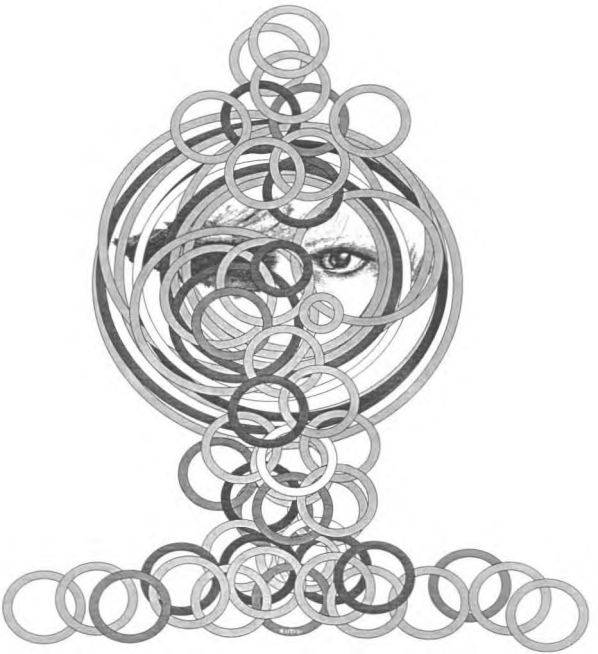
Focus

The B.S.F.A. writers' magazine
Issue 30 Sep/Oct 1996



Focus 30

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Forum

Putting on the Style

Does style affect the way you write, or does the way you write affect style? **Focus** invites you to contribute a short piece (600-800 words) to the Forum next issue on style.

What is style? Is it just a matter of a tone of voice, the atmosphere in your story, or is there more to it than that? Should we allow style to dictate the way a particular piece is written? Is style something that should be conformed to? Do you find yourself, as a writer of science fiction adopting a particular style when you write a short story? Does this change for longer works? Forum pieces on 'Putting on the Style' should be sent to **Focus** by **15 December 1996**

Contributions to **Focus** are always welcome.

Fiction should be of a very good quality and no longer than 5,000 words.

Articles about all aspects of writing are always needed, up to 4,000 words. Please contact the editors if you are unsure whether the article fits our remit. We also require short pieces around 600-800 words for our Forum – see elsewhere in this issue for the subject of next issue's Forum.

Contributions should be submitted on A4 paper, double-spaced on one side of the paper only. Discs may also be submitted – please contact the editors for more information in the first instance.

Cover art, illustrations and fillers are always welcome.

Other BSFA Publications:

Matrix is the news magazine of the BSFA. Letters and enquiries to Chris Terran, 9 Beechwood Court, Back Beechwood Grove, Leeds, West Yorkshire, LS4 2HS

Vector is the critical journal of the BSFA. Letters and enquiries to Tony Cullen, 16 Weaver's Way, Camden Town, London NW1 0XE

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£18 UK; £23 50 Europe; £23 50 (surface) elsewhere; £30 (airmail) elsewhere; £9 UK only for students, unwaged, retired - on receipt of a photocopy of suitable proof.

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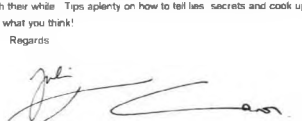
Editorial

Through a telephoto lens, lightly...

The BSFA, and **Focus** in particular, is dabbling its toes in the great electronic ocean. Since we last wrote to you both of your editors have had some surfing experience on 'the net', though by the time this reaches you one of us will have lost her surfboard. The World Wide Web is an electronic construct that has only in the last few years become 'real' as opposed to being science fiction, even Radio 4 has heard of it. Sites containing information on virtually (**sorry**!) every subject, including writing, can be accessed and material downloaded. Check out Andrew Butler's introduction to the WWW for writers on page 18, and on the Web itself. Dave Langford also gives us some insight into the perils of electronic transmission in his tale of the joys of editing an encyclopedia, below.

Plenty of the stuff out there *is* fiction, in the sense of lies, untruths, non-facts. In the English language, *story* or *tale* is synonymous with *lie* or *fib* (look it up in Roget)– and it's no coincidence. We talk euphemistically of 'suspending disbelief' rather as politicians are economical with the truth. We work very hard to convince our readers, for a while, to believe in our lies. Like many a voter, (or X-Files fan) they want to believe, but we have to make it worth their while. Tips aplenty on how to tell lies, secrets and cook up convincing aliens in your very own **Focus**. Don't forget to write and tell us what you think!

Regards



Notes from Fantasyland

David Langford

After a couple of years' entanglement with the project, I am in serious danger of becoming a **Fantasy Encyclopedia** bore. (But not, please, a glory-grabber: the co-editors are John Clute and John Grant, and I am but a lowly Contributing Editor who sits below the salt.) The lesson I have learned from all this prolonged experience with a major reference work is, primarily, that I could do with a lot more sleep than I've been getting. What follows is a random selection of further lessons and oddments arising from the **FE** and related work.

1) Reference books and nonfiction

* You can't trust your memory. All references need to be checked, and especially the ones you know you needn't check. When I was writing the Discworld quizbook (a period of madness which overlapped the greater madness of the **FE**), I was so confident that it was the troll Detritus who spoke a certain line in Terry Pratchett's **Moving Pictures** that I neglected to look up the relevant page and discover that it was another troll called Rock. One **FE** contributor blithely listed Barbara Hambly's novels **The Time of the Dark**, **Dragonsbane**, **The Dark Hand of Magic** and **Stranger at the Wedding** as, respectively, **The Coming of the Dark**, **Dragonbane**, **The Dark Side of Magic** and **A Guest at the Wedding**.

* You can't trust secondary sources. Murphy's Law states that if you haven't read a book and trust to a review for a needed description, this review will be the one that gets it utterly wrong. A blurb example, again from Terry Pratchett: his US publishers were unable to take in the alien concept of morris-dancers, and instead advertised his **Lords and Ladies** as featuring a football team. One day you will read this non-fact in a reference book. (But not the **FE**.)

* Omissions are harder to spot than errors. Showing your material to other knowledgeable folk may help – or it may not. At one particularly exhausted phase of the project, I checked John Clute's draft of the theme entry on MASQUES (to which I added a couple of bits of erudition about **Comus** and **The Man Who Was Thursday**), whereupon John Grant gently pointed out that neither of us had thought to mention that obscure example the 'Masque of the Red Death'. Similarly, a draft entry on MICE AND RATS scrolled past my bleary eyes and looked OK – until, jolted awake next day, I followed up with a hasty fax about the lack of cross-reference to PIED PIPER.

* You can't trust copyright dates in books – at least, in older ones. My hardback reprint of E.R. Eddison's **The Worm Ouroboros** states clearly that it is "Copyright 1926 1952". So I put down 1926, and great was the cachinnation of cavorting Clute as he gleefully taunted me for being one of those innocents who believed such stories about a book published in 1922. Similarly, Methuen's edition of **The Night Life of the Gods** by Thorne Smith (whose **FE** entry I wrote) acknowledges gracefully that "This book was originally published by Messrs. Arthur Barker Ltd., in 1934" – of course, gentlemanly British publishers disdained to notice prior appearance in Smith's low colonial homeland, in 1931.

* For those with net access, there are on-line resources that can help with titles and dates. The ones I found most useful can be reached by telnet: the Library of Congress at `locis.loc.gov` and the National Library of Scotland at `opac.nls.uk` – both of which allow searching of their entire catalogues. The former is best tried in the morning, before America wakes up and clogs the

lines, the latter is available only from 0830 to 2030 on weekdays. On the web, the Internet Bookshop at `http://www.bookshop.co.uk` has a facility for searching **British Books in Print**.

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* As the deadline nears, editors would much, much rather have some text to examine (and comment upon) than an endless string of perfectionist queries about the content of promised text. One contributor who shall be nameless, and who had been assigned a batch of exceptionally marginal entries, not only **kept** sending voluminous e-mail about minute details of emphasis, but repeatedly harangued the co-editors in long and boring phone calls which had mild-mannered Clute and Grant seriously contemplating new careers as axe-murderers. It was a general rule that the most obscure contributors made the most fuss. Eminent critic Franz Rottensteiner sent a delighted thank-you note about some slight changes made to his work for clarity's sake, but one unfamous Eastern European with an erratic grasp of English was blazingly determined to defend every single one of his malaprop words.

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* When you have worked your way deeply into the style of the reference book you're working on, it becomes increasingly necessary to stand back and try to see the text as a new reader might. I admit that my example of a possible sentence in the **FE** entry for BRAVE LITTLE TAILOR was apocryphal: "The BLT sandwiches, as it were, the concepts of..." But there was one draft entry, making two legitimate cross-references, which nevertheless seemed to need some rephrasing of its remark that the author in question was "fond of depicting GHOSTS in BONDAGE."

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* If you can't think of a perfect closing "punchline" sentence for an encyclopedia entry, it's best to omit it and get on with the next entry. Literary airs and graces will probably be cut by the editor in any case. Right, I've run out of steam in this section, and so -- without polish or ceremony -- we move on.

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2) Electronic submission

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Much of the **FE** material was sent in on disk; a heap of (mostly late) entries also came by e-mail, and dealing with these somehow became my job. The continuing surprise was that so many people who'd seen the **FE** style sheet -- not to mention others who owned the **SF Encyclopedia** and were begged to imitate its entry layout on a simple principle of "monkey see, monkey do" -- proved incapable of following instructions. Line spaces, tabs and weirder artifacts were liberally scattered in all the wrong places. The most maddeningly widespread problem was the persistent use of CAPITALS for cross-references which should have been marked in small caps. Any consistent form of coding for a cross-reference -- $$precognition$$ or [talents] or <sc>wizards</sc> or what have you -- could be rapidly converted by word processor macros, but with plain CAPITALS there was nothing for it but to go through doing it all by hand, swearing loudly the while. Less specifically:

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* The ideal arrangement is for you to use the same word processor in which the text is to be end-edited. Failing this option (which is usually accompanied by pigs flying in the radiance of a blue moon), the best systems are those whose format is easily convertible. Automatic conversion programs and "filters" are fallible, and the resulting text can be full of oddities like the mysterious Font Change and Tab Set codes which appeared in each new paragraph of one contributor's stuff, but it's still better than having the stuff retyped. Have a word with the editor about suitable formats.

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* "Plain ASCII text" files are regarded as standard, but have many shortcomings. Most word processors offer the ASCII option, without exactly emphasizing the fact that all your print controls -- underline, italic, boldface and small-caps codes -- will quietly vanish. If you can arrange for, say, underline/italic to be marked with _underscores_ and boldface with *asterisks*, the text becomes far easier to reconstitute. (This is one reason why I like WordPerfect, which lets you write a once-and-for-all macro for conversion of any document's print controls to such alternative codes that can survive ASCII conversion. The endemic LocoScript is a disaster in this area: no macro facility, and no provision for search-and-replace on print controls.)

