

X-ASM:

The Book



© Shep...

Introduction

Welcome to X-asm! The purpose of this booklet is to give you some flavour of the delights we've lined up for you this weekend, or to act as an *aide-memoire* of what happened for those of you who prefer to read the programme book on the way home. My purpose in writing this introduction is to persuade you to take a few minutes out from the con just to flick through and see what's on offer. Obviously we've several pieces on Mike Harrison, which should provide a brief gloss to the man and his works before the interview on Saturday afternoon. Conversely, we've only a short piece on Rastislav Duman, but he is certain to be an entertaining speaker, familiar as he is with both the written and the spoken word.

As ever, some of our projected events became casualties of time and circumstance, but we still have our "Empire of the Senses" theme. One sense is conspicuous by its absence: we never did work out how to do an item on the sense of smell. See the con newsletter, the "X—aminer" for details of how we're planning to fill that gap. In fact, "X—Aminer" is going to be the place to find out what's up. Would-be journalists are invited to wander along to the Committee room on the first floor to be initiated into the Purple Arts.

While we're inviting people, can we just remind you that one of the watchwords of the Iconoclast conventions is "Participation". We can always find some way of employing an extra warm body or cool mind. Again, if you'd like to help out, drop round to registration or the Committee room.

When we started X—asm, we'd a committee for pre-con planning, plus another couple of people to use "on the day". However, pressure of work resulted in us losing Phil Race, Nick Atty (both of whom will be being blatantly exploited this weekend) and Kev McVeigh. This means that most of the pre-con organisation has been carried out by the two of us (Jenny and Steve Glover). Luckily, we have been able to call on the services of *The Iconoclasts* and the *Lucon Mob*. In particular, we'd like to thank Andrew Adams (Operations) and the Brothers Atty (Tech). This is also an appropriate point at which to thank all the contributors to our publications, especially the artists Dave Mooring, Sue Mason, Ian Brooks and Shep. Not present at the con, but deserving recognition are Alan Murray from Cadenhead's for advice and conversation on the art of choosing whiskies, Harry Payne for providing and running our video programme *in absentia* and Dave "Kevin" Perkins for running a shuttle service between the Hotel and Arnley on Friday afternoon.

M John Harrison: an Appreciation Martyn Taylor

To begin this appreciation of the works of Mike Harrison I present you an unfinished image. Picture the man at work, at his desk, bent over his word processor or pen and paper or whatever it is he uses to translate his words (a sharpened humerus dipped in the blood of a long dead critic most like...) The light changes. his ponytail lengthens into a cue, his beard becomes wispy. Arrayed on his bench are an assortment of scalpels, needles, tiny files and he gives his attention to a block of ivory. The craftsman is at work.

We shall return to this image, to complete it.

In a genre which holds even the recklessly prolific Philip K Dick to have been not unreasonably prolific, Mike Harrison is a maverick. The sum total of his *oeuvre* — a few brief novels and a number of short stories — is probably less than a single volume of a David Eddings epic. Ah, but never mind the width, feel the quality. You might mistake David Eddings for any one of a hundred other epic mongers: there is only one M John Harrison and you know from the first sentence exactly who it is you are reading. Consider the first sentence of *In Viriconium*:

"Ashlyme the portrait painter, of whom it had once been said that 'he put his first sitter's soul in the killing bottle then pinned it out on the canvas for everyone to look at like a broken moth', kept a diary".

In 41 words he tells us about Ashlyme, about his enemies, about his friends, about the *fin de siecle* era in which the story is set and that this is no junior high school wish fulfillment fantasy (as most commercially successful SF genre material seems to be). And if that seems like heavy baggage for mere words to carry he maintains this level of information density throughout most of his novels, and all the short stories. Yet anyone picking up a Harrison story in the expectation of reading something like a cross between Barthes, Wittgenstein and Eco written in the original Croatian, will be surprised. Dense his writing is, but not heavy. Everything moves before a relentless tide of imagery — often remarkable and poetically. Take this description of the death of a Dyneship from *The Centauri Device*:

"She burst out of the dyne fields like a morbid comet, rolling belly—up and launching volleys of torpedoes at nothing they could see, her stern consuming itself in pale feverish radiance. Great rents had opened along her length, her bow was an agonized mouth: her golden fins were bent and charred, her turrets melted stubs. She plummeted down on them in a fog of blind murder, braking savagely; slowed, showed a queer blunt profile. Something tore, deep down inside. She broke in half. The entire northern quadrant blazed up soundlessly, drenching their appalled faces with corpse—light".

When American 'critics' accuse British SF of being downbeat, there can be little doubt that Mike Harrison is one of their prime targets. Even when he writes about mighty princes and warriors, their armour is rusty, their swords have no names and they suffer from this odd, human need to eat for fuel rather than show. In *Viriconium* — (he is always in *Viriconium*, no matter what the labels say). Just look how the place names recur and are often absurdist, concocted by a town planner unsure whether he is a Stakhanovite or in Milton Keynes) — life, even when it is glorious, is filled with piss and wind, faeces and decay. Harrison's heroes would know all about Sweeney Agonistes' description of existence as being 'birth and copulation and death' if he let them read T S Eliot (which he probably does ...). Most cannot remember the first, get hardly any of the second and hurtle all too quickly towards the third. Birkin Grif, the Barley Brothers and John Truck may not be just like you and me, but with the wrong lighting and lack of opportunity we may be just like them. Time and entropy bear down upon them like a pressing stone. They could just lie down and die and nobody could really blame them, but they don't. In Harrisonland where there is life there is ... life, and not even the most sanguinely nordic of his heroes dies with a smile on his face. In the face of adversity, slings and arrows and vis superior Harrison's people do not shake their fists, they raise a weary two fingers. Which is not the stuff of epic fantasy, at least not what epic fantasy has become at the hands of American lady writers (of all ages, sexes and nationalities).

