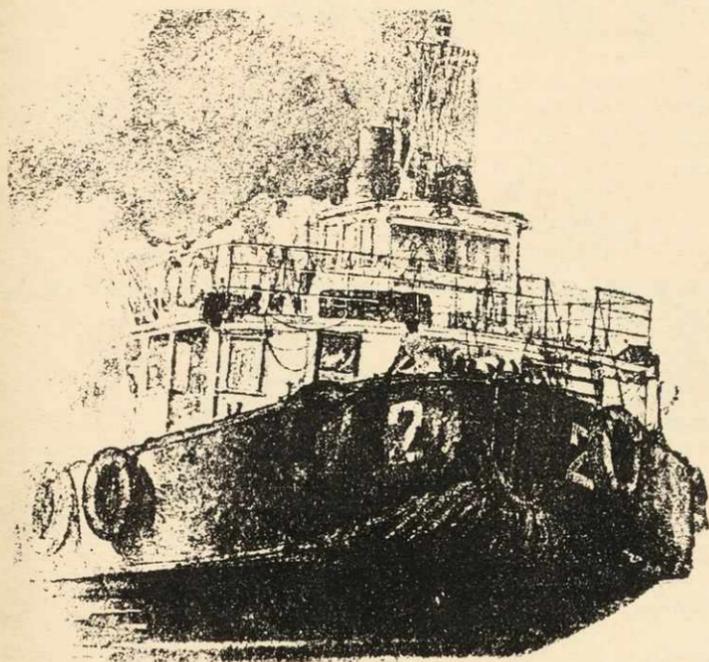


# Myths of the near future



"I believe in my own obsessions, in the beauty of the car crash, in the peace of the submerged forest, in the limitless geometry of the cinema screen, in the

elegance of automobile graveyards, in the repetitiveness of ourselves, in the poetry of abandoned hotels."

## A book review by Andrew Jones

The biggest fault with most postwar science fiction has to be its realization of a future with nothing in its past. Interesting SF futures usually have some connections to the here-and-now, and the further a future is flung, the less credible it is. While all the Asimovs, Van Vogts and Heinleins were gazing into deep space, a young British SF writer by the name of James Graham Ballard turned his vision inward and began to examine the present, creating works which seemed timeless in their settings, and timely in their warnings. J.G. Ballard's new novel, *The Day of Creation* (Lester, Orpen & Denys), isn't exactly what most would call science fiction, but it is a world of the fantastic rooted firmly in the present.

*The Day of Creation* tells the story of the aloof Dr. Mallory, a World Health Organization officer stationed in the desolate town of Port-La-Nouvelle in the Central African Republic, deep in the heart of Africa. Originally sent to troubleshoot the border wars between Chad and Sudan, Mallory dreams of bringing life-giving water to the parched country. He becomes obsessed with finding "The Third Nile", a great, flowing river which would

dle. His most famous novel, 1973's *Crash*, explored with a surgeon's precision the psycho-sexuality of an automobile accident. It met an untimely end in North America when his US publishers pulped an entire edition, fearing public outrage over its content.

*The Day of Creation* also maps out familiar Ballard themes. Dr. Mallory, Captain Kagwa and Professor Sanger, the documentary filmmaker, are all has-beens,

# J.G. BALLARD THE DAY OF CREATION

irrigate the Sahara and replenish the rain forests that once stood along the now-dried banks of rivers marked only on ancient maps.

Mallory gets more than he bargained for when a tractor extending the local airstrip uproots a giant tree, and a small trickle of water pours forth. Within days the trickle becomes a stream, and in a few weeks the stream widens, submerging most of the town and becoming a sizeable river deep enough to sail in. Mallory doesn't trust the explanation of the river's origins — seismic shifts in the water table to the north — and accepts the river as his own, to be named after him, traversed by him, and, if necessary, destroyed by him.

