FOCUS

AN S.F. WRITERS' MAGAZINE

AUTUMN
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ALDISS ·
BRUNNER ·
DAVIES ·
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CONTENTS ISSUE 3 AUTUMN 1980

Edited by CHRIS EVANS & ROB HOLDSTOCK

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Art this issue by Jim Barker (p.8) *Rob Hansen* (p.12), *Richard Litwincsuk* (p.14) *and Simon Polley* (pps.4,6,10) *Cover: "The Pastor's Children" by G.P. Hasenclever*

FOCAL POINT

These are uneasy times for the science fiction writer. The economic unhappiness of the Western World has reached as far as the publisher's pocket; books are too expensive for there to be so many of them. That science fiction books would suffer badly was a foregone conclusion. Science fiction does not sell as well as genre Westerns or romantic novels; some science fiction does, but when the crisis comes the average sales figure for an sf novel lets it down; lists are trimmed, advances are lowered. It's a buyers' market, with too many books being offered to shrinking lists.

The beginning of sf's particular "hard times" can be seen in the early seventies. Remember the anthology boom? Anthologies sold well, and suddenly there was an upsurge of them; so many people jumped on the bandwagon that too much anthology space for too few stories was created, resulting in stories being churned out for an artificially inflated market; when that happens, quality drops - and quality dropped! And then sales drop. By 1978 the anthology was bad news as far as most publishers were concerned.

Now the novel, too, is threatened It amazes and annoys the editors of this magazine that at a time when belts are being tightened, advances of the order of $750,000 are still being paid to some writers To spend such money, savings in other areas must be made. Right across the board, advances are dropping to a point where they no longer yield even an average modern wage. The sf boom of recent years is now having repercussions; too many books bought and promoted in the middle seventies are now showing their true sales figures; very, very bad sales figures. Not that these figures are worse than before, simply that they have not justified their high advances and enthusiastic promotion This was predictable, really; being told that there is a boom in sf will not necessarily make people buy in an area they would normally ignore.

So now, in this country especially, the pressures of having to earn a living from writing frequently force a writer into hasty overproduction; instead of allowing his novel to write itself, at its own rate, at its own pace, he imposes restrictions of time, word-length and commercial values on his work - he makes his work a product. The obvious danger he risks is that of killing off what originality or talent he might possess One answer often put forward is to write in other fields as well - for example, at the moment the occult novel is apparently a healthy proposition, as is the whodunnit - but that still risks drawing both inspiration and energy from a writer at a rate that may stifle his talent.

We do not have an answer to the dilemma. It is just frustrating and, in a sense, very sad that two essentially different processes - that of writing and that of being published - have begun to affect one another to too great a degree.

It is an uneasy time for the science fiction writer. Ten years hence, the writers who will still be here will be those who have not let their concern with the tough economic conditions of the early eighties affect the quality of their work and the flow of their creativity thereinto.

This issue of FOCUS has contributions from two of the most experienced and respected British sf authors. John Brunner has, in his novels, demonstrated an acute and disturbing awareness of trends and dangers in modern society, and in his article, originally given as a speech at the 1980 EuroCon in Stresa, Italy, he offers suggestions for themes which new writers of sf might tackle. Brian Aldiss's "Playing the 'Penel Game' Game" is an affectionate account of a story written and sold some years ago but still being reprinted - most recently in the unlikliest of places.

Several of the pieces in this issue focus upon writers' experiences - it's very easy to think that what works for one will work for all, that there is a pattern to success that can be followed This is not the case, as Dave Garnett clearly illustrates in his account of some of the difficulties which he has faced since making his first sale; compare Dave's article with that by Dorothy Davies, a most enthusiastic and voluminous letter writer, who talks of her obsessive involvement with writing, and the problems which the new writer faces with the present dearth of markets. Kevin Smith and Dave Langford (back by popular request) contribute an article on collaboration which illuminates its subject matter well enough to need no further comment from us; David Wingrove, whose short story in the last issue of FOCUS attracted a good deal of favourable comment, discusses an important influence on his own writing. In Talking Points,the final piece is by Steve Gallagher, responding to questions by journalist Mark Gorton, who asked him about his writing career and his opinions of the value of the sf form.

The special feature in this issue is on the subject of short story contracts, and aims to show that, for the author to protect his rights, a great deal of attention should be paid to terms of agreement, a fact which is seldom appreciated, even by the most professional and well established writer Finally, the fiction in this issue is represented by Robert Heath's "Contacts Linked With Ice", an unusual story which we hope will provoke some interest.

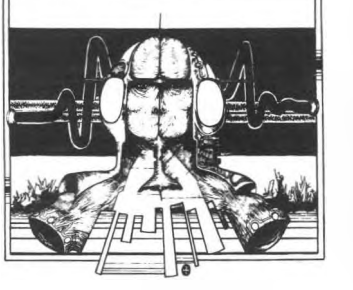
Readers of the first two issues of FOCUS will probably notice a number of minor changes in this issue, most obviously the typeface. We've used a word processor, which apart from giving a neater appearance, has enabled us to juggle with the text a little in order to get the maximum number of words on a page (important in reducing printing costs), while at the same time improving legiblity. Concern has been expressed in some quarters that an inordinate amount of the BSFA's budget is being spent on the production (and particularly the design) of FOCUS We'd like to make it clear that we do everything but the printing ourselves, and have been fortunate in having access to equipment and materials practically free of charge. Once again we have to thank Andrew Stephenson for the help he has given us with typing, lettering and layout; he refuses to accept the post of Associate Editor, but he has done enough to merit it. We're also grateful for the services of artists Richard Litwinczuk, Jim Barker, Rob Hansen and Simon Polley, who responded promptly to our frenetic requests for artwork.

There is no Market Space this issue, simply through a lack of news to report; we have, however, heard that a new magazine, SOMETHING ELSE, has recently started up in Manchester, edited by Charles Partington and featuring stories by writers such as Brian Aldiss. Rumours are also afoot that one or two magazine publishers in the London area are contemplating new ventures which might provide a market for short fiction. These remain unconfirmed at present, but we'll keep our ears to the ground. It may be that while the novel market is dwindling, the market for short stories might open up and thus provide long needed outlets for slavering writers all over the country.

Comments on this issue are, as always, encouraged, and we still need suggestions for items on subjects which we haven't yet covered. We would also like to see a few more unsolicited articles from readers, no matter what their level of writing experience; if they are interesting and informative, we'll be only too happy to print them.

ROB HOLDSTOCK & CHRIS EVANS

Advice to a beginning science fiction writer in the 80s



JOHN BRUNNER

The idea of the 'information explosion' has been one of the crucial psychological factors of the 1970s. The advent of the computer, within a single generation, has already outstripped - in its observable effects - the impact of the invention of writing, the foundation of the great libraries, the printing-press, and even radio and television... at least so far as transformation of one's day-to-day life is concerned.

That's to say: if you live within the orbit of its effect.

Which is where most human beings of today do not live.

True enough, they probably will. A century from now, it is likely that the headman of an isolated African village may well work out the proper dates for planting the crops by consulting a pocket calculator, and it may be solar-powered. But it is equally likely that the crops raised in that village will be doing badly, either because they have been dusted with too many chemicals intended to kill insect pests, so that their germ-plasm has been destroyed by poisons, or because there is so much radiation in the air from World War III's nuclear bombs that no place on Earth can escape.

Moreover, when the pocket calculator goes wrong, nobody in the village will be able to repair it... because the model is out of date, and there are no more spare parts, or the factory was destroyed long ago, or else someone at the 'boss' level decreed that not enough had been sold last year, so it must be discontinued.

Yet no doubt the information needed to repair it is going to be available, by satellite relay from a richer country, and if someone had the time, and patience, and the ultra-pure silicon substrate, and the proper mask and the laser to write the circuit design and the necessary doping elements like germanium and indium in pure enough form and if it needs a mercury battery to power it and... And so on!

If someone had all that, the reconstruction of the pocket calculator would be simple.

Please think again about what I just said, and for 'African' substitute 'British' - French, Italian, even American or Russian. Because if, in the village where I live, we wound up depending on something as abstract and artificial as a computer or calculator to tell us when to plant our crops, we would go very hungry indeed! There is nobody in the village who could repair the machine without access to far more ready-made spare parts than would have been needed by Mr Palmer, the blacksmith whose shop was a few hundred metres from our house and after whom our street was named. In the next street, St. James Street, lives a very nice young man who works as a computer programmer... but even he couldn't mend the pocket calculator I'm talking about.

If there were a world war, or a world economic crisis, it is entirely possible that I, as a science fiction writer, would wind up being the person in the village who possesses most information... because I own an enormous number of books, and books don't go out of order if the power supply fails.

This is a thought which had never seriously occurred to me when we lived in the great city of London, although after a sad experience with a modern medical drug I had begun to wonder whether the old-style treatments based on herbs were safer (something I do now believe, by the way, after an even worse experience). I used to take it for granted that if an H-bomb fell on London I'd be dead. Now I live between the probable targets of Royal Navy Air Command Yeovilton and the British government communications centre at Cheltenham, so I think a lot about the need to escape - to survive from - the effects of those stupid decisions which one can all too easily foresee if the purblind civil servants, bureaucrats, generals, and other victims of official mass conditioning who currently hold the reins of power are allowed to continue squandering the proceeds of what you and I earn by whatever trade we work at, whether writing or mending shoes, whether teaching or ploughing the land, on tools to destroy our so-called 'civilisation'.

I do not profess to know how to run a civilised world. If I did, I would be leading a mass crusade instead of indulging in amusing speculation about the possibilities of tomorrow.

But this I do know: if I were asked by some aspiring sf writer what are the guiding principles to be borne in mind when writing for the audience of the late 20th century, I would say that they must consist chiefly in learning from the mistakes which were made by novices like me a quarter of a century ago. Because I am - at least I hope I am - a writer before I am a science fiction writer, I would single out a number of stupid oversights made by me personally along with hundreds of others of my generation when we were starting out on our careers.

This very day and age that you and I are living in was the sole and unique province of science fiction in 1950... come to that, in 1960 and 1970 as well, but as the phrase goes, "distance lends enchantment to the view", and what I am here trying to explain - or perhaps excuse - is the kind of error that I and people like me made in those days, and the reasons why they should not be repeated.

Early in 1979, an article appeared in one of the major British Sunday newspapers concerning a group of Chinese students at the London School of Economics. Now it so happens that I have slight family connections with China: my grandfather went there on a round-the-world trip in the 1890s, and my father went exploring for minerals in the north of the country in the 1920s. It's a country I have always been fascinated by, and I still hope to visit it one day. Indeed, I was so impressed by the potential

of that massive population, combined with that most ancient of civilisations, that in the very first story I ever sold to an American magazine, "Thou Good And Faithful" in ASTOUNDING for March 1953, I had a starship commander for my hero, and I said, "The captain's name was Chang, a good terrestrial name."

So my wife and I thought what a shame it would be if these Chinese students were to go home having seen nothing of England apart from London. We wrote a letter suggesting they might come to our village folk festival at the end of June. And received a reply in excellent English explaining that most of them had to return home at about that time, but that three of them would be pleased to accept our invitation during the Easter vacation.

Which was how we came to make the acquaintance of Mr Tsui: one person out of all China's teeming millions, one of three people met entirely by chance... who turned out to be an avid science fiction fan.

Not, of course, that he had been able to read a great deal of sf; most of what he had found was either 'classic' like the works of Verne and Wells, or translated from the Russian before the political break between China and the USSR. Nonetheless: a science fiction fan.

Since that time, I have been thinking more and more about the way the future looks to people who have not been exposed to the effects of the Industrial Revolution, who - like the Moroccans interviewed by an American newspaper ten years ago - do not believe a man has walked on the Moon because it says nothing about space-travel in the Koran.

But this does not only apply to backward, underdeveloped countries. I well recall how, a few years ago in America, I was saying how sorry I was that one did not meet more American blacks at sf conventions over there - because I've been a jazz fan since I was in my teens, and have a great admiration for black American culture - and being gently reproved by a friend who pointed out that for most American blacks science fiction is what you see all the time on your television screen.

Quite right. For someone in the sort of slums I've lived in on the lower East Side of Manhattan, the beautiful Californian homes which feature in so many TV programmes are just as unreachable as the Moon itself.

How much more so, then, if the country you live in happens to be South Africa! (This, by the way, was reportedly the chief reason why television was so long delayed in that country: the powers-that-be were afraid that, if they had to buy American films to fill up their programme schedules, they would sometimes find they were showing films in which a black person was treated like a human being.)

But even within the confines of Europe the same holds good. The back streets of Naples, where sheets of home-made pasta hang over the lines outside the crowded tenements alongside ragged laundry, both being made filthy by the dust and smuts from passing traffic, are a case in point. So too was the little country bistro which we visited after the French sf convention at Limoges; we drove along the valley with Herbert Franke, and came to a house beside a bridge bearing the sign *Cafe-Restaurant*. Wanting a drink, we went in and found a squalid kitchen with a sink and a stove and a couple of tables, which hadn't been cleaned for years. It was like walking into an 18th century engraving.

All this, remember, within the confines of one of the world's great economic blocs, an economic super-power: the EEC.

It is perhaps our tendency to see only what we want to see, while overlooking what doesn't automatically present itself to us, that marred the sf of my generation. How many starships have been made to take off from the surface of the Earth without the author wondering what the people in the path of its flight might feel about having thousands of tons of metal hurled over their heads, creating a gigantic sonic boom loud enough to startle housewives into dropping the dinner, or drivers into running off the road... quite apart from possible effects on the weather?

How many stories were populated exclusively by people with British names - or French, or Russian, or Italian? How many writers were content to take their cast-list, so to speak, from the magazines they themselves read, without thinking that you're writing sf you need different names from those you'd use in a detective story, or in a Western?

Oh, perhaps it's wrong to blame the authors for behaving just as almost everybody else was doing in their day, but it certainly would not be right to let that continue. If you want - here I again begin to speak to the novice sf writer whom I mentioned earlier - if you want to write about visits to alien planets, then do so, but remember how long it is since H.G.Wells could introduce us to his Selenites and make them fresh and remarkable; if you want to send your hero on a trip through time, do so, but don't forget how long it is since Mark Twain sent his Yankee to the Court of King Arthur; if you want to write about androids, go ahead by all means, but remember Karel Capek's R.U.R....

