. Seeing an article about it in the local paper, I got in touch with Julia and asked if she would mind answering a few questions. This interview is the result. I hope it has some interest for people who are, as Julia was until recently, still at the "writing and hoping" stage.

Andy Sawyer

Q: How long have you been writing?

A: I have been writing in a serious way only about three years now, but my first actual putting of pen to paper started when I was about thirteen - needless to say with the discretion of years I have burned all my early efforts!

Q: When were your first serious efforts to become published rather than writing for yourself? Do you think this affected what you were writing - ie. did you have a "market" in mind?

A: I have never considered what I was writing to be saleable in the strict sense of the word. I wrote because it pleased me to write, because I wanted to. But in 1977 I saw a notice in our local library for the Wallasey Writers' Circle and I went along to find out what they were all about. It's not a specifically SF circle, in fact at the moment I'm the only SF writer there, most of the other writers being - if you pardon the expression - elderly. They write modern romantic stuff and short articles and poems. We have a cross-section of interest, however, and my readings are always well received. Membership varies, twenty-five is the most usual number, although during the summer we drop as low as twelve. We have twenty meetings a year, twice monthly, 7.45 to 10.00 p.m., with a break for refreshments, and mostly they are general meetings, with some specials, such as Short Story Competitions (with a prize), Article Competitions (with a prize), the Omnibus where everyone has to write 300 words in a serial, a Poetry Night and a Wallasey Night. In general we manage an outing every year to the BBC or ITV to see a play or a programme being broadcast, to give us ideas (not that it ever does).

I joined in 1977 on impulse really, and suffered agonies of embarrassment when I first went until I realised that everyone there was like me, unsure of themselves, and looking for an outlet for their writing. Once I was over that hurdle, and over the even bigger one of reading aloud and being criticised, I began to think that perhaps I should send a few things off, and promptly received my first rejection slips. I think it is a necessary step for a writer who is unsure of himself to join such a circle. It is very cheering to know that you are not alone. As to whether I ought to have joined an SF circle, I can think of nothing more daunting. I'm sure I would never have bothered to write another word if I had.

Q: How did you set about getting published?

A: To start with I purchased a copy of the Writers' and Artists' Yearbook, went through it, and marked all the publishers of SF. I went to the library also and found out which were the most popular publishers and writers. Then I made a list and began at A. Three rejections later I turned up Robert Hale and that was virtually that.

Q:What did you know, at the start, about the publishing business?

A: I knew nothing about publishing except what everyone picks up in a rather nebulous fashion. I knew a lot more about printing because my father was a printer before he retired. I merely knew that a publisher has to make a profit and therefore only publishes those books which he considers have a sale value.

Q: How did you find the "editing" stage? What sort of changes did the publisher insist on?

A: In GABION there were a great many alterations to be made before the book was in its present final form. The publishers' reader made most of the suggestions, and after I'd brooded on them for a while I understood what he was saying, and in fact it tightened up the book considerably.

Q: Can you give us some idea about your writing technique, how you get your ideas, number of drafts, etc. What is the hardest thing you find about writing?

A: As to how I write - well, I just do. I have no technique, no special formula. I have a seventeen-month old son, so I have a great deal of time to turn ideas over in my mind before committing them to paper. Then when I am ready I simply write them down. A preliminary long-hand draft is followed by long-hand corrections, a period of about a fortnight's thought, then either a completely new draft, or a rough typed copy which is further corrected by hand. As to ideas, they just come as they will. By the time they reach the typewriter stage they have usually changed drastically. The hardest thing about writing is the actual doing of it. I get very, very weary.

How do I find time to write? I could give you reams on this, but basically I do what I'm doing now - I say to my husband, "I'm going upstairs to do a bit of work", and disappear for an hour. Tonight being Monday, I'm not watching PANORAMA. Tomorrow he goes out, so I shall work after CHRONICLE. And so on. Please don't think I spend all evening curled up in front of the TV. I just watch to be companionable. I fit my writing in and around my home life. I do a lot of thinking whilst the baby is playing, and I put it down on paper when I can. I just write when I'm not doing other things.

Q: What attracts you to the science fiction type of story?

A: Because I can't write anything else. Not that I haven't tried. My agent kindly returns my efforts and I go back to SF. Basically I like the idea of a world where everything goes as I say. The people unfortunately don't, once they get hold of the plot, but the backgrounds do. I also like to weave drama out of the future. Doesn't that sound pretentious? I'm not a scientist, and would deny strenuously that I write "hard technology" SF. But I haven't gone all the way over to fantasy yet. That is to come, no doubt. I've only written four books (one published, one to be published in May, THE STRANGE LAND, and two still in draft).

Q: Do you read a lot of SF? If so, what particular types/ authors?

A: I read SF as if it was going out of fashion, I read anything and everything, but of course I have my favourites. I do dislike some modern stuff, which I can't understand either because it's becoming metaphysical or because the technology is too hard. Who are my favourite authors? Ursula LeGuin, whom I don't understand, is one. I enjoy reading her over and over again to try to see what she's getting at. I seldom do. I like Anne McCaffrey, Judith Merrill and Zenna Henderson. I read a lot of Robert Heinlein and Isaac Asimov, and usually go away marvelling. But SF books make up such a tiny fraction of my library. I doubt if your readers would be interested to know that some quirk of fancy dictates that there is nothing in my library more modern than the Second World War. Of individual authors I have mostly Jeffrey Farnol and Georgette Heyer.

Q: Do you have any contact with fandom, fanzine publishing and the like?

A: I have no contact with anything to do with publishing except my own publisher. I am not interested in amateur publishing, because it's a blind alley. If your work is good enough, send it up, and keep sending it up to publishers.

Q: Can you tell us how GABION came about?

A: GABION started life as a short plot sequence of people riding down a road in pouring rain on a strange planet, and needing help. That is literally the picture that first

CONTINUED ON P27


DARK THEY WERE
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■ GOING WEST YOUNG MAN?

RICHARD COWPER

I assume that roughly 95% of the readers of FOCUS will be British, and the days when we British purveyors of scientific romances could hope to make a reasonable living out of writing for an exclusively U.K. readership are long since past. Today we have to sell abroad or settle for eking out our lives on National Assistance. That being so, let me concoct a little fictional anecdote.

James Tyro, a young author (recently married) has written an sf novel which (let us assume) he has called The Emerod Factor (don't ask me why). He has sold this work to Messrs Maybe & Maybe (who have the second best sf list in the U.K.) and they have sub-leased the U.K. paperback rights to Pin Books Ltd. Jim's advance from these transactions amounts to some £2000 which is probably slightly better than average for a first novel but, even so, in these inflationary days, is not going to go far towards keeping his infant son supplied with Paddipads. Accordingly Jim's eyes turn towards the United States, lured thither by rumours of the fabulous advances which are currently being paid to the big-name professionals ($500,000 for Heinlein's latest is the one which particularly catches Jim's fancy).

