

Alan Dean Foster (on the right) in Papua New Guinea



Around the World in 80 Light Years

Frank Ludlow talks to Alan Dean Foster

Frank Ludlow: Your writing has encompassed an unusually broad range of genres over the years, from hard SF, fantasy, horror and mystery to westerns.

Have you found it hard to keep a balance between these, or do you allow elements from each to mix occasionally? Which do find the most challenging or rewarding?

Alan Dean Foster: I regard myself as a storyteller first and foremost. First and foremost you have to have characters that engage the reader. Since good characterization is exclusive of genre, I feel comfortable writing about virtually anything. I've gravitated to science fiction and fantasy over the years because these are the genres that allow a writer the maximum amount of creative freedom.

SF is by far the most challenging genre in which I've written. That's not necessarily because it's the most difficult to write, but because the readers are the most alert, intelligent, and dedicated. They refuse to let you, as a writer, relax. And they're not shy about letting you know when you've made a mistake! I value the give and take that dwarfs the feedback you receive from any other kind of writing.

FL: I'm often surprised by the amount of detail readers demand (as spin-off books and glossaries) when a writer is constructing a world. Tolkien is the classic example, but also space operas like the **Night's Dawn** trilogy, with its own handbook.

This can add a lot of depth

to a story's setting. Your own website is very interesting in the same way. But do you think this can be taken too far? I know of one reader more interested in the handbook I mentioned than in the story!

ADF: It's very flattering when readers become so interested in a story that they want not just more story, in the form of sequels and spin-offs, but intimate details of the story's world and environment.

Modern SF is notable for this, not only with respect to Tolkien, but also with such "franchises" as Star Wars and Star Trek. Publishers were astonished to discover that fans would buy things like a set of blueprints for a fictional starship (the Enterprise), much less entire books devoted to such non-story items as clothing, flora and fauna, even the personal histories of characters who played decidedly minor roles in the story itself.

Personally, I'm flattered when a reader expresses an interest in such detail. It means that you, as the author, have created a fictional milieu that someone else not only wants to read about, but to understand in depth and even inhabit. Some writers get upset when readers want to know, for example, why a certain character's hair is long instead of short. I believe that anything that adds to the depth of the reader's enjoyment is worth exploring.

It's also useful for the writer of a continuing series to have readers who will make sure he doesn't stray, and who are willing to go to the trouble of not only catching, but reporting, inconsistencies.

FL: How do you go about getting feedback from your readers? Or how do they go about giving it to you?

ADF: I don't solicit feedback. It's not necessary. Readers supply it whether you want it or not (smile). The web has transformed the whole business of writer/reader interaction. It's so much easier, faster, and cheaper to send an author a comment via email than it ever was via post that the volume of reader commentary has gone up exponentially. Personally, I'm delighted to hear from readers.

FL: As feedback, or purely out of interest, do you ever read reviews of your own books? If so, have you ever responded to a review?

ADF: Any artist who says they never read reviews of their work is a liar, and not a very good one. Sometimes I gain useful insight from a review, sometimes not. There are reviewers with personal axes to grind and those seeking to make a name for themselves by being outrageous. These I ignore.

I've only personally responded to reviews twice in my career. Many, many years ago, Spider Robinson did a review of my fourth book, **Midworld**, that shows what happens when a fellow writer decides to apply thought and knowledge to a review. It was, by the way, by no means entirely complimentary. But it was well-written and well-thought out, and there's no way you can get upset about a review done like that.

The other time was a

response to a female reviewer who had determined, through reading of several of my books, that I hated women. This was so absurd I nearly chose to place it in the basket with the 'personal axes to grind' and the 'intentionally outrageous,' but instead decided to respond directly. Since, in the course of my career, 90% of my editors and all of my agents (both print and media) have been women, I was of the opinion that had that strain been evident in my work, at least one of them would have commented on it previously.

FL: Did the female reviewer write back? Did she ever review a story of yours again?

ADF: No and not to my knowledge.

...I don't see on-the-job work disappearing anytime in the near future.

I have always had what's known as an acid tongue, and I learned as a youth to be very, very careful about using it. It's all too easy to hurt someone.

FL: Has the acid tongue ever come in useful? Perhaps in dialogue...

ADF: I indulge it when writing for characters like Mudge in **Spellsinger**... and in the new **Taken** trilogy, for one named George and especially for an alien named Sque.

