



## IAN WATSON

*Ian Watson was born in 1943. After reading English at Oxford he lectured in Literature for five years, first in Tanzania, then in Tokyo — 'Where I started writing SF as a survival reaction to 21st Century Japan.' Back in England, he taught Futures Studies and SF courses in Birmingham. He resigned in 1976 to become a full-time writer. He lives in Oxford and is married with one daughter. Miracle Visitors is his fifth novel.*

● *Miracle Visitors* is about the UFO phenomenon — a topic which I heartily loathed until a couple of years ago, which is not surprising since the two questions guaranteed to rile an SF writer are (a) where do you get your crazy ideas from? and (b) do you believe in flying saucers?

All those absurd UFO books with mad titles shouldering honest old SF off the shelves: *Was God An Astronaut?* or *Flying Saucers on the Attack!* The logical absurdity of the apparent hordes of 'manned' space vehicles! Apparently they've been buzzing us since Biblical times, as though we are the crossroads of the universe or uniquely interesting (then, if we're so

unique, where do 'they' all come from?). And what do they do? Stall car engines, kidnap cattle, frighten Fred Bloggs, seduce Brazilian peasants and deliver portentous absurd comic messages. In common with most SF writers I simply swallowed the 'space vehicle' story, and promptly regurgitated it again undigested, as indigestible by definition.

However, the 'manned space vehicle' explanation is really an obsolete one which doesn't fit the data; and I was finally forced to pay attention to the data because questions which I'd been exploring in my earlier novels (of the relation between mind and reality) pushed me in the UFO direction, towards this peculiar carry-on — this phenomenon which certainly does exist, yet which systematically denies us proof of its existence. All in the mind? Not so; the phenomenon appears to be partly of the human psyche (and it adjusts itself sedulously to the belief structure of any particular epoch, turning up in different forms as the centuries roll by, as prophetic vision, as fairy lore, as medieval battles in the sky, as phantom airships, and nowadays as alien spacecraft), yet it also involves physical events that affect the objective world. So what is the relationship between consciousness and the reality, that this should be the case? The UFO problem came to pose, for me, some very teasing questions along these lines.

To explore it, in *Miracle Visitors*, I've drawn on theories of the American psychologist Charles Tart about how we can chart the internal logic of bizarre mental states (bizarre and nonsensical from the standpoint of ordinary baseline consciousness) from the inside; and also on some Sufist (Islamic mystical) insights into the nature of inexplicable events and of cause and effect. And I've written a story to demonstrate what the phenomenon might be, seen in these terms.

Carl Jung regarded the UFO sightings as portending a major psychic change in humankind, and I would define this change as an evolutionary one: a psychic dynamic towards the enlargement of our consciousness which works precisely by being evasive.

*Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (which I only heard was being made after I'd started *Miracle Visitors*) has some lovely photography in it, but is far from being even the right sort of explanation. Perhaps it would be nice if it was; yet the universe isn't so simple. As someone once said, the truth about the universe may be stranger than you can possibly conceive — and the UFO phenomenon, in all its forms, is part of that strangeness at the root of existence. Yet it is a strangeness that attracts us towards it — like the first fish to crawl awkwardly on to land.

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● **AWARDS ROUNDUP:** We begin this first SFBC News Bulletin with a look back at the awards of 1978 (given for the best sf of 1977). **NEBULA:** The Nebula Awards were presented on April 27. Best Novel — *Gateway* by Frederik Pohl; Best Novella — *Stardance* by Spider and Jeanne Robinson (Spider's splendid first novel, *Telepath*, is available from the SFBC; see The Backlist); Best Short Story — *Jefty is Five* by Harlan Ellison. **JOHN W CAMPBELL MEMORIAL AWARD**, presented in Dublin in June: Best Novel — *Gateway* by Frederik Pohl; Second Place — *Roadside Picnic* by Arkady and Boris Strugatsky (see The Backlist); Third Place — *A Scanner Darkly* by Philip K Dick (see The Backlist). **JUPITER**, presented every year by ISFHE (Instructors of Science Fiction in Higher Education) for sf that is, in ISFHE's view, very distinguished; awarded on July 25: Best Novel — *A Heritage of Stars* by Clifford D Simak (see The Backlist); Best Novella — *In The Hall of the Martian Kings* by John Varley; Best Novelette — *Time Storm* by Gordon R Dickson; Best Short Story — *Jefty is Five* by Harlan Ellison. **LOCUS**, announced in August: Best Novel — *Gateway* by Frederik Pohl; Best Fantasy Novel — *The Silmarillion* by J R R Tolkien; Best Novella — *Stardance* by Spider and Jeanne Robinson; Best Short Story — *Jefty is Five* by Harlan Ellison. And finally the **HUGO**, presented at the 36th World Science Fiction Convention, Phoenix, Arizona from August 30 to September 4: Best Novel — *Gateway* by Frederik Pohl; Best Novella — *Stardance* by Spider and Jeanne Robinson; Best Short Story — *Jefty is Five* by Harlan Ellison.