Yet SF and Fantasy really hold up a mirror to today and how could Harrison have written other than as he did? *The Pastel City* was published in 1971, at the fag end of the swinging sixties when veins were getting thick, heroes taking out mortgages and the Great Society become Amerika, lying in the mud oozing life blood. Much of the genre is escapist entertainment, and why not? Most of us like to be entertained and if you don't want to escape what are you doing here? But not all is pap and pabulum. Here and there surface works of art. Read anything by Mike Harrison and you are reading a work of art. The cover may proclaim it to be something else and, doubtless, he will snort his denial if you ask, but the truth is inescapable. The back of the Unwin edition of *The Pastel City* has Michael Bishop say "If you like elegantly crafted, elegantly written sword and sorcery, this book is all you could ask for". Elegantly crafted and elegantly written, yes, but sword and sorcery? Mike Harrison only looks (sometimes) as though he writes sword and sorcery (and SF and something like magic realism) because he is an artist and art is subversive.

Ah yes, you say, but subversive of what? Subversive of itself, of all the structures it represents, of the world view it portrays, the philosophy it espouses. Subversive art makes you look again at what

is presented, comparing and contrasting it with what you understand reality to be. The 20th century has been ablaze with subversive art — let me choose Picasso — art which presents itself as subversive — let me choose J P Donleavy, if you must have an example — and would—be art which desperately wishes it were subversive, but isn't — anything from the masturbatory pen of Amis *files*, if you like. I defy you to read Harrison and not to find both a literary craftsman and a subversive artist working there.

On the other hand you could just read him for fast paced, colourful stories peopled by grotesques. Art has the depths which allow you to skate over the surface with no danger of falling through into the void below. You don't have to find the references, the jokes, the allusions, the illusions, but they are there is you care to look. Art is gracious like that too.

But in case this is all getting a little too precious for you, let us look at *Climbers*, which purports to be that most English of forms, a realistic novel. Only it is "about" climbers and everyone knows that the English realistic novel abhors anything redolent of physical activity (except sex) or sport (except sex). It is redolent of climbing, managing at one and the same time to convince me I have been climbing and remind me exactly why I don't pursue that madman's game. Put bluntly, it is bloody well written. It is also peopled by characters who wouldn't be seen dead in one of those incestuous works created by English lady writers for the delectation of themselves, their lovers and their friends in the literary magazines. And some people think it is a realistic novel about climbing. Well, I suppose it is, the way *A Storm of Wings* is about sword and sorcery, the way *The Centauri Device* is about space opera, the way *Viriconium Nights* is about the end of civilisation as we may know it one day. You are urged to buy the book. It is not SF, but don't let that bother you.

Let us return to that unfinished image. The artist has now carved the ivory to the intricate glory he requires, each inner layer of the ball revealing further exquisite imagine from Chinese imperial history, on and on, ever smaller, impossibly so, always perfectly formed. This creation will be a joy and a beauty to behold for thousands of years. Yet, would the artist be content to create something which was merely decorative, however wonderfully so? No, he would not. Each scene he has carved so finely can be identified and when viewed in sequence a cypher is revealed, a coded message. In years to come learned men will puzzle at this until, one day, all is revealed. The message is simple. 'Fuck the Emperor' it says: and somewhere distant the artist sits with a drink and smiles. Appearances are just that, and can be deceptive.

Mike Harrison may be a climber, but why don't you be a speleologist and plumb the hidden depths of his work. The trip is thrilling and may not be exactly safe.

Rastislav Durman Chris Moran

Rastislav Durman was born in 1956 in the Voivodina, formerly an autonomous province of Serbia, Yugoslavia, and was brought up in Novi Sad, where he now lives with his wife and son. He is a writer, and director, story editor and script—writer for Yugoslav radio and television. He has written some twelve science—fiction radio dramas, and has directed about forty radio documentaries, educational programmes and dramas of all kinds, for some of which he has won national prizes. He has published four books, including a popular science—fiction novel *The Green Star* and two collections of short stories. He has published some thirty short stories in Yugoslav science fiction magazines, including *Sirius* of Zagreb. One of his stories will shortly be appearing in a collection edited by Harry Harrison and published in New York. His stories are distinguished by their humour and often deal with the conflicts between individuals seeking their freedom and the society in which they live. He names as his main influences Harry Harrison and Bob Shaw. He is a member of World SF and the Science Fiction Writers of America.

Time Warp and the Eternal Past: Barry Hill, Collector

Phil Nichols

Knowing Barry Hill as the man behind the Old—Time Radio Show Collectors Association, you expect him to be locked into an eternal past, where ITMA vies with The Goons as the pinnacle of western cultural achievement. It is said that his personal tape collection contains more complete radio programmes than any other archive, so when approaching his house you expect to enter a definite time warp. What will you see? Bakelite radios and piles of 78s awaiting a spin on a wind—up gramophone?

Actually, Barry lives very much in the here and now. A few minutes' thought brings the obvious conclusion: an archivist must preserve new material as well as old. He spends his days watching the clock, dashing off with conscientious regularity to start one of his many tape recorders, capturing the output of the nation's radio networks, proving inaccurate the theory that broadcast programmes make an ephemeral art form. His house is in a kind of time warp, or at least a time zone all its own. To save him missing the start of a programme, all clocks are four minutes fast.

I don't think Barry would deny being an obsessive; he seems to take any observation on his motives and behaviour with a philosophical acknowledgement. He may even praise you on your insight, but he certainly won't get worked up — which makes me wonder if this is a true obsessive. The true obsessive (alcoholic, gambler, take your pick) has trouble when his secret is out; call a drunk and he'll deny it to your face. But Barry isn't like this. The reason, I suspect, is that his programme collecting has gone beyond a hobby and become more like a full—time job. That said, he works longer hours than you or I.