I also allow it certain rein in local politics, where it has been intermittently effective... most recently in helping to stop the construction of a five-story building in the downtown historic district.

FL: As you mentioned, the Web has transformed reader-writer interaction. How far do you think the web/computer technology will go? Will we all be working from home or living our lives through virtual worlds?

ADF: Certainly, more tasks will be done at home. But I don't see on-the-job work disappearing anytime in the near future. Too many activi-

ties require person-to-person contact. Hard to put up a building, for example, if all your electricians, concrete workers, carpenters, etc. are at home.

As to living our lives through virtual worlds, each new technological toy changes the way people spend their spare time. Theatre made way for silent film, silent film for radio, radio for TV, TV for home video and gaming. I wonder what's next?

FL: A traditional place where readers provide feedback are the conventions, which I think many writers regard as a necessary evil! Have you gone to many throughout your career? Do you think

the tone of conventions has changed over time?

ADF: I used to go to three or four conventions a year. Now it's just one or two, either the Worldcon or the World Fantasy Con for business purposes, and one more as a Guest of Honour. Between my travels and my wife's health, I really can't do more than that in a year.

Perhaps it's because I don't go to many, but cons today seem little different to me than the first one I attended back in 1968. Fans are still fans. Obviously, there is far greater emphasis on media than there was back then, but at least at the larger cons there are still plenty of people selling, and buying, books. The big difference is that specialty sellers, thanks to the advent of fax machines and the net, dominate the used SF book market now far more than they did years ago, when a general bookstore could show up with material for sale.

All those parents who brought their kids to cons now have their kids bringing their elderly par-

ents to cons. Nice. Back to the future.

FL: A lot of people are saddened to hear of your wife's health. Has there been much time to write?

ADF: Thank you for your concern. My wife, Joann, has had multiple back surgeries that have proven progressively unsuccessful in curing her condition (a situation not unknown to those who have suffered back problems). Her mobility is limited, but she manages reasonably well. Well enough so that I can still manage plenty of time to write. Enough, anyway. Such is life.

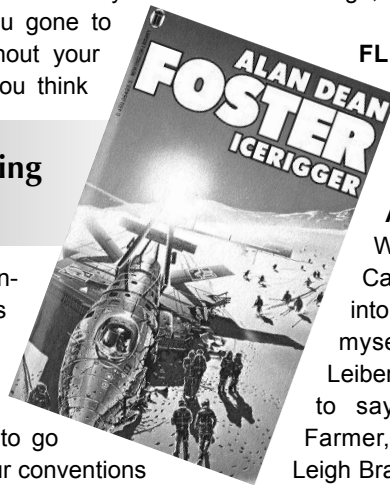
FL: Which was your most memorable convention? Memorable in any sense of the word!

ADF: Probably my first Worldcon, in Berkeley California in 1968. Climbed into a transfer van only to find myself sitting next to Fritz Leiber (couldn't think of a thing to say). Meeting Philip Jose Farmer, Edmond Hamilton and Leigh Brackett, Harry Harrison, and many others. Arguing for an hour with some old guy about Vietnam and publishing, only to learn afterwards that it was John W. Campbell. Meeting Emil Petaja and talking about Hannes Bok.

And probably much that I've forgotten.

FL: Conventions aside, you've travelled quite widely. Tell us something about that. Has it had much of an impact on your writing?

ADF: When I first met folks like Fritz Leiber and Edmond Hamilton, I had always pictured them hacking their way through impenetrable jungles, scaling unscalable mountains, that sort of thing, and I was astounded to learn that hardly any writers in the field ever went anywhere, and practically never unless it was directly connected to their work. When they did, it was usually to Europe. Camping out in rain forests or cross-



ing deserts didn't seem to be on the menu.

Myself, I wanted to be Sir Richard Francis Burton. Now, I'm not Burton (nobody was, except Burton himself), but I believe deeply in seeing as much of this small planet as possible, and in interacting with its inhabitants...human and otherwise. Everything I see, everyone I meet, sooner or later finds its way into my stories. Sometimes I'll get an entire book out of one trip.

Into The Out Of derives from five weeks my wife and I spent in Tanzania in 1983. **Interlopers** draws on my travels in Peru, Australia, and Papua New Guinea. **Primal Shadows** is actually set entirely in contemporary New Guinea, while **Maori** was inspired by my first visit to New Zealand.

