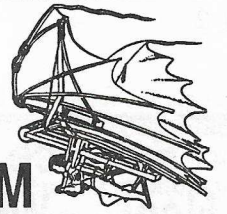


# DISPATCHES 2

## THE Reconnaissance FORUM



Dateline: Cardiff. Issue 2: March 1990

### Centre Pages: In Search of the Technogoth by Colin Greenland.

## Introduction

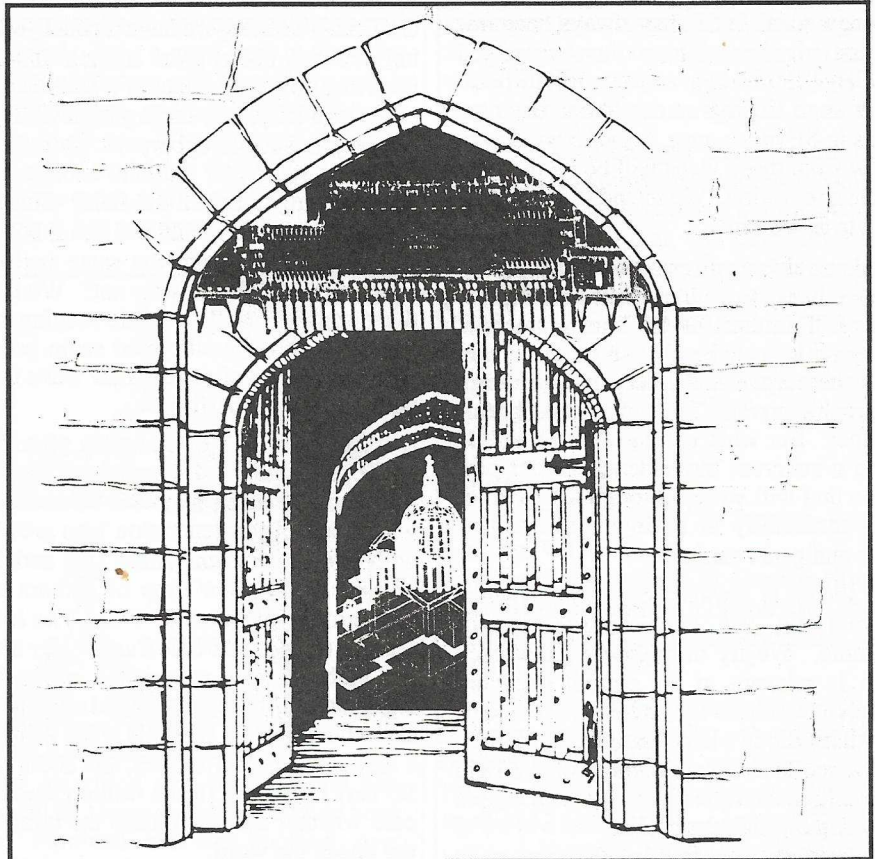
Rob Meades

This issue contains details of the programme in the form of two articles by two of our programme team — Alice and James. These cover philosophy and some real, live, items that we will run — the convention may be a year away, but we are sure enough to state at least some of the things we will do. We know that no-one in fandom is going to stoop so low as to use our ideas before us...

We are also very pleased to feature in this issue an article by Colin Greenland *In Search of the Technogoth*. The article appears in the March issue of *The Face* magazine, and looks at what the new writers in SF are doing and pursues the latest 'movement' — Technogoth, which I understand marries SF with the Gothic horror novel.

And we have other stuff — articles from each member of the committee (Chris O'Shea II providing the illustrations in stead), including our newly appointed Ops' manager, Gary Stratmann.

**ERRATUM:** Due to the greenhouse effect and associated global shrinkage, two values in Steve Bull's article on cold fusion in *Dispatches 1* should be increased as follows. On page 6 '... calculated that around 1012 fusion events ...' should read '... cal-



culated that around  $10^{12}$  fusion events ...' and '... a fusion rate of 104 events ...' should read '... a fusion rate of  $10^4$  events ...'

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## Guests

To reiterate our policy on guests, we do not intend to have any single major guest, but instead will have as many 'Special Participants' as possible. Many of these will be new authors, who can offer a new perspective on SF and where it is going. This is what *Reconnaissance* is all about — 'New Works and New Ideas in SF'. So don't come to *Reconnaissance* just for big names, come because you are interested in the state of SF, and if you have anything to say on the subject *tell us* and we will do what we can to allow you to air those views.

We will be writing off to many new or potential influences in SF shortly after *Eastcon '90* — the next issue of *Dispatches* will contain full details.

## Convention Form

Included with this *Dispatches* is our hotel booking form. Please fill it in, both sides, in block capitals. Note that only attending members of the convention may book hotel rooms, and that there are only a limited number of single rooms available. If you choose single only, with no back-up option, and there are no single rooms left, then we will attempt to negotiate a rate with an overflow hotel. The Park Hotel do not have any standing arrangements with an overflow hotel so we cannot guarantee the rates stated on the form in an overflow hotel. Note also that there is no mention of a creche on the form. This is because we currently have no plans for one. If members who intend to bring their children to the convention would like to contact us and discuss their requirements, we will make arrangements.

## Science Fiction Now — What is the State of the Art?

Alice Kohler and  
James Steel

The theme of *Reconnaissance*, new works and new ideas in SF, has always been important to us; it is a subject often submerged at science fiction conventions. It is difficult to arrange a programme about the new ideas in SF in advance, because we do not know what those ideas will be by the time of the convention. We intend to keep as up to date as we can.