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* Even when you've mastered saving in ASCII format, there may still be problems with special characters. For example, the pound sign (£) and acute-accented "e" (é) occupy different positions in the IBM DOS and IBM Windows character sets. If you use a DOS-based word processor and your publisher favours Windows -- or vice-versa -- the characters will come out differently. More exotically accented letters may be lost altogether since they're not in the basic ASCII character set at all. Em and en dashes are best avoided for this reason: use pairs of hyphens. Watch out for "smart quotes", whereby word processors automatically insert classy (non-ASCII) "66" and "99" characters rather than the unisex "typewriter" double-quote; single quotes and apostrophes may also be affected. The **FE** solution to all this was to ask for a print-out with any potentially "difficult" characters marked, to allow checking. Few contributors provided one.

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* If using e-mail, learn your software. Material sent as a plain e-mail message (which is how I deliver my stuff to **SFX**) needs to be converted to ASCII as above, with underlining marked in some agreed fashion. Too many people blithely take files in their favourite word-processor format (Word, say, or WordPerfect) and load them into an e-mail message -- which produces garbage. If you have decent e-mail software, there should be options for sending files "UUencoded" or as "MIME attachments", both of which can be deciphered at the far end as exact copies of the original file -- provided, of course, that the recipient also has the needed facilities (ask first). It can be worth sending ASCII files by these routes: e-mail tends to arrive with a hard Return at the end of each line, which editors need to remove so that the text can be reformatted. Many word processors let you save in ASCII format with Returns appearing only at the end of each paragraph: sending such files via the UUencode or MIME routes will preserve this.

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* Putting something like the following at the end of each document file will help assure editors that nothing got lost in the works:

[Ends]

The first couple of letters in this issue's letters column are in response to Focus 28. First from:

Roy Gray

Well done on **Focus** again. I was pleased with your presentation of my piece. It looks much better with a properly set out title and it's so nice to be rubbing shoulders with Colin Greenland and Stephen Baxter.

I showed Colin's article to other members of the writing class and we thought it was well said. It's not that we don't do that, just that we didn't do it quite so systematically. Accidentally, perhaps, as we revised our first drafts.

Geoff Cowie responds to our request for workshop pieces:–

Re. the request for comments on writers' workshops, I have participated in a good many over the years. These included local authority evening classes, residential courses, informal readings in hired rooms, workshops at SF Cons, and the BSFA's Orbiter. Mostly this was as a participant, though I did chair a workshop at NOVACON, and co-ordinate an Orbiter group.

Workshops have a variety of different functions, whose relative importance varies from one workshop to another. For getting to know other writers, the local authority classes, and the readings organised in pub function rooms, were the most effective, as the participants lived locally and re-attended frequently. For technical help, the intensive workshops, where material was pre-submitted and then read aloud and discussed, were doubtless the most effective. The Orbiter workshops were good on technical input – depending on the experience of the participants. The experienced tutors available at residential courses or some SF Con workshops make these workshops more valuable than workshops where none of the participants have professional experience.

Cost – many workshops are of nominal cost or can be written down as a cheap evening out. Residential courses are of a different order though, and I would suggest some care in selecting a suitable course which will prove value for money, and in looking for grant assistance which may well be available from your regional Arts Association provided you apply well in advance.

As for what the participants get out of it, this comes under several headings.

Training in the methods of the trade and feedback on the success of one's efforts. This is better than learning by trial and error.

Encouragement: this is important, as it is hardly possible to write without believing that one is creating something good, or that in the course of time one will. Even a few words of praise from an audience will encourage the struggling writer to continue.

Social aspects: humans are social beings, and writing is more agreeable as part of one's social life than as a solitary hobby.

As for the standard of criticism, this varies. At some local circles I have attended, serious criticism seems to be considered rather unsporting, otherwise criticism usually comes balanced with encouragement. Some comments are quite useless, others helpful and highly perceptive.

As for running a workshop, this requires some administrative skill; tact, and if one is to take the tutor's seat, some writing experience. It is probably not uncommon for experienced writers to find that criticizing other people's struggling efforts is almost as interesting as doing their own writing.

I don't write any more, for various reasons, a drying up of ideas, a discouraging row with members of an Orbiter group over content, a feeling that Japanese animation did everything I had been trying to do, only better, and a feeling that I'd never be good enough to achieve any success.

The Plotting Parlour

And now some responses to our last issue.

Sandra Unerman

I enjoyed the article by Sherwood Smith in **Focus** 29. I was particularly pleased to see it, because my impression is that many readers of science fiction and fantasy in the UK do not pay much attention to works which are published as children's books. Some time ago, I spent a year in Minneapolis in the USA and took part in a discussion group on fantasy literature which met once a month. It seemed to be taken for granted that children's authors – not all of them, of course, but some, including Natalie Babbitt and Diana Wynne Jones – produce work just as much worth reading and discussing as those who write for an adult market.

Among other writers for children whose work I enjoy and would be glad to see reviewed in **Vector**, is Susan Price. Her recent books, **Ghost Dance** and **Eftgift**, are atmospheric tales which use traditional material very effectively. Other favourites of mine are Joan Aiken and Leon Garfield. I do not think it is necessary to be a teacher or parent to enjoy such authors and I, for one, would appreciate hearing more about them from the BSFA. **[Vector has in the past published both reviews and articles on SF & F for younger readers – for example, 'SF for Children: the Best Current Paperbacks rounded up' (Vector 176, December/January 1994, pp10-11). However, joint features editor Andrew Butler tells us that they're conscious that little has appeared recently and submissions are actively sought for future issues.]**

By the way, I did not receive the mailing including this issue of **Focus** until the second week in June. So I was a bit puzzled to see 31st May as the deadline for contributions to the next issue. Was the mailing delayed or had my copy got held up in the post? (The printing on the label did seem very faint.) I am not making a complaint about this – I just thought you ought to know, in case anything can be done for future issues. **[The mailing containing issue 29 was delayed. Apologies for the confusion.]**

I am grateful to you and your colleagues for all your work on the BSFA magazines. It is great to feel in touch with people who share my interest, even if I don't often feel moved to write in response. **[Editors are always pleased to see responses to their magazines, letters are what keep us from thinking we're working in a vacuum. So keep them coming!]**

John Howard

Further to Mark Plummer's letter in **Focus** 29, he is absolutely right about the reasons for the BSFA *not* to publish its own fiction magazine.

As someone who harbours no desire to write and publish sf, I think that a BSFA fiction magazine should be avoided at all costs.

I also think that this should include the abolition of **Focus**. The 'how-to' articles, market news, etc could be included in **Matrix**. **[Thank you for being honest, John. However, we will continue producing Focus for as long as there is an interest in it from the membership as a whole.]**

Roy Gray

Well done on **Focus** 29, another good issue. I enjoyed the workshop descriptions but from the sound of it I doubt I would find as much enjoyment in the actual workshops. A pity because so far I've always found them fun.

My vote is no BSFA fiction magazine. There are plenty of opportunities 'out there' whereas they are far fewer for non-fiction articles of interest.

The following is a useful contact for Cheshire writers. Write in to get on his mailing list. John Siddique, Literature Development Worker for Cheshire, c/o Cheshire County Council, Arts Services, Goldsmith House, Hamilton Place, Chester CH1 1SE.
Also Keele University Adult Education Unit run 'creative writing' day and evening classes all over Cheshire and the Staffs region (tel 01272 625116 or 01272 621111 ex 3244).

The Nostradamus Widow

by Howard Watts

The crimson hues of the polluted evening sky and the growing formation of angry grey clouds crept over the houses. The duo clashed over the rooftops, a domestic dogfight for fleeting dominance above the village, before the black warrior of night returned.

At once the hostilities ceased, the intangible ebony assassin reappeared, settling the feud, reclaiming his domain and banishing the bickering pretenders, along with their twilight battleground to fight again the next day.

The colossal black barbarian hung over the village, allowing anyone interested below a view of the tiny points of light, the only occupants it was willing to share its empire with.

Night was satisfied with its omnipotence, and settled comfortably in its appointment, protecting the people as they slept.

Suddenly night stirred, surprised in its almighty blanket of black, as a dark presence drifted above. It trembled as the presence plunged through it towards the land, and cowered as the invader prowled with a sombre dark smear. It was a black formless shadow of obscurity without substance, which eclipsed and humbled the dark of night with a darkness deeper and more dominant than night could ever muster.

The smeared shadow writhed below, relentless and oppressive, crawling through the streets, slinking under doors, through gaps in window frames. An unseen foreign trespasser, ruthless and terrible as it violated the night and covered the land.

* * *

The early morning sky was cloud-free. Bethnene stood on tip-toes, watching from her bedroom window as the stars softened against the approaching blue, and gradually faded as they gave way to morning. The girl looked to the west horizon, and through her sleepy eyes thought she saw a dark wave of something billowing across the rolling hills, as if it were afraid of the daylight. She rubbed her eyes and stared, but the something had disappeared. Only the ashen veil spewed from the huge industrial sites on the edge of the city, some twenty miles distant, fogged what would otherwise have been a beautiful day.

"Beth! Time to get up," called her mother's voice.

She turned from the window and hurried downstairs.

There, standing in the middle of the front room was Christina, her mother.

Bethnene frowned. A dark ellipse had embraced Christina, a black realm whose hazy fringe seemed to reach out and claw against the daylight.

Something clicked in the room and her mother smiled.

"Good morning, Beth. I know this will seem a little strange, but there're a few things I must tell you." The image of Christina flickered, then a thin wave shimmered from top to bottom, temporarily creating a silver wrinkle which unhurriedly refreshed the image. The process was repeated horizontally, revealing the tall angular woman in a slightly different pose.

At once Bethnene understood. Her mother had left the house early, leaving a recorded message for her in her disk-diary. The unit was old and somewhat unreliable, but over the past few weeks it seemed her mother's mind was troubled by something more important than to have the unit overhauled.

Beth hurried over to the controls and turned up the brightness slightly. Her mother was standing in the garden at the back of the house. The black of night had been captured by the recorder's scanning head, but now the foliage in the background fused with the wallpaper behind the image, creating a transparent interlaced embroidery of past and present.

"Beth, it's time you were told about your father. You only knew him for a very short time, and we're now at a point in time where you'll need to understand his story. I've recorded several response sections on disk, to answer any questions you may have for me."

The girl thought for a moment, then sat cross-legged on the floor.

"Daddy was a bad man, wasn't he, Mum?"

The image flickered again as the reader head skipped to a response sector on the disk, and Christina's pose altered.

"No, not at all. I suppose that's play area talk from school. Words spoken by frightened parents and overheard by your friends."

"Last week my history tutor Mr Pauli said that daddy upset the whole world."

Christina's image wrinkled silver. She smiled and shook her head. "Daddy just had a bad habit of always telling the truth, and always being right. Adults are afraid of the truth at times, Beth. For some reason it can upset them."

At the tender age of twelve years, Bethnene felt confused at her mother's statement, but decided to let her continue without questioning why.

The unit purred, and Christina spoke again.