On a different level, every character in **Cachalot** is directly based on someone I met in the course of my travelling. The Chinese executive, for example, is based on the former headwaiter at the Majestic Hotel in Kuala Lumpur, one of the most dignified gentlemen I've ever met.

It's much easier to create a believable rainforest-type alien setting (**Drowning World**, **Phylogenesis**, the **Midworld** books) when you've spent time in one. It's easier to create alien cultures when you've spent time among some of the more exotic of our own (the Himba of Namibia, the Highlanders of New Guinea, the islanders of the Pacific, etc.).

FL: In relation to your travels: where is the place that has had the most lasting impact on you?

ADF: Different places have different impacts for different reasons. You can't compare Iguazu Falls to the Prado, or scuba diving with great white sharks to wandering the streets of Florence on a rainy morning. Certainly the sheer primitiveness, and natural beauty, of New Guinea is near the top.

So was driving alone across Namibia. Petting snow leopards. Swimming with giant otters.

FL: Any advice for the would-be traveller?

ADF: Another book's work.

- 1) Always pack less than you need, as little as possible. Buy what you need on the road and mail home what you no longer require.
- 2) Never buy any size luggage without wheels and a pull handle
- 3) Wear a money belt and put a traveller's check or two inside.
- 4) Take a small multitool. Make sure it's one that has a scissors.
- 5) If you use a fanny pack, buy one with steel cables running through the belt.
- 6) Never argue with customs officials.
- 7) A cheap room in a good hotel is better than a good room in a cheap hotel.
- 8) The best place to find a safe, filling, cheap meal anywhere in the world is at a Chinese buffet in the local mall.
- 9) For souvenirs, either take a half-empty suitcase, or mail home everything.
- 10) Local t-shirts are among the best, and cheapest, souvenirs.
- 11) Never buy jewellery unless you have some idea what you're looking at.
- 12) Always try to learn something of the local language, even if it's only a few words. It will endear you to the locals, and they will be instantly sympathetic because your pronunciation will be so lousy.
- 13) A hard suitcase is better than a soft one because it can be locked securely and cannot be cut into with a knife.
- 14) Once your luggage is in a taxi or a bus, never let the driver get in before you.
- 15) Always buy a pass for the local mass transit system, even if it costs more than the individual trips you have planned. The convenience is worth a little extra money.
- 16) Free sex is not worth the chance of contracting AIDS.
- 17) Whenever possible, rent a car and drive.
- 18) Before going anywhere, buy a good map of the region and study it well.
- 19) Read your guidebooks before going, then make a mental list of what you want to see. Must-sees first, then hopefully-sees, and lastly leftovers. Do them in order and you'll never be disappointed.
- 20) Never get on a bus with one beautiful girl in front and two big guys in back.

I'm afraid there's just too much to settle on "the place".

FL: And along the way have you ever come across anyone that matched a character of your own devising?

ADF: No, but several have come close. There's Rodney Fox, the world's most famous great white shark attack survivor (and a good guy). And the fella who owned about 20% of the pokie (slot) machines in Papua New Guinea, with whom I rode shotgun (well, pistol) from Goroka to Madang. And "The Greek", one of those facilitator types who can manage anything, who

lived in a walled compound in Morogoro, Tanzania. And many, many more.

Some interesting people on our planet.

FL: Have you really caught and eaten piranhas? Describe.

ADF: Sure. Very tasty, like trout. They're very good pan-fried, right out of the water. Lots of small bones. Put a bit of meat on a hook, put the hook in the water, and in less than 30 seconds you'll usually have one. The trick is to flip the catch into the boat and then bring the line back sharply. This snaps the piranha off the hook, leaving it flopping around

in the bottom of the boat... where it is advisable to be wearing something other than sandals.

FL: Ever ran into any tricky situations?

ADF: A book's work. Watching feeding lions in Kruger, South Africa, only to realize the front left tire was completely flat (you don't get out to change it). Getting hit by a whale shark's tail off Ningaloo Reef, Northwest Australia. Almost stepping on a fer-de-lance in Manu, Peru (see photo on website). Caught in a horrific thunderstorm in a one-engine plane coming into Windhoek, Namibia (the one time I actually expected to die).

FL: Please elaborate on the thunderstorm.

