

## NOVAE TERRAE - THE LAST YEAR

### **A. Vincent Clarke**

Novae Terrae was the first fanzine produced in Britain. It began in March '36, and by January '38 was running reasonably smoothly. It kept to the same size, a foolscap (13<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>" x 8<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>") sheet folded in half, and was mimeographed in different coloured inks. Purple and black were used, but most of the issues were in blue. Throughout 1938 it was a Science Fiction Association fanzine in a sercon era, but editor Maurice K. Hanson, his two associates, Arthur C. Clarke and Edward J. (Ted) Carnell and contributors, managed to inject a surprising amount of humour into most issues.

Jan. '38 started with Sam Youd (later known as 'John Christopher') and Arthur C. Clarke arguing over the accuracy of science content in stories ("Mr Clarke must remember that the Lorentz Fitzgerald Contraction is only a theory....."). Then another NT stalwart, D. R. Smith, writes of the need for a mature outlook ("Only those of us who still need to bathe their mental wounds in the soothing waters of imagination's magic river will remain, despised and despising"). But the star of the issue was Don Wollheim, advocating his friend John B. Michel's theories : "MICHELISM is the belief that science-fiction followers should actively work for the realization of the scientific socialist World-state as the only genuine justification for their activities and existence".

The next issue, March '38, ran the third of D.R.Smith's 'Cosmic Cases'. This was a series of humorous reports from a future Law Court, in this instance discussing the question of 'Is Humour an Anticultural Influence?' "His voice was of such power it was agonizing for a Riclavech to converse with him....When asked to give his name he first said, with peculiar inflections, that they called him Mimi, and when asked if that was his entire identification admitted that his name was actually Jolly Joe Jenkins.....". In official reports (London Branch meeting, Feb. 13th, 13 members and one visitor), "Mr. Carnell was called upon to deliver the dope on U.S. fans -- their activities, love lives, jail sentences, etc. Unfortunately, Mr.Carnell announced that he found it impossible to trace the life of any one fan in detail as Americans are so intensely active as to offer world lines of extra-ordinary complexity; he therefore gave a reading from one of the current U.S. fan mags".

The April '38 issue started the most acclaimed series in NT's history, William F. (Bill) Temple's 'The British Fan in his Natural Haunt'. Temple visited London fans in turn and gave some details of their homes and, most importantly for fans of the era, reported on highlights of respective collections. He noted that his first subject, Eric Williams, was an enthusiast for binding. "He's got all the AMAZING, WONDER and ASTOUNDING from 1930 to date in a serried row of neatly bound blue covers". In a short report of the Second Convention (April), with 43 'delegates', Ted Carnell was much impressed by John Russell Fearn. The Treasurer reported a Balance in Hand of roughly £1½ - to put this into perspective this was about half of one week's average wages. To finish the issue Arthur C. Clarke contributed a short poem ('Prelude to the Conquest of Space') - "I shot a rocket into the air,/ It fell to earth I know not where,/ But 50 grammes of T.N.T.,/ Exploded in the Rectory....etc."

The 'Natural Haunt' victim in May '38 was Ted Carnell, who also wrote a 'survey' of a new prozine, MARVEL SCIENCE STORIES. "Ever since Richard Tooker wrote three sex-science-fiction yarns in MYSTERY ADVENTURE in 1936, I've been expecting some smart American publisher to cash in on scientifiction as a background for sex trash. THIS IS IT". Ted went on to give some lurid details, which interested fans of the day and no doubt did the Johnson Science Fiction Service, Britain's only SF specialist dealer, no harm. Ted was the Johnson's London representative. Other articles included two by D.R. Smith and one on poetry by Clarke.

June '38 saw a fairly sercon NOVAE TERRAE, with Temple's article on Clarke a welcome relief. but August brought a 48 page 25th. Anniversary number. Bill Temple was added to the editorial consultants. The first of a two-part editorial admitted that readers liked news and reviews and articles "about magazines (and) philosophy, but most of all they liked articles about fans. They liked to read about fans; fans in London, about fans in Leeds, in Liverpool, in New York and Los Angeles". Possibly because of this lurch to what became the staple diet of fanzines in later years, there was an announcement that reader's letters would be published in future. Bill Temple reported that he and Clarke had attended a revival of 'King Kong'. "We were a bit disappointed at not seeing Poppa Kong land in the street when he tumbled off the Empire State Building. We wanted to see what happened to the people who were in the way". Temple also interviewed Maurice Hanson, and extracted the 'reluctant confession' that he was tired of editing NT. The reason, thought Temple, was lack of reader response.