"Now Beth, this story will sound quite strange, but try to listen. I haven't much time."

Beth noticed from her mother's expression she was gathering her thoughts, but could not know she was remembering the early years of her relationship, before she ultimately became nicknamed, the Nostradamus Widow.

"I met your father fifteen years ago. He was a very interesting man, full of life and expectation for the world he lived in. Somehow we were drawn to each other, the hours we spent apart after our first meeting were meaningless and empty. We fell in love quickly, and were married within a year." Christina smiled with a trace of regret as she recalled images seen and words heard by her mind. "Your dad would say to me, a door opened in my life when I met you. Into a room of endless discovery and happiness." I only wish I could have closed that door, Beth. I might have saved your father from the horrors that room held."

Bethnene's interest sparked up. "What horrors, Mum? Monsters or something?"

Christina nodded, and her image quivered as the drive skipped a few tracks. She knew her daughter was at a stage

where she was afraid of monsters, and she had guessed Bethnene might connect the word 'horrors' with 'monsters.'

"Mmm – you could say that Beth. A monster which appeared in his mind to speak to him. You see, soon after we were married your dad started having visions and hearing voices in strange dreams and nightmares. Some, he told me, were very pleasant, but others were full of nasty things. He started seeing the future, and when he told me what he had seen, we found he was never wrong – not in the slightest detail. At first, your father's gift was easy to live with – really it was a great benefit. His gift made us enough money to move out of the city and live in the countryside. Once we'd settled down, away from the hustle and bustle of the city, I became pregnant. Your father told me you would be a little girl, your exact birth weight, and the time you would be born. Life couldn't have been better for us."

"Tell me about the monsters, Mum. I've dreamt of them before." Bethnene said, standing, then taking a step closer.

Christina stared up to the night sky. Her eyes suddenly filled with tears, and she fought them back and swallowed hard. The image winked out, leaving the girl alone in the silence. Then the disk-drive whirred and clicked a few times and her mother returned.

"As I said, at first your father's gift was easy to live with, but then everything turned bad. He knew too much. His head became crammed with all this, this information. Most of it he didn't need or want, but it just appeared. I remember talking to him as we walked through the busy city streets one afternoon. He was fine – then the strangest look formed in his eyes, a look of total understanding. After that afternoon it was too much. He knew when I'd be happy, when I'd be sad, and he'd try to adapt to those feelings. We had this huge argument – I said, if he'd just stop telling me how I felt! You see Beth, I blamed him. I said he was making me feel those feelings, as if he was steering me into an emotional dead end. It was as if he was a larger part of me than I was. His predictions grew. He knew when I was hot, cold, tired, hungry, thirsty. One evening, I prepared a surprise candle-lit dinner, to steer our minds away from his gift. He walked through the front door with a smile, holding a bottle of wine. We had a lovely evening and..."

Christina paused and thought hard before continuing.

"You had a twin brother, Beth. He was three years old when he died. Your father came home one evening and said, 'I'm so very, very sorry, Christina. Tomorrow our son will die.' I begged him, pleaded with him to tell me when and where, how and why. But all he kept saying was, 'There's nothing we can do. What must be must be. We cannot alter the natural order of things.' I shouted and screamed at him. I hit him, but I knew he was right, there was nothing I could do or say that could help. Your father just sat there in his chair, staring into space. The following day I kept your brother home with us. I watched his every move. He played all day, happy he was, with his mother and sister, and not with the nanny we employed to look after both of you. I sat and watched him, waiting and waiting. Nothing happened.

"Your father returned home that evening and we sat down to eat."

The memory was too much for Christina. Her mind's eye filled with the visions of her lost son, giving birth to streams of tears as if to wash the painful memories away. They could not. The images were carved deeply into her soul. Still frame following still frame, like some ancient historical event engraved thousands of years before in granite that no amount of time or exposure to the elements could distort or misconstrue. A personal memorial of pain, loss, and regret.

She wiped the tears away.

"As we ate dinner, your brother choked. I tried to save him – I tried everything, but it was no use. He died in my arms. All through this, your father just sat in his chair, watching, crying in silence." Christina bowed her head, trying to hide her grief from her daughter. "Somehow I stayed with him. Perhaps at first it was the pity I felt for him. But I know now, even after everything that happened, it was the love we shared that kept us together. That was the most important part of our relationship, remember that, Beth. Anyway, that evening proved too much for your father. He started to go out to the cities and preach, to tell the people they were wrong to live the way they did, to choose the things they chose. But I think even then, he knew it was too late for everyone. A few weeks later he was taken away."

The Nostradamus Widow smiled. "He predicted even that. He walked out of the front door that morning, and before he closed it behind him, he turned to me and said, 'You will never see me alive again, my love. Today they will come for me. But do not fear, for everyone's time is short. I will tell them and they will believe me.'" She paused and bowed her head. "I read in the newspapers they questioned him, asking how he knew so much, where he got his information. Then, I found out when he told them the truth they beat him. They wanted him to lie, but he couldn't. They wanted him to be wrong, but deep in their hearts they knew he wasn't."

Christina glanced at her watch.

"Beth, listen closely. I'm sorry I couldn't bring myself to tell you all this face to face, but there's something very important I must tell you, something your father told me the day he was taken away.

"Beth, today will be a difficult day for you. I won't be here when you wake up in the morning, neither will any adult in the world. You'll have to fend for yourself, help yourself. You see, those wrong choices your father warned the people about, all the hatred, ignorance, prejudice, violence, greed and fear, which runs naked in people's thoughts while they're asleep, surfaces when they wake up. All the bad things in the world have given birth to something terrible. A monster that will sweep all the adults away to a place of permanent darkness to be punished."

She took a few steps forward, her expression trying to mask the fear and heartache.

"Look for other children to help you survive, Beth. In time they will look for you, for you have your father's eyes, your father's gifts of wisdom and insight. They will develop later when you're older, and will help you lead the other children, help you teach them and find the clear path that leads to the future and the new world that needs to be built."

The girl stepped forwards and looked up to the recorded image of her mother. She wrapped her arms around her neck and kissed her on the cheek.

Christina closed her eyes and stepped back, leaving Bethnene in her posed embrace.

"I've left you two other disks on top of the recorder, Beth, knowledge you will need to help you in your task. Take them and

learn, and remember, all three of us loved you very much."

As Bethnene watched, the darkness around her mother grew. A black creeping something crawled from the fringes of the garden as her mother stood unaware. Slowly the black filled the screen, obscuring the garden first, then ultimately the Nostradamus Widow.

Beth bowed her head and shuffled to the recorder. She picked up the disks and turned the player off, removing the black ellipse from the middle of the room. She knew her first job would be to find a new unit to replay the two disks. After all, she didn't want her mother's other messages blacked out by a faulty piece of equipment.

Marketing the Fruits of Your Labour

Knowing exactly which market to send your material to is a boon to any writer, whether of fiction or non-fiction. Research then is paramount. It's no good sending your hard science fiction tale to **Scherazade**, a fantasy magazine. Nor your fantasy novella to **Analog**, which publishes mainly hard science fiction. Of course, you can't read every magazine that is out there, but you should read a fair cross-selection to gauge the current market state. If you can't find a magazine, or can't afford to buy one, then you should at least invest in an SAE (Stamped Addresses Envelope) and send for a copy of the magazine's guidelines before submitting your work; this can save on the number of rejections you can expect back.

✦

There are literally hundreds of markets out there for your science fiction, fantasy and horror stories. Here are a few pointers, and a few market ideas.

✦

Get yourself a subscription to **Zene**, available from Andy Cox, TTA Press, 5 Martins Lane, Witcham, Ely, Cambs. CB6 2LB. A four issue subscription costs £8, cheques payable to 'TTA Press.' **Zene** is a listing of small press magazines from the UK, USA, Canada, Australia and Europe, it also includes guidelines to most entries. This one is a must for anyone wanting to break into the small press scene.

✦

Get hold of a BBR/NSFA catalogue from Chris Reed, BBR, PO Box 625, Sheffield, S1 3GY. Chris carries copies of a lot of UK, US and Canadian magazines. Essential to find out the type of market that you're hoping to submit to.

✦

Send for a copy of **Scavenger's Newsletter** or **Scavenger's Scrapbook**. The US equivalent of **Zene**, available from the NSFA on subscription, or as individual copies.

✦

If you have web access, do a search for market information, you'll be surprised at the amount of information you can find there (see also Andy Butler's piece on writing resources on the web, elsewhere in this issue). In the meantime, here's a couple to be going on with:

✦

The Edge edited by Graham Evans, 1 Nichols Court, Belle Vue, Chelmsford, Essex. CM2 0BS. Billed as 'A Magazine of Imaginative SF, Fantasy, Horror and Slipstream'. Send an SAE to Graham to query if he's reading at the moment. A single issue of **The Edge** costs £1.95, cheques payable to **The Edge**, to the address above.

✦

The Capricorn International Author's Guild Poetry and Short Story Competition. There are two categories: Poetry and Short Story. The theme is open, with no restriction to style, content or length in either category. There are cash prizes of £100 for the poem and story placed first plus publication in an anthology. In addition there are two runners up prizes of publication in an anthology in the short story category and five runners up prizes of publication in an anthology in the poetry category. All prize winners will receive a complimentary copy of the anthology. The entry fee is £3 per poem or story, £1 for the fourth poem and/or story and beyond. Further details can be obtained from The Capricorn International Poetry and Short Story Competition, 17 West Lea Road, Weston, Bath. BA1 3RL. Closing date is 30 November 1996. Don't forget to include an SAE with any enquiry.

✦

County of Cardiff International Poetry Competition. Send SAE to County of Cardiff International Poetry Competition, PO Box 438, Cardiff. CF1 6YA for an entry form. Deadline is 31 October 1996. First prize £1000. Winning poem to be published in **The New Welsh Review**.

Remember whenever writing to an editor or competition secretary for information, *always* enclose a stamped self-addressed envelope.

Dr Greenland's Prescription

When rewriting, I often find I've started a paragraph with an act of looking. 'She looked at him.' Then, because it's her story, I've gone on with what she saw or did or thought or felt – something about her.

Unmodified, 'She looked at him' is a weak opening. Worse, it directs us to look away from her. Pulling us back in the next sentence creates one of those tiny subliminal moments of frustrated expectation that can add up to dissatisfaction with the whole book.

What I usually mean is: we look at him. What's needed there is a short piece, probably one sentence, of description, to allow us to share what she sees: what he's doing, what he looks like. Not just how tall he is or the colour of his eyes, but a loaded description that lets us know how she feels about what she sees – what, therefore, makes her say or do whatever comes next.

The perception becomes the hinge from which that paragraph swings open.

Engaging their senses is what makes your reader believe in your imaginary world.

It is some time in the future, and my viewpoint character is poking around a building wrecked by fire. I write: 'Fused lumps of optical fibre dangled from the ceilings.'

The next task is: to make them feel it. Now they know it's there, to make them sense it. What is it like?