ADF: A middle-aged German couple and I were returning from a week spent in the north of Namibia (Skeleton Coast, Kunene River, Hartmann Valley, etc.) via chartered one-engine, five-seater, when we were told to divert to Swakopmund because the capital, Windhoek, was socked in by severe thunderstorms. As we were about to swing toward

...something slammed into the top of the plane with a deafening bang, sending it straight down for about fifty feet.

the coast, word came through to the pilot that there was a momentary break in the storms. He decided to try for it.

Approaching Windhoek, which is in the central mountains at about 1700 m., we saw huge black thunderheads on either side of the plane, but a clear path ahead. Then, about twenty minutes out, turbulence began to rock the plane.

We seemed to be going up and down as much as forward. Suddenly, something slammed into the top of the plane with a deafening bang, sending it straight down for about fifty feet. It sounded like someone had dropped a fully loaded trash dumpster right on top of the plane.

After the initial shock, I looked around tensely to see that everything was still intact (i.e., wings, propeller, and other components of more than minimal importance). The explosive concussion was caused by nothing more than severe turbulence. Interesting place, our atmosphere. We landed safely and almost smoothly.

I suspect that the imprints of my fingers remain in the rear seat of that plane to this day.

FL: Did any of those experiences ever make you re-consider travelling?

ADF: No, never. Even too-hot spice leaves worthwhile memories. I simply don't know what I'd do if I couldn't travel, and I absolutely have to know what's on the other side of the next mountain. I suffer from an insatiable craving for knowledge.

FL: Have you ever considered a book on the subject of your travels?

ADF: I've started a book called **Wanderings**, which (hopefully) will include all the stories that I cannot fit into my fiction. Whether I'll ever have

time to do much work on it, I don't know. But I have video going back to my first journey, in 1973, so there are good visual references.

FL: Your first sale was in 1971 to Analog for *With Friends Like These*, with other stories featuring in magazines like Asimov's and Fantasy & Science Fiction after that. Did it take long for you to break into print?

ADF: I wrote twelve short stories before I sold *Some Notes Concerning a Green Box* in 1969 to August Derleth for his magazine,

The Arkham Collector. But the Collector was biannual, and slow to print, so *With Friends Like These*, that was actually my second sale, was published first. June 1971 issue.

FL: Many writers move from working at the shorter word lengths to working almost exclusively on novels, but you've maintained a steady output of both over the years.

Do you feel that these styles detract or enhance each other? For example, a great idea for a short story never gets used because it was incorporated into part of a novel or vice versa.

ADF: They're almost separate mediums. I love writing short stories, but it's a quick route to starvation. When I do one anymore, it's always either just for fun, or because I feel it's something I have to write. For example, I recently did a novella, *Box of Oxen*, about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

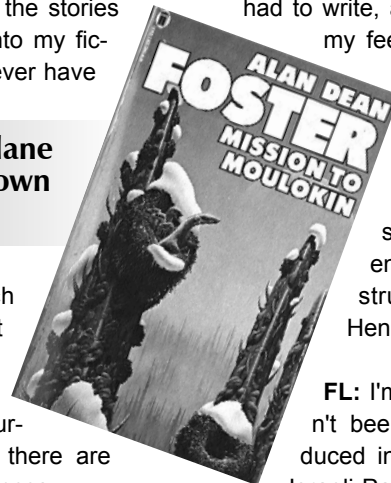
Nobody seems to want it, perhaps because it's only marginally SF, but it was something I felt I had to write, and I was able to get my feelings down on paper without committing to a full novel.

Many times an author will come up with a nice idea that simply isn't deep enough to support the structure of a novel. Hence the short story.

FL: I'm surprised there hasn't been more material produced in genre fiction on the Israeli-Palestinian situation to date. Perhaps it hasn't seen print yet since a lot of people find the subject so unpalatable? Or else have extremely strong opinions on the matter?

ADF: I think you're correct, that most writers find it unpalatable (certainly editors do) or are uncertain how to approach the subject.

FL: How do you see the Israeli-



Palestinian situation in the next ten or twenty years?

ADF: No change until Arafat dies, and possibly also Sharon. More senseless killing. Being Irish, I hardly need tell you how it works. Someone's kid gets blown up, or their wife, or husband, or close friends. After a while, the reason for the conflict becomes subsumed by the need for revenge. Nobody cares about the cause. They want only to kill as many of the other side as possible. Then you get the rise of groups like the al-Aqsa brigades, and suicide bombers. Or the "real"

growing inability to meet 3% maximum debt ceiling, but no break-up.