Having listened to some sage advice our hero approaches a well-known literary agent and asks him if he would be prepared to negotiate the book in the States. The agent agrees to do so and, a couple of months later, Jim gets a phone call telling him that Messrs Trebleday Inc. have offered $2000 as an advance on royalties for a hardback edition of his book. There is also an excellent chance that The Emerod Factor will be selected for the U.S. Science Fiction Book Club which, coincidentally, Messrs Trebleday also happen to control. Manfully swallowing his disappointment that he hasn't hit the $500,000 jackpot at his first attempt, Jim rushes round to the "One Tun" and celebrates till closing time.

Time passes. The Emerod Factor by James Tyro is duly published in the States. It does not get selected for the S.F.B.C. but, a few months later, Jim learns from his agent that Dill Books Inc. have bought the paperback rights from Trebleday for $5000. Jim, naturally, is overjoyed, but his delight is somewhat tempered when a cheque eventually arrives for a paltry £437.00. A hurried phone call to his agent elicits the information that this sum represents his on-signing 50% of the paperback sale to Dill Books less $782 unearned advance on the Trebleday hardback edition, less the American agent's fee, less his U.K. agent's fee, less V.A.T. and less the bank charges - and he still has income tax to pay on it! Jims scrubs his idea for a second visit to the "One Tun" and settles for six small cans of Export Lager from the off-licence round the corner.

Later Jim receives six copies of the Dill edition of his book. The cover is almost certain to be in execrable taste, bearing no conceivable relation to anything written in the book, and will quite possibly scare his infant son into a fit. By this time the original Trebleday hardback edition has been expeditiously pulped and Tyro, tipped off by a writer friend, decides to request "reversion of rights" from Trebleday. He now discovers that so long as any edition of his book is still in print in the States in any form whatsoever he will not be able to regain legal control of it. He also discovers that the 'licence to reprint' which Trebleday has negotiated with Dill Books operates for 5 years from the first day of publication of the Dill edition.

Tyro continues to write. For his next book Trebleday (who of course have the first option on his next two novels) make the same offer as before. With the rent overdue and another baby on the way, Jim is constrained to agree. This time he does rush out to celebrate his good fortune. Truth to tell, he assailed by DOUBT. This takes the form of a sensation as of a bony, spectral hand clutching him fast by the goolies. He consoles himself with the reflection that in another eighteen months or so he will at last be able to request the reversion of rights in his first book.

Eventually he does just that (by Recorded Delivery) and hears nothing. When the specified year is up he writes again to Trebleday and points out that, by his reckoning, all rights in The Emerod Factor have now reverted to him. Some three months later he receives a cheque for £137.52 which, his agent informs him, represents his 50% of the on-signing fee (less usual deductions) for the re-sub-leased volume rights in The Emerod Factor to Salami Press Inc. An agonised phone call extracts the information that Trebleday are acting within their legal rights since the new contract with Salami Press was signed within the original stipulated 5 year time limit - in fact, as Jim shrewdly deduces, it must have been negotiated very shortly after Trebleday received his recorded delivery request for reversion. Furthermore, this new sub-lease automatically extends the original licence by a further 5 years! Tyro acquires the haunted look and the nervous tic which is the hall mark of the true professional.

The above can be read as a cautionary tale. I think it is one which all British writers of sf would be well advised to ponder upon. Put in its starkest form, the message amounts to this: Think long and hard before you sell your work to an American hardback publisher. Only consider... Had Jim Tyro sold directly to Dill Books Inc. he would have received $5000 (less his agent's fee). He would not have debarred his book from possible selection for the S.F.B.C.. He would not have had to share any proceeds from further impressions of his book with Dill who, if they had reissued it themselves, would have paid him either full royalty rate or an appropriate advance. Admittedly, Jim would have had to forgo his U.S. hardback advance and the questionable kudos of having a second hardback edition of The Emerod Factor on his shelves with which to impress the landlord when he called, but there is little doubt in my mind that had the choice been presented to him in the terms which I have outlined in this little fiction, Jim would have opted for the cash and let the credit go.

The sales of hardback sf in the States are not large and (as in the U.K.) are mainly to libraries. Possibly for the Asimovs, Heinleins and Herberts of this world it is different, but for the purposes of my argument they must be the exceptions which prove the rule. By and large the U.S. hardback publishers of sf are constrained to earn their profits out of their control of the subsidiary rights in the books which they publish. If the split were 30% to the publisher, 70% to the author, one could live with it, but the present going rate for the average British sf author is 50/50 and so long as it remains that way (and so long as I have the choice) I will continue to opt for original paperback publication in the U.S.A..

It seems to me that the case for going first into hardback in the States applies principally to native American writers who, I suspect, may be offered more advantageous terms vis-a-vis the subsidiary rights split. They also, I presume, require the evidence of a hardback edition for reasons of prestige and the gaining of some initial press coverage. Neither of these factors applies to British writers who have their own U.K. market to take care of such things. Furthermore, 'original paperbacks' are becoming ever more common in the States and are receiving critical notice accordingly.

The case for British authors opting out of the U.S. hardback market in favour of going straight into original paperbacks strikes me as virtually unassailable. But I could be wrong and I should be most interested to hear the views of other writers who have had experience on this particular battlefront.

■ TOO ESSEFFY FOR WORDS

GARRY KILWORTH

Consider the following statement: "Hogan's Goat will jump in sixty seconds." Keen Larry Niven fans will recognise that line as being from his story story "One Face", and they will know exactly what Niven means. A single 'convention' in the sentence imparts a great deal of information to sf fans - the word 'jump'. It tells them that the Hogan's Goat is not a customised car from King's Road but a starship able to span galaxies. Moreover, the ship has a human crew, and therefore is probably from Earth; and the motive force - the 'drive' - is 'Faster Than Light' (FTL) and not a slow, 'generation' ship.

If I go on putting the esseffy words in inverted commas the page will look like a shotgun blast. I think the point has been illustrated. Even when one attempts to expound sf words, more jargon creeps into the explanation. If one has not been raised on Science Fiction from the cradle it becomes difficult to break through the barriers. Not impossible, but as a generic reader the human race is essentially a lazy beast. It is far easier to remain a reader of general fiction where one knows what the hell the author is talking about.

Of course, not all sf writers use jargon, nor need to. I think you could spend a lot of time with a Christopher Priest novel and probably still come away empty handed. In my own humble opinion Priest is winning. The less sf jargon, the wider the possible readership. What are commonplace conventions to sf fans - hyperdrives, warps, flatearthers, belters, antigravs, espers, etceteras (etceteras?) - are incomprehensible to most outsiders. Star Trek and Star Wars have educated a larger proportion of the non-esseffy public, if you wish to use a word like 'educate' in this context.