The river also becomes a strategic platform for the guerilla activities of General Harare and Captain Kagwa, however, and both try to claim its waters for their own political ends. With the aid of a 12-year-old mute girl from Harare's crew, Mallory flees, stealing Kagwa's ferry and heading upstream to the mysterious river's source, with a charlatan documentary filmmaker on his tail, lensing the incredible event for the posterity of his rich Japanese backers.

The journey upstream is filled with hallucinatory adventure, and echoes similar journeys in *Heart of Darkness*, *The Mosquito Coast* and *Fitzcarraldo*. Ballard's dreamlike and crystal-clear prose captures and displays a multitude of brilliant images — submerged airstrips, discarded cannisters of film, forest lynxes, lanterns at dusk. Ballard is an intensely visual writer, and combines his talent for evoking memorable images with a strong narrative flow, bringing those visions into sharp relief. Sometimes his imagery is so strong that it becomes difficult to han-

faded and weary souls not unlike jaded movie stars losing themselves in the endless, pleasantly shifting dunes of Vermilion Sands, a fictional resort somewhere between Ipanema Beach and Palm Springs. Characters trapped within their own surroundings is another trademark Ballard device. The River Mallory in *The Day of Creation* guides the refugees' course, just like the residents of a suburban *High Rise* reverted to savagery when they found themselves closed in.

Entropy is a strong element in Ballard's work, where the characters often find themselves powerless to stop the world from winding down. This dates all the way back to his childhood experiences in Shanghai in 1945, when he was interned by the Japanese, distantly watching the surreal carnival of a decadent city crumbling under wartime occupation. Being at the centre of this profoundly affected Ballard, and these experiences were something he always drew from in his work, eventually devoting a whole book, *Empire of the Sun*, to these memories.

Aside from being a powerful adventure story, *The Day of Creation* warns us about the future drought problems of third world countries and the self-serving Western media that create empty fodder for glowing television screens throughout the world. In his quest up the River Mallory, Ballard manages to shed light on the future, a future where not much will happen. His novels are like clocks marking time, whether it's the decay of the universe, the world drying up, or just souls fading away, all suspended in a place that's not quite abandoned, but always out of season. Ballard has seen the future, and it's one vast suburb of the soul.



## On COIL's Horse Rotorvator No subject is unmentionable

by Andrew M. Duke

**H**orse Rotorvator (Relativity) is the second album and latest release from COIL. The first half of a two-part set (the second to be released this winter), the LP is the follow-up to their critically acclaimed *Scatology* debut and the incredible *Panic 12*". The latter release featured an overwhelmingly abrasive version of "Tainted Love" with royalties going to AIDS research, and burned "the only thing to fear is fear itself" into many minds.

COIL manifests itself in the form of Peter Christopherson, John Balance, and Stephen E. Throver. Christopherson (who also performed in *Throbbing Gristle*) and Balance were responsible for *Psychic TV*.

The Riders of the four Horses of the Apocalypse have slaughtered their steeds, or so COIL have imagined, and used their jawbones to fashion a massive Horse Rotorvator to do their gardening.

From the Nero-like humour of "The Anal Staircase" through to "The First Five Minutes After Death", one will learn about Azrael, the Angel of Death, and "Ostia (The Death of Pasolini)", and be strangled by the "Circles of Mania" ("Here's Joey" — watch out for those brass derangements courtesy of Clint Ruin). Contributions also come from Raoul Revere and members of Marc Almond's band, the *Willing Sinners*.

Side dishes of alchemy, cannibalism, putrefaction, and reli-

gion are also served. The language portion comes in the chanting of foreign tongues in "Babylero".

Being oxymoronic is a favourite COIL pastime. The guttural music of "Slur" cannot hide the pleasing background material, and the circus scene samples of "Herald" mesh with "Penetralia". Their version of Leonard Cohen's "Who By Fire" is perfect.

Clint Ruin believes "Corruption is morally excellent" and COIL subscribe to the NO SUBJECT IS UNMENTIONABLE theory on *Horse Rotorvator*. With all of the technically superb musicianship, think of this as a Bradburyian forever walk with a demented preacher around and around an orchestra at midnight.