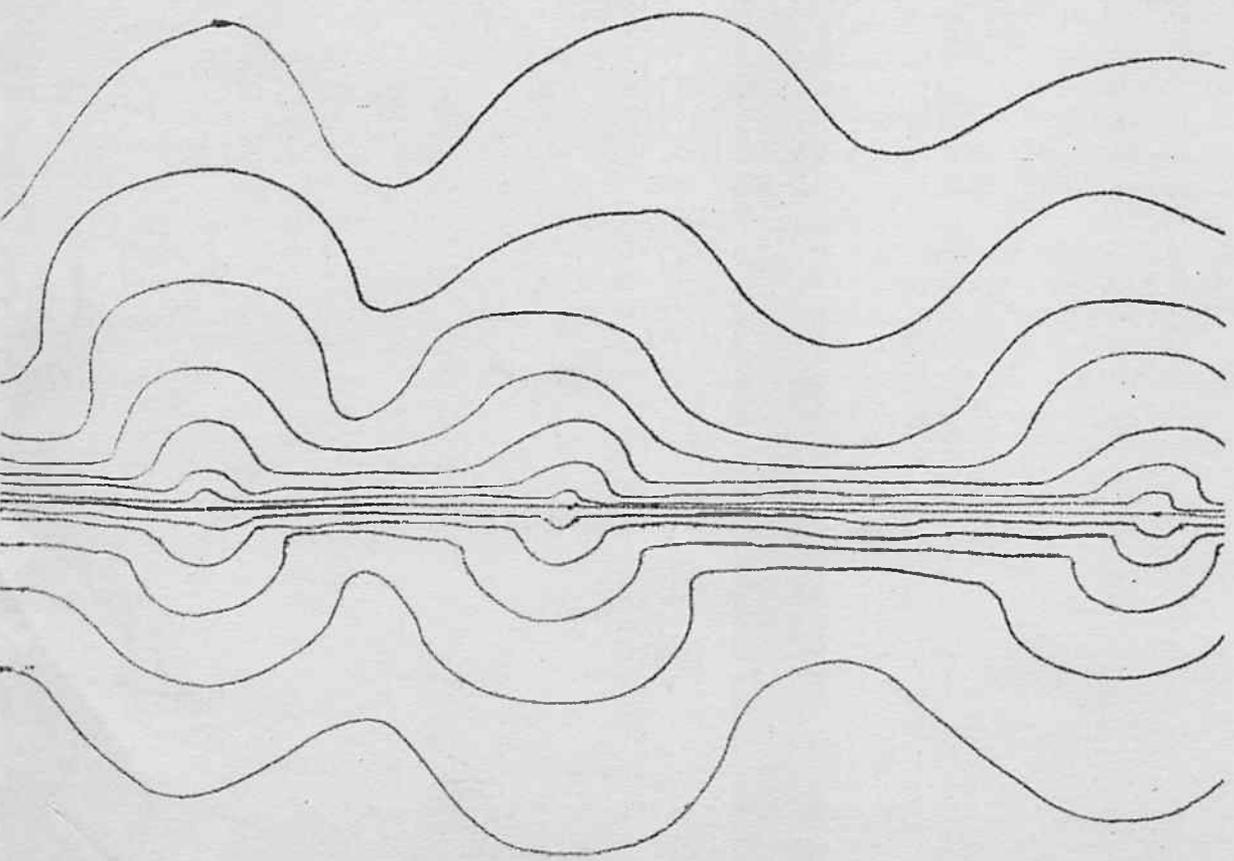


SF COMMENTARY 17



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Last stencil typed, October 18 1970.

I
MUST BE
TALKING
TO MY
FRIENDS

* Friends in Melbourne have finally sent me some information about the 10th Australian Science Fiction Convention, to be held in Melbourne on January 1 and 2. Details are still not very precise: here's what I know. The convention will be held on the grounds of the University of Melbourne, Parkville, and it's a lot easier to find than the Capri Theatre, Murrumbeena. The auction will be held in two segments, each half an hour long; there will be no films, but Paul Stevens is arranging a special film program on January 3; and for the first time in Australia there will be a masquerade ball on the night of January 2. In the hands of John Foyster, Lee Harding and Leigh Edmonds, this should be the most relaxed, unusual convention for some time. Attending membership is \$1.50 until December 1, \$2.50 after that, and \$3 at the door. Obviously you should pay before December 1. Non-attending membership is \$1. Payment to Leigh Edmonds, P O Box 74, Balaclava, Victoria 3183.

* The Ditmar Awards news does not please me quite so much. As you may have worked out in S F COMMENTARY Numbers 11 and 12, many people felt that the rules should be tightened and clarified so that this year's results can never be repeated. These reforms have not been carried out. The nomination form for the Ditmar Awards 1971 reads very like the form issued at the last Convention. There are some amendments, none of them helpful. The "Best Magazine" category has been deleted, for reasons I cannot work out. The "Best International Fiction" category is still a farce. First preference is still given to the first publication of overseas works, instead of "first edition freely available in Australia", an amendment which would have been more sensible. Several people have been talking about SLAUGHTERHOUSE FIVE (Kurt Vonnegut Jr) as a contender for the Ditmar. It is ineligible because the first American edition, unavailable in Australia, was published in 1969. It may have been published between 1st September and the end of the year, but it is impossible to tell from the book itself. The first freely available edition was the British one, which only came out a few months ago. On the other hand, I happen to know that Aldiss' BAREFOOT IN THE HEAD was published in the first week of October 1969...

Even more ridiculous is the provision that "Committee members of the Tenth Australian

Science Fiction Convention will be ineligible to receive awards". This cuts out the obvious winner of the "Best Australian Fanzine" category - NORSTRILIAN NEWS, published by John Foyster and Leigh Edmonds. It cuts out the only possible winner in the "Best Australian Fiction" section - Lee Harding's THE CUSTODIAN, one of the finest stories of the last five years. As I can't vote for it, I'll probably vote "No Award" in this category. I'm only halfway through reading the magazines at the moment, but I don't think this will have much bearing on my choices for "Best International Fiction": 1. BAREFOOT IN THE HEAD (Aldiss). 2. THE TIME MACHINE (Langdon Jones) (ORBIT 5). 3. THE ASIAN SHORE (Thomas M Disch) (ORBIT 6). "Best Australian Fanzine" - well, ahem, since you can't vote for NORSTRILIAN NEWS or RATAPLAN, then the obvious choice is.....

Perhaps I've lost some friends here, but the matter is important, as many people pointed out to me after the Easter Convention. The awards are still open to hopeless mixups. This year there will be a Nomination Form, released sometime after December 1, so there won't be any surprise results. But still, it's not good enough.

* Melbourne fandom is booming in other ways as well. The Melbourne Science Fiction Society was renamed "The Nova Mob" at its second meeting, on September 4. Yours truly non-led a discussion on Philip K Dick, which improved into a general party at John Bangsund's flat in St Kilda. I did hear people talking about science fiction, and even Philip Dick, so the occasion was not altogether wasted. About 40 people attended, and I've heard that about 20 of them turned up at the Degraeves Tavern in Melbourne for the third meeting. John Foyster talked on his feet (literally) and people drank a lot. I've not heard where November's meeting will be. The one meeting I've been to was great fun, and let's hope other meetings continue in this way.

* Welcome news, but not completely unexpected, is ^{the} return of John Bangsund to Melbourne fandom. And what a return. Publication of THE AUSTRALIAN SCIENCE FICTION YEARBOOK and THE AUSTRALIAN SCIENCE FICTION DIRECTORY by the end of the year, organization of Parergon Books (that is the right spelling, John?), promised publication of SCYTHROP 22, forms about that, letters about this. We've heard it all before, but if John has come through the last bout of gafia unscathed, I'm sure we can expect further great performances for some time to come. The ASFY will feature articles by Ursula K LeGuin, George Turner and myself as well as many others, and will cost \$1. Further details from John Bangsund, Flat 1, 8 Bundalohn Court, St Kilda 3183.

* Also welcome news is the kind of publicity this magazine has been receiving. P Schuyler Miller reviews S F COMMENTARY 9 in a recent ANALOG (100,000 readers), and David Gorman dedicated his fanzine S F WAVES to this magazine. Virginia Carew featured the magazine in the prospectus for the latest Secondary Universe Conference. Charlie Brown continues to keep the light glowing in America. Our steadfast friend, Harry Warner Jr, talked about Australian fanzines in the most recent RIVERSIDE QUARTERLY. Thanks to everybody who helps to keep the banner high.

Talking of the mailbox - here's a letter from Our Favourite Author, and it's a letter that raises as many questions as it solves:

* PHILIP K DICK (707 Hacienda Way, San Rafael, California 94903, U S A)

I have wanted for some time to comment on your long article on my work in the February 1970 issue of S F COMMENTARY (9). I have read and reread the article, and it is only now, seven months later, that I am able to respond.

A number of times in my adult life I have become suicidal, and at none of these times have I ever thought anything like, "I should remain alive, because I have something important to offer the world in my art." Frankly, it has never occurred to me that I do anything basically different from what my colleagues do and have done. Therefore I am very humble (at least I claim to be) at this fine, rich, deep impressive article. Thank you very much for it. I got a lot out of it. But it tends to turn my head. It tends to make me think giddy thoughts such as, "Maybe I am saying something important and unique. Maybe what I write matters."

But in all honesty I don't think this for long.

What I write about, I think, is belief, faith, trust... and the lack of all three. "A universe of cynicism and chaos," I once said about my first novel, SOLAR LOTTERY. For me, in each successive novel, the doubt - or rather lack of trust or faith - grows deeper. The split widens, that yawning gape in the earth, into which everything that matters can fall. And, in the novel, but less openly, I explore the possibilities for a rebirth of faith. The yawning gape is the question; new faith is the answer. But faith in what?

The universe disintegrates further and further in each of my novels, but the possibility of faith in one given human being or several - this faith is about certain distinct human beings: Molinari in NOW WAIT FOR LAST YEAR, Runciter in UBIK, Leo Bulero in THE THREE STIGMATA, and so forth. The redeemer exists; he lives; he can be found - usually - in the novel somewhere, at the centre of the stage or at the very edge. In some of the novels he merely lurks. He is implicit. But I believe in him completely. He is the friend who ultimately comes... and in time.

Basically, he is found at the heart of human life itself. He is, in fact, the heart of human life. He is the most alive of all. Where the chattering, bickering, sweating, planning, worrying, scheming centre of life holds sway - well, I have faith that he is there and will show himself, countering the process of entropy, of decay, that more and more undermines the universe itself. Stars are snuffed out; planets die into darkness and cold; but there in the marketplace of some small moon, he is busy formulating a plan for action - action against the black counterforce, the Palmer Eldritch figure in all his horrid manifestations.

In THE MAN IN THE HIGH CASTLE he is Mr Tagomi, a minor Japanese official in Japanese-occupied San Francisco. Mr Tagomi, in a moment of irritation and awareness of suffocation, refuses to sign a form which will transfer a certain Jew from Japanese authority to German authority - one life is saved, a small life and saved by a small life. But the enormous process of decline is pushed back slightly. Enough so that it matters. What Mr Tagomi has done matters. In a sense, there is nothing more important on all Earth than Mr Tagomi's irritable action.

I know only one thing about my novels. In them, again and again, this minor man asserts himself in all his hasty, sweaty strength. In the ruins of Earth's cities he is busily constructing a little factory that turns out cigars or maps or imitation artifacts that say, "Welcome to Miami, the pleasure centre of the world!" In A LINCOLN SIMULACRUM, he operates a little business that produces corny electronic organs - and, later on, human-like robots which ultimately become more of an irritation than a threat. Everything is on a small scale. Collapse is enormous; the positive little figure outlined against the universal rubble is, like Tagomi,

Runcitor, Molinari, gnat-sized in scope, finite in what he can do... and yet in some sense great. I really do not know why. I simply believe in him, and I love him. He will prevail. There is nothing else. At least nothing else that matters. That we should be concerned about. Because if he is there, like a tiny father-figure, everything is all right.

Some reviewers have found "bitterness" in my writing. I am surprised, because my mood is one of trust. Perhaps they are bothered by the fact that what I trust is so very small. They want something vaster. I have news for them: there is nothing vaster. Nothing more, I should say. But, really, how much do we have to have? Isn't Mr Tagomi enough? Isn't what he does enough? I know it counts. I am satisfied. (September 9 1970)

* As I said to Philip Dick when I wrote back, I don't like to give the impression I know more than the author, but.... The feeling I get from the novels is quite different. The mood is one of desperation, not bitterness, the hope in calamity of a Scott in the Antarctic. "Enough is enough" sums up THE ZAPGUN, as I pointed out in SFC 4. But I don't find much hope in the Molinaris or Buleros or even the Tagomis of Dick's books. The main strength of them is that the hero, the real "little guy", can survive the book and catch a glimpse of the processes grinding away around him. Why should Molinari, in NOW WAIT FOR LAST YEAR, survive? Why shouldn't he disappear with everything else, especially as he is one of the silliest of Dick's super-characters? Dick's best books (PALMER ELDRITCH, UBIK, NOW WAIT FOR LAST YEAR) are vivid in that they are vivid glimpses of chaos, with the one hope that somebody retains a niche somewhere to watch the whole catastrophe. Any other view - even Phil's own view - looks sentimental compared with the experiences of the novels themselves. The watcher is hero, rather than the actor.

* But we're now talking about science fiction. Will the local chapter of the Nova Mob now come to order, and introduce:

* FRANZ ROTTENSTEINER (Felsenstrasse 20, A-2762 Ortman, Austria).

I can't agree with the current review of NOVA ((in SFC 14, by Barry Gillam)). The one in the previous issue was more to my taste. An incredible amount of nonsense has been written about NOVA, with the American reviewers in particular again betraying their ignorance about all things literary. I must admit that I found Delany's book pleasant reading, and light entertainment; I enjoyed it much as I enjoy a Charles L Harness novel or a book by Van Vogt, or Burroughs' A PRINCESS OF MARS, for that matter. But if one intended to read the book as a serious piece of fiction, one would have to despair of it after a few pages, for cliché follows cliché, of concepts there are none (but only a smoke-screen of words), the writing is vague, and the characterization is generally ridiculous.

Just an example from Page 19 of the Bantam edition:

Her eyes were the colour of steel. Small breasts rose beneath the laces of her vest, steady in breath. Then steel glittered as she looked about. (She's a strong woman, thought Katin, who could perceive such subtleties.)

Subtleties, Delany wrote. What's so subtle about eyes the colour of steel that glitter like steel? Or about concluding from that that she is a strong

woman? That's one of the hoariest cliches of bad writing and Delany dares to offer something like this as "subtlety". The "interpersonal relationships", it should be noted, are without exception of the same degree of "subtlety": sensational and gross. To quote the F&SF review: incest and assassination, father-son, leader-follower, human-pet.

I'll say nothing of the social and economic problems of the galaxy which are reduced to the level of the personal feud between two equally useless representatives of two galactic families of robber barons. It is possible to achieve a more sophisticated level of discussing a problem in fiction.

The motivation of ^{the} villain is wholly incredible. His bad character seems to stem principally ^{from} the disfigurement of his body: the absence of a functioning hand. But Delany has depicted (or tried to depict, for he obviously has no clear notion what it would mean) a society living in close communion with machines. Human beings are directly plugged into machines. In such a society, the loss of a hand or a leg would be less of a disadvantage than in ours. One of the characters in the novel speculates that "Prince Red" is that bad because an arm less means a "socket" less, which is clearly nonsense, for there is no reason why such a socket couldn't be installed in his shoulder or an artificial arm. (There is another guess that is more reasonable, but it's just a guess, not an explanation). But the principal reason why Delany has his villain walking around with a clumsy tool instead of an efficient bionic or cybernetic tool is that he needed a villain with a spectacular defect for his cosmic melodrama.

It's curious that English language readers of s f should have an admiration for the "poetry" of language. To them emeralds and amethysts seem to be the epitome and essence of poetry. Is an amethyst intrinsically more poetic than say, a bicycle? They are envious of Delany's vision of the world. I submit the other view, that it must be terrible to perceive the world in such a way. Also, I can't say that I care much for Delany's cosmic Blondels or for his character who wants to write a novel in an age where there are no novels, and who'll never write one, because it seems that he doesn't know what a novel is, and is chasing the will o' the wisp.

