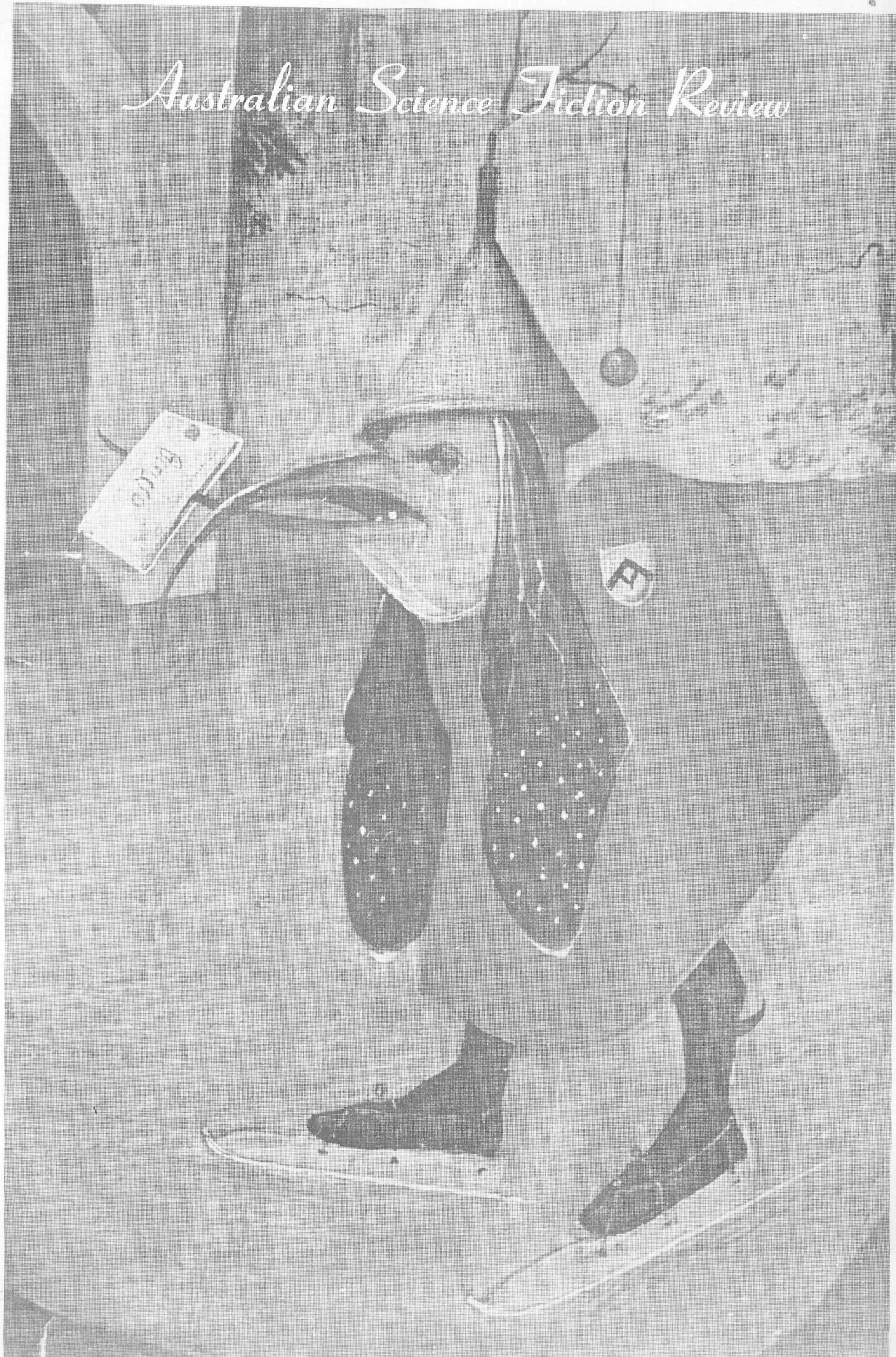


6

Australian Science Fiction Review



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INNUENDO AND OUT THE OTHER

A happy new year to you, friend, and much good may it do you.

As a bright, forward-looking new experiment in idiocy we present herewith our first two-stage fanzine. No.6 is the booster stage - powered by such illustrious names as JAMES BLISH, TED WHITE, DICK JENSSEN, and... er... others. The nose-cone (dedicated to King Alfred), with its deadly load of incendiary criticism, follows as No.7. I say 'follows' and that's strictly accurate, but only - if all goes well - by two days. No.6 is scheduled for publication on January 5 and No.7 on January 7. (At this rate you'll see the next Xmas issue on Friday week.)

Once in orbit, do we indefatigable rocketeers rest on our laurels and...? Hardly. There's still the special Cordwainer Smith issue to work on. Remember? - the one we promised for last month. (This is called procrastination: putting off till tomorrow what you can't hammer into shape today.) It's still coming: I say no more. If there's one new year's resolution I've made, it's not to promise anything anymore. It's so embarrassing when everyone asks you what happened to the promised article by Koncrit Florbryx on The Life And Work Of Wolf J. Flywheel. It's just as embarrassing when no one asks you.

The most interesting news this month, as far as ASFR is concerned, is the discovery of a fan club at Wodonga, Victoria. (That poor David of a town, ever hovering in the shadow of the goliath Albury, just over the border in New South Wales.) Not only does the group exist: it produces a fanzine, which has so far seen sixteen issues. (Blush!) Spokesman for the group is Alan France: his letter is on page 25. Alan sent me a sub months ago. I sent him one issue, I think, and promptly mislaid his address. He subsequently wrote to me, politely enquiring if we'd published any further issues (some people in a situation like that can be very sarcasmic and indignant, but Alan wasn't: we are gentlefolk here in Victoria) and so communications were restored. Which is a good thing, since one of ASFR's aims is to contact precisely such groups as this one at Wodonga.

Now let me tell you a bad thing. Do you know, we've now (almost) published seven issues; we've had subs from all over Australia, from Britain, America and Sweden; we've had letters from those places and from Italy, Canada and Czechoslovakia; overseas fanzines have printed all kinds of flattering remarks about us; we've had articles and letters from a surprising number of pro writers and big-name-fans. But, until now, we've had not one report from any fan group in Australia outside of Melbourne; moreover, if we had to rely on Australian letters of comment we wouldn't have a letter column.

Lately I've heard that some readers are not happy about the space we give to overseas contributors. If that's the way you feel about it, why not write and say so? As the Reverend Doctor Fosdick once said: are you part of the problem or part of the answer? Incidentally, in our first seven issues we will have published 248 pages of articles, reviews and letters - of which 33 pages have been written by people overseas. Brian Aldiss remarked in ASFR3 'I look forward to the day when you have so much local material there is no room for us.' That day has not yet come. Perhaps you can do something to hasten it a little.

Anyway: is fandom dead in Sydney, Adelaide, Brisbane, Perth, Canberra, Hobart, Fremantle?

Do you, gentle reader, agree with every darn thing in ASFR? If not, say so!

Editor descends pulpit, changes metaphors in midstream, and resumes normal transmission...

I'm not sure what was the first fanzine I ever saw. It wasn't very long ago, I know that. Perhaps a little over three years back. It might have been WARHOON, Lee's favourite. Or it might just possibly have been John Foyster's WILD COLONIAL BOY. But I am quite certain that the first fanzine I ever received through the mail was John's SATURA. Issue One, February 1964. SATURA more or less became an institution in my life: my first stumbling fanzine contribution appeared in No.7, and I was tickled pink when John commissioned me to draw the heading for No.12, with which issue its name changed to THE GRYPHON. In the seventeen issues of SATURA/GRYPHON (for the less said about that 120-page monster last October the better) John published a lot of fine material. And possibly the best thing ever to appear there was a letter from Dick Jenssen, in SATURA 6, in which he talked about his visit to Stuart Hoffman...

Diagonally opposite the Exhibition Buildings in Nicholas Street, Carlton, is a block of flats huddling in as dense a jungle of trees and shrubs as you're likely to find, this close to the city. Parking my car, I forged a path through the undergrowth to a certain door, and stood knocking. And stood. Eventually the door slowly opened, and there, blinking at the light, his slender frame draped in a dressing-gown, clung Dr. Jenssen. His agile brain alert and active even at so early an hour (9.30am), he soon recognized me and showed me in. Then he sort of slumped into a chair and appeared to relapse into sleep as I asked his permission to reprint that article from SATURA. Anything for the quiet life, anything to hit that cot again: he agreed. Exultant, I tore home and stencilled it before he could wake up and realize what he had done.

I think you will enjoy OFF ON A COMET as much as I do. Just bear in mind that it was written nearly three years ago, and has not been revised. Oh, and don't blame Dick for the title: it's mine.

A swift scene change to Perth, Western Australia, and there I am, eight months ago, sitting at a rickety table in the dungeons under the Commercial Travellers' Club, typing away on a rented portable, preparing ASFR 1. Justifying the margins, of all stupid things... Presently I rise and make my way up the stairs to the receptionist's desk. Mail? Yes, a letter from Diane, and another from The Harding. The latter informs me that the bearded one has been asked again to appear on a TV show.

Again I could change scenes and whirl you off to Launceston, Tasmania, where I reclined in sybaritic luxury at the Travelodge Motel, reading another Harding letter and the first draft of I WAS A VICTIM OF THE GREAT AUSTRALIAN BRAIN BLUDGE! ...but I'm getting dizzy.

Thank ghod we don't award our own local equivalents of the Hugo, or we'd be forced to present Lee with one for being Australian Science Fiction TV Personality Of The Year. Mainly because he's the only one of us so far to manage to talk or bribe his way on-camera. (Other contenders please state your claims.) Unless he Meets the Press, or Picks a Box, or pops out of Graeme's barrel this year, this is the last of the Harding TV memoirs for the time being. (I notice he modestly refrains from mentioning his appearance some years ago on Coles's £3000 Quiz, but perhaps that episode would be of more interest to a film fanzine.)

Joking aside, Lee's article is a fascinating one. Maybe it doesn't tell you much about sf, but it does tell you what a lot of people think about sf, some interesting things about TV - and, for the discerning reader, many interesting things about Lee himself.