And in every case, take into account what we have learned about our most fundamental fictional resource, the human race, since those early days.

Remember above all that it is highly questionable whether we shall ever reach the dizzy heights of star-travel within the context of our present civilisation. Two world wars and many other small ones have driven us to question the naive 18th-century belief in the perfectibility of mankind. Mere technological advancement does not, it appears, suffice to gratify most of our species. Although there is no lack of evidence that people can be driven crazy by deprivation - whether physical, by starvation, or psychological, by repression - there is as yet no proof that a mere improvement in living conditions can drive them sane. On the contrary: there is much evidence to the opposite effect. During a war suicide-rates diminish, for example, and it is a regrettable fact that black or coloured people, living at a higher standard in the framework of a rich Western country than they could dream of enjoying in the Third World, are frequently rendered mentally unstable by the constant prejudice and bigotry they encounter. How would you like it if, in a transformation like Kafka's "Metamorphosis", you woke up one morning to find that by arbitrary government decree, the group to which you belong had been ruled "non-people", as the Jews were in Nazi Germany?

Or, putting it into a slightly more science-fictional setting, if a computer error - worse yet, a deliberate act by someone you'd offended, who worked in a government department - had deprived you of your right to credit for food, or clothing, or housing, or electricity, or work?

Our society is not the paradise envisaged by the writers of a generation ago, freed from want and misery, even in the richest countries. It is an unstable house of cards, at the mercy of criminals and terrorists, of people who have more money and/or power than is good for them, of heartless practical jokers and otherwise normal individuals who have suffered wrong and can find no way of securing justice, so turn to vengeance aimed at anybody, including you and me.

Not very long ago, I found in THE GUARDIAN an article entitled "The cost to civil rights of fighting terrorism", and I quote from it because it indicates at least a part of what I'm talking about.

> "For over five years police records in Britain have been absorbing a steady trickle of information of up to 4000 people who have not been, and probably never will be, charged with any criminal offence.
>
> "They are the people picked up for questioning under the country's wide-ranging anti-terrorist law, held for up to seven days without lawyers and without being accused of specific offences, photographed and fingerprinted against their will in some cases, and then simply released.
>
> "The effect can be traumatic. Many emerge exhausted, frightened, demoralised, and sometimes physically hurt...
>
> "The Act's critics say the police use it to trawl indiscriminately for information about all left-wing groups, that it is an essentially racist law designed to intimidate the Irish into avoiding political activity... Such criticism may come from partial sources, but certain facts about the working of the Act are established.
>
> "Many people later admitted to be innocent by police are detained, frequently without proper clothes and in permanent light in insanitary cells, denied access to lawyers, and photographed and fingerprinted for police records. Their right of silence is abolished, and they may be physically ill-treated." GUARDIAN, 2 Jan 80

All this, remember, in the country which sacrificed so much to resist the forces of Nazism, and at the cost of going bankrupt eventually defeated it.

Or did we win, after all? Did we not, in actual fact, lose?

But I am not claiming - let me hasten to add - I am not claiming that someone now starting to write sf must concentrate solely on the negative aspects of our world. Far from it! It remains true that there are some trends and tendencies in the world which are worth fostering and encouraging. Life in the village where we live, for instance, is closer to what I would think of as civilised than almost anywhere else I have been; I haven't carried a door-key since the week we left London. Our friends and neighbours are welcome to walk in when they like (provided I'm not working, that is..!) and we're glad to see them.

But it is not only in an English country village that one can live this way, if one so chooses. Once my wife Marjorie and I were taken to call on Samuel Delany in an area of San Francisco which, our hosts told us, was too dangerous to walk about in after dark. They tried to make Marjorie stay in the car; she refused, and when we reached the house we found the door was unlocked and we walked in and said hello to Chip...

Precisely because there are real places like that in the world, I'd like to see that fact stressed in the science fiction of the eighties - with due acknowledgement of what we have learned about the reason for them from people like Oscar Newman. He was once assigned to cut the crime rate in an American slum. The buildings were quite modern, indeed almost new, but the families living there were forever quarrelling and robbing one another and calling the police.

According to a television programme which we watched, Newman discovered that the crime rate could be drastically cut by such simple methods as allowing each block's occupants to paint their frontages the colours they preferred; or giving each block a section of garden out front, to be surrounded with a little fence and planted by the people themselves, with flowers and bushes of their choice, which they would then take care of. Even such basic measures as painting white lines around areas in front of each building helped to make people more respectful of the property which belonged to them all.

The arguments advanced by Robert Ardrey in **The Territorial Imperative** may not be wholly without flaw; nonetheless, it does appear that we human beings need the chance of a little privacy in order to lead sociable lives. One begins to wonder whether this phenomenon may not account for the kind of social problems which have begun to be apparent in countries like the Soviet Union where a determined effort was made - and for the most part successfully - to put people into modern accommodation even though they might be crowded when they got there, for at least this would be better than living in the broken-down ruins left from World War II. Alcoholism and violence on the streets have been reported from there, too...

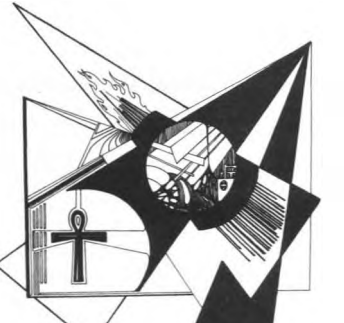
Earlier, I mentioned that in one of my very first stories I had a "Captain Chang" with a "good terrestrial name". What I didn't mention was that nowhere in the story did I mark him out as Chinese. This was deliberate. On a purely statistical basis, given the number of Chinese and the area of the globe they have spread over, it seemed logical that Chinese names would turn up a lot in the future.

But my name is Swiss, and I'm not Swiss. My wife's maiden name was Prussian, and she's not Prussian; her mother's name was Huguenot, and she wasn't Huguenot - and so on.

A truth which I would like to see reflected in the sf of the 1980s is that culture does not follow the name of a person. A culture is like an organism, independent, capable of flourishing where conditions are right, equally capable of being starved to death where they are not.

The essential question underlying the negative aspects of our possible future, which I talked about before, is this: why are we not prepared to encourage the growth of those cultures which make life easier, more peaceful, more enjoyable for the people who live within them, instead of encouraging those which tend to make them feel lonely and miserable, alienated - as the cant term has it - and cut off from their fellows, and ultimately threaten us all with extermination?

Perhaps there is no answer to the question. Yet. But since one of the functions of sf is to shed a light - dim but nonetheless useful - on our path towards tomorrow, I would dearly like to see the next generation of sf



writers at least attempting to provide such an answer.

Our kind of fiction provides a laboratory in which social experiments can be carried out. It transcends the dictates of contemporary religions and ideologies in just the same way as it can transcend the physical limits of the scientific world. There is no reason why we should not - as well as sending spaceships to the stars via an imaginary "hyperspace" - why we should not send our characters to a habitable, to a civilised existence. It isn't going to be easy. As the saying goes, "one person's utopia is another's hell."

But it strikes me as the most essential task facing us - facing, in particular, the novice sf writer whom I talked of when I started this article. I don't care whether you think your descendants would be better off in a future world run by capitalists or communists; I want to see, in your stories and novels, your acceptance of what we now know about the nature of human beings; about the limitations on the resources we have to dispose of on this planet; about the way in which deprivation in childhood can turn a person into a greedy adult, frightened to the point of paranoia by the fear of being frustrated in his or her just attempts to enjoy a fair share of the fruits of the Earth; I want to see your comprehension of the sad fact that there are too many of us for any given individual to enjoy the full luxury of seeing his or her imaginings come true.

And I don't mind whether you have a political or ideological axe to grind, so long as you take into account everything that is wrong with your preferred system - from the martyrdom of the victims of the Inquisition, through the mass slaughter of the petty land-owners in Russia, by way of the invasion of tribal lands and their theft at gun-point to create European empires, and the brutal imposition of central control with tanks and rockets on countries still proud of newly-regained independence (read that how you will!) - I want to see all this taken into account when you present your vision of a better future for us all.

And remember: some of your readers may very well be Chinese.

John Brunner originally delivered this article as his Guest of Honour speech at the 1980 European Convention in Stresa, Italy.

a dialogue on collaboration

[DAVE: The first problem Kevin and I found in collaborating was that each secretly expected the other to do most of the work.

[KEVIN: Tell me when you've reached 2000 words and I'll take over.

[D: The second problem arises from the need to smooth over the joins between one's own exquisite prose and the ill-considered paragraphs of the lout one is working with, subtly meshing the intricate cadences of style and sense into a perfect and harmonious whole.

[K: Dead right dere, boss.

[D: Quite.

[K: A further consideration (in order to advance one's own writing career the better) is the necessity of giving the impression that one is mainly responsible for the entire piece, and that one's collaborator provided only the odd subtle preposition or definite article; or semicolon. One method, startling in its simplicity, is actually to write almost everything, allowing merely the slightest interjection--

[D: But--I

[K: However, this runs flat up against our first problem.

[D: It is also essential, of course, that the two authors continually think along the same lines, or else you end up with immense clashes of ideas, as well as arguments about the workload.

[K: A second way to establish predominance is contribute the Heavy Ideas, and leave the development and word-churning to one's associate. Dave...

[D: As the story goes, Jerry Pournelle had written a really terrific novel called The Mote In God's Eye, but felt there was something missing, so he went to see his good friend Larry Niven and said: "Larry, can you put in some aliens?"

[K: Do you think it would be a good idea to tell the people the method we've actually used for collaborating?

[D: There are things Man was not meant to know - but if you insist: you had written the remarkable, and not unfunny, Alcain Saga...

[K: Whilst you had produced the amazing, and mildly humorous, Mac Malsenn mini-epics...

[D: ...and we thought it might be quite fun to bring the two together: mighty-muscled, hairy, very stupid Barbarian King and mighty-muscled, incredibly clean-shaven, super-competent Cosmic Agent.

[K: We sat around in Dave's room at Oxford with a lot of beer and bits of paper, scribbling down scenes and ideas when we should have been reading physics books.

[D: From time to time we'd discuss plot developments - i.e. the best way to fit our independently conceived scenes and ideas together. The rest of the time we'd drink the beer.

[K: Actually, that part of it was relatively easy. The hardest bit was deciding on a title. Nothing seemed suitable, until we had the bright idea of using an appropriate anagram. An anagram of what? Considering the origins of the story, it had to be an anagram of 'The Miscegenation'.

[D: Thus was born "Then Time Is No Cage".

[K: The writing of the sequel to this story, "The Case On Time's Encoding" (an anagram of "The Second Miscegenation") was a little more problematical. Term finished and Dave went home to Newport, me to Loughborough. Obviously, a different collaboration method was required.

[D: We chose the 'two page' method. I would produce two typewritten pages, send a copy to Kevin, and he would produce the next two and send them to me. No hints were allowed in accompanying letters; the follow-on had to be 'blind'. This produced some curious results.

[K: For example, throwaway lines from one were developed at length by the other, while major themes were dealt with and discarded in a couple of words. As time went on, of course, the plot diverged more and more until half a dozen plot lines of significance were running at once - these being the few survivors.

[D: And naturally, neither of us could resist the temptation to leave the other an impossible cliff-hanger - in mid-sentence preferably - to see how he would get out

of it. I'm still trying to forget the section which ended: 'He continued to transmogrify...' We kept the turnaround time very short. Within three days of sending out the two pages, the next two would arrive back.

{K: Fortunately the holiday finished before either of us was harmed permanently, and we were back at Oxford, able to compare notes again. If I might digress a moment, it occurs to me that two typed quarto pages would contain about 800 words, which quite coincidentally is van Vogt's magic number of words between plot twists. Well, it sure as hell keeps the action moving.

{D: You merely sacrifice coherence, tight plotting and a few dozen other literary virtues.

{K: I can't deny it. It's a good job we were only trying to be funny. We quickly realised that the 'two page' method might be excellent for getting things going, but would never in a million years draw the loose ends together - not to the satisfaction of both of us, at any rate. We had twenty pages, and a half dozen more of combined, concentrated effort should see it out, we thought. Twenty-four pages of combined, concentrated effort later, we were able to type 'The End'.

{D: There you go, grabbing the credit again. I typed that dynamically original phrase.

{K: You even got your poxy name first on the title page, come to think of it.

{D: Only because I typed that page too. Which brings us to the all-important question of priorities: basically, the simplest way is to put the names in alphabetical order, especially if your name is Langford and the sucker's is (say) Smith.

{K: This is the sort of intensely personal and idiosyncratic question which can only be solved by the collaborators' stepping outside to exercise their knuckles for the next bout of typing. Let us turn with an immense effort to other forms of collaboration.

{D: The 'two page' system is merely a long-range variant of the 'hot typewriter' approach, whereby X (whom for the sake of argument we shall call Frederik Pohl) is chained to the machine until he's churned out the agreed number of pages. Then Y (who for the sake of argument might be termed Cyril Kornbluth) takes his place until his quota is made up...

{K: Then we have the 'missing link' collaboration, in which X (probably A.E.van Vogt) writes a story containing large gaps which he feels his talents are unable to fill properly: the ever-helpful Y (quite possibly Harlan Ellison) then manufactures a suitable literary Polyfilla to occupy these spaces (see "The Human Operators" by van Vogt & Ellison).

{D: With the 'fossil reconstruction' system, X (who is dead, and tends to be Doc Smith, Robert E. Howard, or Edgar Rice Burroughs) contributes a discarded plot outline, a trenchant sentence or a useful syllable; his collaborator (who goes under various names - 'hack' being the one which most readily springs to mind) expands this into several volumes of appalling trash which sell depressingly well. A carefully chosen dead collaborator can be an excellent asset to the young author; I myself have this trunkful of undiscovered H.G.Wells plot outlines...

{K: The simplest form of collaboration has X writing the first draft and Y tarting it up. This can be a cunning idea if X happens to be dyslexic, and even more so if Y does not. Generally, however, if X (say Dave Langford) actually feels energetic enough to finish the story he won't want Y muscling in on his efforts.