At this point you can worry about the actual characteristics of optical fibre. You can research its typical deformation at appropriate temperatures.

Or you can do what I do. Use your imagination.

This is where we traditionally reach for a simile. Something strange can be sensed if compared to something familiar.

I thought of thick, clumpy, gluey strands melted together.

Spaghetti.

Also, especially dangling from ceilings: cobwebs.

No image is neutral. Every one comes with connotations and associations. Spaghetti seemed potentially comic to me; cobwebs creepy. I went for cobwebs.

The fibres are like cobwebs, but unlike them too. Science fiction makes the strange familiar, the familiar strange. These cobwebs had to be made more solid; and synthetic.

> "Fused lumps of optical fibre dangled from the ceilings *like cobwebs of molten glass*."

Now I felt those fibres were present to my senses. I could see them; almost touch them.

Then I made one last adjustment to my sentence:

> "Fused lumps of optical fibre *hung* from the ceilings like cobwebs of molten glass."

Weakening the verb strengthens the image. If you emphasize too many things, you end up emphasizing nothing.

Find the sensory image with the right connotations, and it will do the work for you.

In my story 'The Wish', the cocky and opinionated Steve has passed into another, older world, and doesn't realise yet that there is no way back. I wrote:

> "Outside the forest was soft and encroaching. The air was like dusty amber. The car would not start."

Dusty amber gives you that deep golden particulate glow of evergreens. It also encourages us, because amber was once fluid and is now set, and because the dust may well be inside the amber, to suspect that Steve is stuck.

If I wanted the contrary, say, to prepare Steve to be energised and dispatched, I might have written:

> "Outside the forest prickled with seed and sap. The air was like spring water. The car rumbled into life."

Contrast is a useful principle for evoking a sense of location, of ambience. It can also clarify your work, making places and things instantly distinguishable.

Part of your story is set on two spaceships. What does it feel like on board each? How do they differ?

Well, perhaps one has artificial gravity. So, the other doesn't.

Now every time someone makes a movement it will be clear to you, and to your reader, which ship they are on.

Especially if the two ships belong to species from different worlds, they must have distinct models of organisation. One is run along naval lines. The other is more like a palace, a pyramid of servants transporting a potentate. Or a co-operative, with everyone equal. Or a business, where a board of astrodirectors governs a separate body of people who do the actual work.

Each model will give you a vocabulary for ranks and functions, a system of relationships between characters. Are there crowd scenes? Are those nameless people passengers, crew, ratings, denizens, functionaries, a mob?

And what do their senses tell them?

How are the two ships inside? Is one all gleaming white sterile surfaces? Then the other is full of expensive and ostentatious retro decor, patterned carpets and wood panelling. Or it's industrial and murky. Or uniform battleship grey.

Differentiate the colour schemes. One of your ships is full of green plants. So green is largely if not entirely absent from the palette of colours you use to describe the other one.

How do they sound? Perhaps one is silent, while the other has a distinctive noise, audible everywhere on board. Is this the sort of story where the actual mechanics of the spacedrive are of interest? If so, what would the noise of such an engine be? Is there piped music, traffic, continual public announcements? Background noise can be very useful to establish a location, or to add a dash of atmosphere between the speeches of a long conversation – especially if the noise is so persistent that none of the characters notices it any more.

Smells. Incense, disinfectant, scorched metal, sweat? If one ship smells like a freezer, the other smells of the artificial apricot scent Star Fleet favours for deodorizing the recycler.

Poetry...

After Long Years Alone Awake

by Steve Sneyd

sweetgreen ball to circle too
fine for sure for riffraff
frozen in his holds ah
but duty had to deposit
here new start no but
now that sweep of hill
thigh bust that edgecliff fine
features his mother wife he
forgot neither hole to hand
to check clutter of years
developed in Control one of
them for sure must be
both maybe years-merged must he
sour so wondrous with scum
no no onward a dirtier
outer iceball would do or
could bail out leave ship
on road set the old
songs the best set the controls for
the heart of
either twin sun would do

In Praise of Science Fiction

by Elizabeth Counihan

"...thank you..the Cleethorpes Barefoot Buskers...great
Sorry to stop you, but it's getting late
And we have one more book to talk about tonight
What is it? Science Fiction...no, that can't be right.
Space ships and ray guns? Was the producer pissed
when he allowed this rubbish on the list?
Of course, I love *all* books, but silly me
I never could do maths or chemistry
at school and so, although I'm keen
to ban the ozone layer and save the green
house thingy, I leave *details* of the facts to nerds
who read sci-fi and have no love for words
or lit'rature. And besides
I'm hot to write my current book "The Brides
of Hampstead". And I've got a good advance...
No.. it's not Booker prize this time... no chance
A light work... a shocker.. intellectual games
A sensitive detective.. just like P. D. James?
Well, I try! Now *there's* a real writer, you'll agree.
Oh dear.. I'd better stop this reverie..
and get back to this book I haven't read,
Suppose I'd better earn my daily bread.
I've hired a man who *really likes the stuff*
to talk about it. My task isn't tough.
All I must do, to show the folks I'm trying,
is introduce him. *What's your opinion, Brian?*

G

by Nancy Bennett

Gaia sphere, the one mother station left
fondling her offspring in the blue sky blankets
aware of the risk of separation she has placed the bowl
on their heads, layering them safely from space, she chides them not to look
at the sun, be ultra conservative, but her children drive her to madness...
swallowing her pride she takes the medicine from space
marbles too big for her giant children to swallow
a bitter pill they hurl for her throat and seconds
before impact she chooses not to die, turns her cheek...
Gaia, good mother station, saved from suicide how many times
one only need to count the pock marks
on her once beautiful face.

In Praise of Fantasy

by Elizabeth Counihan

There are some men reach for the pen
to tell of all that's sad and bad in people's lives.
They fill the page with righteous rage
and then get drunk, go home and beat their wives.

Some other guys (whom the first lot despise)
remembering their twisted, fear-choked dreams,
fill all their books with ghouls and blood and screams.
But when they've spun their chilly noose of dread
they kiss the wife and put the kids to bed.

Evolving with Age

by Nancy Bennett

Rejuvenation within the wetted folds
stinging rays of drying light, an old earth-bound woman
opens a woven tapestry of growth.
Wrapped in a prism of wetted sheets, a shroud of turning, shy of becoming
but knowing she must evolve
she beats her draped body dry, rushes to flesh out
before time itself expires on a current of old crone dreams....

Discussing Death, Deviance and Diners OR Let Sleeping Logs Die - by Andrew Darlington

when the first of the
Chronos-Spheres settled
in Times Square and the
exterminations began
I was eating
vegetarian tagliatelle
complemented by chilled Rhiesling
in the pleasing ambiance
of the Pizzaria Roma

it was only later
that the disappearances
became apparent, when
the populations of
Seattle, Huddersfield,
Rheims and Rio vanished,
but by then I had
reached the sweet course
choosing profiteroles in
chocolate sauce with
dark cappuccino

the Chronos-Spheres, they say
are now going further back,
ten, twenty years, maybe more
for their murderous sport

the next day
every Italian
on the planet
disappeared

and I had to
eat Cantonese

Creating Aliens by Brian Stableford

It has often been pointed out that science fiction will always have difficulty living up to the aesthetic standards laid down for the novel by Henry James, which place the development of character at the core of the enterprise. How does a writer characterise an alien being?

Such a project seems at first glance to be fundamentally paradoxical, in that the designation 'alien' implies, if it is not actually defined by, a decisive failure of that empathic understanding which enables us to comprehend the desires and purposes which motivate the behaviour of others. On the other hand, one could argue that it is the project of the 'realistic' novelist which is ludicrously overambitious, in that it takes for granted the highly dubious assertion that we can indeed comprehend the other people with whom we come into daily contact by carefully comparing them to ourselves.

All social life is, of course, based on the dual assumption that we can and must 'read' the behaviour of others and that we can and must organise our own behaviour so that its meanings can be 'read'. Were there to be more than a small margin of uncertainty in the everyday business of interpretation and organization it would be impossible to produce and reproduce the pattern of interactions which constitute human society. For the sake of society, therefore, we have no option but to pretend that we understand one another, and to pretend that we are making every effort to render ourselves understandable, even if we can't and aren't.

I cannot speak for others, but I am happy to confess that all my own performances are a patchwork of deceptions. I have never been able to fathom other people and I long ago despaired of the possibility of making myself fathomable in their eyes. Mercifully, they do not care and neither do I, so my social interactions can at least be relied upon to shuffle along without undue embarrassment on either side. It is much the same with the human characters in my work; I understand them perfectly as *narrative devices*, which have a certain function to fulfil in moving the levers of the plot and certain poses to strike in order to generate the sense of black irony which is my main literary stock-in-trade, but I could never for a single instant accept them as *people*. It is different with the aliens. The aliens I understand because they are simpler folk by far. Aliens, unlike people, are exactly what they appear to be.

Sometimes, I will admit, I cheat. Sometimes, I use seemingly human characters who are simply aliens in disguise. This makes them much easier to deal with, and has the further philosophical advantage of being readily excusable, on the grounds that people who live in the future and the colonists of other worlds really will be much less like us than we assume. Nor is this an improvisation which only works in fiction; I find that it is usually easier to deal with actual individuals if I adopt the working assumption that they are aliens in disguise – and thus, however unlikely it may seem, neither more nor less than what they appear to be.

It is a truism of science fiction criticism that most SF writers characterise aliens by implausible subtraction – which is to say that aliens are usually defined by something vital that they do not posses, like Mr Spock's emotions or Christ's sinfulness. In fact, although the more high-minded literary theorists have taken great pains to ignore the fact, *all* characterisation is characterisation by subtraction. Although we talk about our emphatic understanding of real and hypothetical others as a matter of 'identification' it is actually a matter of seeking contrasts: of trying to figure out what the other lacks. We do this on a general level (e.g. by reference to the generosity of Scotsmen, misers and editors, or to the compassion of soldiers, psychopaths and cnbcs) as well as the personal one (John Major is particularly easy to characterise by reference to wit, charm, intelligence and/or good looks.) The truth is that we do not 'identify' with other people at all, what we actually do is an opposite process which is so taken-for-granted and yet so secret that it lacks a label.

Once this is understood, it becomes easy for the would-be SF writer to construct believable aliens. All you have to do is look around you, at your parents, siblings, children, spouses and neighbours and ask one simple question: what would these individuals be like if their behaviour actually *made sense*? If you can follow that idea through you won't need to dress your aliens up like extras in **Space Precinct**, their strangeness will speak for itself.