He doesn't just collect radio programmes. He seems to collect dogs, too. He claims them as part of his security system, that they help keep his insurance premiums down. But he'll admit, if challenged, that he's a dog lover. This collection is an eclectic one, each canine specimen with a history. Ask Barry about his TV appearances and he'll tell you with glee of the time he was filmed at the vet's while his dog underwent testicular surgery.

the subject of dogs brings me on to science fiction — and the ostensible reason that Barry will be at Xasm. He's an avowed SF fan (and the only person I know who shares a passion for Richard Matheson's SF/vampire novel *I am a Legend*) (his favourite bit is the section about the dog) (yes, there is some logic to the flow of my prose!) He's set up stalls at various cons over the years, and has visions of doing so again when it comes to the release of *Imperial Boy*.

Imperial Boy was Barry's attempt to make the kind of radio programme he's always enjoyed listening to. A few years ago, he set about developing a story for an SF radio serial, and building a studio in his basement to record it in. He bought equipment to make multiple cassette copies of the finished product' got some theme and incidental music written and re recorded; recruited a bunch of professional actors from a nearby theatre; recorded the ten—part series. But one way or another the finished product never emerged. Now, though, two years later, post—production is finally underway, and *Imperial Boy* is on target for a 1992 release; the first major British SF radio serial since *Earthsearch* (remember that?)

Barry's just back from a spell in the States, where he spread the word about *Imperial Boy* to a number of station managers; and he naturally returned with piles of tapes for the archive, and no doubt promises of even more. But for him, there's no such thing as a holiday. The first day back means sorting out the off—air material waiting for him, recorded by the family in his absence.

Xasm, Barry and *Imperial Boy* seem made for each other, all of them products of Leeds. I hope you enjoy them all.

An Insufficient Appreciation of Mike Harrison Ramsey Campbell

In 1983 I wrote, in part and in a somewhat different form:

"M John Harrison is the finest British writer now writing horror fiction, and by far the most original. Saying that makes me aware of the inadequacy of a term that can refer to tales by Walter de la Mare and Robert Aickman on the one hand and on the other to the work of a horde of talentless hacks who might be described with excessive kindness as semi—literate. Harrison is up there with Aickman; indeed, at least two of his stories — "Egnaro" and "The New Rays" are among the very few that can be described as both in the tradition of Aickman and worthy of him. The mysteriously appalling "New Rays" might almost be a lost Aickman, except that none of Aickman's tales has its sense of suffering. "Nothing ended, however" complains the narrator of Mike's other story about illness (in this case, cancer), and it's this kind of truth to life that some readers may find threatening. One looks in vain for escapism in his work, and quite right too. He does deal in a kind a deadpan comedy of embarrassment, an integral part of his horror fiction and of the precision with which he writes of lived experience (something too many fans seek to avoid in fiction, and maybe not only there). His perceptions are relentless when it comes to describing those everyday encounters we would all wish to avoid and, having suffered them, would rather forget, but this is certainly not all he has to offer. "Running Down", perhaps his masterpiece, begins as his most uncomfortable psychological comedy, but reaches a conclusion which — like far too little in this field these days — inspires awe. "The Incalling" struggles to reach a qualified optimism, the more poignant when set against the fierce rejection of pap of all kinds in "Settling the World", and his lyrical sense of the English landscape, crucial to several of these stories, leads him in "The Quarry" to write an optimistic enigma. He is a master of enigma, whether human or supernatural".

Most of that appeared in a review of Mike's collection *The Ice Monkey*, and I expressed the hope that "this book will gain him the wider reputation he deserves". I'm sure it must have to an extent, but nevertheless Mike is shamefully undervalued and unappreciated by the very audience which ought to welcome him. Since 1983 he has published "Small Heirlooms", an exceptionally subtle ghost story, and (in Douglas E Winter's "Prime Evil") "The Great God Pan". It is another masterpiece, and a story I would love to have written. Perhaps its title serves to alert admirers of Machen to Mike's work, which is of comparable suggestiveness but in every other way, a tale nobody else could have composed: who else would have dreamed of setting a tale of occult flashbacks in contemporary Huddersfield? I stake a claim on these tales on behalf of horror fiction because the field would be the poorer without them, but the simplest truth is that they are, inimitably, M John Harrison stories. Just as much as *Climbers*, they bring the world into sharper focus when I read and re—read them. I commend the experience to you all.

M John Harrison — A Personal Appreciation Christopher J Fowler

Michael (M John) Harrison is a man who has created his own myths. These myths interweave his work and his life, and they can easily obscure the essential values of both. When I first met him, in the summer of 1975, he looked like Jerry Cornelius, an all—purpose *New Worlds* character. Now he resembles Killer Bob, the demonic presence from *Twin Peaks*. Neither of these appearances was unintentional. Whilst he may not have re—invented himself as relentlessly as that master of disguise, Bob Dylan, Michael has none the less contrived to make it difficult to penetrate to the heart of his concerns. He is working hard to entertain you as you venture through the maze, but he wants you to work hard as well. Hang on tight to your ball of twine: there is a way out.

Probably the greatest myth about Harrison is that he is "difficult": difficult to read, difficult to deal with if you are his editor. Whilst he has certainly contributed to the latter idea, it is hard to see where an intelligent view of the work can show him to be difficult to read. Certainly, the typical Harrisonian milieu may not be to everyone's taste. We find ourselves in the run-down back streets of Camden Town, where in the summer newspapers are blowing around in the dust and a smell of garbage is never far away. In the winter, it is always raining. The Harrison woman sits in a dim cafe, drinking tea and eating Battenberg cake while peering through the condensation on the window to catch a glimpse of the passing show. Meanwhile, the Harrison man is huddled over a one-bar electric fire in a bleak bedsit above a bookshop which is about to go out of business. Perhaps for a change it is near the British Museum, in which case the man is worried about something odd he has just spotted in a 17th century manuscript.