Endless turmoil in Africa in the absence of better leadership, except in SA, where improvement continues. Rioting and fighting in the South Pacific due to pressure from overpopulation problems. South America muddling along, except for noted improvement in Argentina. Russia growing less democratic, but improving economic climate. Continued Muslim extremist terrorism as Arab countries unable to modern-

Money (i.e. power) and sex are at the root of all human endeavours...

IRA. Revenge supersedes accommodation. Very bad.

It takes special individuals to crack that cycle. A Gandhi, or a Lincoln, or a Mandela. I don't see such on either the Israeli or the Palestinian side, though one could always emerge. You have the recent formula for a settlement that was prepared and agreed to by a joint non-governmental group of Israelis and Palestinians. But politics on both sides prevent its adaptation.

And then there are the religious fanatics on both sides, who claim justification for their actions and programs from God. 2000 year-old real estate claims. The need to destroy all infidels. Logic and reason no longer apply.

What a species...

FL: And the forecast for the rest the world in general over the same time-span?

ADF: In twenty words or less? Oh well...

Increasingly better relations between U.S. and China due to growing dependence of Chinese exporters on U.S. market. Explosive rise in U.S. interest rates due to inability of foreigners to continue financing U.S. debt plus more attractive investments elsewhere. Fractious EU under strain due to

ize and population under 30 continues to explode.

Most important overlooked shift: India draws closer to the West and to the U.S. in particular as economy slowly modernizes, and it seeks counterbalance to growing power of China.

Ask me again in ten years.

FL: Do you think genre fiction (Fantasy, SF) has an advantage over the mainstream in covering and examining these types of issues?

ADF: Yes, I do think SF fiction has an advantage over the mainstream in covering and examining these types (economics, population pressure, etc.) of issues. The trouble is that, with few exceptions, it doesn't use it.

The **Montezuma Strip** stories and **The Mocking Program** were all inspired by the economic as much as the cultural changes that are taking place along the U.S.-Mexican border. The problem is that economics is as boring as it is essential. Money (i.e. power) and sex are at the root of all human endeavours, as I put forth in a speech at the University of Catalonia in Barcelona several years ago.

Since sex is usually adequately dealt with, I think the acquisition of money ought to be dealt with more often in SF. Too often you read about the creation of vast empires, stellar or one-world, without any reference to why the participants want to create empires in the first place. As a hobby, it's a bit over the top. So...what are the real reasons? Which emperors in human history chose to live simple lives?

Much easier to do big space battles. Or even little ones.

FL: Recently, a lot of people have said that a better place to find discussions of these issues is in the speculative science journals like *Scientific American* etc. Is SF being left behind as the medium for speculation on the future? Not only in terms of economics and society, but with technological speculation as well.

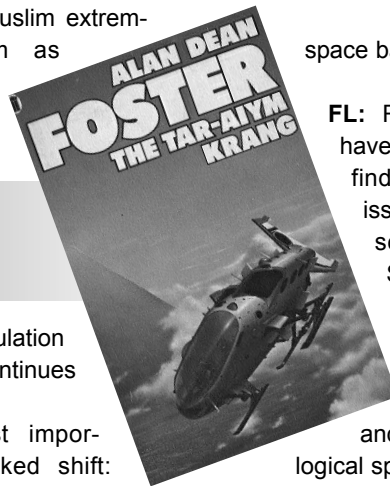
ADF: I don't think so. Even *The Economist* occasionally notes the importance that SF plays in predicting various futures (though economists do not).

Writers like Greg Egan, Stephen Baxter, Greg Bear and others are always on the cutting edge of speculative science. And I think there is plenty of invention in the field relating to the directions society in general and individual societies could take.

I was referring earlier to a lack of interest in economics specifically. When it comes to dreaming futures involving matters like population control (or the lack of it), relations between the sexes or between countries, that sort of thing, SF is still well out in front.

FL: In the past, people always debated the definition of SF; now the debate seems to be about whether SF is dying. What's your opinion on this debate?

