

book reviews, music, art, literature, self publishing, writing, travel: spike magazine

iBuzz touch yourself
The iPod sex toy - on sale now



click
here



Lovehoney:
the best UK site
for Sex Toys!

spike classifieds

[Your Ad Here](#)



[home](#) | [splinters \[blog\]](#) | [interviews](#) | [features](#) | [book reviews](#) | [music reviews](#) | [travel](#) | [links](#) | [book news](#) | [contact](#)


☐ spike

☐ web

 updates:

spike magazine: books, music, art, travel

related pages:

- [Flight And Imagination: Millennium People interview with J.G. Ballard](#)
- [Future Shock: Ballard discusses the film adaptation of Crash](#)
- [Not A Literary Man: Rushing To Paradise interview with J.G. Ballard](#)
- [Prophet With Honour: Ballard's unique contribution to 20th century literature](#)
- [Extreme Metaphor: a crash course in the fiction of J.G. Ballard](#)
- [Cocaine Nights: J.G. Ballard book review](#)
- [JGBallard.com](#)
- [WillSelf.org.uk](#)

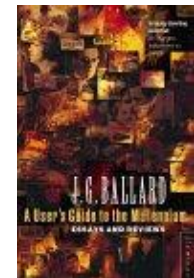
Extreme Metaphor

Chris Hall gives a crash course in the fiction of JG Ballard

Existing somewhere between the manifest edifices of *Crash* and *Empire Of The Sun*, the rest of JG Ballard's fiction glides and grinds like vast tectonic plates. Those already acquainted with *Crash*, the polar extreme of Ballard's oeuvre, and his most successful book, the semi-autobiographical work *Empire Of The Sun*, will find the rest of his work as resonant and thought-provoking as these two novels. With the controversy and critical acclaim that has surrounded [David Cronenberg's](#) film adaptation of *Crash*, it is about time that the rest of Ballard's work received a closer look.

I can clearly remember reading my very first Ballard short story, "Track 12", among a collection of science fiction short stories from the likes of Isaac Asimov, Arthur C. Clarke et al, all of whom were then part of the English secondary school curriculum. What set Ballard's story immediately apart, besides its extreme brevity (3 pages - an inspiration to all of us who lazily took up the creed of quality over quantity), was the fusion and overlay of inner and outer landscapes, the public and private colliding and commingling. Here I first glimpsed the compressed economy of Ballard's writing, as if he were living in a world that would suddenly disappear or be destroyed. Asimov once defined a short story as one in which if you removed just one sentence then the entire story made no sense. "Track 12" is about as close as anyone will get to adhering to Asimov's dictum.

Ballard's narratives would seem to represent a warped inversion of *reductio ad absurdum*, in which truth, not



A User's Guide
To The Millennium
JG Ballard

Buy from [amazon.co.uk](#)

Buy from [amazon.com](#)

See **all books** by
JG Ballard at

Buy from [amazon.co.uk](#)

Buy from [amazon.com](#)

amazon.co.uk

Search now!

amazon.com

Search now!

Free New Books:
[Continuity: Jason McNamara, Tony Talbert](#)

[Go It Alone!: Bruce Judson](#)

[Just In Tokyo - Justin Hall](#)



The Crystal World
J. G. Ballard
New \$14.00!
Used \$6.87!

Crash
J. G. Ballard
New \$10.01!
Used \$5.50!

Less Than Zero
Bret Easton Ellis

The Atrocity Exhibition
J. G. Ballard
New \$11.38!
Used \$9.50!

Concrete Island
J. G. Ballard
New \$10.40!
Used \$7.00!

The Best Short Stories O...
J. G. Ballard
New \$14.00!
Used \$2.95!