That, at least, is the popular view of Harrison. It may seem strange to those who hold it to say that when I read Harrison's last published novel, *Climbers*, I frequently laughed out loud, to the considerable embarrassment of my fellow commuters on the Reading train (which, incidentally, features in another Harrison story). I found the novel equal parts comedy and sadness. I still think it odd that many people seem to regard the book as depressing, and have missed the humour altogether. In fact, as far back as *The Centauri Device* there has been comedy — albeit of a pretty dark kind — in Harrison's work. And I've always enjoyed those nasty and energetic dwarfs. Even where there is no leavening of humour, the sheer beauty of the prose, the perfect rhythms of the sentences, the adroitness of the structure and the fascinating hints and allusions draw the reader irresistibly on.

Of course, it's all different if you're Harrison's editor or publisher. Michael is not one to have his work tampered with. I well remember the scene in Holmfirth, where I was the guest of Michael and his long-time companion Diane, when he heard that his American paperback editor wanted to change the title of *In Viriconium* to something a bit more marketable, a bit more fantastic-sounding — *The Floating Gods*. Michael stormed round the living-room — a feat in itself, given how tiny it was — threatening to get on the first plane to New York and dangle the editor out of his office window by the heels until he relented. Fortunately for the editor, even if the three of us there had clubbed together, we would not have been able to afford a return ticket to York, let alone New York. The cats were terrified and hid in corners. Diane said *For goodness sake, Michael, calm down!* I hopped out of his way, saying *Why are you so upset? You know these people are all idiots.* In the end, nothing could be done about it. One more editor moved onto Michael's reject list. That edition was referred to as *The Floating Gobs* in the Harrison household.

Harrison has learned from such defeats. He has fought for an ever increasing amount of control, not only preventing any changes to his text or titles, but also co-operating in and where possible supervising the marketing and promotion of his works. He has come to understand that it is no longer enough to write. Now he has to market — not only the work but also himself. The creation of his own colourful myths, most notably that of the hard rock climber, is a part of this. It is a way of attracting attention to the work whilst still shielding the essence of his person.

Michael realised the need for this just over six years ago. In a long interview with him, published in *Foundation* in 1981, I titled him "The Last Rebel". By 1986, he had had enough of being a rebel struggling outside the system. He had decided to use the system and perhaps subvert it a little, from the inside. Changes in his personal life also encouraged him, and he moved to London. Despite an enormous amount of effort, however, he has still not achieved the breakthrough which the many admirers of his work have been hoping for. His "mainstream" novel, *Climbers*, certainly his finest work to date, received favourable reviews and reasonable sales, but publication has still not been achieved in the USA. There it is regarded as a "regional novel" likely to be of no interest to American readers. Even in Britain, far too many people thought the book was about climbing, rather than being a novel about a group of people who use climbing as an escape from the wreckage of their lives.

Harrison's latest novel, *The Course of the Heart* (due to be published in the Spring of 1992) is cast in a more popular mould, being a metaphysical thriller akin to the works of Charles Williams. Whether it will help him to break out of the box in which he has been placed — a writer of "difficult" literary fantasies — remains to be seen. Certainly Harrison continues to "push the envelope" in this novel, and his command of the structuring of fictional works continues to grow. The fact that important elements of the book relate to Central Europe, to the mysterious heart of the continent which is now re-emerging after the breakdown of the East/West divisions, lends a timeliness to its publication. It is interesting to note that another fantastic work about Central Europe, also involving magic, Avram Davidson's *Eszterhazy* collection, has also just re-appeared. Are we about to witness a renewed interest by writers in Central Europe, with *The Course of the Heart* in the van? Is it possible that for the first time in his life, Harrison may be in exactly the right place at exactly the right time?

We can only hope that this will prove to be the case. Far from being depressing, difficult or negative, Harrison's fiction is positive and life-affirming. He rejects solutions imposed from above, be they political (*The Centauri Device*), religious ("Settling the World") or scientific ("The New Rays"). But unlike the young man confronted by the same dilemma in Robert Bresson's *Le Diable Probablement*, he does not despair. Rather he affirms that the solutions to our problems — or, if they are insoluble, the way to live despite them — comes out of each individual. The way to deal with them is by working together. We must make contact with our own nature, and indeed with Nature itself (another connection between Harrison's work and that of Colette). In Harrison's fiction, this idea is expressed at the most fundamental level of structure, where the story grows from the characters and increasingly from their interactions with each other. Harrison believes in the redemptive power of love, which perhaps makes him a romantic in the best sense of that word. And why not? In an age when our politicians are entirely without vision, or where many writers cannot see beyond their Hampstead sitting rooms or university campuses, we could all use an author with a few big ideas about human values.

Video Notes

Harry Payne

Warriors of the Wind

(1984) 90 minutes

A thousand years after World War III, humanity fights it out for the remains of habitable land, which is being covered by a deadly forest ruled by a gestalt of giant insects. Only a young princess can stop both the human conflict and the war against the forest, but time is running out and no-one wants to listen.

The American version of *Nausicaa of the Valley of Wind* is still exceptional despite the messing about with the script, plot, film footage and even the characters' names. For the purists, the original, uncut and undubbed version will also be shown at this convention, but if you haven't seen *Warriors* or read the manga, it might be worth your while to check this out first.

Laputa: the Flying Island

(1984) 120 minutes

Not only the island flies: sky pirates, the Imperial army, and secret agents by the bucketload take to the air to capture a young girl for the crystal she wears about her neck. The crystal is the key to Laputa, whose people ruled the world centuries ago, and is rumoured to be a treasure trove ... or perhaps a nightmare. When a young miner, whose father saw the island in his youth, sees the unconscious girl floating to earth surrounded by a blue glow, the stage is set for a high-speed adventure which would make Indiana Jones tip his hat in respect.

Almost uncut, and properly dubbed, this is one of animation's classics. Don Bluth, eat your heart out.