An interesting article in this issue was 'Why Fandom?', by Jack Speer. This was an attempt to turn fanzines away from being solely about SF : "The fan is now at an age when he is philosophizing about anything and everything. In fandom he has learnt to express himself...."

D.R.Smith was present with a humorous space story: "Why, it's only a cog-wheel" cried Madeleine. Steve gave her a glance from which love and respect were conspicuously absent. "A left-hand helical mitre gear" he said, with emphasis on the last word. "Involute tooth form, helix angle about twelve, ground after hardening," he went on didactically. "What does all this mean?" cried Madeleine hysterically. Steve regarded her irritably. "It means that I know more about gears than you do".

This large August issue also ran a short 'Investigation', replies to Clarke, which tried to probe the reason for SF fans being fans. Was it something in the genes?

The Editorial in the September issue ended with a down-beat note; "(if) the readers do not find the magazine of sufficient interest to merit more response than has been apparent....there can be little point in continuing to publish it". There was the usual mix of articles, with Dave McIlwain (who later wrote as 'Charles Eric Maine') bringing in Freud to help an analysis of fans - "Unfortunately, or perhaps fortunately, a severe society represses their natural instincts...."

Earlier in the year, Hanson had casually mentioned a 200 circulation. In the November Editorial he started "During the last few months 120 copies of each issue have been bought and paid for....(and) it is safe to assume that another 80 persons .... read the magazine". Yet, mourns Hanson, only 12 had bothered to reply to the August questionnaire; he is bitter about the non-answerrers : "we will leave them to the exalted delights of their chosen form of literature....".

Douglas W.F.Mayer managed a two-page article on a couple of proof-reading errors in THRILLING WONDER STORIES, where he was quoted in the Reader Speaks columns of that magazine as 'Dorothy F.Meyer' - the article was entitled 'The Mystery of Sex'. D.R. Smith was present with one of his 'Cosmic Cases' - aliens objecting to the way they were depicted in SF. An article on the Orson Welles War of the Worlds scare on US radio concluded that the public had been prepared for it by familiarity with SF concepts, and "it was a branch of literature which was taking too long to mature out of the schoolboy stage". In the round-up of SFA Branch activities, there was a hint of gathering clouds as D.W.F. Mayer was reported to have given the Leeds Branch a talk on 'Gas Masks

and Chemical Warfare'. "He concluded by donning his civilian respirator with the air of an astronaut putting on his space-suit".

Amongst the assortment in the December NT - 'Art and Science Fiction', 'Why Aren't We Dictators?', etc., is a little gem: Idle Chatter in the Vaults, by Eric Williams. He opened by informing readers of a fact of publishing fan life which held for many years - the British Museum asked for copies of all fan magazines. Williams takes the reader to the BM vaults in the far future: "You know, Jol, when you consider that all these stacks and stacks of duplicated stuff stored away here for lord knows how long were all turned out on cranky old machines that dripped ink and tore the paper to shreds every so many turns, it makes you marvel at the patience and devotion these people must have had to go on churning it out month after month".

Don Wollheim was also on hand in December to report that the USSR was officially encouraging SF - "the popularisation of scientific ideas by presenting them in the form of romance".

The January 1939 Editorial announced that NT was ceasing, the torch being taken up by Ted Carnell editing a new fanzine, NEW WORLDS. Hanson explained NT was 'taking time properly belonging to more important interests'. He writes of working on the fanzine all Christmas Day and during a Bank Holiday, and that his work was hardly acknowledged by those who enjoyed it.