(Prices may change)
Privacy Information

today on spike:**[Look Back With Contempt](#)**[\[read more\]](#)**[A Spark goes out](#)**[\[read more\]](#)**[Suicide: No Compromise: David Nobakht](#)**[\[read more\]](#)**[The Blogs That Bind](#)**[\[read more\]](#)

falsity, is shown through absurd logical consequence. It's always too late for going back in his fiction; there is a kind of inexorable rush that draws us towards destruction or transcendence and often, both. (For these reasons, Ballard avoids elliptical plots). The moral ambivalence inherent to a lot of his work is best illustrated in *Crash*, where Ballard's own introduction to the novel seems to be a disguised disclaimer. While Ballard himself, off the page, stresses the cautionary nature of his stories, his more apocalyptic novels (*High Rise*, *Concrete Island*, *The Atrocity Exhibition*) have been continually read as showing nihilistic or pessimistic obsession with decay, destruction and disaster.

Far from it. Ballard's work shows a deep concern with transcendence and the recognition of unconscious forces. As the critic Gregory Stephenson points out, Ballard is subversive in the true sense of the word ("to turn from beneath") in that he deals with the unconscious mind and its drive to manifest itself through our waking ego-consciousness, in a sense to banish time and space itself.



This resolutely amoral tone has certain biographical and psychoanalytic roots in Ballard's own history. Ballard originally intended to be a psychiatrist before abandoning his studies in medicine (it is no coincidence that he shares the background with [William Burroughs](#)). Moreover, by the time he was 13, he had witnessed every kind of conceivable

human horror from a childhood spent interned in Lunghua, Japan. It is as if Ballard has had this imprinted upon his mind, hardwired as the template with which he views the world, filtered through and fused with it. Perhaps for this reason his stories, especially *Crash*, come across as someone trying to shock themselves with their own fiction.

Martin Amis wrote that *Empire Of The Sun* "gives shape to what shaped him". Ballard bears this out: "People brought up in the social democracies of Western Europe have no idea of this kind of savagery." By the time he was repatriated to England from Japan, Ballard was 15 and the culture shock is still with him. He is always going to have an outsider's perspective; one that, for example, finds the London suburb of Shepperton where he lives "lunar



Martin Amis

[Vanishing Bangkok: Surat Osathanugrah](#)**[Underground: Suelette Dreyfus](#)****[Hacking Matters: Wil McCarthy](#)****[Kevin Kelly: New Rules For The New Economy](#)****[Explorion: Free Travel Books](#)****Recently on Splinters****[Look Back With Contempt](#)**

I've read and watched a lot to admire from the books and cinema of the 60s Angry Young Men crowd over the years: Alan Silitoe and the younger Kingsley Amis and Keith Waterhouse for instance (despite.... [\[Read more\]](#))

[A Spark goes out](#)

Just a quick word of tribute to Muriel Spark, who has died aged 88. The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie was a great book, and the film wasn't bad either. RIP. [\[Read more\]](#)

[Suicide: No Compromise: David Nobakht](#)

Suicide: No Compromise - David Nobakht "...does a sterling job of chronicling Suicide's rise over 30 years with a cast of thousands describing what a huge impact listening to or seeing the band had... [\[Read more\]](#)

[The joys of schadenfreude](#)

[\[read more\]](#)

and abstract" in the summer. Perhaps making his fiction abstract and detached is one way of dealing with such terror.

As a writer Ballard has always been more interested in idea, vision, dream and nightmare than in character (or at least character in the usual sense.) The viewpoint of his fiction is a clinically neutral affair even in first person narration, where it is usually a doctor or a psychologist. Indeed, in this sense, Ballard's fiction comes closer to being psychoanalytic rather than science fiction. Some of the techniques used in psychoanalysis were partly designed to encourage the patients' defence mechanisms to emerge. Freud argued that therapists should impose as little of their own personalities as possible by remaining neutral and detached. *Crash* is like Dr Ballard passively relaying our psychosexual nightmares, listening to our defence mechanisms and checking for common symptomology. Indeed, *Crash* seems more like an extended short story, where the obsession is allowed to play out in time; a temporally exploded idee fixe. This obsessional quality is evident in a lot of Ballard's other work. *The Drowned World* ends with the hero heading South, towards the heat and insanity of the rainforests. The American publishers wanted the hero to head North, because otherwise it was "too negative." Ballard points out: "But it's a *happy* ending. South is where he *wants* to go. Further. Deeper. South!"