My Neighbour, Totoro

(1987) 95 minutes

Two small girls move to the country with their father to be near their sick mother, and soon discover that not all creatures from folklore are confined to storybooks. Not only is their house the home to what resemble flying tribbles, but the nearby forest is home to Totoros, wood-spirits, one of whom befriends the younger girl. When she gets lost, only the Totoro can find her, provided her sister can find the Totoro first.

A truly heartwarming film: the more cynical viewer might wonder what the people who made it were smoking at the time. (Subtitled).

Kiki's Delivery Service

(1988) 100 minutes

A trainee witch leaves home on the night of the full moon after her thirteenth birthday to study her craft, according to ancient custom. However, the big city she flies into has little time for a country girl and the old ways — until they're put to practical use. She begins to make new friends and find her way in the world, until her powers suddenly vanish and one of her friends falls into deadly danger.

One of the best "rite of passage" stories filmed or written in the last decade. Sorry, not dubbed or subtitled, but neither are really needed.

Power of the Lens

In the distant future, the evil BOSKONE EMPIRE (hiss) has perfected an ULTIMATE WEAPON (gasp) capable of bringing doom to the FREE GALAXY (TAANSTAAFG). A GALACTIC PATROL ship (cheers) has captured the blueprints for the ULTIMATE WEAPON (cheers cheers and yah boo snibbins to the TREENS as Molesworth) and is heading for the home planet of a young famboy KIMBALL KINNISON (Huzzah!) ...

Not so much based on Doc Smith's *Lensman* novels as "containing characters with the same names as ...", this typical Harmony Gold hack-job of two different TV series with some linking footage is for those of you who don't have the time to watch all three *Star Wars* films in one go. Having said that, it's inoffensive enough' some of the aliens are weird enough to be worthy of the good Doctor (though he might balk at the manic aboriginal punk DJ), and there are some interesting computer graphics. Don't expect anything too original or intellectual, and you'll have a good time.

Hayao Miyazaki: A Brief Appreciation

Harry Payne

Or, yet another attempt to get fandom interested in anime.

He is acknowledged to be one of the greatest living animators in the world. He works seven days a week in a continual state of panic during projects, reputedly resorting to acupuncture to keep his drawing-arm working. Otherwise, he is merely a workaholic. For over 25 years, he has helped produce SF and Fantasy films and short features; he has almost single-handedly created half a dozen of the finest examples of animation. He is Hayao Miyazaki.

Born in 1941 in Tokyo, Miyazaki showed an interest in animation in high school. However, he graduated from University in 1963 with a degree in economics, and only took a part-time job as an animator whilst waiting for an opening in a large corporation. By the time the post became vacant, the first feature Miyazaki had worked on had been released, and he never looked back.

For the next twenty years, Miyazaki worked on a variety of features and short cartoons, moving from fill-in animator, to key animator, to screenplay writing and layout. It was in the early seventies that he began to gain a reputation for meticulous research when he travelled to Switzerland for pre-production work on an animated series of *Heidi*. He also made visits to Italy and Argentina in this period for research on other series, but also worked on the fantastic as well as the historical: *Future Boy Conan*, a post-holocaust series which was to provide inspiration for *Nausicaa* and the popular *Castle Cagliostro*, a film featuring the cartoon character Lupin III, grandson of the master thief Arsene Lupin as portrayed in the novels of Maurice Leblanc such as "The Girl with Green Eyes". Miyazaki had worked on the *Lupin III* series prior to this, and although *Castle Cagliostro* was supposed to be his final project with this character, the animated Lupin proved to be as persistent as his literary ancestor: it was not until 1985 that Miyazaki finally parted company with the gentleman thief with a penchant for food and turbo-charged Citroen 2CVs.

Whilst producing *Great Detective Holmes* (released on video in the UK as *Sherlock Hound*), Miyazaki began drawing a manga (comic) story for the magazine "Animage", about the daughter of a tribal chief whose kingdom is one of the last outposts of humanity following a catastrophe was brought about by overuse and misuse of the Earth's natural resources. *Nausicaa of the Valley of Wind* because popular, and talks soon began to make either a film or a series. Miyazaki opted for the latter, and in 1984 the film was released to tumultuous acclaim in Japan.

Though perhaps not as technically perfect as films made by western studios such as Disney or Bluth, it was obvious that Miyazaki had understood that the most important aspect of any film is the story, and had put this tenet into practice. This, combined with character, mechanical, architectural and animal designs, made *Nausicaa* a very sophisticated anime film, with easily-observed parallels with SF novels such as the *Dune* series. Certainly the film shares the scope and epic feel of Frank Herbert's books, with its warring armies, mysterious priesthoods and other-worldly yet intelligent lifeforms. As for the central character, Miyazaki was struck by the parallels between the Nausicaa of Greek mythology and a princess from Japanese folklore who talked with trees and insects, and refused to conform to social customs of her time, such as shaving her eyebrows and painting her teeth black.

Unfortunately, *Nausicaa* was too sophisticated for audiences outside Japan. Its US distributors (the appropriately-named Manson International) removed half an hour of footage, changed the storyline from an ecological tale to a simplistic action/adventure and even changed the main characters' names. *Nausicaa* being too Japanese for Americans to handle. Despite these indignities, the renamed *Warriors of the Wind* is eminently watchable, which is a somewhat back-handed compliment to Miyazaki's skills.

By this time, Miyazaki had set up his own company, Nibariki ("Two horse-power") and had started work on *Laputa: the flying island*, an adventure film in its own right. Though it borrows Jonathan Swift's concept of an island in the sky, the film owes more to the ideas of Jules Verne, H G Wells and even Rudyard Kipling, than to the tales of Lemuel Gulliver, and is a salute to Victoria engineering and imagination from the opening sequences. Miyazaki continued to improve his innovative animation techniques, depth of characterisation, and intelligent storytelling which kept audiences' attentions throughout. As well as the influences of the aforementioned authors, the robots which appear in the film are similar to those drawn by Max Fleischer for the *Superman* cartoons of the 1940s, and the end of the film is reminiscent of Douglas Trumbull's *Silent Running*. When released in 1986, it astounded audiences throughout Japan and the US (the latter being perhaps even more amazed that the film had remained more or less intact and had been sympathetically dubbed!)