Who Needs Aliens? by Ian Sales

You want the other in your science fiction, you want strangeness, you want the exotic? You don't need aliens. Instead, consider:

1) a society structured around groups, where personal interaction follows different rules according to whether or not the other person is a member of the group; where this inside/outside differentiation is carried through to the physical world and also affects behaviour
2) a society where jobs are differentiated according to gender: some jobs are seen as women's jobs, others as men's jobs; some jobs may be taken by either sex, but the job title differs: some 'women's' jobs can be taken by men, but their sexuality is assumed not to follow the norm
3) a society where, if a guest admires a possession of the host, the host is obliged to offer it as a gift, and the guest is equally obliged to accept the 'gift'
4) a society where the most prestigious position in a vehicle is directly behind the driver and to refuse this position when offered it is an insult
5) a society where it is against the law to deface the national flag; and a society where the national flag has no identity whatsoever
6) a society with two official languages, two governments, two sets of every media.

This is not science fiction. It is... 1) Japan (the concept is known as *uchi* and *soto*), 2) the West, cf cook and chef, secretary and executive assistant, nurses' airline cabin crew; 3) Gulf Arabs; 4) Japan again; 5) the USA and the UK; 6) Belgium. And this is (mostly!) Now, during some historical periods, things were even stranger.

Unfortunately, all the above proves that it's too easy to 'invent' an alien society by basing its 'otherness' on that of an Earth culture. For most readers, this shortcut will succeed; few readers are experts on Latvian social niceties. It also has the advantage of making the aliens in some way identifiable. But it's no real substitute for original ideas. And SF is all about ideas.

Exploring the Alien Psyche by Riaz Hussain

The problem with writing about aliens is how to avoid the stereotype.

For example, I recently read that most people's idea of an alien is a cross between a punch-drunk bug-eyed Octopus bent on conquering the earth and some short, noble, ET-like character who's come to tell us we're not alone.

Throw in the Terminator's' haircut and particular brand of sunglasses and it seems we have the whole picture! Or have we?

The key, successful SF/fantasy authors say, is to explore beyond the 'novelty value', the 'hey, this thing's from outer space!' effect. But how do we actually achieve that?

One way is to explore their original environment. Every being to some extent, is affected by their culture, upbringing, social structure, ethics - and possibly even the air they breathe. Add some bias and prejudices with a leading personality trait, and what results is the basis of a believable character. Essentially, it provides an insight as to how they would interact with others, what they would do, say and think in a given situation.

It's working from the in – out; exploring the psyche, building a profile that goes beyond the superficial aspects.

The contrast between characters should also be explored. We could make one completely unemotional, cold and analytical while the other remains consumed by a passionate hatred of human beings. (Perhaps there's a plot here somewhere!)

Clearly, it's the degree of thought behind it which gives our work depth, rubber-stamping it with the clause of 'credibility'.

But there is a danger.

In attempting to understand aliens in terms of human attributes, we might possibly make them too human! This is on a par with B-Movie aliens all speaking with American accents – the 'talking animal' syndrome where it's basically humans dressed up in costume pretending to be something else. Bungle and Zippy could do better than that!

However, in cultivating the alien psyche, the *real* trick is to exploit the concept of otherness, *at every level*.

For example, we can make a minor issue out of our character having trouble adjusting to earth's atmosphere. Or perhaps they have a capability for withstanding a high threshold of pain given their unique physiology. What about their actual thought processes being markedly different from ours? What about communication?

Cultural differences, ethics (or lack of them) and the way they see our world all come into play, illustrating aspects of otherness.

And remember, aliens *are* fascinating creatures, far removed from our sense of reality, apparently coming from a place we know nothing about. They provide the link between us, and the unknown, thus fueling our curiosity. Secretly, we may even be hoping they can tell us something about ourselves, and the universe – which leaves the door wide open for writers to exploit.

But that isn't all.

It's interesting how we can generate dramatic conflict based on the classic situation of a character trapped and at odds with an alien environment. (Remember the 'Tarzan goes to New York' theme?) Either they struggle to gain acceptance, or fight to preserve their own identity. Their anxiety deepens because of the alienation they're made to feel; an aspect sometimes mirrored in human experience.

'King Kong', is another example of a being trapped in an alien environment, only there it's more a case of: "to hell with making friends and enemies I just feel like pulverising everything!"

The reverse is true where the protagonist doesn't have to travel too far to realise their survival is under threat.

I once read a powerful story where a lone spaceman discovers his kin have been killed by a new species – humans!

Secondly, it helps personalise SF. And it's no coincidence that most enduring works tend to be those which personalised the issue. Look at the classics from H. G. Wells and C. S. Lewis to the published episodes of **Star Trek**: they're about characters facing conflict and caught up in dilemmas, be they moral, spiritual or otherwise. Aliens, are by no means the exception.

Speaking of **Star Trek**, the 'What-if?' question also counts. When the makers of the now-legendary series first visualised the concept of Mr Spock, he was supposed to be a red-skinned martian who neither ate nor drank and was in fact, basically a living computer.

What, argued writer Samuel Peeples, would happen *if* Spock were to be half human-half vulcan but weren't able to reconcile these two extremes? And thus emerged the 'Logic versus Emotion' conflict; which, if you think about it, is certainly telling us something!

Sea
by Tess Williams

Harka's water-pushed jaw slackens slightly. Chiten glimpses discoloured ivory and a paleness of flesh, looks past Harka's mouth line to a frosted pupil closing too often. That eye: dark, dream-sugared like shallow-water stone, disappearing beneath the first crisp skins of coral. Chiten refuses the great sea-dream of Harka swimming black-shadow between them. She refuses the blind-unlistened shadow of god-in-air, the only world shadow to match the spin-swimming fleetness of Curora Travellers, surge for surge, dive for dive. The shadow that catches and consumes.

Distances rock mother and daughter, on the restless back of the Mother. Calm for-ever water, horizon to horizon, soothes urgent needs and griefs, the warm day-time eye of Kelchon heats black-glass skin. Below, lumps of land fall away into no-sound green and Chiten listens to darlings that excite her belly.

[extract from **Sea as Mirror**]

Chiten is a young orca, commonly called a killer whale, and in this passage she is swimming with her dying mother Harka. Chiten weighs five tonnes, is four metres long and is an efficient and intelligent predator, adapting her hunting patterns to her environment. Chiten has no natural systematic enemies in the ocean, and therefore no fear. Her primary sense is "echolocation". This is a form of natural radar which is more akin to human hearing than eyesight, but her eyes, each of which functions independently, are still incredibly keen. Chiten (*Kai-ten*) and her father, Tachotic (*Ta-koe-tic*), are two of the three main characters of my new novel **Sea as Mirror** (**SAM**).

Chiten is not cute, in fact she is a ruthless predator when she is hungry. Neither is Chiten morally or intellectually superior to humans, rather she is morally and intellectually *different*. Her social reality, as constructed in **SAM**, is predicated very much on her biology and her environment, but I have assumed two things in order to place her firmly in a human frame of reference: language and a sense of purpose. As much as I am able, I have stayed faithful to the whale's biology and her environment. For example, whale-speak language patterns have been distorted to reflect the choppiness and/or back-and-forth movement of sea and waves and there is a lyricism reflecting the sensuality of a water world. Where I have extrapolated to Chiten's society or culture, I have still tried to stay faithful to Chiten's experience of the world. Orca eyes constantly process two fields of vision, so the eyes of their tri-partite god "Kelchon", are the sun and moon which also constantly view two different aspects of the planet.

Does this mean this book is another **Watership Down**? No, it is not. Is it like **Toad of Toad Hall**? No. Like **Babe**? Absolutely not.

Why?

Simply because it has a different literary genealogy. **SAM** does not share the writing conventions of the texts mentioned. Although Chiten learns to communicate with the woman who works with her, there is no humanised "personality" transferred on to her. Instead, she is positioned by a third person narration which normalises the world of whales for the reader in the "Sea" chapters of the book, while the reader also experiences a more conventional view of the whales and their actions through their human contacts in the "Land" chapters. This is different from the direct mimicry of human society, speech and mannerisms found in the other books mentioned above. Those texts, while they are delightful to read and almost universally loved, do not explore those boundaries which humans construct between themselves and other living creatures or between each other.

Few writers take up this challenge. It is a job that requires great patience because language regularly traps us into denying anything outside human experience, in fact, it even shapes what we do define as human experience by privileging certain modes of existence over others. For example: language is now considered phallocentric: favouring masculine experience and excluding feminine experience; and aliens (including animals) in many SF books are often considered to be constructions of the excluded feminine.

This limitation in language is problematic for readers and writers actively working in the social/cultural margins: trying to reclaim invalidated experiences or understandings. However exclusion of a value does not mean it ceases to exist. Rather, it becomes pushed into what the Russian theorist Bakhtin calls the "unofficial" consciousness, that is, the negatively valued pole of a binary cultural division where motives begin to find difficulty in manifesting as outward speech. The genealogy of **SAM** therefore lies more with texts that seek to illuminate the excluded or unrecognised and to redress these divisions.

C.J. Cherryh's work offers a number of examples of this kind of writing. Her novel **Foreigner** is an almost oriental circling of profound cultural difference existing between two humanoid groups, where she poses some very tough questions of biology versus socialisation. Another of her books offers an "animal" alien in **Forty Thousand at Gehenna**, a strange reptilian creature of strategy, silence and persistence. Cherryh regularly subverts hierarchies and colonial thinking by working with symbiotic rather than oppositional models through which she examines "human" and "other". This is also the aim of **SAM**: to offer a model where the "alien" is simultaneously known and unknown, to challenge preconceptions of "others", to explore and extend qualities of the marginalised feminine, and to examine potential relationships between different but similarly powerful entities.

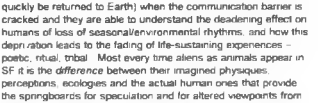
Aliens as animals
by K V Bailey

There are aliens, like so many encountered on Trek, who are just humans in fancy-dress and cranial makeup, speaking colloquial American, and there are aliens like Olaf Stapledon's eponymous solar-dwelling Flames. Those Flames are barely visible or conceivable; they communicate, haltingly, by telepathy, one of them saying: "I am trying to describe in a fantastically foreign language things that are strictly indescribable, save in our own language." For opposite reasons neither alien makes for readily convincing science fiction, and that is where the animal/alien creature comes into its own. The title of Thomas Nagel's famous philosophical essay 'What Is It Like to Be a Bat?' implies that the bat is a conscious creature whose faculties and experienced environment are at once so different from ours and at the same time have sufficient similitude to ours as to make such curiosity meaningful. Now that is somewhat the desired condition for a science fiction writer who wants to avoid the pitfalls of the two extremes first described, while moving readers to speculation about what varieties of sensitive life the universe may contain, and towards those fresh perspectives on the human race and condition that observation of and thought about the alien can induce.

James Tiptree Jr in **Up the Walls of the World**, created the jet-propelled, giant-squid like Tyrenee masters of the zones and currents of their oceanic planet, to be at the focus of her cosmic drama. Then by means of telepathic transference of human mind into Tyrenee body she provides an authentic-seeming reader-experience of what it is like to be a Tyrenee. C. J. Cherryh, a great alien-inventor, depicts (in **Pride of Chanur**) the leoline *hani* Pyanfuar observing a stressed human stowaway and empathically discerning what it is like to be a human: "If his pathetically small ears could have moved they would have lain down, she thought; it was that kind of look."