[The Blogs That Bind](#)

Blogs - everyone's at it. Good job too. Novelist Roger Morris has his own blog where he discusses Ian's recent review of Taking Comfort; Ian is playing about with Amazon's new promo blog feature for.... [\[Read more\]](#)

[The joys of schadenfreude](#)

Hands up who cheered when Keith from Lytham lost Â£32,000 on Who Wants to Be a Millionaire just now? The question for Â£32,000: "Which British playwright won the 2005 Nobel Prize for Literature?". The o.. [\[Read more\]](#)



Salvador Dalí: The Metamorphosis Of Narcissus

Ballard's surrealism has a great deal more affinity with pictorial, rather than literary, surrealism. Paul Delvaux's *The Echo* features in *The Day Of Forever*, for example, and Salvador Dalí is something of a hero to Ballard, featuring prominently in his books as well as on them. (Dalí's *Nuclear Cross* adorns my copy of Ballard's *The Terminal*

Beach, his best collection of short stories.) Max Ernst's silent forests and swamplands, weathered scenery and gnarled post-apocalyptic detritus are redolent of much of Ballard's early disaster fiction (*The Drowned World*, *The Drought*, *The Crystal World*). Strikingly, there is also the similarity with Yve Tanguy's strange beaches. The point is that along with these surrealists Ballard interested in psychological landscapes, i.e. mindscapes. They are all concerned with the externalisation of the mind's "iconography". Even with *Empire Of The Sun*, or, more recently, *Cocaine Nights*, his most realistic or naturalistic novels are full of these signature images and recurrent themes.

Ballard's work is also notable for its internal consistency; the deep themes are recurrent but the details, settings, plots ideas, - the surfaces as it were - are varied. I find it curious that so much modern fiction has aped, say, the style of Martin Amis, but not that of Ballard, who, along with Amis, is the great stylist of postwar English fiction. It would be almost too easy to make a Ballard pastiche with its lexicon of drained pools, disused aerodromes, terminal beaches and aeropsychic time. I suspect the reason is because it works only within an imaginative framework, rather than a parochially realistic one merely concerned with relationships. Truly can we use the adjective Ballardian.

Ballard is none too interested in authorial intrusion either - as he says, "The writer's task is to invent the reality" (or as Nietzsche put it: "No artist tolerates reality") and not the fiction which is all around us - mass merchandising, advertising, politics as advertisement.

David Cronenberg, the Canadian director of *Crash*, bears this out from his reading of the novel: "...it provided you with fantasies you didn't know you had before. Once they were there, they were real. They made sense." Only Ballard can come up with a sentence such as "What links the first flight of the Wright Brothers to the invention of the Pill is the social and sexual philosophy of the ejector seat."

The key to understanding Ballard's work is in the fusion or overlapping of internal and external worlds. In 1962 he wrote an article for *New Worlds* magazine entitled *Which Way To Inner Space?* (collected in *A User's Guide To The Millennium*) in which, essentially, he sets out his own



JG Ballard



[Empire of the Sun](#)

J.G. Ballard

New £6.39!

[High-rise](#)

J.G. Ballard

New £7.99!

Used £2.80!

[The Atrocity Exhibition](#)

J.G. Ballard

New £6.39!

[Millennium People](#)

J.G. Ballard

New £6.39!

Used £0.74!

[Cocaine Nights](#)

J.G. Ballard

New £6.39!

Used £0.01!

[Empire of the Sun](#)

J.G. Ballard

New £6.39!

Used £0.55!

[The Kindness of Women](#)

J.G. Ballard

New £6.39!

Used £2.40!

manifesto. He despairs of the standard SF "rocket and planet" story and devices such as time travel and telepathy which actually prevent the writer from using his imagination at all. He criticises SF writers for treating time like "a glorified scenic railway" and would like to see it treated as one of the "perspectives of the personality". Ballard wants SF to become abstract, and specifically, he'd like to see more psycholiterary ideas of science. All in all then, a stylistic and thematic overhaul of SF. Most tellingly of all, he writes that "I believe that if it were possible to scrap the whole of existing literature...(to) be forced to begin again...all writers would find themselves inevitably producing something very close to SF". Further, that "no other form of fiction has the vocabulary of ideas and images to deal with the present, let alone the future."



