

# Editorial

By Andrés Vaccari

**G**ene Simmons, bass player from Kiss, once said that he had formed the band to play the music he had always wanted to hear. Similarly, with *Abaddon*, we strove to make the magazine we always wanted to read.

What are we about? Let's begin with myself. As a reader and writer, I come from a background of science fiction, which I began reading at an early age. But the scientific elements of the genre never fired up my imagination as much as its capability to deal with other imaginary dimensions, with realms of dream, possibility and desire. I felt (like many others before me) that the genre is not living up to its full potential. I like its ability to create worlds from scratch, distorted images of our own, but dislike its escapist and juvenile tendencies. I like its potential to explore the psychology of change, to develop ideas in a grand scale, to present limitless mutations, projections and doubles of the human being. But I dislike its technocratic and rigid sociological models and its

allegiance to traditional narrative. Here we are, reading stuff set in the twenty-fifth century in narrative modes and psychological models that belong to the nineteenth. Although it purports to deal with technology, science fiction (with the exception of writers like Burroughs or Ballard) has seldom questioned the technology of language itself and has not successfully engaged with some dominant (and curiously "sciencefictional") languages of our era: the languages of advertising, propaganda and science.

The biggest challenge for the genre (at least in its traditional form) has always been the present, a present that has turned out to be a million times weirder than *Brave New World* or *Fahrenheit 451*. William Gibson rightly claims that the best science fiction of the Nineties is to be found in CNN. What is the use of asking "What if?" when the *if* has arrived? How can art surprise us, shock us in a world like this? Indeed, why bother writing at all?

As my reading taste developed, I found elements I enjoyed in science

fiction present in other writers like Franz Kafka, Samuel Beckett, William Burroughs, Salman Rushdie, Thomas Pynchon, Virginia Woolf and my fellow countrymen Julio Cortazar and Jorge Luis Borges. What these writers have in common is that they understand fiction as a form of philosophical play, as a way of illuminating our present from unusual places, from skewed perspectives. One of the most peculiar characteristics of our world is that it can be better understood in this manner, through the prism of fantasy, nightmare and delusion.

So, is *Abaddon* a science fiction magazine? Probably not. Although you will find here discussions of *Martian Chronicles* and *Star Trek* (and even an "alien" abduction), there is also the death of Princess Diana, a look into the strange world of the public service, an imaginary journey through America, video art, and an essay on death and dreaming.

Anyway, I hope you enjoy the magazine. Over to you. And see you in *Abaddon* #2! ☐

## A Brief note on Abaddon

**A****BADDON:** Hebrew 'place of destruction' in the wisdom books (*Job*, *Proverbs*, *Psalms*), usually meaning death, or the grave, or a region for the dead (and twice linked with the problematic Hell-word 'Sheol'). It is never a proper name in any of these examples.

Abaddon is not mentioned in the rest of the Old Testament, and only appears in the New Testament once, in a garbled phrase in *Revelations* (Catholic *Apocalypse*) 9:11 as the name of the angel of the abyss who leads a plague of locusts against humanity. The OT insect-ruler is Beelzebub (2K, 1:2ff), though that is a snide Hebrew pun about The Prince of the Earth, Baal-Zaboth, some other peoples' (e.g. the Ugaritic) God, altered to Lord of Flies (or specifically dung-flies). The Rabbinical traditions that increasingly saw the universe as centred upon Jerusalem, used Abaddon for a part of Gehenna

(Ge-hinnom), the waste-disposal area outside the walls (like Tophet), where the city's refuse was burned. Most medieval narratives defined Abaddon as the Pit of Hell (a pit in Greek is Abaton), where only the very wicked were consigned. Then, strangely, in very late Medieval and Renaissance Catholic tradition, the personified Abaddon reappeared.

How did Abaddon get personalised? Probably through Classical learning. The Greek Apollo, the sun-god (Phoibos Apollo) has as his opposite, underworld aspect the Pythian Apollo, the prophetic wisdom of subterranean darkness, whose pit-priestess served a chthonic great serpent. Hence Apollyon, a later Apollo-of-the-pit.

Another possible cause of the personification reappearing was that several Renaissance cults had a frisson about *Revelations*. These were often the same cults that were fascinated by 'pagan'

ritual, and a physical abaton was standard equipment in the temples of many religious traditions. Often a rite of passage involved spending one night or many in such a pit, the Latin *mundus* (earthwomb) miming death and burial, rebirth and awakening. In the abaton the faithful literally incubated their prophetic spirit, an incubus that came in the pit's darkness. Later celibate Catholic traditions worried about other things that came to the dreams of novitiate monks, giving a new, prurient meaning to incubus and a sexual edge to the name of some of the newly glamorised demons and devils—especially Abaddon and Asmodeus (this 'Asmo-god' is thought to specialise in lechery thanks to the Book of Tobit). The abaton experience was especially important for the stimulation of prophetic dreams and (as with Joseph down the well) the interpretation of other people's dreams. ☐

NORMAN TALBOT

# ABADDON

ISSUE 1 SPRING 1998

## FICTION

### 6 **Ethel and Her Cross-eyed Typing**

"Dear God, Please find enclosed your final compensation payment. In light of your recent medical, it has been decided that you are now fit to return to your previous

### 10 **Flight Path**

"Dear God, Please find enclosed your final compensation payment. In light of your recent medical, it has been decided that you are now fit to return to your previous

### 15 **The Great Lakes**

"Dear God, Please find enclosed your final compensation payment. In light of your recent medical, it has been decided that you are now fit to return to your previous

### 23 **Chariot of Fire**

"Dear God, Please find enclosed your final compensation payment. In light of your recent medical, it has been decided that you are now fit to return to your previous

## FEATURES

### 30 **Borges on Mars**

"Dear God, Please find enclosed your final compensation payment. In light of your recent medical, it has been decided that you are now fit to return to your previous

### 32 **Ulysses is Computer**

"Dear God, Please find enclosed your final compensation payment. In light of your recent medical, it has been decided that you are now fit to return to your previous

### 36 **While You Were Dreaming**

"Dear God, Please find enclosed your final compensation payment. In light of your recent medical, it has been decided that you are now fit to return to your previous

### 39 **Mortuary: the Work of David Haines**

"Dear God, Please find enclosed your final compensation payment. In light of your recent medical, it has been decided that you are now fit to return to your previous

## REGULARS

4 Editorial

22 Poetry

28 Centrespread

46 Reviews