There are fundamental problems for the sf writer, especially when dealing with an alien world or race. Many of these trouble spots are associated in some way with time and distance. Extraterrestrials who speak of miles, inches, hours and years just do not reach that level of foreignness, that sense-of-wonder plane, for which we read sf. Therefore the writer has to invent words that are onomatopoetic in construction. Hopefully they become conventions, then at least all those in the sf field will know what the writer means when he says 'two collapsar jumps, ten months subjective'. (Awful, isn't it? But what can you expect from a novel of the future where soldiers are still digging foxholes on alien planets!)

Many conventional terms are connected with human shape and form. Cyborgs (derived from cybernetic organisms); robots (from the Czech robota, compulsory service, used in Karel Čapek's play R.U.R.); androids and humanoids; they litter our literature and people our pages, as numerous as the tongues that wagged on Nimord's tower. Many of our monsters and machines have human shape.

You could say that sf conventions come to acceptance in two ways: generation-ship-style (ie, slowly) or by FTL. The latter would normally arrive via the pen of a Big Name Writer such as Heinlein. Recently I saw the use of the word 'clicks' being applied to a measurement of distance. One was in Heinlein's The Number of The Beast and the other in Lee Killough's novel A Voice Out of Ramah. Although I think Heinlein is a highly overrated writer, he does have this knack of choosing the right sounding words. Several 'clicks' might be a movement through space or time, or between parallel worlds. (In current slang, 'clicks' are kilometers or kilometers-per-hour, though I can't see Heinlein using such a small measurement for trips between galaxies.) I attempted an experiment to see what sort of scale one might use. Taking some heavy, useless objects - a certain American writer's novels - I threw them one at a time as far as I could, clicking my fingers until they hit the ground. I didn't manage to calculate a scale because I got carried away with jettisoning the ballast, but I was able to clear some shelf space.

Incidentally, the other day, I was looking through some Ballard stories in search of conventional terms - I had the idea that Ballard was using near-fantasy references to give his story settings a timeless quality, eg. the dwarf 'with eyes like crushed flowers' from "Cloud-Sculptors of Coral D". Anyway, I was re-reading "Track 12" when a familiar phrase hit me: 'his legs and arms had become enormous, like the bloated appendages of a drowned giant.' "Track 12" appeared in 1958 and "The Drowned Giant" in 1964. Here you have a man who clones his new stories from his own previous creations.

Which leads me into 'clone'. There appear to be two main types of jargon in science fiction. There are the 'invented' words, which fill a vacuum, and there are those words already in the dictionary which sf writers make popular through continued use. Examples of the first type might be the 'gom jabbar' from Dune (playing on a racial needlephobia!) or to 'grok' from Stranger In A Strange Land. Who knows, some of these esseffy word constructions may reach the dictionary eventually - many of them are bastardised from Latin or Greek in any case. But words like 'clone', a botanical term for transplants from an original stock (or an asexually produced individual) could, until recently, probably be used with success in a game of "Call My Bluff" at a Chelsea party. Outside of sf it was rarely used in everyday conversation. Then came a spate of usage of the word from the science fiction field, though sf writers tend to embellish the original meaning. (SF clones tend to be telepathic amongst themselves - ie, a single brain shared by several bodies.)

Richard Cowper used the word 'clone' to title his novel of his likeable hero(es) Alvin. We recently had The Boys From Brazil (about clones of Adolf Hitler) doing the cinema circuits, and an American claims to have knowledge of the existence of a human clone for which he refuses to offer proof but insists his book will reveal all, if only someone would pay one million in advance royalties. Furthermore, the fact field seems to have moved in the direction of cloning amphibians and televising the same. Once it reaches films and TV, an esseffy word cannot remain sacrosanct to fans. No longer can they whisper it in a public gathering, knowing that any response will identify a fellow conspirator. No longer can they use it as a Freemason uses that peculiar handshake to find friends among the neuters. It becomes a 'popular' word. ("Mornin' Mrs Entwhistle. How's your poor old clones today?")

There is a third type of jargon, less used than either the invented or popularised terms. This is the replacement of a commonly-used word for alien effect. The best example I can give you of this comes from Tanith Lee's Don't Bite The Sun, where 'hello' becomes *attlevey* and *tosky* means 'neurotic'. There are some beautiful obscenities amongst them which you can use at Auntie Nellie's tea parties without raising an eyebrow. (*Farathoom, I've dropped my flooping sandwich!*)

To conclude, I believe that wherever an author is able he or she should resist the urge to use esseffy jargon. It's the fan rather than the writer in us than owns the small voice calling for genre in-talk. But just as there is said to be no such thing as a rich Mexican (once they have wealth they become expatriate Spaniards), there is no such thing as a fan that writes novels, only authors that were once fans. It's two sides of a whole. It would be nice to remain a fan, with all its delightful, enthusiastic involvement but unfortunately once one is committed to the world of the undead there is a different kind of responsibility to consider. The art appreciator becomes the artist, the viewer becomes the doer, and however much one may wish to cling to the joyfulness of fannish pastimes, for the writer sf becomes the serious business of living and eating - and of communicating as clearly as possible with the reader.

WRITING IN THE DARK

TONY RICHARDS

Looking back, I'd say the past two years have been some of the toughest in my life. Reason? For the past two years I have been holding down two very demanding jobs: in-house editing from 9 till 5, and writing in the evenings. I'm not alone in my madness. I'd guess that most of the readership of FOCUS are in the same position. I cannot give you any password to get out of that spot, and neither can the few full-timers. There is no password. What I'd like to try to do is pass on some of the things I have learnt and which have helped me through those wee dark hours when the clacking of typewriter keys becomes a substitute for snoring. I hasten to add that these are not absolutes. The author accepts no responsibility for the personal vagaries of his audience.

I've said there is no password to success. There is, however, a keyword which will always help: professionalism. If that conjures up an immediate vision of someone rich and famous sitting at his desk surrounded by contracts and deadlines, it shouldn't. So few people understand that you don't need to be full-time to have a professional attitude. You don't even need to have sold! Professionalism is a state of mind, a level of existence and attitude. And so, conversely, is amateurishness. The first thing to get clear in your head is how you are going to approach your work. Perhaps you don't even want to go full-time? That is irrelevant. When you sit down in front of that typewriter, you must know whether you're doing so seriously or not. It's the difference, say, between painting your house or scrawling graffiti, between potting clay pigeons or fighting a war. I use that last metaphor advisedly.

If you opt for the former approach (and you must opt unconditionally; there's no such thing as a sometimes maybe sort-of professional) it means, firstly, never letting yourself or other people down. It means always writing at your best. It means developing your own self-critical faculties and reacting reasonably, though not subserviently, to the criticism of others. It means sticking to deadlines as promised, keeping up with the market, never getting discouraged. It means sending your article for FOCUS in on time.

I'm pontificating, sure. No one, not even the most reliable of writers, scores top marks on that checklist. Most fall far short. But the goals are always there, the impossible stars ever reached for.