But I guess this kind of fuzzy language is what passes for "poetry" among the people who admire poetry in a prose writer, praise a writer of poetry for his prose and probably would esteem a philosopher for his knowledge of the stock-market. What I'd like to know is just how many s f fans actually do read poetry? (One thinks of C S Lewis' remark that the readers of fantasy are those people who cannot appreciate poetry - the remark goes something like that).

Let's admit that George Turner is right, and that all s f that comes after Wells (and Capek and Stapledon) is a fall not exactly from paradise, but a fall from a considerable height indeed, and that Delany and Zelazny are thoroughgoing adherents of the thud-and-blunder school. I just happened to read Charles Robert Maturin's gothic novel MELMOTH THE WANDERER a few days ago; what worlds there are between him and Delany! What writing power Maturin had, and how superficial is Delany's handling of his theme. And yet there are people who think Delany the world's best s f writer. If that is true then it only means that s f is still not worthy of serious attention.

((Also re. SFC 14)): There is some truth in what Sam Moskowitz says, although we probably wouldn't agree on what are the important books of s f and fantasy. But still, there is a fanzine in the world that pretty much follows the policy he outlines: my own QUARBER MERKUR. I review only books that

are either significant because of their merit, or which are by authors that are important in the field, even if the book under review is very bad. That's unfair in some respects, for by this method people like Blish or Delany or Zelazny are knocked, although there really are much worse authors in the field; but I can keep myself from reviewing the latest works of Messrs Ted White, Lin Carter, Emil Petaja, Robert Moore Williams or similar masters of s f and fantasy, although by this method the readers are probably deprived of much fun. It's some consolation that even the best s f is still unintentionally funny enough.

So - anybody interested in ^{that} what's going on in the s f world should learn German. My main trouble is/there is a considerable time-lag between the appearance of significant books and review in QM. But still, in many cases I can beat US fanzines, although my publication appears very irregularly and at least four times a year (at 80-90 pages).

But it's a pity that fandom, especially American fandom, devotes so much space to reviewing worthless books by people like Panshin, Anthony and the like, just because they happen to be fans and make a big noise in the fanzines. On the other hand, Robert Plank's THE EMOTIONAL SIGNIFICANCE OF IMAGINARY BEINGS, surely one of the most interesting books on s f ever written, didn't even appear in fannish bibliographies, and to find it reviewed you have to turn to such sources as HARTFORD STUDIES IN LITERATURE (or QM 19). And Alfred Kubin's beautiful fantasy novel THE OTHER SIDE has been reviewed - to my knowledge - only in ARTS IN SOCIETY, in its special issue on speculative writing. (August 1, 1970) *

* S F COMMENTARY does not help at all, what with long articles (and letters) on NOVA; and special articles on the novels of Bob Shaw. Well, speak o' th' devil:

* BOB SHAW (6 Cheltenham Park, Belfast 6, Northern Ireland)

Many thanks for the copy of Australia's premier fanzine... Naturally I read this one with a more than usual amount of interest - seeing three of my books reviewed at one go almost made me feel like a real author!

It would have been very interesting and possibly valuable for me if you had my first published book to hand as well - one called NIGHT WALK, which hit distribution problems. Of the three books reviewed, the one which got the poorest review (a just review, in my opinion) was SHADOW OF HEAVEN. It was conceived and partly written many years ago, which puts it in an earlier time slot than NIGHT WALK - and it would have been interesting for me to see if your reviewing team had correctly put the four in order of development. Your own comment about the 1940s B-Grade movie atmosphere of SHADOW OF HEAVEN was a very discerning one. I think I was heavily influenced by movies when I was thinking up that story, and I still enjoy watching B movies of the '40s on television. The acting was generally pretty hammy but the films themselves had something I call integrity. There was none of this setting up an interesting situation, throwing in a few pots of primary colour, then walking away and leaving the whole thing.

Tod Pauls' review of THE PALACE OF ETERNITY took a load from my mind. Some other reviewers have insisted on identifying the purely physical, and - although potentially immortal - killable egons as plain old-fashioned souls, and the word "metaphysics" has been bandied about to such an extent that I was beginning to wonder if my understanding of the language had deserted me.

But Ted saw them exactly as I did, which was reassuring. In answer to Ted's objections to the ending, could I put the following suggestions to him? This isn't a defence of the book's ending because if a reader finds it unsatisfactory then I have failed, even if his objections can be answered, but as he took such a keen and kindly interest in it I would like to discuss it with him. The big point to remember is that in this war which has gone on for 65 years the aliens have had only a handful of their numbers suffer true death, i.e. the destruction of their egons. The war has been one continuous victory for them simply because humanity did not know that its ultimate weapon was the butterfly ship. Millions of humans were suffering self-inflicted true death, but no aliens - and to have the war enter a phase in which millions of aliens would experience true death was something the aliens just would not contemplate. Far easier and safer for them to pull out into another sector of the galaxy. This, too, is why they wouldn't retaliate by building their own butterfly ships and destroying human egons with them - humanity had been doing that all along. To a Pythysccan a human would have appeared a dreadful being who not only spread true death among others but heedlessly inflicted it upon himself. We would have been far less comprehensible to them than a Japanese suicide pilot was to us. Too late to think of it now, but a really interesting exercise would have been to write a chapter or two from a viewpoint inside a Pythysccan mind.

(August 18, 1970) *

* And that settles that. Actually I feel both smug and hypocritical when I place Bob's letter directly after Franz's (quite apart from the fact that it looks good on the Contents Page). The juxtaposition makes my own attitude towards reviewing look eccentric, at best - have a look at my review columns anytime. I do have general rules, but even these yield odd results. I like to print reviews from good reviewers (David's and Franz's, e.g.) and any reviews I've written myself. But after that, I concentrate on books that have been sent me by long-suffering publishers. I'm still reading books Victor Gollancz sent me a year ago, for instance, although a hardcover publisher can take advantage of such a long-term view. If there is any space left after that, then I try to review more unusual books, or more "important" books. Which brings us back to Bob Shaw. As I said some issues ago, I don't actually like any of the Shaw novels I've read. But he's a force to contend with because he's an author that more people are likely to read, than, say, Italo Calvino. Like George Turner, I'm inclined to think that time will dispose of the less "important" books, and meanwhile I'll follow the policy just outlined. The best way publishers can have their books reviewed is to send no copies. Otherwise, I'll review THE NEW SF and TIME AND THE HUNTER and anything else that's sitting on the shelf. Meanwhile, I must take up German sometime so I can read QUARBER MERKUR.

* While, we are talking about reading matter, important and not so important, I reprint the Hugo Awards, which you should have read already in practically every other fanzine:

BEST NOVEL: THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS, by Ursula K LeGuin (Acc; Walker). Now both George Turner and Stanislaw Lem have praised it, I must read it sometime. My choice (BUG JACK BARRON) came last.

BEST NOVELLA: SHIP OF SHADOWS, by Fritz Leiber (F&SF). No comment. Jerry Lapidus wrote to say that third-prize winner, WE ALL DIE NAKED (Blish) is quite good, but the volume that features it, THREE FOR TOMORROW, has not arrived in Ararat yet.

BEST SHORT STORY: TIME CONSIDERED AS A HELIX OF SEMI-PRECIOUS STONES, by Samuel R Delany (NEW WORLDS; Acc). Not bad, but... best for the year?

(NOW PLEASE TURN TO PAGE 47)

CRITICANTO

ROTTENSTEINER ON HERBERT
GILLESPIE ON KNIGHT
GILLESPIE ON MOORCOCK
BOUTLAND ON NOLAN
GRIGG ON ANDERSON
ANDERSON ON ROSS
PENMAN ON KNIGHT
GILLESPIE ON STABLEFORD

DUNE MESSIAH

by FRANK HERBERT

GALAXY magazine July-Nov 1969
174 pages

Berkley N1847 :: 95 c

Reviewed by Franz Rottensteiner

Mr Herbert's latest contribution to unimaginative literature is a typical product of the commercialism of the field. DUNE was a success and so it became inevitable that the reader should become plagued with infinitely worse sequels; but perhaps it is unreasonable to ask that s f authors should write only when they have something to say, for then the field would disappear and only a handful of

stories remain.

This collection of words then tells us in so many words how twins were born to the emperor Paul Atrides of Dune, and what complications, intrigues and plots preceded the happy event. Now, I've always been most interested in the fates of the royal houses, and knew no end of rejoicing when I learned, some years ago, that an heir had been born at last to the royal head of Persia. For what a lot of trouble might have arisen if that most honourable man had remained childless - the commies might have taken over!

And now the galaxy is saved once again, now that the line of the ruler is ensured. True, there are a few complications even after the birth, for the wicked plotters don't give up their infamous plans, so that the reader isn't even spared the frightful spectacle of seeing the children being threatened by a "Tleilaxu face-dancer" with a knife - in the royal chamber, and in order to blackmail the emperor! What most competent security organizations such galactic empires have in order to make possible the most melodramatic turns of plot!

What the purpose of the plot or the novel as a whole can be, I failed to understand; it seems intended to create confusion and spectacle. The behaviour of the emperor himself is most strange. Although he has the gift of visions of the future, and soon recognizes his enemies for what they are, he allows them to continue in their nefarious actions. Although he knows the girl Lichna is actually

one of his enemies in disguise, he allows himself to be lured to a place where his eyes can be burnt out with a "stone burner", so that at the end he can perish in the desert, following an old Fremen custom. It is repeatedly said that all this was necessary because he saw it in his prescience, and the future must come as seen or ill luck would strike the empire. But since the reader cannot share his vision, which consists of chains of badly chosen words on misused paper, any other course would have seemed more sensible. Paul Atreides would conveniently have killed all his enemies in the middle of the novel, thereby adding some more to the 61 billions whose deaths he has caused, and which are mentioned quite in passing. And nothing would have been worse; indeed, the reader would have profited greatly, having to wade through many fewer words. And if the plotters had administered poison to Paul's mistress Chani instead of stupidly playing around with a contraceptive drug, it would have been possible to abort the novel still earlier.

It is impossible to find one normal human being in the book - at least, not among the more important dramatis personae. They all seem to have escaped from a circus or a freak-show. They are not characters, but monstrosities equipped with exotic qualities from the arsenal of miracles s f has to offer: fulfilling a need not for wonder, but for miracles. The emperor has a full knowledge of the future; his sister is a girl who already knew in the womb all her mother had known (but remarkably nevertheless is a sexless being); there is a ghola, a human golem resurrected from the dead (in a society where golems are accepted more or less casually, artificial insemination in human beings is regarded with horror, especially by the Bene Gesserit, an "order devoted to mental arts and the control of genetic lines"); a fish-human in a tank, "face dancers" and an assorted variety of other exotisms. If you subtract the freakish quality from the e "characters", you couldn't find them, even under a microscope. Such are the tricks by which even the bad authors manage to invest their cardboard wares with some superficial and sensational interest. These people are all very dull, saying dull and incredible things, on politics and religion most of the time, saying which are offered to others and accepted by them in terms of depth and subtlety. "You are a deep one," says one bloke in answer to the remark that "all men are interlopers". I'm only glad that wash-basins are a little deeper, or we would all have to go around unwashed. There's also a liberal use of exotic words such as "Tleilaxu" or "Bene Gesserit way", which aren't supported by exotic concepts.

When an author tries to deal with real problems, we often hear the criticism that he has just taken the problems of the present and transposed them into a future setting. There is some truth in the remark, although many problems of the future are already problems of the present and will arise out of them. But I'm a little surprised that an analogous criticism is rarely ever levelled at books such as DUNE. For what do they tell us about a future? Nothing. Nothing that is treated in them is a real problem of the future. There are only intrigues, plots and assassination plans that we know from any number of historical cloak-and-dagger novels, dressed up in some genetic and psionic cliches from the stock of the s f trade, and none of which has any relation with either the future or the present. They are only taken from that dim reservoir of crank literature and popular superstition that is the daily diet of the uneducated. For instance, the excessive stress on heredity carried more conviction in romantic novels.

The reason for all this seems to be clear: s f authors are victims of their own propaganda of change. The return to the institutions of the past doesn't necessarily mean that s f authors are true reactionaries or lovers of the past, although s f also has its share of genuine ones, such as Poul Anderson. In most cases, however, they simply feel obliged to remain true to their credo and offer "change". Lacking true originality, unable to understand the complex world, they cannot comment upon real problems or show likely developments of the future. So they eagerly return to the patterns of the past which are not novel, but at

least different enough from the present and its political institutions. Herbert probably doesn't dislike democracy: he is just incompetent to think out real alternatives, preferring to make use of cliches.

When better written than DUNE MESSIAH - a particularly dull example of this sort of pseudo-historical s f of escape and intellectual barrenness - it can be fun; but it is nothing that one can take seriously as fiction.

ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF SCIENCE FICTION

Edited by DAMON KNIGHT

Victor Gollancz :: 1969

368 pages :: 30/-

First US publication 1968

Reviewed by Bruce R Gillespie

This is a most peculiar volume. Let me say what it does not do. It does not present stories evenly spread throughout the last one hundred years. Of the 20 stories here, ten come from one decade: the 1950s. Another five come from the 1960s - and that leaves only five spread throughout the other 80 years between 1870 and 1970. No story predates 1905 (Rudyard Kipling's WITH THE

NIGHT MAIL) and only one story (a poor Fritz Leiber effort, SANITY) represents that decade that many would consider most important to the field - the 1940s. Even if you accept the premise that there was any "science fiction" before 1926, you must suspect the whole volume as a record of the past century.

The volume lists its stories under subtitles as maudlin as "Aliens, on Earth and Elsewhere" and "Marvellous Inventions". Each subtitle includes three or four stories. Each one hides the eccentric criteria that must have been used when choosing these stories - for only one story (Dickson's BLACK CHARLIE) deals with outer space or planets other than Earth. In this way, Knight has left out a huge variety of science fiction, and made his volume further suspect as a representative of the whole field.

Because of this, the volume has no chance of recording the best stories by the authors represented, or the best authors around. Most of the best stories of, say, Paul Anderson, have their stages in space or on other planets. Cordwainer Smith is not here - Old North Australia was his favourite world. You could probably say the same of most of the authors in this book. In his introduction, Damon Knight lists his criterion for selection as "(Stories) that have given me enduring pleasure." This observation makes me no less puzzled.

More importantly, I share little of Damon Knight's pleasure, even as he would share little of mine, if I put together a similar volume. I've said what is not in this volume. But if you gather together the other coins in the bundle, you will see that they form a fairly consistent pattern. Damon Knight obviously thinks that the most important science fiction has come from the fifties and sixties, that the best stories concern the future of our Earth, and that the famous authors' best stories are not the ones that appear in all the other anthologies.

But what else makes up Damon Knight's view of our field? Take one of the few stories that made much impression upon me:

BLACK CHARLIE, by Gordon R Dickson, tells of an art expert (whose jargon immediately shows that he knows nothing about art) who travels to Elman's World at the request of a friend. He inspects some pieces of statuary that "bore a somewhat disconcerting resemblance to the kind of stones people pick up for paper-weights". The art buyer dismisses the objects, but is persuaded to meet the

artist: Black Charlie, a local inhabitant who looked "like a large otter, with flat, muscular, grasping pads on the ends of its four limbs, instead of feet". The story-teller still cannot accept the alien's idea of "art", but shows him the kind of thing that he might buy if the aliens chose to produce it.

Some time later he returns to Elman's Planet, only to find Balck Charlie near to death, murdered by his fellows. His crime?

And then, the rest of the mud came free in my hands. I saw what it was, and I could have cried and laughed at the same time. For, of all the shapes he could have chosen to work in stone, he had picked the one that no critic would have selected as the choice of an artist of his race.... With painful clumsiness, he had fashioned an image from the soft and grainy rock: a statue of a standing man.

And I knew what man it was.

This is a poignant story centred around one idea. Or perhaps not so simple: the story-teller did not realize that Black Charlie might be executed for making an image of a man:

I glared at them - and then the rage inside me went out like a blown candle. For there was nothing there to hate. They had not hated Charlie. They had merely feared him - and their only crime was ignorance.

The travelling art buyer only describes his own ignorance: his unwillingness to examine the foreign culture in the first place, and his offhand demand that Black Charlie turn out Terrestrial art.

Like BLACK CHARLIE, nearly every other story in this book turns on a single simple point. There are no rambling adventure stories; there are no compressed word poems of the English school except Ballard's VOICES OF TIME. Instead there is the (to me) quite predictable denouement of Clarke's NINE BILLION NAMES OF GOD, the endless blackboard lectures about elementary mathematics featured in A SUBWAY NAMED MOBIUS (A J Deutsch), and the predictable man-beats-alien theme that wears through the otherwise interesting fabric of THE SHAPES (J-H Rosny aine). Knight presumes that interesting ideas may be placed in neat little puzzle boxes and when you've solved the little puzzle, you have necessarily experienced a satisfactory piece of fiction. VOICES OF TIME is the one exception, but its indirectness only emphasizes the emotional flatness of the rest of the volume.

