
AUSTRALIAN
SCIENCE FICTION
REVIEW
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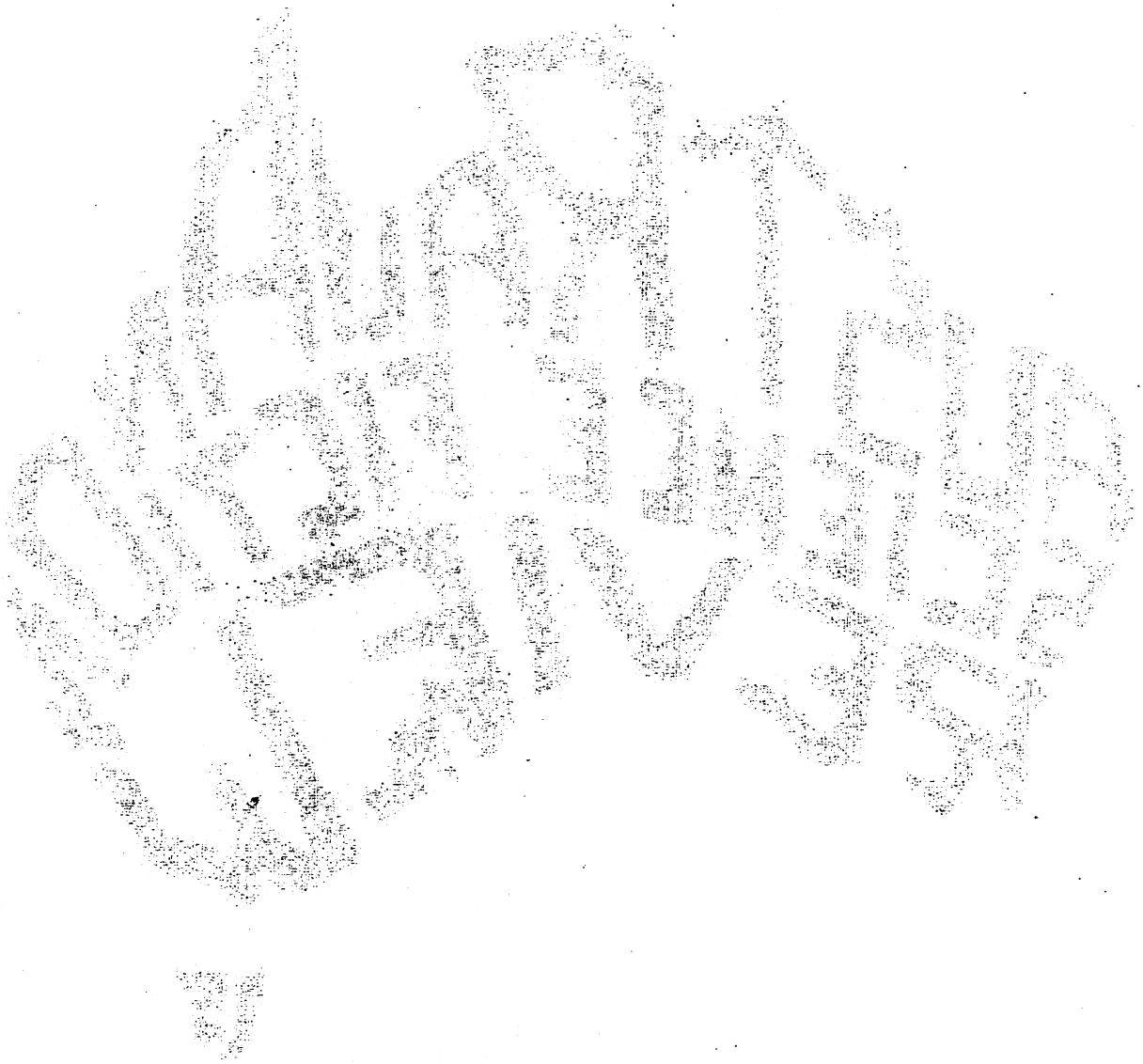

AUSTRALIAN SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW

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Cover Illustration: Well, it's a long story, but if the cover is printed on white paper then the editor is to blame, but if it's on orange paper then this magnificent illustration is by Dimitrii Razuvaev. In the former case we can unequivocally state that next issue's cover will be a magnificent illustration by Dimitrii Razuvaev. Unless the stencil is lost or the cat gets at it or...

Unsolicited Testimonial: "ASFR is no longer a forum for the views of local fen. ... ASFR became better and better and at last became so good that you have to be Samuel R. Delany to get into it." (Leigh Edmonds, in his fanzine ETHERLINE II.)

Editorial Disclaimer: You don't have to be Samuel R. Delany to be published in ASFR. But it helps.

GOGOTAMABUDAPESTAMISTICISM REVEALED

Actually that's just one of the many organizations I have at one time or another thought of forming. Others include The Invisible Whistling Bunyips Association and ISIS (pronounced iz-iz), the International Steam Intellect Society (patron: Thomas Love Peacock). But I never seem to have the energy to recruit members for my groups, so they remain, as it were, dismembered.

Now I've gone to the length of publishing (in association with Tony Thomas) and distributing a proposal to form an Australian Science Fiction Society. This proposal is to be a major topic of discussion at the Melbourne SF Conference this Easter, and already I have had a number of opinions on the subject. John Foyster has even published his own list of questions and comments, which I hope everyone interested in the matter will obtain and peruse.

One recurrent comment is that there already exists such a Society. I disagree. G. Stone's organization is called the Australian SF Association; it used to be called a Society, but he can't have both titles. Furthermore, I am a member of Graham's Association and would be very happy to see it performing such functions as holding conventions and all the other things that a national fan organization should do. But for such a thing to happen would require a radical transformation on G. Stone's part. He despises everything fannish, and exercises such autocratic control over his Association that any attempt on the part of its members to hold an election or to conduct any other activity than compiling bibliographies would be laughable.

As far as G. Stone is concerned, we fans are "on the wrong wavelength". Are we really? Are our activities and enthusiasms all that silly or undignified or juvenile? Graham produces the Journal of the ASFA. It looks and reads like a fanzine. It's a helpful little publication, and quite serious in intent, but it still looks and reads like a fanzine. One of its helpful features is a continuing bibliography of Australian sf, and a digest of news from here there and everywhere of interest to the serious local student of Australian sf. Yet in the two years of its existence, ASFR has not been mentioned once in its pages! One would not suspect for a moment from Graham's Journal that an amateur magazine has been produced in Australia and seriously referred to as "the international arena for serious discussion of science fiction".

To many people overseas ASFR has become the voice of Australian fandom. But, as Leigh Edmonds rightly points out in ETHERLINE II, that voice is not wholly representative. Because we have set high standards we have had to reject a lot of local contributions, and far from discouraging the contributors, they have started their own fanzines - so many of them, in fact, I've lost count.

With so many voices now being raised - new fanzines, new local organizations in Sydney, Brisbane and (CONTINUED p.30)

AN AESTHETIC THEORY OF SCIENCE FICTION

FRANZ ROTTENSTEINER

The more criticism of sf I read the more I was dissatisfied with technical criticism. I felt that it was too limited. One reason for this feeling may be that in fiction technique is comparatively less important than in some other fields, especially in painting and architecture. In these arts a long study of technique is required, so much that often a painter who has only technical skill may be mistaken for a good artist. But anyone with a sure grasp of his mother tongue can write fiction.

Then I encountered John Baxter's A HORNBOOK FOR CRITICS in NIEKAS 9. He stated that the greatest deficiency in sf criticism was its lack of consistent standards. One could answer him with Andre Gide that firm standards are only wanted by those who do not want to develop a literary taste of their own; and even if we do not share this extreme opinion we surely must recognize that there is no convenient yardstick that may safely be applied to any work - criticism is an art, not a science.

Baxter claimed that true criticism is aesthetic and philosophical, but not technical; and he thought that he had found a standard for science fiction, namely, how well has the writer captured the spirit of science (not so much science itself)? Although technical criticism, too, is aesthetical - it is a normative aesthetics - I feel that Baxter's standard is one step advanced; but it is still too limited. For him sf is based on the belief that science is something beautiful. Perhaps so. But I fail to see the bridge (or ladder, to quote John Foyster) leading from sf to mainstream fiction which Baxter so hopefully foresaw at the end of his essay. Other literature doesn't share this purported belief of sf so exclusively. And, good sf as Blish's BRIDGE and Clarke's PRELUDE TO SPACE are, they certainly are not literature.

Baxter took Knight to task for writing of Kornbluth's WITH THESE HANDS, THE ALTAR AT MIDNIGHT and THE GOODLY CREATURES, "I think these three stories explore a dangerous dead end in science fiction; but I am unable to wish they had not been written." (IN SEARCH OF WONDER, p.149)

Baxter thinks that no good critic should ever have to admit that his intellectual standards and his emotional opinion do not agree. Regrettably, Baxter has neglected to show the application of his standard to C.M. Kornbluth. I think that by using Baxter's standard, three possible ways are open for appraising THE ALTAR AT MIDNIGHT, which is "about the gulf between generations, and the lure of destructive, well-paid occupations, and the guilt of scientists and similar things" (Damon Knight): (a) you conclude that this story is merely a disguised mainstream story and not sf at all, the standard therefore not applicable; (b) you use the standard and find that in the story science is not something beautiful, but something terrible, the story therefore bad sf; or (c) you may feel that there is not only an optimistic beauty of science, the "voir pour prevoir" of positivism, but also a terrible beauty of science, just as there

is Tennyson's "terrible beauty of war" or "l'horrifiquement beau" of Alfred Jarry. But perhaps Baxter never meant to stretch his term "beauty of science" so far, and perhaps this interpretation would make his standard meaningless.

Solution (b) simply would pain me. If we feel as Arthur Jean Cox does that sf is sub-literature, we are often in a position to say: "This is good sf but it isn't literature," but to say the reverse, "This is good literature but bad sf" would suggest that sf is a genre quite apart from other kinds of literature and to be measured by some standard alien to literature.