There are already discussions which we can say are likely to be important to the direction of SF in the 1990's. The commercial pressures influencing British and American publishers is one, and the continuing impact of graphic novels, TV, fantasy and horror another. But what will the 90's bring? Is there a coherent movement, another new wave that will sweep through the field, or will conformity to a single presentation style and genre vanish?

The theme is always kept in mind when discussing the *Reconnaissance* programme. We try to make sure that each item is relevant to the central question: What is the state of the art? Each of the talks and discussions will be biased towards their relevance to the development of the field now and in the future. Of course, a couple may slip through the net, but we will try to make sure they are few and far between.

This philosophy covers not only written SF; we intend to look into the state of science fiction wherever it occurs. We will also look at other forms of fantasy in the same light.

When we're not discussing such weighty matters, there will be time for the less serious pursuits of the convention. We plan to have several comic items, taking a light-hearted look at the field. We hope to address the real issues of SF, such as:

Is a Blue Peter version of Da Vinci's flyer possible? Where do authors *really* get their ideas from? And what time does the bar open?

There will also be a few cartoons stuck in the programme almost, but not quite, entirely at random.

If you would like to participate in the programme, or have an idea for an item that relates to our theme, then please write to us at:

75 Hecham Close, Walthamstow, London, E17 5QT. □

## A Sneak Preview

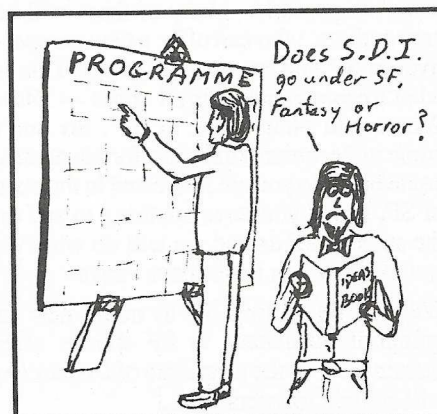
Alice Kohler and  
James Steel

Enough of generalisations! It's time to tell you more about some of the items we hope to be running. There are still ten months to go until the con, but we already have firm ideas about our programme.

On Friday evening we have a panel "Making Waves", about great stylistic innovations and how they affect SF. Did the 60's new wave leave any lasting legacy? How have styles such as cyberpunk altered current attitudes to SF? Is there another new wave waiting to engulf the field? Similarly, how has fantasy changed; can it be said to have suffered from the same periodic upheavals, and if not, why not? We hope the discussion will be wide-ranging and interesting but we still need some people with experience of the old new wave to sit up front in the crossfire.

In "Images of SF" on Saturday afternoon we hope to have a discussion on the way film and television alter SF. Current SF writers are of the generation who grew up with *Forbidden Planet*, *Star Trek* and *Quatermass*. The new crop of authors will have grown up with *Star Wars*, *The Hitch Hiker's Guide* and *Blade Runner*. By altering both author's experience and public expectations, the media has had a not inconsiderable effect on the field. We will take a look at current influences, talk about how SF may change to fit the fashion, and discuss whether the word leads the image or the image the word.

One of Saturday Evening's evening's discussions will be "The Edges of SF", in which we intend to talk about the crossover between the genres. The point of overlap between horror, fantasy and SF can be very indistinct; there are many works which it is impossible to define as belonging to any one field, and this cross-fertilisation becomes even more apparent as established writers branch out, exploring the different genres in their different works. Similarly,



the border between SF and mainstream fiction is often unclear, and science fiction and fantasy elements now appear in many places outside the field, having entered western 'culture' in a variety of ways. Is it possible that SF is leaving the ghetto at last?

We also intend to run a panel about the films that will be shown over the weekend, discussing how each film influenced the genre when it was first released, and later, as it became a classic.

There is not enough space here to describe all the events we have planned, the above items are just a sample of what we hope to do at *Reconnaissance* though we can't guarantee that they will run on the days stated\*. To find out about the rest, you will have to come to the con! □

\*Disclaimer: the committee deny that this is a disclaimer.

## Organising Convention Films

Andy Morris

This subject divides into two parts. The first is how to get the film prints (which I will cover here) and the second is how to show them (which I will cover in the next issue of *Dispatches*).

First you need to decide what films you want to show. This can be an enlightening experience for any convention committee! You can produce a list of suggestions, vote on them, and take the most popular; or avoid the question and hand the whole thing over to one person (who therefore takes the blame leaving the rest of the committee free to pass it). You can pick titles at random, or fit them to a theme. Whichever method you use, the result is THE LIST.

Now you have to find the films on THE LIST. Where you look depends on how you propose to show them. If you are putting them in a handy cinema then you generally require 35mm or 70mm prints (though some cinemas have 16mm facilities if this is the only gauge available). These come direct from the distributors and the cinema itself can organise the transport with its regular films. You have to book the prints, haggle the price with the distributor, and pay them. Normal cinema practice is that a percentage of the box office take goes to the distributor, but with a convention you need to settle on a fixed price since films are not charged individually. This is usually the most expensive method of presentation, unless the distributor has a reason to want to put his film in your convention (they get very friendly at this point!).

The quickest way to find a particular 35mm distributor is to ring or visit the BFI infor-

mation centre. They will tell you who is the distributor for a particular film and their address. After that it's up to you.

If you are putting the films into the convention hotel you can present them on 16mm, 8mm or video. 8mm is really only useful for a small convention, though you would be surprised how many full-length SF feature films are available for rent/purchase in this gauge (and in Cinemascope!). It is cheaper than 16mm and commercial video hire, though the quality is better than video on a larger screen.