But Knight's book explores some consistent themes, and some of these "simple stories" are very well done. Paul Anderson's THE MAN WHO CAME EARLY presents ideas that emerge in most of the other stories, for instance.

Anderson's story tells of an American army engineer stationed on Iceland at the start of an atomic war who (for want of a better means) is thrown back a thousand years, presumably by the first bomb. However, the story is not told through his eyes, but he is observed by the chief of the puzzled Icelanders who pick him up. Sergeant Gerald Robbins conveniently knows ancient Icelandic: he speaks the right words, but the message does not cross the thousand-year gap, even when Robbins tries to fit into this society.

But the old chief has trouble fitting him in, or even taking him seriously:

Afterward Helgi questioned him about the gun, and he said it could kill a man at bowshot distance but had no witchcraft in it, only use of some tricks we did not know. Having heard of the Greek fire, I believed him. A gun could be useful in a fight, as indeed I was to learn, but it did not seem very practical - iron costing what it does, and months of forging needed for each one.

Anderson looks amusedly at that aspect of twentieth century civilization we most admire in it - its technology. The systems have little relevance in the world of this story, but Robbins must try to live without them. He cannot even shoe a horse! Even worse, he makes a pass at the clan chieftain's daughter, runs foul of the daughter's suitor, and invokes everybody's wrath in no time at all.

But it's not just a wry comedy. The clan chieftain does his best to make allowances, but it is the visitor who fails to see himself as others see him:

Ketill sat straight. The flames splashed his face with wild, running red. A rawness was in his tone. "Yes, we've found what this fellow can do. Sit about and make pretty songs for the girls."

...Gerald's face darkened and his voice grew thick. "That was no way to talk. Take it back."

Ketill rose. "No," he said. "I'll ask no pardon of an idler living off honest yeomen."

He was raging, but had kept sense enough to shift the insult from my family to Gerald alone. Otherwise he and his father would have had the four of us to deal with...

In Robbins' mind, this is simply a suitor's quarrel, to be decided in typical barroom manner. In the chieftain's mind, it is a quarrel between families, or could have been if Robbins had thought about the forces that held him in this society. The "point" of the story is simple, but not immediately visible, and Anderson admirably animates the whole of the story with his ideas. Gone are the lectures we have become accustomed to in Anderson's recent stories. Here is a humanity which has also been absent from Anderson's recent stories. THE MAN WHO CAME EARLY was first published in 1956.

Again and again, the same type of theme emerges in these stories, as we see the effect of rapid changes in technological or social circumstances upon human beings. Many would say that this is the only theme proper to science fiction. Damon Knight is at least consistent.

But he is almost too consistent. The themes recur, and even the characters recur. The petit bourgeois alien of Algis Budrys' NOBODY BOTHERS GUS

...looked at the straggled clumps and windrowed hay that were all that remained of the shrubbery and lawn. His broad, homely face bunched itself into a quiet smile along its well-worn seams. His hands itched for the feel of a spade.

A lawn-mower salesman couldn't think of a more congenial, dull figure. This

little-man-with-dirt-on-his-hands becomes the failed little creep that Theodore Sturgeon makes the hero of THE OTHER CELIA:

Slim was constitutionally incapable of borrowing your bathroom without looking into your medicine chest.... Slim liked you better if, while talking to you, he knew how many jackets hung in your closet, how old that unpaid phone bill was, and just where you'd hidden those photographs. On the other hand, Slim didn't insist on knowing bad or even embarrassing things about you. He just wanted to know things about you, period.

What a sweet, considerate lad! Where there are recognizable characters in these stories, their peculiarities are smothered under the assumptions that (1) All civilized people are like midwestern American businessmen, and (2) these characteristics form the ideal person to make great discoveries. Even Anderson's Icelandic farmer sounds like a gruff Wyoming rancher.

In this volume, the reader finds it easy to understand the themes and identify with the characters. He will find little to astonish him, and little to make him think. 100 YEARS OF SCIENCE FICTION is an eccentric, large and innocuous collection of Damon Knight's favourite stories. You are warned; buy it if you must.

THE BLACK CORRIDOR

by MICHAEL MOORCOCK

Acc S F Special 06530 :: 1969
187 pages ::: 75c

Reviewed by Bruce R Gillespie

THE BLACK CORRIDOR is a book written in short sentences. It starts with:

Space is infinite.

It is dark.

Space is neutral...

Space does not threaten.

Space does not comfort.

Space is the absence of time and matter.

which is a refreshingly un sentimental way to start any book. Space is not (for instance) the playground of gum-chewing space cowboys. It is not the territory of Lovecraft's nameless monsters. It holds no dangers; it holds all dangers. It depends on whether you are out there or not.

Ryan is out there, in the spaceship Hope Dempsey, heading for the planet Munich 15040. Earth has probably died of nuclear war behind him; his destination is far distant and not yet seen. Ryan shares the ship with hibernation cubicles that include thirteen of Ryan's family and close friends.

The book describes one man alone on a spaceship and what he thinks about. He does not collide with showers of meteors, he does not discover Dreadful Secrets, and he does not meet even one alien. He just exists and thinks.

Ryan thinks back over his past life:

"Well," he said. "Let's inspect the family mansion."

Hand in hand they wandered through the apartment, over the pale gold carpets, past the simulated oak furniture of the living room to stare out through the long window at the apartment blocks opposite.

His is a world of small comforts, of "pale gold carpets" and "simulated oak furniture". They pass the "shining tub in which grew a diminutive orange tree" and Mrs Ryan murmurs: "Mother's kept it all watered." Domestic bliss and the couple's first awkward attempts at love-making are interrupted by the neighbour's Chinese jazz records:

"Damn them!" Mr Ryan raised his fists impotently. "Good God! Don't tell me that's the kind of neighbours we've got"... Slowly he took off his shoes. "I'll show them." He went to the wall and banged on it vigorously, stood back, shoe in hand, and waited.

The reader sympathizes with the Ryans. After all, it could be ourselves doing exactly the same thing. New homes in this near future will be no fun:

"I've always been a private person," she cried. "It's all right for you - you weren't brought up like me. People in our neighbourhood never intruded. They didn't come poking their faces through windows. Why did you bring me here? Why?"

"Darling, I find it all just as distasteful as you do," Ryan told her. "Honestly. We'll just have to sort it out step by step. Show people that we like to keep to ourselves. Be calm."

Mrs Ryan could be ourselves: Mr Ryan thinks he can deal with the situation. But if you are Mr and Mrs Ryan you don't speak to the neighbours and you don't welcome window cleaners. If you are Mrs Ryan you take sleeping pills as early as decently possible in the morning and sleep through the day.

Ryan considers the purpose of the mission. He writes carefully in his diary every "day":

"Today is Alex's tenth birthday - another birthday he will miss. This is very saddening. However it is the kind of sacrifice we must make for ourselves and for others in our attempt to make a better life..."

But when Ryan writes in his diary he puzzles us. He writes grand phrases about the "kind of sacrifice we must make for ourselves" and the "endurance and discipline" that guides his life. Why must he take "firm steps" to walk from one section of an empty spaceship to another? Why doesn't he put himself in one of the hibernation capsules so that he won't be lonely? If he finds himself so alone, why doesn't he wake up the rest of the crew and have a bit of fun on the way to Munich 15040? After all, Ryan expects to see their new home, but he will have aged more than the others.

Moorcock soon shows us that there is little in Ryan that is what it seems. Ryan thinks in short positive sentences, and ceaselessly debates with himself, with his

diary, and occasionally with the ship's computer. But Ryan table-thumps to himself as if he were interjecting at a permanent public meeting. He knows he is right!

But who was talking about "right" or "wrong"? Ryan does. He writes: "We will start a new colony on cleaner, more decent, more rational lines". He proudly recollects "what I - what we as a group - have done to save ourselves." He sees himself "a strongly built man of forty, standing with his back to the vast plate glass window of his large, thickly carpeted office. His heavy, healthy face was pugnacious, his back was broad, his thick, stubby-fingered hands were clasped behind his back." A giant of a man - but he does stand on mental tiptoes much of the time. Self-confident, he is always defensive. Why?

Not only does Ryan remember the past, but his mind wades in vivid dreams and near hallucinations that drown his mind during the long weeks of waiting. His mind cannot maintain the role it has adopted, and he becomes not a ship's captain, but the toy-maker he was before he left Earth:

At the end of each machine is a large drum into which spill the parts used in the making of Ryan Toys... The piles fall and tumble as Ryan kicks them. The Realgirls link hands and dance around him, tossing their blonde curls. The Ryan battlewagons run about the floor, shooting their miniature missiles.

Ryan looks fondly at the action, music and chatter of his toys. The whole of the tiled floor is being gradually covered with toys in motion. All these things are Ryan's - made and sold by Ryan.

He animates his toys in his mind, enjoys their confusion and identifies the force of his ego as the animating spirit. And what are these toys that Ryan thinks he can "kick" at will? - surely they are representatives of the world he left behind. Now in the spaceship the "Realgirls" and "battlewagons" of his past life have disappeared; now nothing moves in the spaceship except himself. In his fantasy the world "falls and tumbles", "dances", "tosses" and "shouts". Now in silence, the violence of a mind exposes itself.

Meanwhile, his recollections of life on Earth pass through his mind. This life moves towards a single sombre solution. England is taken over by a paranoid group called "the Patriots":

"It's them, then. The Patriots." Mrs Ryan looked at the others. Again no one replied.

The chanting was close under the windows now.

The lights went out. The room was left in complete darkness.

There was the sound of running and sharp cries. Then a pitiful high screaming like the sound of an animal being killed...

The blind shot up. The window covering the whole of one wall was open to the night...

The crowd had caught a young man of twenty, one of the people who lived in

the block opposite. They had tied him to an old wooden door, propped the door against a great steel power supply post, drenched the door and young man with petrol and set light to him.

..."What did you want the blind open for?" James Henry demanded. "Eh?... You had no right to expose us to that - particularly the women," said James Henry.

Uncle Sidney looked up and there were a few tears in his eyes. His voice was strained. "It happened, didn't it?"

"What's that got to do with it? We don't want to get involved."

So this is not just another disaster story, although Moorcock describes the increasing political anarchy very succinctly. The horrifying element in the tableau is not the burning boy, but the watchers in the building above, who would have ignored the accident but for an impulsive gesture by one of the characters. The world holds no more buffers between "ordinary people" and their fates, but Ryan and his family try desperately to build more buffers, finally adopting the spaceship itself. Ryan's world is one in which all the old clichés ("We don't want to get involved") have lost their effectiveness. The Ryans don't realise it.

Yet Moorcock writes so precisely that he makes it clear that he is involved. He looks through Ryan's eyes, sees what Ryan sees, and shows the inadequacy of the mind behind those eyes. "Ryan tried to smooth things over". Ryan constructs the escape route.

But the escape route always exposes more of the chaos of Ryan's mind. On the spaceship Ryan, injected with codicil, convinced of his safety and sanity, feels the layers of his complacency picked from his mind:

Ryan activates the screen and looks out at space. The holographic illusion is complete. Space and the distant suns, the tiny points of light so far away.

Ryan's brows contract. He notices trails in the blackness. They appear to be wisps of vapour and yet they are plainly not escaping from the ship. It is something like smoke from an open fire, trailing in the dark... He is alarmed. He casts his mind over the data he has accumulated, hoping to think of something that will account for the vapour.

Meanwhile the wisps continue to rise. There are more and more of them now. They swirl together, break apart and reform...

Out there in space are the whirling figures of his nightmare, the figures of the insane dancers in the darkened ballroom...

The dark circles which are their eyes stare blindly at each other. Their faces are rigid below the dark glasses. They circle through the void toward Ryan and the music becomes louder, more solemn, more threatening.

"Daddy! Daddy!"

Alexander is crying...

They are very close now. The music slows. They are just a few paces from

the ship. They turn to face Ryan with their blinded eyes. Slowly they take a step. One step... Two steps.... Three steps toward Ryan.

They are clustered, some thirty of them, a foot from Ryan, standing just outside the window. And then Ryan realizes with greater terror that it has been an illusion. The dancers are not outside. What he was seeing was a reflection in the window. The dancers are actually behind him. They have been in the ship all the time. He dares not turn. He stares instead into the mirror.

This passage must surely be one of the best pieces of horror fiction ever devised. The reader becomes so beguiled by Ryan's self-image that he is shaken as much as Ryan by the slow revelation that the twelve people from the hibernation cubicles seem to have risen. Space is comfortable for him - "the tiny points of light so far away". At first he thought the vapour trails might have been alien spaceships, but even these would not have been as horrifying as the revealed images. The darkened figures threaten him, but we realize that the voice of his son threatens him just as much. Even at that stage he thought they were outside the ship - until he is completely terrified by the figures' presence in the cabin. And again, the most terrifying figures are those of his own family.

The passage completes a pattern that binds together all the strands of Ryan's revealed mind and all the strands of Moorcock's commentary. Ryan is terrified by all close contact with human beings, and most terrified of information that tells him the truth about himself. He sees only the blank eyes, "feels their malice" and can only fend off their plea "Let us in. Let us in." Ryan calls himself a pragmatist. We admire his refusal to become involved in the mass paranoia of the politics of England; we admire his strength of mind in a chaotic situation. But he hijacks a jet as the first A-bombs fall... and kills all the crew when they land. It was necessary. He kills his mistress because she knew about his scheme. Ryan does not "fight" the forces of chaos; he is their most obvious representative. Only in the silence of the spaceship do the forces of his spirit show themselves so that he recognizes them. Moorcock shows Ryan as both the world's greatest single failure ("liberal with a small 'l'") and representative of the whole world's failure.

Having been forced to pick out the strands of the novel in this way, the reader must recognize THE BLACK CORRIDOR as almost wholly metaphorical, rather than psychological. Perhaps all novels are metaphorical, but in most of them the images point nowhere but back to themselves. THE BLACK CORRIDOR's images resound against most of the events we see in today's world.

There are problems in the novel, and I only want to list them. They don't seriously disrupt the pattern that I have outlined. Ryan is a complex figure, but he does not represent all the elements of the humanity that controls Earth today. After all, it is just as expedient for politicians to prevent the occurrence of the events described in this book, as it is for a Ryan to escape by spaceship. He represents many of the self-delusionary elements of the world's psyche, that may yet dig Earth's grave and drop us in. Ryan is a moral Aunt Sally, but we cannot knock him over with impunity. We may knock ourselves over.

Ryan as a dramatic figure is not worth knocking down. Even at the end of the novel, he can pick up the armour of illusion and put it back on. He hasn't enough imagination to realize, like Macbeth, the full significance of his crimes. The drama is generated by the conflict between Moorcock's sarcasm and Ryan's self-confidence. If we are like Ryan, then we won't see the point of the novel, and if we see the point of the novel we are not like Ryan. Perhaps.

And there are those crazy computer printouts scattered around the novel, random symbols that form the word "KILL" over and over again. And there is the computer's instruction to Ryan to take lcc codicil daily for 14 days in order to cure his personality breakdown. Only after this instruction do the complete hallucinations commence. I have more than a suspicion that the whole novel consists of the computer's view of Ryan - an attempted psychological cure, so to speak. It flashes at him the urgent message: "WHAT IS THE EXACT NATURE OF THE CATASTROPHE?" making it plain that Ryan has no idea that the question is important, let alone soluble. Moorcock's future Earth builds the "character" of Ryan, and people like Ryan wreck the Earth, yet the vision still does not extend far enough beyond Ryan. Rather, it does, but at the end of the novel there remains only a dead Earth and a spiritually dead captain taking twelve hibernating people to an unknown planet.

Every reader must judge Ryan and his world for themselves. Perhaps you might risk seeing some of your own reflection, perhaps not. If you don't, no matter. It's a most enjoyable catastrophe.

A WILDERNESS OF STARS

Edited by WILLIAM F NOLAN

Victor Gollancz :: 1970

276 pages :: 32/-

Reviewed by David W Boutland

William Nolan is the co-author of that exciting chase-novel LOGAN'S RUN, and this 1970 Gollancz collection edited by Nolan is blurbed as "10 stories of Man in conflict with the Universe of Tomorrow". Big words - but it contains some big stories to back them up.