There is one further objection to Baxter. We may accept that we feel that rocketry is something beautiful when we read PRELUDE TO SPACE. But when we read about an alien society why should we then feel, even if only in an analysis, that the science of society, sociology, is something beautiful? When we read Dostoevsky, to quote another example, we do not feel that psychology is a wonderful thing: that would be perverse. Why then should we feel differently about psychological or sociological sf?

If Baxter had only said that science <u>can</u> be a thing of beauty! There are so many things that we find beautiful under certain conditions, so why not science, too? But I cannot see a reason for limiting our appreciation of beauty to one kind of beauty only - or even predominantly. Indeed, it is characteristic of art that it succeeds in showing us things as beautiful that we would otherwise find objectionable. I need remind you only of the paintings of Bosch, the naturalistic novels of Zola; of morally despicable characters such as Falstaff, whom we nevertheless find aesthetically pleasing (whereas Hugh Farnham, to quote my favourite example, is merely despicable). It is this quality, as Arthur Jean Cox has remarked, that permits art to deal with questions that would otherwise destroy us.

What we need is, I feel, a general aesthetic standard that includes a standard for sf as a sub-standard - as a special case of a much wider field.

Aesthetics is now a chaos, a battlefield of quarrelling opinions; but I think that I have found a standard especially suited to sf, in a genetical and biological theory of aesthetics. I'll first explain it and then show its application to some writers, and append a few remarks on the cataclysmic novel and characterization in sf; where possible I will try to use examples that have been discussed by other writers.

Our starting point is Friedrich Schiller, who used the analogy of playing to explain aesthetic pleasure. When we are playing we derive our joy from the very act of playing, not from some purpose that is to be achieved by our acts. Playing gives us pleasure for the mere reason that it is an enjoyable occupation. That joy derived from the exertion of our physical and psychical powers is only a special case of a more general biological and psychological law.

All organs and functions that have been developed in man in the course of time have, in a certain sense, to be exercised. Objectively, this exercise is a need, i.e. a condition for the functioning and development of the human organism. Organs and functions which have no possibility of being exercised are likely to regress. This need is, like many others, reflected in our consciousness, and in this manner a number of subjectively felt needs arise which we shall call <u>functional needs</u>.

Now every need is, at the time when it is felt, a feeling of displeasure, and it is connected with certain conceptions that drive us to act; we have those conceptions until the feeling of discomfort has abated.

Much the same applies to aesthetic pleasure. We may consider aesthetic pleasure as a sort of functional pleasure, i.e. a joy deriving from the exercise of several psychical functions. Therefore this pleasure is, as Kant was the first to remark, a disinterested joy without any influence on our desire to possess something; and for the same reason it is closely related to playing, but not identical with it, for in the former higher forms of psychical functions are touched that are rarely ever exercised when we are playing.

The aesthetic functional need is characterized by the fact that it is initiated by the act of contemplation. As contemplation we do not only consider the act of looking at things and listening to them, but also the conditions of our mind when we are reading works of literature. In contemplation different functions of our self are activated. Not only are our senses engaged in a way that we feel to be joyful, but also our fancy, our thinking and feeling are being stimulated. All these functions remain related to their object and by this our functional pleasure receives its direction and its colour.

Even simple colours and combinations of colours, notes and rhythmically arranged sounds induce elementary aesthetic feelings in us: we experience a sensual functional need. In painting, in architecture, in sculpture and music, this plays a great role, but not so much in literature, because the vividness of certain kinds of literature is not caused by our senses but by our imagination, so we can forget this kind of pleasure in what follows.

(An exception to this is the kind of nonsense-poem exemplified by Christian Morgens tern's THE GREAT LALUA:

Kroklokwafzi? Semememi!
Seiokrontro - prafriplo:
Bifzi, bafzi, hulalemi:
quasti basti bo...
Lalu lalu lalu lalu la! - and so on.

In such poems the impact depends upon the rhythm and the youthful playing with sounds. In the example quoted it helps if you speak German.)

Our aesthetic pleasure is much richer if the object which we consider engages pleasantly not only our senses but also our imagination and our thinking. The more the objects and processes stimulate our memory and the working of our fancy, the richer our aesthetic pleasure will be, and the less likely is it to be dulled - quite contrary to our sensual functional pleasure. Especially in works of pleasure we note this intellectual functional need. Difficult lines of thought touch us only then as being pleasurable, when we have succeeded in understanding the author's intention, in reproducing it in ourselves and in developing it further. As long as that is not the case our intellectual functional need remains inhibited and there is no aesthetic effect.

Similar to this intellectual functional need is the pleasure which we derive from the workings of our own fancy that are excited in us by a vivid description of objects and characters. When we read Homer, for instance, his characters Achilles, Agamemnon, Ulysses and so on appear lively in our minds. We will call the pleasure we take in the spiritual

reproduction of figures created by the artist our imaginative functional pleasure.

What we have considered so far, the sensual, intellectual and imaginative functional needs, have shown us only the beginnings of aesthetic pleasure, the outworks of art, as it were. We perceive the inner being of pleasure in the beautiful in art and nature only when we remember that feeling too is one of the basic functions of our consciousness. We actually feel a need to get emotionally excited, and the stimulation of this need is pleasurable in the highest degree. We will call this need our emotional functional need.

As a result of the central nature of all feeling, the emotional functional need has more far-reaching effects on the life of the mind than the sensual or intellectual functional pleasure.

This is a theory of aesthetics that lends itself easily to an interpretation and evaluation of sf: we are able to assess its role in relation to literature, and why and to what extent sf is sub-literature. The pleasure sf gives is in almost all cases rudimentary: genuine emotion is excluded; our centre of aesthetic satisfaction is either not stimulated at all or is not wholly satisfied.

And this, the emotional functional need, is the crucial criterion to distinguish literature from sub-literature: a piece of fiction may be excellently written, intellectually and imaginatively brilliant, and still be sub-literature.

We see also that sf is a limited form in other respects: its theoretical content is restricted to science or the spirit of science or speculative thinking - call it what you will - whereas great literature admits of any possible content (at least theoretically) and doesn't exclude in practice wide realms of human experience. Science fiction, while being in its best examples on a higher intellectual and imaginative plane than the comparable mystery novel, is sub-literature for precisely the same reasons: that it deals with the emotions, if at all, in only a formularized way. (The best example of this is Theodore Sturgeon, whose conception of love is pure schmaltz.) If we accept this, we see that literature covers a much wider field of thinking and feeling than Heinlein's mechanical distinction of "fiction of the past, present and future" would suggest.

I think that the intellectual functional need is the central interest of sf, with the imaginative qualities being of more importance only in its better examples. In fantasy, the reverse is true, because there the theoretical interest is in most cases of a tried and common nature. SF fans stress the importance of "ideas" for sf; these are often understood in a non-literary sense (cf. Leland Sapiro's TECHNIQUE AS CREATION in INSIDE no. 1).

This stressing of theoretical content we see most clearly in what I like to call the "great bad books" of science fiction: THE WORLD OF NULL-A, STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND, FARNHAM'S FREEHOLD, THE SEEDLING STARS and so on. They are controversial books, they provide, as the fans say, food for thought - but they are not "bark and steel for the mind". They, or rather the problems stated in them, interest us intellectually, but finally they are unsuccessful, for we are unable to follow the thoughts of the authors; we disagree with them. But it would seem that the average sf fan is content merely to be stimulated and doesn't ask of an author that he really does make sense. Typical seems to be Buz Busby's statement in SPECULATION,

January 1967: "At the very least, writers, try to fake a plausible-sounding excuse when you goof..." This is to encourage cheating. If an author depends for his effect upon a deception (clever or not so clever), and if this deception is essential to the story, then the story is worthless as soon as you recognize the deception, and the effect is one of aesthetic displeasure.

It is obvious that fans prefer stories with a strong theoretical interest to others that are aesthetically more perfect but lack their theoretical interest.

If we accept that the theoretical interest is the heart of sf, then Isaac Asimov is the sf purist and ANALOG the sf magazine. Asimov has a tremendous interest in theory, a boundless enthusiasm for science, but he sadly lacks imaginative abilities. Neither his robots nor his people nor his settings are in any way memorable. He is best at the description of gigantic cities. Only a few of his stories show imaginative qualities as well, and they are his best: DREAMING IS A PRIVATE THING, NIGHTFALL and THE MARTIAN WAY.

The slightest possible kind of this "intellectual" or "theoretical" sf is Hal Clement's FIREPROOF (ASF, March 1949), which revolves around the idea that in free fall an open flame cannot burn. That is something best said in a line in a technical article or in a newspaper; for a story it is pretty weak. But there are people who find this kind of triviality ingenious, witness Arthur C. Clarke's account of the story. (Although he didn't remember the thing well enough to recall the author's name: he attributed it to Harl Vincent.)

There are other "ideas" which are not so slight, for example speculation about the nature of time, the fate of humanity and so on, and one may judge this kind of story solely by the importance you attribute to the subject matter and by how many blunders the author has managed to commit. Complex ideas are, of course, more valuable than simple ones. But sf writers are like Jack Vance's sorcerers - their minds can encompass only a few spells at a time - and what an author knows in one story he often forgets in the next; and if the writer is also a critic, he is liable to forget his critical knowledge when he is writing fiction.

The trouble with these "thinking man's stories" is often that they are written by people who cannot be said to be thinking - and therefore cannot be said to be writing (since in a work of art, form and content are identical). It is impossible to find one real thinker among ANALOG's whole bunch of hacks.

Of more importance is that sf which also shows imaginative qualities. James Blish's BRIDGE is a good story because it is imaginative; so are Aldiss's SHARDS and the HOTHOUSE series. And should I value the latter less because cobwebs reaching to the moon are manifestly impossible? I like the imagination of the concept; what does it matter that the theoretical content of this series is not science? Paul Scheerbart made fun of science in his cosmic fantasies, and yet he is the greatest German humourist of the 20th Century, and by far the best German sf author.