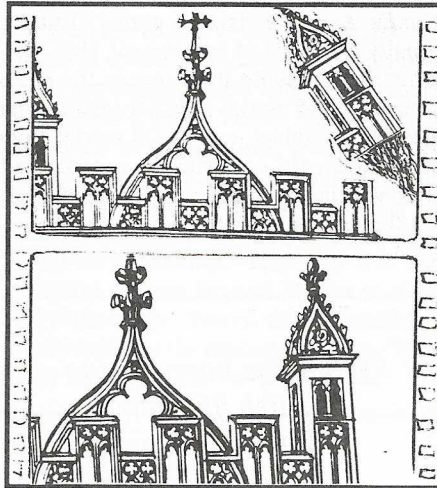
16mm is the best method for large screen presentation, particularly since many films made in Scope can be obtained in that ratio. The most useful reference is *Films on Offer* which is published every 2 years by the Film Society Unit of the British Film Institute. This lists all feature films available on 16mm or video for non-theatrical hire in the UK. The latest issue has just been published and includes everything up to November 1989 plus a few due to be released this spring. It lists title, country, director, running time, version (Standard/Scope/colour/B&W/subtitles), renter and price. There is a list of the active 16mm renters and a directors cross-reference. In addition to this, the catalogues of the three primary 16mm distributors are useful. They are Filmbank, Glenbuck, and the BFI itself. Filmbank generally handles US product, Glenbuck and the BFI the European product, though this is not a hard and fast rule. These companies also tend to handle the non-theatrical hire of video as well (for a similar fee to 16mm film hire).

Video, whether shown on TV or a large screen, is technically the easiest method of showing films. However, large screen video projectors are expensive to hire (from £200 per week for self-contained units to £500-£900 per week for units to project onto a separate screen) and are really only justified if your material is only available on video. Renting feature films from the local store for presentation at a convention is not a wise idea as they are legally limited to home use for audiences up to 7 people. Videos you buy yourself have the same limit in the purchase licence. You cannot show such a video to anyone who has paid for the privilege (that includes convention membership). There are now random unannounced checks of venues by inspectors from the Performing Rights Society, and the fines start at £1000. Hiring films on video under non-theatrical rules is very little cheaper than 16mm print! If you are showing product that is on video only, make sure you have permission in writing from the copyright owners. This is easier to organise (and cheaper) than you may think.

Non-theatrical hire is basically for audiences in clubs and societies (technically up to

100 adults, children count as half), which is the category SF conventions come under. You are not allowed to advertise times and dates of showings to the public or admit public at the door for a fee. Day memberships of conventions scrape under this rule as the film is only part of the content of the convention. You can tell people what films you intend to show, but not the precise date and time until they are members.

Older films are cheaper, newer films are more expensive. Your choice of titles may be influenced by budget constraints as well as demand. Take a good look at the older stuff, your audience may never have seen it on a big screen and may appreciate the chance to do so. If a film was made in Scope, see if the 16mm version is available in a Scope print and show it. This is not difficult, it just requires forethought.



Having identified who rents out the film you want in 16mm, you then have to book them. Filmbank will take bookings over the phone straight into their computer for up to 9 months in advance of playdate (that's all the computer can handle). Anything in advance of that needs a letter. If you have never rented from them before, you may get checked out that you are genuine; once you have rented from them, just quote your reference number. A few days later you will get a **Confirmation of Booking**, for each film, which shows the cost. On top of the rental (which is legally a fee for a licence to show the film) there will be an 80p insurance charge, £12 for carriage by Securicor, and VAT. If you collect the films yourself, the £12 Securicor charge is replaced by a £7 handling fee as all Filmbank's prints are handled by FMS at North Feltham Trading Estate (near Heathrow - ask me for directions). Glenbuck will reserve over the phone, but this must be followed up with a booking form. This form has a space on it for a bankers reference if you are a new renter (that's most conventions). A few days later a single **Confirmation of Booking**, for all the films ordered, will arrive, showing the rental fees only. There is a £1 insurance charge added

to the invoice for each film, plus Securicor charges, plus VAT. The BFI operate the same system as Glenbuck. (Glenbuck is effectively an independent company backed by the BFI at arms length). To avoid the Securicor charges adding substantially to your bill, arrange to collect (and return) the prints yourself. Glenbuck are behind Surbiton railway station, the BFI library is in the BFI building which is off Tottenham Court Road.

If you wish to show a film more than once, subsequent showings are usually charged at 50% of the rental fee. Discounts can sometimes be had for booking several films from one renter - particularly the BFI.

The insurance charges added to the film hire charge by the distributor cover damage to a maximum of 350ft of a print when in your care. After that, you pay. Since this is 8 minutes of film, even the dumbest projectionist should have noticed something was wrong. Total loss or destruction of the film is not covered. Get insured, particularly if you are transporting the prints yourself. Allow £2000 per print, including short films.

**Addresses:**

British Film Institute, 21 Stephen Street, London, W1P 1PL.

Filmbank Distributors Ltd, Grayton House, 498-504 Fulham Road, London SW6 5NH.  
Glenbuck Films Ltd, Glenbuck Road, Surbiton, Surrey KT6 6BT.

**Plug:** A Festival of Fantastic Films (i.e. all the trappings of an SF convention, but devoted to films) will take place at the Parkers Hotel, Manchester over the weekend of 12 October 90 — contact: The Society of Fantastic Films, 95 Meadowgate Road, Salford Manchester M6 8EN. □

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## A Hundred More Words

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*Patrick Lawford*

I don't believe it!