In other parts of the January issue, articles on Fortean phenomena, H.G. Wells, criticism of SF, and Clarke turning the tables on Temple by writing a 'Natural Haunt' type article on him, were overshadowed in my mind by a Branch Report from London, anonymous, but bearing all the hallmarks of Temple. A review of a film shown to the Branch reads in part: "It was an icy day, snowing, with the wind rattling over the roof, and the second film, 'White Hell of Pitz Palu' paralysed the audience with sheer cold. When a character freezing to death on a blizzard-swept mountain took off his outer clothes and shivered in his shirt, uncontrollable teeth chattering broke out".

In addition to the regular issues, two of the last three issues contained special 4-page supplements on blue paper, one a parody space-opera by O.J. Russell and A.G. Brown, and one a brilliant parody of the Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám by Sam Youd: "Awake! For Campbell from the Bowl of Night / Has flung the Stone that puts our Fears to Flight; / And Lo! Astounding's Editor has caught / A brilliant Halo and a Crown of Light"

.... and so on for 27 verses. Steve Sneyd in England has recently reprinted this evocation of fan's feelings in that era.

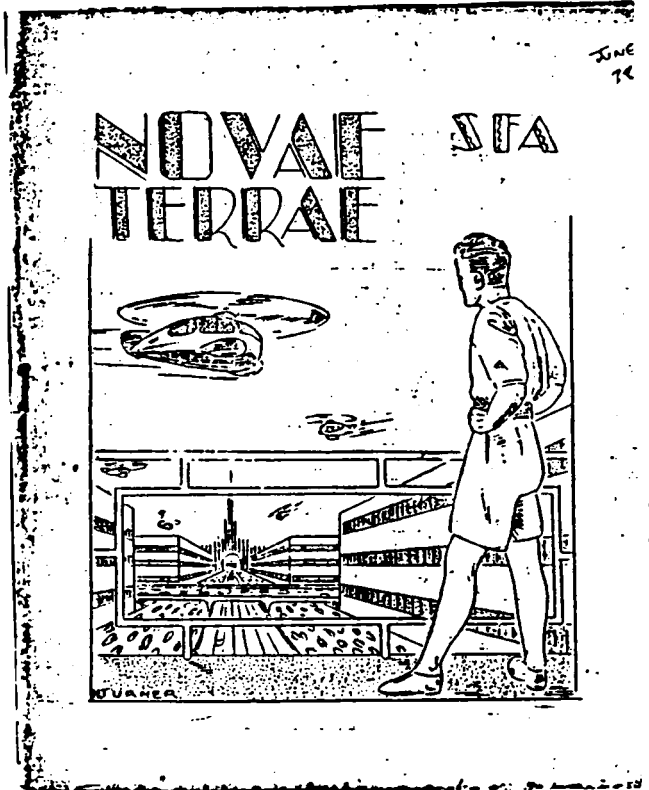
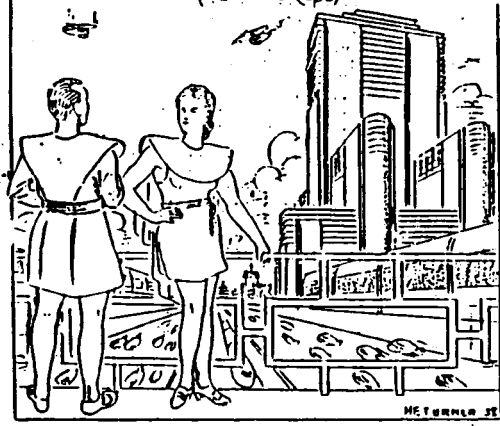
Most of the covers on that last year of NT were drawn by Manchester artist Harry Turner, though Eric Williams raised reader comment by a cover showing a grave headstone reading "AD 2000 - The Last Militarist - Thank God" on the September issue.

In 1938 there were few signs of the myth-making and self-referential humour which characterised fandom in later years, and NOVAE TERRAE, like many other fanzines, had its share of self-important articles written to an audience of a couple of hundred. It should also be remembered that outside the cosy world of fandom the threat of world war was growing. Through it all, though, NOVAE TERRAE concentrated on being informative and entertaining. It's a pity that, as with so many early fanzines, there were only a few active fans to help.



— SFA —  
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NOVAE TERRAE  
(NEW WORLDS)



JULY 78

NOVAE TERRAE