The intelligent introduction by Shelly Lowenkopf leads us to a 20,000 word short novel by Walter M Miller Jr, THE LINEMAN, a piece of hard-bitten writing from the author of A CANTICLE FOR LEIBOWITZ - and the Nolan anthology ends with a Miller again, with DEATH OF A SPACEMAN, a short story originally printed in a 1954 AMAZING.

Since 1959 Walter Miller has written no new science fiction and I read both stories with interest. They show a different Miller from the one we see in CANTICLE - and we glimpse the sadness of a writer who having produced an almost perfect novel, must now suffer whenever comparisons are made. Without CANTICLE, both of these old stories would impress; having read CANTICLE, they disappoint.

Sandwiched between the Miller stories we have Bradbury, Clarke, Ray Russell, Shockley, Charles E Fritch, Poul Anderson, William F Nolan himself, and Chad Oliver. The Bradbury, I, MARS, is an ancient 1949 Bradbury sketch done with lonely winds and endless sands on the face of a timeless world - Mars - where one man has been waiting his whole adult life for a rescue ship to arrive from Earth. His telephone rings, and he finds himself talking to himself, the himself of forty years ago. The uneasy breezes of isolation and death breathe in through your pores as you read. Someday when we land on Mars, it will be to find the spirit of Bradbury, copper skinned and golden-eyed, in rightful possession.

With fifty million square feet of sun-sail flying, Clarke's SUNJAMMER takes us into Earth orbit with the yachtsmen of the future. SUNJAMMER first appeared in BOYS LIFE, and in fact the copyright for 1964 is credited to the Boy Scouts of America. No doubt they enjoyed it, but I'm puzzled as to why it should appear in this collection. The sense of futility as the playboy yachts of tomorrow sail out under the pressure of the sun's energy in a race to the moon steals away the wind

of adventure. This tiny chip off Clarke's staggering imagination is poor value for his adult readers.

Nolan's own contribution to the anthology is a nicely nasty little story about a couple who go to another world to live happily ever after. But again, this is a story which disappoints because it doesn't match the loudness of the cover blurbs or Lowenkopf's introduction.

THE BETTER MAN by Ray Russell is the other disappointment. A PLAYBOY story, it's a twist of a twist about a human who turns out to be an android. Still, he does it neatly and with precision, as the bunny girl said after a night with the robot waiter... And Robert Sheckley does it neatly, too, in his story CARRIER, a long story about a future based on psi abilities, when a man who can't fly is considered to be a cripple. CARRIER is fun, it's exciting adventure and as tricky and twisty as Sheckley's skill can make it. Don't be surprised if by the end of the story you try to close the book with a psi command.

Originally printed in the second issue of GAMMA, in 1963, THE CASTAWAY by Charles E Fritch is a disturbing story about Man's yearning for the stars. Its main character, Jordan, has crashed his ship on a world of eternal day, a planet orbiting twin suns, an earthly paradise where a man doesn't even need to eat to stay alive. But Jordan is a man tormented by Space: "Its cool reaches out there just beyond the sun, out in the yellowness that becomes black as the blackest velvet, with the stars like blazing diamonds." The stars are an obsession with Jordan, and in eternal sunshine he is shut off from them. What happens when a man's starward wish can never be fulfilled?

In GHETTO, the Poul Anderson story in this collection, we find a race who have gone out to the stars, whose lives stretch into the future because of time-dilation on the long interstellar trading journeys near the speed of light. The Kith have their own city to return to, a place which remains unchanged while other cities of Earth rise and fall outside its walls as the centuries and ages leap by between flights to the other worlds. The Kith become separated from humanity, envied and hated. GHETTO is a love story, a story which holds a good deal of Anderson's own "starward wish".

A theme touched on by Anderson in his magnificent story THE INHERITORS - the conscience of a man in authority faced with the problem of permitting or preventing colonisation of a planet already inhabited by intelligent but primitive beings - is the subject of Chad Oliver's NORTH WIND. Oliver is an anthropologist and he handles his subject and his characters well. His outwardly cynical Norman Navor is the man whose job it is to grab land from the primitives for occupation by Earth colonists. But he has his own way of keeping his conscience clean. In his introduction, Shelly Lowenkopf says: "This collection of stories... brings us headlong into our own destiny while we still have something to do about it." What will happen when we go out to those other worlds with their primitive cultures? On Arcturus III, Mavor finds that the people have a saying:

"They say that in the spring the winds blow from the south, and the trees and flowers and people will live forever. But when autumn comes the north wind blows; the leaves turn brown and fall, and the people know that they too must die."

A collection of the good, and the indifferent, A WILDERNESS OF STARS just once or twice in its 276 pages achieves what its rather extravagant blurbs claim for it.

And that makes it worthwhile, in my book.

BEYOND THE BEYOND

by POUL ANDERSON

Victor Gollancz :: 1970

224 pages :: 30/-

Original US publication 1969

Reviewed by David Grigg

"Poul Anderson never had a dull idea, never wrote a dull story" runs the blurb for this volume of five novellas. But look at the contents of the book itself. Of the five stories, all but two are near unreadable, badly written and lacking originality. The other two are merely passable, though scarcely worthy of note.

MEMORY is a story about a Tarzan-like hero of a civilisation which has been spawned from a lost colony of Earth. It turns out that he was planted by a spacefaring group of Empire rebuilders, and is recalled just as he is about to cement a relationship with the daughter of one of the chieftains of a local tribe. An ancient process had been used to remove from his memory his previous space-navy life. This earlier memory is now reinstated, but the memory of his life among the "barbarians" removed. The story concerns the question of identity, and the relationship between the hero and the girl he had known on the planet. There is little logical basis for the ending, but it still doesn't surprise you. One of the two readable stories.

BRAKE must rank on any list of the worst s f stories ever written. It is certainly the worst I have read from Anderson. The first half of the story tells of a totally confusing battle on board a spacecraft en route to Ganymede. The captain finds one of his crew held at gunpoint by one of the passengers, and from then on, everyone shoots guns (!) at everybody else everywhere, for no discernable reason. After rereading the story carefully, I found that this fight is the result of a clash between two opposing religious/philosophical groups of Earth. A typical piece of the story? An astronaut, Gentry, on the scene:

A bullet smashed down the corridor, ricocheted, and whined around his ears. Gentry came into view, with the drop on him.

"Oh, oh," said Banning, "School's out." He scooped up Cleonie and scampered back into the companionway.

The whole story takes on the air of a space-western, and I had to laugh at some of the dialogue of these people. Add to that a character who quotes Shakespeare at frequent intervals during normal conversation. The story seems to have been written solely so that Anderson can introduce a gimmicky solution to the problem of stopping an out-of-control ship, and it's more gimmick than solution.

THE SENSITIVE MAN is about an unoriginal superman in an unoriginal environment involved in a cops-and-robbers plot and a bid to save America from the wrong political party. (Where was he in '68?) This is Dick Tracy territory, although more interesting than the previous story.

THE MOONRAKERS concerns a sort of convoluted political intrigue involving the inhabitants of Mars and the pirates of the Asteroid Belt. As in BRAKE, the story takes far too long to meander to a conclusion, and so fails as an adventure story. Anderson writes fast-moving stories best, but here speed has disappeared.

STARFOG is the best story in the book. Somewhat like MEMORY, it describes a recontact between the worlds of a shattered Empire. The problem is well-defined: a group of people from a very dense star-cluster contact outside civilisations, but cannot find their home star again because of the cluster's density. The

situation is fascinating, the characters this time convincing, and the ending resolves into an unexpected twist in the relationship between the main character and one of the women from the star-cluster.

This collection does not flatter Poul Anderson: I get the impression that even the Permanent Wave has left him beached.

THE GOD KILLERS

by JAMES ROSS

Sidgwick & Jackson :: 1970

182 pages :: \$A 3.25

Reviewed by Paul Anderson

This novel ascribes its copyright to "A C Halliwell and H Darrington" so I suppose they are the co-authors of the book. As a first novel from two new authors, THE GOD KILLERS is a creditable performance. Judged by any other standards, it is not an outstanding effort.

The book's introduction is marred by a large number of mini-lectures providing a large amount of pseudo-scientific background information. Some of it is irrelevant to the main story. The writers try to make us feel the urgency of the situation in which Denain Parton finds himself when he discovers the planetoid Para XI. The experienced reader of science fiction will immediately recognize all the elements of this terrifying situation, and therefore skip it all together.

The second chapter introduces the main character of the book, but not for another five chapters do we learn his name.

The main characters develop little during the novel's length, mainly because the authors fail to explain the motivations that animate the clashes between the representatives of Earth and Ocheron. The hero, Chase M'Avoy is a remarkably placid gentleman, who never lets anything ruffle him. After he has been selected to replace his murdered father in the Galactic Council, he is introduced:

(He) suffered a fleeting moment of sorrow as his keen eyes rested on the medallion. Fists clenched at his side as he mentally repeated his vow to his dead father.

However the hero forgets this vow until the final chapters of the book.

This book is an excellent story with which to quieten a troublesome child, or introduce him to science fiction. It is better than the usual juvenile, and contains interesting touches: the Galactic Council satellite is called the Star Chamber, and compares with its historical precedent; there is an enjoyable description at the end of a storehouse of knowledge from beyond this "intergalactic group cluster".

The authors tie together the strings of several sub-plots well. Except for this, the "capture and escape" formula rules supreme. Is a slightly better version of this plot all we can provide younger readers, however?

TOWARDS INFINITY

Edited by DAMON KNIGHT.

Victor Gollancz :: 219 pp :: 25/-

Reviewed by David Penman

"Compiled especially for young readers". For once a cover blurb sums up fairly well not only what an editor set out to do, but what he succeeded in doing. These stories are

well-known and time-tested: the only one copyrighted later than 1952 is the first story, by Theodore Sturgeon.

THE MAN WHO LOST THE SEA is^{also} possibly the only story that out of place in this anthology. It concerns a space pilot dying on a beach, and links him with a surrealist boy and a kite. As science fiction it is hardly outstanding in any way: even the "twist" at the end is half expected and carries little impact. I wonder why Damon Knight included it. Possibly he made the common mistake of confusing a story about children with a story for children, and considered juvenile science fiction as an important part of the field. But a child would hardly understand this story and he would need to wait til he were old enough to realize its true value (or lack of it).

Ford McCormack's MARCH HARE MISSION is an imaginative account of a man who escapes from an enemy fortress under the influence of a drug which deprives him of his memory every two minutes. It is a new idea, well approached. No story could be better used to introduce the initiate to the possibilities of short stories in science fiction, compared with the novels in the field. 10,000 words succeed where 60,000 would fail miserably.

THE EARTH MEN, by Ray Bradbury, twists the classic "landing-on-another-planet" theme into one where the Martians (in this case) treat the explorers as lunatics who have imagined the whole thing. This story features wit and wry humour, and there is also a fine touch of irony. It also features a new turn on an old idea, and this is also the main attraction of IN HIDING (Wibmar H Shiras) which is an above average "forerunner-of-the-new-race" story.

Finally there is RESURRECTION by A E Van Vogt. Aliens intent on colonization land on an Earth of the future where life has been wiped out by some unknown disaster. They resurrect various people to try to find out why, with unfortunate results for themselves. Van Vogt's aliens are believable, and the story deals nicely with the theme of human vanity. Why don't we see more such stories around?

Damon Knight mainly chooses well, and covers a broad range of science fiction. The collection is mainly interesting for someone just beginning to read science fiction, and not for the veteran reader, as many stories are quite well known. 14 year old nephews with birthdays coming up, anyone?

THE BLIND WORM

by BRIAN M STABLEFORD

Sidgwick & Jackson :: 1970
192 pages :: \$A 3.25

Reviewed by Bruce R Gillespie

I was going to review this book at length, but it hardly seems worth the trouble. This is the sort of book which drags in a wide variety of strange creatures, cities and humans and tells you that it is an "escape" novel. You know the old line: melt into this strange world and take your mind off the mundanities of the modern world.

Unhappily, this novel merely removes the intending escapist from his own mundane existence to one that is far more mundane. Stableford's characters speak in the most inane way I've ever found in any novel: he makes them sound like instructors in English for little French children. Landscapes roll by, propelled by stale flat and probably mouldy sentences. The big moment comes, and the wandering heroes meet the Wildland's brain: "(It) was a single cell..naked glutinous protoplasm turbid with subcellular membranes and organelles". The rest of the prose is not much better. This is the second worst s f novel I've ever finished; Ace published the American paperback edition.

JOHN BROSNAN

MRS B'S WANDERING BOY

PART ONE

(**EDITOR'S NOTE** The full story of "The Bus Trip" may never be told. John Brosnan had most of it written down in notes left in a suitcase somewhere between Sydney and London. We haven't heard whether it turned up or not. Ron Clarke, another member of the expedition, has contributed some notes to our local apa, the Australian and New Zealand Amateur Press Association. Darn it! I don't even remember when the expedition left, except that it was sometime after Syncon (at New Year). I've never seen a full list of the participants on the trip. Perhaps one appeared in THE NEW FORERUNNER earlier this year.

In short, these are strictly notes...from letters sent to John Ryan mainly, and published in BONZER, Ryan's magazine for ANZAPA. Further scraps come from letters sent from John to me, but no doubt there are other pieces which will come to light. Naturally we will try to publish the complete story, if and when John ever finds that lost suitcase, or delves back into his memory. In the meantime, John resides in England (as if they don't know by now!), Ron Clarke is on his way home, and Chris Guy came home some time ago. Perhaps the rest were hi-jacked by a passing Heicon attendee. **)

1 FROM INDIA (Published in BONZER, June 1970)

You may be wondering why I am not typing this letter. Well, the truth of the matter is that I sold it in Delhi. I also sold the camera I foolishly bought in Singapore. I ran out of money in Bombay.

The trip has been eventful but not really enjoyable. Sort of thing it will be fun to look back on in later years, say a hundred years or so. Morale is...well, actually it isn't. There has been a high rate of illness since leaving Bombay. Practically everyone has been sick and there have been a couple of serious cases of diarrhoea. The bus has been acting up - so far the trip has consisted of a series of stops at bus depots for repairs. The clutch went funny, the wiring burnt out (that was spectacular!), the fuel injectors are acting peculiar, and as

I write this the bus is outside a bus depot in Rawalpindi - the engine is in pieces and we're not sure where the pieces are exactly. I have since learnt that the NRMA's report on the condition of the bus's engine was "worn out but satisfactory."

2 LONDON: ST JOHN'S LETTER TO THE AUSTRALIANS (BONZER, August 1970)

Extract from THE TIMES:

"Great Britain greeted the arrival of St John of Brosnan (recently granted Saint-hood by the Pope for by-passing Rome on his travels) on Sunday, the 25th June at Charing Cross railway station with typical British coolness. As he stopped off the train displaying his personal coat-of-arms (a rampant chicken on a yellow background) he was met with joyful cries of "Shit!... Aussie bastard!... Poo!" from the crowd of two West Indian porters who had gathered to meet him.

"Depositing his second-hand duffle bag at the LEFT LUGGAGE department he left on a quick tour of London. Saint John told reporters that he was particularly impressed with Big Ben and the Houses of Parliament and was pleased that they had been completely rebuilt after being knocked down by Gorgo's mother in 1960. Then, after picking up his second-hand duffle bag from the LEFT LUGGAGE department, he made his way to the Youth Hostel at Earl's Court, where a luxury suite had been prepared for him."

As you can see from the above I have reached England. I have but the bus hasn't. You may be already familiar with the woeful facts concerning "Pegasus" (which is what we called the thing) but for any of you who aren't, here's what happened. On our third day in Greece the bus developed engine trouble, or to put it in the terms of the layman, it stopped moving. We were forced to have it towed into the nearest town which was Thessaloniki. There we were told it would cost the ridiculous sum of \$300 to have it repaired. Main bearings worn or something. We were obviously in trouble. As the bus was on Chris Guy's passport it had to leave the country with him. We couldn't sell it or even abandon it. A few schemes were tossed around to enable us to bypass this little setback, such as having Chris swim to Italy. But then the Australian Embassy stepped in and arranged with the Greek government to allow us to dump it with them.

After that, people were divided as to what they wanted to do. All but three people had contributed to the "Carnet de Passage" (if you don't know what that is, tough!) as the majority wanted to stay with the bus until the "Carnet" money was refunded from the NRMA in Australia. (It only applied up to Turkey.) By some strange coincidence, the three people who hadn't contributed to the "Carnet" were anxious to be pushing-off towards Athens. Which we did: I just happened to be one of the three.