The low life scum have done it again! You would have thought that the last time would have taught them, but oh no, they had to go and do it again.

Months it took me. Months of self doubt and anguish. Hours spent in deep and painful psycho-analysis with my psychiatrist. Days in remote, drafty, Tibetan monasteries, meditating on the confused state of my soul. All wasted!

Just as I thought I was beginning to recover from the trauma of having to write at least one hundred words for the first *Dispatches*, THEY DO IT AGAIN! □

## FEATURE

## In Search of the Technogoth.

Colin Greenland

*In line with the theme of Reconnaissance — 'New Work and New Ideas in SF', this article looks at the new writers in British SF and pursues the spectre of a new 'movement' — Technogoth. It is by Colin Greenland, an SF writer and critic, and is reprinted, with his kind permission, from the March issue of The Face magazine.*

What's the future of British science fiction? "Charles Stross asked me that," recalls author and editor Robert Holdstock. "I said, 'I don't know, Charles, what is the future of British science fiction?' 'Technogoth!' he said. 'Technogoth!' And he went off chuckling, with this gleam in his eye."

Science fiction is more than just a genre. Its a subculture as intense as any club scene, though a lot more staid. The prospect of individual writers submerging their talents in technogoth or any other movement, bothers a man like Holdstock, just as the prospect of cyberpunk bothered a lot of British authors and fans five years ago.

The reason? American SF writers mythologize themselves far more readily than us. You can just see them all, the names of the clans in silver studs on the backs of the bike jackets. Since cyberpunk there's been humanism, outlaw fantasy, steampunk and something that may or may not have existed, called freestyle: "the basic idea is to write like yourself, but more so." Here, we just have writers.

Until now. Now there's soon to be technogoth. As yet, nobody but Charles Stross knows what it is. Strangely, nobody seems keen to find out. And nobody knows how to get in touch with Charles Stross, either. It seems typical enough. The hint of a British movement and the author disappears down a black hole. A new American movement and the author would probably have his press pack, polemical slogans and spin-off computer game sorted before he actually sat down to write his book.

In America, science fiction is sometimes seen as little more than a marketing label. In Britain we're more ambivalent, seeing it as a serious tradition, the literary offspring of Mary Shelley and H.G. Wells. On one level, the American version is winning out. Most SF sold and read in Britain is American. While a successful British writer — Iain Banks, for example — can expect to sell between 30,000 and 40,000 copies of a new paperback in Britain, the American Larry Niven shifts 250,000 here. A first novel by a British author would be doing well to sell 10,000, and there are plenty of writers struggling for air far below that.

One who isn't struggling quite so much is David Wingrove. His first novel, *The*

*Middle Kingdom*, about a Chinese-dominated future, sold 21,000 copies in four months. The first volume of a seven-volume series called *Chung Kuo*, it's been described by one contemptuous reviewer as "Dallas in the 22nd century." There's entrenched hostility to *Chung Kuo* on the British SF scene. Partly it's envy, partly it's that nobody much seems to think *The Middle Kingdom* is any good. But it's equally a feeling of resentment, that Wingrove isn't playing the game in the *traditional British way*. "He's packaged his work as a product, on the US model," one of Wingrove's competitors complained. "It's working for him so far," he said, darkly, "but it's a strategy not to be encouraged."

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*What has happened to British SF under Thatcher? Do we have an answer to cyberpunk? Is there a new British SF?*

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Perhaps it defies certain cherished critical myths about the differences between British and American approaches to SF. We're supposed to be the artistic ones — they're the professional hustlers. This may seem simplistic, but it's a belief that's deeply ingrained. Only a few people still believe that American SF is written by robots about robots for robots, but everybody here thinks British writers are more interested in meaning, good writing and imagination; while Americans are interested only in showbiz — entertainment, design, and working an audience. In LA you can go to college and learn how to write and sell SF from tutors with credentials in writing and teaching. The only British equivalents are workshops organised by writers for mutual support, like *Writers' Bloc*, a gathering of pros that Wingrove acknowledges as helpful in his career, or *Cassandra*, the amateur self-help group that has bootstrapped Stross and several others to professional status.

New writers need all the support they can get. As New English Library paperback

editor Humphrey Price points out, "It's never a good time for new authors." But times are better now than they were in the days when Charles Stross went round an SF convention with his trilogy in a plastic carrier bag, asking everyone if they'd seen any editors. Kathy Gale, senior editor at Pan, warns that publishers should be looking hard for British talent. In the Single European Market, British publishers will be competing with Americans selling directly into Europe for the first time. "It's going to be chaos, absolute chaos," says Price. "Expect bullish patriotism from publishers between now and 1992."

But have we got anything to be bullish about? What has happened to British SF under Thatcher? Do we have an answer to cyberpunk? Is there a new British SF?

Ian McDonald, a British writer based in Belfast, started on the Enterprise Allowance Scheme and boosted our exports a touch by selling his work in the States before being picked up by Bantam UK. His first novel, *Desolation Road* is a canny, commercial exercise of a completely different order from *The Middle Kingdom*. In defiance of science, *Desolation Road* reclaims the fantastic Mars of the Forties, a mysterious desert planet that envelopes its colonists in mirages and memories. It reads like Ray Bradbury rewritten by Gabriel Garcia Marquez and reminds you that before there was Magic Realism there were Tall Tales.