It boils down to this: I do not care whether a story is fantasy, sf, "mainstream" (a word I hesitate to use, since I am sure that most sf fans and authors mean by that term not what I would consider to be literature, but some popular trash), or whatever. Classification is a worthless game when one is concerned with critical appraisal. I know sf when I read it,

and that is sufficient. And I have my own private definition of sf, which is somewhat cynical, I fear: when I read a story right to the end that I would normally throw away after a few pages, or not touch at all, then it surely has to be sf. I really see no reason why I should bother with a "mainstream" story of no more quality than the average sf story.

My choices for sf writers with both strong theoretical and imaginative interests would be Philip Jose Farmer and James Blish. Farmer is the better of the two. Blish is both a very good and an exasperatingly bad writer. Sometimes he has been called "one of the few thinkers of sf", and at first glance he gives that impression, but actually his imagination is powerful and his theorizing often pretty weak. He has given us a dazzling display of various gimmicks: Okies, spindizzies, pantropy, antimortalica and so on, but hardly any of this can be called thinking. By and large he has failed to give these devices a larger meaning, to put them to some use that is meaningful for our human existence. When it comes to that Blish is not much better than most other sf writers. THE SEEDLING STARS, about which I have written elsewhere at some length, is his most startling failure, and there are other, perhaps even more obvious, blunders. In the several-times anthologized THE BOX, for instance, an enemy of the USA who possesses a new secret force-screen, impenetrable by any matter or energy, puts this defence against atomic weapons to the asinine use of suffocating an American city. In effect an ideal weapon of defence is suddenly turned into a rather weak weapon of attack, and our American hero is thereby enabled to develop counter-measures. This story displays an astonishing ignorance of strategy; it is as if the Japanese had tested Pearl Harbour on some smaller American target. The surprise of the story is that surprise means nothing to James Blish.

In THE MAN IN THE ATTIC, because some use has to be made of pantropy, he thinks it necessary to adapt human beings to a life in trees - on a perfectly Earth-type planet.

The weak spots of EARTHMAN COME HOME are equally obvious. His Okies are an imaginative concept: a floating or flying city appeals to our imagination; but intellectually they seem far less impressive. Damon Knight has already pointed out that the Okies do not need to turn to inhabited planets to get their petroleum; but what he has failed to see is that the planets do not need the Okie workers either. The city of New York is a city of oil-prospectors, searching and drilling for oil on the planets where they are called to work. But it isn't that you just drive a hole in the ground and out comes oil forever - oilfields have a habit of becoming depleted; so the search for new sources has to go on continually. The planets simply couldn't wait until another Okie happened to come along. If a planet has an industry developed enough to need masses of petroleum, its inhabitants will have developed techniques to get them. The only sensible course would have been, as Blish suggests in his novel, to turn the Okies into traders and teachers. The Okies are migratory workers just for the sake of a dubious historical parallel. That is not really satisfying. What is interesting about the book is its imaginative scope: the flying cities, the wandering planet He, the rift in the galaxy and so on. Those things are the strength of an otherwise conventional adventure yarn.

We may say then that good sf satisfies us intellectually and imaginatively. If it also satisfies us emotionally it may claim to be some kind of literature. But I feel that in most cases not even those stories that are said to deal with human emotions are really gripping.

But if we accept that the emotions are the central part of aesthetic

pleasure, it is easy to explain the things that puzzled Knight in A YARD-STICK FOR SCIENCE FICTION (FUTURE SF, June 1958) and troubled Baxter: "If the scientific error, or lapse in logic, serves a purpose - if it's an essential part of the story, like the breathable air on Bradbury's Mars - and if what somes out at the other end is art - okay. If it's an unnecessary error or carelessness - nix."

We can say now: if an author, who lacks both imaginative and emotional qualities (the usual run of sf authors), that is to say one who is already a very minor writer, also makes lapses and errors in what aesthetic pleasure he has left us - intellectual content of a very superficial sort - then surely we find any scientific error annoying. But if an author, say Bradbury, who touches upon something meaningful, upon something really moving (however slight when compared to a really great writer such as Tolstoy, Pushkin, Woolf, Schnitzler or Ibsen), then the mere factual content of a story loses its importance and may trouble only some zealous sf fan who is able to detect some factual inaccuracy. A writer who has nothing to offer save some facts stands or falls by the soundness of his facts - just like the author of a work of popular science - but when a Bradbury makes a mistake we hardly notice it. When an author chooses to introduce into his story some other theoretical content than science, we are perhaps justified in denying that he has written sf - which is not an aesthetic judgement - but if he introduces science in such a manner that it matters, then we must insist that his science be correct.

We can also build up a hierarchy of sf, according to its importance. At the bottom we have the "intellectual" gimmick story: if it is successful it is not much of an achievement, if bad, not much of a disappointment. But there are kinds of sf in which the authors fail even when they succeed in what they set out to do - because they have set their sights too low. I think that especially all stories dealing in some way with a "real" future, or the nature of man, must touch upon something really meaningful. An author who, for instance, treats the artificial introduction of mutants merely as a biological problem is a bad writer: the purely technical side is the least interesting part of the problem; such a new process would also involve political, historical, religious, moral problems and so on. Such a story would be disappointing in a way that a gadget story, of which you do not expect much in the first place, could never be. A simple solution may be sufficient for a simple problem; complex problems rarely have simple solutions. This is why most of the so-called "sociological" or historical sf is crap. Gimmicked-up history is unreadable.

I'll now append a few words on the cataclysmic novel and characterization in sf.

The cataclysmic novel seems to be very popular with editors and readers outside of our field, whereas fans do not care much for it. It is easy to see why. The theoretical content of the form is not very important and above all not very different from one novel of the kind to the next; whether the catastrophe is caused by too much water, too little water, ice, storms, plants, intelligent beasts, the death of grass or what you will, doesn't make much difference: it is essentially the same situation. And the imaginative qualities of the process of destruction are hardly sufficient to carry the book. The cataclysmic novel is foremost a story of people and therefore, potentially at least, literature. It either shows us the reactions of human beings in an extreme situation, or it shows us nothing at all. (And, in passing, let me remark that I think the literary instincts of the British writers are right when they concentrate upon this

form.) I do not feel that it is important literature (in most cases it shows only a few basic reactions); paradoxical as it may sound, the end of the world, which is after all a very unlikely event, is not so important as the death of a single individual, or the fate of a woman who happens to be unfaithful to her husband.

There are two notable exceptions from the usual run of end-of-the-world novels: Blish's A CLASH OF CYMBALS (or THE TRIUMPH OF TIME) and Ballard's novels. Blish treats the end of the universe as a purely theoretical exercise and therefore manages to be very boring and unimaginative.

Ballard's novels (with the exception of THE WIND FROM NOWHERE) are imaginative triumphs. His characters are hardly better than those of other sf writers, but his landscapes are unsurpassed. Buz Busby, writing in the issue of SPECULATION already quoted, criticized the new school of sf writing for "throwing impossible phenomena at the characters... for Emotional Effect." I think that this is a deep misunderstanding, at least as far as Ballard is concerned. He is all intellect and imagination. And is he the "least intelligent" of the new writers, as Budrys has said, because he has decided to use his intellect only to renounce intellect? Then Leibniz would be the most intelligent philosopher and Schopenhauer the least. Ballard's landscapes "seem to be drained of all emotional associations" (to use his own words about the surrealists). I feel that Ballard is writing some highly imaginative form of a minor kind of literature. One is in no wat moved by his characters. It is mood-writing and, to my mind, mood-writing is primarily imaginative. Ballard may not like it, but in a very special sense he and Lovecraft are similar: the one is concerned with man's relationship to time, the other with man's relationship to some eldritch horror. You may feel that Ballard is a very good writer, and Lovecraft a very bad, but you are neither frightened by the atmosphere of Lovecraft's stories nor moved by the destiny fate has in store for Ballard's characters.

Ballard's characterization is not very good. That is something equally true of all sf, so much so that people such as Bruce Montgomery and P. Schuyler Miller have assumed that you can either have a detailed background or character, but not both - a sort of Heisenberg's principle.

This is not original with them, of course. Here is a similar sentiment from David Hume (from OF SIMPLICITY AND REFINEMENT IN WRITING):

> "When the affections are moved, there is no place for the imagination. The mind of man being naturally limited, it is impossible that all its faculties can operate at once; and the more any one predominates, the less room is there for the others to exert their vigour."

And with the minds of sf authors usually being small rooms, it is understandable that they are more often than not lacking in all respects.

In VECTOR, Dave Busby quoted (in A QUESTION OF CHARACTERISATION) one person as giving science fiction's "lack, on every level of the whole field, of any credible characterisation" as its most serious fault. Among the characters of sf offered by Dave Busby as well-characterized were Fr. Ramon Ruiz-Sanchez of A CASE OF CONSCIENCE, Mayor Amalfi of the Okie series, Bester's protagonists of THE STARS MY DESTINATION and THE DEMOLISHED MAN, and even Grosvenor of THE VOYAGE OF THE SPACE BEAGLE. I'll offer a few myself that are in the same class: Kirth Gersen of THE STAR KING and its sequels, Hassan of THIS IMMORTAL, and perhaps even Hugh Farnham of FARNHAM'S FREEHOLD.

Busby was at a loss to explain why they should stick out as characters when they are really, as he well recognized, not characters. Why should Grosvenor, who is a mathematical pattern, be regarded as a character? Surely because he "feels right" in the novel, and another man would be considered an intrusion. I think that the characterization in sf is Descartian: a "clara et distincta perceptio" of the figures in a story is all that readers and critics alike want. Harry Warner Jr. writes in RIVERSIDE QUARTERLY no.8 that Heinlein "had no difficulty in differentiating" among the male characters in FARNHAM'S FREEHOLD, obviously approvingly. Damon Knight never examines the psychological credibility of a sf character: he merely tests whether he behaves according to the way his author has defined, however improbable. One reason for this is perhaps that once you begin searching for psychological depth, you give up reading and criticizing sf - in desperation.