You may be thinking that that was the end of the bus... but you may be wrong. A telegram was sent to BARDAHL, our chief sponsor, for help. The last I heard was that they had agreed to lend \$200 towards the cost of repairs. Whether or not the bus has been repaired and is on its way again I don't know. I certainly hope so. There are still seven people on it, as far as I know, including Chris Guy and Ron Clarke. The others are making their way across Europe by various means, having left the bus for financial and emotional reasons.

While in Athens I went over to Mykonos with one of the girls and spent a week there. Some may think this an ideal situation. A beautiful girl, a Greek island and plenty of sunshine. But the girl was engaged, and the last I heard her boyfriend

was flying to Greece to take her back home for their planned July 10 wedding date, Mykonos was crawling with rich Americans and very expensive, I had a splitting headache the whole time and I got my knees sunburnt!

Back in Athens I booked on a train to London. It was due to leave on June 18. When does it reach London, I asked the girl at the booking office. She seemed puzzled so I asked her again. Next Wednesday, she told me. I did some quick calculations and realised that it would take me six days to reach England. That seemed odd, considering the relative closeness, but I took her word for it. Do I have to change trains, I asked. Yes, she replied, once only at Monaco. That seemed odder still as I was positive the train route didn't go anywhere near Monaco.

The train left Athens at 6 pm on the Thursday. There were only three other people in my compartment which meant it was possible to get reasonably comfortable. But around midnight we stopped at some station and the compartment was suddenly filled with Greek peasant women carrying babies. Thus endeth the sleep. Christ, I thought, six days of this!

But in actual fact the trip only lasted two days and three nights, and we didn't change at Monaco (a physical impossibility) but at Cologne. I was also under the ludicrous impression that the train I was on was to be shipped across the channel... but at 11 pm on Saturday night I found myself staring at the channel, at a place called Ostende in Belgium. I had run out of train. My ticket did cover me all the way to London... but from the Belgium coast onwards it was up to me to figure out just how I was going to get there.

I arrived in Dover at 6 am on Sunday and, after successfully getting by the Immigration people (despite no proof of assets), immediately got lost looking for the railway station. I eventually reached London about 11am.

Though dead tired I spent the day wandering around London staring at famous sights through sticky eyelids. This was because the Youth Hostel didn't open until 5 pm, unlike the one I had stayed in at Athens which was open all day and had a restaurant that served food and drinks, including beer and wine, from 7 am to 11 pm. In comparison, the English one was amusing, as the supervisors ran around in little white shorts and reminded one of scout masters. They contrasted sharply with their mostly, hippie-type patrons. They had some quaint little customs, too, as I was to find out the next morning, when I went to sign out.

"Have you done a duty?" asked the little fellow at the desk.

"Have I what?" This was a new one on me.

"Have you performed a duty this morning?"

It sunk in. Apparently one had to perform some sort of ritual deed before one could escape from the place. I thought fast and attempted to bluff my way through.

"Err, yes...I helped tidy up the room this morning."

"What room were you in?"

"Number three."

"Hmm... That's strange. I gave that duty to two other chaps. Let's see if I can find something else for you to do."

My bluff had failed.

Not wishing to stay in the Youth Hostel another night, I spent the rest of the day looking for accommodation. I finally ended up with a bread-and-breakfast arrangement for 25 bob a night, at Tulse Hill. You haven't heard of Tulse Hill? That's not surprising. It's not exactly the excitement centre of London. It's not even connected to the Underground - one has to use a mundane surface train to get there... and the surface train system is even more confusing than the Underground. Even though Tulse Hill is only 10 minutes from the heart of London one still has to change trains on the journey out there. On my first night I caught the wrong train and ended up miles away. It was the last train, of course, so I had to walk back... guided by my A TO Z ATLAS OF LONDON. I was carrying my kitbag, which was heavy, and naturally it started to rain.

Then the police picked me up.

As I skulked along the back streets, keeping under the trees to avoid getting wet a police van passed me. It stopped up the street, turned around and came back.

"Where are you off to?" came this authentic London copper's voice.

I scampered over to the van, looking innocent.

"Tulse Hill," I replied.

"That's a fair way off, isn't it?"

"Yes, I know."

"What are you, a cadet or something?"

"No... I've just arrived," I said inanely.

"Arrived? Arrived from where?"

"Australia," I replied, thinking it should be glaringly obvious.

"Oh." Moment's silence. "Do you want a lift then?"

"Yes, I'd love one."

Which was how I got picked up by police on my second night in London.

*** **

Later that week, I moved to a bed-sitter in Earl's Court. I didn't exactly choose Earl's Court, but I wanted something in that area (Kensington, etc) because it's close to the City and a direct route on the Underground. There wasn't much available and I was lucky to get the place I finished up with. Earl's Court is different from what I had expected. Judging from the horror stories you hear at home the place is crawling with diggers, cockies, wombats and the air is thick with boomerangs. So far, I haven't met one Australian and have only heard one Australian accent while in a shop. It's very cosmopolitan, though, and you can see an interesting variety of types in the main street. One thing I like about it is that everything stays open until very late.

My bed-sitter isn't exactly what you'd term a bed-sitter. More like a bed... or a sit. In other words, it's a bit small.

It has atmosphere, though. A sort of "Marie Celeste" atmosphere. This is because

of the possessions of the previous occupant, that are still scattered around. A scarf, a half empty bottle of after-shave, a pipe, a shaving mug, a pile of china plates, an almost full bottle of shampoo, a membership card to the Casino Club (expired 1-4-1970) and a plastic spoon. I began to suspect that Mr Elwick (I saw his name on the club membership card) had to leave in a hurry. And my suspicions were confirmed early one morning, during my first week here, when a banging on the door brought me abruptly out of an innocent slumber. I staggered to the door and opened it, revealing a balding man wearing a raincoat.

"I'm a police officer," he said. "Is Mr Elwick in?"

"No... he no longer lives here," I said. "I've been here a week."

"Ah, I've just missed him then. Sorry to have disturbed you," and he trotted downstairs. In hotblooded pursuit of the mysterious Mr Elwick, I presume.

One thing wrong with Earl's Court Square is that in all the surrounding buildings there are people learning to play various musical instruments. And I emphasize the word "learning"! None of them seem to be accomplished musicians, and I have doubts that any of them ever will be.

Being an old building, the walls are solid so I don't hear much of my fellow flat dwellers. Except for the flat directly next to me. We're connected by a door (I suspect my room was once their bathroom...or worse) and though it's sealed it still transmits sound very efficiently. The flat is occupied by a young couple who manage to obtain, judging by the sound they make, a perfect orgasm on every night I've been home.

If it wasn't for a few incidental things like Buckingham Palace, Big Ben, etc, I'd swear I was in some American city. London is full, and I mean full, of Americans. They are everywhere. Walk along a street and 9 out of 10 voices you hear have American accents. The other voice is usually French, Dutch, German, Italian, Indian, Spanish or Swedish. I'm beginning to think that the real English people no longer exist - they've all been wiped out by some secret invasion. It should be interesting when summer is over and all the foreigners go home. According to my theory the only people left in London will be the Queen and myself.

At the time of writing I haven't got a job. I applied for one with the Civil Service but I don't think I got it. I haven't been officially informed, yet, but the interviewer gave me the impression he didn't think I was civil servant material. It could have something to do with my appearance. I haven't had a haircut since I left Australia (my hair would make Mick Jagger grin) and I was wearing my genuine Iranian-made suede shoes, which began to fall to pieces the day I bought them. The interviewer was an enthusiastic, eager young man who spoke like this: "Ah, Mr Brosnan, I presume? Great, fine, marvellous... come this way... good, marvellous... in here, please... fine, fine, marvellous... take a seat... great, marvellous, good, good... and now..." He kept this up during the entire interview.

Perhaps I should take it as a compliment that I'm not considered as civil servant material.

Peace be with you all,

Saint John.

(PART TWO next time: John takes a job; John meets English fandom; John attends Notheicon; John sees some films - all in S F COMMENTARY).

GEORGE TURNER

BACK TO THE CACTUS

Boredom sets in eventually. After forty-odd years of reading s f one gets pangs of acute apathy, and there's nothing for it but to swear off until the urge returns. This was my fourth or fifth turning of the back on s f, and it lasted about twelve months. When the time came to take up the drug again I could only stand petrified at the rash of new titles waiting to be read. It simply wasn't possible. The only thing to do was to ask advice. What should I read in order to become reasonably up to date? What are the current books of note?

Dependable John Bangsund whipped up an armload with the ease of dusting a shelf and much the same movement. "These are the current scene!" I noted that none of them were really new titles, but then the currently discussable books rarely are. Bruce Gillespie insisted on UBIK - what else could a devotee recommend? And I picked a tentative few for myself.

And in a dazed fortnight read some twenty novels.

I'd like to talk about some of them - not to review them, because that has probably been done ad nauseum - but to look at them in relation to their authors and to some other things, such as critics, New Wavery and blurb writers. (Note to B Gillespie: Don't expect a nice, tidy essay with all the loose ends tied up. This one is going wherever the material takes it.)

Let me start where the marathon grind of reading started; with

KURT VONNEGUT IN THE SLAUGHTERHOUSE

Vonnegut has a big reputation in s f and out of it. Even TIME reviews him with doubtful awe. PLAYER PIANO was a fine novel in its day and SIRENS OF TITAN a hilarious one in any day; CAT'S CRADLE was a chilling story and GOD BLESS YOU MR ROSEWATER an ambiguous and fragmented one. Now in SLAUGHTERHOUSE FIVE he has set out to write the novel of all his novels and, incidentally, to tear himself to pieces and the world with him.

He says unequivocally in the opening chapter that this is the book he has been trying to write since he began novelising. Take that with a grain of salt; a writer's (or other artist's) statements about himself tend more to rationalised hindsight than strict accuracy. But, since he insists on it as an integral part of the novel, the book must be accepted as his definitive statement to date. Therefore let the reader beware and watch where he is being led.

In fact he is being led nowhere new. Humanity stinks but must be regarded with compassion, particularly with respect to its dropouts, weaklings and misfits. "The meek shall inherit the earth", if there's any earth to inherit when the strong have finished with it. One wonders if Vonnegut realises the paranoid insult inherent in this form of compassion, and suspects that he does. That makes his cosmic jesting a mite vicious as well as unbalanced.

Vicious? That darling man?

Look a little closer.

Look at the extrapolated parody of John W Campbell, for instance. Although I find Campbell politically naive and stylistically irritating I hold no brief for the presentation of him as a traitor, ersatz Nazi and coat-tail hanger-on of conquerors. These things he emphatically is not; his weaknesses lie in other directions.

Look next at the conception of time. The Tralfamadorians - ex-"Sirens of Titan" - see time as static, like a landscape in which all action, from universal birth to extinction, exists in a permanent now. So a Tralfamadorian sees a man not as a two-legged being passing through time but as a sort of millipede with short legs at one end of his life and long ones at the other. A neat illustration.

This conception involves predestination, because in a motionless time all things are as they are and unchangeable, and this is firmly laid down at several points in the novel. Then why the rantings about brutality, stupidity and the debased condition of Man? His semi-idiot hero is no better or worse than the rest, despite his Christly innocence, because he has no choice between innocence and sophistication. What is, unchangeably is. This is nihilism in extremis, prepared to destroy even itself.

Is Vonnegut savagely condemning the world or merely despairing of it? Neither, I think. He appears in person at several points in the narrative, and in one such appearance comments uncomfortably on this static time idea. He doesn't like it. He adopts the position of a man who believes but hopes it isn't so. He holds out no hope for humanity but insists on loving it although it cannot, in the nature of the Vonnegut universe, be anything but beastly. One suspects his real pity is for himself. Vonnegut wants a way out.

Making himself a character in the book was a tactical error. What might have been taken for vengeful satire becomes apparent as a flailing in the dark and, as so often with articulate flailers, personal spites spew out.

One of these is his thoroughgoing contempt for s f. Kilgore Trout of GOD BLESS YOU MR ROSEWATER is with us again, pilloried unmercifully and more than a little unjustly, and the Tralfamadorians are the ultimate parody of all the s f super-starmen yet invented. It is surprising then that the present generation of s f readers (mostly comparatively young and very defensive about their loves and hates) care to nestle Vonnegut in their uncritical bosoms. He should be for them a focus of vituperation.

Or do these readers also tend to nihilism as self-destruction? If so I am shocked; but then I believe in free will, which at least gives me the right to be shocked at what I see and hear. However, I really don't think they are psychological nihilists. I do think they are people held fascinated by the individual brilliances of a book (there are many in SLAUGHTERHOUSE FIVE - that's the peril of it) and fail to coordinate them into a true picture of the author's statement.

SLAUGHTERHOUSE FIVE is a repellent book, however interesting and readable, because the writer has missed his mark, and missed it because he is constantly misdirected by the notes in his vision. He is uncomfortably aware of the presence of notes but cannot detect their nature. (How many of us can?) They keep him in a dazzle of wrong turnings and he is flailing to get out.

In this he has a not so distant relationship with Philip K Dick, which brings us hopefully to

PHILIP K DICK SAYING IT ALL OVER AGAIN

But hope lies bleeding. I have always enjoyed Dick's work on the superficial level of entertainment and yet been aware of dissatisfaction on deeper levels. After a year without him, UBIK crystallises the dissatisfaction; my day as a Dick fan is nearly over.

Here is the book of a man who shudders between the real and the unreal, who sees alternatives as realities and realities as a transient phase among alternatives. Alternatives and realities coexist, and even influence each other (UBIK, NOW WAIT FOR LAST YEAR, THREE STIGMATA OF PALMER ELDRITCH) and through this incredibly complex universe Dick tries to trace a path. It can't be done. The human brain cannot reduce an infinite number of possibilities to a story pattern simply by selecting what appeals, particularly when one realises that effects can initiate their own causes, as in COUNTERCLOCK WORLD.

Many years ago Dick announced his theme in EYE IN THE SKY, but the depth of his involvement was not observable in that lighthearted piece of fun. Perhaps the tales featuring the Perky Pat game were the first real step into the confusion. These predicated a search for alternative reality on the part of the players; later THE WORLD JONES MADE and TIME OUT OF JOINT suggested that perhaps it was the author who searched.

In MARTIAN TIME SLIP the sense of all possible reality vanished, became a shifting thing. Later books have tended to become extended metaphors of this idea, and have become increasingly disfigured by unresolvable complexities which only tend to show that the idea itself is invalid and/or cannot be expressed in the prose of an apparently material universe.

In COUNTERCLOCK WORLD Dick used reverse time as the frame for his thesis and ran head-on into impractical complications. Living backwards cannot be done in a universe obeying physical laws as we know them, and Dick had to admit these laws in order to remain comprehensible; he simply ignored the impossibilities and paradoxes and ploughed straight over them. His analogy for multiple realities or, if you like, the absence of all reality, fails because it depends on basic realities for its existence.

The same can be said of NOW WAIT FOR LAST YEAR and its parallel time lines. The basic premise made the plot unworkable, so some aspects of the premise had to be ignored. This just won't do in a man conducting a running argument with the universe.

In UBIK we are given the living and the half-living; the half-living are actually dead but existing in another version of reality until their vestigial remainders of consciousness finally drain away. Their "reality" is subject to manipulation by a strong personality among the half-living, which piles complexity on complexity until inconsistencies begin to stand out like protest posters. The plotting is neat but cannot override the paradoxes. The metaphor fails because it cannot stand against the weight of reality as we know it.

This is plainly an obsession with Dick. He is too intelligent not to know that his plots are snow jobs, so one can only assume that he is being defiant, shouting, "I know it is so, and some day I'll find a way to demonstrate it." My bet is that he won't.

At the moment an accomplished writer is imprisoned in a vicious circle. What personal statement Dick has published tends to confirm the obsessional nature of his preoccupation and also suggests, between the lines, some psychological reasons for it. I refer to his letter published in S F COMMENTARY 9. As of now he remains an entertaining writer battling against a brick wall; he must either break through it or become a repetitive bore.

To sum up, UBIK is not the great book so many have recommended to me. It is as good as most of his work but cannot compare with THREE STIGMATA OF PALMER ELDRITCH, in whose drug-infested pages he came close to presenting a believable universe of shivering unrealities.

Like Vonnegut he is imprisoned and wants to get out. Unlike Vonnegut he does not release his spites as satire, but Vonnegut is the better writer and more likely to impress. Both are, in their ways, dangerous to the impressionable. They write with authority, and authority must always be suspect if we are to retain personal values. Their works entertain with ideas, but enthusiasm should not become uncritical acceptance.