By the way, did you pick No.1 as Lee last month? You did? Yes, I thought he gave the most intelligent answers, too. However, Lee was in fact No.2.

And now, if you'll excuse me, I just have to compose one more editorial and type another thirty-eight stencils and I'm finished for this week. It'll be lovely to get back to work on Monday. I need a break.

John Bangsund

OFF ON A COMET

DITMAR JENSSEN

While as a human being or a meteorologist existence and the vagaries concomitant with being and becoming have yet to press my potentialities into their full entelechy, I can say that as a Science Fiction Fan I have truly lived. The world of sf can at best promise only anticlimaxes from this moment - only poor surrogates for the monumentality of emotion I now experience. For before me... on my left... I have, as I write, one of the most venerated and, perhaps, sacred objects of the tight and oftentimes ludicrous world which we, as sf-loving nuts, inhabit. I don't think it's entirely my imagination, or a strange confluence of light and surface, which could account for the charismatic aura surrounding this quasi-holy relic.

Of course, it could only be one thing - and it is: a copy of AMAZING STORIES for April 1926. That's right... the first magazine to devote itself to sf exclusively... and the first issue of that magazine! Let Hugo Gernsback tell you about it:

"Another fiction magazine!

At first thought it does seem impossible that there could be room for another fiction magazine in this country. The reader may well wonder, 'Aren't there enough already, with the several hundreds now being published?' True. But this is not 'another fiction magazine'; AMAZING STORIES is a new kind of fiction magazine! It is entirely new - entirely different - something that has never been done before in this country. Therefore AMAZING STORIES deserves your interest and attention.

There is the usual fiction magazine, the love story and the sex-appeal type of magazine, the adventure type, and so on, but a magazine of 'scientifiction' is a pioneer of its field in America.

By 'scientifiction' I mean the Jules Verne, H.G. Wells, and Edgar Allan Poe type of story - a charming romance mingled with scientific fact and prophetic vision."

So there you have the first definition of sf - the emphasis being mine. And what's in this very first sf magazine? Well... Verne's OFF ON A COMET, Wells's THE NEW ACCELERATOR, Poe's THE FACTS IN THE CASE OF M. VALDEMAR, Hall's THE MAN WHO SAVED THE EARTH, and stories by Peyton Wertenbaker and George Allan England. The cover? By (who else?) Frank R. Paul, illustrating the Verne story. I haven't read the book (only seen the film) so I really can't tell whether artwork and prose are compatible or even consistent. Against a lemon-yellow sky hangs a bloated and candy-coloured Saturn: a peppermint-pole-striped body surrounded by brown, off-white, yellow and blue rings. On the left centre is one of its moons, and the foreground is thus obviously another of these peripatetic satellites - frozen o'er into glacial

immobility, a vast expanse of slick-smooth ice recedes back, back to a not too distant horizon where twin mounts of fractured ice rear themselves upward to the honeyed sky. Perched on these breasts of Saturn's minion - and serving the function of technological nipples - are a pair of sailing-cum-steam ships. Laughing merrily, and delightedly, breathtakingly skimming on the ice of the foreground are many, many fur-clad natives. That they are natives is plain, since they wear no helmets. The names of Verne, Wells and Poe are prominently placed, in vibrato-vermilion, on the cover, together with the legend: '25 cents'.

What more could one ask? The second, third, fourth... issues? Ah, they too are here. Wells, Poe, Verne and Paul are back for May '26... Poe is missing for June '26, and July and August and September... but the other favourites remain. Issue 3: Leinster (THE RUNAWAY SKYSCRAPER) and Kline appear, Siodmak in number 4, Serviss (A COLUMBUS OF SPACE) in number 5... BEMs are with us from May onward, disembodied brains have materialised with August, intelligent creatures from inner (sea) space bring their terrifying presence to grace the September cover.

You want more? How about PHANTOMS OF REALITY - a complete novelette of adventure in the fourth dimension - by Ray Cummings, in the first issue of ASTOUNDING STORIES OF SUPER-SCIENCE? Leinster also appears, and Harry Bates edits. Or, let's see... STARTLING STORIES, Volume 1, Number 1, January 1939, with Weinbaum's THE BLACK FLAME, appearances by Kline and Binder, and a Picture-Story of A. Einstein's life.

FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, WONDER STORIES (AIR WONDER, SCIENCE WONDER, WONDER, THRILLING WONDER), FUTURE, GALAXY, STARTLING, F&SF, THRILLS INC., SUPER SCIENCE, NEW WORLDS, IMAGINATION, IF, GOLDEN FLEECE, etc. etc. etc. Take your pick - they're all here.

And here... where is here? Why, Stuart Hoffman's little Schloss. A modest three-storied building, with the upper floor almost wholly devoted to Stu's sf collection, and situated in a part of America's Dairyland picturesquely called Black Earth. (Looking through the window here I can see the ground softly rolling away: dark - but not black - dirt showing occasionally through cold straw-brown grass, dotted in places with patches of still-frozen snow. On the hills, gaunt bare trees and small shrubs. The light is harsh and glares down sharply from the sky, so that over all a violent silver gleams and dazzles. It is so much like the Australian countryside on one of those oddly disturbing Spring days when light and shadow merge so gently into each other that it becomes difficult to isolate the smaller features.)

Mrs. Hoffman is bright, charming, petite and thoughtful. Witness: Stu works at strange, odd hours, and, to give me the maximum chance of meeting and talking to him, Mrs. H. invited me to spend the full weekend with them. The bus last night, of course, was delayed some 1½ hours - I mean, this is only to be expected when I travel - and I had visions of Mrs. H. sitting huddled in the corner of the filling station which doubles as the Greyhound terminal at Black Earth, for at least these 90 minutes. Well, I couldn't let that happen, could I? So I hopped into a cab and taxied the 22 miles. As I had surmised, there was Mrs. Hoffman dejectedly twiddling her thumbs and wondering where in hell that bus could have gotten to. Back at the establishment, her first thought was 'can I get you something to eat?' Foot and hand,

hand and foot, the waiting went on. The Marvels of the Library would have been far more than adequate, but the attention I'm receiving is the nth degree of hospitality.

And as for the library... not only the rare relics already mentioned, but such miracles of device as Genuine Finlay Illos, Freas, Dollens, etc. The Finlays are just unbelievable... I'd always thought him to be one of the top illustrators in any field, but I had never imagined that his drawings, in their full size, would be but slightly larger than the magazine reproductions. They are incredible... and it's a great pity that they lose so much when transformed into blocks and printed on the coarse lignar pap that serves the pulps as paper. The Freas paintings - two of his covers for ASTOUNDING - show also a great proficiency in his handling of the technical aspects - but I'm afraid that apart from this, F.K. Freas is no great shakes. The Morris Scott Dollens painting is highly imaginative, but...

I haven't mentioned any of the books lining the walls - row upon row of them. I don't think it'll serve much purpose to do so, either... you'll merely become jealous, or bored, or worse.

All these goodies surrounding me have induced a state of mind, an emotional situation which I'd thought I had forever passed: I don't know quite how to describe it - it's a terribly withdrawn and confined feeling, and yet marvellously impregnated with wonder and freshness and delight. A kind of state that one would want to carry over into the real (?) world. As I said, it isn't the type of feeling that I now experience readily - thanks to the process of growing older, and perhaps maturing slightly, the discovery of less emotionally wonderful things, better adjustment to the dullness and stupidity of reality - but it is the type of feeling that I suspect one needs from time to time.

I've often wondered - more and more lately - whether I wasn't becoming too stodgy, too dull; whether I wasn't losing the precious gift of being able to will myself into that 'state of disbelief', losing that absolutely essential sense of wonder. I was frightened that my training (which is seemingly never going to be completed) as a scientist might hasten and perhaps even bring about completely the destruction of that freshness of vision that time has dimmed. I am no longer quite so afraid. My sense of wonder is still there, just as strong as ever (I hope), but merely channelled into other fields. There is still a strong residue for the spheres of fantasy and sf... and this is not only nostalgia for the remembered past, not only the re-stimulation of faint cherished memories by old, half-forgotten stories or the smell and personality and geist of the pulps.

This plays a part, I know, but it's not the whole story. I've just completed reading a book on the Heroic Fantasy - SWORDS AND SORCERY, or some such title. You know, the kind of story that Howard used to write, or Dunsany, or C.L. Moore... and, in fact, they are all represented in the book. While I thought some of these were just awful, not a few stirred my imagination. A few years ago, I'm sure, I would have liked all the yarns unqualifiedly, but now... well, that's the penalty one has to pay when one's critical faculties improve and become more demanding: the sense of wonder remains, but is harder to satisfy. A story has to be so much better - better in every respect: logically, stylistically, emotionally, intellectually, and so on

(though any one of these criteria may swamp the others and yet produce a satisfying story) - before it can seduce one's belief into willingly overpowering one's natural cynical scepticism.

And this is, I think, what is wrong with sf today. Oh, I know that's not an original thought, but nonetheless it's true. Who, for example, needs to throw their cynicism into the part-time limbo when reading a story, so full of tiny, finicky detail that it sounds for all the world like a technical report, about Space Station USA Freedom No.69?

The science in sf should not, to my mind, be the dull cut-and-dried facts of today, nor even a logical extrapolation of those same facts - unless something wonder-full is added. This element will not be composed of strange or bizarre characters (though they will help), nor flowing, rolling myth-rich prose (though that, too, is of use), but rather a method of communicating to the reader the breathless feel of something new, the unique discovery of those new facts. For example, consider Hasse's HE WHO SHRANK. What have we here? The old (but then new) idea that perhaps the atomic system was composed in the shape of a miniature solar system: planets forever circling a central nucleus. In itself that is nothing startling, nor breathtaking. But what Hasse does is... to shrink his hero: and, as he does so, lets marvellous unforeseen events take place. Who had ever thought of being chased by a germ? of slipping between the cracks of matter? of shrinking into solar systems? of falling for infinity into the infinitesimal?