After these epics, Miyazaki wanted to produce something in a lighter vein. The result was *My neighbour, Totoro*, released in 1986, which simply follows two young girls who move to a rural Tokyo suburb in the 1950s with their father, to be near their mother who is recovering from a long illness in a cottage hospital. *Totoro* is not only a film for children, it is a film about children and childhood innocence which knows that magic is real, and can be seen around the corner, or under

the next tree, if you're quick and careful enough. It is a homage to a way of life which has long been swallowed up in the *Akira*-style rush of modern Japanese cities, and is fast disappearing even in the remote countryside. Miyazaki was quoted as wanting to give every child brought up in a city the summer in the country they never had: nobody who has seen *Totoro* could say that it fails to give this. Recently premiered at the Barbican as part of the Japan Festival, the English-language version has been exceedingly well translated: names of people and places, and even local names of flora and fauna have been faithfully rendered.

Barely a year later, Miyazaki's adaptation of Aiko Kadono's novel *Kiki's Delivery Service* was released. *Majo no Takkyubin*, or *Witch's Express Delivery*, is a pun about Yamato Transport, who began by complaining about trademark infringement and ended up sponsoring the film. Both book and film are gently subversive works which gently question fixed ideas about society's attitude towards women who seek independence. Miyazaki worked closely with Kadono in developing the book's characters for the film, and spent over a month travelling around Europe drawing and taking photographs to create a fictitious country just to the west of Ruritania and south of Grand Fenwick, in whose capital television is a commonplace but electric ovens are only just beginning to replace word-burning stoves, and in whose skies biplanes and airships still provide transport. This anachronistic blend of carefully-observed minutiae gives the film the internal consistency which has become Miyazaki's hallmark in anime. It may be hard to believe that a 13-year old girl could not only survive in a large city on her own, but run a business without being overwhelmed by bureaucracy, unions and social workers, but as a fantasy it works beautifully.

To date, Miyazaki has continued to work on the manga version of *Nausicaa* (which frustratingly currently ends on a cliff-hanger of awesome proportions) and has recently released *Only Yesterday*, an adult-oriented romance which as of last month was seventh in the top ten films in Japan. Details on this last film are sketch, but it apparently deals with the dilemma of career versus friendship, organic gardening and time travel! It all sounds very weird and wonderful, but then Miyazaki is a genius at transforming the mundane to the wondrous.

With grateful acknowledgements to John Ashbrook, Helen McCarthy, Kiyo Murakami and the staff at Animeage.

More than Mushy Peas and Tripe Food in Leeds

Leeds being the cosmopolitan centre of the North (though Bradford might have something to say about that) has the usual range of bland international type restaurants which you find anywhere: Macdonalds, Pizza Hut, Pizzaland. There are clusters of Italian, Indian, Chinese as per normal in any metropolis, all of varying quality. It is possible to find a gem, but would be the equivalent of hunting for a straw in a mechanised haystack. Or something.

So here is a list of my favourite restaurants, investigated in depth by a meticulous researcher. Top is the Mandalay (Harrison Street). This serves Indian Tandoori cuisine and, believe me, they are superb. The service is friendly and moderately quick and the kitchen has a glass window for customers to see the chef being extremely untemperamental and spinning like a — very busy chef. There are some special dinners: the vegetarian one has onion bhaji, allu tikki, vegetable samosa with salad and minted yoghurt followed by vegetable malai kofta, bhindi bhaji, mattar paneer, dhall, naan, pilau rice and raita, followed by kulfi and coffee (£12.75 for one). There are equivalent tandoori dinners (£14.75) and also a house dinner (£13.75). The specialities of this delectable restaurant include Karahi Murgh Khas — chicken cooked in a kahari (wok) with ginger, onions, tomatoes and assorted herbs then served with a dry, highly spiced sauce (£7.95); Kebab-t-Nizami — lamb marinated in masala and served roasted and sizzling (£6.25); Peshwari Naan — leaf-shaped bread covered with pistachios (£1.70) and Kulfi — icecream with almonds and pistachios again (1.95).

But for Chinese connoisseurs, there is the **Jumbo** (120 Vicar Lane) which has a huge range of dim sum at lunchtimes, all at an average price of £1.45. They come in tiers of wicker baskets, steaming, challenging, the breath of exotic authenticity pouring out: there's Koon Chin Sui Mai, Ha Col, Ca Yuk Siu Mai, Pat Good Siu Mai, Bat Coe Siu Mai, Steamed Ling Yeung Bun (with Lotus Nut Paste), steamed beef with ginger and spring onions and steamed cheung fan with prawn, beef or pork. And there are fried prawns in rice paper. For a main course, if you've still got room, why not try chicken in a paper bag (£4.60), Hong Kong Roast Duck, cold (£4.50), Beef with Green Peppers (£4.50), Char sui fried rice (£3.60), remembering that the meals do not include rice, but that it is available plain for £1.05 or fried for £1.10. The dining room is in the basement, somewhat dimly lit, chopsticks are taken for granted, the food is excellent (if you happen to like Chinese cuisine).