{D: Agreed. It's writing words which takes it out of you, and statistics show that one has to write fewer words if someone else supplies some of them.

{K: Such timesharing can be taken further: it has been known for several writers to evolve a brilliant book outline from their pooled talents, knowledge, imagination and beer - and then to assign a chapter or two to be written by each collaborator.

{D: It has also been known for such a group, called for convenience W, X, Y and Z (or for short, Langford, Smith, Scott and Reed) to go away and never set down the merest semicolon of their immaculate concept.

{K: ((Weeps into beer, guiltily.))

{D: An unusually easy - and unusually unlikely to succeed - form of collaboration is one where the very form of the story requires a certain formlessness.

{K: You've been reading Chesterton again.

{D: What I mean is, the collaborators agree on a beginning, which we shall call x, and an end, which for convenience may be termed x+f(x,t)...

{K: Will you stop that!

{D: The point is that the middle is designed to require numerous scenes which can come in any order and cover a wide range of topics without need for close continuity, the important thing being their cumulative effect.

{K: What idiots would adopt such a grotesquely unworkable and conceptually ludicrous approach to collaboration?

{D: We did.

{K: Oops, so we did. I was trying to forget that one... our only serious collaboration.

{D: A serious shaggy dog story, actually. (It's easier to collaborate on a vast joke or send-up, as witness the success of Earthman's Burden, The Incomplete Enchanter or The Mote In God's Eye.)

{K: It began with some mysterious alien craft arriving; it ended by tying all the reader's expectations into an intricate knot, and then holding aloft the sword of revelation to slash through this double reverse Gordian Knot... and going away without actually doing so.

{D: But in between,all manner of arcane speculations about the nature and purpose of the aliens were required; a cast of billions reacted to their strange doings in what could have been several hundred scenes, but was ruthlessly cut to a few dozen when we got tired of thinking up new gags.

{K: And as you said, those in-between sections could come in any order.

{D: I still can't tell who wrote what (although I recognised the good bits as being mine).

{K: I know the feeling. By that time we'd abandoned anagrams; it was time for that ancient recourse of the hack, a title which was a quotation.

{D: Oh my God. Yes. We looked through every volume of verse in the Langford library and unearthed a line from Swinburne: "Nor loosening of the large world's girth".

{K: It had one advantage - when we took the story to a Pleiades workShop, everyone was so bemused by the title that the time left for justifiable 'pissingon' of the story was quite limited. This is a useful tip for attendees at writers' workshops.

{D: Afterwards you sliced the story from 8500 words to 5000, discarding all the best bits—

{K: The excessively silly Langford bits—

{D: —in the process. You changed the plot; you altered the title to the almost memorable "Stick Insects"; and then, poor fool, you sent it to me for copy-typing.

{K: So when you'd reinserted your ludicrous pet scenes and submitted the thing to Ken Bulmer, it's not surprising that he sent it back with the speed of a striking sex-crazed strooka (to borrow a simile of his).

{D: Persistence being a vital attribute of the professional writer, few people will be surprised to learn that Kevin and I at once gave up on that story.

{K: Commonsense may also have had something to do with it.

{D: I suppose we should include a stern moral for the benefit of FOCUS readers: collaborations between relatively inexperienced, lazy and drunk writers are undertaken in the hope that each can get away with doing less work, but in practice you can't get away with the resulting sloppiness.

{K: Loathesome and unthinkable though it may seem, each partner in a collaboration will probably have to work harder than if he or she wrote the same number of words alone.

{D: Realising this, Kevin and I were swift to give up the whole idea of combined effort. Nothing, we swore, nothing could make us join forces for another literary plebald.

{K: Nothing at all. Follow our example and you too can abandon amateurism and sell to some of the lowest-paying markets in Known Space - as we did once we gave up writing collaborations.

{HAZEL LANGFORD: Have you finished that joint article for FOCUS yet?

{D: Rats! You just blew our cover.

The city was vast. Roads spread outwards from its centre, though they could be followed by sight for only short distances. I was standing at a junction, wondering at the activity all around me. A great concrete department store was behind me, extending hundreds of yards down one side of a road, while the immense glass structure opposite held on its surface a grotesque image of the store. On an island between the two was a piece of modern sculpture, all circles and curves and smooth, shining surfaces.

The roads were crammed with traffic. Inside and outside the vehicles were people whose diversity I realised, was limitless; and I understood how important they, and the rest of life, were. That in an environment which is static, or in a universe where matter and energy are subject to natural laws, living things are the only sources of unpredictable movement and change. I saw many people whose features were set, showing only fear or sadness; if they met someone they knew they would smile and speak without hesitation. And once alone again their expressions would stay bright for a short while, and then fade.

They looked so much worse than usual today, as the air was damp and the sky was tinted a horrible mixture of grey and brown. The buildings were oppressive: they were clustered so close together that most blocks looked like single structures. Yet... still the roads were there, grey aisles among the towers. I began to walk away from the centre of the city, by the side of a highway, along which cars moved swiftly and noisily.

Someone asked for the time.

"Eleven fifteen," I told her.

"Thankyou," she said, and added: "Cold."

I nodded my agreement, and moved on.

Icicles hung from an archway, and mist coated many windows of an office block. Exhaust fumes rose in thick clouds from passing machines, and peoples' breath swirled visibly about their faces. And most looked at me as they passed, some with casualness, a few with sharp curious gazes that disturbed me. Eventually I asked someone why he stared, and he shook his head, frowning, seemingly uncertain of what to say.

"You look so cold," he said. "As if... you are freezing, and dying. I don't quite understand. I'm sorry." Then he turned and walked quickly away.

I looked at my hands, and touched my face; I was cold, yes, but was I dying? I smiled as I turned into a narrower road.

There were fewer buildings in this part of the city, and they were even more strictly functional and lacking in elegance - structures of wood and brick and concrete and glass. I saw few people, and thought of turning back, but decided not to.

Snow started to fall from the pale grey sky.

Then something changed. The road was now very narrow and stretched ahead to the limit of visibility. The city lay far behind me, and looked small and unimportant beneath the blank grey canopy of the sky. The road cut through waste-ground - there were heaps of red and grey ash, with abandoned cars and other rubbish scattered about, all speckled with snow.The air was colder, and I shivered.

Slum houses stood on the wasteland: they were arranged not in rows but in single units, black and warped, with glass missing from windows; and at least some were occupied, for occasionally I could see movement within.

My heart began to beat faster.

"Hello!" I cried. My voice was dead on

the air. "Someone answer me. Answer please!"

Afraid, I waited several minutes, but the silence remained unbroken - eventually I decided to carry on walking away from the city, though unsure that I was doing the right thing.

Once, I called to someone: "Can you help me? I'm lost."

He was an elderly man, and his clothes were dark and ragged; he held his hands deep in the pockets of his overcoat. He didn't move.

"Can you tell me where this place is? Please."

No answer. I stepped forward but he turned and ran - so I followed, shouting at him to stop - and as I caught up he tripped and fell heavily. I reached down to help him to his feet... and gasped in surprise when I touched him, instantly pulling my hand away.

He was unbelievably cold, like ice many degrees below freezing point. Yet he was real, alive - I stared at him. He stood up, watching me, his face showing no emotion.

"Contacts," he said, his voice deep and harsh. "Contacts are linked with ice. If we reach out, we freeze. You've come from the city, you're still warm, but getting colder. This is your world now."

"My - " But I didn't know what to say. I was frightened and did not want to know more - helpless, caught in the rapids, I was heading for the fall... I turned away and stumbled back to the road, feeling confused and alone, and once there I looked towards the far-off, dismal outline of the city, and then into the haze where the road led, and I realised that the man had spoken the truth. Then he called to me and spoke again.

"Let me tell you," he said, coming closer. "There are cold people in the city, and they absorb warmth from others, from people like you and I, so it becomes hard to tell them from the warm people. Except that we can't continue to exist in the city, because it becomes a place for ghouls - so we come here. They can exist in the city, but they are thieves; we can only grow colder."

Ashamed of my earlier cowardice, I asked him where the road led to.

"I don't know."

"Does it get worse - that way?" I pointed into the mist.

"Again, I don't know: I live here, in my pathetic little home, for now."

"Will you ever want to know?"

He hesitated.

"Sometime," he answered, "when it becomes too warm here."

"But you already feel the warmth," he added. "So now you know one more thing: the temperature drops along that road. I'm sorry, I just realised - that must seem worse to you."

Bowing his head slightly, he turned and walked away. I walked onwards for a long time, while the track became ever narrower, and the buildings fewer. Snow fell at intervals, and the air was soundless save for the noise made by a few isolated people wandering about on the waste-ground. They appeared pale grey in the gloom, and I realised that frost covered their flesh and clothing. Soon, they would be following me.

The temperature continues to fall. My body, too, shines silver-grey with frost.

Fatigue comes to me, not of the body but of the will, so that my thoughts are slowed and I no longer care about anything, not even myself; so that I no longer desire to live, yet don't hope for death. I understand this as apathy brought about by extreme cold.

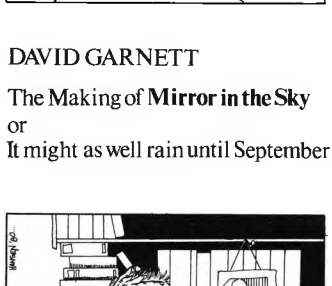
Three figures appear ahead of me in the mist, and more come into view as I approach, though none moves. They are part of a group, the size of which it is impossible to estimate because visibility is so poor. They are alive, but incapable of movement; glacial statues, white and glistening, forever still. Gleaming threads of ice, some fine and some thick, pass from one to another so that they are all linked together. Contacts. A circuit of human experience. Momentarily I wonder: did the man lie; did he know what was to be found here, or had he guessed? I recognise who they are, for this is a final gathering place for those driven out of the city: for the ignored, the downtrodden, the despised. They have been forced to exist elsewhere, beyond the vision of other people, on common ground far from the city.

I grasp one of the threads, and freeze...

I travel on now, though I have no body and my mind is a vapour. The road has gone, and so has the wasteland, and there are no people here, only stars and galaxies - I derive some comfort from their presence, but even they are fading away, and I grow evermore cold and lonely as I approach the heat death, the unattainable Absolute. Near the end of time there is no other way to go but down the slope to greater cold and darkness, to Absolute Zero, when there is no contact.

DAVID GARNETT

The Making of **Mirror in the Sky** or It might as well rain until September



Until I was fifteen or sixteen, there were quite a few things I had never done - one of which was read a book. My only reading (apart from schoolwork) had consisted of comics such as the EAGLE, those full of picture strips. I wouldn't buy or read any that contained the occasional short story. (And by short, I mean short: around 1500 words.) Then it Happened - and I can't remember how or why. I got hold of a copy of **More Penguin Science Fiction**, edited by Brian Aldiss. The rest goes without saying. Like you, like everyone reading this, I was hooked.

The logical step from reading sf is to writing it, or trying to. And within a year I had my first rejection slip from NEW WORLDS, which also contained the fatal message: "Very Promising. Keep Trying. M.N." A very brief note, but then it had been a very brief story: around 800 words, if I recall correctly, but it had taken me all weekend to hammer it out on an ancient borrowed typewriter.

In the Good Old Days - this was the mid-Sixties - the usual route into print in sf was via the magazines. There were probably as many issues of sf magazines published each year as there were novels being printed. Nowadays there is almost no scientifictional way to be published in Britain except in book form. So it is not uncommon for an author's first novel to be also his (or her) first time in print.

I feel sorry for anyone in Britain who is starting to write science fiction now, because there is nowhere for their stuff to be published. They'll never know what it is to write a story one week, mail it to NEW WORLDS or IMPULSE, then get it back with a page of detailed criticism from Mike Moorcock or Keith Roberts the following week. You didn't have to write a novel, then wait proportionately longer for a reply (which would probably be in inverse proportion to usefulness: you know the sort of thing - "does not fit our current requirements/meet our high standards"...). Then there was always the other guy you could try, who sent out letters such as "...inconclusive story, not very well plotted with rather poor dialogue...it is badly written..." But that's still better than nothing, or a rejection slip. (Although I doubt if I felt so at the time.)

The above comment related to a story which became my first 'sale'. Keith Roberts offered me fifty shillings (that's £2.50 to you, kids) per thousand words and it was five thousand words long. It was scheduled for publication in Spring 1967. Too bad that the final issue of SF IMPULSE was February that year.

By Summer 1967 I had a collection of 60,000 words of unsold stories. IMPULSE was gone, NEW WORLDS had just invented the New Wave, and it was expensive and time-consuming and futile sending scripts to the USA.

60,000 words, I quickly calculated, was about the length of a novel. So why didn't I..?

So I did.

Writing a novel is easy. 60,000 words is only thirty days' work at 2,000 words a day. Thirty days is only six weeks, working a five-day week.

On Wednesday June 7, 1967, I sat down in front of my typewriter, rolled in the quarto-carbon-quarto sandwich and started to write. The "Sergeant Pepper" album (or L.P. as we used to call them) had just been released; Ace Books a few weeks earlier had published Delany's **Einstein Intersection**; hippies were waiting around the next corner, but the word marijuana wasn't even in my dictionary (I know, because I needed to spell it right in the book); and I was nineteen, living in Liverpool ("like the Beatles", as the book jacket was later to proclaim).

Six weeks later, on Tuesday July 8, I finished the final page exactly on schedule. As I said: writing a novel is easy. Any fool can do that, as I'd just proved - er, if you see what I mean. The trick comes in getting away with it (i.e. having it published).

Six weeks was only the first draft of **Mirror in the Sky** - as it eventually became titled. And it stayed at the first draft as I lugged the manuscript around with me on my travels that Summer - down to Wales, then Poole, then Brighton, up to London, back to Liverpool - crossing out a word here, adding a phrase there, altering the punctuation. In the end the manuscript was so badly chopped and changed around that had I known any better I would never have submitted it in such a state.

