

Editorial

By Andrés Vaccari

Here we are again, this time writing in a cold and tragic autumn, with Kosovo on our TV screens, the comedy of national and international politics unfolding as mundane and ancient forces write the destiny of our children and our species. Sometimes I feel like laughing at those spotless, well-groomed faces. But to laugh would be to violate the sanctity of suffering, the sheer reality, the weight, of it. Smiles come out frozen, skewed; our rage is a glacier in our chests as we glimpse the real intentions behind the transparent façade of press conferences and diplomatic meetings. Even the ordinary people on the news look like trained actors as they vent their sorrow and mouth their soundbites after school shootings and devastating tornadoes. As the end of the millennium approaches, life seems to be picking up speed, somehow losing its immediacy, its connectedness. Or maybe it's ourselves, that creeping feeling of disembodiment as we watch the tragedy unfold. We are asked for inhuman amounts of empathy and understanding. How can we feel part of this? The world seems to offer only two extreme options: Deadening distance or unbearable despair.

And welcome to the realm of art, to the relationship between reality and its expression. If the world seems unreal then it is in art, in fiction, that we may hold to something real and true, that we may feel alive. It's a meaningful coincidence that Brandon Cavallari's painting on the cover of this issue of *Abaddon* was begun nine years ago (at the time when post-communist Yugoslavia faced its first internal conflicts), and that it is still relevant to what is happening today.

But let us focus on the issue at hand. A second issue of any magazine represents a challenge. It is a strengthening and recapitulation of the editorial vision. After the first issue of *Abaddon* came out, I was very anxious: would we be able to obtain the kind of fiction, the kind of literature we wanted? The comments and feedback we've received has been overwhelmingly positive and

encouraging; I felt a responsibility on my shoulders. The job of an editor depends on how well the writers do their job. All the material in the first issue was solicited from people I know. This second issue would be a different matter. Were there enough people out there willing to share our vision? I was excited. I checked the mailbox every morning, tearing open envelopes covered with stamps from all over the planet. For the most part, I was either disappointed, amused or bored. But on rare occasions, there was a flash of revelation as a story or poem hit the nerve. "Yes!" I would shout to the empty room.

On one hand, we had to be flexible and open to all the many voices out there. On the other, we had to be strict, making sure we preserved our unique angle. We worked with the authors, who were receptive to our suggestions and presented successive rewritten versions. I feel proud and privileged to publish these pieces. I think we've achieved the balance we were looking for. The three longer pieces of fiction in this issue display a fabulistic tone and a bent towards straight narrative. Yet they are mature and individual stories that disrupt convention in other ways, and successfully employ fantastic themes and settings to explore contemporary themes of alienation, technology and awakening to knowledge.

I would like to point out that all the literary contributions in this issue (with the exception of one story and two poems) are from Australians. Although we are open to writers all over the world (and have received plenty of submissions from the US, the UK and Canada), the strongest pieces, we felt, were those penned by local authors. I take this a sign of something, though I'm not sure of what. Maybe Australia's distance from the hegemonic cultural centres of the world has allowed us to create a fresh and healthy kind of mutant perception. Maybe we can become, in due time, another centre. Maybe we already are, and we don't realise it yet.

The realisation of this dream is up to you, writers, editors and artists out there. In the meantime, I hope you enjoy this second serving. And see you again this summer! ■



ABADDON

ISSUE 2 AUTUMN 1999

FICTION

6 **A Length of Scarlet Silk**

She would be the hands the great humming machines lacked. She would love the machines as her family, and in return they would shelter and protect her. Until a man from the outside arrives to remind her she is still a girl. Still human... By LYN McCONCHIE.

22 **Over the Hump**

They seek warmth and security in the collective mind, in the blind and self-effacing amassing of bodies. But the boy knows there is a world beyond the Hump. The boy knows he is different. JOHN KILBEY weaves a strange and hallucinatory coming-of-age tale.

44 **New Map of Hell**

Flight, memory, technology. How many moments are contained in a moment? SYMON BRANDO explores the forces that shape our existence.

48 **The Parallax Garden**

She didn't belong to this city, to this life. Her memories were empty vessels, false reminders of a life she knew was not hers. GEOFFREY MALONEY serves up a disturbing piece exploring themes of displacement and estrangement.

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GEORGE ALEXANDER writes on water and descends into the centre of the earth. Musings on the universe illuminated by the artwork of DENIS MIZZI.

32 **The Art of Dreaming**

An interview with Jack Dann. *Abaddon* picks the brains of this remarkable author.

39 **Love and the Great Dark**

ANDRÉS VACCARI explores the fiction of Jack Dann.

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Cinema analyst HAMISH FORD gets stuck into the megalomaniac logic of the Event Film.

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