Going a bit further, geographically, there is **Ike's American Restaurant** (1 Cross Belgrave Street) which has more of a US flavour. Delicacies include potato skins — crisp fried, filled with salami, smoked bacon, onion and mushrooms, topped with melted cheese (£1.25) and there are also low calory meals like hamburgers with cottage cheese and everything with salad plus a Norwegian prawn, for consolation. This is the place for hamburgers, they are served with barbecue, chili, chasseur, bacon, cheese, aioli, but if you want any further variation, the staff are sympathetic. The chasseurs are as fresh as the very best Waldorfs. More seriously, the bistro dishes include Lamb Navarraise (£7.95) which is a pan fried loin of lamb with a julienne of mushrooms and ham, gruyere and cream, baked in the oven and Steaks, like a Fillet Steak (£8.95) which is served with deep fried onion rings. There are pizzas, gourmet pizzas and vegetable dishes, like vegetable stroganoff or aubergine and walnut casserole (both about £6), but leave some space for the desserts. There is **Alcoholic's Deception**, chocolate icecream smothered in the liqueur of your choice (£2.50) or **Death by Chocolate** with cream or ice cream (£2.15). Like most of the city centre restaurants, this is open until late (11pm) on Friday and Saturday, but it is also open until 10pm on Sunday.

Swerving violently from West to East, there is a Thai restaurant in Lower Briggate, the **Maitai**. Recommended starters are the transparent noodle salad (£3.50), and there are also dim sum (£2.90) and hot and sour (Tom Yam) prawn (£4.25). For a main course, there is a green curry (beef or chicken) for £4.50, beef with basil for £4.95, pork with pineapple for £4.50 and chili squid for £5.95. Jasmine Tea is available at 60p per pot, and the Thai custard sounds suitably exotic (£1.95). Watch out for the 10% service charge.

For those who've never tried a Test-Tube Baby and still want to, the **Observatory** at the corner of Boar Lane by the station is the place to be. It has an extended happy hour in the week, and outside those hours, people pay by the unit of spirits, which can lead to some rather peculiar concoctions. Other cocktails on offer include a **Blue Bitch**, a **B—52**, a **Velvet Hammer** in addition to the quite ordinary (in comparison) **Singapore Sling** and **Tequila Sunrise**. They serve the sort of food which is needed to mop up such mixtures: lasagna, chili, sweets, starters, for an average price. The place is a little dark, a little noisy, the bouncers are experienced: it is an experience going there.

Finally, don't forget the **Shabab** (2 Eastgate) which offers **Qutub Shahi Raan**, a whole leg of lamb cooked in a charcoal oven with two vegetable side dishes, rice, naan, mussellan sauce and salad (£34), or, more reasonably on belly and wallet, **Jinga Bhuna** — prawns with onions and tomatoes in a thick sauce for about £5.30 or **Machlee Pasinda** — fillets of rainbow trout in masala sauce (£3.10), not to mention **Jelfrezi**, a positive rainbow of a dish with peppers of all colours, onions, tomatoes and coriander (£5.10). And really finally, there is the **Sang Sang** (7 The Headrow) who have **Mountain Fresh Fruit Salad** (£1.50) or **Fried King Prawn with Straw Mushroom** (£5.50) or **Steamed Port Ribs in Plum Sauce** (£4.60). Like they say, Yorkshire offers more than you expect — in everything, but there's a really cosmopolitan selection of food in the city centre. Good hunting.

The Whisky Tasting

The idea of having a tasting of some sort at a con has increased in popularity over the years, with the Unicon food tasting being perhaps the best-known example. We ran a wine tasting at Iconoclasm two years ago, which seemed to have been well received, so we decided to do it again. Of course, it would have been far too easy to simply run another wine tasting, so we thought for a while and came up with the idea of a beer tasting. In the interval between Iconoclasm and the present event, though, there were several cons with beer tastings — most notably the one at Confiction, which had a truly international range of beers. Eventually we settled on the present idea.

Rather than buy a selection of whiskies from a local off-license or wine merchant, we thought we'd go to a specialist supplier in the hope of coming up with a malt or two that people hadn't had a chance to try before. In the event, the whiskies came from Cadenhead's of Edinburgh, who certainly came up trumps — at least one of the malts on offer is the very last of its type (and no, we're not telling you which one until after the tasting). Cadenhead's are more than a whisky shop with a ludicrously complete range — they do their own bottling, too. This isn't just a ploy to give all their bottles a "house style", there's a reason for it.

Most single malts these days are somewhat mucked around with by the distillers, usually more in the hope of giving a traditional appearance, rather than taste, and in this process some of the essential oils which give whisky its flavour are removed by chill-filtering. "Quality" is further controlled by blending different casks of the same nominal age — they might even have been distilled in separate batches. Finally, not all distilleries have their own bottling plant these days, so when the whisky is diluted from cask strength it might be "contaminated" with water from a different region.

Cadenhead's get around these problems by buying single casks of a given malt and bottling them at room temperature. This means they tend to be a little cloudy when cold, but the difference in flavour should make up for that.

The Whiskies

Glenglassaugh 13 year old. ABV 60.7%

Highland.

Milroy lists this one and Auchroisk as Speyside malts, but that's just an artefact of his classification scheme — The "shop" version of this whisky is a 12 year old of roughly two-thirds the strength, so I'm not sure about his comments on the "light, fresh and delicate" nose. There is a "hint of sweetness" in the taste, but I suspect the "delicious stimulating follow-through" will be a good deal stronger than in the 40% version.

Auchroisk 12 years old. ABV 58.7%

Highland.

Not "Singleton of Auchroisk", as that is diluted with the wrong sort of water(!), but actual Auchroisk at cask strength. According to Milroy, there's a hint of fruit in the bouquet (Shades of Michael Jackson!). Again, he comments on a hint of sweetness in the taste. Unlike Glenglassaugh, he classifies this one as an "after-dinner" malt. No, I don't know what he means either...

Linkwood 21 years old. ABV 55.8%

Speyside.

This is allegedly one of the best malts available, even as the 40% twelve year old. The notes are a triumph of understatement with a "slightly smokey" nose with a "trace of sweetness" and a "full-bodied" taste. He says nothing about the sherried cask... According to Cadenhead's, this would be one of the most popular malts in the world if only it was "GLEN Linkwood".

Macallan 19 years old. ABV 46%

Speyside.