I'll deal with most of the above points later on.

Let's start with basic mechanics. They may seem the least important aspect of writing, probably are, but adherance to them will save you a lot of hassle and heartache later on. Gone are the days of manuscripts in red ink on pink Basildon Bond, stories dumped at the back of damp closets, works lost in the post and then forgotten. Make sure your manuscripts are always neat and workmanlike - it won't improve the quality of the story, but it will improve the temper of some migraine-ridden editor out there. Keep records of where and when you've sent your work, and keep a track on it. Institute a filing system for your MSS and carbons. (No need to go in for one of those expensive metal jobs; my 'filing cabinat' is a large cardboard box bearing the legend: Kjeldans Butter Cookies.) Record any rights you sell for future reference, and make sure the words 'All Rights' or 'World Rights' never appear on that record. Open an Ideas File. Carry a jotter with you to capture that brilliant storyline which comes when you're running for the 7:45. Keep that same jotter by your bed and learn, oh yes, learn to write in the dark. Retain receipts, and book down all your tax-deductable expenses. Get a list of such. I recommend you to the Writers' & Artists' Yearbook. May I not recommend you, incidentally, to the list of magazines and journals in that same publication, not without double-checking. It goes out of date with frightening speed.] In short, organise.

Schedule is the next problem, and the one which most worries part-time writers. Should I stick to a rigid schedule? How many hours? How many pages? From my experience, the answer to the first question should definitely be yes. TV, one's social life, household affairs and suchlike always provide good excuses to be sidetracked. Having a schedule provides just enough guilt-feeling to override my exhaustion. As to how many hours or pages, how many can you cope with?

Then we come to meeting editors, talking with writers. Making contacts. People complain that it's impossible to do this while they're living outside London, but they're wrong. Such an attitude speaks of provincial thinking far more than provincial location. Because, unless you're a bedridden, pannikless, multipla-amputee who lives at the bottom of Cheddar Gorge you can get to an sf club or convention. Writers and editors of either will be there. You're luckier than your counterparts in thrillers or mainstream; they don't have that kind of network. So, at your next convention, give up some of your beer-buddy time and spend it talking to the people who work in the field, and listen to them. From the editors you'll get interest in your work, advice, direction. From the writers you'll get grapevine talk, which markets are available, which agents are signing on, who's available, who isn't.

And how to approach these dazzling demigods? Well, treat them as human beings, not merely 'contacts'. Be polite but not shy. And never, ever, let yourself be put down. Of the very few things which will support you through the dark, dismal times of rejection slips and non-interest, self-respect is the most vital. Being ever-so-'umble might have been okay for Uriah Heep, but then he wasn't trying to break into FASF.

As for your own ambitions - whether you write for the market or for yourself, for catharsis or purely for publication - that is entirely your own business. No one is coming down from the mountain in this column, and the only tablets I can offer are aspirins. Disabuse yourself, though, of visions of instant wealth. If you want riches, be a lawyer, a dentist, a pornographer. Not a writer.

While we're on the subject of money, how about your daytime job? How many different jobs have you actually done? My favourite quote on writing came from Alfred Bester when he said, "I write twenty-four hours a day." Which means, crudely, get out into that world and live, and live, and gain experience and store it, and then come home and write it in your stories. Different jobs mean different experiences, different people, different perspectives. The uncut cloth of fiction is at your fingertips. You spend one third of each week at your job. Use it.

I have to wind up now, though I could fill the magazine from cover-to-cover on this theme. It strikes me, though, that I cannot end like this. I've painted a rather gloomy picture. It's a true one; writing in the dark is wearying, frustrating, and sometimes you think you'll never see the light.

There is a bright side. Namely, the knowledge and discipline you'll gain will always tide you through your writing years. Because if you can write in the dark and keep on writing then, brother, nothing will stop you.

■ THE LANGFORD FILES

PAUL BARNETT

It was through Mike Scott Rohan that I first heard the name Langford. "Langford's a bloody loonie," said Mike, "and deaf with it. But he's a bloody good writer, and he knows a hell of a lot about blowing things up."

At the time the words went in one ear and, tEapped by alcohol fumes, stayed there. I was only to recall them some eighteen months later when I brilliantly conceived the idea for a book on the possible and predictable future of military technology, to be called War In 2080. The problem was finding somebody to write it. I vaguely remembered the name Langford, and phoned the ever-helpful Mike, asking him if he thought that Langford might want to earn some money writing a book for me.

Thirty seconds later I was dictating a letter. Would he like to write this brilliantly conceived book? I asked. Would he like to get together to discuss it? And, if so, would he recommend a good hotel in Reading where we could meet?

Dave, to give him credit, did offer the services of "our somewhat seedy accommodation" when he replied. However, I'd been caught out in the past by having accepted a night's lodging from an author only to discover, about halfway through dinner, that we couldn't stand each other; so I declined, and reiterated my request for the name of a good hotel. Ever the practical joker, Dave suggested the Roebuck, on the outskirts of Reading.

And it was there I arrived one evening, ready to brief him. At this stage I had only a very sketchy idea of the structure of the book which I envisaged - something slightly unusual for me, since I generally would have thrashed out at least some sort of draft synopsis on the typewriter. Although the function of this draft synopsis is purely as a discussion document, I've found that in something like 50% of cases the structure of the final book follows it reasonably closely: this is not to suggest that the authors concerned are hacks, just that with many subjects there is a "righter" method of approach than most of the others, and that I've been lucky enough to hit upon it. Even if the final book doesn't resemble in the slightest my draft synopsis, I don't think the exercise is a waste of time; simply by trying to work out the structure I can prove to myself, before approaching a potential author, that at least my half-baked idea is actually workable.

With this book, however, my only set ideas on structure were that the text should be divided into three main parts running, as it were, chronologically into the future: the latest developments of today; things that were likely (or possibly unlikely) to happen over the next hundred years or so, with Man confined largely to the inner planets; and the far future, where one could have tremendous fun designing planet-busters and galaxy-smashers.

These thoughts were swirling around in my mind as I arrived at the Roebuck. To boldly venture up its dusty staircase to my bedroom required courage. The room itself more than fulfilled all my worst expectations. The bed had been left behind by a visiting fakir. The blanket was see-through. The shower ("All our rooms have private showers!") was a curious arrangement which I'd never seen before: it folded out of the wall and covered the end of the bed with cold water. It covered me with cold, and only cold, water until, during an intimate stage of the showering procedure, the temperature suddenly shot up by about 200°C. I had a scotch to warm myself up while trying to dry myself with what I had first assumed to be a J-cloth. Dressed but clammy, I stumbled down to the bar to await Dave.

I'd suggested to him earlier that perhaps we'd better have some sort of system for recognising each other ("You'll recognise me by the stick of rhubarb in my ear") but "No need!" Langford had said: "We've met before."