And, speaking of uncritical acceptance, the critics are with us in full voice when we come to

JOANNA RUSS CONSIDERING CHAOS

Fritz Leiber: "AND CHAOS DIED explores... what telepathy and clairvoyance would actually feel like. The result is a stunning achievement."

Robert Silverberg: "I wouldn't really call it a novel at all. I'd call it a trip."

Samuel Delany: "Miss Russ has taken it on herself to put the reader through the experience (of psi-phenomena). The result is a stunning achievement."

Two "stunning achievements" out of three make's for expectation. One opens the book and discovers a dedication split between S J Perelman and Vladimir Nabokov, and recalls that Joanna Russ is a poetess and a university professor. One is overwhelmed by the company one is keeping and can have no doubt that the adulation of the three blurbs is deserved to the limit.

Can one? This one can.

Well, the prose is uniformly excellent, as is to be expected from the author of PICNIC ON PARADISE. It is also subtle, witty and occasionally profound, as is

also to be expected from, etc ... But the appearance of two major characters from Kafka as minor symbols in AND CHAOS DIED gives the game away. We are to be treated to Art, capital A and all. And by God aren't we! For the first ninety pages, at any rate.

Kafka was always understandable - he was a good enough artist to make sure of that. Miss Russ is not always so indulgent. Silverberg referred to this novel as "a trip". I am tempted to call it an unnecessary complication of basically simple ideas but that would be leaning too heavily in the other direction, though there is some justification for it.

Despite the ravings, there is nothing new in AND CHAOS DIED. A couple of Earthmen are stranded on the planet of a psi-oriented group of forgotten colonists (or lost crew members or something of that sort - it isn't important) who have developed their powers in generations of isolation. One Earthman is a clod who gets nowhere with them; the other is a sensitive type who eventually becomes psi himself (on the grand scale, too) and marries the heroine.

All the enthrallment is in the first ninety pages, wherein Miss Russ goes flat out to show what it must be like to be floundering in a psi-oriented world. To some extent she succeeds, but it is no Trip; one has to concentrate in order to catch everything that is going on; one can't just relax into it. This section is worth the effort, though that same effort militates against reader identification. The rest of the book is well-written banality, with a generous lashing of sex that isn't nearly as funny as it is meant to be, a conclusion visible 60 or 70 pages off and a fistful of cardboard characters.

Delany, Silverberg and Leibor should save their ecstasies for a better occasion. This type of book had sooner or later to be attempted, and the attempt deserves applause. But, despite the lady's undeniable gifts, it remains an attempt, admirable but not ecstatically so. PICNIC ON PARADISE was a better novel in every department.

Why the hell do writers give themselves over to hyperbole? What are they to say when the real thing comes along?

We meet the blurb writers again, but in a different context, when we consider

RON GOULART ENJOYING HIMSELF NO END

It is nice, at this stage, to come to a novel I enjoyed without reservation but, if the cover blurbs are to be taken seriously, I enjoyed it for all the wrong reasons.

"A rousing satire on tomorrow," says the heading.

"...Alive with satire, with merriment and fun," says Philip Dick, who should know better.

"Ron Goulart, like a totally sane Jonathan Swift, kills more clichés and pretensions than Carter has liver pills," says Avram Davidson, who should have killed that particular pretension before it left his typewriter.

And I won't quote Joanna Russ's contribution because what she says is sensible and I want to say some of it myself.

The blurbs play up this novel, AFTER THINGS FELL APART, as satire. On what? On everything, says a bit of the Davidson effusion which I forebore to quote. Now "everything" is a large order, difficult to fill; if the book satirises anything worthwhile at all it is the type of story which postulates an unlikely future and then sets busily to work to undo it. Satire is undoubtedly present in the small sideswipes which are a part of almost any readable novel, but they are not the raison d'etre the cover-puffers would have us believe.

One might, if pressed, accept Goulart's series of little futures in a collapsed and fragmented America as a sort of if-this-goes-on extension of present trends and therefore peripherally satirical, but in fact he doesn't extrapolate the trends much beyond anything to be found in today's newspaper. He simply gives us our world in Cinerama and brassily lit Technicolour.

And why not? After all, what he tells is a private-eye yarn set against exotic social backgrounds with loads of action and spit-spit dialogue and nicely "normal" hero who bashes his way imperturbably to success and the girl as much by luck as by judgment. But it moves. It is unpretentious, competently written within its format, plotted for excitement rather than probability and calculated to keep the reader in hot pursuit of its twists and surprises.

It isn't quite another LOGAN'S RUN, but anyone who enjoyed that piece of gusty nonsense should enjoy AFTER THINGS FELL APART. Forget the blurbers; they are at the tired old game of finding significance where only entertainment is the goal. Here the goal is reached.

Reading back, I note that the word "pretentious" and its variations are appearing fairly often. Which puts me in mind of the New Wave, God rest its rather simple soul, and brings me with a sigh of despair to

MICHAEL MOORCOCK SERVING UP PRINTER'S PI

The book is THE BLACK CORRIDOR; it is flotsam on the New Wave and should be jetsam. I am immune to New Waves. I have survived a number of them, under similar names, since I learned to spell out THE MAGIC PUDDING and ALICE IN WONDERLAND some fifty years ago. Each one contributes a little - just a little - to the totality of literature and splashes away, its ocean-roar of protest muted to a forgettable whimper. Literature most unfairly goes on without it, having taken what was useful and excreted the other 98%.

THE BLACK CORRIDOR contains nothing useful.

In it a paranoid world - Earth in the early 21st century - spews up a paranoid hero who steals a space ship in order to take his family and friends to a far star where they can begin over again to find the "true values" etc. The hero is pilot, the remainder are in suspended animation. In his loneliness his latent paranoia ... develops alarmingly until - Well, the outcome is a little ambiguous so let me not spoil it for anyone who wishes to find out for himself. This ambiguity and much of the treatment of the paranoid delusions are the best things in the book and are very good indeed, but the remainder is determinedly New Wave, with all its excesses and sillinesses.

For example, the novel opens like this:

Space is infinite.
It is dark.
Space is neutral.
Stars occupy minute areas of space. They are clustered
a few billion here. A few billion there.
Space does not threaten.
Space does not comfort.
Space is the absence of time and of matter.

Perhaps this spacing is meant to give an illusion of poeticism, perhaps an illusion of portentousness. Alas, it is no more than a series of banal statements in banal prose. One shudders at the thought of a whole novel of it. That is not given to us but the same sort of thing, with variations, recurs throughout the book, reaching a climax of hysterical type-setting on pages 86 through to 91 (Ace Special edition). I forbear description; it has to be looked at to be believed. "Looked at" because only the grimly determined would bother to read it. I did so in the interest of fair play and can affirm that it adds nothing to the book.

Alfred Bester began this sort of thing in THE DEMOLISHED MAN (as far as s f is concerned - the poets were at it long before that) but he used it for a purpose and achieved an effect. Moorcock uses it for an effect and achieves an exhaustion of the reader's patience with pretentious gimmickry. And succeeds in holding up the story at a point where it should move.

He also New Waves his banner of freedom in the use of obscenity. There's nothing against the use of four letter words if they serve a literary purpose; the continued use of any word, obscene or not, which serves no purpose is plain bad writing.

Moorcock serves us five helpings - from memory - of "fucking"; four of these are unnecessary and distracting; the fifth is used surprisingly well to initiate a small incident and illuminate a psychological trend. It nearly misses effectiveness because repetition has already dulled the response. The nominal form, "fuck", is used twice by a minor female character under circumstances where any woman of even minimal sensitivity would have found a better and truer expression than one of the audially ugliest words in the language. I quote:

"You don't want one last fuck? For old time's sake?"

She comes to a sticky end, which I approved of.

What irritates me is that THE BLACK CORRIDOR is basically a good novel abominably mishandled.

But for the s f addict there is compensation in the welcome form of

URSULA LEGUIN GIVING A LESSON ON HOW TO DO IT

John Bangsund has dinned LeGuin into my ears for many a moon and I have resisted blandishment because too many female writers are softly, persuasively and emptily the same. Mea culpa! Mrs LeGuin is not the same; she is a steed of a very different colour.

There is a species of super-beautiful prose style which eventually cloy like a diet of clotted cream and honey. Reviewers tend to refer to it as poetic, which it is not. Merritt and Williamson used it in the dear old days, John Campbell had a crack at it in his alter ego of Don A Stuart, Anne McCaffrey dabbles in it today and the sword-and-sorcery boys use a debased form of it under the impression that it lends archaic dignity to essentially undignified goings on.

Mrs LeGuin uses a variant of it. Don't recoil. She uses it with sinew and muscular control, and knows how to discard it unobtrusively when it does not suit the immediate subject. The result is a continuous fascination which carries the reader over roughnesses and ineptitudes that would otherwise jar intolerably. I had to finish ROCANNON'S WORLD before I realised that it was padded, ill-constructed, deplorably plotted and utterly old hat. One up to the lady for tricking this old and jaded palate.

But that was her first novel, a beginner's triumph of manner over content.

Moving directly to her latest, THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS, what a difference is here! The fumbling plotter has gone with the wind of time, the literary padder has pared her style to essentials and the fantasist has become an s f writer. More - she has become a novelist with something to say.

The story is superficially one of intrigue on a distant world, of an Envoy seeking to bring this world into a larger federation of worlds. On a more personal level it treats of a "normal" man trying to come to grips with an ambi-sexual race. The people of Gethen are genderless, containing the potentiality of both sexes. Their sexual urge is cyclic, with male or female responses surfacing according to which partner is hormonally dominant at the time. For four fifths of the time they have no sexual urge at all.

On the final, important level Mrs LeGuin attacks the problem of finding points of contact and understanding between two persons of utterly opposed psychological orientation. The Envoy's thinking derives from a sexually motivated race; his friend/opponent thinks with the larger freedom (with some concomitant restrictions) of one to whom sex is a periodic facet of life, so that other matters can be considered without the influence of the continual surge of the gonads. These people of Gethen are probably the first true aliens presented in s f, so the authoress has succeeded where a thousand monster-mongers have failed. She realises the problem in some depth and presents it with acuteness and a very wide appreciation of the fundamental differences involved.

She finds a solution which is valid within the framework, and she left this reader with a sense of having finished a thoroughly satisfactory novel. It has its faults, mainly structural. So has WAR AND PEACE. Mrs LeGuin is, as of this book, the best s f writer in the world.

NOVA' AND SAMUEL R DELANY

The last sentence above was, of course, written by Algis Budrys to describe Samuel Delany and NOVA. My protest is hereby recorded. Much good it will do me among the Delany fans.

I had read only one earlier Delany novel, THE EINSTEIN INTERSECTION, and found it a formless hotch-potch of ill-digested and ill-matched myth and folklore with pretensions of portentousness which fell apart under a straight stare. Stylistically it was well enough, with signs of a real competence to come, but was ruined by

obtrusive and unnecessary chapter-head essays which were partly irrelevant and sometimes - in what purported to be extracts from his diary - mildly embarrassing.

In NOVA I looked for some fulfillment of a talent heretofore cluttered with decoration but also loaded with promise. What I found was peculiarly inept for a man with five or six novels already under his belt. Awards and adulation to one side, for Delany is not yet a good novelist. And he is a damn bad s f writer.

NOVA is spoiled, aside from the blatant gimmickry and non-science, by the continual presence of the writer, an incessant background hum of Delany murmuring, "Now listen to this bit!" This is probably an unfortunate side effect of his almost frantic striving for style, for atmosphere at all costs, for profundity where none exists, for words and more words as if critical reaction must be beaten to its knees. It doesn't work. One has seen too much of it, from John Russell Fearn onwards, to be fooled.

This would matter less if the flesh were draped on a sturdy skeleton, but it is not. The story, baldly, is of the attempt of a spaceship owner-captain to snatch a priceless load of Illyrion (Delany's capital) metal from the heart of a nova, where alone it can be found in better than minimal quantities. The pseudo-scientific reasoning for this provenance will make you squirm if you can't just swallow it whole and pretend it wasn't there. His lifetime enemy means to prevent him getting it because it will upset the economic balance of the galaxy and therefore his private financial empire also; he would, in fact, like to have it himself. Neither gives a damn for galactic economics or the consequences to people, despite a little pious talk thrown in for excuses. They fight it out on the fringe of the nova, the captain gets his Illyrion and what this does to the galactic economy we are not told. If we had been it would have been all too obvious that the hero should have been strangled at birth. He's a near psychopath in any case, and such sympathy as one can find for him is generated by the fact that his enemy is an all-time monster of plain and fancy nastiness.

Plot in general is not too important in a novel, being merely the string for the beads, so let's examine some of the beads, the details of the work.

The captain, Lorq Von Ray, surrounds himself with a crew of near-nuts, selected at random in the street of a city, for the whimsical reason that he had attempted the nova before with a highly trained crew and failed, and therefore proposes an unintegrated, untrained team for the next try. Playing whimsies within reach of a nova is a game for lunatics, but it gives Delany a chance to put together a collection of fantasy-characters who can be depended upon to support the exotic atmosphere at the drop of an emotion.

The enemy, Prince Red (Prince is a christian name and is enough to show how far Delany is prepared to go to get his effects -- his sister is Ruby Red) has a prosthetic arm which he uses early in the piece to carve up Lorq's face. For reasons mystically unexplained Lorq refuses to have his face repaired and faces life as a more horrible Gully Foyle. (Possibly this represents the vow of the knight on quest - we get the Grail symbol later.)

Prince Red is involved in a never stated but probably incestuous relationship with sister Ruby, who has a minor yen for Lorq but apparently a bigger one for big brother, and the rest of the cast is similarly off-beat, each in his technicoloured, unlikely and unnecessary way.

Lorq and Prince have a few confrontations, in one of which Lorq avenges his face by slicing Prince up with a laser beam, leaving him as a bundle of hate supported in a tank of nutrient fluid. Then we take off for the nova, with the tank of nutrient fluid in implacable pursuit.

On the way Lorq and the reader are treated to a lengthy interlude with a Tarot pack read by a crew woman. This much-noticed section appears to have little purpose beyond casting a pseudo-mystic aura around the proceedings and to give Delany a chance to suggest that fortune telling is a true science which only the intellectually blind cast doubt upon. More things in heaven and earth, Horatio! The ultimate effect is to forecast most of the ensuing plot at a point where any competent thriller writer would keep it to himself. On the mystic side we are also treated to some references to the Grail, as though the flight to the nova were a holy quest. (A little investigation of the Grail story might have put him off using it. Do you know what the single use of the Grail was, except as a symbol of purity? Read it up and find out - it's worth a laugh.)

Having got the mystical build-up behind us, we arrive on the fringes of the exploding star, where Lorq kills his enemy and so makes it possible for himself to collect his Illyrion and set about throwing the galaxy into chaos.

How he is able to collect it, by driving his ship through the centre of the nova, is the most marvellous piece of fantascientific effrontery since "Doc" Smith postulated a planet in stable orbit round seventeen suns. Astrophysics, plasma physics, radiology and mathematics go out the observation port in order to make a cool hole in the centre of the star, and Lorq's ship happens to be moving at just the right angle to get through it. The hole is described as being large enough to permit the passage of "a couple of Jupiters", which is a big hole - about a hundred and seventy thousand miles wide. But - a nova is apt to have a diameter of 300 million miles or better. Like to calculate the chances of hitting that hole at any respectable interstellar speed?

In this inferno Lorq uses his eyes to look for the Illyrion. Since it would be in plasma form, despite some double talk of the centre of the nova being at only 6000 degrees, one wonders what he was looking for. Naturally he loses his sight.

And here we get some more wonderful s f reasoning. Crew member Katin - a characterless would-be artist-novelist in search of a theme - also takes a forbidden look at the nova at close range, but loses his sight only temporarily. The reason? He looked at it while they were moving away (Lorq looked while they were moving in) and the Doppler effect given by the ship's speed damped down the ultra-violet radiation which would have scarred his eyeballs. That the hard radiation would have been similarly damped down into the UV spectrum is conveniently ignored.

And, incidentally, the flight through the nova is accomplished off-stage, and so Delany passes up an opportunity for a piece of descriptive writing which somebody like Poul Anderson - whether you like him or not - would have brought off with panache and a due regard for scientific credibility.