And that, I realised, was what I had to do. Submit it. I couldn't keep on procrastinating, because it makes you go blind. The question was: where to send it? The USA seemed a long way (about 3,000 miles) to send a

script, although that was the logical place to submit it. The home of science fiction, where all the best books were published. There was no such thing as an original British paperback in 1967. Almost every paperback was a reprint of a hardback which in turn was a reprint of an American book, and even British authors would have their books published in America first. Then - as now, and this must be the one similarity between 1967 and 1980 - the main hardback sf publishers were Faber and Gollancz; but they relied mostly on American authors, although Ballard was with Gollancz and Aldiss with Faber.

The manuscript went to Faber first, who sent it back with one of the "not up to our usual high standard" type comments. (And this from the people who were later to publish **Indoctrinaire**! Only kidding, Chris...) After Faber came Gollancz, who also responded negatively. (Clearly they were keeping their list open so as to have room later for the new Ian Watson book every three months.)

It had to be America, there was no other course. And one of the paperback companies. All I was reading at the time was American paperback sf, so I knew the publishers. Ace, Avon, Ballantine, Berkley... I decided Berkley would be the lucky recipients of my manuscript. They had a good list, including J.G.Ballard, and they'd also published one of my favourite books, Walter Moudy's **No Man On Earth** (a book I can now remember nothing about). That was a first novel. So was Tom Disch's **The Genocides**. I'd met him at Bristol earlier that year, my first convention, the first author I ever spoke to, and he impressed me a lot. He was much older than me, of course. He was twenty-seven. Also at Bristol I met Charles Platt. I've always liked Charles, because the second thing he said to me was, "Let me buy you a drink". I can't remember what the first thing was. Charles was involved with NEW WORLDS in those days - some things never change - and he told me how Damon Knight had recently bought his first novel for Berkley. That settled it. If they published that, they'd buy any old crap. (Don't misunderstand me. I don't mean that mine was any old crap, or even Charles'. Just that the title of his book was **Garbage World**.)

Then I wrote to Michael Moorcock, told him about the book and that I was thinking of sending it to Damon Knight at Berkley, did he think it was a Good Idea? He wrote back and said, "Yeah, why not," which then meant I could write to Damon Knight to see if he'd consent to read **Mirror In The Sky** and say "Mike Moorcock suggested I send it to you...". Damon said he'd read it, so I parceled up the script with a bundle of International Reply Coupons and posted it at the cheapest rate to Milford, PA. It cost me 25p. That was January 31, 1968.

The letter from Damon Knight was dated March 10: "...I like **Mirror In The Sky** very much and have recommended it to Berkley...". By the end of the month Berkley had written with an offer of publication, I'd accepted it, they'd sent me the contracts, and I'd signed and returned them. Two months from posting off the manuscript, by sea, to signature.

I was an author.

And eventually, **Mirror** was published, with a cover illustration by Richard Powers in September 1969. (I'll skip the boring bits - okay, the *more* boring bits - about having to re-sign the contracts because I was under twenty-one.) By then I'd written three more books. Berkley took the first: **The Starseekers**. After that, I started doing second drafts. And I've never sold a book in America since, though the other two were eventually published in Britain.

By the time of **The Starseekers** I'd been told that I ought to have an American agent, because that way I'd get more money. So I sent the script to an American agency, who promised a reply in six weeks. It was nearer six months. Eventually they decided it was "too slight for the kind of science fiction that's now in demand over here. The story line is just not original enough, offering no fresh concepts." All they had to do was pass it on to Berkley, who had an option on it, because Berkley thought it was "a rich and strange book, and sometimes baffling". (By offering a few words of praise they can get away with a lower advance.)

So: I'd sold **Mirror** in America. It would be easy to get a British publisher for it. I thought. After all, Charles Platt had sold **Garbage World** to Sphere. And Brian Stableford had sold his first to Sidgewick & Jackson. Brian was younger than me, too. I suppose he still is.

I tried Faber and Gollancz again, to give them a second chance to see the error of their ways. But they still didn't want to know. (They were at the bottom of the list the second time around, however.) Sphere, Dobson, Rapp & Whiting, McDonald, Hart-Davis, Jenkins, Mayflower, Corgi, NEL, Hale and Sidgewick & Jackson were the others. (Some of those names bring back memories to we Old Timers. There's a high turnover amongst publishing companies and their editors. Most of the people responsible are no longer involved in publishing. They may have turned down **Mirror In The Sky**... but what good did it do them..?)

I got the usual brief notes of rejection, saying nothing; in only one case a printed rejection slip, although that adds up to the same thing. One editor thought the story "was not strong enough for us, but I like your narrative style - have you written a straight novel we could take a look at?" Another went to the trouble of enclosing the reader's report on the book, one of whose comments was that it was written in a curious elliptical narrative style, whatever that may have been. Someone else said: "I enjoyed reading it and think you will soon find a publisher, but I don't think I dare add any more first novels to my list for the time being." One of those to whom I sent the paperback replied almost by return to say that he "would certainly like to consider (my) rewritten version with a view to publication." So I sent it. Eventually I heard from the publisher again, although a different editor, saying that the former editor had now left. But at least they told me what they thought of the book: "The novel reads well, but we feel that the action is too slow and slightly repetitive, and the ambiguous ending leaves one feeling a bit dissatisfied."

That made thirteen in all, and I could take a hint. It's not that I'm superstitious; it's unlucky to be superstitious.

Time passed.

At the Chester convention in 1972 I met V** H***** (name deleted to protect the guilty) who had become the reader for Hale and said he was trying to improve the list. Not difficult at that time, since it couldn't have been much worse. He asked if I'd tried **Mirror** at Hale. Yes, I said. Try again, he said. Okay, I said, and bought him a drink. This time Hale accepted the book, and it was published in September 1973 with what must have been the best cover Hale have ever used - a photograph of a gargoyle. Very tasteful, but nothing whatever to do with the book.

The first time I'd submitted the book to Hale, they'd said: "It is not a particularly imaginative piece of science fiction and the plot is not really strong enough for our requirements." By now they'd obviously changed their minds. It shows what the price of a drink will do. Why had I never considered bribery and corruption before? (I've tried it since, without much luck. In fact, I've tried everything to get stuff published. I mean, almost everything...)

I sent all my other suitable books to Hale, although not in the order that I'd written them. In the space of eighteen months I'd signed six contracts with them.

In 1975 a Swedish edition of **Mirror In The Sky** appeared, published by Sam Lundwall, with a cover from an old Ace Double. Two German publishers wanted to publish it, and the contract went to the one who offered the lower advance. (No, I don't know why either.) That was published in September 1977, with a cover by Karel Thole.

September '69, September '73, September '77. A nice regular pattern there. It would be a pity to break it, so if anyone wants to bring out a British paperback edition in September 1981, the rights are available. No reasonable offer refused.

Thirteen years since I wrote **Mirror In The Sky**, and what is there to show for it? Assorted copies of the four editions. Half a dozen royalty statements from Berkley (but no royalties), and a few more from Hale. A review - yeah, just one - in VECTOR 55 (1970) which got the title wrong and seemed to be about a different book. A fan letter from an American G.I. in Vietnam. What else could there be? Just the dollars, the deutschmarks, the kroners, the pounds. Long gone now, of course, but having totalled up to £911.31.

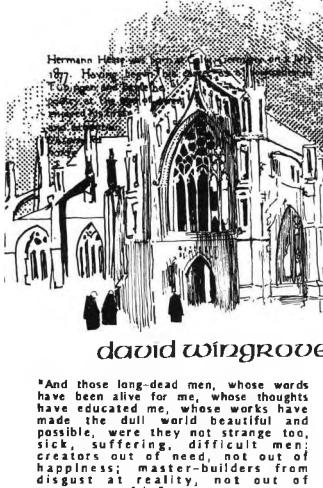
That was a lot back in 1967, before inflation was invented. You could get drunk, buy a slap-up fish and chip dinner, a packet of Woodbines, a woman, a tram ride home, and still have the change for a copy of FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION out of a quid.

What else could I have done at nineteen and made £150 per week?

It would be nice to have that sort of money now.

Maybe I ought to write a science fiction novel.

"to make the dull world beautiful"



david wingrove

"And those long-dead men, whose words have been alive for me, whose thoughts have educated me, whose works have made the dull world beautiful and possible, were they not strange too, sick, suffering, difficult men; creators out of need, not out of happiness; master-builders from disgust at reality, not out of acceptance of it."

Hermann Hesse
"Journey To Nuremberg"

My beginnings as a writer lie in the above words, in that slightly romantic notion of "sick, suffering, difficult men, creators out of need". I began in earnest only a short while ago – a week after my twentieth birthday (I am now almost twenty-six) – and my hope is that I shall one day begin to produce pieces of fiction that satisfy me in the manner that the work of Hesse satisfies me. It is the standard I set myself: one which I rarely attain, and then can sustain merely for a paragraph or two at most, yet also one which draws me slowly to it. As a child I was no story writer. I kept no scrap books, planned no great novels. At school I wrote interminable poems in awkward, stilted English, pointedly symbolic and tiresomely insipid – for which I yet won prizes: best of a dire bunch. At the time I was subject to all influences and yet to no influences. In the brief time since I 'began' Hesse has been my Mentor; my touchstone. There have been other influences, admittedly – Kafka, Sartre, Mann, Joyce, Golding, Musil, Bowles, Aldiss, Dick – whose manner of perceiving and presenting the world have provoked imitative ventures in my own work, but none as lasting or all-permeating as that of Hesse.

Hesse died when I was seven. He is, for me, one of "those long-dead men." The novels of his which have had the greatest influence upon me – **Steppenwolf, Demian,** and **Narziss and Goldmund** – were all written long before my birth, in what seems to me to be another age. He was a Nobel Prize Winner for Literature (1946), was born in 1877 and was a German who in 1917 opted to live in Switzerland in protest at German militarism. He was a staunch pacifist and was honoured by the Nazis when they destroyed every book of his during their Reich (of those piles of burning books we see on old newsreels, how many of them were his. I often wonder). All of this is, perhaps, germane. But in our modern world what importance could such a figure have for me? Perhaps an explanation of my own gestation as a writer and Hesse's influence upon that is called for.

At twenty I had just returned from a holiday in Jugoslavia after "discovering" science fiction in its only available English form out there – seventeen books by Asimov. It was enjoyable, yet it lacked something crucial. It was vigorous, reasonably intelligent stuff, yet it affected me in much the same manner as G.A.Henty had when I was a nine-year-old. The 'creatures' within those stories **acted** but they did not **think**. Or rather, they "thought" in the manner of calculating machines – emotionless caricatures without human **substance**. I had already encountered literature and **knew** that a finer sensibility and a greater care for psychological portrayal was possible in fiction. I also **thought** that I could write as well as Asimov. So I determined to write 'deep' science fiction: something with the verve of Asimov and the 'depth' of a Penguin Modern Classic. The first venture, produced in two weeks, was **Immortal Man**, a 65,000-word novel which dealt with the psychological trauma of first contact from the **alien** viewpoint. It was abysmal. The plot fluttered in the reader's mind like the American flag after the Alamo. Melodrama was one of its **virtues**. I realised that I needed to acquire both technical virtuosity and a certain understanding of the mechanics of writing. I destroyed the novel.

In the next six months I wrote approximately two dozen 'standard' science fiction stories – they varied from pastiche Lovecraft (a story called "REM") through nauseating imitations of Silverberg, Niven and Tolkein to vague and unsuccessful parodies of Dick and Sladek (a beauty called "The Stream-Driven Joy"). I kept an ideas file, wrote to the requirements of American magazines and experimented shamelessly with any and every style that caught my attention. I also collected eighteen rejection slips (including four terse lines from Emma Tennant: the apotheosis of a dismal sequence of printed Screams!) I began re-writing what I could remember of **Immortal Man**, using a technique borrowed shamelessly from Sartre's **"Roads To Freedom"** trilogy whereby I had several major viewpoint characters and the events of the novel described as happening contiguously in time. After a further two drafts I ended up with over 300,000 words in two box-files. It was an exercise which proved to my **own** satisfaction that I could sustainedly handle plot and characterisation and was capable of a limited 'poetic vision'. Three complex, introspective characters had some semblance of reality in those pages, and a tapestry of interconnecting minor plots moved to a series of climactic denouements at the end of each of the three volumes – with the 'big-bang' at the very end. It covered the whole gamut of sf themes and was heavily reliant upon overt symbolism. Alas, the writing of that book also proved just how nebulous my subject matter was.

It was at that stage that I read **Narziss and Goldmund** and afterwards found myself creatively impotent. That novel prompted several questions in me.

– Why are you bothering to write if you cannot ultimately say something as **well** as Hesse does?

– What purpose do you serve by writing brief, amusing explorations of whacky ideas?

– What are you writing for, ultimately?

– What have you got to say – if **anything**?

Briefly, **Narziss and Goldmund** is about the two characters named in the title. Narziss chooses the spiritual path and becomes a monk. Goldmund takes the wordly, sensuous path and becomes a sculptor in wood. The **conflict** in the book is that between Intellect and Emotion, Acceptance and Questioning. However, as in so many of Hesse's books, the polarities exist to complement each other; by his own analogy forming a "two–part melody" where the two lines of notes and sounds would complement and correspond to each other and be reciprocally related in a vital and intimate way and yet remain essentially opposites. I saw echoes of myself in each of the characters and a direction for my own writing to take.

Narziss and Goldmund is still, to my mind, the most perfect book I have read. At the time, however, I decided that if I could not aim to write as well as that then I might as well not bother. Consequently I wrote only three small, insignificant pieces in the next two and a half years. But not writing was not a comfortable feeling for me. In personal terms the feeling of creative impotence came at a time of apparent personal stability: I had a 'secure' relationship and a sound and successful job in the Head Office of a London Bank. However, my underlying discontent with both aspects of my life and the genuine feeling of being a "creator out of need" forced me to channel my energies elsewhere, and so I began the attempt to sharpen my own critical faculties – the second edge, perhaps, to the writer's blade. The model, as elsewhere, was Hesse, whose own critical writings were motivated by a love of the books he dealt with and the zeal to share his experience with others. Hesse firmly believed in only dealing with those books that spoke directly and personally to him. He would have nothing to do with the destructive analysis of bad books. His intention was the simple one of popularising what he judged to be books that were both fine artistic creations and sound moral explorations. It is an example I have always tried to follow (though there have been some regrettable failings). The critical work also honed my sensibilities regarding my own work. A year after beginning to write serious reviews and articles on sf, I sat down and wrote 20,000 words of a novel in three evenings (my habit being then to begin in the early evening and work late into the small hours – a habit I have now freed myself from). It was different. It was **about** something. It was also something that I was not technically capable of finishing. I recognised that immediately and put it away with the longer 'monster' product of my earlier energies. The **recognition** was as important, I felt, as the writing. I was beginning to see that having something to say and having a way of saying something were separate things, and that they needed to be **coordinated** within a piece of fiction to produce a satisfactory result. I felt that I possessed several competent writing techniques which could accommodate certain topics. However, it would have been a gross error had I immediately chosen to fit my subject–matter to my mastered form.