When it comes to using animal similarities and differences in order to distance, but not cut-distance, the alien in the cause of objectifying the condition of the observer (i.e. human), no novel has been more successful than Judith Moffett's **Penterra**, with its hermaphroditic seal/frog/dinosaur-like *hrossa* (named after C. S. Lewis's amphibious Martians). In studying the parent/offspring and individual/societal relationships of this race, by monitoring their reactions to stories alien to their culture (e.g. 'Hansel and Gretel', **King Lear**, Abraham and Isaac) the human field on Epsilon Eridani II salutarily find themselves mirrored there. [The *hrossa*] felt terribly sorry for us, for the barbarousness of human nature." In later novels, **The Ragged World** and its sequel **Time, Like an Ever-Rolling Stream**, Judith Moffett goes a step further and has an alien race, the perhaps too cosily named Hefn, taking charge of the Earth's ecology for the planet's own good; but not all humans appreciate being regulated by the little hairy varmints – a phrase as eloquent of animal abhorrence as of xenophobia.

Where you have creature with needs based on one biological form and environmental ecology in contact or conflict with dissimilarly based creatures, the grounds for non-communication and misinterpretation are obvious. Such situations in SF can produce parables of ethical import. Imagine the uncomprehending complacency of, say, battery hen breeders, or zoo proprietors, providing ample food and warmth, while their charges/victims decline or become increasingly neurotic. I once wrote a story ('They Sent a Message Back to Me' – which saw print in #10 of the now defunct **Cassandra Anthologies**) exploring the theme in terms of salamandrine aliens who aim to exploit Earth's vulcanism, while needing for their cosmic purposes to maintain earth's future diminished population in good physical and psychic health. The humans are transported to hygienic underground cities built into various minor planets, and the salamandrines only realise why the air-breathing mammals do not thrive (and must quickly be returned to Earth) when the communication barrier is cracked and they are able to understand the deadening effect on humans of loss of seasonal/environmental rhythms, and how this deprivation leads to the fading of life-sustaining experiences – poetic, ritual, tribal. Most every time aliens as animals appear in SF it is the *difference* between their imagined physiques, perceptions, ecologies and the actual human ones that provide the springboards for speculation and for altered viewpoints from which to consider, perhaps correctively, our own terrestrial species-specific nature.



Walls, Mirrors, Pussy-Cats and Assorted Vegetables.
by Ian McDonald

For the past three years I've been writing almost exclusively about two alien species: the Chaga and the Shian. **Chaga** told of humanity's first contact with reverse terraforming (xenoforming?) through the inexorable growth of alien biological packages in the tropics. **Sacrifice of Fools** (just completed) is set in the slowly-unfolding Shian cycle of near-future Earth settled by the ostensibly humanoid Shian.

The Chaga is the macedoine of assorted veg the Shian are that great meta-genre trope, the SF cat, but to me they're ultimately walls and mirrors.

In one sense all aliens are animals – domesticated animals – in that they're cross-bred for specific features and purposes. The Shian result from the unlawful union of Jim Crace's story 'On Heat' from **Continent** and a review in **Territories** of J.D. Gresham's **New Worlds** story 'Heat', which sniggers: "Hey, it's the return of the SF cat. Um, what if people had the same sexuality as my Tiddles?" So I shoved these two in a room, watched, sniggered, wiped the stains off and the Shian emerged. Aliens develop, you never get them all at once. I started with giving them two sexual seasons each year, and also made both sexes physically similar – like cats, and unlike primates where the male is invariably larger and stronger than the female. Identity would be communicated by pheromones, sex by the release of endorphins in the presence of a triggering pheromone from the partner. Males would not compete physically for partners – unlike

all manner of apes, but by display and dance, like certain species of birds. Moving a little away from the SF moggy already. This gave me a platform to reflect on human sexual and physical differences and their effect on society. Interesting. This is getting somewhere.

Pheromones would imply smell is their dominant sense. How would this affect their technology, as opposed to the dominance of vision and visual media among humans. And what about making their society primarily hunter-gatherer rather than ape-farmer? Non-geographical. Nations. Overlapping territories – hunting demesnes. Semi-nomadic. Dislike of water, fits the cat image. Furious devotion to their young; children mature at eight, at ten or eleven leave home to travel in search of new social units.

On a roll now. The society begins to emerge. Both sexes are the same size, same strength; one does not physically dominate the other. Chemical mediation of sex; how would it be if intercourse is always by invitation and mutual consent? For good PC measure, let's have both sexes suckle young. (We're not in Tiddles-land any more.) Their seasonality could imply that love and sex are separate to them. Lots of mileage in this. Up to speed now. Thank you, my inevitable SF-cats.

That's the meat. The vegetables, as ever, get left to last.

The Chaga, the ever-expanding alien nanotech jungle transfiguring everything in its path does not, contrary to the chattering classes, have any seed of 'The Crystal World' in it. Due to a late-teenage *plus-Hibernians Hibernorum* rebellion against what I saw as bourgeois, End-of-Empire, introspective *Englishness*, I developed a blind spot to Ballard. Yes I know it's heresy. The lineage of the Chaga is by the Genesis device in **The Wrath of Khan** (in slo-mo) out of an **Interzone** profile of Brian Stableford by Roz Kaveny which refers to a 'world-wide, unified, constantly metamorphosing form of perfectly balanced life' – it thrives on making it impossible for any other life form to continue to exist.' Somewhere down the family tree are bastard bonks with Quatermasses 2 and The Pit, and a tiny wee snippet, inverted, from **Starship Troopers** about the superiority of mid-western wheat in pushing out un-American alien flora.

As the idea evolved out of the story 'Towards Kilimanjaro' into **Chaga** (and continues to evolve toward the sort-of sequel, **Freedom Tree**) it attracted symbols like camp followers: change, colonisation, de-colonisation, the American, European and African concepts of the Other, the heart of darkness, the Cloud of Unknowing, Africa as the forge of a new evolution. All those Clarkian resonances. They changed the nature of my alien, so that it retreated behind this semiotic trench-line. I didn't want it to be knowable, hence contactee and **Close Encounters** jokes. At the end of Umberto Eco's **Foucault's Pendulum**, when the Great Secret of a thousand years of hermetic knowledge is revealed, the reply is, "Is *that* all it is?" True hermeticism is like doing MDMA; it takes more and more mystery to get the same spine-tingle.

Which brings me to walls and mirrors. My aliens are one or the other. Walls are impenetrable barriers to comprehension and communication, giving nothing back but surface. Mirrors reflect our own image back to us, sometimes distorted, sometimes exaggerated, sometimes unflatteringly. The Shan were constructed to mirror human sexuality, the thrust of the stones of the Shan Cycle has been how *men* interact with these aliens. The Chaga is a wall. It only becomes knowable as it evolves towards human needs. It dresses itself in the clothes of whatever species it encounters; its native form reflects Carl Sagan's comments about chauvinism – a form of life so alien to humans that we can't even recognise it's alive.

Walls, mirrors, meat and one veg. What about pudding?

Flights From the Iron Moon: Genre Poetry in the UK Fanzines and Little Magazines 1980 - 1989 by Steve Sneyd (Hilltop Press – ISBN 0-905262-12-3 £2.50)

Reviewed by Andrew Darlington

The future isn't here yet. But on the flightpath to the Iron Moon, it never really went away.

Science Fiction poetry is where fantastic images come at their most coded and concentrated. Where they collide and collude on Einstein intersections. Where words meet in altered states. SF poetry spans the quantum leap between the genetic substructure of discrete particles and the galactic outer rim of NGC 5159. Yet it gets published in disreputable magazines with ludicrous names like **Rabbits Tend to Explode**, **Epileptic Caterpillar**, **Angel Exhaust**, **Stygian Dreamhouse** and **Nerve Gardens**.

Steve Sneyd is a small-press archivist and 'zine obsessive. He knows more than it is healthy to know about genre poetry. And he is compiled, in manic detail, what **Interzone** calls this 'A-Z gazetteer of persons, titles and fanzines'. SF poetry began as inept but well-meaning space-fillers in blotchy mimeo: its rhyme schemes hissing like meteor-holed air into a vacuum. But as far back as 1956 Robert Conquest's novel **A World of Difference** envisaged computer-generated poetry. Now, in **Star Trek: The Next Generation** Data writes cybernetic poems to his cat. Between the two lies a Gutenburg Galaxy of strange attractors drawing luminous dreams from H.P. Lovecraft, Symbolism, and the Messier Catalogue, Pink Floyd, Escher, and Surrealism. Aldiss, Decadence, and Ballard, Chesley, Bonstell, Burroughs E.R.B., and Burroughs W.S.

Science Fiction is intensely visual. Always has been. It deals in eternities and infinities beyond rational comprehension. And sometimes the only way to express the inexpressible visions is beyond prose. Genre poetry can code and compress constellations, spin galactic clusters in spirals of words. Ignite dream and nightmare. It has achieved a kind of literary escape velocity through the decade under microscopic scrutiny. In no small part due to Sneyd's own vigorous PR. Here, his invaluable grimoire of esoteric verse locates a Michael Moorcock poem; The Curse of Man' in an early **Back Brain Recluse**. Then it goes on to list genre contributions by Robert Calvert, Thomas Disch, Ramsey Campbell (in **Dark Dreams**) and Simon Clark. But the continuum's defining practitioners include D.F. Lewis, T. Winter Damon, John F. Haines, Simon D. Ings, Bruce Boston ... Sneyd himself, and other names that only Sneyd's inexhaustible planet-sized memory files admit to remembering.

To them, SF poetry exists where cosmonauts ride impossible steeds. Where the bleep and bleed of Pulsar radiation and the transfinite gravity transmissions of pulsed static drift like acid rain. Where words free fall and coil through uncharted infra-red skies. Here, science never sleeps and machines grow strange wings on flightpaths to iron moons.

But the DIY press is an on-going open-ended process, as Sneyd admits: "this is not the whole story."

And the future gets closer all the time.

INSIDE CLARISSA

by David Weston

Nothing lived out there, nothing moved. The surface features never changed, just the colours.

By day the full white fierceness of the Xenophon triple sun system poured down upon the bleak and featureless surface of the planet, only to be reflected back towards a pink heaven by those smooth pale folds of burning rock. At sunrise and sunset the landscape turned grey, and the sky deepened to a lush vermilion. By night the stranded station was encircled by a frozen impenetrable blackness. And Craven watched these violent scene changes day after day after day.

*

He had been alone here for many years now. Once there had also been his partner, a big and swarthy Bulgarian named Malov. Malov had been good company, he recalled; jovial and full of life – although Craven had come to hate him in retrospect. One morning, years ago, Malov had gone out on a routine probe mission and never returned. Craven had searched briefly and in vain; after an hour he had known that Malov was out of oxygen and therefore dead. Since then he had been forced to bear this solitude.