Added up, NOVA amounts to a wild and woolly, wickedly sadistic adventure yarn wherein all the insistent trickery in the typewriter cannot support the mysto-philosophic meanings too many reviewers have read into it, and which Delany no doubt intended them to find. It is plain fantasy, masquerading as super science, and even as fantasy it has no base in reality to allow the reader to identify with any character in it. Alfred Bester would have brought it off as a straight thriller with twice as much action and half as much nonsense and no overtones of quite absent deep meaning.

Make no mistake, Delany is a writer at heart, but works too hard at grandeur and the stunning effect. The most readable and best handled passage in the book is the chapter concerning Lorq, Prince and Ruby as children, where his talent is not obscured by the monstrous and the overwhelming.

He has good s f in him, or perhaps good fantasy, but NOVA is neither. It is empty.

It is a pity Delany has had so much to say about himself and his art in fanzines and other places because he is not yet ready to do himself justice. Too much Delany and not enough artist; too much "Listen to this bit" and not enough to say; too much concentration on the big effect and not enough search for the proper vehicle for his undeniable talent. He could study Ursula LeGuin with profit. She gets twice the result with half the effort, and without mumbo-jumbo, and never forgets that she is writing about human beings. Which is why she deserved her awards.

With the air of fantasy rasping a little in my throat, I turned, with some misgiving, to THE PHOENIX AND THE MIRROR, to discover

AVRAM DAVIDSON PLAYING IT STRAIGHT AND COOL

I love not second-rate fantasy or Avram Davidson either save in his occasional good moments, but his frolic with Vergil Magus is wholly acceptable.

He stays within the limits of the legend which, in medieval times, clothed Vergil in the robe of a white magician and master of hidden arts, and offers no penny-a-line philosophy to make his tale suspect. His Vergil is not the poet and could never have produced an AENEID. He is a more Earthy character who might have managed the ECOLOGUES, particularly the one wherein he is testy about having his property sequestered for the use of returned soldiers. And he is very much the Vergil of legend with Roger Bacon's brazen head appropriated for good measure. Dante's Vergil perhaps.

Tantalisingly, Davidson never lets us know what century the tale is laid in. Doublets and hose are worn, Cyprus is still at its zenith and the Roman Empire does not seem to have yet split into East and West; an emperor rules but his name is never given. But in a fairytale world this is a minor irritation.

The plot is good, the style adequate without striving for archaism and the characters recognisable as human beings. Also the conception of the Phoenix is unexpected and neatly turned. What more do you want for a few quiet hours of enjoyment without overblown pretension? It leaves sword-and-sorcery dead at the post.

In between these noticeable novels I read a number of others not noticeable, neither good nor wholly bad, the middle-of-the-road stuff which is the backbone of genre writing; they need not delay us. In order not to neglect the short story field I invested in two anthologies.

The first was BEST S F STORIES FROM NEW WORLDS 5. Let me be honest and admit I didn't get through all of it. Such as I staggered through left me cold. These tales are of the essence of New Wavery, Moorcock version - stylistically exaggerated, vanishingly small in content, often obscure for obscurity's sake, often obscure for lack of a clearly conceived point, and all curiously dated. Time and again I was reminded of the literary experimentalism of the late twenties and found little that was not a reworking of those forgettable strivings. For those who luckily are too young to remember the late twenties, a typical tale of the time would have been one wherein two women stand in the street and talk moodily, significantly shifting from foot to foot once a page and occasionally easing the weight of their shopping baskets. At the end of talk about the weather and the old man's drunkenness one would move tiredly into the nearest shop and the other disappear into the crowd. The reader, presumably, was left to ponder the whichness of the whatness and extract some profound comment if he could. The stories in this

volume are the modern s f equivalent of that happily dead product, differing mainly in their relentless use of the short, sharp sentence which is designed to give urgency to the writing and all too often succeeds in reading like a shopping list. A whole article could well be given to the dissection of these tales, but they are hardly worth it.

The other volume was THE YEAR'S BEST SCIENCE FICTION No 3, collated and edited by Brian Aldiss and Harry Harrison. Now there's an unlikely team! But the result is as good as you could wish for, and the stories are uniformly above average. They include three items from NEW WORLDS which are significantly different from the Moorcock preferences. One is an unusually straightforward piece by J G Ballard, another is an equally straightforward piece which would be at home in FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION, and the third is not a story at all, but a witty and entertaining psychologist's joke which is worth preserving. The piece de resistance is NINE LIVES by Ursula LeGuin, who seems to do everything well; it deals with human cloning and concentrates on the psychological aspects rather than the obvious melodramatic possibilities. The whole book is highly recommendable.

The effort to sum up impressions is not a simple one, for the field has developed a variety which makes summations doubtful and comparisons invidious. Reading back, I find the word "pretentious" recurring, and this perhaps stays in mind as a major irritant. Of the eleven volumes surveyed, four were disfigured by pretentiousness, three of them irredeemably. Of the remainder two (the Vonnegut and the Dick) were enjoyable but suspect, three were acceptable on their own levels, one book of shorts had distinct class and one novel was, and in any year would have been, outstanding. Despite my rumblings and snarlings, statistically that makes the current scene look pretty good.

The inanities of critics, even the comparatively respectable ones, continue to jar, and the extracts selected by Ace Books for their blurbs should be preserved in an anthology of nonsense. Why do these people who should, and I think do know better, hurl themselves into blind ecstasies at the commonplace and sometimes third rate? That most of them are themselves competent s f writers compound the sin. As I asked earlier, what are they to do when the real thing comes along? They will have to invent new superlatives or strangle on their typewriter ribbons.

An appalling thought to finish with:

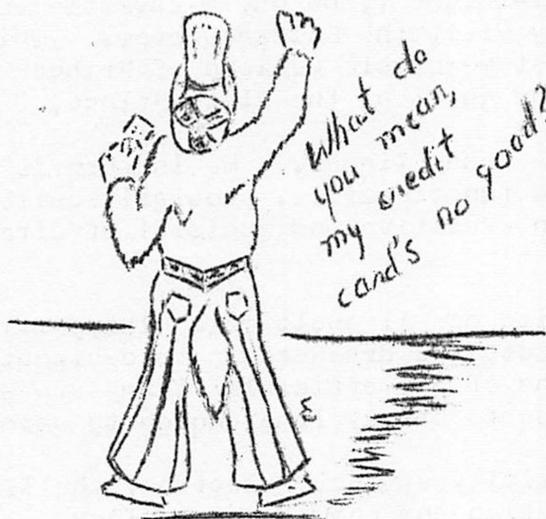
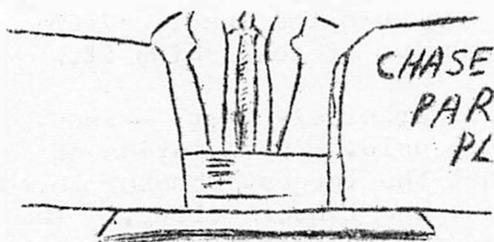
Mrs LeGuin's LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS has all the earmarks of a mainstream novel using the s f method merely as a framework. Perhaps with the advent of really good novelists the genre will disappear into the body of fiction.

Then everybody will be reading it and all excuse for fandom will have vanished!

- George Turner 1970

JOHN
&
SANDRA
MIESEL

PLATYPUS MYTHOS II



PLATYFAN AT STLOUISCON

(***EDITOR'S NOTE

PLATYPUS MYTHOS I appeared in DOUBLE:BILL 21 accompanied by lots of little drawings, and started with the ominous words: "Twelve hundred feet above the drear Australian outback looms Ayres Rock". It told of the musical skills of the platypi ("If the new Sydney Opera House is completed within this century, rumour persists that the inaugural work will be Peter Illich Platypus' sensational ballet, CORROBOREE") and of that "feared and phallic commercial baron, Big Jack Platy!" So speaks our favourite animal to John and Sandra Miesel, of Indianapolis, Indiana. **)

PLATYCRATICUS

The governance of the Platypus People may be described as an astounding combination of absolute autocracy and total anarchy. However their current institutions are comparatively recent developments in their eon-spanning history. For untold millions of years after Bigfoller Platy awakened the Primal Pair beneath Ayer's Rock, the platys dreamed on in the modest splendour of their perfection. They required no formal political organization beyond a loose system of clans, the prime function of clan elders being logistical planning for the pentannual Great Chants.

Tranquility is shattered by the advent of man and dingo. To meet these dangerous challenges, the then Paramount Chanter was chosen Prince and invested with unconditional emergency powers. These have never been rescinded, yet are wielded with utmost benevolence - which is to say they are scarcely ever wielded at all.

The dynasty of that first Platy Prince extends in unbroken lineage to His present Serenest Highness. Each Prince abandons his personal name upon coronation as a sign of his total immersion in the Awful Princely Glory. But naturally, historians have assigned epithets to distinguish certain outstanding individuals (e.g. The

Sybarite, the Pussiant, The Conspicuous Imbiber, The Bald-Tailed, The Terror of the Dingoes). Such is the prestige of the office that not even the lunatic fringe of platypusdom, the Monotreme Liberation Front could conceive of abolishing it.

The Prince's official residence, the Golden Burrow, is precisely that - an immense, labyrinthine burrow lined with sheets of pure gold. Some notion of platy cultural values may be gained by observing that the largest chamber in the Burrow is not the opal-studded state audience hall but the liquor cellar. The pantry is a close second. Under terms of the Confidential Compact which acknowledged the Principality's cherished semi-autonomy, no human save the reigning monarch of Great Britain or immediate heir may visit the Golden Burrow. While it does not appear in any public records, the most memorable weekend of Prince Charles's sojourn in Australia was spent as the guest of the Platy Prince.

The chief official assisting the Prince is the Grand Tinger. He in turn is assisted by a corps of Lesser Tingers. These functionaries, popularly called "The Fore-Swpatts of the Prince" conduct such executive and judicial affairs as individual goodplatys will permit.

The Lesser Tingers are chosen by lot from a list of all adult male platys willing to serve. None may serve more than once. Lots are drawn again to designate one Tinger as Grand Tinger. Since the lengths of all officials' terms are also chosen by lot, some platys have occupied the seats barely long enough to warm them.

Yet in spite of (or because of?) the eccentricity of their election, the Tingers customarily serve with a high degree of dedication and competence. They voluntarily restrict their beer consumption and curtail their forays among the Sydney bikini girls.

However, in the event that a Tinger is guilty of gross malfeasance, punishment is severe. He is transported to a desolate region of the Outback and publicly bottled. The cruellest torment the condemned platy suffers is to stand unshaded in the sun watching his cobbles empty the bottles they will hurl at him. If he manages to survive their barrage, he will be released without further penalty. Then the execution is transformed into a celebration of Bigfeller Platy's mercy.

Ere any upstart human dares deride platypus institutions, it would be well to ponder their racial motto: "WE SURVIVE".

- John and Sandra Miesel 1970

The platys have been sentient for upwards of twenty million years. They are linked in a group mind so nothing an individual ever does is lost. They are much superior to human beings in every way except size and brute strength. As a race they are "unfallen" but a few individuals are incredibly depraved, like Bug Jack Platy. Bigfeller Platy is not a god but a demi-urgic angel. (If angels are pure spirits, there's no logical reason they couldn't appear in the form of platys as easily as humans.) Platys have barely enough interest in females of their own species to maintain the species but human females... Hmmm. There is a platypus among s f fans, the intrepid, lecherous, hard-drinking Platyfan. (See previous page). Obviously, it is nothing but crude species chauvinism that keeps the truth about the noble platys and their semi-athonomous Principality secret.

FICTION MACHINES

THE AMERICAN S F MAGAZINES OCT-DEC 1969

The last regular FICTION MACHINES column appeared in S F COMMENTARY 3, June 1969. There I despaired of ever finding originality in the magazines, and said that "the magazines remain (barely) readable, not because of the average quality of the fiction offered, but because of the occasional surprises". The comment covered the American magazines, October to December 1968.

Cover the same period in 1969, and can I say anything different? I should be able to discover something interesting, as the gap between the end of 1968 and midway through 1969 has given us more changes in the magazines than during any similar period of time for decades. You probably know the changes well by now: Sol Cohen appointed Ted White editor of two non-magazines, AMAZING and FANTASTIC. Before Ted, Barry Malzberg briefly beat his head against the brick wall of Cohen financial policies, and lasted two or three issues of each magazine, publishing several memorable stories during his editorship. Ted White, perhaps a more dynamic person, perhaps luckier, decreased the magazines' reprints quickly, reintroduced the letter column, wrote long editorials and held out his hands to the science fiction fans. Within 6 to 8 months he bought and published two serials (UP THE LINE and A LINCOLN SIMULACRUM) that were better than any serials that had appeared in the magazines for years. Most of the short stories are still mediocre - but more of that later.

Also, during the period from January 1969 to September 1969, GALAXY and IF underwent even more drastic changes, none of them to bad effect. After all, what could be worse than the level that IF attained by March or April in 1969? Green middle pages that looked and read as if meant for eight-year-olds, as well as a selection of the worst fiction I've ever read in any science fiction magazine. Pohl's bankrupt policies failed so badly (and this was the magazine that had just won another Hugo) that his magazines were sold to the Universal Publishing and Distributing Corporation. New editor Ejler Jakobsson took some time to make necessary changes, but he had considerable troubles with his printers and Pohl's backlog of stories. By December Jack Gaughan was securely placed as Art Director (and sole art contributor) of both magazines, helped by offset printing. Jakobsson announced himself, at least indirectly, as the first American magazine editor to

buy "New Wave" fiction, and the first editor I've noticed who has opposed John W. Campbell's theories in his editorials. As I say yet again, Jakobsson knows how to make friends of at least some of us.

The other magazines continued as before. Discussion and statistics released in SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW 38 and elsewhere, show that all the magazines except ANALOG now tread on thin financial ice. Distribution in USA is not much better than in England, where it has recently killed two magazines within six months of each other. (See Phil Harbottle's letter in this issue of SFC). Only in such a situation, it seems, will magazine editors put themselves on the line and try out new policies. The latest reports I heard (in LOCUS, of course) indicated that Jakobsson's policies have been successful at the front counter, while Ted White's have not been. FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION declines into senility, although it holds occasional surprises. ANALOG's sales increase, and now extend to well over 100,000. F&SF's partner, VENTURE, has been a financial success, despite, or perhaps because of its very bad covers. In Australia we don't see the other magazines.

But when it comes to the crunch - what's the fiction like? The average quality of the fiction in IF and GALAXY has improved; it couldn't have become worse. But when I look at my little list I find there are only three stories from three months of these two magazines that I particularly liked. They all appeared in the December issues of IF and GALAXY, so maybe I can play Micawber and hope that something will turn up in 1970, and that it took Jakobsson six months or more to find any fiction that he really wanted. :: ANCIENT MY ENEMY (Gordon R Dickson) is an excellent companion for his better story, JEAN DUPRES, which appears in the NOVA 1 collection. Man again attempts to understand alien, or in this case he only wants to avoid fighting him. As in JEAN DUPRES, man is the intruder, playing alien's rules, and only has himself to blame for his non-success. The explorer's girlfriend tries to find real rapport with the alien committed to ritualistic vengeance, but even she cannot turn aside the deluded fighters. This is a story full of meaningful gestures, stray words and brave people who do silly things; a story dramatized rather than merely related. :: ORACLE FOR A WHITE RABBIT (David Gerrold) is the same old story about the computer that talks back, but in this case the computer does more than merely talk back - it presents a mirror image of humanity that the computer operators can only call "insane". A story that should be no longer amusing, but is. :: HORN OF PLENTY, by Russian writer, Vladimir Grigoriev, seems to show the sort of unusual story that we may come to expect from these magazines. It's the special Russian tall story you find usually in little magazines and University editions of Russian s f. Whimsy follows whimsy, as the very Russian eccentric exposes the horn of plenty to a very Russian public service. Needless to say, the invention never becomes a commercial proposition, although stories like this are always good risks.

The FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION 20th Anniversary Issue did not provide the goodies I expected from it. Aldiss' story was unexpectedly flat-footed, the Bradbury unreadable, and Bloch's not very funny. But Philip Dick contributed one of his now rare short stories, THE ELECTRIC ANT, and made up for most of the deficiencies in the rest of this issue. Like FAITH OF OUR FATHERS, Dick's last short piece (in DANGEROUS VISIONS), THE ELECTRIC ANT sums up most of his present preoccupations in 15 pages. Garson Poole wakes up to find he has no right hand, and things get weirder from then on. He finds he is an electric ant, an android, and then he finds he has a little door in his chest, and underneath that is a little spool with his recorded life running through the pickup heads, and then... Well, read it. A very funny story. :: Asimov's FEMININE INTUITION was also very enjoyable, but as I said before, it's still Ike of the fifties - although nobody really wants him to change.