The only other work I've ever come across which conveyed the sense of the macroscopic and the microscopic was an article, 40 JUMPS THROUGH THE UNIVERSE, published in a Unesco Courier some years ago. But what has happened to modern science and its concepts? They have fled from commonsense, have abandoned the convenient mental picture method of explanation. For one explains the new in terms of the old, in terms of the familiar, and as soon as a mathematical concept is found which replaces the pictorial one all succeeding concepts will be abstract as well. And more and more so. So now, if one wanted to write a story about a shrinking man, one would have to stop at the pre-nuclear stage, or have one's hero portrayed as a unit of certainty amongst clouds of probabilities. And who can stand on a cloud, or grapple with chance?

This is not all that science has contributed to the death of sf. (Perhaps it is not yet dead, but it is certainly moribund, and the sooner the last rites are said the better. Of course, a Lazarus-miracle may yet occur.) How many new discoveries have been made in the past years? Discoveries which could compare with the Relativity theory, or the rise of Quantum Mechanics, or the widening of cosmological horizons, or the freshness of new technologies? These are part of the lifeblood of sf. And even should they occur in the next year or so, the time lag between science and its application in fiction will prevent the use of new ideas for many years. You see, no sf author has succeeded in outlining a story which depended on a totally new scientific idea. Even if he did it wouldn't be published, because the science would be, by virtue of its newness, 'unscientific'. SF depends on old scientific ideas: what appears new in the stories is merely an extrapolation of these old thoughts, an extrapolation which any scientist could make if he wanted to. What makes an sf yarn of quality is its ability, as I've already pointed out, to convey the atmosphere of intellectual excitement which these new (now

old) ideas engendered, and to show how they might affect the individual.

And there is another reason for the plight of modern sf. There are virtually no new horizons. All the earth has been explored - Man has climbed the highest mountains, plummeted to the lowest depths of the oceans, travelled across all the continents - and there is no place where HERE BE TYGERS can be written on the map. Tygers or dragons, koalas or hippogriffs, the unknown has vanished. Only Space remains. And that is sufficient - or will be, once we venture into it: right now it is a new frontier, but it is so new that it cannot be exciting. When the first man returns to tell us what space is like, how the stars appear, what fantastic new images are present there, then the sf authors will be able to attempt to convey this meaning and emotion to their readers. If something is totally unknown it is not exciting. Does Glük stimulate your imagination? Of course not. But if you knew more - but not too much - about it, it might prove to be immensely wonderful. Space is of the Glük variety: what does suggest itself as marvellous has already been written to death - only exploration and new discoveries will reinstate its mysterium.

And, finally, sf is dull, and becoming more and more dull, because we are at fault. We are becoming too blase with regard to technology and its progress. And with over-familiarity, perhaps, contempt - for with technology there must be a contingent boredom with the more basic scientific researches.

How to save sf? I can only suggest the resurrection of the old-time pulps: new reprints, anthologies... From the vast number of E.R. Burroughs-type books which are springing, so to speak, spontaneously into being, I suspect that the I-swash-you-buckle school of sf is still a potent force. And if this is so, then why not some of the more 'scientific' romances? Perhaps Hugo Gernsback's definition of scientifiction is not as outmoded as people would have us think?

"I say, this evening we'll all get drunk - I say - dash! - an
"Anthem, an Anthem!" said Suction.

"Lo the Bat with Leathern wing,
"Winking and blinking,
"Winking and blinking,
"Winking and blinking,
"Like Doctor Johnson."

Quid: "'Oho', said Dr. Johnson
"To Scipio Africanus,
"'If you don't own me a Philosopher,
"'I'll kick your Roman Anus'."

- From William Blake's AN ISLAND IN THE MOON (1737).

(Ah, they don't write dialogue like that any more...)

I Was A Victim Of The
Great Australian Brain Bludge!

'I confess nothing. They must have dug up your name all by themselves, rather as dogs rooting around in a garbage tin may, through some freak of chance, drag a pearl necklace out of the rubbish. These things happen.'

That's his story.

It had been a bad week. My wife and small son had temporarily vacated the house, ostensibly for a holiday but actually to preserve our collective sanity: life gets like that occasionally. And I had spent an uncomfortable week batching and going to bed late and eating meals at the oddest hours and seeing a lot of second-rate movies and generally not doing a scrap of worthwhile work for all that. So: when the phone hollered one morning at the ungodly hour of seven-thirty I flailed my way out of bed hoping it would be my wife on the other end, anxious to come home, and perhaps life might now right itself again.

'Mr. Harding?' enquired a sophisticated baritone, 'Mr. Lee Harding? The Writer?'

From a mind befuddled with sleep I managed to wrest an affirmative. It didn't sound like a creditor. They usually adopt a much firmer tone. And who among them knew me for a writer, for crissakes?

'My name is Tennison,' the voice went on - smooth, and accustomed to this sort of long-distance monologue. 'I'm with the Willard King Organization.' You could hear the Capitals. 'I believe you're a writer of, ah, science fiction, Mr. Harding?'

I realize now that I could have lied, told him I was the local butcher or something like that - anything to have saved myself a lot of time and worry. But there I was in the dim hours of early morning, on the cold kitchen floor, hopping uncomfortably from one bare foot to the other, while this guy captured my interest under such screamingly adverse circumstances merely by mentioning the magic words Science Fiction.

'...and I believe you and some other writers held a Convention in Melbourne recently...?'

Sharp guy. Must have read one of the reports in the BULLETIN or the AGE. I hoped it hadn't been that absurd piece by Keith Dunstan in the SUN.

'That's right.'

There followed a short pause while he shifted into jocular tone.

'You're a hard man to find, Mr. Harding.'

'Is that so?' I was thinking hard. Who among my Good Friends had

betrayed me thus? Binns? Foyster? BAXTER? It could only have been Baxter...

'Yes indeed. Now, we were wondering if you could possibly come into the Channel Seven studios on Tuesday night and discuss science fiction with Mr. Bob Crosby on his National Show?'

Bob Crosby...?

Without even giving myself time to realize what I was letting myself in for, I agreed. Personal problems were all very well, but we were all of us still enjoying the euphoria of the splendid Convention publicity and were agreed that any extra publicity made available should be grabbed at once. So I grabbed.

'Good.' That seemed to please him, and he now lapsed into a very genial manner and explained that he was at the moment in bed partaking of toast and coffee, and that he was sorry for calling me so early but he knew that he was sure to catch me in at such an early hour. This was Friday. I figured they must operate on a rather frantic schedule if they wanted me 'on camera' the following Tuesday.

'Could you give me some information to pass on to Mr. Crosby? Let's see... You are Australia's most successful science fiction writer, is that right?'

I struggled desperately to control my mirth. Gaggling, I managed to say 'Not quite!' and conjured up the mighty name of Bertram Chandler to prove my point.

There was a pause. Then... 'I see. Hmmm. Well, undoubtedly you are one of our most successful science fiction writers...?'

I agreed. I was prepared to play my own part slightly larger than life - after all, it was for the Cause, and all that - but then conscience intervened, and I dutifully trotted out the magic names Baxter and Broderick and so restored the status quo.

Another pause. They were getting longer. Presumably he was scribbling all this information in some executive's notebook while he munched away at a piece of cold toast.

'Hmmm. Well now...' And he launched into a Plain Man's View of sf. Would I be able to talk on the prophetic aspects of sf? I replied that prophecy was hardly the preoccupation of contemporary sf - but I did hit him with the old Cleve Cartmill business* and that seemed to excite him. Then we discussed my own work with what I considered merciful brevity on my part - and oh! those vast, unpublished works! - while he chewed thoughtfully over my portentous words.

At last he appeared to be satisfied. 'All right then, Mr. Harding. We'll see you Tuesday evening. At about seven-thirty?'

I said okay and let him hang up. I was left miserably cold and alone to face another day. The thought depressed me more than usual. I parked the

* A year before Hiroshima, ASTOUNDING published a story by Cleve Cartmill called DEADLINE, in which he described with staggering accuracy the explosion of an atomic bomb. Such accuracy, in fact, that the FBI, fearing a security leak from the top-secret Manhattan Project, moved in...

phone, trundled back to bed, and contemplated the surly world outside the window.

What had I done with my life in the past ten minutes?

Had I committed myself to some irrevocable insanity in the cause of sf?

I would soon find out.

I burrowed down into the blankets in search of sufficient courage to get up and face another useless day...

...and then the truth struck me.

I HAD BEEN CAUGHT BY THE BLUDGE!

The name Bob Crosby held no magic for me, but the sort of activity it now symbolized certainly did. Only once before had I faced the television cameras, and that had been two years previously on a show called PEOPLE. But that had been an interview in depth, preceded by several personal interviews with the compere, Gerald Lyons, and an intelligent and perceptive questioning on camera. Lyons's programme followed closely the format and intentions of John Freeman's British programme FACE TO FACE. I had memories of a very rewarding experience. But that had been with the local government TV channel, ABV2. Crosby's show was a commercial product and I could hardly expect the dedicated sort of intelligence I had discovered during my visits to Channel Two.

This would be no interview in depth - that was for sure.

I would be just another bit of padding for some crummy variety show.

Another vain and ignoble victim of the Great Australian Brain Bludge.*

I hadn't even seen the Bob Crosby Show.

The Harding household boasts no goggle box. There are more amenable time wasters in this part of the world - (just ask John Baxter) - but we do manage to keep abreast of the medium by paying attention to what other people talk about and, in my own case, by browsing through the occasional TV WEEK at the local newsagency. From this I managed to cull the rather vague information that this Crosby fellow had been imported out here to compere a new show, and that his fee had been astronomical - but I couldn't recall hearing any rave comments. Quite the contrary. I could see I had some work

* The Great Australian Brain Bludge: a term coined by Adelaide bookseller-author-critic-columnist-TV celebrity-comedian-Daimler enthusiast-and-general-gadfly-of-the-Australian-Way-Of-Life, Max Harris, to describe a not-quite-honest practice among commercial TV networks in Australia. Local variety shows suffer from notoriously low budgets, and one way their producers have found to get around this problem is to liberally sprinkle 'guest spots' between the novelty acts. Subjects interviewed vary from retired politicians through juvenile delinquents, faded entertainers, prostitutes, university dons, and now, it seems, even sf writers. The list seems endless when one considers the number of such fascinating people available in this country. Each 'guest' receives a nominal 'appearance fee' which may range from \$10 to \$20, depending on the Channel concerned - certainly not on the guests. For this princely sum the producers stand to get anything from 5 to 15 minutes of cheap time, and so save vast amounts of money they would need to otherwise spend on professional acts.

ahead of me if I wanted to find out what the show was really like before I went on.