Take the short story "Manhole 69" for example, where an experiment to eliminate sleep goes horribly wrong and ends with the subjects suffering from catatonic seizures. The central hypothesis of this short story is that the mind cannot endure continual consciousness, particularly self-consciousness, and reacts by shutting down. They could "no longer contain the idea of their own identity". As in so much of Ballard's work, we see this inexorable battle between the unconscious and the conscious, with the former characterised as the more primeval and "real" part of ourselves.

Where *Crash* literalised the term "auto-erotic", *Cocaine Nights* does the same for "guilt complex" (note that these are both psychoanalytic terms). *Cocaine Nights*, Ballard's most recent novel, is something of a departure; the first half

of the book reads like a fairly straightforward detective piece, with none of Ballard's trademark tampering with space-time or individual psyches. *Cocaine Nights*' plot centres on the Spanish resort of Estrella de Mar, where a housefire kills five people, and the subsequent involvement of Charles Prentice, an outsider whose brother Frank has been arrested for murder. Like Conrad's *Heart Of Darkness* and indeed *Crash*, the book is under the spell of an alluring and quite possibly insane visionary figure. In its description of a society hellbent on leisure, *Cocaine Nights* follows the line of the argument set out in Carol Reed's *The Third Man*, where Harry Lime compares the cuckoo clock art that came from the genteel Swiss culture with the decadent and depraved reign of the Borgias that produced da Vinci.

Perhaps the best place to begin with Ballard is his essays - the recent collection *A User's Guide To The Millennium* amounts to a varied and imaginative reading of twentieth century iconography: *Mein Kampf*, Coca-Cola, Dali, Burroughs, Elvis, TV, nuclear weapons. A collection of Ballard's journalism from the last 25 years, including book reviews, it points to the sheer breadth of his interests and showcases many of the ideas which drive his fiction. Ballard admits to being an assimilator of the "invisible literature" of technical manuals, company reports, journals, etc. Indeed, one of his recommended books of the last five years is the transcripts of black box flight recordings. For Ballard, it's a telling choice: over the last forty years, his writing has attempted to do the same - to record the moments at which our lives are most at risk both from the world outside and from within ourselves. May his own literature become a little less invisible in the future.

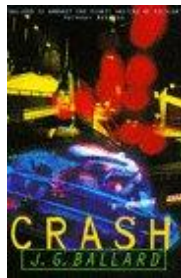




More on 'j g ballard'

Number of products: 240

Page 1 of 24

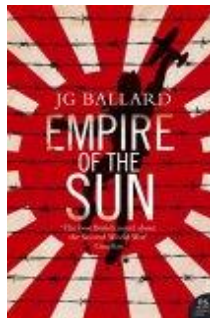


[Crash](#)

by: **J.G. Ballard**

publisher: **Vintage**, released: **19 January, 1995**

price: **£6.99** (new), **£1.50** (used)

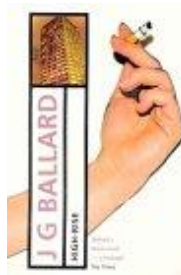


[Empire of the Sun \(Harper Perennial Modern Classics S.\)](#)

by: **J.G. Ballard**

publisher: **HarperPerennial**, released: **20 February, 2006**

price: **£6.39** (new), **£2.00** (used)



[High-rise \(Flamingo Modern Classic\)](#)

by: **J.G. Ballard**

publisher: **Flamingo**, released: **04 September, 2006**

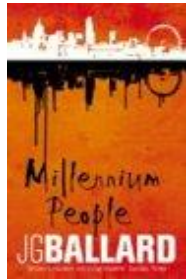
price: **£7.99** (new), **£2.80** (used)



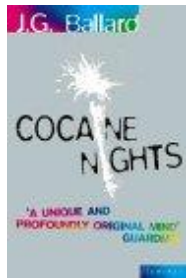
[The Atrocity Exhibition: Annotated \(Flamingo Modern Classics\)](#)



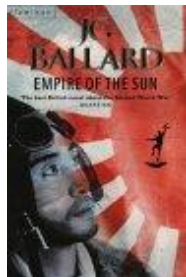
by: **J.G. Ballard, William Burroughs**
publisher: **Flamingo**, released: **21 May, 2001**
price: **£6.39** (new), **£3.30** (used)