Those characters who stick out are memorable solely for their intellectual and perhaps imaginative qualities. It interests us to see a man without feelings in action; a remorseless but disinterested killer; an abstract person enfolded in an abstract problem. But we do not really care for them, nor feel for them. The most interesting thing about Kirth Gersen is not what is happening to him nor what he is doing, but what the author will do with him after he has killed his five demon princes. Any reader not sharing our special interests will find Grosvenor, Gersen et al. terribly dull people. Each has some outstanding quality, is excessively characterized in some way, and this is commonly mistaken for convincing characterization. Science fiction is a reactionary genre, in more ways than one: in its harking back to sociological patterns of the past, for example, and in its characterization. Reactionary, I would say, is the dramatic supposition of so much sf that princes, leaders of the state, leading scientists and so on are more dramatically interesting than the "common man" - or even that they are the only interesting people in existence. Reactionary is the concentration upon the "leader". A sf fan will never understand that Sir Walter Scott is a more modern writer than Robert Heinlein.

And what the fans fail to see is that their beloved not-common men are so very common and unexceptional in every way save one - an ability to read minds, teleport, predict the future, make "right" decisions, and so on. And how could it be otherwise when the reader wants to "identify" with the hero? He can only identify with someone who is so much like himself, differentiated only by something which he would like to have. And what they all lack is greatness: most especially those who talk Campbell editorials at an unsuspecting reader.

I think that the new writers are performing a valuable service for sf if only by tearing down the old conventions to make room for the innovations that will come later. Some of them succeed even in being emotionally gripping, most notably Roger Zelazny. But there is still a long way to go, although you would think Zelazny was the most important writer now living when you read some of the reviews. Zelazny's characters are in most cases less articulate than Homer's peasants and warriors.

Hell Tanner of DAMNATION ALLEY (GALAXY, October 1967) is fairly typical. A man tells him with some justification: "You have killed men and raped women. You once gouged out a man's eyes, just for fun. You've been indicted twice for pushing dope and three times as a pimp. You're a drunk and a degenerate and I don't think you've had a bath since you were born. You and your hoodlums terrorized decent people when they were trying to pull their lives together after the war. You stole from them and you assaulted them, and you extorted money and the necessaries of life with the

threat of physical violence." That's Hell Tanner, whose social theory boils down to the sentence that nobody has done anything for him. In love he isn't more articulate: "Let's make it."

In short, he's the perfect troglodyte. In the story there is much violence and much casual killing, but finally it arrives awkwardly at a humanist solution. It is a good story, for Zelazny can write, and he manages to say something; he says it is basically irrational: life is something that you cannot quite grasp, but only live; a sort of Nietzschean philosophy. It is also a true story, for there is so much senseless brutality in the world, and it seems to be increasing. But still there is a curious dichotomy in modern life, which is a life of the city. On the one hand this irrationality and welling-up of the sub-human; on the other hand a tendency to greater refinement. Modern man is able to express finer shades of meaning and to feel more differentiated emotions than was possible in an earlier age. And this, the complexity, responsibility and sensitivity that also is modern reality, and likely to become more so, is sadly lacking in sf. Zelazny's characters have all the elementary force of an earthquake - and all of its subtlety.

The ideal sf, I think, would be a synthesis of Wittgenstein, Norbert Wiener, and Arthur Schnitzler; a merging of Rudolf Carnap, Kafka, Virginia Woolf and Frank Wedekind. Ludwig Wittgenstein ends his TRACTATUS LOGICO-PHILOSOPHICUS -

"And about which you cannot speak, you must be silent"

- after he has written that by the answering of all questions that can be asked (i.e. by all scientific questions) the problems of our lives would not even have been touched upon. For a writer of fiction, such a mystical silence is impossible: he must seek, if he really wants to call himself a sf writer, for a synthesis of science and life. The results achieved so far have been poor. Usually mysticism - something that can never be the content of a scientific sentence - is treated as if it were scientific data, thereby degrading science and robbing mysticism of all the power it has as mysticism (e.g. STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND).

But I do not think that sf will be forever unable to achieve this synthesis: an inseparable unity of intellect, imagination and feeling, which is the necessary condition of finding Schlegel's "continuum of reflection" that is the mark of a really great piece of literature; that enables us to interpret it in ever new ways, to continually find new meanings in it. SF, as it is now, doesn't fulfil this condition, for as soon as such men as Heinlein's competent simpletons, those oversized boy scouts who never grew up, open their mouths all thought is stifled - just as it is when you take a hard look at Bester's characters or those of dozens of others.

What makes me nevertheless hopeful for sf is an example given by a novel that is not sf: E.M. Forster's A PASSAGE TO INDIA. This novel contains deep reflections (though not about science), character, and above all it conveys that sense of alienness that is to be found in some of the best sf. Forster's India is more of an alien planet than Hal Clement's Mesklin. Why in hell should it be impossible to achieve this synthesis in science fiction? Have we to wait for a genius more brilliant than E.M. Forster?

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THE WORST SF STORY EVER PUBLISHED

BRIAN ALDISS

Competition for the worst sf story must be about a hundred times stiffer than for the best. It seemed advisable, therefore, to consult the files of the worst sf magazine ever published.

There was one story in particular in AUTHENTIC which, ever since I read it on its first appearance in 1954, had impressed me as reaching a really impressive peak of badness. To my great delight, I found on reading it again that it has grown even worse over the intervening fourteen years. I therefore would like to nominate as the worst sf story ever published:

THE LAVA SEAS TUNNEL, by F.G. Rayer and E.R. James
(Authentic SF, edited by H.J. Campbell, Vol.1, no.43,
March 1954.)

Anyone who has followed the careers of these two authors as closely as I have will know how exquisitely poor they can be alone; together, they are exquisitely bankrupt. That they are cousins, and therefore consanguineously exquisitely bankrupt, is just the sort of extra luxury touch to appeal to the sf connoisseur. And the final gilding of the lily is provided by the fact that even the editor - as we shall see - seemed to believe the story was dreadful at the time.

The badnesses in the story are so many and various that it is simpler to categorize them. First a summary of the plot. (Story length: 3,300 words.)

A "boring machine" has been built to descend to the centre of the Earth. Its captain is Steve Martel; he has a crew of three, none of whom is what he seems! Martel has been in an earlier boring machine which met with an accident (an accident which is never explained). The present machine has gone only a short way when it grinds to a stop. A fault has developed in the thermostats. It is fixed; the machine continues downwards. Hours pass. The machine stops with a jolt, Martel is knocked unconscious. A nozzle has become blocked. This takes a long time to fix - "After sixteen hours of almost unbroken labour the store of spares was almost empty"; from which one must assume the spares-store consisted only of new nozzles.

They go on, but soon the machine stops again. Martel climbs down into the nose and finds that somehow two of the crew have climbed out and have found diamonds as big as eggs. When Martel tries to get them in again, the men pull a gun on him and one of them escapes and gets back to the surface by the escape apparatus.

This man is a big engineer, a cowardly man who shakes like a jelly, called McGilligan. Before leaving, he breaks everything up: "The instruments in the control room had been smashed and were useless." Martel

"patches everything up" in an hour - pretty good going when the thermostats took two hours.

They sink lower and lower. Hours pass. Once, they stop to allow some of the heat to dissipate. At last, Martel falls asleep. He wakes to find himself tied to a chair. Another member of the crew, Hedgerley, the observation engineer, has done it, and now reveals himself in his true colours. He tells Martel: "You've made a mistake. A big mistake. I draw two pay packets - one from your firm and one from a foreign country we don't need to mention. I came to see that this job is a failure - and such a failure that no one will try again!"

In fact, all he does is leave by the escape apparatus. Martel gets free of his bonds and goes to find the other member of his crew, the communications officer, who has been knocked out and is lying in the third and last remaining unit of the escape apparatus. (Why a four-man ship has only three escape units is not explained.) Hedgerley, on leaving, has damaged the escape unit, but the communications officer is okay. I now have to reveal that the communications officer turns out to be Martel's son Dave, who in some way has managed to replace the real officer.

Father and son now decide to take the machine down farther. They sink and then the machine sticks. After a bit of revving up, however, they fall and plummet downwards, only to land with a "grating thud." "The bottom seemed to have fallen out of the shaft" (authors' italics).

All around them is "leaping flame and incandescent gas" - which the authors seem to imagine as two very different things. Here is the very lava sea they were looking for; "from it, heat could be taken through great pipes to the surface, there to provide power for enormous industrial machines."

They are in trouble - exactly what trouble, it is hard to determine. Rayer (or James) seems to think the machine is "slipping gradually downwards"; into the magma, one must suppose. James (or Rayer) merely wonders "how long the machine would continue to cling to the slots in the crumbling tunnel walls", although, since the machine fell so far, it is hard to imagine how it can still be in its own tracks (or "slots"). Well, it's all very puzzling, but fortunately, at this moment, young Dave reveals that he has rectified the mechanism on the third escape unit - and not a moment too soon! They escape together as the machine sinks.

"We've done it, son," says Martel. He grips his son's shoulder, of course.

So much for plot. A lot of thrills there, packed into just over three thousand words. What impressed me even more than the awful plot, the awful characterization, and the awful writing, was the awful lack of what - for want of a better word - we must call 'science'.

For the assumption behind the story is that things are really desperate on Earth: all supplies of coal and oil have run out, and the only thing that will power Earth's "enormous industrial machines" is lava. The authors literally have not heard of nuclear or hydro-electric or solar power. Even the editor of AUTHENTIC seemed to feel that there was something wrong here. Adding his own layer of ineptitude, he captions the story in such a way that we are led to believe we are about to read an alternate-time-track story. His come-on reads: "Suppose no one had split the atom. What would we do when coal and oil ran out?" Hands up the

bright boys who said "Split the atom then."