ADF: Speculation about whether SF is "dying" seems to be fuelled by two things: older readers who inevitably



lament the passing of their favourite writers and/or style, be it Analog-type stories, New Wave, or whatever, and fears that the flood of media-related SF may overwhelm work in the traditional genre.

I think both are unfounded.

Like any field, the future of the genre will continue to evolve. Evolution inevitably means death for some life forms, but new ones emerge to take their place. That's as true of SF as any artistic form. And yet, the old standards remain. SF is unique in this way. Except for accepted classics, who reads general novels from the '40's and '50's? But all of Heinlein and Asimov is still available, and read for enjoyment, not academic treatises.

FL: In light of the all the above,

I put as much effort into the "writing" of a novelization as I do into an original novel...

where do you see SF (& also fantasy) heading in the next decade?

ADF: More media tie-ins (particularly involving gaming). SF will remain a steady and important part of the mass-market, but fantasy, both because of its greater accessibility to the general reader and its wider embrace by publishers, will continue to increase market share.

FL: Have you had much experience writing stand-alone media tie-in novels?

ADF: There are the two Star Wars novels, **Splinter of the Mind's Eye** and recently, **The Approaching Storm**, and the two Dinotopia novels, **Dinotopia Lost** and **The Hand of Dinotopia**.

FL: You've had quite a bit of experience with novelizations. How do they compare to writing something entirely of your own? How much freedom are you allowed?

ADF: Of course, writing one's own stories is more rewarding. I

approach novelizations as a fan sitting in the audience with friends, commenting on the mistakes in the film and chatting about what we'd like to see that isn't included. In that respect, novelizations can be a good deal of fun...if it's a decent script, to a decent movie.

I put as much effort into the "writing" of a novelization as I do into an original novel, which is one reason why I think mine tend to be successful.

As to how much freedom I'm allowed, that depends on the producers.

Usually, I'm given a free hand. I have enough of a track record so that anyone who engages me to do this kind of work knows I'm not going to make a tragedy into a comic

farce, or change the leading character into a paedophile. Sometimes, though, the filmmakers have to stick a hand in.

Usually, this involves small changes. Sometimes, though, as with **Alien 3**, they can come down heavily. This is uncommon. It's also why I declined to do the book version of **Alien Resurrection**.

FL: Can you tell us a little about what happened with **Alien 3**?

ADF: Sure. As a fan of the preceding two films, there were a number of things that troubled me about **Alien 3**. The business of killing off Newt and then doing a forensic examination of her corpse struck me as obscene, not to mention antithetical to the overarching storyline. Keeping her alive would have provided motivation for Ripley to fight to survive.

So in my original version of the book I just kept her in a state of suspended animation, with no one

able to open her capsule because it might cause her death.

All of the convicts, who are just ciphers in the movie, received detailed backgrounds. In the original version of the book, you not only learned about them, but why they had been sent to this horrific place.

I also adjusted many other scenes, especially correcting for anachronisms. No hunting for D cell batteries hundreds of years in the future, for example. One would presume artificial light generation by other means.

After I turned the manuscript in, I got a letter from Walter Hill, one of the producers, informing me that these changes were all unacceptable, and that if I would just follow the script exactly, "it

would make for a much better book". Having previously done one or two mildly successful novelizations, to the complete satisfaction of the original screenwriters, this response rather rubbed me the wrong way. Not to mention that none of my objections were addressed directly.

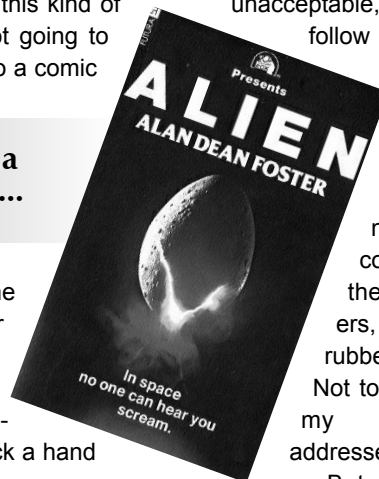
But a novelization is a work-for-hire. As the contracted writer, you have no control over the finished product. So I threw out all the extra work I had done, all the character elaboration, etc., and did precisely as requested.

The experience put me off doing film novelizations for many years, until just recently.

FL: Having a respected author fill in gaps is a great advertisement for reading novelizations. It seems shortsighted that this fact isn't highlighted more.