I asked some friends. None of them watched it. I consulted the press - disaster! The show had been running for five weeks and had laid an egg first-up. From a country infamous for its low-quality vaudeville-variety shows, the producers of the Bob Crosby Show had somehow managed to hit an even lower level than usual. Oh, wonderful! Furthermore, Crosby had been so disappointed by the promised package that he had resigned almost immediately, but, being bound by a water-tight contract, he had to see the remainder of his thirteen weeks season out before he could shake the Australian dust from his shoes (actually it was mostly mud at this time of the year) and beat it back home.

My hopes fell. I had been prepared for the worst, but not quite for this. I mean, there are limits to how bad a show can be. Or so I thought. Now Mr. Willard King, whoever he was, had proved me wrong.

But I did find some useful information. For one thing, there were two shows weekly: Tuesday's in Melbourne and Friday's in Sydney. My show would go on live, and would be videotaped for showing in Sydney on Friday. Ulp... That meant my Good Friend John Baxter would be watching, so I couldn't let the side down. I would have to give of my best in spite of the appalling odds: not only was I going on a dead show, but I would be interviewed by an American band-leader who was bored to death with his chore and only filling in time until he could get the hell out of the country.

I saw a lot of movies that weekend.

On Monday afternoon my wife dropped by to pick up some clothes.

'I... I'm going on the Bob Crosby Show tomorrow night,' I said.

'Big deal,' she said. And left.

Then it was Tuesday night.

I made my way like a martyr to the Fitzroy studios of Channel Seven.

They're situated in a converted movie theatre, a grandiose relic of the past when people went to the Friday night movies in their thousands. The business section is located downstairs in what used to be the stalls, and the accessory departments are upstairs where the Gods used to be in the days of Tom Mix serials and Saturday afternoon matinees. I couldn't find a sign anywhere that said Enquiries, so I just stood around in the foyer until someone decided I must be the science fiction writer. The someone was an attractive and efficient young woman whose name I seem to have forgotten, which is a pity because she was one of the few genuinely real people I met during the next hour. She had read all about the Convention in the BULLETIN article, and confirmed my suspicions: they must have tracked me down via Charles Higham and John Baxter. Anything else seemed out of the question - and on Friday night Baxter would be sitting before his idiot box, gloating, secure in the knowledge that he is six hundred miles out of reach...

Ushered into a room lit by glaring fluorescents, I allowed myself to be seated in an oversized barbers' chair while another attractive young woman applied makeup to my wan cheeks. All rather perfunctorily. And while seated thus, I finally made the acquaintance of Mr. Patrick Tennison, Current Affairs Producer of the Bob Crosby Show.

It felt strange, being a Current Affair.

'Ah, Mr. Harding.' He smiled genially and extended a hand.

'Mr. Tennison.' We shook.

With the protocol out of the way it soon appeared that he too had read the BULLETIN article. The repercussions of Charles Higham's literary hand-springs seem endless. I have visions of a future plagued by people quoting him at me. Perhaps if we were to burn Higham in effigy at the Club one night? Perhaps...?

'When they've finished with you I'd like you to come downstairs and I'll introduce you to the producer of the show. And Mr. Crosby.'

I said that would be interesting. My mind had stopped boggling at a productions system that throws people in front of the cameras unrehearsed and without audition. I had resigned myself to being a part of what was rapidly assuming the proportions of a colossal makeshift: why, the thing was being flung together with even less thought than the average sf story!

The hell with them. I decided to play it by ear and have some fun.

I consigned the pleasant memories of my association with Gerald Lyons firmly to the back of my mind.

It was 8.45 before I got downstairs. The after-dinner mums were patiently queued up outside the glass doors waiting to be let in. My audience. My public!

This theatre was once the second-largest in the Southern Hemisphere. There's not much of it left. The stalls have been roofed over and divided up into offices. The gaggle of lights suspended from the ceiling compress what is left of the theatre into a very small space indeed. Only a dozen or so rows of seats remain. On the left, what used to be the crying-room (not for overwrought viewers, but for mothers with lachrymose kids) has now become the control room.

Everywhere there was an air of... frenzied nonchalance? Feeling slick and sleek like never before I followed Tennison down the aisle and was introduced to, first, Mr. Crosby - a very relaxed and unassuming kind of image - then the producer of the show (whose name I've also forgotten), and finally another 'guest' - a Mr. Donovan Joyce, middle-aged veteran of more than two decades of churning out scripts for (sob!) local radio, now temporarily free-lancing.

There was a Subject under Discussion, so I sat down and listened. Neither Mr. Crosby nor his producer seemed interested in enlightening me in any way, so I played along with them. Tried to look the worldly-wise cynic, as if this sort of thing was just so much old hat.

The Gentle Crosby was recalling the Great Days Back Home with the Jack Benny Show, and lauding the multiple scriptwriters of that long-lived programme. I gathered he had been unimpressed by the local equivalent, and from what I knew of Australian TV writers (miserably underpaid, therefore prolific, hence bad) I could understand his misgivings.

'Generally, it's a conflict of attitudes,' said Mr. Joyce, 'You see, when TV was first introduced in America it was regarded as a cheap form of

cinema. When it came here, economic pressures made us consider it as a rather expensive form of radio, and the old habits haven't been discarded even now. The writers still haven't trained themselves to write for a visual medium.'

The producer-whose-name-I've-forgotten is an ex-real-estate-agent-turned-finance-company-director-turned-talent-promoter-turned-TV-producer via the Long Hard Route. And, as he went to great lengths to point out, 'I'm not looking nervously behind me at anyone.' This dearth of eager young technical talent in the medium, he would have us believe, is the plight of local TV. I am inclined to think that the real trouble is that our programmes are in the hands of ex-real-estate-agents-&c....

Fifteen minutes to starting time, and not a brain in sight.

Mr. Tennison vanished.

The audience, no more than forty of them, spilled ungracefully down the aisle. The Channel's bright young man bounced onstage in a vivid red sweater and proceeded to warm them up with a few off-colour gags and then introduced them to his simple signal system - when to applaud, when to laugh, when to shut up. The audience was rather bright, and picked this up very quickly.

The studio was deathly cold.

In my hands I had a duplicated sheet listing the questions I could expect. Mr. Crosby had a similar list.

Five minutes to go.

Mr. Tennison reappeared, and directed me to a seat in the stalls away from the audience. I found myself quietly impressed by the man - he seemed professionally remote from the surrounding incompetence.

I sat down and looked at the questions again.

Something nuzzled against my arm...

I looked around and discovered my co-stars: two lovely great Afghan hounds - and an even lovelier attendant. Right there beside me.

I forgot the questions. We began to talk.

But only for a moment.

The lights dimmed in the stalls, there was a loud call for QUIET! followed by a count-down and a burst of thunderous music from the pint-sized band, and

we

were

on!

I leaned over to Tennison and whispered, 'I knew when you called me that I'd be going on with either a dog act or a magician.'

He smiled.

'Well, it isn't really a dog act, you know...'

And sat there patiently in the dim light, an island of intelligence in this vast puddle of artistic indifference.

The young man in the red jumper (whose name I haven't forgotten) whipped his subjects into hysterical applause at Mr. Crosby's entrance.

Bob did his bit of studied nonchalance, sang a weary sort of a song, and introduced the first 'act' for the evening.

I felt like burrowing down into insignificance as I watched those twin sisters miming their absurd little song against that tatty cardboard backdrop, but there was no escape. I had to endure... When they finished Bob sidled over to them, carefully reading his script from some 30" by 40" idiot boards held just below the camera by a floor boy. Bob looked bored. Probably thinking how many more shows he has to walk through before he can go home. After some well-intentioned but tasteless comments on the Vietnam war - the twins, apparently, were off soon to entertain Our Boys - and a commercial break, he introduced the next item - some local neapolitan band. The din was deafening: these boys definitely did not mime.

The audience applauded everything like crazy.

The wild red jumper hopped up and down like a demented kangaroo, urging them ever onward, ever louder.

The band bellowed away.

Tennison tapped my arm: 'If you'll just follow me, Mr. Harding.'

Ever so polite.

I was glad to be first on. I couldn't get out of the place quick enough. But as I followed him down the aisle I was struck with a momentary panic.

'Look,' - I grabbed his arm - 'How long can I expect to be on for?'

'Oh, I'd say about eight minutes.'

Well, that was something to work on. But I'd have to talk fast and not depend on Mr. Crosby to feed me cues. I'd seen his desperate dependency on the idiot boards.

I would be all alone out there.

Standing slightly off-camera I waited for the band to finish.

And for Crosby to light up a cigarette and go for a walk while another clutch of commercials capered across the monitor screens overhead.

I felt somehow at a loss.

In desperation I grabbed the attention of the nearby floor-manager.

'What... what's my cue?' I called out, in a hoarse sort of whisper.

'Your name.'

I managed to look even more mystified.

'You walk onto the set when your name's mentioned,' he explained, patiently, unaware I had not been told as much.

'Oh,' I said. 'Thanks. A lot.'

The last commercial gurgled into oblivion.

Crosby sat down in his wide-backed cane chair and studied his script. Then was on camera and smoothly slipping into my introduction.

The rest went something like this:

CROSBY: (reading very carefully from the idiot board)

These days it's getting difficult to separate science fiction from science fact. Recently a group of sf writers held a convention in Melbourne, and I think they tried to straighten it all out. We'll be able to find out if they accomplished this after we've talked to one of Australia's top sf writers, who should help us find out some of the answers. His name is... Mr. Lee Harding.