This total blindness to any sort of technological probability extends to the equipment of the machine itself. The escape apparatus consists of three inflatable balloons, which are supposed to drift up the tunnel the boring machine has made! The machine is not refrigerated; it has "heat-batteries" instead. Nor is it equipped with an intercom; Hedgerley's voice comes "over the reproducer".

The authors' reluctance to come to grips with anything that might be termed a fact means that they do not tell us at the beginning that this is a four-man boring machine. This, coupled with their haziness of characterization, causes difficulty for the reader. For instance, "The latecomer looked hurt" is - though we won't know it for the next two pages - the radio operator. "A large man climbing down a metal ladder" is actually McGilligan, but it is some time before we connect the two, so that, at first reading, it seems as though the machine is swarming with crew - ratings, maybe, since the only people mentioned are officers.

Then, just how old is this son of Martel's? The only word of description about him is "golden ringlets covered the head", which suggests either that he is about six, or an old bald guy in wig and drag.

Perhaps ASFR readers have had enough glimpses of the authors' style for me not to have to go into that painful subject. So I will rest my case, confident that I have unearthed the worst sf story ever published.

The only factor that makes me doubtit is that, whatever else you can say about it, THE LAVA SEAS TUNNEL is certainly original!

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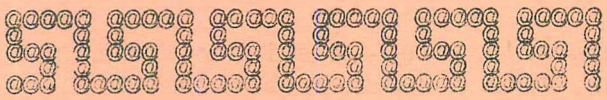
SF EUROPA SF EUROPA SF EUROPA SF EU



ROPA SF EUROPA SF EUROPA SF EUROPA:

JB: This column started in the last issue with reports from various countries. This issue we have news from - wait for it - the Ukraine (!) and a review of a book recently published in East Germany. Both by courtesy of Franz Rottensteiner, who seems to have taken over this issue.

UKRAINE ::: "Phantopia" (this would seem to be one of the East German sf clubs now being formed all over the country, with the active support of sf author Carlos Rasch. FR) received a letter from the Club for Scientific Fantasy in Kiev. Vladimir Mitshenko, an afficianado of Utopian literature, reported on the activities of the club and on the meeting which took place in the house of that writer in Kiev on 16th January 1968. "Monthly meetings are held by the Fantasy Club in Kiev. They are, however not always a success. For the most part they consist of discussions about scientific predictions. Authors, scientists and especially afficianados of Utopian literature take part in them. (JB: I've just looked up my Spanish dictionary and find that that word is spelled 'aficionado'. Let's just call 'em fans.) Usually such meetings develop in this way: someone makes a speech that serves as a starting point for the following discussions. After the speaker has finished, everyone may stand up and utter his own views, and, if possible, formulate his own hypotheses and air unusual ideas. Our last meeting took place on 16th January and lasted for three and a half hours. There were about 200 persons present. This time the topic

was Flying Saucers. The speech was made by Olesj Bezdnyk. It contained some interesting information, and he put forth many hypotheses, but regrettably his views were prejudiced. (FR: I do not know what hypotheses he advanced, nor in which ways they were prejudiced.) About fifteen fans then entered into a discussion. About the role of Utopian literature, Vladimir Mitshenko said - and he seems to have uttered a view commonly held in the Ukraine - "If a writer locates his heroes and their deeds in other places and in other times, then he is allowed to depict unusual, curious and even improbable things; indeed, he must do so. Only then his work may claim to be of a fantastic nature. With even well-known, respectable scientists not hesitating to advance daring and sometimes even seemingly mad concepts and working hypotheses, the authors of futuristic fiction have the duty to do the same. Scientific fantasy is scientific fantasy; reality has always presented surprises to us that surpassed even the wildest fancy."

KLAUS WALTHER (ed): MARSMENSCHEN ("Martians")
Cosmic and Cybernetic Adventures. An Anthology of International SF.
Berlin: Das neue Berlin, 2nd edition, 1967; 381pp.

- reviewed by FRANZ ROTTENSTEINER

I don't know why this book was called MARTIANS - there are some strange beings in it, but none of them a Martian. It is a truly international book, featuring besides their own Communist writers (no Germans, however) some Japanese, British and American authors.

Stories that will be well known to any English-speaking reader are Simak's LULU, Wyndham's PAWLEY'S PEEPHOLES, Bradbury's MARIONETTES INC. and Anderson's CALL ME JOE, all of which are taken from translations published in Western Germany and Switzerland. Of these CALL ME JOE, which combines elements from Blish's BRIDGE and Simak's DESERTION to form a satisfying new unity, is by far the best; it is one of those stories which makes you forgive Anderson the trash he writes about that dark age when we will have to do without a Galactic Empire, the very thought of which fills my heart with dread.

(For the record be it known that Sturgeon's Rule - A science fiction story is a story built around human beings, with a human problem and a human solution, which would not have happened at all without its scientific content - has now found its way behind the Curtain via the Swiss anthology ROBOTER, published by Diogenes in Zurich. Now anything can happen, I suppose.)

Of the rest, one story is known to American readers: Arkadi & Boris Strugatsky's SIX MATCHES, which appeared in THE HEART OF THE SERPENT, issued by the Foreign Languages Publishing House in Moscow, and later republished by Collier Books in MORE SOVIET SF. It is a moderately interesting story about psi phenomena.

Two stories are good humorous/satirical efforts: the Czech writer Josef Nesvadba's THE INVENTION AGAINST ITSELF and Anatoly Dnieprov's MACHINE E.R., MODEL NO.1. Nesvadba writes about an inventor whose invention does away with the necessity of manual work; the consequences of his invention are not quite a socialist paradise. Dnieprov's piece is about a wonderful computer which helps its owner to get rich by giving him information about horse races, Wall Street fluctuations, and so on. At last it makes its owner poor again, fearing that the man will sell it and buy a better model. The author was careful to locate his story in America, and the editor explains that Nesvadba and Dnieprov are satirizing capitalism. I'm not so sure about that, but I guess it's safest.

Victor Saparin's A LANDING ON VENUS, on the other hand, is a conventional story about the exploration of another planet that is faithful to the party line. The altruistic Earthmen of the story are helping the primitive inhabitants of Venus on their long climb towards civilization.
A HAIR FROM MOHAMMED'S BEARD, by Dimiter Peew (a Bulgarian author) is a long essay but hardly a story. A long time ago we were visited by beings from outer space, who left us a message. This message is now being deciphered. That visitation is a cliche in Communist sf, ever since Kasanzev advanced the theory that the Tungusian meteors of 1908 were really a space ship or ships. The extraterrestrials are hardly ever brought on stage. The story won a prize: I can't see why.

Konrad Fialkowski writes in THE CHANCE OF DEATH about robotic doppelgangers revolting against man. A poor story is Mikhail & Jeremei Parnov's THE EQUATION OF THE PALE NEPTUNE, which combines mechanically an equation for the control of the universe with the persecution of non-Aryan scientists by the Nazis. The invention is made for no other reason but that the hero of the story may escape into outer space.

Equally mechanical is Oldrich Zelezny's THE STOLEN DREAMS, a Czech story. Here some rascals, making use of the latest science, namely the discovery of "REM sleep" (compare the article SLEEP, DREAMS & COMPUTERS by Dr. Evans in NEW WORLDS 173), kill Communist notables by depriving them hypnotically of their sleep. No reasons are given why a Czech citizen would want to murder officials. Probably the author thought his readers could think of reasons of their own.

A story by the Japanese author Kobo Abe, who would appear to be an important Japanese writer since some time ago he had a mainstream novel published in Western Germany, is amusing to read, but is more of a mystery story than sf. It is called THE TOTALOSCOPE.

Finally we have Stanislav Lem's DR. DIAGORAS, an excerpt from his novel, THE INVINCIBLE, due to be published this year in Berlin. So far only two of his earlier books have been published in East Germany (and they had a first printing of 250,000 copies each - in hardback!), as well as a fine collection of Münchhausian short stories. One of them was a boring Utopian novel; the other drew a convincing picture of a world - Venus - destroyed by an atomic war, but was otherwise conventional. A later book, EDEN, was published only in Western Germany. This was a tour de force and a fine adventure story. A space ship from Earth crashes on an alien planet; the crew must both repair their ship and explore the planet. Theysucceed in the first task but not in the second. True, they see many things which they take to be signs of a great civilization, and also things that appear barbaric to them, but they cannot establish contact with the aliens and they cannot understand anything of what they see. Some members of the expedition think that the signs of mass executions (or are they that?) they see constitute proof that the aliens undertook a biological experiment that got out of control. Others speculate that there are Nazis on the planet, suppressing the rest of the population and exterminating it; as good Communists they naturally want to take action against these butcheries. But finally they do nothing, for they understand nothing, and they leave the planet no wiser than they were when they came to it. A lesser writer, an Anderson or an Asimov, would have explained it all in the end, down to the last boring detail. Lem does nothing of the sort; there remains only a deep mystery, much as in Kafka. I believe that Lem had some difficulty in getting the novel published in Poland.

The unfortunate thing is that I do not read Polish and the German

translation appears to be very bad. But even so the impact of the novel is considerable, and I think that this book alone would make Lem one of the foremost sf writers in the world. The novels published in East Germany - where they have good Polish and Russian translators - were translated much better; but they don't publish many sf books there, the paper supply still being very limited. Mr. Rasch tells me that for every copy of a sf book they print there are still ten people who would like to have it.