There are many tales of how difficult it is for a writer working with filmmakers, either when optioning novels, writing screenplays or novelizations etc. What's your overall opinion on the matter?

ADF: Filmmakers are notorious for praising someone's work to the



skies, hiring them, and then proceeding to change everything they do. It's much less common with novelizations, but (**Alien 3** being an example) not unknown.

If you believe in a writer's work sufficiently to pay money for it, you should believe in it enough to leave it alone.

FL: One of your best-known works of fantasy is the **Spellsinger** series. After Book 6 was there much pressure from readers (who must have become quite attached to the characters) to continue?

Was **Son of Spellsinger** a way to inject some new blood?

ADF: I'd be quite happy to continue the **Spellsinger** series...if some publisher was interested. And I would, as in the new **Spellsinger** novelette (to appear in the upcoming anthology **Masters of Fantasy**, from Baen Books), return focus to Jon-Tom and Mudge.

FL: Do you think readers accepted the change of focus from Jon-tom to his son?

ADF: Although it's a good book, I think the shift to Jon-Tom and Mudge's kids was a diversion only, as was the volume dealing with Jon-Tom and Mudge as older characters. I really prefer writing about the young Jon-Tom and Mudge.

FL: In terms of writing a series of novels, when in your opinion, is enough?

ADF: Either the author grows bored, or the audience does, or both together. Sometimes it's good to pause and let the characters rest awhile. Some series simply end naturally. It's hard to imagine a fourth **Lord of the Rings** novel, for example. On the other hand, readers often ask for further books in a series, and the foundation or enthusiasm for it is simply not there in the mind of the author.

I get frequent requests for a fourth book in **The Damned** series, for example. But I just don't

see it. I regard that trilogy as just that: a trilogy. On the other hand, I wouldn't be averse to doing more **Spellsinger** books, say. But in that instance, the publisher isn't interested.

And Flinx and Pip are still having too much fun to say hail and farewell to them.

FL: Do you think Fantasy or SF suffers from the abundance of multi-volume (seemingly unending) stories? Sequentialism I think they call it.

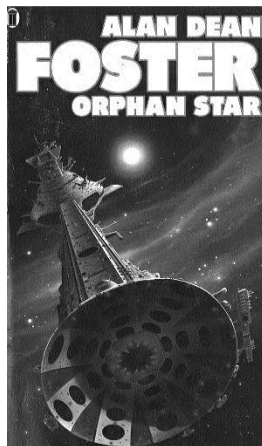
ADF: All fields suffer from sequentialism. What matters is whether the individual book is good or not. The readers make the ultimate decision. Dumas didn't write **Twenty Years After** because he was burning to do a sequel to **The Three Musketeers**... his readership clamoured for it.

If what the readers want is **Perry Rhodan #268** or **Star Trek #933**,

it's their money. They don't suffer from it, the publishers don't suffer from it, the writers don't suffer from it (nobody forces anyone to write these things). Only the critics suffer.

FL: This interview aside, have you done many annoying, boring or otherwise memorable interviews?

ADF: All interviews are enjoyable, as long as I can make the time. The most memorable one was probably on Good Morning South Africa in 1993, where I was able to talk not only about SF, but about the future of that country (I said I thought that while there would be the inevitable problems, the country as a whole would turn out fine, and that those who remained stood to make a lot of money).



I did not foresee the complete collapse of then beautiful Zimbabwe, but then, neither did anybody else. Namibia I thought would hold up well, and has, so far (we'll see what Nujoma decides to do about running for a second illegal, fourth term as President) and Botswana, except for AIDS, has done better than anyone had a right to expect.

FL: In light of the African situation, what do you think about the whole anti-globalization movement?

ADF: It's definitely a mixed bag. Those countries that are capable of competing, from giants like China to minnows like Maldives (fishing and tourism) do well out of it. The problem isn't globalization, which is inevitable: it's predatory protective economic policies by western nations; of which the West's agricultural policies are by far the most egregious.

Farmers in Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Mauritania, where cotton is about the only cash crop, can't compete with

The problem isn't globalization...

subsidized cotton from the U.S. and elsewhere. EU butter and meat is paid for by European taxpayers, the surplus is then sent as "aid" to Africa and elsewhere, with the result that the prices African farmers could get for their own butter and meat is grievously undercut. Sugar producers in the Caribbean, Fiji, and elsewhere have to compete with the highly subsidized U.S. sugar industry.