(My cue! I made my entrance accompanied by a blast of music and Thunderous Applause. I grasped Crosby's outstretched hand. We smiled warmly at each other and at the cameras, then sat down to get on with the business.)

CROSBY: Jimmy Allan and the band played FLY ME TO THE MOON, Lee...

HARDING: Yes - I heard that! (glaring balefully at the band)

CROSBY: (after a forced laugh at my little joke)
Tell me, Lee: what makes people interested in science fiction?

HARDING: (settling back comfortably)
Well, I suppose they've become more interested in the last five or six years, since we began sending satellites into space and talking about landing a man on the Moon - it seems to have stimulated a new interest in the field on the part of the General Reader.

CROSBY: Lee, don't you think... (glancing surreptitiously at the idiot board) ...don't you think that perhaps they got more interested in sf after they saw some of the things Jules Verne had written about, and, ah, Wells - they came true?

(I didn't have the time to demolish this popular fallacy, otherwise I would have loved to have done a good destruction job on the so-called 'predictions' of M. Jules Verne!)

HARDING: There's always been a small audience for sf, Bob, but since we began space exploration it's become popular with a larger audience. You only have to look at the science-fictional influence on plays, films - even television. In the old days we never had anything like that.

CROSBY: (looking again at the idiot board, and taking off on a new tack)
What got you interested in sf, Lee?

HARDING: Well, I started reading it when I was at school, began writing it in my early teens, and then, well, just sort of drifted into writing it professionally, I suppose.

CROSBY: Do you do it for profit or because you like it?

HARDING: (momentarily startled by this searching question)
Both. I started writing sf because I found the medium fascinating. Now I am paid for enjoying myself.

CROSBY: But you have another income, too?

HARDING: Yes. I'm a photographer by profession, and I manage to keep on writing in my spare time - and not only sf.

CROSBY: (whose mind has been elsewhere during my reply, and whose eyes have already sneaked a look at his idiot board script)
Now, that convention that you held. As I understand it you have your

own language, you have your own, er - some of the things you use like 'neo', 'sercon' - and 'pubber', 'fanzine' - and 'gafiated'...*

HARDING: (who has suffered acute mental discomfort listening to Crosby savouring these juicy fanologisms)
We've been wondering if it would help our image if we burned Charles Higham in effigy...

(There is much laughter from Crosby, which is picked up and amplified by the dutiful audience, during which Mr. C. casually glances in the direction of you-know-where. Mr. H. meanwhile attempts desperately to divert the direction of the interview.)

HARDING: It's rather like the jargon of the jazz clubs, Bob. The people who go there have their own special way of appreciating jazz, and their own little closed circle of friends. Well, you have this to a lesser extent with sf readers; we have our favourite terms, our special sense of humour and all that. I think Charles Higham captured all this rather well.

CROSBY: Yes. I read the article by Charles Higham about the convention...

HARDING: It was a very good article.

CROSBY: ...and I thought that he explained everything very thoroughly. I was particularly intrigued because he was 'gafiated' at the convention. Now what does 'gafiated' stand for?

HARDING: (taking a deep breath) It's an American idea, Bob. You know how they string together the first letters of a group of words to create a new one? Well, 'gafia' simply means Getting-Away-From-It-All - and presumably that's what Mr. Higham felt he was doing by going along to the convention.

CROSBY: (after more laughter: why, I don't know - unless it was my face as I struggled to remain serious about all this...)
Have any sf predictions, that you've read about or that you've written yourself - you've dreamed them up, they're unreal - and yet have any of them come true?

HARDING: I don't think that a science fiction writer attempts to be a prophet, Bob. It's a sort of side product to his story. He's speculating about what society might be like in the future, not trying to lay down any specific blueprints. Of course he sometimes scores an unintentional bull's-eye. Thirty years ago we were writing matter-of-factly about space ships and robots - and in those days, Bob, you hid your magazines in here - (gesturing dramatically inside jacket) - because if anyone saw you reading those trashy magazines, well,

* I think I should explain that although Mr. Higham gathered a lot of material for his article from conversation with John Baxter, his fannish information was taken from an N3F fanclub 'terminology' loaned to him by John.

you were regarded as a bit peculiar. Now anyone can walk into a bookshop and buy a science fiction book or magazine, because the medium has suddenly become respectable. We didn't have that respectability thirty years ago.

CROSBY: And nothing's beyond the realm of possibility, eh?

HARDING: Well, I wouldn't say that. As a science fiction writer I do find that the superficial scientific story is being overtaken by pure science, developments being so fantastically fast these days, and we've virtually had to abandon what we call the 'hard' sf story - the sort that concerns itself with rockets, with robots, with all of the paraphernalia of modern technology - and concentrate instead on the 'soft' sciences: psychology, anthropology, sociology, and all that. What makes people tick, what might constitute a future society, say, a thousand years from now.

CROSBY: (after another glance at the idiot board)
As an individual I'd like to make the observation that some of the sf writers I've read... it appeared to me that the writers had pretty good backgrounds in science.

HARDING: This has been true in the past, Bob, but in the last few years the field has been - shall I say, infiltrated? - by writers who are primarily good writers and only scientifically orientated in a superficial way, and with no technical background as such.

CROSBY: (with a gentle smile) And is this why some of the sf I've been reading lately deals with sex.

HARDING: (aghast) What sort of sf have you been reading, Bob? (Much amusement displayed by compere and audience here.) But I think I get what you mean. When sf originally started in the magazines it was a very neuter sort of writing. It was concerned primarily with a glorification of scientific technology and the machine in particular. There was little evidence of characterisation. But as the writing improved, the emphasis shifted gradually towards the human element, as opposed to that of scientific abstractions - and, naturally, Bob, you're going to get women in sf stories and, in this broad-minded age, all that goes with them. This is only in line with current fictional trends, to be as realistic as possible - particularly when it comes to relationships between the sexes.

CROSBY: (slightly taken aback at the sudden plunge into seriousness)
Ah... what do you actually do at a science fiction convention, Lee? You writers and such, do you talk rationally?

HARDING: We try to enjoy ourselves. That's what conventions are for. I think the idea is that people with similar interests want to get together and have some fun and relaxation, and sf fans are no different to company executives in this respect. But at the same time there needs to be some concrete reason for holding the convention in the first place, and with ours we felt concerned about the lack of local markets for sf, and the general lack of communication

between the people most interested in this rapidly expanding field. Our local writers are all well known and widely published overseas - there are ready markets in America and the United Kingdom - but because there are no local publications to provide the necessary pressure to get new writers off the ground and writing steadily, budding writers tend to dissipate their talent into other, more accessible fields - such as paperback hacking, and writing for the men's magazines. There's really an enormous pressure at work overseas: it's a writers' market at the moment, and there just aren't enough good writers to supply the demand. But unfortunately we're too far away from all this frantic activity to get any real benefit, in terms of consistency.

CROSBY: (hastily, for time is running short and other topics must be crammed into the few remaining minutes)

Now, Lee, you've been published in England, in America, in German - even in Spain and the Netherlands. And you've also had a story published by Penguin - which is a mark of distinction. Are you going to continue this or are you going to develop a publishing industry for sf in Australia?

HARDING: Well, that's a mighty tall order... What we are trying to do is to stimulate local interest in sf as much as possible: we've even planned a regular review to circulate as widely as possible. We may eventually have our own professional magazine devoted to sf, but I don't feel too confident about that. I don't think the circulation would support it. We have too small a magazine-reading public in this country. However, I do know that an anthology of sf stories by Australian authors is under way and will be published in England in the near future - and there are indications of a vital interest in sf at the moment in Australia.

CROSBY: (whose roving eye has caught the wind-up signal from the floor manager) Have you got any story ideas that you'd like to tell us about, that you haven't set down as yet?

HARDING: (panic-stricken) Bob! - if I did that, somebody out there - (gesturing melodramatically at the camera) - might beat me into print with it!

CROSBY: (laughing jolly-like) Well, we'll keep it quiet, Lee. In the meantime, would you mind listening with me as we turn the programme back over to the point where we try to make a little money for the network? And this is called a 'commercial'.

(Fade in music.)

And I faded out, shaking Mr. Crosby's hand and mumbling something pleasant. He immediately turned away, his mind elsewhere, my connection completed.

Eight minutes.

The time is 9.30 and not a brain in sight - except for the Afghans.

Mr. Tennison reappeared and guided me from the set.

'Will you be staying for the rest of the show, Mr. Harding?'

I hastily excused myself. I only wanted to get out of the place as quickly as I could, now that my little bit was over and done with. I had no inclination whatsoever to stay and watch this dreary show chunder to a close.

I made my way up the aisle.

Behind me, Mr. Crosby's voice droned on:

'I really did enjoy talking to Lee Harding, who is undoubtedly one of Australia's most prolific and successful sf writers - and believe me, if you do want to get gafiated - which means 'get away from it all' - pick up one of his stories on science fiction and spend a little time in the realm of the impossible.'

A few days later my wife came home.

'Darling,' she said, 'you were marvellous.'

The hell I was.

Postscript:

I read in the press a few weeks later that Patrick Tennison had resigned as Public Affairs Producer for Willard King & Co. (Perhaps they didn't pay him either. I still haven't had my cheque from them.) Tennison has returned to freelance journalism, specializing in current affairs, and is purported to be working on a novel.

I was very glad to hear that.

W A R N I N G

You will print such books as these?

Then you're lost, my friend, that's certain.

If you wish for gold and honour,
Write more humbly - bend your knees.

Aye, you must have lost your senses,

Thus to speak before the people,

Thus to dare to talk of preachers

And of potentates and princes.

Friend, you're doomed, so it appears:

For the princes have long arms,

And the preachers have long tongues,

- And the people have long ears!

Heinrich Heine

[illegible][illegible]

When I picked myself up from the floor after receiving Mr. Blish's subscription to our humble journal, I sat down and wrote him a letter in the course of which I suggested - in that subtle, diplomatic manner that we editors have - that he might like to write an article for us. Specifically, an article on his book DOCTOR MIRABILIS: why he wrote it, how it was received, whether it may be considered in any way a work of science fiction. I posted that letter on December 13 and he sat down to reply on December 17... I say James Blish deserves a special Hugo for co-operation. Welcome, Sir, to our corner of the Jungle!)