As I bought my pint and found a seat in the corner it came home to me that I couldn't remember our having met before. His assurances that I had been hungover at the time and would be bound to recognise him rang hollow in my ears. The appointed time came and went. What if Langford were sitting at a different table, waiting for whoever he thought were he to turn up, I mused. I steeled myself to begin asking around.

Members of the Reading Vice Squad were just beginning to take an interest in my activities when a burly figure

thrashed me on the shoulder and asked if I was Paul Barnett.

"Yes," I replied.

"What?"

"Yes," I replied more loudly.

In that crystalline moment was forged the unique bond between author and editor, something incredibly important if the book is to have any chance of being a good one. It's a difficult bond to describe - unlike, say, marriage - but from personal experience I know that, if it is successfully established, what might have been a bad book emerges as an adequate one, what might have been an adequate book is instead a good one, etc. Generally an editor knows almost instantly whether this rapport is going to manifest itself; authors take longer and indeed may never realise that it has happened, simply because an author writes only one or two books a year (at most) while an editor may commission fifty, and consequently is more used to it all. The converse, where the bond is not forged, can be disastrous: I've several times commissioned extremely fine writers and known from the word "go" that the book is going to be a painful one - not because we don't like each other but simply because we don't...er...grok.

Most of the (few) editors I know have had the same experience. I'm currently working on two projects whose authors are at the opposite ends of every spectrum - political, moral, even age - from myself, and yet I know that the "bond" is going to work (and is working). There have been authors I've liked and admired enormously; but while I've respected their work and they mine, I've known from the start that things were not going to work smoothly.

Anyway, Dave and I were lucky. (Or so I think. He may have been thinking: "Jeez. How in hell am I going to be able to work with this creep?") In short, we had a drink. Then another drink.

Talking the while about everything except the nature of the proposed book, we found our way with difficulty to the hotel restaurant, and soon wished we hadn't. I will never forget the steak I had: it added a whole new meaning to the word "rare", still having ice crystals on the inside. We began to talk about the book inbetween my futile attempts at technicolor yawns in the gents. We continued to talk about the book - at great and rambling length - as we returned to the bar for a few more rounds of drinks. Dave agreed with everything I said. I agreed with everything he said.

"I want 5000 words of specimen text in three weeks..." I began.

"Impossible!"

"...and I'll give you £100 for it."

"No problem."

Stung by the thought of money, eight pints of beer, a bottle of wine and a few shorts, he staggered off into the night while I located my bedroom.

Some while later a synopsis and specimen text arrived. It was all right in places. I decided to commission, and sent Dave a superbly generous contract. This he attacked, dreams of being a tax exile no doubt filling his mind, and deftly removed all the most generous bits. (I recently negotiated a contract where the author insisted on a change being made despite the fact that I had pointed out to him that, because of the change, if he died while writing the book we would be legally obliged to sue his widow. Lots of other authors have their own little ways of making sure they lose money. Some whittle away at the percentages for subsidiary rights to the extent that it's not in the publisher's interest to sell them; quite a few are so difficult about ephemera that the publisher eventually thinks of Joe Snoakes around the corner who can do the book just as well for a fiver; some ask for silly advances - although I once acquired a very successful book simply because I offered a smaller advance than the competition: the author had tax problems; some insist on changes which would involve the publisher hiring an extra accounts department, and ignore evermore generous offers which would enable the publisher to avoid doing that; some authors successfully ensure that they never reach print. These are pitfalls also stumbled into by some agents - not those who are worth their percentage.)

The contract was duly signed, and there was a long silence. Occasionally I would drop Dave a line. "How are you getting on?"

"Not as quickly as I'd expected. You see, with Skycon coming up and Martin Hoare's computer..."

In the end, the text arrived on time. Apart from the usual scattering of typing errors, it was more or less acceptable. Also, it was double spaced. I took my blue pencil to all the silly bits and was left with some of the chapter headings. I checked the maths here and there and wished I hadn't. After prolonged hacking I phoned Dave with three carefully selected minor suggestions which I knew he'd agree to and hoped that, for the rest of it, he would forget he had originally written and assume that he was a genius.

Which is exactly what happened. In due course the book appeared and everybody said what a jolly good book it was and wasn't Langford a good writer and could they borrow a copy because £5.95 seemed rather a lot; and Langford stopped heading his letters to me "Hail o great and mighty one" in favour of "Hi there, scum". And sadly did I watch as his pleasing servility was replaced by sheer, downright arrogance. (Just for the hell of it, I bought a short story from him and commissioned his second book.)

Time passed and my sorrow diminished. But a few days ago a xerox of a couple of pages of FOCUS came through the post, and I read with growing fury an article by Dave packed with slanders and libels and suggesting that he deserved any credit whatsoever for writing the book. Even though he had scrawled "with profuse apologies" at the top of it, there was no way that I could ever be mollified.

But I suppose I'll have to start buttering him up again. You see, I got this brilliantly conceived project and I'm desperate for an author for it...

JULIA RIDING - P22 CONTINUED

formed in my mind, and from there it grew outwards to encompass a complete plot. My plots occur like photographs, and in my mind they proceed like a snapshot album. After I'd written the first draft of GABION I put it away and started something else. But then I got it out, re-read it, decided the basic idea was sound, and started all over again, from a different angle. As I said before, I wouldn't have dreamed of sending it up if it hadn't been for the Circle.

Q: Do you find that having an agent is more effective than casting around the market yourself? What sort of advice do you like to receive from your agent?

A: I don't know whether it's more effective to have an agent or not, because I had three rejections before I found Robert Hale. When I was accepted by them I took advice, and found an agent through a mutual friend. She certainly gives me her frank opinion on my work, which is what I like to hear. And the best sort of advice she gives me is the sort that is accompanied by a cheque.

Q: What sort of time-span exists between finishing a novel and actually seeing it in print?

A: GABION is a special case because there were so many alterations. It was never really "finished". But it's six months or more between contract-signing and publication. It's not frustrating, because I'm heartily sick of the book by then, having had to proof-read it, and I don't mind reading every word, but when I have to read every exclamation mark and comma, it's very tiring indeed. My next book by then is probably in its second draft, if not finished. As I say, I have all the time in the world to think about my plots, and very little time to write, so I tend to work in great chunks.

Q: What future plans have you for your writing? Will you stay with science fiction for further novels, or try the American magazines, or will you expand your writing to the wider "non-SF" field?

A: Future plans extend no further than SF at the moment. My books wouldn't sell in American markets, of that I am sure. I don't write "hard" SF. As to expanding into other markets, I've tried that and been rejected. I write SF only at the moment. In another thirteen years ask me how I'm getting on. I've only just started.

Thank you, Julia Riding.