Nothing could be further from cyberpunk, but like William Gibson, McDonald works with a collage of references and quotes from pop culture, from *Thunderbirds* to Talking Heads, Kajagoogoo to Italo Calvino. Unlike Gibson, he doesn't airbrush his fragments into chrome mirror-visions so much as stitch them together in glorious tumbled patchwork. Film critic, author (and probably the hardest working man in Soho) Kim Newman also deals in a brand of wised-up, slightly whimsical pastiche. His first novel, *The Night Mayer*, is set in a future Britain where taped dreams have replaced books, movies and videos. The Dream that criminal mastermind Truro Daine is dreaming inside his prison cell, is a city built of every *film-noir* ever made, from *The Maltese Falcon* to *In a Lonely Place*. Two hack dreamers, a vulnerable

man and a capable woman, have to go inside and shut it down before it eats the entire national computer network. Newman — who has actually seen all these movies and everything else since, and remembers them all — manages to make the book a treat for movie buffs and for the rest of us too.

If *Desolation Road* and *The Night Mayor* are cheerful, poster-paint post-modernism for beginners, *The Archivist*, Gill Alderman's astonishing first novel, proves there's life in modernism yet. It's set in an imperialist, matriarchal culture on an alien planet where space flight is a thing of antiquity. Unusually, Alderman constructs Guna the way the best travel writers construct Greece or Tibet. She does the traveller's round: the long trek on horseback, the grand sights, the back streets, the cliffs and tower-tops. She has a steady eye and an even steadier hand. That's the background. In the foreground she works the sensual, impressionistic landscape of personal relations the way Virginia Woolf or Lawrence Durrell saw them: life at skin level. *The Archivist* is a close-up study of a perverse relationship which, incidentally, causes the empire to totter.

However, the best novel around at the moment is *The Child Garden*, by Canadian Geoff Ryman, who has to be the best SF writer currently working in Britain (even though he himself thinks "SF is scuzzy"). A long, generous, story about love and art in the time of viruses, set in a future subtropical Britain, *The Child Garden* doesn't slot easily into either the modernist or post-modernist camps. Similarly, with the possible exception of Milan Kundera, there isn't really anyone comparable to Ryman in SF or out. He's an original.

American commentators like Bruce Sterling may chafe at our retrospective tendencies, but it's significant that *The Child Garden*, *The Archivist* and *The Night Mayor* can all be seen as state-of-the-nation novels, reflections on superannuated societies. The rummage through the-end-of-Empire liquidation sale provides as much evocative imagery for Ryman or Alderman as it has for older, more established SF names like Michael Moorcock and Keith Roberts.

It's also significant that all these books have happy endings, though they may pass through fear and loathing and redefine happiness on the way. There's more optimism and pluralism, less angst. Twenty years ago we believed SF should jettison its genre paraphernalia — the spaceships, gadgets and alien planets — and dissolve itself into fiction. Writers like Christopher Priest, Christopher Evans, J.G. Ballard and M. John Harrison worked hard to shake off the disreputability of SF, but sacrificed a lot of the fun in the process. No barriers, they said then: 'out of the ghetto'. Now we're

back, and we actually like the ghetto, especially since it's become a development area, the urban docklands of fiction: quaint, unregarded by the authorities, ripe for commercial exploitation.

One thing sorely missed by those of us who started to write science fiction in the cautious early Eighties was the traditional chance to earn the rent with hack fiction. It didn't exist. In 1990, trying to get tough for the coming chaos, the British publishing industry has re-invented pulp SF. Games Workshop, a British company, is publishing novels and anthologies set in the worlds of their role-playing games. Again the model is American: the Dragonlance books. GW's list is being filled by eager, aspiring novices hiding behind pseudonyms, turning out formula fantasy to editorial direction, just the way it was when Michael Moorock started 30 years ago.

One of the first GW titles, *Drachenfels*, a book of dwarfs and taverns and vampires and iron-masked men with hellish laughs, is by Jack Yeovil. Yeovil claims he wrote the book in three weeks, with a plot from Busby Berkeley. And, he's writing more of them. Jack Yeovil is Kim Newman. You can tell which he is on any specific day by what he's drinking. Newman will occasionally venture beyond Perrier to a glass of white wine; Yeovil drinks whisky. "I write them for the money," he says. "I hope they are fun. They have to be fun."

*In 1990, trying to get tough for the coming chaos, the British publishing industry has re-invented pulp SF.*

They weren't for one disgruntled contributor. Sandy Mitchell isn't going to write any more. He says, "They told me to take out the character development and put in more violence. It's no good learning to work to a formula if it runs counter to everything you are interested in writing about."

GW's editor is David Pringle, who also edits *Interzone*, the bi-monthly SF magazine. *Interzone* started quarterly and small; now, with sales topping 10,000, it's about to go monthly. Eight years of hectoring editorials are paying off. Pringle gets 150 unsolicited stories a month, and not all of them are rubbish. *Interzone* and its four spin-off anthologies have launched many of the new British SF writers, including Kim Newman — and Charles Stross.

*Interzone* and original anthologies like the *Zenith* and *Other Edens* series are vital,

because short stories are to SF what singles are to pop. They're where you look for fresh talent, and also for the concentrated buzz. Today's fresh talent includes Eric Brown, whose stories of alienation, of lives emptied by technical advance, have something of the purposeful, elegiac quality of Christopher Priest's. Brown is due to receive the rare honour of having a collection, *The Time-Lapsed Man and Other Stories*, published before he's written a novel.

Grimmer, but more startling, are S. M. Baxter's stories: hard science that's up-to-the-minute, conveyed in bleak moralities reminiscent of the so-called Golden Age of the Forties, monochrome visions of psychically crippled characters stripped to the bone by the hard sleet of physics. Nicola Griffith is a promising successor to Ursula Le Guin and James Tiptree, redesigning gender and power relations in alien milieux.