● **MAGAZINES:** The long awaited and somewhat jinxed *Omni* is with us at last. Jinxed? Well, it was originally called *Nova* but the name was changed when an American TV programme of that name obtained an injunction against the publishers on the use of *Nova* as a magazine title. And *Omni* had three editors even before issue one appeared, the latest being Ben Bova, formerly editor of *Analog*. And then distribution was delayed. But the troubles seem to be over. 75,000 copies were imported and the publishers report 80% sales within the first week or so. **ANALOG:** the new editor, one of the most prestigious positions in the sf field, is Stanley Schmidt, 34. He is the fifth editor in the magazine's 48-year history.

● **FILMS:** December sees the Royal Premiere of the \$33 million 'epic' *Superman*. *Star Trek — The Motion Picture* goes into production with a \$15 million budget and a script based on a story by Alan Dean Foster (see The Backlist). Also coming up are *Star Wars 2* (\$10 million); *Alien* (\$5 million); *Conan* (\$15 million); *Battle Star Galactica* (\$7 million); *The Martian Chronicles* (\$6 million). And a little offering of which I've heard nought but the title — and that's unbelievable — *The Fish that Saved Pittsburgh* (!).

### ● CONVENTION UPDATES

**YORCON.** 30th British Easter SF Convention. GOH Richard Cowper. Dragonara Hotel, Leeds, April 13-16. Write: c/o Alan Dorey, 20 Hermitage Woods Crescent, St Johns, Woking, Surrey GO2 1UE  
**SEACON** '79. 37th World SF Convention. GOH Fritz Leiber, Brian Aldiss, Harry Bell. Toastmaster Bob Shaw. Metropole Hotel, Brighton, Aug 23-27. Write: Seacon, 14 Henrietta Street, London WC2E 8QJ

## The Backlist

Established in 1953 — 26 years later Britain's only Science Fiction Book Club continues to offer the very best SF in hardback club editions at a price little more than some paperbacks. Each month *The Backlist* will feature a selection of important titles from our full exciting range. You may order now or (providing stocks last) later; so be sure to keep your SF Book Club News for future reference.

**PHILIP K DICK A SCANNER DARKLY:** Winner of third place in the John W Campbell Memorial Awards. Meet Fred, intrepid undercover narcotics agent out to make his biggest bust: pusher Robert Arctor. It's a snap for Fred, except for one small catch — he is Robert Arctor. 220pp REF 8712  
SFBC £2.70 (publisher's edition) Gollancz £3.50

**ALAN DEAN FOSTER MIDWORLD:** The Green Planet is a rich, peaceful and arboreal land — if you can stay alive. 213pp REF 5134  
SFBC £1.00 Macdonald & Jane's £3.95

**COLIN KAPP THE SURVIVAL GAME:** A grand space opera romp: two Star Lords wager on the outcome of an Earthman's attempts to survive on a planet where everything — everything! — conspires against survival. 184pp  
SFBC £1.00 Dobson £3.95 REF 5138

**R A LAFFERTY ARRIVE AT EASTERWINE:** The exuberant, hilarious and wise testimony of an obsessively creative machine. A satiric, irreverent and unpredictable romp through history, mythology, theology and swarms of nutty people. 216pp  
SFBC £1.00 Dobson £3.95 REF 5137

**CHRISTOPHER PRIEST A DREAM OF WESSEX:** A projection of an ideal future world is created through a machine that melds the dreams of social and scientific experts. But into the projected future comes a new, evil influence — and the experiment goes out of control. 199pp  
SFBC £1.50 Faber £3.95 REF 5140

**SPIDER ROBINSON TELEMPATH:** Debut novel by the winner of '78's Nebula, Locus and Hugo Awards. Strikingly original novel about the world following the release of a deadly virus that magnifies the sense of smell, driving people insane or to suicide. 223pp REF 5143  
SFBC £1.50 Macdonald & Jane's £3.95

**CLIFFORD D SIMAK A HERITAGE OF STARS:** Jupiter Award winner for Best Novel. Thousands of years in the future in an age which barely remembers the greatness of old technological civilization, Tom Cushing sets out on a quest to find the fabled Place of Going to the Stars. 219pp REF 5142  
SFBC £1.50 Sidgwick & Jackson £4.50

**CLIFFORD D SIMAK SHAKESPEARE'S PLANET:** Carter Horton is trapped on a very strange planet inhabited by an even stranger creature, Carnivore, and portentous signs intimate some dire happenings unless they can escape. 188pp REF 5130  
SFBC £1.00 Sidgwick & Jackson £3.50

**ARKADY AND BORIS STRUGATSKY ROADSIDE PICNIC:** Widely acclaimed and winner of second place in the John W Campbell Memorial Awards. The litter of alien visitors make an attractive prize for those brave or stupid enough to try and obtain it from the Zone. 145pp  
SFBC £1.50 Gollancz £3.95 REF 5145

**IAN WATSON ALIEN EMBASSY:** Man has established mental contact with three benevolent alien races, but is the truth about these beings as simple and idyllic as things seem? 208pp  
SFBC £1.40 Gollancz £4.20 REF 5139

**THE MARTIAN INCA:** A sample of Martian soil has dramatic effects on a remote Bolivian village. What will happen to the crew of a Mars-bound spacecraft? 207pp  
SFBC £1.00 Gollancz £3.95 REF 5127

**THE JONAH KIT:** Scientists discover that the universe no longer exists! And a boy is discovered to possess the memory of a long-dead astronaut. Is there a connection?  
SFBC 95p Gollancz £2.60 REF 5116 221pp