Letters

CHARLES PLATT, LONDON W.11

I admire your industry and dedication in producing FOCUS, but I have mixed feelings about the purpose of the magazine. Thirty or so years ago, it used to take a lot of dedication and courage and idealism to be a science fiction writer; there was no money in it, no status, and fewer markets. The writers who emerged, then, shared a special quality -- a shared conviction, a purity of intent. Today, you don't have to make any sacrifices to write SF: it's lucrative, respectable, and there are endless guides and courses and writing workshops, enabling young writers to achieve a basic level of proficiency much more easily. If I say I don't entirely approve of this situation, I will sound like a puritan or an old fart; but I don't approve, because the change in the field has encouraged the growth of facile writing by ambitious and sometimes opportunistic newcomers. There's a parallel with medicine: so long as being a doctor doesn't pay well (eg. a general practitioner in the NHS), the profession attracts only those who are dedicated to medicine. As soon as being a doctor becomes lucrative and prestigious (eg. specialists working in the USA), sharp operators move in. They may be equally well-trained, but they lack that pure dedication.

A magazine like FOCUS makes it still easier for newcomers to become science fiction writers. You may argue that the more writers there are, the more competition there will be, and hence the higher the standards; yet it seems not to work that way. My personal experience influences me: I found it extremely easy to enter the SF-writing field myself (I was lucky, and I started during a small boom period) and this didn't do anything for the quality of my work back then. There is something to be said for going through a harder apprenticeship.

On another topic: Chris Priest's discussion of submitting finished manuscripts vs. submitting portion-and-outline is mostly invalidated by his reliance on data published by the SFWA. I am out of touch with British publishing, but I know that in the USA most editors are reluctant to spell out their real policies in the SFWA BULLETIN because it attracts such notoriously awful submissions. The truth is that all the editors I know can be persuaded to buy a book on the basis of seeing a portion-and-outline of it (including Berkley, despite Chris's mentioning of them as being opposed to buying outlines). What influences an editor is the amount of evidence guaranteeing that the writer will go ahead and write the book properly, and deliver it on time. This evidence can take the form of a) the author's past performance, b) recommendations from a literary agent or other author, c) the impression created by personal contact with the author. The author who seems professional and businesslike will naturally find it easier to sell a book on the basis of an outline.

Whether the author prefers this method is, of course, another matter. I know various people (from Tubb to Van Vogt) who hate to write outlines, and find it almost impossible to do so. I know others who won't work any other way. Personally I prefer to sell an outline, for two reasons: it gives you confidence to write the book (you know someone's waiting for it), and it's much easier to change an outline as a result of editorial criticism than it is to change a completed manuscript. Also, if you sell an outline, you are given a delivery date for the finished book, which acts as an incentive to the writing of it; on the other hand, you get money right away, which is a disincentive.

Christopher Priest replies: Platt makes a valid enough point. I acknowledge that what publishers say in print in their "market reports" and what they do in practice can frequently be different, but to find this out you have to meet the people involved. How many of us are in personal contact with editors? How many, for that matter, are even members of the SFWA? I assume that FOCUS is intended to bridge the gap between writers and publishers, and to get a fair distillation of what publishers are at least saying is a start. (All my quotes from publishers were strictly verbatim, incidentally.) However, if the market reports in SFWA err towards the cautious or discouraging, then it only reinforces the larger and more important point of my article: that it is dangerous to see an outline as an easy short-cut to writing a book. Clearly, most publishers concur with this

ANDY SAWYER, BIRKENHEAD

I was impressed by FOCUS - what more can I say? I did have doubts as to whether an "SF Writers' Magazine" would prove of interest to those of us who aren't/don't particularly want to be/lack the ability to be, SF writers. But as far as I'm concerned, the whole thing was a winner. Andrew Stephenson, especially, brought out how much work is involved in writing before you get to the typewriter. Considering that my own "obligatory novel" is stuck at the outline of Chapter 12, I shudder!

I was particularly interested by Douglas Hill's article, as it has long been my contention that SF for children is - how can I put it tactfully? - even worse than SF for adults. I come across a fair amount of stuff in my work as a librarian, and I've found that while children's fantasy is of a high order, SF which is published as children's SF tends to be of the Patrick Moore variety in which fully-rounded sixteen-year-old astronauts have to have the facts of 'O' Level chemistry explained to them - in general lacking the energy and pace of your standard TV fare and lacking even the more sophisticated values you might expect. Why is that, I wonder? Could it be that fantasy writers are part of "children's literature" (remembering "Alice", "Wind in the Willows" etc.) whereas SF is for adults.

Generally speaking, if a kid is reading SF by age 12 - 14, he or she is reading "adult" stuff. (Yet so much SF seems designed for adolescents. I'm not saying that in a pejorative sense but simply as a fact.) Is it market pressures - adult SF is where the money is - or a sense among writers that "if you're so good, why aren't you writing for adults?" Whatever the reason, I hope that more SF writers turn to the children's field, even if to produce good action/adventure SF rather than bad. I know from my own experience that there are a lot of kids who are deeply into SF, be it STAR WARS, BATTLESTAR GALACTICA, BIONICS or DOCTOR WHO, yet who find the novels written about them too difficult to read.

I approached the fiction with some wariness, but although I felt that Jonathan Post's piece was, oh, I don't know, the sort of thing I'd think was good in a fanzine, Simon Ounsley's story was more "authentic".

Douglas Hill replies: Of course I must agree with Andy Sawyer, since he is good enough to agree with me. I, too, hope that more writers return to children's sf. They're needed by those kids whose age (or reading age) keeps them as yet from the adult stuff; as I tried to point out, there must be some intermediary, evolutionary stages between "Peter Rabbit and the Moonmen" and "Dhalgren". No doubt that is why many leading American writers have never hesitated to write "juveniles" - Silverberg, Harrison, Heinlein, make your own list. British writers, it's time to follow suit.

RICHARD COMPER, DITTISHAM

Let me say at the outset that I am the ideal - the quintessential - consumer for magazines which concern themselves with "writers' shop". Give me half a chance to plug at the particular nipple and I'll guzzle away blissfully all the livelong day. Reading about other writers' problems is so much more enjoyable than trying to cope with one's own. FOCUS was delicately for me. I read it avidly from cover to cover and, having done so, decided that I might as well chip in with my own pennyworth. After all, who knows but that my words may strike a chord in some other aching breast out there...

Readers should see TALKING POINTS for the particular nipple on which Richard has chosen to guzzle.

JOHN FRASER, GREASBY

I think you've made a good first issue. The articles are informative as well as entertaining. My only comment is that I'd like to see more under the MARKETSPACE heading, ie. on magazines, publishers, etc., as apart from the unpredictable fanzines, there doesn't seem to be many markets in this country.

So would we! But unfortunately we can only report on markets that exist, and the sad fact is that in this country we have only one paying magazine at the moment - AD ASTRA. Original anthology series do not sell well, and anthologies comprising new or unknown writers are even less saleable. Editors of such anthologies therefore tend to approach established writers directly and do not frequently advertise their requirements to a general audience.