Charles Stross — in many ways the best of the bunch — purveys a hard, impacted, glittering deviance like early Samuel Delany remixed for the post-cyberpunk disco. Is this technogoth? Does anybody care?

Certainly not Geoff Ryman, the best loved and most admired *Interzone* writer. "There is a story, you can even find it in *Interzone*, it's written by people who have read William Gibson, but not the people he's read, Thomas Pynchon or Robert Stone. They've seen *Blade Runner*, but they haven't read Philip K. Dick. It's about an ethnic/female/crippled protagonist with psi power, made into Arnold Schwarzenegger by bio-engineering; it's about computers, Japan, organised crime, and it has a semi-American tone. It's got the structure of a mystery story, but it doesn't work."

Ryman is not alone in his belief that the new British SF is merely a mirage, the effect of a temporary increase in opportunities to get into print. It is temporary, no doubt. "The anthologies have peaked now," says Alex Stewart, who edited *Arrows of Eros*. "The window is already closing," Ryman warns. Cynically, Sandy Mitchell predicts the demise of Games Workshop in a couple of years.

Perhaps you should expect pessimism from people who often earn their living retailing visions of future doom. But Ryman's gloom is overstated. In many ways, at the start of the Nineties, British SF is in much better shape than it was ten years ago. But whether it's healthy enough to start selling itself as the Next Big Thing post-cyberpunk is another matter completely. No one, not even the people you might think were in the thick of it, believe there's any kind of concerted new British movement. "British SF," says Eric Brown, "is a group of disparate writers, doing their own thing, mapping the lie of their own brainpans, which is how it's always been." □

## The Humanisation of the Hero

Gary Stratmann

A few years ago there was a very marked movement towards humanising superheroes in comics. They started to develop personal problems, relationships, money worries and so forth — a major development from the perennial business of keeping one's secret identity secret.

Unfortunately, it rather diminished the powerful, mysterious figures when you knew that their tax man was waiting at home, their boss was going to fire them for continual absenteeism and so on. Superheroes became more human, more like soap stars than unique crimefighters. This trend created large numbers of heroes who spent their whole time suffering angst and indulging in navel gazing.

"What does it matter if I can move worlds if I can't have the woman I love?"

Fortunately for the mere mortals these people were supposed to serve and protect, they were still usually able to indulge in a sort of knee-jerk thug stomping.

*Enter Wonderman:*

"I have to try and sort out my job, I'm so behind that ..."

*Alarms go off, gunshots, cries for help:*

"This is a job for Wonderman!"

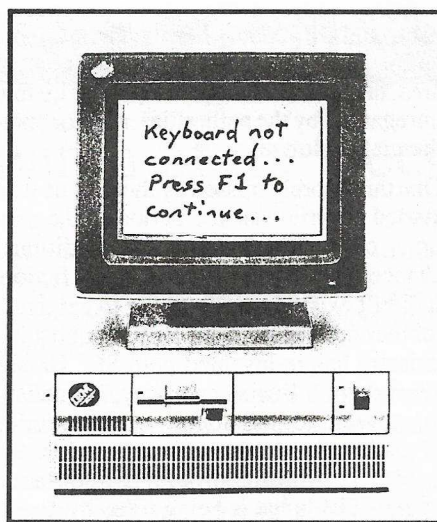
*Thumps and crashes, the sounds of massive damage to scenery as the criminals are apprehended:*

"... if I don't get my desk cleared they'll fire me."

Many team comics seemed to score here — personal problems are so much more fun if several people can have them together. The *Teen Titans*, *X-Men*, *Justice League* and *Avengers* all tended to worry — a lot. Also, teams made sex easier. After all, earth shattering disasters qualify as an extreme form of coitus interruptus. At least a fellow superhero will be understanding. Try and imagine the secret identity who tries to explain why they suddenly need to use the toilet for four or five hours.

Of course, this led to heroes getting married; aside from the memorably naff wedding of Wonder Girl in *The New Teen Titans*, the villains always pay their respects. Perhaps, for supers, the guests should form an arch of crossed bad guys.

All in all, heroes became much more ordinary, struggling to live normal lives as well as saving the world. □



## But Captain Kirk, the Hard Disk's Crashed!

Marcus Streets

Why do computers in SF never fail?

Sorry, I'll rephrase that — why do computer users never make that fatal mistake? I had written a piece for this *Dispatches*, and was just going to copy it to floppy, when instead of typing:

DELETE A:\*. \*

I typed:

DELETE \*. \*

Not having Norton on the system, I then copied COMMAND.COM from \system, where I keep a spare. This, I discovered, when I finally got a copy of Norton from work, managed to overwrite not only the article, but the backup copy as well, even though three-quarters of the disk was free — why does this have to happen to me and why doesn't it happen to Captain Kirk?

Computers in science fiction are always way ahead of anything we have. Unless, of course, it was written while valves were still *de rigeur*. For example Asimov's Multivac or Clarke's computer in *Into the Comet*, which even gave up due to cold.

In SF, computers normally talk to you, and most can even understand speech. Though the computer in *Alien* seems to do nothing but print meaningless figures on a screen, which Sigourney Weaver somehow interprets — if you followed that print-out you're a better man than I am Jabba the Hut.