I could talk about several other stories, but it would serve little purpose. The quality is still low, but the surprises are more frequent, so I'm starting to enjoy the magazines again. What more can we hope for? -Bruce R Gillespie 1970

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 10)

BEST DRAMATIC PRESENTATION: T V COVERAGE OF APOLLO XI. I saw this in the living-room of Hardings at 8 am, and in the assembly hall of the Dandenong Technical School, but... yes, it was quite dramatic. Do we vote for the FLYPAST OF SIX PLANETS in 1980?

PROZINE: FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION (edited by Ed Ferman). You are kidding, people, aren't you?

BEST PROFESSIONAL ARTIST: KELLY FREAS. I would have preferred the Dillons, but I've just been reading Harry Harrison's IN OUR HANDS, THE STARS in ANALOG, and admiring the illustrations on the way. He's worth every penny Campbell pays him.

BEST FANZINE: SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW (edited by Dick Gais). Predictable, perhaps, but well-deserved. I was extremely disappointed that SPECULATION came 4th on the ballot. I still think SPEC should have fought it out with LOCUS, but... Gillespie loses again.

FAN WRITER: BOB TUCKER. Where? Will somebody send me a fanzine that featured something by Bob Tucker during 1969. Incomprehensible.

BEST FAN ARTIST: TIM KIRK. Well, I suppose. But Steve Fabian, the best of the 5 came 5th! I retire licked, not understanding the fannish mind in any way whatsoever.

The S F COMMENTARY award will be given just as soon as I read the magazines through to September, and I think I can safely say that it will have no relation whatsoever to the 1971 Hugo awards.

* A lot of people would have liked SLAUGHTERHOUSE FIVE to win the Hugo, and expected it to beat LHD or run a close second. Instead it came fourth, which shows that an awful lot of people can be wrong under the Democratic Way of Fandom. George Turner discusses it elsewhere in this issue, and Leigh Edmonds take up an unaccustomed role as Reader of Science Fiction. More astonishing things do happen, I suppose:

* LEIGH EDMONDS (P O Box 74, Balaclava, Victoria 3183)

Paul Anderson, in his review of SLAUGHTERHOUSE FIVE ((SFC 15)) is of the opinion that the Tralfamadorian view of life is only "their view of existence". This is not true, since it is obvious that they experience their philosophy and are completely justified in accepting it as true. Because a human being cannot live any part of life when he wants, doesn't mean his philosophy is the only right one... It only means that since he cannot do this, he is blind to other possible truths about reality. Simply because a human being can hide from himself that fact of the hopelessness of life it gives him no right to say that it is "limited" to hold the Tralfamadorian belief. Paul, with a strictly human point of view, uses words such as "completely fatalistic", "how limited they are", "pitiful" and "doomed". What about the situation a person can find himself in if his illusions of some sort of hope in the future, are shattered? The ability to take life as it is and to be able to say "So it goes" is the only way in which the characters of this (or any other) novel can face reality.

Paul has neither faced the reality of the novel, nor, I suspect, the larger reality of life. Paul uses the word "puppet-master" to describe the word "fate" and I gather from what Paul wrote earlier, "They ((the Tralfamadorians)) consider it ((time)) to be an immutable unchangeable unit" that he considers

the Tralfamadorians as victims of fate, passive by-standers to passing time. I don't think Paul likes the concept of fate, a pity since we're all prisoners of it, whether we like it or not. (August 14, 1970) *

* Apart from disagreeing with reviewers, other letter writers have disagreed with yet other letter writers. Bob Smith lists his reading during the last few months (he actually remembers that the Ditmar Awards are coming up):

* BOB SMITH (Flat 1, 64 Elouera Rd, Cronulla, N S W 2230)

Lyn picked up a copy of SLAUGHTERHOUSE FIVE in town recently, I grabbed THE PLANET BUYER off our local newsagent's stand a couple of days ago... and so it goes. On the other hand, books that I have gone after recently: Sullivan's WE ARE NOT ALONE, Singh's MODERN COSMOLOGY, Durrell's NUNQUAM, Ardrey's AFRICAN GENESIS, and TERRITORIAL IMPERATIVE, Lorenz ON AGGRESSION, Blyth's MUMONKAN, Einstein's MOZART, Baxter's SCIENCE FICTION IN THE CINEMA, Lindsay's THE INKED-IN IMAGE, Von Darikon's CHARIOTS OF THE GODS, and Von Braun/Ordway's HISTORY OF ROCKETRY AND SPACE TRAVEL... That would be a reasonable four-month grab bag.

...Lem's command of the written English language is fantastic, but I find myself disagreeing with his reasoning on two counts: Surely the science fiction writer who explores all facets of the future must take the view that the "probability" of something being so in the far future is possible? And isn't it much more courageous and challenging for the s f writer to attempt an "in-depth" love relationship between a non-humanlike alien and a human? Isn't Lem showing a scientist's lack of tolerance for the illogical and irrational behaviour of human emotions? The average s f reader may not care a damn about the author's scientific background, but he has an interest in the author's attitude towards, and treatment of, a race that is "alien".

I have a standing order with Angus and Robertsons for VISION, and so I seem to be at least two issues behind you... It's quite amazing you know: for years we fans smiled tolerantly at old John Russell Fearn and wouldn't be caught dead with his titles on his shelves, but - my wife announces that INTO THE UNKNOWN is the best story she's read in VISION (1 to 7) so far, and a friend of hers at work who has never read science fiction thinks it's terrific. And here's the editor of SFC telling us it has something contemporary science fiction hasn't... and it's almost thirty years old. I have read the story, and it's pretty close to what we often vaguely term "sense of wonder". It's very similar in theme and scope to one of my favourite old stories, Poul Anderson's FLIGHT TO FOREVER and they just don't write 'em like that anymore... and neither did JR Fearn.

(August 9; August 28 1970) *

* Which is by way of introduction to the saddest letter I've received recently. I have some idea of the effort, emotion and skill that are now laid waste because of the simple words here:

* PHIL HARBOTTLE (2 St Nicholas Buildings, Newcastle Upon Tyne 1, England)

I have mailed you a copy of the September VISION. I regret to say that this will be the last one to be issued, as Ron Graham has informed me that he is withdrawing from all publishing. His reasons for this are private, but the demise of VISION is almost 100% attributable to a disgusting standard of

distribution at the hands of the New English Library magazine division. I was unable to get this improved, though I tried everything I could think of... You might like to remind readers that they can get back copies of the twelve issues for 5/- each post free. I much prefer payment by cheque or currency notes, as we have received many money orders incorrectly filled out. American dollars are also acceptable. (September 10, 1970)

* Phil also reminds me to look out for the Fearn story, THE SLITHERERS, which appears in either Number 11 or 12, and the Lee Harding story written around Stan Pitt's last cover for VISION.

There is little I can say by way of epitaph. As I said to Phil by letter, the odd result is that VISION will leave a valuable legacy for everybody except the people who actually published the magazine. VISION has had a lot to do with the recent revival of Australian fan and professional activities, and has launched at least one of our authors into a full-time writing career. I feel sorrow for all those people who justifiably hoped for so much at the beginning of the project, and saw it wither in the icy English publishing climate. NEW WORLDS finally succumbed to the same publishing pressures, and at about the same time, so it looks as if a science fiction magazine is now an impossible publishing venture in England or the British Commonwealth. I suggest that Phil try publishing a paperback-anthology VISION, but he would need a new, very affluent backer, and Eddie Jones would still be a casualty. I can't see a way out, but this is a project that should be rescued if at all possible.

* Other news of the moment is less depressing. I'm not sure that most of it is news, but mainly bits and pieces that reach me through the mail. For instance, I received an offset, newsy fanzine several weeks ago - all in Roumanian, and representative of an active Roumanian fandom. S F HIRADO is published by the Mtesz Klub SF, Budapest V., Szabadsag ter 17, Hungary. My contact is Peter Kuczka, the editor of the magazine. He writes a literate English letter, so presumably he would like to see English language fanzines.

* L Sprague de Camp sent a postcard to thank Paul Anderson for his review of THE GOBLIN TOWER in SFC 13, and to say that he is "hard at work on a sequel, THE CLOCKS OF IRAZ".

* The organizer of Scicon 70, the British Convention held over Easter, was George Hay. Now he is organizer of the S F Foundation recently set up at the North East London Polytechnic. The Foundation has the green light to explore avenues of research into science fiction criticism, publishing, readership and other aspects of the genre that no institute has previously undertaken. The Foundation has both cash and a professional staff, and this is quite an innovation within the science fiction field. As George said at the Speculation Conference, science fiction has now become "respectable... for better or for worse". It can only be for the better.

* Not that science fiction has previously escaped respectability. I received the prospectus for a course in "Science Fiction and Public Policy" prepared by Dennis Livingston (presumably, Professor..) of the Interdisciplinary Studies department of Crawford Hall, Cleveland, Ohio. The course covers most aspects of science fiction with the "focus on what science fiction has to say about important public policy issues bedeviling society or likely to arise in the near future". It's a Sociology course, rather than a Literature course, but I'm still impressed by the width of the course. Its bibliography covers all the important critical material I'm familiar with, and gives a description of fandom, conventions, and science fiction organizations in the addendum. I only wish I lived near enough to enroll.

* Some of my favourite fanzines have turned up in the mailbox recently. Besides OUTWORLDS 4, which has the best artwork I have seen in any fanzine (except for the cover of SFR 30, also by Steven Fabian), I received the first WARHOON for 1½ years (Number 27) which precedes the Walt Willis reprint issue - 266 pages on stenoil! Dick Bergeron still has 50 copies left of Number 26, if you are interested, and plenty of Number 27. "Available for contributions, letters of comment, in trade for your publication, or 60c if inspiration fails you" from Dick, at 11 East 68th Street, New York, New York 10021, U S A. This is a good issue of the world's best fanzine, and mainly reminisces about the Glories of Fandom. WARHOON has an air of elation, good humour and quality about it that evades nearly every other fanzine published today. Unmissable.

* More regular is SPECULATION, which topples from its Top Spot when WARHOON reappears. It is taken far less time for SPEC to reach its 27th issue than it took WARHOON, and SPEC now presents the best s f reviews and general articles you can find. Number 27 presents a review by Aldiss (!), reviews by Tony Sudbery and Pamela Bulmer, among others, and a transcript of parts of the Speculation Conference. Peter kindly sent me these tapes, and I have transcribed some more of proceedings, which will be published in S F COMMENTARY.

SPECULATION affects my personal interest, however, because I had sent Peter some reviews. Naturally I thought Peter would be undyingly 'grateful for these masterpieces, so I was a little surprised when Peter sent some of them back. With them has come an interesting letter (among the many still on file) in which one editor gives his views of another editor's reviews. A dangerous proceeding - but all this did was to set me thinking about the reviews I have done. Do they get the message across? Are they "good" reviews? Nobody has ever taken them apart, or tried to improve them, so I have presumed that everybody was happy with the material I find time to write. But let Pete comment, and I'd like to hear comments about reviewing procedures in this or any other fanzine. I am well aware, for instance, that the SFC reviewer who has received the most mail is Paul Anderson, whose reviewing methods are quite different from mine.

* PETER R WESTON (31 Pinewall Avenue, Kings Norton, Birmingham 30, England)

I quite like your reviews, but there are a couple of things I'm not too happy about. This is just my opinion, you understand, and it probably arises because I've been looking for something else in my SPEC reviews. I noticed two things in particular in your reviews and articles:

1 You seem to be too intense - like Franz Rottensteiner, almost incensed that s f should be so bad. Whether it is or not doesn't matter, but I think we have to realise that authors usually have put something into their books, and that we mustn't be too nasty. Also, it doesn't ring true - the obvious question is: "If it's so bad, why read it?"

2 The other thing is that you have the rather bad habit of saying: "X is a bad story - listen to this" and then quote a slab of text as a bad example. Not only does this get repetitive, but it is also a boring way to fill pages. And worst of all, half the time the examples quoted don't seem especially bad for any obvious reason - and you don't comment on the quote to say why you've quoted it!

The sort of thing I really am looking for is material like Pam Bulmer's review of NOVA, and Tony Sudbery's review of Brunner's QUICKSAND, in SPEC-27.

(September 6 1970) *

* My answers to Pete ran something like this: My dismay at the low quality of s f is an expression of my belief in its possibilities. If it is the field where people can be truly original and imaginative, why isn't it? I try to keep in mind the kind of s f novel we could be reading, if it was written and published. And if I'm talking about an s f novel or story in a review, then I like to talk about the work itself, not my paraphrase of it. I like to present my evidence, in other words, and in such a way that people can test the evidence for themselves. I try to explain my choices where possible, but often this is like explaining a joke - either you see my point or you don't. In other words, Pete and I just have different ideas concerning the ideal review, and there may be other models for sale.

* One other SPECULATIVE matter. Pete Weston has had such a good response to the next British Eastercon (Worcester, 1971, organized by Peter himself) that he is thinking about the next British Worldcon bid. 1975, he suggests. The Swedes are still bidding for 1976. Peter won't be forming a Concommittee himself, but he's put the idea to his readers and even suggested a site. It's going to be tough, people, if we really want that Worldcon..

* Many people have written: Brian Williams (England), Liz Fishman (Indiana), Derek Kew (Victoria), Alf Van Der Poorten (N S W), Robin Johnson (N S W, Heicon, and most of the rest of the world), Sandra Miesel (Indiana), Harry Warner Jr (Maryland), Michael Cameron and Neil Rahman (the two most active new fans in Australia at the moment - from Brisbane, Qld), Bert Chandler (N S W), Chris Priest (England - he doesn't see how anybody can judge a book's importance before it is read and reviewed, so he rejects SAM's ideas out of hand), Stuart Leslie (N S W - at length), Cy Chauvin (Michigan), and Jerry Lapidus (New York). I'll be using many of these letters in the next issue, of course, but meanwhile here is the Secret (and not-so-secret) Master of Australian Fandom:

* JOHN FOYSTER (12 Glenariff Drive, Mulgrave, Victoria 3170)

As Lem says, there is quite a danger that a highly scientific education would harm a person's writing. That is the problem with s f, if you like. And again, a product of the ideal s f writer might not be palatable to the average s f fan, but I like to think that it would be at least acceptable to connoisseurs of "Great and True Literature", and certainly pleasant for Stanislaw Lem and Franz Rottensteiner and a few others... Lem's final paragraph is the important one.

Pity Sandra Miesel couldn't spare the time to read my article on s f writers in SFC 10:

SM: Surely breadth is preferable to depth in factual knowledge...

JF: A Ph D in one area would probably be less useful than a broader knowledge. (p. 6)

SM: I disagree with your implications that scientific knowledge can only be acquired by formal university education...

JF: I'm not going to suggest that the only measure of knowledge is a bit of paper: on the contrary I simply don't believe it to be true.(p.7)

SM: ...and that the physical sciences are the only proper bases for science fiction.

JF: Linguistics, Architecture, Anthropology... (p.7)

Hell, I know it is boring and time-consuming to read carefully, but surely a little attention now and then would save on, for example, letter-writing.
(August 13, 1970)

* On that cheery note, we retire into the woodwork. Next time around we're 26 pages or 106 pages. Thanks for the use of your eyes.

LATE NEWS, ADVERTISEMENT, OR WHAT YOU WILL

Since the last stencil was typed, John Bangsund has announced that he will publish AUSTRALIAN SCIENCE FICTION MONTHLY, which will complement SCYTHROP, AUSTRALIAN SCIENCE FICTION YEARBOOK and AUSTRALIAN SCIENCE FICTION DIRECTORY. ASFM is aimed not only at all those people who haven't seen enough John Bangsund fanzines recently, but also at all those thousands of people who read science fiction regularly but have never attended a convention, written to a fanzine or visited the Melbourne Science Fiction Club. Initial circulation could run to 3000, distributed to schools, universities and other Centres of Intellectual Ferment throughout the nation. Price probably 30 cents a copy, \$3 a year, and John would appreciate suggestions about centres of distribution, as well as your own financial and other support. First issue out real soon.

And while I'm typing, I might mention that all John's new activities are registered under the banner of PARERGON BOOKS (and that is the right spelling). The address is

JOHN BANGSUND, FLAT 1, 8 BUNDALOHN COURT, ST KILDA, VICTORIA 3182, AUSTRALIA.
Write to him and find out all about it.

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