DR. DIAGORAS deals with the creation of intelligent robots. It is hardly a short story, containing much reasoning and no physical action, but it is nonetheless interesting. One of the criticisms frequently levelled at Western sf by Communist critics is that it totally misses the things most important in modern society - cybernetics for instance. At first glance this may seem unfair, considering the many robot stories that have been published in the magazines, but I nevertheless think the criticism is a just one. I would be at a loss to name a story dealing seriously with automation or cybernetics. PLAYER PIANO perhaps. But the rest deal either with electronic monsters trying to enslave the world or show robots as little humanized darlings. Most of the stories are trifling examples of ratiocination, mere play with ideas in a vacuum. Asimov's three laws of robotics have smothered the field. Perhaps it is some merit that they did away with the clanking Adam Links, but Asimov also diminished the dramatic stature of robots to mere toys. What all robot stories of the Asimovian kind lack is sincerity and a sense of urgency; there is nothing in them. The Frankenstein story, no matter how badly done, contained at least a powerful myth. The Asimovian robot story, even when well done, is an empty plaything. Asimov destroyed a deep feeling (anti-science, true!), but was unable to replace it by an equally strong feeling. Prometheus is destroyed and in his place there is small talk.

And here, at least, Communist authors are ahead of their Western colleagues, for they treat cybernetics as an urgent problem that will deeply change the structure of society; and it is also one of the topics they can write about relatively unhindered by official doctrine. It would appear to be sufficient that they, now and then, pay lip-service to the established social order.

MARTIANS is a very interesting book, giving a spectrum of sf in many countries, varied both in content and (regrettably) in quality.

BOOKS REVIEWED IN THIS ISSUE

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R E V I E W S

EUGENE BURDICK: THE 480
(Gollancz)

R. D. SYMONS

I read this book the day after reading Vance Packard's work of pop sociology, THE NAKED SOCIETY, and found the juxtaposition disturbing. When systems compete they become similar: "executive" is American for "commisar", trade is become as bureaucratic as the civil service, and it appears that America may have become as committed to economic determinism as Russia itself. The "480" are the four hundred and eighty socio-economic groups into which the entire population of the US has been divided by the Simulmatics Corporation, a real company which was used by Kennedy in his 1960 campaign for the Presidency. The corporation is the most advanced sector of what Burdick describes as the "new underworld" of politics, "made up of psychologists, sociologists, pollsters, social survey experts and statisticians." Its fictional counterpart in the novel, Simulations Enterprises, with its IBM behind street level plate glass windows on Fifth Avenue, claims that from the millions of bits of carefully compiled information, such as "how many protestants in the Midwest read the Chicago Tribune", it can predict what people will do in a situation which they have never heard of before.

This of course raises the perennial question of determinism versus free will, on which I lean towards the theory of freedom developed by Stuart Hampshire. "Freedom derives from a consideration of the two ways in which knowledge can be gained of how a man will act. First there is the knowledge, open to all, which consists of prediction, based upon known general laws and known initial conditions; and secondly there is the knowledge, open only to the agent himself, which comes from him deciding what he will do." (Hampshire: THOUGHT AND ACTION)

It is Hampshire's contention that the second kind of knowledge is always a possibility. Once the agent accepts the data on which those who observe him predict what he will do, he can always stand back from the situation and try to do something that either fits in with or transcends the conditions they see as determining him, but, in either case, restores to himself his freedom. Our freedom, in other words, lies in our capacity to form intentions. Drop out, switch on.

To give Burdick his due, he doesn't present yet a picture of a society in which everything is decided by a high speed filing system. The candidate, John Thatch, owner of a construction company operating mainly in Asia and the Pacific, spectacularly averts a political crisis over a bridge his company is building on the India-Pakistan frontier and becomes the subject of a TIME cover story. Political intuition exercised by two old kingmakers of the Republican party, provides him, initially, with the opportunity to become a candidate for the presidency, but at his first meeting with these two he is analysed by a too-cool lady behavioural scientist. The computer is programmed for a simulation of Republican Party delegates and given a "Fortran" (formula translation) instruction for the profession they most admire. Thatch's political career is launched when he gives a tailor-made speech to the audience of young doctors indicated by the computer analysis.

This, of course, is where modern American democracy, and let me admit, the democracy of some other countries, becomes depressingly similar to Goebbels's ideas. "If farmers want to hear something which is contradictory to what trade unionists want to hear, two speeches will be written. One will be delivered in Des Moines, the other in Detroit. The new techniques could make a science out of this hypocrisy." Burdick is reasonably optimistic about it all: "...it is in the best American tradition to use new facts, new insights, new discoveries" - but They have got the computers while we have only a capacity for rebellion against the encroachments of bureaucracy, and of increasingly self-perpetuating bureaucracy at that. The US marshal of folklore has been replaced a mere hundred years later by the electronic surveillance techniques not only of the FBI but of credit investigators, insurance companies, management selection "experts" and nobody knows who else. Human intelligence, freely operating, makes wider controls of societies possible, yet, having done so, is threatened in turn by the bureaucratic controllers. The Russian bureaucracy shoots dissenters, the American equivalent ostracizes them (Oppenheimer, Alger Hiss).

The book is up-to-date, researched in the indefatigable American manner, well supported by the sub-plot consisting of the relationship between Thatch and his part-Asian wife. Perhaps one could read it in the hope of finding some way to become unpredictable.

ROBERT SILVERBERG: THORNS
(Ballantine: 90¢)
PIERS ANTHONY: CHTHON
(Ballantine: 90¢)
BOB SHAW: NIGHT WALK
(Banner: 70¢)

ALAN REYNARD

Robert Silverberg has probably written and published more sf than anyone else alive. That the bulk of this once prodigious output has been forgotten is a reminder that he rose to prominence at a time during the late fifties when the magazines were at their barrel-scraping worst, and editors were scrabbling for whatever they could get their hands onto in order to keep their crumbling publications together. The paperback market was then but a fledgeling, giving no hint of the colossus it was to become, and Silverberg had only begun to branch out into this more lucrative field when sf suddenly became a dirty word to publishers and the market collapsed overnight.

From this early period only a handful of Silverberg stories can be called to mind: the Nidorian series, written for Campbell in collaboration with Randall Garret, and a short story or two. The rest is harmless dross. With the collapse of a great number of magazines, Silverberg deserted the sf field altogether and moved into the slick pages of magazines like HIGH FIDELITY and popular hardcover tomes on archaeology and the like. Recently he has made a careful return to the specialist sf magazines, his output modified to accomodate a slightly more sophisticated market, and he is obviously willing to take more care with his prose than before.

THORNS is an ambitious novel, the work of a Sunday Gentleman determined to produce something more than his customary best. Ballantine have given the book their full "prestige" treatment, but the book is creaking uncomfotably before one is past the first chapter. A sense of deja vu plagued my reading. Surely we have been here before? And met these people before - sensitive man and sensitive woman, exploited by a ruthless sadist so that their emotional experiences may be vicariously enjoyed by several billion people?

Did I say "people"? Well, I'm sorry. Because people they are not. Names, no more, pulp ciphers, acceptable in less ambitious novels, but dis-

astrously ineffective when one realizes that Silverberg has built his novel around them. "We bleed. We feel. We live." So says Lona Kelvin in THORNS, but it is not so. These people never involve us more than cursorily in their experiences and our final attitude is one of - so what? A better writer would have made us follow their struggle with much greater empathy than Silverberg has managed to do. We can agree that the protagonist and his love have known a great deal of pain, but we do not care. They are names upon a printed page, and they never for one moment come to life in a way that the work demands they should.

So I am disappointed with this book. There are passages of such intensity scattered throughout its two hundred pages that I am made to wonder if Silverberg has been trying to communicate something profound and personal in the old-fashioned guise of his novel. If this is so then the man must be mad, for he has sold his story down the river from the very beginning by opting for pulp treatment of a theme that cries out for some sensitivity and a little more care in the deployment of literary devices. In all his years of writing he has never managed to forge a really distinctive style and the pallid cable-ese reproduced in this and other novels is no real substitute for writing that carries conviction. Literary allusion as practised here and there throughout THORNS is meaningless unless integrated with a more profound sense of involvement. Perhaps Silverberg has been the Compleat Hack for too long. But I hope not. There is evidence here that if he ever wanted to and was patient enough to take some real time over his work, he could well write a novel that would leave the competition gasping.

Ten years ago THORNS would have stood out even in the presence of such superior work as Bester's THE STARS MY DESTINATION. Today it just seems earnestly old-fashioned. Certainly not worth a dollar of good Australian currency - although I would advise anyone who can borrow a copy to do so, so that he can see what Silverberg has been trying to do.

If THORNS seems to lack convincing characters, then there is blood and sweat on every page of CHTHON. This is Piers Anthony's first published novel, and while he lacks Silverberg's expertise with words, his vision is much more splendid. There is enough material in CHTHON for three novels, and perhaps it is this abundance of material that overwhelms the stylistic shortcomings of the book. It is a long work by our standards - 250 pages - and also ambitious in a way that we are unaccustomed to seeing in sf. Ambitious in the manner of a Cordwainer Smith or a Robert Heinlein, to supply more than a simple plot for the reader to follow and fleshing out the skeletal framework with a rich abundance of fascinating detail.

As a character, Aton is no more successful than one of Silverberg's creations, but his feelings and emotions convince us in a way that pulp stereotypes never do. If Aton transmits to us no convincing physical image then his thoughts and his feelings reach us on a deeper level than most contemporary sf heroes. And the allegorical nature of his sufferings provides a readily identifiable structure that enables all sorts of personal reactions on the part of the reader to enrich an already crowded tapestry.

I could take issue with the structure of CHTHON on the grounds that a more conventional development would not have destroyed Anthony's monolith and would have cleared up some wedges of muddy writing towards the end of the book. CHTHON starts off conventionally enough but the latter half of the book is so overcrowded that it seems unbalanced.

Aton's quest seems that of an adolescent but that is not without worth as the author has conceived his work. "It is said that most first novels

are autobiographical," he says in an Afterword. "I wouldn't know." If CHTHON is, in a sense, personally derived, then it is a phenomena not so rare today as it would have been a decade ago. Piers Anthony is obviously one of the new generation of sf writers, the educated men who have never known the old-time influences of pulp editors and who are giving to sf a new and more durable image than the one we have become used to in the past. CHTHON is the first evidence of a major talent and I urge you all to buy and read this fascinating book. It boasts flaws aplenty, but when placed beside Silverberg's book its fervent honesty becomes blinding. Piers Anthony has been lucky enough to avoid the bad habits of lesser writers, and I look forward to his next novel with every confidence. He has won the F&SF/Pyramid/Irwin Allen novel competition with a work currently titled SOS THE ROPE. I await its appearance eagerly.