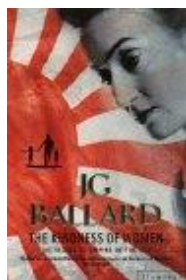
[Millennium People](#)
by: **J.G. Ballard**
publisher: **HarperPerennial**,
released: **06 August, 2004**
price: **£6.39** (new), **£0.74** (used)



[Cocaine Nights](#)
by: **J.G. Ballard**
publisher: **Flamingo**, released: **01 September, 1997**
price: **£6.39** (new), **£0.01** (used)



[Empire of the Sun](#)
by: **J.G. Ballard**
publisher: **Flamingo**, released: **12 September, 1994**
price: **£6.39** (new), **£0.55** (used)



[The Kindness of Women](#)
by: **J.G. Ballard**
publisher: **Flamingo**, released: **12 September, 1994**
price: **£6.39** (new), **£2.40** (used)



[Myths of the Near Future](#)
by: **J.G. Ballard**
publisher: **Vintage**, released: **17 February, 1994**
price: **£6.99** (new), **£5.00** (used)



[The Drought \(1960s A.S.\)](#)
by: **J.G. Ballard**
publisher: **Flamingo**, released: **17 April, 2001**



price: **£4.99** (new), **£0.01** (used)

- [Next results](#)

Product category:

Search type:

Which server:

Language for page:

Search string:

feedback

Post a [Contact](#) Chris Hall

spike shop

[amazon.co.uk](#)

[amazon.com](#)

You can buy **A User's Guide To The Millennium** online from
[Amazon.co.uk](#) in the UK and [Amazon.com](#) in the US

See **all books** by **JG Ballard** at
[Amazon.co.uk](#) in the UK and [Amazon.com](#) in the US

Bored of books? Try [Lovehoney's sexy and secure adult shopping](#)
 for something a little more stimulating!

related links

search [spikemagazine.com](#) for more about **JG Ballard**

search [spikemagazine.com](#) for more articles by **Chris Hall**

search [Google](#) for more about **JG Ballard**



Buy US books,
CDs and movies

[amazon.com](#)

Buy UK books,
CDs and
movies

[amazon.co.uk](#)



- [splinters \(weblog\)](#) • [interviews](#) • [features](#) • [new writing](#) • [book reviews](#)
- [music reviews](#) • [travel tales](#) • [book review links](#) • [daily book news](#) • [daily music news](#)
- [links](#) • [open directory](#) • [buy books & CDs](#) • [about spike](#) • [contact spike](#) •

spike hosting: Knightsbridge.net | site design: Chris Mitchell | recommended [web hosting](#) and [domain name registration](#)

Other sites by Chris:

[Free New Books](#) [recent books to download for free] - [Thailand Diving](#) [Similan liveboards] - [My Thai](#) [Thailand journal]
Divehappy [[Scuba Diving in Thailand, Borneo and Vietnam](#)] - Travelhappy [[Backpacking in Thailand](#)]

More bookshops:

[Scuba Diving Bookshop](#) | [Thailand Travel Bookshop](#) | [Buy Books Online](#)

Bored of books? Try something a little more stimulating!

[Lovehoney](#) | [Durex Play](#) | [Hen Night](#) | [UK Sex Toys](#) | [Fleshlight UK](#) | [Tracey Cox](#) | [Cheap Sex Toys](#) | [Cheap Lingerie](#)

Lovehoney bestsellers: [Jessica Rabbit Vibrator](#) | [iBuzz](#) | [Hitachi Magic Wand](#) | [Hitachi Magic Wand UK](#)

[Hitachi Magic Wand Attachments](#) | [Zestra Feminine Arousal Oil](#) | [Pink Lady Fleshlight](#) | [KY Warming Liquid](#)

[Prostate Massager](#) | [Future Tech Ultra 7 Jessica Rabbit](#) | [Silencer Vibrator](#) | Want more? See the Lovehoney [Blog](#)

[\[site map\]](#)