And what was my form? Working within the science fiction **genre** I had developed what I felt to be a competent science fictional structure (one that was very much a composite of those elements in other writers I then admired in the **genre**) spiced with poetic allusion and salted with my own brand of 'obscurity'. But what I had to say could not easily be accommodated within such a framework. What I needed to say (and yet need to say) was made more coherent through reading Hesse. His articulation of my own ill–defined thoughts gave me a solid framework upon which to build my own literary philosophy. "The true profession of a man is to find himself", he says in **Demian**. In that phrase I find the articulation of my own need to examine myself in order to understand others – my attempt, in strictly literary terms, to **commune** with myself and thereby (through touching something deep down that is common to all and dragging it to the surface) to **communicate** with all. In **Steppenwolf** Hesse states, "Learn what is to be taken seriously, and laugh at the rest", which expresses my own sense of priorities (and also a complex set of paradoxes which place the greatest emphasis on **love** as the sole meaningful product of our meaningless endeavours in life). But there is in Hesse the constant affirmation of the individual and of the creative force – two emphases that are crucial to me. There is also an expression of the need to balance these two emphases with the basic humanitarian instinct not to harm: to try to avoid the obvious snare of intellectual elitism that lies along those paths – the Nietzschean trap of amorality.

There is one final quotation that perhaps best expresses the 'spiritual' essence of my own approach to writing – something normally neglected in the heated discussions of markets and plot requirements. Without that 'essence', I feel, the rest is an empty shell, and I might as well return to the profession of banking as produce empty shells for money.

> "What remained to him was his art, of which he had never felt as sure as he did now. There remained the consolation of the outsider, to whom it is not given to seize the cup of life and drain it; there remained the strange, cool, and yet irresistable passion to see, to observe and to participate with secret pride in the work of creation. That was the solace and the value of his unsuccessful life, the imperturbable loneliness and cold delight of art, and to follow that star without detours would from now on be his destiny."
>
> Herman Hesse
> "Rosshalde"

No doubt that passage will be anathema to the pragmatist; but I do not apologise. If I did not feel so deeply about what I write then I would have to ask myself the question – Why do you bother? It is perhaps not in my nature to suffer the lonely (and, to my eyes, grossly bohemian) path of the 'outsider' – my nature seems to me far too practical and earthly for that – yet Hesse articulates that other compulsive feeling well; the "irresistable passion... to participate... in the work of creation". It is something that fuels my constant strivings to formulate that perfect coordination of the something–to–say with the way–of–saying–it. If I ultimately fail in that aim, I shall then **know** I was inadequate for it. But the cold and secret delight is in attempting it!

SMALL ADS

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by Dianne Doubtfire

(Allison & Busby; 1978; 86pp; £2-50 paperback; £4.95 hardback; ISBNs 0-85031-244-2 and 0-85031-253-1 respectively)

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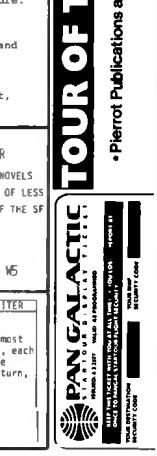

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SHORT STORY CONTROLS

feature

This feature is aimed at the young, agentless writer who still blurs, in his mind, the romantic connotations attached to writing with those of being published. Writing is solitary, emotionally intense, fulfilling, intellectually rewarding. Publishing is a rat-race, it is a business, it is harrowing, frustrating, unfulfilling, and more often than not, unrewarding.

But it is quite clear, from letters, conversations, and indeed our own 'lumbered experience', that there is a great deal of excitement attached to the idea of being published. This enthusiasm to 'join the ranks' of published writers can lead to two things. Firstly, a misdirection of a natural and perhaps very high talent, by the young writer determinedly securing the magazines, seeking the 'key' to success; seeking, in other words, the sort of story a magazine seems to like, and deliberately writing (say) 'a typical ANALOG story'. Secondly, it leads to inadequate protection of one's own rights in a story - impatience to get into print often goes hand-in-hand with a neglectful attitude towards a contract.

This feature is concerned with the second problem. It will not incite you to haggle for forty-clause contracts for every story you manage to sell; it will encourage you to press for no less than five clauses, a minimal Memorandum of Agreement which you should insist upon even for the shortest short story in the smallest paying magazine.

Don't forget (and it is remarkable how many people do) that you NEVER SELL A STORY. You sell the LEASE in a story. Unlike a building, a story has many leases (we call them 'rights'); the commonest rights are English Language Serial Rights (first English language magazine publication), First English Language Anthology Rights and Anthology Reprint Rights.

Each of these 'rights' belongs to you until you sell it. At no time does the story itself cease to be your property; the danger you face is that a contract, or Memorandum of Agreement, may not state clearly enough the areas and extent of the publisher's useage of your story. This can lead to your story being used widely for a very small initial payment. This is annoying. It can also lead to you being sued for misleading a second publisher by having leased rights that were no longer yours to sell. This is extremely annoying.

You must remember that if a publisher buys rights from you, he can also sell them. For example, if serial rights are included in an anthology sale he is at liberty to sell those serial, i.e. magazine, rights. Certain rights are normally mutually exclusive - to sell to a magazine will wipe out that story's saleability to an original anthology (1st Anthology Rights). The reverse is more often true than not. What you are looking for in a story's life, therefore, is a 1st magazine or anthology sale, second and subsequent anthology reprints, and translations.

Selling a story to an anthology or magazine is a process made hazardous by unexpected pitfalls. Here are a few to be wary of.

THE MEAN TRICK: You have waited nine months for a response from ALARMING STORIES to your short piece of fiction. You receive, through the post, a copy of ALARMING STORIES May 198- with your story already printed (and beautifully illustrated). Tucked inside the flap is a cheque for $50. On the back of the cheque are the words: "Cashing of this cheque represents acceptance of the sale of world rights in this story." This used to happen a lot; it still happens to a frightening extent.

What should you do in this situation? You can always cash the cheque and kiss control of your story goodbye. But you would be better advised to send the cheque back. Enclose a letter stating that your fee for First English Language Serial Rights only is $50, and that payment should be made within 30 days. Point out that the story was printed without permission (technically a breach of copyright). State that no other rights are granted to the magazine. Be resigned to the fact that you will not sell to this magazine again (but remember, you are probably in the majority in this). Sometimes the cheque comes before publication, in which event you merely return it stating that you will sell them First Serial Rights only for $50, and that permission to print under any other terms is denied. Request a cheque that does not need endorsement.

THE LAZY EDITOR: Too many anthology editors see their job as 'selling a great idea for an anthology, compiling the stories, editing them, writing forewords, celebrating the volume's publication... and then forgetting about it'. "Once it's published my job is finished." But this is not how it should be. Once the anthology is published the editor is responsible for the contributions, and to the contributors, for the rest of its life. Each reprint, each royalty statement, each foreign edition, each review, all of these things must be communicated by the editor to the contributors. It rarely happens.

THE NAIVE YOUTH: It's easy for a hoary old pro to refuse to sell to an anthology (or magazine) because the terms are ludicrous; it's harder for that pro to take a stand on an issue, and fight for better terms, better rates: it's harder because it is time-consuming, and 'time' can often be seen as having value only in 'lost production'. But if someone does take a stand, the brick wall that is faced almost inevitably is "we can't do for one what we don't do for all". Fine, you say, do it for all. And are told that others in the collection have already agreed to the terms - the young writer, the unconscientious 'professional'.

THE ASTONISHED EDITOR: He's the fellow (above) who seems to find it amazing that you, an unpublished, or struggling writer, should have the temerity to challenge his terms; "Good God, man, I'm doing you a favour! Times are hard, competition's stiff, you should be grateful for anything." TRANSLATION: I can't be bloody bothered to work out a decent contract with the publisher, and fight for decent terms. I want self publicity, and easy cash.

CONTRACT CONFLICT: What is often forgotten (with reference to anthologies) is that two contracts exist: there is an agreement between you and the editor for certain useage of your story; and there is an agreement between the editor and the publisher for useage of the anthology as a whole. It is not unknown for the two agreements to promise essentially different things. In one fairly celebrated case, the Author-Editor contract was three clauses long. The Editor-Publisher contract was twenty-three clauses long. It is not inconceivable that some of those twenty extra clauses might have been of some relevance to the author. What sort of problems arise?

For example: you have agreed that the fee he is paying is for First English Language Anthology Rights (covering both UK and USA). He has agreed that the fee he has been paid, to pay to you, is for English Language Anthology Rights. The volume is reprinted; you ask him

for money, he sends none (because he has received none). Fight breaks out.

Second example: the editor has not worried too much about the clause stating that the publisher's fee was for Serial Rights as well. Why should he? It's an anthology and thus Serial Rights are irrelevant. But are they? Two years later you find translations of your story in four different European magazines. You've had no copies and no money. It is fatally easy to think of serial rights as being the rights sold if you offer a story direct to a magazine. But serial rights are bought by magazines that publish serially. A novel extract, a story from a collection, all can be sold to a magazine after the event of their first publication. Don't forget, if a publisher buys rights he can also sell them! If serial rights were included in the deal for the anthology you can find your story appearing on its own! Thus the importance of getting the publisher's declaration that his rights extend only to the anthology as a whole.

Of course, you're in the right when you say that the publisher was not at liberty to so sell your story. The editor cannot make sales on your behalf. The publisher's rights in your story are those that you granted. But what a hassle will face you getting your money. And suppose your story has been sold to a magazine whose political position is deeply offensive to you?

The simple answer, of course, is that the publisher should supervise the individual contracts; that the contributors should see copies of all agreements; that the editor should know what he's doing.

THE LONG GOODBYE: Take a very, very simple magazine, with a very, very simple Memorandum of Agreement. The editor says to you, "All I want to do is be the first to print your story in the magazine, and you keep everything else, all other rights. I'll pay you four hundred pounds on publication for First UK Serial Rights. That's all I want, nothing else."

What can go wrong, you say? Well, four years later you still haven't been published, and you still, of course, haven't been paid. Publication issue, and publication date, weren't specified, nor was there a clause that said "after one year, if the story hasn't been published, the agreement is invalid". You agreed, effectively, to wait for eternity. Anything else? Well, yes. Your story appears with FORTY atrocious typesetting errors, including the loss of 400 words that the editor explains he "didn't understand, and since the story just went over the page", he "chopped them for neatness". You didn't have a clause, either, asking to see and approve proofs; and you had not agreed that your text would be printed unchanged, except after mutual discussion. A CONTRACT IS AND ALWAYS SHOULD BE ABOUT MORE THAN JUST MONEY! NEVER FORGET THIS.

Anything else? Well, yes. Because he has bought First UK Serial Rights, you could quite legally sell the story to an American magazine requiring only First USA Serial Rights. They pay you an enormous advance. Then you discover that the UK magazine has been sold through bookshops in the USA. The editor offers you a token apology, pleading poverty. But the American magazine has found out. It has already paid you... and wants its money back. You've spent it. (In practice you rarely sell to magazines in both countries.)

THE UNREASONABLE REASON: Other writers, even editors, will often point out the silliness of fighting for a decent contract for a short story sale, putting on a weary expression, and asserting, "Come on, a short story is the work of moments... it hardly counts as importantly as a novel that has taken you eighteen months. Short stories are the bit of fun, the icing on the cake. It's novels that matter. Don't fuss, and expend energy, trying to protect a short story that has only taken a week to write."

Remember, a short story can be as long as 20,000 words, and take months to write. A novel can be as short as 40,000 words, and may have been hacked off in, well, a month. But your 'short story' will have no more, no less protection in an anthology than a 1500 word short-short in the same collection. And this is the way it should be. The short-short should be as amply protected as your long-long. And that protection must be full, complete and comprehensive.

What can you do?

Be aware. Do not be impatient. It's great fun to sell; it's great fun to see your story in print. But it's no fun at all when someone else benefits from your naivete; it's no fun when the printed form of your story reads as if it has been typeset by a drunken Neanderthal. Be prepared to write a courteous, but firm, follow-up letter to anybody who has expressed an interest in buying your story, and who has not clearly stated his requirements - be prepared to list yours. Be prepared not to sell to an anthology, or magazine, that offers a single payment against all rights. It is unlikely that you will - these days - come across too many truly bad contracts. However, ill-considered contracts are still quite common. There is no harm in knowing clearly, and definitely, the minimum that you want in that agreement.

The contract that appears here is not put forward as a 'Model Contract', but we feel it comes very close to being one. It is based on a recent contract for a paperback anthology. (A hardcover anthology contract would be slightly different.) Some of the clauses relate more particularly to 'original' anthologies than to 'reprint', and vice versa: the notes that follow make these clear. Do not expect to get so detailed a contract for each story sale you make; but always keep the 'minimal requirements' list close to your heart.

NOTES ON CONTRACT CLAUSES

1 & 2: It is customary to assign permission to the editor and publisher to negotiate the sale of the anthology as a whole in other editions. For the duration of that contract the publisher cannot be prevented from selling where and as he wishes.

4: You will often be offered 'payment on publication', a hateful state of affairs, but a common one. You will have to decide for yourself whether you accept. With magazines it's almost inevitable; with anthologies it's probably worth stirring a little to get a 50% advance.

5: Editors take varying amounts of money from the anthology proceeds - some take 50%, which is disgraceful. 40% for an original anthology, involving reading a slushpile, and editing manuscripts, is probably fair. For a reprint anthology any editor taking more than 20% of all monies is ripping the contributors off.