Not long before Malov's disappearance, their station, codenamed *Clarissa*, on an open-ended exploratory voyage through the universe, had developed a terminal motor-malfunction and crash-landed on this undesignated planet, which Craven had christened Hell. Gradually the remaining systems had degenerated, until all that remained were the oxygen and temperature-control units. Craven never went outside the station now: there was no point, and anyway it would have wasted precious air. In six months time, perhaps a year at most, his food and water would run out. Even before that, maybe, the oxygen would be exhausted. Or the cooling and heating systems would break down. Or the toxic and corrosive atmosphere of Hell, which all the time was attacking *Clarissa*'s titanium hull, would finally eat through into his sanctuary. It did not matter much to Craven which way things ended, or how soon. Thirst or starvation, roasting or freezing, suffocation or acidic toxaemia, it came to much the same thing. *Clarissa* was his prison and his coffin.

In the meantime, though resigned, Craven had not entirely given up. He tried to exert himself as little as possible to save oxygen. He strove to keep his mind occupied, to stimulate his own reactions. He was desperately afraid of going mad with loneliness in this closed and silent world. He was only too aware of the dangers of mental, sensory and physical deprivation, locked in an empty box which offered nothing to engage the faculties. It seemed a constant daily struggle to retain his energy and interest, to arm his soul against a fatal inertia. Craven kept going almost as a challenge to the void. At the moment the void was still outside him, and he was determined not to let it in.

Craven even clung to faint hope of rescue. From the early days after the crash, when Malov was still there with him, they had rigged up a primitive transmitter using some Kalium crystals salvaged from *Clarissa*'s dead motor. Since that day, every thirty seconds, the transmitter had beamed a distress signal out into the cosmos: a simple mathematical phrase which no-one receiving it could possibly mistake. Craven knew it was a desperate hope. The beacon's range was less than a single light year: the chances that any craft would come within its scope were billions to one against. But he liked to imagine that transmitter. It was another defence against insanity and despair. And after he was dead: for ten thousand years or more, those Kalium crystals would continue to send their optimistic plea into the vast spangled vacuum of space. Craven found the idea somehow comforting.

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Recently he had found himself dwelling more and more on his memories of Malov. He sometimes tried to reconstruct the face of his lost companion. It was never an easy task. The nut-coloured skin, the dark laughing eyes, the thick bristling beard and the jet-black, curly, rather greasy hair swam round as in a kaleidoscope, disparate elements which always refused to unite to form a coherent human visage. He seemed to recall that Malov had been thick-set, with coarse, peasant features, and that his hair was far too long and unkempt for the Service. He couldn't understand how Malov ever got his commission, with hair like that. Also he was quite vulgar, and had an irritating accent. These details grated on Craven's mind, yet he could never seem to banish Malov entirely. At times it seemed that Malov's presence was still with him, a smiling yet invisible shadow.

Increasingly Craven had grown to resent the Bulgarian for leaving him alone. His continual isolation was the fault of Malov's stupidity and carelessness. Occasionally he took revenge by trying to imagine how Malov might have died, and what his final moments must have felt like. Malov wandering lost in the bleached wilderness until his oxygen gave out, lying helpless at the bottom of a deep crevasse with broken limbs, panicking as his insulated suit lethally malfunctioned. Malov choking in his own carbon dioxide. Fried like an egg in the day's white heat, or frozen rigid by the arctic night. Malov's death agony as the poison acid of the planet's atmosphere ate into his flesh, into his bones, dissolving all his being.

These imaginings brought Craven a fleeting satisfaction. They assuaged his bitter loathing of the Bulgarian. But they also left him with an unpleasant aftertaste, prefiguring Craven's own end as they did. And at other times it seemed to Craven that he really did love his vanished companion, that despite everything he longed to see again that grinning, genial countenance. For all his annoying faults, Malov had been an open, generous, kind-hearted ox of a man.

So Craven's relationship with the dead co-pilot wavered constantly between hatred and a strange love.

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Craven tried not to think about Malov too much, realising the danger of his obsession. In order to stave off the void he kept himself occupied for every moment of the day (he had long ago given up sleep). He kept a diary, in which he wrote down all his thoughts and impressions. It might prove a useful record for anyone who came after, and by re-reading what he had written he could confirm that his mind remained intact. Solitary confinement had enabled Craven to ponder deeply on the essential questions of life and the cosmos; he had reached several important conclusions, evolved many basic and original theories, all of which were set down in the diary.

He played chess with himself, worked out astrophysical equations in his head; designed whole new colonies and space stations. He rearranged the furniture and equipment inside *Clarissa*, to vary the monotony. He busied himself with necessary diurnal chores: servicing the equipment that still functioned, preparing his food and drink, monitoring the readings on the many dials. Craven missed the computer, which he had never been able to fix since it had been ruined in the crash, but strove patiently to resurrect the other damaged fixtures. So far the dead electronics and micro-circuitry had refused to respond, but Craven never gave up hope. One day, perhaps, he would succeed in recombining the technology, to salvage something useful. In any case it was an exercise in concentration, which kept the brain alert. The more mechanical repairs and maintenance - on the oxygen pumps, thermo-units and coolant systems - were of course quite routine.

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All of Craven's diversions, all his mental activity, were part of a scheme to preserve the balance of his mind through the long years of isolation. And it seemed to him that his strategy had so far succeeded. To himself he appeared perfectly normal and sane, just as he had been before the crash, before Malov's disappearance.

He could not always be absolutely sure, however. It was difficult to judge his behaviour with nothing to set it against; almost impossible to gauge his own reactions, in this closed world devoid of all external stimuli. Occasionally doubts would creep in.

It was true that, like many lonely people, he had adopted the habit of talking to himself. He would talk out his thought processes, make decisions aloud, hold imaginary conversations with his own soul. He would even address the equipment aboard *Clarissa*, or the harsh landscape outside. Craven was convinced that there was nothing very wrong or alarming in this. It was simply a means of simulating company, as an old woman might converse with her cat. It reassured him. Unbroken silence, after all, would certainly have been unbearable.

And yet there were other tendencies that sometimes worried him. Craven had almost come to think of the beached craft herself as a living creature, as a human being. *Clarissa* was like an old friend he knew very well, and on whom he depended. At times Craven was rather disturbed by this intimacy. There was something almost sexual in his attitude to the ship. Although, of course, as with sleep he had long ago lost all interest in the physical side of sex.

On the whole, Craven discounted these and other small signs as meaningless. He never seriously questioned his sanity, or his hold on reality. He often wondered, though, how he would appear to a stranger now, after all these years of solitude, if one suddenly materialised. Would he pass as an average man? Or had loneliness altered him in subtle ways, slowly changing him into a peculiar and rather grotesque individual?

In the end of course it didn't matter, as long as his mind held together. Eccentricity and weirdness did no harm. He had developed his own lifestyle, suited to the narrow and enforced conditions of his survival. As long as the external dangers (lack of oxygen, extreme heat and cold, thirst and hunger, the toxic atmosphere) overcame him before the internal ones, then he would know that he had won. That was the ultimate test of his battle against solitude, insanity and emptiness.

*

Craven could not afford to take any proper physical exercise, which squandered oxygen. He always moved slowly, remaining seated in one position for long periods. Most of his pursuits were mental and imaginative, the essential chores and repairs he carried out with the maximum economy of effort. *Clarissa* was not a large ship, and he confined himself almost entirely to the control room. In order not to become too unfit he ate very little. His principal relaxation was looking out through the windows of the observation bay, watching the sterile and unchanging landscape.

He would spend whole hours sitting in the perspex dome. From there it was possible to view the entire circle of the horizon. Gazing at those inert wastes of bone-coloured rock, he could forget about himself and his predicament; he could simply lose himself in the blazing desert of mica and quartz. It was a form of meditation. Perhaps this motionless scenery watching was Craven's main source of pleasure. Certainly it formed a welcome contrast to those other, more demanding cerebral activities. The dead, unmoving surface of Hell relieved and soothed him, and he found himself drawn increasingly to that revolving chair in the observation bay.

He knew every corrugation, every rock and furrow of the surrounding terrain. During the day the three white suns of Xenophos formed an equilateral triangle in a salmon-coloured sky that seemed to be continually alive, as the thermal currents whorled and pulsed in skeins of mauve and orange in the upper atmosphere. The suns thrust down their hard, intense light, heating the rocks and poisonous air to a temperature of 300°C by noon. Light which struck flashes from the fields of broken schists, made glittering displays of dancing fire across the shattered crystal plains of gneiss, feldspar and diamonds. Light which flared with an unrelenting savagery off the grey flanks of the mountain ranges, off the hollows and aretes, off the polished monochrome plateaux and the cliffs and basins streaked with veins of gleaming quartz. There were no shadows in that landscape, no perspective. So harsh was the glare that, had Craven not worn his sunglasses, he would have been dazzled and blinded in seconds.

Towards evening, though, came the first chromatic displays. As the three suns fell below the last mountain rim, the sky turned the colour of blood, its atmospheric tides pulsing in one final glorious spasm, like a technicolour epilepsy. The fierce glare vanished from the land, as the whole panorama of igneous rock turned yellow, then orange, then pink before arriving at its natural grey. The grey darkened rapidly, while great purple shadows erupted all across the terrain, exaggerating and distorting the shapes of the familiar landforms. Meanwhile overhead the psychedelic flux, deprived of light, abruptly ceased as the sky turned cerise, through indigo, into black. After that there was nothing but the super-chilled blackness.

It was all over in a minute or so. Within half an hour the temperature had dropped to minus 100. The polar night lasted until dawn, when the performance occurred again, only in reverse.

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Craven cherished the end and the beginning of the day for their sheer splendour. But it was the long vigils, watching through the stretches of blazing time, that most absorbed him. He knew that landscape so well that he was able to think of it almost as an abstract painting, as a dream-vista with no physical reality and no meaning. Those moulded contours might have been composed of lamina: those curved and layered surfaces of metal, polystyrene, glass or plastic like some vast sculpture that had swallowed him whole. Staring out at that seared panorama he could sometimes imagine himself contained inside a projection of his own mind, lost in the white topography of an externalised psyche. As if the landscape of Hell were his soul turned inside out. At such moments he experienced a curious feeling of suspension, of drift.

*

Occasionally these impressions caused Craven a slight anxiety. And just lately, it was true, there had been other occurrences, small shocks which had begun to gnaw away at his certainty. There was one thing in particular that bothered him.

He knew that Hell was uninhabited. All logic, all reason told him that this must be so. The extremes of temperature, the caustic toxicity of the atmosphere, the utterly sterile nature of that terrain of hard, bare, silica rocks, meant that no life could possibly be sustained here. He, Craven, was the only living thing left on this planet. And yet. And yet, one day, gazing out through the tinted perspex of the observation dome, he had seen something *move*.

At first he'd put it down to tiredness, imagination, a trick of the light. But then on the following day he had glimpsed another movement, definite this time: a tiny dark shape that slid behind a metamorphic ridge some miles away. It was no optical illusion. There couldn't be any doubt now. Out there in that wasteland, where nothing had ever stirred before, something was happening.