Coming after two ambitious novels, Bob Shaw's NIGHT WALK seems quietly understated. And yet, because his canvas is smaller and his intent less grandiose, Shaw has produced a most satisfying piece of prose. There is nothing world-shaking here. On the surface it is just a routine adventure set on another hostile alien planet. But after a somewhat crowded opening with a little too much explanation, Shaw accelerates the pace commendably, and the result is excitement in the grand old manner of STARTLING STORIES.

I have been following Shaw's second genesis closely. The stories he wrote for that most inexpertly edited of all sf magazines, the Scottish NEBULA, some years ago, were unremarkable examples of hybrid fan fiction. But after a long silence BoSh has returned to the field and unwrapped an impressive chrysalis of talent.

His first novel is closer in mood to the outre DUMBO in IF than the gentle poesy of the "slow grass" stories in ANALOG. If he has any stylistic surprises he has kept them up his sleeve for this one: NIGHT WALK has but one knotted pine protagonist and some simply shaded adversaries. For the major portion of the book Tallon is blind, and the whole story hinges upon this missing faculty. I had a suspicion on a number of occasions that Shaw wasn't playing quite fair and that Tallon was accomplishing feats that a man with his handicap should have had some difficulty with, but the narrative kept moving so smoothly that I didn't stop to worry the matter out. And when I'd finished the book I hadn't the heart to go back and see if I'd been right: I'll leave the nit-picking to others.

I enjoyed NIGHT WALK as a mild adventure and recommend it to people who like that sort of thing. It is eminently competent and seasoned with a general atmosphere of nightmare that gives just the necessary piquancy to the plot. I suppose one could cavil at the superman-solves-all finale - but then I must confess I swallowed it uncomplainingly, accepting it all in the grand old tradition of pulp fiction and not letting it worry me for a minute.

I'd like to see Bob Shaw write many more novels and perhaps unleash the generous talent he seems to have been carefully rationing until now.

JOHN CARNELL (ed): NEW WRITINGS IN SF 11 — K.U.F. WIDDERSHINS
(Corgi: 60¢)

Do not expect to see many more issues of NEW WRITINGS IN SF. The latest issue seems to be so weak in content that the survival of the series must be considered very unlikely. I confess that I could only bring myself to read two stories, but those two were quite enough to suggest the nature of the others.

In an Australian fanzine, of course, you would expect to see the Australian stories reviewed in preference to the others, and that is what you are going to see.

Lee Harding's SHOCK TREATMENT is beyond doubt the worst melange this modestly talented writer has ever sold to editor Carnell, whose faculties are obviously failing. While it is not a sin to use a thesaurus when writing, the sight of Harding trying to thrust the thing into his mouth with his foot must be amusing.

Harding writes about 'residual confusion', 'burgeoning sunlight'; a 'desire for inertia' is 'circumvented' - but there is surely no need to seek examples beyond the first page and a half. Harding is overwriting grossly, even when using reasonable English ('a clear sky canopied the waking earth') and with the sure hand of the inept he manages to bungle even the most elementary of ideas, strangling the language as he goes ('and with this movement began the small beginnings of the day'). One wonders whether the thesaurus had perhaps been stolen by the family dog during that crucial phrase: certainly this was a time when the much-abused thing was needed.

But let us leave Mr. Harding's elegant style, noting merely that this time the cake seems to be over-iced, and examine what is left of the story. Well there isn't much else. Editor Carnell introduced the story with the suggestion that 'Lee Harding has a penchant for writing stories about "lonely" things': may I humbly submit that 'penchant' should be replaced by 'mania'? I do not know of any Harding story in which loneliness is not the main (if not the sole) theme. Naturally, after some twenty stories, the idea is a little tattered.

It seems that man (whoops! - Man) has become soft because Nature has become kind. Soft in the head, that is, as well as in the body. There's a pleasant mixture of 'Keepers', 'Manses', 'Thinkers', 'Great Engines', 'First Planners', ad naus., just as was found in ante-diluvian science fiction (or even Palmer's AMAZING STORIES). Only one category is missing - but that is saved for the story as a whole - a 'Stinker'.

So much for the better of the two stories. (No, please don't go away, Jack Wodhams - I'm only joking.) Wodhams's THE HELMET OF HADES was his earliest work, I understand, and it shows. The creakiness of THERE WAS A CROOKED MAN is foreshadowed here by downright ham-handedness. Fortunately Mr. Wodhams seems to learn fairly rapidly, so we shall undoubtedly not have to sit through improbable plots and scenes, idiot characters and over-strained writing again - from his pen.

Under the circumstances, it is perhaps reasonable not to read the remainder of the collection?

THOMAS M. DISCH: CAMP CONCENTRATION
(New Worlds 173-176)
HARRY HARRISON: WAR WITH THE ROBOTS
(Dobson: 18s0d/$2.30)
TERRY CARR(ed): NEW WORLDS OF FANTASY
(Ace Books: US75¢)

JOHN BANGSUND

The ingredients of a good sf novel, according to our friend Sten Dahlskog in his review of another book by Tom Disch (in ASFR 8) are "a disciplined imagination, a logical plot, believable characters, and a well-told story". One would have to add to this dictum "...having something to do with science", but I am sure Sten took this for granted. In any event, these (and more) are the ingredients of CAMP CONCENTRATION, and Tom

Disch shows not only that he knows the ingredients but also that he knows, superbly, how to mix them.

The novel concerns a writer, a conscientious objector in a time of war, who is imprisoned, at first in a fairly ordinary prison but later in a special underground concentration camp where a biological experiment is being conducted. At first the writer believes he is in this place, for some obscure reason, as an observer, but he later learns that he is in fact part of the experiment. A rebellion is mounted by the prisoners, against impossible odds, and in a most unexpected way it succeeds. End of story.

Not a particularly original plot, but one that has been used before and will be used again to make good exciting stories. However, Disch does rather more than this.

For a start, his protagonist, the writer, is thoroughly authentic. Louis Sacchetti is primarily a poet, and we know that Disch is a poet. One wonders how much of the author has gone into the character - particularly since in an earlier story, SQUIRREL CAGE (New Worlds 167), which similarly involves a prisoner writing a journal, the narrator turns out to be Tom Disch. But this is not terribly important: if Sacchetti is not a self-portrait, he is nonetheless a real - agonizingly real - writer.

The other main characters, and most of the secondary characters, are likewise convincing; some, like Mordecai Washington, the negro ex-hoodlum, are indelibly memorable.

The action of the story, such of it as I have outlined above, is slow-paced. But I have misled you in that most of the story's action takes place in the minds of the characters, particularly in the narrator's mind, and here the pace and scope are exhilarating.

If the book has any weakness it is in the plot. The denouement of the story rests on an idea that not all readers will find either palatable or convincing. But, to be honest, perhaps it is simply that with this idea traditional sf bursts into the story, and it is a little disconcerting after the intense realism that has gone before. The idea concerned - call it a gimmick if you like - is by no means an unworthy one in itself, and frankly, I don't see how Disch could have rounded off his story except in some such way as this. In this regard the book is similar to Brian Aldiss's AN AGE. Aldiss, too, uses a traditional gimmick to round off his story. But, as might be expected from a writer of his experience, he handles it in a rather more satisfactory manner than Disch has done.

CAMP CONCENTRATION and AN AGE are the two finest products to date of the so-called New Wave. One of them, I haven't decided which yet, will be my recommendation for the Hugo this year. Both are tough, adult fantasies, full of beauty and humanity, idiosyncratic in style, yet true to the finest pulp traditions. It is to the lasting credit of NEW WORLDS that both novels first appeared in its pages.

WAR WITH THE ROBOTS is not a particularly new collection, the stories having been originally published between 1956 and 1961, and the collection itself by Pyramid in 1962. However, here it is just issued by Dennis Dobson, and I'm sure it will be welcomed especially by library readers and hardback collectors (if such beings there are in our poverty-stricken fraternity).

There are eight stories, all uniformly competent and entertaining.

The robots come as a bit of a shock after Asimov's - they are so much more human - and (dare I say it?) the stories are better-written than any of the Good Doctor's robot pieces.

A couple of minor criticisms of presentation: The British edition has been photo-copied from the American paperback and there is a consequent cramped appearance to each page, accentuated by the wide margins; this (increasingly more common) practice means that the original typesetter's confusion over such words as 'moral' and 'morale' (both used incorrectly in the book) is allowed to be perpetuated.

I normally tend to steer clear of straight fantasy; though, perhaps inconsistently, I prefer a dash of fantasy in my sf to the straight technical stuff. I confess also that I cannot abide sword-and-sorcery, ERB or horror stories. (But I enjoyed Tolkien.) Having said as much, let me say that I found NEW WORLDS OF FANTASY the most satisfying anthology I have read in a long time.

Authors present include Zelazny, Brunner, Borges, Carr, Disch (with THE SQUIRREL CAGE, mentioned above), Ballard, Roberts, Davidson and seven others. The Davidson story, BASILISK, appears here for the first time, and I have to admit that it is the only one I did not read. I just can't read stories with characters in them named Thrag and Zembac Pix.

Of the fourteen I did read, all are good and some are very very impressive. My favourite is John Brunner's BREAK THE DOOR OF HELL, which first appeared in IMPULSE. The story is sparked off by a quote from THE EPIC OF GILGAMESH: "I will break the door of hell and smash the bolts; I will bring up the dead to eat food with the living, and the living shall be outnumbered by the host of them." And what a superb fantasy Brunner weaves around this awe-inspiring notion!