I'm delighted that your editor's favourite novel of mine is DOCTOR MIRABILIS, since I'm thoroughly convinced that it's the best work I've done. I will gladly answer his questions as best I can.

As sometimes happens, the book didn't start out to be at all the sort of work it finally became. I had been an admirer of the heroic fantasies of E.R. Eddison for many years; and when in the mid-fifties or thereabouts a U.S. publisher re-issued a hardbound edition of THE WORM OUROBOROS, it occurred to me that I might enjoy writing something like it - not with much swashbuckling in it, since I don't write sword-swinging heroics well, but a book involving high politics, a fair amount of magic, and a 'high' style a la Malory where the situation seemed to justify it.

My first thought for a subject was Roger Bacon, but at that time I knew very little about the man; what I was attracted to was the Bacon legend. I think you can see that the legend might have made a good book of Eddison's sort - and in fact he in part dictated my choice, because of his use of a Baconian cypher as the major conjuration formula in the WORM.

However, once I started reading about Bacon, I became much more interested in the historical figure, and less interested in the legend. There was so much drama in his futile fight for recognition, his imprisonments, his (apocryphal) death-bed apostasy, which gave the whole tragedy a modern - or at least, a non-Greek - turn, and of course the inherent irony of his attempt to invent theoretical physics four centuries too early. Then, too, I had a pre-existing interest in the Middle Ages; though hardly anybody is willing to grant the fact now, the 12th and 13th Centuries were periods of tremendous intellectual ferment, and the politics were as interesting to me as anything in Machiavelli. Finally, opportunities abounded for me to use a formalized style and one for which I felt

a strong affinity, since I've always felt that Middle English was the most beautiful (though not the most flexible) form of the language. In contrast, the Bacon legend came more and more to seem to me like a pastiche of the Faust legend - and besides, I found, there was already a novel about it, John Cowper Powys's THE BRAZEN HEAD, as well as the Greene play FRIAR BACON AND FRIAR BUNGAY. On the other hand, there was no novel at all about the historical Bacon - or if there is, I've yet to encounter it. This figure, the real man, was also an immensely complicated one, not just a conventionalized sorcerer, and that was also attractive.

As I got into the job, I thought I might make it only the first of a series of novels about crucial figures - or events - in the history of science, a subject which is a special hobby of mine. (There is another such novel in the works now, but these things take a long time to ripen, at least for me.)

And, too, as I got to work, I discovered for myself what might have been obvious to a critic, and had been discovered independently by several other sf writers, notably Poul Anderson and L. Sprague de Camp, and lately, Avram Davidson: that for the sf writer of a certain cast of mind - the kind that is directly interested in the sciences themselves, keeps up with them, and likes to do homework - in other words, the 'hard' sf writer - the historical novel is a natural second medium. It calls upon many of the same skills at handling an unfamiliar culture, at digging out what are the crucial facts upon which an event may turn, and in dealing with a whole flock of givens which cannot be scamped, written around or taken for granted. Thirteenth Century Paris was as odd a place as Mars, and 13th Century motivations a good deal odder than some I've seen attributed to Martians.

It also has some of the same temptations, particularly that of shoving the exotica into the foreground and letting them do the work which ought to be being done by the characters and the emotions.

Is the result science fiction? Though I gratefully acknowledge your editor's defense of the affirmative, I myself am on the other side. It's certainly true that I intended the premature emergence of scientific method to be as much a 'person' in the story as Bacon himself, as he points out; but I still feel that there is too little speculative content in the book to make me comfortable calling it sf. It seems to me to belong to another class of novel, and a very well recognized one, which we might call 'novels of science;' for example, the novels of C.P. Snow, Harasanyi's novel about Galileo, or ARROWSMITH. If this is a sub-class of something, it is closer to being a sub-class of the historical novel than it is of sf, though a novel like ARROWSMITH may also be a sub-class of the novel of manners.

The reception of DOCTOR MIRABILIS has posed me a problem; in fact, several. It first appeared in England from Faber & Faber, after a history of steady rejections and dropped options in the U.S. It got miles of review space all over the Empire, including India and Singapore, and almost all of it enthusiastic. (Though one surly English review not only hated the whole thing, but also complained that my Latin was bad. This particularly amused me because about 95% of the Latin in the book is direct quotation from extant manuscripts of the major characters.) As a result, since

its appearance very early in 1964 it has sold steadily and well, and can be chalked up as one of my three or four most popular books.

Yet I still cannot get it published in the States. Editors here cite several different reasons for steering clear of it. The most frequent is that the book is at the same time too scholarly to be sold as a novel, and too fictionalized to be sold as a biography. A second reason, obviously closely connected to the first, is that hardly anybody in the U.S. has ever even heard of Roger Bacon, which would make a novel about him more difficult to sell here than in England, where Roger is a minor national hero and folk-lore figure. Finally, of course, some editors find it simply dull.

Hence I'm still missing an American audience for what I think to be my best book (and, of course, an American income on it). What's worse, unless I get it published in my own country before 1970, my ad interim copyright will run out and it will go into the public domain. Needless to say, before I let that happen I will publish it myself.

I would also like to have some U.S. reviews, because my continuing project of other novels in this vein won't prosper without them. There have been a few, reviewing the Faber edition - but I daren't encourage many, because if the sales of the Faber edition here result in the importation of more than 1,500 copies, that also throws the book into the public domain. Our crazy copyright law is due for revision next year, at which time most of these inequities will be removed, but unfortunately DOCTOR MIRABILIS is subject to the present law, and will continue to be.

In the meantime, pleased though I am with the Roger Bacon novel as it finally turned out, it doesn't in the least satisfy my original itch to write a novel in which ceremonial magic would play a large part. Happily, I am now coming down the home stretch on just such a novel, to be called FAUST ALEPH-NULL. Hubris can hardly go much farther than that.

.... but now began,
Now must begin, a clear new turn in history,
And there in his atoms, cramped in so small a span,
It glittered before him and rayed away out to infinity.
How perilous and dark, how enigmatic a course
It seemed to set whirling there for the race of man
Now bound to the inmost force of the universe -

And yet as he looked at the sky so dark with warning
Vast over earth and its towers, the night heaved over
Close and familiar as a waterwheel turning
And shed its stars like drops of crystal water
And radiant over the world lay the clear morning,
Men moved in darkness truly, but also in the sun
And on that huge bright wheel that turned for ever
He left his thought, for there was work to be done.

DOUGLAS STEWART: concluding stanzas of RUTHERFORD

MOORLOCKS

ALAN G. FRANCE TED WHITE JOHN FOYSTER

ALAN G. FRANCE 241 Lawrence Street Wodonga Victoria

I am sending a copy of the 16th issue of FENATTIC, our locally-produced sf fanzine. It has been issued fortnightly by a group of local young teenage fans since May 1966.

Your constructive maga/fanzine ASFR has promoted a great deal of interest among enthusiasts here. For all of us, it is our first glimpse of a fanzine besides FENATTIC. We were shocked upon observing ASFR 3. It was too good to be true. As none of us have ever seen one, each had his own idea of what a fanzine looked like. ASFR appeared to be an alien conspiracy. Stupefied with awe, we wrote away enclosing a subscription. Eventually our trembling hands ripped open an envelope stamped ASFR. We have seen, read, and later will write about it.

For the moment, all I can unravel myself to comment on is the cover of issue 5. This illustration reproduced from a section of Bosch's GARDEN OF DELIGHT provoked one non-scientifictionist friend to remark: 'That's not sf! There aren't any spaceships or monsters!' Keep them like that. The large-circulation sf magazines can have their garish covers: please continue reprinting classic fantasy illustrations for ASFR.

On the contents page of issue 2 there is a reference to an Amateur Fantasy Publications of Australia. Is there such a group? If so, could you please provide me with details and/or its address?

In issue 5 you mention amateur publications such as RIVERSIDE QUARTERLY, SCOTTISCHE and ODD. Could I have their addresses, please? And if you know of anyone who has old fanzines for sale, I am willing to buy them.

This letter has mainly been a one-sided list of questions on fanzines. But, as a neo-fan, I am glad to see a fanzine such as yours, and hope that it will continue to debate, review and discuss past and present Australian sf.

JB: I have published your letter more-or-less in full, Alan, for several reasons - some of them indicated in my editorial. Sometimes I, too, get the feeling that ASFR is an alien conspiracy. This week, for example, I am attempting to type 72 stencils. Who but some sinister extraterrestrial intelligence could inspire such madness? I'm not strong on monsters, either. Spaceships I can take or leave. Bosch I'm nuts about. But grangerizing cover illustrations is not so much a matter of policy as expediency in the face

of a profound dearth of suitable amateur work. This situation may soon be rectified: Steve Rasmussen is a local artist of considerable talent, as also is Jim Ellis, when he's in the mood, and both are working on illustrations for us. There most certainly is an Amateur Fantasy Publications of Australia! What it does apart from renting its duplicator to ASFR, and producing dahlia catalogues, I haven't the foggiest. However, the presiding genius of AFPA is Mr. Mervyn Binns: you could write to him at 19 Somerset Place, Melbourne C.1. RIVERSIDE QUARTERLY is published by Leland Sapiro, Box 82, University Station, Saskatoon, Canada (British agent: Graham Hall, 57 Church St., Tewkesbury, Glos.); SCOTTISCHE by Ethel Lindsay, 6 Langley Avenue, Surbiton, Surrey; and ODD by Ray Fisher, 4404 Forest Park, St. Louis, Missouri, 63108, USA. And that brings me to one of the main reasons for publishing your letter, Alan: fanzine publishers are a pretty friendly lot - maybe they'll see your letter and inundate you with their obnoxious productions! Anyway, good luck - and keep writing.

TED WHITE Assistant Editor Fantasy & Science Fiction USA

While over at Terry Carr's last night, I picked up his copy of ASFR 4 and leafed through it. 'There's an, umm, review in there that might interest you,' he said. I hit page 30, and there was a review of a book I had written. Well, in spite of that, I borrowed the copy to bring home and read at my leisure, and, having done that, I went out and had a check drawn up for a subscription. I'm afraid Terry may be unhappy with me for marking his copy, but I find a number of items provocative of comment.