SIMON DUNSLEY, LEEDS

I think my favourite piece was Dave Langford's. The man's energy is an inspiration! When I sit down at the typewriter after a day's work at the office, and fling myself nodding off to sleep, I come to doubt that it's possible to write a full-length book and hold down a job at the same time. Langford's piece destroys this illusion, which is very encouraging. I suggest you feature a series of articles about people who have written novels in incredibly short spaces of time and under impossible odds, to encourage the faint-hearted amongst us.

Only Ken Bulmer's article investigated the business of writing in its strictest sense, and I thought it was a worthy attempt to discuss what must be, even for an experienced professional, to a large extent a sub-conscious process. As I have very limited time in which to write, one of my particular problems has been continually having to start work from where I left off the last time; the need to produce a narrative which flows, and doesn't have stops and starts in it which reflect the interrupted writing process. On reading the article, I realised that I'd occasionally been sub-consciously using the technique of re-writing the last section in order to get started again. Now that I know this, I'm using it regularly and intend to try the other techniques which Ken mentioned if the needs arise. If other writers could suggest similar techniques, I would find them very useful. Research is really something of a luxury for a non-pro. If you write in your spare time, then it's because you enjoy writing, and therefore you want to spend as much time doing that as possible. You've got ideas and images in your head which you want to get down on paper, and the idea of having to correlate them with what may be tedious facts may not be an attractive one. Maybe the reason that so many would-be writers choose sf and fantasy is because it's possible to get by with so much less research than in other genres. They're both a fairly pure product of the writer's imagination.

Nevertheless, I did a bit of rudimentary research for the PHOENIX story, which consisted primarily of looking up the entry for "reptiles" in the encyclopaedia. I was a bit concerned about making the lizard-like Candellians hermaphrodite when Earthly lizards aren't, so I looked up the well-thumbed section on "reproduction" in order to find a type of creature which the readers would be more willing to accept as hermaphrodites. The best one I could find was the barnacle, and I toyed for a moment or two with the idea of making the Candellians intelligent barnacle-like creatures. This might, I supposed, give the story greater credibility. Luckily, after a few more months of thought, I reversed my opinion.

That is a fairly silly example. I suppose, but it does point out the fact that, for the inexperienced writer at least, an sf story can be over-researched. It can sometimes make them less, rather than more, credible and tempt the writer to include a plethora of facts which may be boring and unnecessary. Sometimes pure imagination, coupled with common sense, can be more effective. My main criticism of FOCUS 1, in fact, is that rather too much emphasis was placed on research, although to be fair you did confess that the issue was aimed towards professional writers.

So what would I like to see?

Well, as much market information as possible, of course, though I realise that's a province which is really outside your control, i.e. if markets are limited, information must be limited as well.

The fact that the short story market is so limited/non-existent, encourages amateur writers to attempt a novel rather more early perhaps than they otherwise would. Having completed about a dozen short stories, some to what seemed at the time a satisfactory standard and others not, I think I have some idea of the amount of planning required before I attempt to start a story. Naturally you need a pretty good idea of what the thing is about, the setting and the characters involved, but my experience has suggested that a better story, one more enjoyable from the point of view of both reading and writing, results from leaving the plot as fluid as possible. In applying the same policy to writing a novel, I found it less successful. The spontaneous invention of a change in the plot can lead to the action going in a direction which you hadn't anticipated and don't particularly want to write about, yet because of the larger scale of the novel format, you can already be committed (by thousands of words) by the time you realise that.

I'd be interested in some views on the amount and type of planning which is needed for writing a piece of fiction, and also on the differences in approach which should be applied to a short story and a novel, both in the planning aspect and any others.

Talking to Don West about his work as a reader, I found out that he's not just looking for good sf but has a pretty good idea of the type of good sf which Gollancz are looking for (eg, how much science content they want and the kind of fantasy which they will consider). I don't believe in writing for a specific market, and in fact find it impossible to do so, but some notes regarding the sort of material which different publishers are looking for (perhaps from the publishers themselves?) would be useful. These would enable me to check which ideas have some chance of commercial acceptance, and give priority to the ones which do.

Good luck with future issues.

SANDY BROWN, BLANTYRE

I've absolutely no aspirations whatsoever to writing a novel, or even a short story, but I'm most impressed with FOCUS - it looks really smart and professional. I don't feel the lack of artwork in it - it's well enough laid out without it. And do you need more than one piece of artwork per piece of fiction? I feel that the fact articles are better without breaking them up with pictures, and you have an adequate amount of visual material in the adverts to break up the print.

GREG HILLS, WANGANUI, N.Z.

The articles on, about, around and beside writing were uniformly readable (if not uniformly informative). And the two items of fiction you printed were both quite well done - particularly "The Teeth of the Phoenix". His biology lacked credibility in places (the genetics of memory descent from parent to child were not explained; and I feel that the glossing over of this angle was more a matter of inability to knowledgeably explain it than a desire to avoid blocking story flow with complex explanations. However, it can be explained away simply by dragging in telepathy and postulating the vicarious gaining of experience by the chick thru that link to its parent: in one way, it would aid the help to explain why, presumably, no adults escape the winnowing on hatching night - the hatchlings track them down. So I let the matter pass as I read the story.) but by and large the tale was well told and entertaining.

"Skiing...", while interesting and well written, was not really sf. It was playing with an idea that was mainly an extrapolation of high-altitude skiing. On the other hand, the idea is science fictional. Pass.

Lastly, while I sometimes got lost in the confusion of columns and lines, I found the mag well enough laid out so as to facilitate reading, without descending to the usually mechanical "put 'em plain on every page and leave lotsa white space" employed by too many "editors".

Did like the efforts made to relate artwork to subject matter - albeit on p16 I was surprised to learn that after tearing the shutters open outwards by the hinges, the hatchlings somehow managed to leave them hanging into the room. In fact, I was surprised to see shutters that apparently opened inwards, period. Of course, it is an alien planet, but Simon Dunsley mentioned nothing about the way shutters were meant to open...

JACQUELINE Y. COMBEN, HARROW

This is just to say "thank you" for FOCUS, which to me, at least, seems to strike exactly the right balance. It is exactly the publication I was hoping for when I joined the BSFA, and I hope that you are able to maintain the high standard of the first issue.

Market Space

OMNI: At a recent SF Lunch Club meeting, Bob Sheckley, newly-appointed Fiction Editor at Omni, outlined his requirements - short stories up to 8000 words, strongly plotted and well written. Omni pays $800-$1250 for First World Serial Rights plus Non-Exclusive Anthology Rights. Publication is hoped to be within a year of acceptance. Reply times: about 3 weeks. He says he is not a 'science person', but would carry on Ben Bova's upbeat policy on hard science and technology stories; he would look favourably and very hopefully on humour, but regretted that sex was out, despite Omni's publishing affiliations.