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Since then, on subsequent days, the dark flitting shapes had begun to appear quite regularly. The phenomenon puzzled and worried Craven. His watches became more intense, he tried hard to avoid drifting off into reverie, but was not always successful. He found himself spending longer and longer at the dome, and less time on his routine chores and mental exercises. He sought desperately to find a sensible explanation, or any explanation at all.

Maybe there was some creature out there after all? A whole population of beings perhaps based on the silicon chain, which could exist at the furthest limits of heat and cold, that breathed those poison acid fumes, that nourished themselves on crystals and the chemistry of rocks. Craven tried to imagine what such beings would look like. Supposing it was those beasts who had killed Malov, supposing his disappearance had been no accident after all? And what if Malov was still alive out there, what if those elusive shadows were actually him, taunting Craven inside his prison?

Of course Craven knew these fantasies were nonsense, but at times he had to keep a tight grip on himself in order to prevent his mind veering off into such wild and crazy realms.

*

It was about this time that Craven began to carry the ray-gun around with him. Until now it had been forgotten, locked away in a sealed compartment, now Craven felt safer with the weapon at his side.

He did not attempt to rationalise this insecurity. He did not admit to himself that he was frightened of the crystal-eating monsters outside, or that the expectation of a return by the vindictive Malov unnerved him. Rather, he thought of it as a sensible precaution. For when, as was inevitable one day, his oxygen ran out, his food and water became exhausted, or the atmosphere ate its way through *Clarissa*'s hull, it would prove more tolerable and convenient to end his life quickly with a self-administered blast of muon rays, than to suffer a lingering or agonising death.

But apart from the final emergency, of course, he had never seriously entertained the idea of killing himself. It just did not feature as an alternative. Whatever might happen in the near future, suicide was repugnant to Craven's entire philosophy. All of his efforts so far, alone aboard *Clarissa*, had tended in precisely the opposite direction.

*

Meanwhile outside, the movements were occurring with increasing frequency. At first there had been only one or two sightings a day, and always in the distance. Now they came continually, and, he noticed, they were getting closer and closer to the immobilised ship.

Craven spent virtually all his time in the observation bay now. He had abandoned most of his other activities: he no longer serviced or maintained the equipment, no longer took readings from the dials, played chess or performed his mental calculations, no longer fiddled with the electronic circuits or designed space stations. He had even given up eating. Craven had no interest in any of these things any more. Each moment of the day was spent at his vigil in the dome, seated in the swivel-chair, watching over the desiccated land. Nevertheless he still kept up his diary, recording all that he saw, all that he thought and felt.

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He was increasingly tense. Almost every minute he would catch sight of a small dark blob, which vanished immediately behind a quartzite boulder, or into some gully or hollow. They were very near, some of them, and all around him now. Craven imagined a huge army advancing upon *Clarissa* from every side. There seemed no escape. If he closed his eyes the face of Malov appeared before him, or the spectre of those hideous creatures. He could sense things closing in, and knew that it would not be long now. He strove to remain alert.

*

He was sweating profusely, and his pulse seemed to race beyond all control. At the same time he found that it was difficult to concentrate. Staring fixedly at the landscape, by now alive with those small black movements, Craven's consciousness began to merge with the window's tinted perspex, with the hard crystalline rocks, with the glare and the heat. At other times it seemed that the landscape was actually inside himself: that the seething dance of those black particles represented the bacteria in his own body, or the interference in his brain. These impressions assailed him with a rigid intensity, and he would emerge shaking and exhausted, clutching the ray-gun. Craven found it increasingly hard to separate his personality from that of the ship, or the terrain, or Malov. He kept thinking about the Bulganan, who seemed to be very close now, lurking just beyond his field of vision. He could feel Malov's hostility, like the hatred of the black blobs and the very grains in the rock. He could feel himself dissolving into the hot speckled brightness.

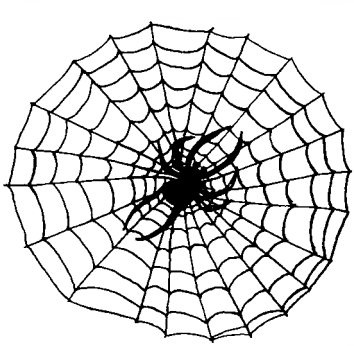
*

Craven stood up suddenly. For the first time ever he could hear a sound outside. Many sounds, slight tappings and scrapings at *Clarissa*'s hull, becoming louder all the time. Now they were banging and tearing at the thin titanium skin. It was Malov, of course, and the quartz-eating monsters. They had arrived at last, as he'd always known they would. And now they were trying to get at him.

Galvanised now, Craven moved unsteadily across the floor of the observation room. He stood in the centre, braced and waiting. Malov came through the wall behind him, that broad familiar figure with its tanned and bearded face. Malov was smiling, but as Craven whirled to face him he saw the knife in his hand. Craven screamed soundlessly as the Bulganan advanced. At the same time he was dimly aware of the great yellow serpent of sand and rock that towered overhead, of its three blinding eyes and its crystal jaws. Just when Malov was reaching out to touch him, Craven raised the gun, squeezed the trigger, and fired. *Clarissa* was filled with a warm red glow, which seemed to expand until it embraced the entire universe.

What a Tangled Web We Weave: An Introduction to the WWW for Writers

Andrew M. Butler



Possibly if you've had your head in a Luddite bucket during the last year or so, you will not know what the World Wide Web is. Put at its simplest, the Web is a collection of materials which people have made accessible to anyone with the correct software. Rather than the same old non-italicised, non-emboldened, non-underlined font of e-mail, the Web allows colour, graphics, audio, movement and even text which blinks on and off. Naturally this high technology and sophisticated programing has been used to store pictures of Page 3 girls and coffee machines. But sorting the signal from the noise, there are resources out there which may be of use to writers. Rather than laboriously typing out lengthy addresses, you can click on a link on the screen and be taken to the remote site where that information is stored.

To access the Web you need several things: a computer, a modem, an account with a company which offers access to the Internet and the Web and someone to pay your phonebill.

Academics now have computers which are hardwired into the net somehow, and possibly cable companies (or Blair's New Labour) will extend this privilege to the rest of the country. Alternatively, you could spend half an hour at one of the Internet Cafés which are springing up around the country.

Finally I would recommend talking to someone who uses the Web before you commit any money – learn from their experiences.

There are several different kinds of software or browsers which are available to access the Web – but the ones you are likely to come across are Netscape, Microsoft Explorer, Mosaic and Lynx. The last two are positively stone-aged (that is, *dreadfully* 1995) in their handling of material from the Web; Lynx is text-only, which misses out on the pretty pictures. On the other hand, Netscape can be so slow in accessing material that I turn the graphics off. Netscape and Microsoft are the major players in the market, and competition between them will mean that software becomes obsolete with worrying rapidity. Test versions of Netscape can be used for free for limited periods of time.

The Web was originally designed to facilitate communication between scientists, who seem to love jargon as much as literary theorists. Rather than each piece of information having an address, it has a URL or Uniform Resource Location. For example:

http://www.hull.ac.uk/Hull/EL_Web/amb/focus.htm

"http://" is the kind of language the browser should expect to read – alternatives would include "gopher://", "telnet://" and "ftp://". "www.hull.ac.uk" is the location of the files in physical space – there is a computer on the UK academic network at Hull with my files on it. "Hull/EL_Web" is a series of subdirectories determined by the institution and "amb" another subdirectory I've set up for my files. "focus.htm" is the actual file, with the ".htm" suffix telling the browser that this is a "hypertext mark-up language" file.

The Web is a huge place, and beginners are apt to feel either disorientated or unimpressed, according to where they start from. A number of sites will help you to find material. The Granddaddy of these is Yahoo, a searchable hierarchy of topics to be found at:

http://www.yahoo.com

A search on "writing" revealed 519 links, some of which are irrelevant, some of which are not. Immediately "Arts:Humanities:Literature:Genres:Science Fiction, Fantasy, Horror:Writing" springs out as a likely list of resources, at (deep breath):

http://www.yahoo.com/Arts/Humanities/Literature/Genres/Science_Fiction__Fantasy__Horror/Writing/

Other search engines are available; AltaVista is a powerful one which allows refined searches. Having gone to the advanced search at:

http://AltaVista.digital.com

and looked for "writing near resources near science" I found two hundred links.

Resources include on-line versions of **Webster's Dictionary**:

http://c.gp.cs.cmu.edu:5103/prog/webster?

Roget's Thesaurus:

gopher://odie.niaid.nih.gov/77/.thesaurus/index

and Fowler's **The King's English**:

http://www.columbia.edu/acis/bartleby/fowler/

Most out-of-copyright literary texts will be available on-line somewhere . Try:

gopher://rsl.ox.ac.uk/11/lib-corn/hunter

– and the Web is otherwise a huge encyclopaedia of Greek mythology:

http://www.intergate.net/uhtml/.jhunt/greek_myth/greek_myth.html

film:

http://uk.imdb.com/

and a thousand other topics. It is a gold mine for research.

Once you have written your story, you might wish to have it workshopped. Critters offers an e-mail workshop, but you need to have fulfilled certain criteria of criticising the work of others before you can take part. Details may be found at:

http://www.cs.du.edu/users/critters/

and the enterprise may be joined by sending a message to

critters@cs.du.edu

There's also the online SFnF Writers Workshop –subscribe by sending the message "subscribe SFnF-Writers first_name last_name" to:

sfnf-writers-request@zorch.sf-bay.org

And finally, you'll need up-to-date market information. There's a market list available at:

http://www.greyware.com/marketlist/

which may be downloaded and another at:

http://www.cs.cmu.edu/~mslee/mag.html

Speculations has market information, updates and warnings at:

http://www.greyware.com/speculations/index.htp

Scavenger's Newsletter has plans to go on-line, in the meantime subscription details are at:

http://users.aol.com/Lemarchand/scavenger.html

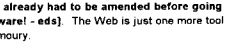
Factsheet Five have an electronic version at:

http://www.well.com/conf/f5/f5index2.html

The Web offers unparalleled scope for self-publication – the basics of the hypertext mark-up language are quickly learnt – and perhaps allows you to reach a wider audience than a paper-based fanzine could. (If you do set up a page, announce it via Submit-It:

http://204.57.42.243/?

which will have your page indexed in the various search engines). More importantly, it offers scope to access the most up-to-date information; **The Writers' and Artists' Yearbook** is carved in stone, the World Wide Web in water. But some words of caution must be given: the web is a victim of its own success. After midday, when the Americans log on with their breakfasts, downloading times notably increase. Sites become too popular, and have to move addresses; sites become moribund when the maintainer gets a real job **[one of these URLs has already had to be amended before going to press, so beware! - eds]**. The Web is just one more tool in the writer's armoury.



A version of this article, with further links, may be found at:

http://www.hull.ac.uk/Hull/El_Web/amb/focus.htm