John Foyster's reviews of Campbell editorials are an excellent example of praising with loud damns: one hardly expects to find his closing paragraphs of admiration for Campbell after having read the preceding pages in which he thoroughly rakes him over the coals for being a narrow-minded bigot with neither the ability to follow others' reasoning nor to reason on his own. Mind you, that's not my personal opinion of Campbell (which falls somewhere between the extremes: I simply can't be bothered to read his editorials), but simply the impression Foyster gives me.

What surprises me is that his reviews concern themselves entirely with content, and not at all with style. It may be that Campbell's style has changed (though I doubt it), but some years ago (1959?) I listened to a Campbell speech only days after reading a Campbell editorial. I was struck at that time by the similarity of their construction and style.

Basically, a Campbell speech seems to be the ideal form for the Campbell editorial. In both that I compared, he made his point in the first third of the speech (and editorial), and then spent the remaining two thirds of his time repeating the same point in slightly different language. This is an effective trick in oratory, since it leaves the audience with a feeling of having been bulldozed by The Truth. Unfortunately, the difference between oral and written communication is one of immediacy - you can't page back to a speaker's earlier words - and repetition is far more necessary in a speech than in a written work.

The bombastic delivery of a Campbell speech - dogmatic delivery of an apparently paradoxical statement, followed by a redefinition of terms

that sneaks you back to the opening statement in stunned agreement, always buttressed by assertions delivered in the most positive manner ('We've just found out...' 'It is now a known fact...' 'It has been conclusively proven...' etc.) - is all echoed in his written editorials. All that is missing is the stern, no-nonsense tone of voice of his delivery.

Foyster errs in a couple of his statements about the U.S.: the subway fare was not 5 cents (and hasn't been for some years), but 15 cents (and was raised to 20 cents as a result of the irresponsible Transit Workers strike, which also cost many New Yorkers, including my wife, several weeks' pay); and the persecution of the Chinese in earlier days rivals the worst done to the Negroes (though the Chinese weren't imported as slaves into a static society, such as the plantation South, but rather as raw labour into the dynamic and unstable West - primarily as miners, and track-workers for the railroads; nonetheless the life of a 'chink' was worthless, and a lynching good sport for the western workers in the railroad tent-towns); - but my major disagreement with him lies in the following statement:

'... I'd feel happier taking (the advice of Litterateurs) on the worth of a novel than that of the editor of a pulp fiction magazine.'

This is reasoning unworthy of Foyster, since it is a criticism devolved of a sneer. One must accept first that Campbell's ANALOG is a pulp fiction magazine, and then agree that a pulp fiction magazine is, per se, beneath our notice. I can't accept either.

A pulp magazine can be defined in several ways. The easiest is to say that it is a magazine printed on a type of paper known as pulp paper. By this definition there are no pulp magazines, and have not been for years. Further, the same definition would include many U.S. magazines of fifty and sixty years ago which have not been commonly regarded as 'pulp,' since their quality of approach, presentation, and material was what is now regarded as 'slick,' despite the paper used.

The second definition is more commonly used: the magazines published in large strings by pulp publishers, filled with material bought by the yard, and paid for most commonly at one cent a word. Even here, exceptions stand out. Such major Twentieth Century American writers as Hammett and Chandler wrote almost exclusively for the pulps, and not alone for the exceptional BLACK MASK magazine. For all of its schlock reputation, the pulp field gave birth to a number of better than hack writers.

Science fiction has been of the pulp, but rarely pulp itself. The earliest US sf magazines were not pulp-sized, nor did they use pulp paper. (The exception would be WEIRD TALES, easily the least 'pulp' in content of any sf or fantasy magazine.) ASTOUNDING, back when the subtitle was STORIES OF SUPER-SCIENCE, was an unabashed pulp, and, indeed, edited by a pulp editor rather than a sf-oriented editor like Gernsback.

But when Street & Smith took over the magazine, and increasingly after that time, ASTOUNDING became less and less a pulp in both appearance and content. Certainly the ANALOG of today cannot be defined as a pulp in any of the traditional ways, and to do so purely for the purpose of belittling its editor is neither appropriate nor honest.

If Foyster feels that, based on Campbell's revealed opinions, he would prefer to look elsewhere for an opinion of the worth of a novel, by all means let him say so. But stow this 'pulp editor' jazz. It never fit Campbell.

The review of PHOENIX PRIME is not one I can remain indifferent to. I am not perturbed that it is a 'bad' review in the sense that it put my book down, but I do think that it is a bad review because it defies the very standards established by such as Blish in the review which preceded it.

I've received many contrary opinions on the book, ranging from raves to utter scorn. I myself am not ashamed of it. It is an early work (my third book: I've since written four more), based on a short story Marion Bradley and I had in AMAZING. The writing is without a doubt uneven, both intentionally and unintentionally (I had intended contrasting styles to mark the contrast between those portions set in the mundane here-and-now and those set in the alien world), and there are elements of construction which were either ill-advised or inadequately realized, and I will own up to all these faults.

But Lee Harding, like some other fanzine reviewer who compared the book unfavourably with Burroughs and seemed to feel I'd stolen it all from ERB's Mars (when, in fact, I've never been able to read Burroughs), is not reviewing the book. He is to some extent reviewing me (and inaccurately), and largely exhibiting his prejudices.

His style, in this review, seems to consist of value judgements - e.g. 'dreadful inadequacy of the plot - which is another not-too-clever variation on the Jonathan Hoag theme...' '...yet another tiresome superman...' '...an alternate world borrowed from a hundred other stories (which find their way into paperback form with yawn-provoking steadiness' '...yet another version of the lone man thrust into grim survival techniques...' '...all very unoriginal and tedious.'

This doesn't tell me a thing. It tells me that I started out with Jonathan Hoag (false); that I did nothing original with the superman idea (false); that I borrowed my alternate world from other sources (false); that Harding doesn't care for stories of men against hostile environments (interesting); and that he regards the book as, I would gather, a bore, which is his privilege, but nothing more.

He also makes a couple of false presumptions, one of which is that 'It starts out... with White writing heavily about himself and being Real Serious about subjects like jazz, love and copulation.' Harding doesn't know me, and I don't know him. How could he possibly presume to know whether I was writing about myself? I wasn't. The character I constructed for Max Quest does not resemble me physically or mentally. I have not held one of his occupations, and never lived the kind of life I ascribed to him. However, I would gather that I presented him convincingly enough that Harding assumed I was writing from personal experience, and I will accept that as a grudging compliment. I checked my desk copy of the book, and I can't find a mention of jazz less periferal than the bit player Melvin Smith, a personal dig (and about the only one I allowed myself) at LeRoi

Jones, who pops up briefly at a party. The Seriousness about Love and Copulation I will allow.

Not having heard about the fisherman stranded in Bass Strait when I wrote the book in early 1965, I wasn't aware that some people are so squeamish about uncooked meat that they'd starve first, and, in any case, I don't think Harding's criticism is at all valid, since there are an equal number of cases of men who have been adrift at sea and been damned happy to eat the raw fish they brought up. I have myself eaten raw meat, and I based the desert experiences on both personal experience and a knowledge of the American Apache Indian, who survived in a similar type of desert without supplies, living entirely off the land.

Curiously enough, Terry Carr, who did not care overmuch for the book either, disagrees diametrically with Harding about the effectiveness of the mundane-today scenes and those in the desert, so I must conclude that Harding's criticisms boil down primarily to the fact that I wrote a kind of book he did not care to read, and that his dislike, and his comments ('the silliest book I've read this season... I expected better of a professional. Avoid this book at all costs.') reflect largely his own prejudices and not the quality of the book I did write.

I am grateful, however, to find that copies of the Lancer edition are on sale in Australia.

A few other comments:

John Breden seems unaware that del Rey's STEP TO THE STARS was a reprint by Belmont, and that the original book was a juvenile published by Winston in 1954, and probably written a year earlier. As such, I think the book deserves more serious attention. If the science still seems valid, then del Rey has scored a formidable accomplishment. And surely the 'romance' of building a space station was both more distant and more purely science-fictional in the early fifties than Breden finds it now.

Michael Moorcock, who writes in the style of the twenties and thirties with his left hand (cf. his Mars books under the name of Edward Bradbury), is a bit premature in his pronouncement that the sf of the forties and fifties is 'dying or dead anyway.' However, I will give him credit: he is doing his damndest to kill it off with his encouragement of his young writers to abandon story content, credible characterization, and adherence to plot. He seems to feel that TV killed the pulps, and thus magazine sf of the type he reviles. I suspect that he is right that TV had a large hand in killing the pulps as a class of magazines (and I think this is one of the least admirable things TV has done), but the magazine field here is still alive, and even growing a bit. And, fortunately, the paperback field has done much to take over the all-fiction pulps' functions. Moorcock should be grateful, since he writes the stuff, that the market is not as dead as he claims.

Nothing tees me off as much as a hypocrite. Moorcock is one of the purest examples of a pulp hack I've seen. I am not suggesting this is a Bad Thing. Pulp writing has traditionally been the bedrock support for fiction writing, and many pulp writers who had the potential to rise above

the median level of pulp-writing did so because of their experience in the pulps. An outstanding example today is John D. MacDonald, from whom we could all take lessons. Moorcock's career, from his early TARZAN ADVENTURES days to today, when he all but writes the Compact Books line himself, is one of obvious hacking. I think it is indeed commendable when a man can point to such a background after writing a distinguished story. But Moorcock hides behind the pious mask of stoutly denying his pseudonyms and attacking the very fields and sources which have paid his way. And I find this a great deal less than commendable.

The snobism implied in so much of what he says about the sf field irritates me no end. He feels that sf magazines 'in a modified form' could 'compete in the majority market.' Has he any awareness of this 'majority market,' its readership's likes and dislikes? What does he think sells PLAYBOY or ESQUIRE, to take two of his examples with which I am familiar? For a sf magazine to directly compete with those magazines it would have to immediately jettison most of its fiction (today's mass-market readers do not care for fiction), and make the rest easy to read with simplified themes. It would have to tie itself directly to each and every Now, In, and Hip fad, preferably just as each breaks. It would have to become 'fashionable,' and to do this tie itself directly with every up and down in fashion.