PAUL BARNETT (EDITORIAL): an Editorial Packaging and Consultancy Firm, newly set up to initiate projects with authors and publishers (acting in conjunction with the author's agent, if any). Assuming all goes well, he will then work with the author on the project, much as a publisher's editor would, as well as arranging for illustrations , probably design, and all those other little bits and pieces that go to make up a book. In short, he does everything that book packager would do except produce the book. The author would do as well as if he were dealing directly with the publisher, and far better than if he were working with a book packager. The editorial packager's fee comes from the publisher, not out of the author's royalties. Address:

84 Wykes Rd. EXETER

VIRGIN BOOKS' previously-announced plans (see last issue) have been amended: the project is still going ahead, but on a much reduced scale - Maxim Jakubowski is still in charge but is buying far less than he would have liked - plans for an sf anthology have been shelved.

ETERNITY SF is an SF magazine edited by Stephen Fregg and Henry L. Vogel II, P.O. Box 510, Clemson NC 29631. They're looking for stories, poetry, cartoons, puzzles and artists. All fiction should be between 2000 and 20,000 words, and they are particularly interested in 'intelligent space opera'. They pay 1 cent a work (that's about £4.50 a thousand), 20 cents per line for poetry, 15 dollars for a cartoon concerning science or science fiction, and 15 dollars for a B&W illustration. Payment upon acceptance; rights: North American serial only.

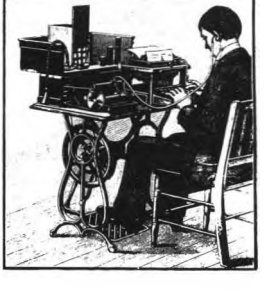
ANALOG, as at January 1980, is looking for stories of less than 20,000 words. They are not yet buying serials again, and when they do they should be between 40,000 and 80,000 words. Fact articles around 4000 words. Although they prefer science fiction they will consider borderline fantasy now. Reply time 2 weeks plus 'journey home'. Analog pays 5 cents a word up to 7,500 words, 375 dollars for stories between 7,500 and 12,500 words, and 3 cents a word thereafter. Fact articles at 5 cents a word. Stanley Schmidt (editor), 304 E. 45th Street, New York, NY 10017.

ISAAC ASIMOV'S SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE, edited by George H. Scithers, Box 13116, Philadelphia PA 19101, is currently looking for short fiction (maximum length 30,000 words). They prefer science fiction to fantasy. Reply time is very fast ("1 day to 1 week"). Payment is 5.75 cents per word for short items, grading to 3.5 cents per word for anything longer than 12,500 words.

PENGUIN BOOKS, up to January 1980, were buying actively in the novel field; length is immaterial, and they have no special preferences as science fiction or fantasy. Reply time, about 1 month. Payment varies. The SF editor is Paul Sidey, 536 Kings Road, LONDON SW10 OUH. Penguin Books have recently had a purge and it is naturally to be hoped that this market information will not suddenly become out of date. In an effort to cut back the firm's losses (or improve its profits?) a number of jobs will be lost, and the list of published books will be cut back by as much as 20% (information from the Guardian). The same Guardian report infers that this sacrifice will mostly be met by books that do not do sufficiently well to warrant a reprint. Since virtually all new, British SF fits into this category (and not just at Penguin) we will have to hope that SF's genre status will start to work in its favour for once.

NEW ENGLISH LIBRARY, where the Managing Editor is Carola Edmond, are not interested in short stories or in collections, and they look more favourably on authors previously published in the SF field. They are looking for straight science fiction as opposed to fantasy (including sword and sorcery), of length 60,000 to 80,000 words. Reply time is about 8 weeks. Payment varies. Editorial Department, Paperbacks, Barnard's Inn, HOLBORN, London EC1 NJJR.

FOCUS: Don't forget, we can't use stories longer than 5000 words; we don't pay. Reply time variable because of the need for two persons to read; we can't use your fiction if you've been professionally published. We are looking for articles up to 5000 words on any subject concerned with writers and writing, but we'd prefer to discuss the article with you first. Short articles (1000-3000 words) can be sent on spec. Articles from unpublished writers on their experiences and visions very keenly wanted. FOCUS is a magazine for everyone who spends time writing science fiction. We don't recognise 'grades' of writers. FOCUS is a BSFA publication.



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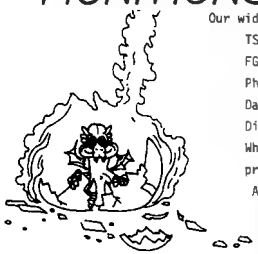

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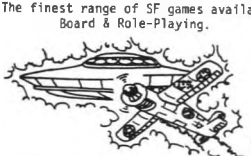

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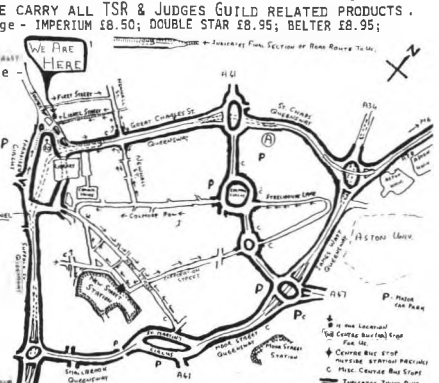

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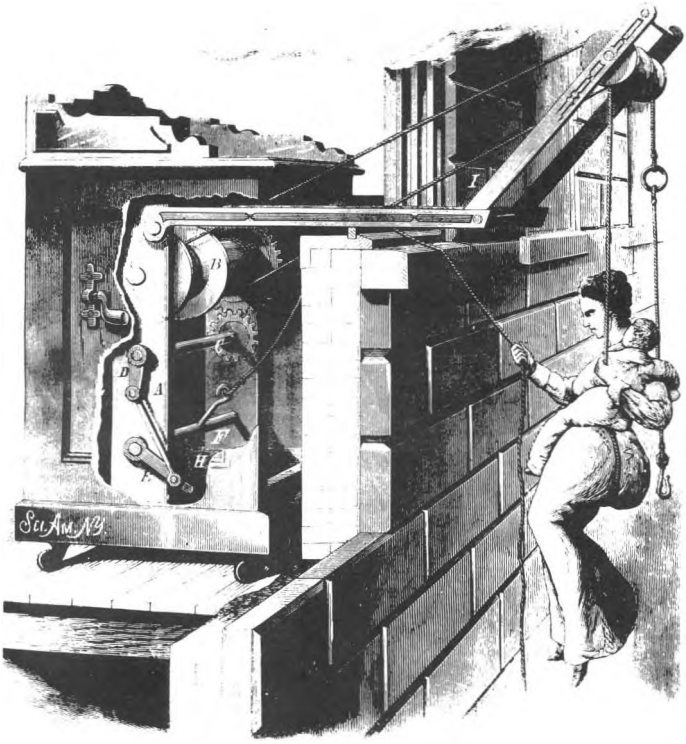

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