By 2001, for instance, we are meant to be getting HAL; you can judge for yourself whether this is a good thing. Of course, compared to an Ono Sedai, HAL is so much scrap metal. Though I never really understood how you used Cyberspace to actually

do anything useful. What happens to the deck jockey when the lift maintenance man kills the power to the apartment block? Perhaps where deck jockeys live there are no lift maintenance men. Just in case there are any irate lift maintenance technicians reading this, I must point out that Philips (where I work) believe lifts are there to be maintained not used, and this seems to lead to the power to my computer failing regularly.

So what are we stuck with? I can type on a Qwerty keyboard, never the fastest of input devices. If I make a typing mistake my spell checker, if the dictionary were not corrupted, would guess what I meant and half the time one of its ten guesses would be correct. If you want real time subtitling, a human has to type it in. Speech recognition works, for a very limited range of words and a known speaker. Optical character readers exist, but cannot cope with handwriting. So if someone sends me a fax can I read it into my PC? You are joking aren't you? Most of the time I can't read it.

Then there is the display. I have a 14" screen, a fairly normal size, and it will display 16 colours. Of course, if I have an Amiga or Archie then you're talking 4000 colours, but still on a flat screen, and with a very limited ability to animate. Real time animation is still challenging large computers.

MIT have produced and transmitted computer generated holograms. Unfortunately, so far these are limited to a two inch cube in a single colour. Though, of course, from there it may be just a case of more number crunching, the number crunching required is bound to increase at least according to a cube law, and even that would be lucky. Hologramatic Dallas is not going to appear just yet.

I am working on a so called 'desktop application' with windows on a normal screen. What I want, however, is a desktop display that is just that, a flat, preferably colour, screen the size of my desktop. LCD technology is not quite up to this yet, but it is under study, mainly for applications such as ultra flat TV screens.

I would also like a printer that I can leave alone to print a hundred pages without chewing up the paper. The laser printer does not chew paper, but then it does not hold a hundred pages in its hopper. We keep hearing about the paperless office, and I get hundreds of pages of paper explaining the products that will help bring it about.

Anyway if you want to listen to a discussion of the future of computing, illustrated with the best and worst clips from movies and TV then I will see you at *Reconnaissance* in the programme item 'Zen, Hal, or Holly?' □

# Can You Spare Ten 3,000,000 Pence Guv?

or Financing a Worldcon Bid  
John Stewart

Worldcons are big, in fact they are enormous when compared with the majority of other conventions. And part of the process required to bid and run a worldcon is the raising of the necessary finance, which, in line with the rest of things, is also enormous relative to most fannish activities.

This article is not going to look at financing a worldcon once the bid has been won, because generally if budget forecasts have been carried out correctly the money required is going to come from people joining as convention members — similar to most conventions, just bigger.

No, the item that smacks you full in the face when considering a worldcon is the sheer amount of dosh required to even bid!

Especially as, of course, bidding does not mean winning, so that although you are going to be supremely confident, else you wouldn't be putting in the amount of effort

that is required, the investment in money terms always has to be treated as a gamble.

What amount of money are we talking about? Well the exact sum is going to vary dramatically according to what a bidding committee decide to do, and where you have to travel from and to promote the event and how often... If we take the current United Kingdom worldcon bid as an example, various castings of the runes, spreadsheet, straws and looking at other people's accounts has suggested that a figure of about £25,000 to £30,000 is going to be required to cover all bid expenses.

Clearly the traditional method of the committee all chipping in their share is impractical while the committee is a small number of, say, seven to ten people. So one solution, and one that has been used by the Americans on occasions, is to go for a large committee of maybe thirty people, each contributing a couple of hundred dollars/pounds per year leading up to the bid. The exact amount will depend how much time there is till the bid.

This is one method, and it does work, however for most British fans involved in such a committee it is going to require a fundamentally different approach compared with the way con committees generally function. Most of the traditional detailed decisions taken by a con committee are going to have to be delegated to sub-groups, with the main committee merely ratifying,

or not, the recommendations of these groups or departments, unless the committee meetings are going to resemble the Papal Conclave that the Catholic Church has when they decide upon a new Pope!

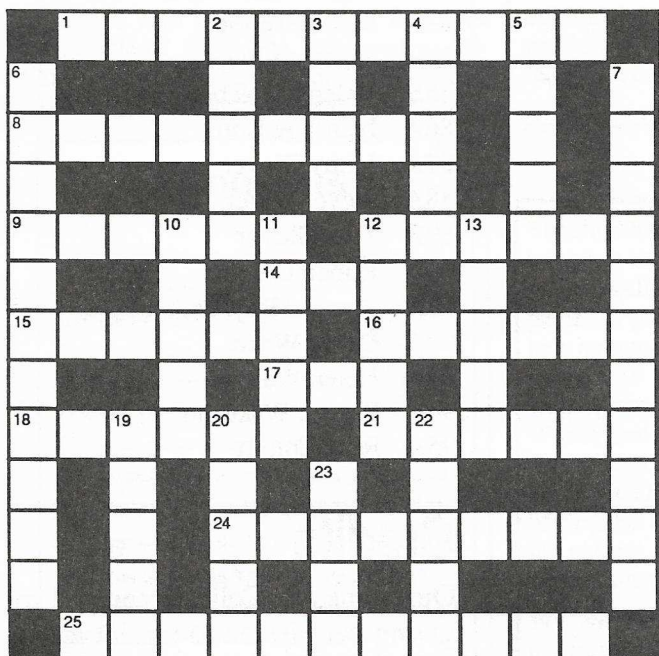
Other methods which could be looked at are the possibility of having a large number of 'Friends of the bid' each of whom gives say £50 towards the costs. With the figures mentioned above you would be talking about 600 people to raise £30,000! Other possibilities range from sponsorship to merchandising. The former has been used before, though it is quite a difficult exercise to get the balance right between the publicity the sponsor(s) wants and the image the convention wishes to project. The latter is a little 'chicken and egg' in that you still require an up front investment and need to choose items that people will buy. However both have their place.