If the anthology goes into other editions it becomes increasingly unfair to pay on a word length basis. This applies most particularly to reprint anthologies. A fairly typical pro-rata division in these circumstances is to allocate points per 5 thousand words. This acknowledges the difference between a novella and a short story, without continually favouring stories that are only a few hundred words longer than co-contributions.

7: Don't forget: reversion of rights if the anthology (or magazine) doesn't appear; reversion of rights if the anthology goes out of print for more than (say) 5 years in all editions; protection if it comes out late.

11: We'd recommend always checking the proofs. Do not be put off by threats to make you pay for corrections over (say) 10% of setting costs. If there are substantial corrections to be made do not necessarily trust the editor to pass them on. Send a photocopy of the corrected proofs to the fiction editor of the publishing house, pointing out your grievance.

12: The first sentence of this clause is very useful, as it cannot be agreed without the editor checking his own contract with the publishers.

MEMORANDUM OF AGREEMENT made this ... day of .....19.. between: THE EDITOR of ADDRESS (hereinafter referred to as "Editor" and: THE AUTHOR of ADDRESS (hereinafter referred to as "Author") concerning the work entitled: ROTSTUFF (X thousand words) (hereinafter referred to as "Story") which is to be included in an anthology of short stories provisionally entitled ROTSHOTS (hereinafter referred to as "Anthology") which is to be compiled by the Editor and published in the first instance in the United Kingdom in volume form by NADIR BOOKS LTD of ADDRESS (hereinafter referred to as "Publisher").

WHEREBY IT IS AGREED:

1. The Author grants to the Editor and the Publisher non-exclusive Anthology rights in the Story for use as a part of the said Anthology in volume form in the English language throughout the world.

2. The Author further grants to the Editor or his appointed representatives the right to negotiate the publication of the Story as a part of the said Anthology in translated volume editions.

3. The Author warrants to Editor and Publisher that the Story is in no way whatever a violation of any existing Copyright and that it contains nothing libellous and the Author will indemnify the Editor and Publisher in consequence of any breach of this warranty.

INCONSIDERATION WHEREOF IT IS FURTHER AGREED:

4. The Editor shall make a payment to the Author or his/her representative of £.... for the use of the Story in the Anthology in the Publisher's edition, which payment shall become due as follows: (for example:
a) One-half £.... on signature by all parties to this Agreement and in any event no later than within 30 days of that date;
b) One-half on publication of the Publisher's edition and in any event no later than within 30 days of that date.]

5. The Editor shall make payment to the Author or his/her representative according to a strict pro-rata division of all earnings based on X percent (FOR EXAMPLE AND IDEALLY 80%) of the amounts actually received by the Editor after deduction of agency commissions where applicable. The pro-rata division shall be calculated according to the following (typical) formula:

Each work included in the Anthology shall be allocated points on the basis of ONE point per THOUSAND WORDS. Royalty division shall then be made according to the proportion of points assigned to each author. The Editor confirms that the Story has been allocated X Points out of an anthology total of 10X points.

6. The Editor confirms that the payment described in Clause 4 is a pro-rata distribution of the Publisher's advance against future royalties. All royalty earnings over and above the Publisher's advance payment shall be distributed in the same proportion and paid to the Author or his/her representative within 30 days of their receipt by the Editor.

7. The Author guarantees not to allow publication of the Story except by written permission of the Editor in any form other than in the Anthology for a period of one year after first publication by the Publisher, or two years from the date of this Agreement, whichever is the earlier, provided he can use the Story in his own collection with the Editor's consent.

8. One year after first publication of the Anthology, or two years from the date of this Agreement (whichever is the earlier) rights granted hereunder shall become non-exclusive and the Author shall be at liberty to make alternative arrangements for the publication of his story in other anthologies. It is understood that if the Anthology is not published within three years of the date of this Agreement the rights revert to the Author and the advance paid on signature shall not be refundable in any event.

9. It is understood that the Publisher holds the right to licence publication of the Anthology as a whole for British hardcover rights, American rights, and Reprint Book Club rights. In the event of any such sale or licence Publisher is entitled to make a percentage deduction from the receipts at the following rates: British Hard-cover ...%; American ...%; Reprint Book Club ...%. The Editor shall therefore distribute any income from these sources after dedicion of these percentages and according to the formula set out in Clause 5.

10. The Editor warrants that he shall promptly notify the Author or his/her representative of the successful negotiation for publication of the Anthology under Clause 2. Payment for such use shall be according to the same pro-rata share.

11. The Editor warrants that he shall make every effort to ensure that the text of the Story as printed shall be true and faithful to the text previously agreed with the Author. In the event of translated editions of the Anthology, the Editor and his appointed representatives shall make similar efforts to ensure that the translation is true and faithful.

12. The Editor shall be responsible for checking of the text in proof form unless on signature of this Agreement the Author notifies the Editor in writing that he/she will be responsible for the text of his/her own Story whereupon he/she will correct and return such proof within three working days of their receipt.

13. The Editor confirms that his rights to the Story are confined to its use within the Anthology as a whole and that all rights not specifically mentioned in this Agreement are reserved to the Author. The Editor further confirms that on the written request of the Author he will supply a copy of his Memorandum of Agreement with the Publisher or any subsequent Agreement concerning the Anthology with any other publisher wherever possible.

14. The Editor agrees to supply the Author with at least one presentation copy of the Publisher's edition and to make every effort to supply at least one copy of any subsequent or licenced edition unless otherwise mutually agreed between the Author and the Editor.

15. The Editor confirms that the Author's name shall appear with the Story and the following Copyright notice shall be printed in the preliminary pages of every edition of Anthology:

.....STORY....(c)19..by ..AUTHOR...

together with the following acknowledgement (applicable in the case of reprints):ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Signed:

MY MINIMAL MEMORANDUM OF AGREEMENT SHOULD PROVIDE FOR—

- Paying me a specified amount at a specified time.
- Specifying clearly what rights and what territories are being bought for the money, and asserting that all other rights are reserved to me. Specifying that the publisher's rights are reserved to the use of my story in the anthology as a whole.
- Reverting the rights to my story if the anthology does not appear, or if it goes out of print.
- Sending me proofs.
- Sending me a specified number of complimentary copies of all editions.

LETTERS

ROBERT ALLEN: Co. Antrim

FOCUS impressed me immensely and although my own publication EXTRO is not in direct competition I can't help feeling that FOCUS will benefit the British science fiction world of publishing in the long run.

I am pleased, delighted in fact, that someone else is trying to establish another sf magazine, especially with an emphasis on publishing new authors. I believe Charles Partington in Manchster is launching one, but like James Manning with AD ASTRA I gather he will be going for the big name authors; but that will mean that there will be four markets in the UK for fiction, three of which will pay. If you add ARENA and FANTASY MEDIA then things are looking good for the British sf fan.

I hope for all our sakes that FOCUS succeeds because any new author who gets published in it will stand a better chance of getting into the other markets and not being frightened of the consequences.

Despite the unavoidable fact that sf is a specialist market, competition can only be healthy and the more magazines the better; sf needs attention and to get the authors the editors will have to pay and that in the end will benefit the writers, the readers and British sf in general.

My own experiences with EXTRO were rough, the sea is now calm and the storm seems as far away as ever. It was a struggle to get it going, more so as I had no financial backing, but the recent/current big screen sf boom has given the public a greater awareness of sf and the sales of EXTRO in the average newsagent make me believe there is a greater far larger audience out there than was originally thought.

According to James Manning, AD ASTRA is pulling a 20,000 circulation and I'm sure at least half of those are attracted to the fiction not the fact. At the present, all the magazines are selling in their own little pools but there is a larger pool waiting to be filled. I think that it is not just the hard core sf fan who wants information on books, authors, etc.; I am convinced there is a public ignorant of science fiction because no one has bothered to tell them what it is really all about.

If the major publishers see that there is a larger interest in sf they will start publishing it in bigger quantities and that is what we want, isn't it?

Good luck with EXTRO. Readers should see our Small Ads page for further information on Robert Allen's magazine.

NEIL TALBOT: Oadby, Leicester

I thought that Mr Charles Platt was a little unfair on FOCUS, because I reckon that you are doing an excellent job and your magazine does fill the gap as a much-needed forum for aspiring writers in the sf field. Okay, if it is much easier to get into print these days - though one would doubt very much that this is true for British writers - then at least FOCUS is helping to point out all the pitfalls to the tyros who want to make it into print. And why should a young writer not "want to achieve a basic level of proficiency much more easily"? Having achieved that basic level, surely any self-respecting writer would then feel confident enough to explore his own creative individuality with a greater facility at his elbow.

Graham Andrews' 'The Singularity Man' was dreadfully over-written - almost impenetrably so in parts. A classic example, one would say, of that common fault of inexperienced writers - an over-fondness for being verbose and using too many big, complicated words where a single, simple word would do. Regrettably, this has the effect of rendering all his tableaux wooden, graceless and two-dimensional. Then he went on and committed that other cardinal sin of the novice (sic!), using long tedious lectures to explain everything... The story could have been told in a quarter of the time.

Mr Platt seems jealous of new talent being given a hearing. I would venture to say that the more opportunities created for new writers, the better.

After all, time and changing fashions will decide which ones will survive their first blossoming. Perhaps one would be called ingenuous to think that the better writers will survive and the facile ones die away, but hopefully FOCUS will encourage the former to try arder to maintain their standards.

To comment briefly on the two stories in FOCUS 2: if they show very different approaches to a similar theme (your editorial), then one must be to show how to approach the theme, and the other how not to.

I found 'Photographs' to be an enigmatic, absorbing and thought-provoking story - an internalised Kafkaesque 'trial' in which the protagonist is crucified by an eternity of mirrors. If this is David Wingrove's debut in fiction writing, then I look forward to seeing more in print.

ROBERT HEATH: Stoke-on-Trent

FOCUS 2 was a very interesting issue, well balanced, and all the features were informative and potentially useful - if not to all, then surely to some. Richard Evans' article drove home the point that a book should (or must) have commercial potential - most recognise this, I guess, but the nuts and bolts of the business add weight to the argument. Of the pieces on workshops, Randal Flynn's contribution impressed me the most, perhaps because of the detail and because I can identify with his 'reasons' for writing.

Charles Platt's letter: easier to become a writer nowadays? Who can say, really? His contention that sf is lucrative and respectable doesn't concur with what I've read/heard elsewhere, and with only one paying magazine in this country - and not many in the USA - I can't see that FOCUS will make it that much easier for new writers to have stories published professionally (which is presumably what most intend).

The fiction: I liked 'Photographs': a brooding, introspective kind of story - for that reason, I doubt that it could have been published in a paying magazine, when the editor may have to consider the oh-so-conservative tastes of its readers. However, I do think that the language of the story is a little wordy; some sentences included too many polysyllabic words, and this usually hinders the flow of a sentence. As to 'The Singularity Man', the pieces of speculative science didn't convince me. I thought that Graham Andrews went into too much detail - sometimes it's easier to suspend disbelief in a process or concept that is only hinted at than in one which is described in detail. And the story was interesting. I could imagine, I think, that the combining of the various elements into a coherent whole was no easy task, yet he managed this quite well. The joins show in one or two places, and the writing is a bit flat with (as in David Wingrove's story) a few too many polysyllables scattered about. I'm nit-picking, perhaps, because both stories were fine.

J.T.MILLER: Whitmore, Newcastle-under-Lyme

I'd like to say a few words about my involvement with one of the B.E.M.s of the literary universe - Vanity Presses. I'd had a novel rejected by two publishers, and my outlook was, basically, that I would give anything a try. A company called Stockwell Ltd. of Ilfracombe advertised in a local newspaper, so I sent them the manuscript of a novel that I'd just finished, and to which I was eager to test to test the response on all levels. I received a reply after a couple of weeks, in which this company enthused so much that the exuberance dripped on to the carpet. But then came the surprise - they wanted **me** to pay **them**. In my naivite, I thought I might as well enquire about their price. The prompt reply boomed: THREE THOUSAND AND NINETY-FOUR POUNDS. After being treated for shock, I decided to seek advice from someone who knew more about this than I did... It was revealed to me that Stockwell Ltd. were memebers of a dreaded species of publisher which is regarded as hostile to humanoids. I was advised to have nothing to do with them.

I've now written to them politely declining their offer and asking for my manuscript back.

We've since heard from Mr. Miller that he has received his manuscript back quite safely. We think he's made the right decision.

NOEL CHIDWICK: Yardley, Birmingham

Richard Evans' piece in FOCUS 2 was very illuminating and is the sort of thing the prospective novelist should keep in mind when he sends his manuscripts to a publisher.

No one seems to agree over the synopsis-and-portion controversy. The answer seems to be that you write your synopsis (which you have to work out and jot down anyway) and post these off. As you wait for your reply, carry on writing your book. Simple.

The Writers' Workshops sound like fun, in a masochistic way. I don't know whether they would be of any use to every potential writer, but there's only one way to find out.

I agree with Garry Kilworth's conclusions wholeheartedly; you shouldn't need to have served an apprenticeship to read a science fiction novel. The use of jargon implies a private clique and sf is part of the world of literature (isn't it?). There are enough barriers around sf as it is.

Tony Richards' thoughts are reasonable, but he gives the impression that writing is like building an Airfix model - just follow the instructions.

On to the fiction: David Wingrove's piece is exposed-nerves-in-prose, very effective, haunting. And as they say, his writing is economic, which suits this tale. Graham Andrews' is well written but the science obscures the story. He is too enthusiastic about getting his ideas across, and the theme is lost in the crush.

ALASTAIR MOYLE: Llanelli

As an old member of the BSFA returned, I am particularly pleased to see an additional publication in the stable. But one that caters for those who write and those who would write is more than welcome. Welcome FOCUS!

Anyone living at a distance from the more active centres finds it easy to fall prey to an isolation that deepens as the uphill battle against indifference to his aspirations and lack of feedback lays him low. To know that others suffer and persevere can only boost confidence and encourage the weary.

Although it is the avowed and understandable intention of FOCUS not to become involved in practical advice and criticism, there is a similarity in the role of the writers' workshop covered so well in issue two, and the role of the magazine. The difference occurs when the beginning writer discovers that he is not a neurotic and that he does not exist in a vacuum. Anyone who has been to a workshop finds this - and this is where FOCUS performs its greatest service.