I hope we made the right choice here. We'd the option of swapping Linkwood and this one for a ten year old Macallan from an oak cask (TOTALLY unexpected flavour) and a 23 year old Tannavulin, but were swayed by the Linkwood. This one is Smooth!!

Glenkinchie 21 years old. ABV 46%

Lowland.

Can't say much about this one, I haven't tried it myself, and Milroy comments only on the ten year old. Even so, he comments on the smoothness and slightly dry flavour (contradicting the sweet nose).

Linlithgow 9 years old. ABV 65.4%

Lowland.

Not St Magdalene's as such, but was distilled there. At nine years old, it's not going to be as smooth as the St Magdalene 20 year old, but its ludicrous strength may well make up for that.

Ardbeg 16 years old. ABV 57.6%

Islay.

Now we come to my own favourites... Sadly, this is an ex-distillery, but the spirit lives on. Milroy calls this one the ultimate test for beginners, whilst blethering about the peaty aroma, his usual "hint of sweetness" and the "full-bodied and luscious taste". I mean, you'd think he was writing about a Page 3 girl. "Lovely Ardbeg comes from the isle of Islay..."

Bowmore 11 years old. ABV 58.4%

Islay.

Again, you'll not get this one in the shops, (just 10 and 12 year old versions) Not quite as peaty as the Ardbeg, and again a "very popular after-dinner malt" (Just one more wafer-thin malt, M'sieu Milroy?)

Longrow 16 years old. ABV 46%

Campbeltown.

From the same distillery as the better-known Springbank, but using entirely peat-dried malt. Again, this has two years on the "shop" malt. It's described as having a "creamy, malty palate and a fine lingering aftertaste". Slightly peaty, it could be taken for an Islay.

Springbank 12 and 21 years old. ABV 46%

Campbeltown.

Classic malts of their type, Milroy describes these in terms more suited to a hero from the Boy's Own Paper. "Steadfast, full of charm and elegance". VERY popular in Japan, and AGAIN, a "superb after-dinner drink". Apart from Islay, the closest distillery to Campbeltown is the Bushmills distillery in Northern Ireland.

Highland Park 21 years old. ABV 46%

Orkney.

The 12 year old version is over-rated. It's "good, but not THAT good". This version is a lot more "grown-up". Again, a characteristic taste (as we chemists say), slightly smokey.

Further Information: If you want to buy any of these whiskies yourself, it's not necessary to make a special trip up to Scotland. Cadenhead's will accept orders by letter or telephone, and you can even pay with plastic money (definitely soluble in over-proof whisky!) Carriage to Leeds was on the order of £12 on a case — not excessive when it's delivered to your door in a Security Van).

The address is: Cadenhead's Whisky Shop, 172 Canongate, The Royal Mile, Edinburgh EH8 8DF. Phone: 031 556 5864.

Hotel Information

Once a Crown Hotel, the Metropole had an uncertain future for most of this year. It has now been totally refurbished as a Principal Hotel. Unfortunately, this state of flux has been reflected in the management structure to the extent that we have had three separate Conference Managers to deal with since our last Progress Report.

The function space is mostly on the first floor, where you will find the Mountbattan Suite for main programme items, Room 111 will be the committee, secure store and newsletter room and Room 114 will have some art and Dave "Hurling Reliant Robins III" Hodges with his unique Hitch-Hiker's Guide database. On the ground floor is the Charles II room where the alternate programme items, including the videos, will be.

Breakfast is served from 8-10am and consists of a buffet with good options for vegetarians and carnivores alike. Lunches are available as a choice of meat or vegetarian options with vegetables or side salad and chips or jacket potatoes for approximately £3.50 but they must be ordered by 10.30am. The chef will put up a board in the foyer first thing in the morning. Evening meals are also available on Friday and Saturday, and again they will need to be ordered by lunchtime. Sandwiches will be available from the bar by order at other times.

The Bar will be open to non-residents from 11am to 11pm, except for Sunday, when it will be open from noon to 10.30pm

Con attendees who use the car park should confirm this with reception, as a car clamp system is in operation. However, there is space for 50 vehicles.

Friday		
Time	Main programme	Alternate programme
1600	Registration Opens	
		Warriors of the Wind
1700		
1800		The Mixer Game
1900		
	Volunteer Meeting	
2000	Opening Ceremony and Introduction to the Empire of the Senses.	
		My Neighbour, Totoro
2100	EOTS(I) Radio SF: The Cinderella of the Air. Barry Hill	
2200	EOTS(II) Story Telling Workshop	The Infamous Purity Test Workshop
2300	Filking...	

Saturday		
Time	Main programme	Alternate programme
0900		Laputa: the Flying Island
	1991: An SF Review of the Year	
1000		
1100	EOTS(III) The Fantastic in Art: Hilda Birchall	The Inklng Thing
1200		
	The Write Stuff: Apas, Fanzines and the Urge to Write	
1300		
1400	Just Around the Corner: Fantasy in a Contemporary Setting	
1500		
	Mike Harrison Interview by Chris Fowler	
1600		
1700		Radio: War of the Worlds
	No Islands in the Net?	
1800		
		EOTS(IV) Malt Whisky Tasting
1900		
2000	EOTS (V) Musica Mediaevalis: The Grinnigogs	Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind
2100		
2200	Filking...	EOTS (VI) Body Workshop
2300		

Sunday		
Time	Main Programme	Alternate Programme
0900		
	What the Papers Say	Chronoclasm Video (Also Canal Walk)
1000	Turkey Reading	
1100	Eastercon Preview	Imperial Boy
1200		
	Local SF Groups: Care and Feeding of...	Unearthing the Arcana: Obscure Role-playing Systems
1300		
1400	What is this Thing Called Slipstream?	
1500		
	GOH: Rastislav Durman	
1600		
1700		
	Closing Ceremony	
1800		Power of the Lens
1900		
2000* til late	Party...	

PROTOPLASM

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