At the end of the day all such methods will no doubt be used any worldcon committee aspiring towards world domination!

*N.B. While the above is the personal view of a member of the Worldcon GB bid committee, anyone who feels they have ideas that might be useful, or indeed large quantities of spare cash are invited to contact me at:*

5 St Andrews Road, Carshalton, Surrey.  
SM5 2DY.

## Zen Crossword



### Across

1. Who is the Windy Miller of the windmills of your mind?
8. What is the eutectic point of an expedient solution?
11. Who was the guest of honour at the Geneva Convention?
12. How do they get Teflon to stick to frying pans?
14. Does Schrodingers cat have 18 half lives?
15. How many books make a trilogy?
16. If I melt some dry ice, can I go for a swim without getting wet?
17. How many schools are there in a classless society?
- 18.
21. How do you set an atomic clock?
24. How do Bonsai trees survive in the wild?
25. How is it that we can send men to the moon and perform open heart surgery, but we can't tell the difference between butter and margarine?

### Down

2. Compare and contrast John Calvin Batchelor.
3. How can we be sure about Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle?
4. Who discovered that Haggis was edible?
5. How do 'go faster' stripes work?
6. Who is Norbert Dentress-angle?
7. Why don't babies come with a 'best before' date?
10. When yoghurt goes off, how can you tell?
11. To be, or not to be, what is the answer?
12. If nothing works faster than Anadin, why don't people take nothing?
13. When do Care Bears™ hibernate?®
19. Why aren't there any Zen golfers?
20. Where is the off switch for the Aurora Boralis?
22. What do lorries marked 'Harmless Food Product' actually carry?
23. What happens if I press this button?

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## Information

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*Reconnaissance* will take place over the weekend of 22-24th February 1991 at the Park Hotel, Cardiff.

All correspondence/memberships should be addressed to:

*Reconnaissance*, 5 St. Andrews Road,  
Carshalton, Surrey, SM5 2DY.

Electronic Mail Contact Points:

Telecom Gold: 73:TPA075  
Greenet: gdn:johnstewart  
DASnet: DE3MIR:johnstewart

Membership for *Reconnaissance* from 17 April 90 (the day after *Eastcon '90*) is:  
£18 Attending  
£10 Supporting.  
(£15 and £8 respectively until then).

Conversion is always the current difference in rates. Cheques should be made payable to *Reconnaissance*.

Advertising in *Dispatches*:

Fan Rate: £10 full page,  
£5 half page.

Pro Rate: £20 full page,  
£10 half page.

Deadline for *Dispatches 3* is 12 October 90.

*Reconnaissance* T-shirts and sweatshirts are available for £5 and £8 respectively from our convention desk at *Eastcon 90*, or by post (add £1.00 for postage and packing).

*Reconnaissance* badges are available for 50p (plain) or 75p (hand coloured).

The *Reconnaissance* committee:

Patrick Lawford, Rob Meades, Andy Morris, Chris O'Shea II, James Steel, John Stewart, Gary Stratmann and Marcus Streets. □

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## Membership List

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At 19 March 90

A = Attending B = Baby S = Supporting.

- 13A Ian Watson  
14A Terry Pratchett  
15A Patrick Lawford  
16A Andy Morris  
17A James Steel  
18A John Stewart  
19A Marcus Streets  
20A Wim Morrison  
21A Alice Kohler  
22A Eef Hartman  
23A Adrian Last  
24A Susan Francis  
25S Trader Horn  
26S Paul Clough  
27A Ben Brown  
28S Mike Gould  
29S Nick Smith  
30S Rhodri James  
31A Fabian  
32A Neil Blaber  
33A Anna Smith  
34A Jill Bradley  
35A Phil Bradley  
36S John English  
37S Steven Caine  
38S Mike Abbott  
39A Neil Jezard  
40A Mike Damesick  
41A Larry van der Putte  
42S Alan Braggins  
43A Steve Bull  
44A Roger Robinson  
45A Jon Brewis  
46A Paul Dormer
- 47A Pat Brown  
48S Chris Smith  
49A Rob Meades  
50A Bridget Wilkinson  
51A Alex Stewart  
52A John F. W. Richards  
53S Jane Killick  
54A Richard Jones  
55S Maureen Porter  
56S D. M. Sherwood  
57S Liam Quin  
58A Peter Cohen  
59A William Armitage  
60S Elda Wheeler  
61A Roger Perkins  
62A Mike Westhead  
63A Kathy Westhead  
64A Colin Fine  
65S Karen Goswell  
66A Michael Braithwaite  
67S John Stewart  
68A Keith Coslett  
69S David C. Moor  
70A John Dallman  
71A Peter J. B. Day  
72A P. J. Groves  
73S Alan R. Fleming  
74A Tim Goodier  
75A Melinda Young  
76A TOERAG  
77A Nick Carter  
78A Caroline Mullan  
79A Brian Ameringen  
80A Gwen Funnell  
81A Peter Wareham  
82A Martin Easterbrook  
83S Martin Tudor  
84S Jonathan Weeks  
85S Helen McNabb  
86A Ivan Towlson  
87A Jenny Glover  
88A Steve Glover  
89B Tara Glover  
90B Robert Glover  
91A Stephen Baynes  
92A David Wake  
93A Helen Wake  
94B Rachel Wake  
95A Rafe Culpin

To:

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## Credits

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