Basically, a magazine would have to become a magazine of the present. And this is expressly what sf is not.

Science fiction demands more of its readers than most people are willing to give. If sf is to be broadened into a mass appeal, the very elements which will first have to be surrendered are those dearest to Moorcock's heart: the esotericisms that pervade the work of writers like Ballard.

While my attachment to the staff of F&SF may be considered prejudicial, I must state that I think Moorcock, and his conveniently anonymous correspondent, are off their asses when saying that the 'seminal' writers are all in NEW WORLDS, as opposed to F&SF. Every name he gives appeared first in F&SF, and still appears there often. Roger Zelazny's award-winning stories appeared in F&SF and FANTASTIC. Aldiss's award-winners were in F&SF. We just ran a serial by Brunner. We've recently run one of Bulmer's best short stories (his novels strike me as hack potboilers). No one is printing much of Jim White, but we've published him in the past.

Zelazny is probably the most important new writer since Phil Dick (he's head and shoulders above Ballard as a writer), and Roger writes for every market, every magazine. He is unconcerned with word-rates, and has even sent stories directly to Robert Lowndes's one-cent-a-word MAGAZINE OF HORROR. He is not a NEW WORLDS find. He is his own find, or, if anyone's, Cele Goldsmith's. His most important stories have been in F&SF.

I don't think F&SF is as good as it could be - I've never entirely agreed with the editors I've worked under - nor do I feel it is as good today as it once was. But, candidly, I consider it vastly better than NEW WORLDS. And so, I suspect, do most who have read both. Moorcock needs a new horn.

JOHN FOYSTER:

Ted White raises three main points about my article, and on two of these our disagreement, if it can be called that, is very minor.

Concerning the subway fares in New York: I was simply quoting the figures Campbell gives in May 1966 ANALOG. He states that the old fare was 5 cents, and that as a result of the strike it was raised to 15. If Ted is right, then Campbell has boobed again. On p.7 of ASFR4 I made the comment, 'Well, that's the way he explains it...' There are quite often matters on which one simply has to take Campbell's word and hope he is right.

When I wrote of the lynching of the Chinese it was a passing comment, as indicated by the structure of the sentence in which the idea was expressed. I was attempting to cut the article, not expand it, and to go into problems like this one deeply would only have made this already interminable article just too much for Bangsund's sensitive fingers. Ted is possibly right again, though to my knowledge the Chinese were despised rather than persecuted. Anyway, we essentially agree that there's a lot of difference between the negro problem and the Chinese problem - which Campbell denied.

The third matter is more serious. I stated that 'I'd feel happier taking (the advice of a litterateur) on the worth of a novel (rather than) that of the editor of a pulp fiction magazine.' That sentence is less strongly worded than it originally was: yes, friends, there is censorship in ASFR. ((Self-imposed in this case, John: let's be fair. JB))

My first point would be that this is not 'reasoning unworthy of Foyster' for the very good reason that it is not reasoning at all. It is simply an opinion, and an opinion about a hypothetical situation at that. I say, in essence, that 'supposing that just what fitted the genus 'Literature' was decided by a self-perpetuating body of examiners,' then I'd value their opinion more than that of a pulp fiction magazine editor.

Basically, this is a matter of levels of discussion. The only writers Campbell mentioned were Joyce and Shakespeare. Thus, in a way, to talk about Hammett and Chandler, and as writers rather than as editors, is to quibble. So if Ted likes to write about 'better than hack' writers, that's OK. But this is not the sort of writing Campbell was talking about, nor the sort I was talking about. This is, quite simply, a matter of asking oneself whether F.R. Leavis or Ray Palmer is better equipped to assess the worth of Proust or Melville &c. Strangely enough, it seems to me that the editors most au fait with the world of literature were editors of genuine pulps - Merwin, and Mines perhaps. But here I am talking about sf pulps only. I guess if one went further afield one could find equally knowledgeable editors of other pulps, but still there is not one of them whose opinion I would give more weight to than to the opinion of this 'self-perpetuating board.' That's mah opinion, and Ah'm sticking to it.

By the way, the word 'pulp' was one inserted in the process of censorship: I still think it is fair to describe ANALOG as a pulp fiction magazine, in the broadest sense of the words. And, Ted, I did say that bit about Campbell's revealed opinions: p.11, para.4.

Ted's point about the similarity between Campbell's editorials and his speeches is an interesting and well-thought-out one. It seems to be more than reasonable that this explains Campbell's hectoring style. I only hope that one day I'll be able to suffer it. And as for praising with loud damns - well, it takes a lot of liking to go through those editorials. In my case it was a matter of trying to turn back to the past, to see if the magic was still there. It wasn't, quite, but the memories are still too bright.

S M I T H ' S B U R S T

B O B S M I T H

When I was a wee tad, still at school, there was one weekly event to which I looked forward more than any other, I think, and that was the English country town Saturday morning 'market.' 1942 - and my parents, to escape the London bombings, had moved to the fairly quiet (in those days) town of Bedford, some sixty miles north of London. The name of Bedford would be reasonably well known to most English school-children (in those days - Ghu knows what they teach 'em now!) because it had been the place where John Bunyan wrote his PILGRIM'S PROGRESS - and, if your parents happened to be wealthy, there was a possibility you'd end up at one of England's better public schools, Bedford School. Well, my parents were not wealthy, but I had read Bunyan's rather frightening book (a fair sort of introduction to fantasy for any child, I imagine) and so Bedford town wouldn't be all that strange, I thought.

Wandering among the various market stalls and over the old cobble stones of Bedford's market place we see a skinny lad of twelve summers - probably sucking an icecream cone or dipping into a greasy bag of chips - who (amazing coincidence!) turns out to be Bob Smith. 'Smudger,' as he's known to his school mates, jingles the few low-value coins in his pocket and heads for the only stall which holds any magic for him... the magazine stall.

I can almost hear two-thirds of ASFR's readers groaning: 'Yeah, yeah ... we know. This is where Smudger - what a godawful name! - bores us with how he Discovered sf, and how it has warped his young and cloddish mind ever since...' Gentlemen, I am surprised at you! Where is the tolerance, patience, and ability to view things objectively that we of the sf fraternity are know for? Bear with me.

Actually, I had 'discovered' sf about a year and a half earlier, when some kind and fatherly ARP warden gave me a battered copy of the BRE ASTOUNDING during a sojourn in the shelters, while the Luftwaffe had their nightly crack at London. (It was many years later, while reading the Hadley edition of FINAL BLACKOUT, that I realised it must have been part of Hubbard's serial I read that noisy night in the shelter, back in 1940. I certainly hadn't read it anywhere else!) (Fantasy, of course, I'd discovered while still in the learning-to-read stage, via those wonderful DR. DOLITTLE books and others.)

Getting sf in England was something of an ordeal in the early 1940s, as any veteran of the English sf fraternity will tell you. The Thorpe & Porter reprints of AMAZING, GALAXY, FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, FUTURE, SF QUARTERLY and WEIRD TALES hadn't yet arrived on the scene, and sf was very difficult to track down - even if one had money and knew people, which a twelve

year-old boy certainly didn't. Bookshops that dealt in second-hand magazines were few and far between in Bedford, and an extremely meagre source for sf. That magazine exchange and mart stall on Saturday mornings, though, revealed unexpected treasures...

The wily old gent who ran that stall must have had some contacts up in the Big Smoke, and I would imagine (knowing what I know now) he'd cottoned on to the great piles of magazines from the U.S. used in ships for ballast. (It is sf historical fact that this was one of the few ways decent sf came into the country during the war years.) Those Saturday mornings became a kind of adventure, because you never knew what he'd turn up with next, and I think he knew this. The man was a bit of a showman, and would cunningly display only a few of these choice overseas magazines every Saturday, with a few more under the counter. He was gonna make his supplies last as long as possible, and extract the utmost profit, by golly! And he did... (Of course, there were other tempting items to sometimes distract you: American pulp detectives, the various war pulps, and... intriguing magazines full of naked ladies, or ladies with nothing on but black stockings. Gee...! I'll say one thing for that stall man: none of us youngsters ever managed to buy, beg or steal any of those more risque publications from him. He may have been a spiv or con merchant, but he apparently had some scruples someplace.)

After all these years, I remember him better than I do the sf magazines he sold me. He was a London Jew, and I was inclined to be a little frightened of him. (The young Smith had been reading OLIVER TWIST at school, and tended to think most Jews were Fagins under all that friendliness. For some reason my father never spoke kindly of them.) He used to peer at you sharply through glasses that made his eyes appear enormous; always unshaven, a sallow complexion, always a cigar butt tucked in the corner of his mouth, and his voice hinted of sly doings and you'd-better-not-get-too-close. I imagined him among the fleshpots of darker London, and squirmed deliciously.

'Ah, my boy,' he would purr, 'what we got for you today, eh?' and his hairy hands would caress a tattered copy of AMAZING, PLANET or SUPER SCIENCE (of which he seemed to have an awful lot, as I recall: years later, while reading a columnists complaint in a 1940 copy of Harry Warner's SPACEWAYS that Pohl's SUPER SCIENCE STORIES didn't seem to have very good distribution in the U.S., I remembered the apparently inexhaustable supply my stall man had, and chuckled). I would eagerly hand over my sixpence and the equally tattered copy of, perhaps, THRILLING WONDER, and make my choice for the week.

Sixpence... When I think that I had to do some fast talking to extract a mildewed copy of a 1939 AMAZING from a bookshop in Brisbane in 1956 for about five shillings... when I remember all the science fiction pulps that passed through my grubby fingers during the war years... I could almost spit!

But then, I do have those warm memories of those early days in a country town, of a character who probably doesn't exist any more, but who definitely had me well on the way to becoming a sf fan, and of all those old American mags passing through my hands... twenty-four years ago.

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