For those like myself, who haver an almost morbid interest in the way other people work, FOCUS will be invaluable. Richard Cowper said it all.

Simon Cunsley might be interested to know that there is a species of lizard to be found in the arid conditions in Central America that is able, when need arises, to reproduce by parthenogenesis. A little research into the back numbers of the NEW SCIENTIST - 1978, I think - should produce the goods. Speaking of research, I suggest that Greg Hills has a look into the experiments on flatworms that involve memory transfer by protein material - I assume that this is what Simon had in mind in his story (issue one).

Some might argue that if is an exact art, and that probably explains why nit-picking is so prevalent in the genre. I even used it myself on occasion: then I have to ask myself whether the greater service has been done by the author's imagination or his accuracy. Frequently - most frequently - speculation wins.

WILLIAM BAINS: Coventry

I found 'Workshops' to be a very enlightening item, and one which dispelled the image I had of writers' workshops as places of unrelieved gloom and viscIousness. The feedback they apparently generate is the greatest need of a writer seeking foot on the unpaved path to publication, and it is encouraging to those of us with little nerve to see that this need can be fulfilled without jackboots walking over the soul. But they left a gap in the discussion, one not filled by the excellent articles on the more professional side of publishing nor by the complementary article in the last VECTOR on 'Readers', namely how do established authors go through the agonies of self-appraisal that the uninitiates experienced at Pieria ((workshops)) and the like? This will vary, author to author, work to work, of course, but it might be interesting to instigate a small series along the lines of The worst piece of writing I ever did, and how I came to burn it before embarrassing myself in front of an editor', to give an idea, if an idea can be given, of how the internal censor works. Having no such entity myself, I find the subject not a little fascinating.

We both fight running battles with our own internal censors, so your suggestion is a welcome one. We're soliciting material on the subject now.

ANDREW HUDSON: Waltham Forest

I read the Spring 1980 edition of FOCUS with interest, particularly the section on writers' workshops. I have been a member of two writers' workshops and I am somewhat doubtful as to their use in teaching people to write. What I have found them useful for is in passing on information such as addresses or details of short story competitions.

The problem with writers' workshops is that quite often a dominant personality will attempt to force his views on the group, or conversely that an individual may feel that his style is being cramped by the collectivist atmosphere. They do have the advantage of bringing a would-be writer into contact with others; this helps them realise that they are not alone in their struggle to become published and to work out that rejection is commonplace at first. If the latent ability is not present no amount of advice or instruction can put it there. I should add, however, that I have never been a member of a science fiction writers' workshop so I have had no experience of how one operates, but I imagine the general rules apply. For myself, science fiction is merely a type of writing and surprisingly enough not an entirely new one either, but it is a type of writing that I am interested in.

PAUL MASON: Richmond, Surrey.

As an aspiring writer I have come to a number of conclusions:

1) There is a massive market for science fiction, particularly if you include radio, TV, film and even theatre.

2) For logical commercial reasons, agents, publishers and producers are nervous of using material from unknown and untried writers.

3) To become a successful writer you have got to work out some way of presenting your work so that it is assessed fairly.

Can I therefore propose that some of us get together to set up a marketing group to sell all the group should have a number of functions. First, it should get as many contacts as it can in markets and in potential markets. Find out exactly what the contacts want and carefully select from BSFA's members' work the right material to submit.

Second, it should help new writers by advising them how to present material to the market.

Third, it should act as a pressure group to try to persuade the media to use more SF. It could also provide articles etc. to newspapers, TV programmes etc.

Fourth, it should develop outlets for SF. For example, we may be able to produce radio programmes for North America, or even a magazine.

It is my belief that there is potentially a far wider market for sf than many of the writers in FOCUS believe. If films like 'Close Encounters...' do so well, or if 14 million people watch 'Blake's Seven', then how come the SF market is so small? The answer is, I believe, a badly informed public (about sf), badly informed buyers (except in many cases badly designed book covers which put off all but the dedicated fan.

How to organise the group? I would suggest setting up a group within the BSFA. It would need a coordinator, a number of people who would be prepared to do some market research, and a number of people who would be prepared to work on various projects. I am sure we could get advice from BSFA members who are experts in various aspects of publishing or broadcasting.

Can I just say one more thing, the only way a writer is going to sell his work is by hard marketing. I can assure you that the common myth that if your work is good it is bound to find a sympathetic publishers is generally wrong. You may be the lucky 1-in-a-million. A successful book or story has to be shown to the right publisher at the right time. To do this it is better that the writer is organised and well informed about markets.

Finally, if anyone is interested I am prepared to act as coordinator until a marketing group is set up formally.

We're not at all sure of the advisability of setting up a marketing group such as you suggest. Our own opinion is that it is better for writers to follow their own inspiration rather than producing work to satisfy specific markets.

Any one interested in Paul's idea should write to him direct at 23B Kew Gardens Road, Richmond, Surrey.

JOHN HITCHIN:
Publicity Director, Penguin Books

I happen to be a member of your Association and as I received a copy of FOCUS and was astonished to read your piece about this company, which passes on to your readers a set of totally unfounded rumours about our publishing activity. We have certainly cut back some aspects of our publication programme but this does not include science fiction and we have absolutely no intention of faltering in our desire to extend the range of good sf in our list. We are not, nor do we intend to be, major publishers of the genre, but nevertheless feel that a right and proper for it to be represented in our programme of new books.

We have just published Isidore Haiblum's **Interworld**, and we are about to reissue Yevgeny Zamyatin's We in our sf series. June sees the publication of the Poul and Karen Anderson major work **The Starchild Trilogy**, and later in the year, we reissue Saberhagen and Robert Sheckley. Gahan Chakker's Well World series starts coming out from us in 1981, which was when we always intended it to be, and we hope to make the first book for the series **Midnight at the Well of Souls**, available at the end of January. We are also planning to publish several titles by Lem in 1981 and we have a specially commissioned **Reader's Guide to Science Fiction** coming during the course of the year...

In conclusion I would like to affirm that we have every intention of going on with sf and reissuing it wherever possible. Our worldwide sales of the genre more than justify our doing so but of course we are not exactly helped in our task by the kind of adverse publicity which the BSFA journals choose to give us. I do hope the record can be set straight.

We are very pleased to hear that the Penguin sf list is continuing, and we're sorry that we inadvertently gave the impression in Market Space last issue that it was not.

While we try to print letters intact, we do reserve the right to print extracts only. We welcome letters that look in detail at items, or at single points raised, in the issue.

Our thanks to everyone who wrote in. Your letters were much appreciated. Keep them coming.

Playing the "Panel Game" Game

BRIAN ALDISS

This is a tale not so much about writing or earning money but about a rather unsuccessful story and the success it has had.

The tale comes to you courtesy of my file card system, which I began almost before I had written any stories for publication and still keep up. It is my Domesday Book, and those often-messy little cards tell me a great deal about life, time, fortune, and other imponderables.

So here's the file card for a story called "Panel Game". The card has a modest cluster of colour-coded stars in the top righthand corner. It also records how many words the story consists of, when it was written, to whom it was offered, and where it was published, reprinted, and translated. Sometimes, it remembers to say how much the story has earned in its various appearances.

"Panel Game" was a light-hearted and somewhat satirical look at the future of television, and how it would conquer the world. It was intended as amusement, not prophesy. I have not read it for twenty years and do not intend to do so now.

The card states that the story is 4,350 words long. It was written on the twelfth of September 1955. It was sent to NEW WORLDS, and I received an acceptance on the sixteenth of September (green star). It was published in the December 1955 issue. What speed! - Indeed, what haste! Ted Carnell was often short of material and would take short stories at the last moment just to fill in space. To many writers this could have been an incentive to submit. I was perverse; I wanted an acid test, I wanted to know that I had won a place in the magazine. It was unsatisfying to feel that one was just plugging a gap.

When I sent Ted Carnell "The Failed Men", a far better story than "Panel Game", he wrote by return of post saying so. I recall the actual phrase - "This will make you laugh..." And then went on to say that although he hated the story, which was both obscure and depressing, he would use it at once because he had a blank space to fill. (Ever since then, the charge of being obscure and depressing has been levelled against me; so this article will strive to be lucid and elevating.)

In fact, what Carnell said on acceptance of "Panel Game" was this: "I have no doubt that this is the fastest acceptance you have ever received. Even dare swear that it is probably a record in the publishing industry. However, I'd like to take "Panel Game" for our December issue. It makes a nice satire and we get far too few of those." I had posted the story in Oxford on Wednesday morning; the note of acceptance arrived on Friday morning. Payment took slightly longer - but Ted always paid promptly on publication.

Worrying though the speedy publication of "Panel Game" was, Carnell presented me with more cause for cogitation by suggesting that I should also be the subject of a 'Profile'. 'Profiles' appeared regularly inside the front cover of NEW WORLDS, always of famous writers like John Wyndham or E.C.Tubb; again, I held that such slots should be hard-earned and felt to be hard-earned. I'd only had half a dozen stories published in NEW WORLDS, if that.

Along with this modesty went unquenchable cockiness. Of course I deserved a 'Profile', and some other authors who manifestly couldn't parse a sentence had better watch out. (In those days, I thought of telling a good story and being stylish as somewhat separate operations.) I had some reason for being cocky, for 1955 was my great Year of Beginning.

My first book had been published and had had a friendly reception. That was **The Brightfount Diaries**, published by Faber & Faber, with illustrations by Pearl Falconer. What's more, they'd written to me, asking me if I'd like to do the book. None of your knocking on doors for this boyo! Also, I'd come first in THE OBSERVER short story competition, against the big names, such as John Christopher and Arthur Clarke. So I felt I was set to go places. Not that one can go many places, except perhaps Tunbridge Wells, with flibberty-gibbet stories like "Panel Game".

The story's second appearance was in my first collection of short stories (red star), **Space, Time and Nathaniel**, published in hardcover by Faber. It was some years before I could secure a paperback edition. Nobody wanted paperback sf in those days (or the hardcover stuff, please note). It's impossible to say how much "Panel Game" has earnt to date as a component of **Space, Time and Nathaniel**, but Ted Carnell paid me £7.14.0d. under the old pounds, shillings and pence arrangement. In April 1958, the story made its first appearance in translation (brown star). It was published in the German illustrated weekly, DIE WOCHE. Faber and I received fifty per cent of the fee each, which netted me £2.12.6d.

In 1959, I was surprised to receive an application from John Murray, the publishers. They wanted permission to include my story in a textbook for schools; it was to be called **Aspects of Science Fiction**, and was edited by a man called G.D.Doherty. I eventually received £2.5.0d for this permission (blue star).

But the money wasn't so important. What was important was that there was going to be a textbook of science fiction stories for schools. They were going to teach the stuff instead of burning it! Incredible! I wrote to this amazing chap Doherty. Soon we met. Geoff Doherty was a ball of fire. Some may remember him at the Gloucester convention, generally in the company of Kingsley Amis, Harry Harrison, and me. Geoff was full of excitement and could not stop talking. And his book was such a success that he compiled a second anthology for schools. As far as I know they were the first of all the school sf

textbooks, preceding the American ones which now pour forth with such rapidity and acclaim.

That is really the end of the tale, except for the reason why I fished out the file card for "Panel Game" today. For over twenty years it has lain undisturbed in the familiar wooden drawer. This morning, I got it out to add another brown star. "Panel Game" had just been published in Chinese, in a Peking anthology of science fiction entitled UFO, edited by Wang Feng-chen.

You are permitted not to think this momentous. For me it is momentous. It would take too long to explain why. All I will say is that I have always admired things Chinese (though not necessarily their form of government), and that one of the great things writing has brought me is the ability to travel. When I went to Peking last year, I met the editor of the anthology just published, who told me he that was translating "Panel Game".

Although China is a great power, she belongs – as the Chinese like reminding you – in the Third World. That phrase, The Third World, takes on mysterious connotations in Peking, as one might say 'Middle Earth'; it is a phrase to conjure with, containing incantatory properties. Humanity is the same everywhere, but in China it is also different; one has gone through the looking glass, and the bondage of cultural norms on both sides becomes apparent. The Chinese are now making great efforts, possibly mistaken ones, to conform to outside expectations. The sf anthology, UFO, is proof of that. So they will probably sign the Universal Copyright Agreement. Till then, there is no copyright. They do not pay for anything they publish. This sends some writers into paroxysms of righteous indignation. I am happy to contribute what I can free, hoping it may help. I owe far more to the luring image of China that I've held in my head since I was a child than I can ever hope to repay.

The question arises, Why should Chinese readers want to read "Panel Game", wrenched from a cultural context and dated? The answer probably is – that's just luck, the sort of casual luck that attends every writer. Not merit, luck, like winning THE OBSERVER competition or getting a good review, or being GoH at a Worldcon, or even being invited to China.

But beyond that, one perceives some mysterious point in the choice of "Panel Game". The Chinese perhaps see themselves as being in some respects where the British were in 1955 – emerging from a troubled period and facing the onslaught of the mass media, together with a vulgarisation of standards as described in the story. Perhaps the story embodies their hopes and fears in acceptable guise.

So was I, in 1955, exercising some kind of prodromic talent hitherto unrecognised, which would come to fruition only after a quarter of a century had passed? No, of course I wasn't. But I was describing, as sf writers naturally do, some of the pangs that technological cultures pass through. Despite its good-humoured jokiness, the story has long since lost its force over here; in the Third World, its theme retains topicality.

As I've said, the ability to travel over the world is one of the great things writing has brought me. I couldn't write without travel. My stay in Jugoslavia in 1964, to write a travel book called Cities and Stones, has had its influence on almost all of my novels since, not least on more recent ones like The Malacia Tapestry and Life in the West. Travel is expensive. You will gather that my earnings don't come from stories like "Panel Game".

Over twenty-five years, "Panel Game" has made only five modest appearances, and earned me (leaving Space, Time and Nathaniel out of the reckoning) the princely sum of £12.11.6d, under twelve guineas. Yet I'm pleased with it. It is my first bit of prose to find its way across the world and reach a Chinese audience.

You can't get more lucid and elevating than that.

Home Thoughts

DOROTHY DAVIES

21st March 1980. First day of Spring – and it's cold!