Here's a great example. Referring to the economic crisis in Argentina, the U.S. Secretary of Commerce said that Argentineans ought to produce goods that U.S. consumers would like to buy. One of the few recent agricultural success stories in Argentina involves the export of Argentinean honey to the U.S. Then U.S. honey producers

promptly complained, with the result that tariffs on imported Argentinean honey went up something like three-fold.

How's that for free trade? Of course, along with Third-World farmers and herders, the biggest sufferers are European and American consumers, who pay unnaturally elevated prices for almost every food they buy at the market.

FL: Do you think anti-globalization protestors might be better to try and work for beneficial outcomes of summits like the Cancun WTO talks, rather than contributing to their breakdown? Or, as many claim, is the breakdown merely a result of poorer countries fighting back?

ADF: The breakdown at Cancun hurt poor countries far more than the rich ones. How could it not? If you

The breakdown at Cancun hurt poor countries far more than the rich ones.

have rich and poor and nothing changes, who benefits? Who loses? There was a lot of grandstanding by the representatives of Third-World countries for their media back home. It did poor farmers and fisher folk no good at all.

As for the anti-globalization protestors, if you want to protest something, protest unfair conditions and unfair decisions, not a process designed to discuss both. Or turn in your cell phones and go to work in the countries affected and help the people directly. A surplus of hypocrites on both sides, say I.

FL: You appear to have taken quite an interest in Africa. Any particular reasons?

ADF: No more interest in Africa than anywhere else, actually. It's just that I made it to Africa before other parts of the world, and have made several multiple-month trips there. Like anywhere else, I'm fascinated by the diversity of cultures, languages,

wildlife, landscapes, and so on.

One of the nicest things about Africa, which people don't realize from watching TV, is that much of it is perfectly accessible by ordinary car. Namibia, for example, looks exactly like where I live... Arizona. Except when baboons or ostriches are running across the road.

FL: In your opinion, has there been a great African SF novel?

ADF: I have not read nearly enough of the potential contenders to be able to give a satisfactory answer to that question. And my purely African novel, **Into The Out Of**, is dark fantasy and would certainly not qualify.

FL: Very few in SF have taken this enormous continent as their

backdrop. Any reasons?

ADF: This relates directly back to an earlier question of yours, in which I explained the importance of travel. When I first went to Africa (Tanzania and Kenya, 1983), I prepared an entire outline for the novel that I thought I would write based on the trip. What I saw and experienced there led me to throw away the outline and write something entirely different.

This is why, if you're going to write properly about a specific place, it's vital that you go there. Sure, you can write a novel set in Africa, using African motifs, strictly based on research from books and the Internet. But the flavour, not to mention wonderful inspiration, is absent.

Many of the scenes and characters in my African dark fantasy, **Into The Out Of**, are based on

events I witnessed and people I met or spoke with. The sorcerer in the mountain, for example, exists as an actual unnamed geologic formation on the road north from Morogoro to Arusha (there is a vidcap of it on my website, in the bio/photo section). The Maasai laibon, or shaman, is a composite of several Maasai I met on the trip. These are components you cannot derive from reading a book.

FL: Are there any black African writers working within the genre?

ADF: As far as I know, not in SF. But many African writers draw fruitfully on the legends and tall tales and folk fantasies that abound across the continent. And there is a small publisher in Burkina Faso who has a particular fondness for both genres, but neither the resources nor the audience to publish for them. As technology penetrates the continent, interest in both kinds of storytelling will grow.

FL: Tell us about what you're working on at the moment.

ADF: I just turned in to Universal the novelization of the upcoming David Twohy film **The Chronicles of Riddick**, starring Vin Diesel. I'm currently about 20,000 words into **The Candle of Distant Earth**, the third volume in **The Taken** trilogy. The first book (title to be determined) will be out in June of 2004. The second book, **The Light-Years Beneath My Feet**, is completed. After I finish **Candle**, I'll decide what to do next. I want to do a very large near-future novel set in India titled **Sagramanda**. There is also a fantasy percolating.

FL: Have you given any thought to attending Worldcon 2005 in Scotland? We'd be delighted to see you there!

ADF: Too soon to tell. I'm more likely to be in Africa or Asia or someplace. But one never knows. Be nice to see Glasgow again (no more driving to the Orkneys, this time!).