Dear Focus,

Someone asking for news and views, I cannot resist the temptation to write.

I am a brand new writer, only started seriously writing last July, and I am an even newer BSFA member. I make a serious confession now: I opened my first mailing and the first thing I found was a convention flier, which I threw away (as a married woman with a child, no way am I going to get to Conventions – except as GoH!), then VECTOR and the reviews, which I threw away (as a postman's wife with no money, no way am I going to be able to buy the paperbacks), then MATRIX, which I started to read but didn't understand, and I don't suppose I will until the next one, since it was full of letters referring to topics I hadn't seen!... and then I found FOCUS. I started reading it, and suddenly felt as though I had been converted all over again, that there are people out there who think as I think, who work like I work, who suffer as I suffer –

I AM NOT ALONE!!!

and if FOCUS does nothing else ever in its career, if it does that, makes new writers like me feel they are not alone, what more can you ask of a publication?

I started writing in July of last year, when I joined a Blake's 7 fan club, and was asked to contribute a story to the fanzine. I told the head of the fan club I couldn't write; she retorted that I could write five pages of single line foolscap letters then I could write stories. So I tried, and found I could. I soon progressed from Blake's 7 stories to more adventurous sf stories, and then started experimenting with ghost, horror, black fantasy, and now science fiction again. The months I spent writing stories have not been wasted. And in this I am answering Simon Ounsley's letter (FOCUS 2). I found the discipline of creating and writing a short story a tremendous help when I finally got around to planning a novel, which is already written. But I am sure I could not have written it so quickly, or so easily, without writing so many stories first. The concept is very different too; I am a visual writer, I can create a story from a single picture in my head, e.g. I had a picture one night of a blond, green-eyed Spacer locked in a cage. I then spent three days working out how he got in there, and more importantly, how to get him out again! The result was a 'light' sf story. This visual approach could not work for the book; I had to plan a complete storyline, even though I have written it as though it is a

film running through my mind.

I was recommended an agent by someone who writes, and I nervously wrapped up my first batch of stories and sent them off. I waited a month, jumping on the mail every morning, until the whole lot came back to me marked 'Gone Away'! I was recommended a second agent, who responded politely to my letter but said they didn't touch short stories. I then did what I should have done in the first place, which was ignore all the 'helpful' advice and obtain a copy of the 'Writers' & Artists' Yearbook; I worked my way through the agents, picking out those who said they accepted short MSS. Believe me when I tell you they don't. What they do is tell you "there's no market for them", or "we do it as a service for our established clients" and do their best to stop you! I'm trying to market my own - that way I get to learn from Editorial comment.

Tony Richards' article, "Writing In The Dark", struck chords with me. I know how he feels, I feel that way at times! I have been reduced to getting up and writing in the night when insomnia spoils the dark hours, but no typing, we live in my dilapidated 100-year-old cottage, and my typing hours are strictly limited by the fact that both my husband and the man next door are postmen! But the compulsion to write is strong, and grows stronger all the time. This week I have had a stack of paid typing (which supplements the income) and it has rather numbed my brain; but normally I'm writing all the time, when not typing I'm sitting with a folder of blank paper and notes and scribbling whilst the TV is on, or whatever.

My work is offbeat, perhaps; weird, definitely. I have seven commandments on my board in front of me, listing my priorities:

- Don't play God
- If Terry Nation can do it, so can I
- Can I twist the end of this story?
- Have I described my characters sufficiently?
- Have I told a good story?
- Is there anything I can do to make it better?
- First and foremost, I am a storyteller.

And the last is the most important of all.

When people found out I was writing the gratuitous advice poured in like an avalanche! Do this, do that, buy this, write that, type on this, count like this, assess like this. The latest piece of nonsense I have had to cope with is a 'friend' - admittedly connected with a publishing firm and married to a successful author - telling me I need an 'office' and if there is no room for an office or study in my two-bedroomed terraced cottage; I should rent myself an office and go there for set hours per day to work, thereby ensuring I go to the work fresh! This is so much nonsense, but only as far as I am concerned. Every one of us works in a different way. I understand R.F.Delderfield wrote from 9 to 1 every day and walked all afternoon. My friend's husband sleeps most of the day and works from 10 p.m. to 3 a.m. in his study. I write all day every day, in my head, when I can get to my desk, when I am driven from my desk by cooking, socialising, shopping, TV; I have a work folder and I carry on scribbling in that. And that accounts for what now totals 42 stories and a novel since last July. But that is the way I want to work, the way I have to work.

For me, the essential thing about FOCUS is the helpful tips I've already collected, confirmation like the Chris Priest article that what I've done is right, and the feeling that I am not alone. The person in Sunderland who wrote that he doesn't have a car, is broke, and feels isolated from writers, that's me, but I didn't write and complain because I didn't know where to write and complain! I would recommend carrying on correspondence with other writers. I do this a lot, we swap ideas around, discuss problems (characters taking over etc.) - I'm broke, yes, but the 10p I put on an envelope I consider worth it for the exchange of ideas, and the knowledge that you are not alone!

Maggie Noach's article "Who Needs An Agent?" with its "few agents now represent authors on the strength of short stories alone, unless those stories are outstanding" is typical of the sort of advice I could have done with a few months' back. I also am disturbed by this bias against short stories. People have insisted that it is a shrinking market, that there is no tradition in short story writing; I have been told that you can-not break into a short story market unless you are H.E. Bates etc. etc. Then I get told that I am "Bradbury, very, very black", "unusual and interesting", "full of quality and enthusiasm". So why the hell won't an agent look at me as a storyteller? And how different do I have to be? There is considerable art in writing a short story, confining and defining detail within a short set of words. There is no room to introduce characters in detail; their physical appearance and personalities have to be revealed throughout the short story, along with and coincidental to the action, and all this without losing your reader. It is an art, and I defy anyone to tell me that it isn't. Bradbury has proved it is, and I'm going to do the same! And to paraphrase the editor of GALAXY: if odds like that don't deter you, then you definitely have the kind of determination it takes to become a science fiction writer - or any other kind of writer, come to that!

The Medium and the Message

STEVE GALLAGHER

My first paid writing job was a radio serial for Independent Local Radio called **The Last Rose of Summer**. I'd originally intended the story as the book that every sf reader is one day going to write - it was in a half-devised and very incomplete form when I heard through the grapevine that Manchester's Piccadilly Radio was looking around for a drama project to develop. They were a young station, just into profit, and they didn't have an established drama production system; it was a case of the slot going to whoever could make the strongest pitch. I adapted the opening into a half-hour pilot episode, and we produced it in late-night sessions when the commercial production studio was empty; on the strength of this, the programme controller gave us the go-ahead for a six-part serial. It was my first commission and it did pretty well, syndicated around the country and in Australia.

I still had those early novel drafts of the story, and I thought that perhaps the radio production would give me a hook into

the market that a new writer wouldn't otherwise have. Commercial publishing (and there isn't really any other kind) is very media-oriented, but ILR stations still command comparatively parochial audiences, so a book trading on that publicity would still be a gamble. I took the original draft of The Last Rose of Summer to three publishers, and it was bought by Yvonne Heather for Corgi Books. Around this time I sold a play, The Humane Solution, to BBC Radio. It was an unrelated sale, picked off the slush pile. It got a strong production and led to two more commissions, one of them an sf outline, An Alternative to Suicide. I still rate this as the most honest sf I've done; it took a lot of faith on the part of Bernard Krichefski, my editor, and Martin Jenkins, the producer, to break free of the typical BBC Quatermass-oriented format for science fiction.

The Last Rose of Summer wasn't really much, I'm the first to insist. Some parts of it make me want to crawl under the table when I look back at them. Saturn 3 came some time later, but with a novelisation we're talking about something else altogether.

It came to me through Yvonne; she became my agent when she left Corgi. She began with my partner, and I'm main financial support for the agency in those very early days was from novelisations - hence the agency's name, Film Link. Yvonne has since moved out on her own to build up a straight literary list; only the name's stayed on.

In past months I've given a lot of reasons why I did it, most of them ego-boosting. It's difficult - or rather, it's impossible - to take any real pride in a novelisation. After all, it isn't your story and they aren't your characters, and it leaves you with damn-all. You're just a translator, or at best a reporter on events controlled by somebody else.

I've called it a foot in the publishing door, which is true - it's tough for new authors even to get looked at these days, let alone bought, and with the folding of most of the short fiction magazines there's no kind of intermediate testing ground. I had Chimera, my own first real book, in the pipeline, and I needed to get attention from publishers both at home and abroad to pave the way for its eventual sale. The Last Rose of Summer wouldn't have had that effect; it wasn't sufficiently commercial, and I don't think that it was good enough.

Those are a couple of the reasons I generally give, and there's some substance to them. The strongest reason, and the one that I generally avoid, is that I needed the money.

Perhaps you remember the strike (or the lockout, depending on which side of the story you get) which hit all the ITV companies for over three months in 1979. I welcomed the free time - I was working on Chimera by then - but I wasn't so happy about the instant evaporation of means. I was using my odd days to hop between London and Cumbria to research locations, and it wasn't a cheap affair; Saturn 3 gave me the means to go on without any break in continuity, alternating between my own work and the screenplay.

A novelisation can be as good or as bad as you care to make it. Most are pretty awful - cash-ins, hardly more than tarted-up screenplays with the punctuation rearranged. When Film Link in its early days set out to improve the situation, it attracted business like a magnet.

I was given what I assumed was an early draft of the screenplay. Characters weren't worked through, and a lot of the technical details either weren't covered or were inaccurate. Gravity, for example - no account was taken of the fact that even Saturn's biggest moon has a much lower gravity than Earth. There was even some confusion over which of the moons it was supposed to be. The whole socio-economic background was underdeveloped, and the actual purposes of the Saturn Survey were obscure - something about feeding Earth's hungry billions, but all you ever saw them do was collect geological samples.

There was also some simple bad plotting, like having a power overload handle at your elbow just when you needed it, with no prior setting-up or explanation. I tried to walk a narrow line between correcting the gross errors and contradicting the original - after all, it was a secretive production and I didn't know how the final film would be.

I re-wrote most of the dialogue, and tinkered with the plot where I could. The only really major thing that I did was add a new ending which nobody seemed to mind. Stanley Donen, the film's director, saw it and liked it, and Sphere Books decided to raise their print run by 25,000. I haven't seen the film so I don't know how it turned out; I like the basic situation a lot, but wouldn't have developed it as the screenplay did.

Anyway, it got me through the rain; I saw my people and I climbed my waterfalls, and Chimera was drafted by Christmas. Michael Joseph bought the hardback rights, and Sphere got the paperback rights. It's due out in February 1981.

My only other brush with the media was to be approached as a potential Doctor Who writer on the strength of An Alternative to Suicide. I responded with an outline, and the BBC responded with a commission. I'd thought it would be fun, and that proved to be the case. There hasn't been two other opportunities for TV work, neither of them enough to raise much excitement.

The "value of the sf form" isn't something I feel I can give a quick answer to, especially as I'm no longer sure what the sf form really is. I used to think I had it down pat, but really I was only preoccupied with the hardware and the generic icons - interstellar travel, strange worlds, aliens, all the coat-tail moneyspinners of the TV and film business. I now tend to be less captivated by good old-fashioned science fiction, whilst I'm paradoxically more convinced that the attitudes which lie behind it are the major component missing from late twentieth century "literature" (a literature which makes the mistake of believing that everyday detail is sufficient in itself to lead us to some major truth; I don't believe there's much of lasting value to be extracted from what has been described as the daily goings-on of the university wife-swapping circuit).

I think every young sf reader thinks that he or she is a natural fiction writer. I was no exception. Perhaps the main attraction was that you could substitute invention for experience and research, a fast shortcut to authority, but I don't see how such an attitude can ever produce decent fiction. Ask any layman for a snap assessment of sf, and the likelihood is that you'll get a stock reply: escapist plots, wooden characters. Try to lift this layer of prejudice and you're likely to find another: sf as prediction. I've heard of H.G.Wells as a writer being assessed on the number of things he got right.

If I have to stick my neck out, I'll say that the greatest value of the sf form is the sf reader. It takes a certain frame of mind to cope with sf and not become blank,

baffled, or hostile. The sf reader, by definition, has already accepted the principle that reality is flexible; it's the great slow forces lying behind the minor details that are important, not the details themselves.

It's taken me three years of writing sf for radio audiences to recognise the temptation to do things the wrong way round; that is, to start with your format and then try to push your ideas into it. Real ideas create their own formats; this is bad news to a salaried employee who has to by X number of stories per season and needs to look for regular signposts of acceptability; but when an author willingly and knowingly conforms to that kind of system he becomes a hack. I was getting good feedback on my radio stuff, mainly from people who were starting to glimpse the potential of science fiction above being 'B' Westerns with rayguns, but I'd suspect that this was only the first shock of exposure. After reading around, they'd find that my contribution ranked low in the field. I was learning the basics of the craft; I was also digging a hole to bury myself in. It was a stage of an apprenticeship, but it's over. Time to make a change.

From now on I'll let the ideas lead. This mainly means books, because this is the form in which the ideas are transmitted at their least diluted. Later adaptations can bow to the market pressures on the media, but the can't detract from the original statement.

Of the three projects which are occupying me now, none is readily recognisable as sf. Equally, none would be conceivable if it wasn't for science fiction. This is surely the way that all fiction will have to go; the world of 1980 is not the world of 1979. Perhaps the changes were implicit; but technology speeds such implications to us before we can get ready for them. Sf has been entertaining us with a flexible form of reality for years; now we're trying to live with it.

(With thanks to Mark Gorton)

We welcome submissions for TALKING POINTS. Our ideal word length is between 1000 and 1200, with an absolute maximum of 1500. The idea of TALKING POINTS is that contributors can talk about literally *anything* they like as long as it is connected with some aspect of our business - writing, selling, publishing, covers, writer's groups etc. An ideal TALKING POINTS article is a mixture of anecdote and experience, further example, discussion and conclusion. We are looking for a *point of view* upon the subject being discussed. We welcome humour.

Deadline for FOCUS 4 submissions - in *all* departments - is December 1st 1980.

CONTRIBUTORS

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