EDMUND COOPER: A FAR SUNSET
(Hodder: 18s0d/$2.30)
PHILIP WYLIE: THE DISAPPEARANCE
(Pocket Books: 75¢)

DIANA MARTIN

A FAR SUNSET is a beautifully-written and warmly satisfying book which engrosses the reader right to the end. This does not mean that the story is a happy one; in most respects the tale of Paul Marlowe, an Earthman in a primitive alien society, is starkly tragic, but essentially he wins through to a thrilling discovery and a triumphant though unexpected finale.

Edmund Cooper, one must admit, seems to have leaned heavily on the history of the Aztecs of Mexico to construct his Bayani civilization, and if you have read something of those people much of the novelty of the aliens is removed. This in no way detracts from the enjoyment and fascination of the novel, and as far as I am concerned the discovery of "Omri" (Bayani's great god) is very satisfactory and quite credible in the context of the story.

There seem to be no false moves or writers' tricks in the unfolding of Paul Marlowe's transformation into "Paul Mer Lo" and the characterizations are expertly drawn. This is a book to read and enjoy without critical reservations. The quality of the writing carries it through any possible banalities and lifts it well above other stories which have somewhat similar situations. A FAR SUNSET will grace any sf reader's bookshelf.

One day as I was propounding to Lee Harding my own version of man's attitude to women over the centuries - that is, his fear of the female,

knowing that without woman, human life would cease to exist within a couple of generations - Lee said that a book had been written about my idea, i.e. the disappearance of the opposite sex from the earth. And in due course this book found its way into my hands.

THE DISAPPEARANCE as visualized by Philip Wylie covers much more than my simple imaginings, as it involves a bilateral vanishing of males from females and vice versa. In an instant, too! As one reads the book one becomes a member of two camps, the men and the women. Each group co-exists invisible to the other and each sex copes with its extraordinary predicament in what would seem to be typical of the best and worst in the two sexes.

Philip Wylie is an American, and to a certain extent a great believer in the female of the species to judge by his satirical and critical assessment of the women's handling of affairs compared with that of the men. This is not to say that woman triumphs in the human disaster but certainly seems to come out a little better than the man in the basic issues.

I was most intrigued by the overall pattern shown by Wylie of the dislocation of the American way of life created by the disappearance. Other countries are mentioned fleetingly, and predictably the Russian womenfolk seem best equipped to manage things without men, but the essence of the story is a sharply barbed attack on all that is shallow, false, proud and petty in modern America.

For an Australian the women seem a little namby-pamby in parts, and the average middle class housewife seems much too spoiled and selfish by comparison with those I know. The men, too, are obsessively dismayed by their loss of sex, which is epitomized by the glorious "Miss America Doll" sequence. One cannot help but believe that some of the actions and behaviour patterns would not be so pronounced in our ownsociety, but probably everyone who reads this fascinating but revealing work will feel the same.

The author knows his people: throughout the book he gives lectures, happily in context, on psychology and religion which cut deep into the basic attitudes of the male, and which any intelligent female would like to be able to quote verbatim just to give her spirit a boost. Wylie has an uncanny insight into a woman's mind which can be disquieting, but which makes one feel that he would be an excellent husband. I have read other works by this author and his depth of understanding and skill of portrayal is well worth the concentration required in the reading.

First published in 1951, the book has not dated. The writing is somewhat verbose but never tedious, and the story is always gripping, reaching a satisfactory ending after a long period of near despair on both sides of the sexual curtain.

HAL CLEMENT: OCEAN ON TOP — BRUCE GILLESPIE
(IF, Oct-Dec 1967)

> With a name like mine, of course, I've never exactly sought the public eye, and usually I resist the temptation even to make bright remarks in company. Just then, though, I was wishing there was someonw to hear that diagnosis of my feelings.

Thus the third paragraph of Hal Clement's OCEAN ON TOP. Not the sort of opening you would expect from Clement, the author of such highly "tech-

nical" stories as HOT PLANET and MISSION OF GRAVITY. Told in the first person? - psychological self-analysis? - flippancy? OCEAN ON TOP is a surprising novel (just slipping into this category, with a little over 100 pages) on two counts: 1. it marks at least a partial change in direction for Hal Clement, and 2. it is a good novel that appeared in IF. To quote some ancient sage or other: mayhap we'll never see another.

For those who may not have read this far-from-prolific author (less than ten stories in the last six years) OCEAN ON TOP may not seem all that remarkable. However, the main impression that Clement normally leaves on the reader is of some technical fact or set of technical problems, completely dominating the attention of a highly competent technical-problem-solver. John W. Campbell in disguise? Maybe. At any rate Clement always shows a superbly rational grasp of the details of his problems, and consequently can at times evoke an almost poetic sense of the order and sense of the world of the scientist. A superb example of Clement as we know him is RAINDROP (IF, May 1965) - the struggles of his characters take place within a huge bubble-shaped water-storage "raindrop" suspended in space. The story is made vivid because of Clement's homework, giving him an intimacy with the details of such a body of water under such unusual conditions.

Hence my surprise at OCEAN ON TOP. Clement's main concern, from the beginning of the novel, is with his main character, and not merely with the situation in which he finds himself. Clement has always quite deliberately restricted characterization as an element in his novels, probably because he has felt that he can handle detailed technical explorations a great deal better than he can large casts and much juggling of characters. However he has not radically changed his style, but simply improved it in a quite unexpected fashion. The situation of the story's main character seems, at first sight, typically Clementian: Main Character, in rapid order, investigates the mysterious disappearance of three friends around the spot in the ocean, descends in a submarine to investigate, finds mysterious lights scattered about the ocean floor, is approached by strange submarines, attempts to regain the surface, is chased, &c &c. If this was just another Clement novel, this character would simply be faced with the problem of investigating his findings while attempting to avoid the strange subs and at the same time not running out of air, &c. Having found the city under the sea (I'll have to give away that much of the plot, I'm afraid), he would simply have the routine and rather dull task of investigating and reporting on the deep-sea dwellers.

It might have been as boring as it sounds if Clement had not realized both the innate unattractiveness of a cliched idea that extends far back into the mists of sf history, and had not attempted a new mode of writing for himself. From start to finish Clement attempts to make his main character the raison d'etre of the novel, not just exploring a new situation, but at least attempting to explore the person who has happened on the undersea city. Therefore all the minute detail of the novel not only entrances Clement because of its intricacy and narrative qualities, but because this detail is seen by his main character in a way that is especially amusing for the reader. Therefore he has lost none of his mastery over the particularities of this kind of sf adventure/exploratory yarn, but has simply given these details a new role which, for him at least, they did not have before.

Most interesting and important as a connecting thread in the novel is the main character's progressive disorientation. (Unfortunately for the reviewer) Clement does not give him a name, and one suspects that he is meant to be some sort of anonymous Everyman. He is certainly "ordinary"

enough, doing a fairly simple job and running into some highly unexpected problems. From the submarine the main character attempts to deal with a number of increasingly difficult tasks, most of which are made more difficult because he had previously not even considered their existence. For instance, in Chapter One, the main character thinks he has solved the problem of getting to the bottom in one piece. Having congratulated himself on the success of his venture he then hits the unusual ocean "floor" - a luminescent surface, rather than mud or sand. Again and again Clement undermines the viewpoint of his naive technician, especially by posing long series of questions, for which his character often makes wrong or barely right answers. As the physical details of the underwater city become more apparent, the city itself becomes progressively more incomprehensible to him. In a way, of course, Clement is repudiating the whole of his previous work, and much other "gadget" sf - just because one can neatly investigate and solve a given scientific problem, does this mean that one has come any closer to solving deeper problems about himself as a person, or of himself as concerned with the physical environment? Clement's new attitude could easily have been used as a gimmick, of course, designed to "entertain the reader" and "amuse him". In that case I don't think the novel would have possessed the conviction or consistency that it undoubtedly has: the writer's lucid and logical prose carries the story onwards, meanwhile revealing the complete inadequacy of his "I" character. Clement heightens the effect by continually carrying his character to the verge of self-recognition, but he, in contrast to his creator, can never make the right conclusions from his own insights. Talking to himself, he attempts to stem his own "curiosity" (which is actually extreme caution) by this self-admonition:

> Dangerous thinking, boy. Don't let all those wasted kilowatts go to your head. You're just a detached eyeball; if you don't get back with information, anything you <u>do</u> manage to do is pure waste...

Of course, he <u>is</u> very much a "detached eyeball", in that he is far more helpless than he knows, and yet he is still quite confident of his power. At the same time he is the only person who has, at the moment, the power to carry the news to the surface, but through indecision or incompetence he lets all his opportunities pass.

In detaching himself from his character, Clement detaches himself from the whole attitude that this character represents. Instead of, as in a detective story, the whole picture becoming progressively and genuinely more comprehensible with each piece of new information, the status and function of the underwater city and its inhabitants become more complex with the apparent solution of each new problem. The best example is the main character's carefully logical solution to the problem of the underwater dwellers' respiration and nutritive requirements. He works out a quite elaborate possible system that would allow both functions without the need for visible breathing equipment, but then finds that his speculations are totally wrong, but lacks the knowledge to fully understand the real explanation. Also, his quest would seem over when he finds his three friends, but this event only magnifies enormously the gravity of his situation. He has no personal resources, beyond complete surprise, to face the fact that two of his friends are quite determined to stay, but that Marie just as firmly wishes to return to the surface. Also, although he has his own ingenuity to deal with such minor problems as submarines and underwater living, he has no weapons to deal with Marie, an independent woman in a tough situation. Clement's humour rarely rises above careful restraint, but he slips in a marvellous passage at what would be

the Soaring Climax of a more conventional novel:

> "Will you make your own mind up, just this once?" she snapped.
> That was unjust, of course. I'm perfectly able to make decisions, and Marie knows it. She's even admitted it. I just don't like to make them when there's a shortage of relevant information. She knew perfectly well what information I wanted, and why, too - she'd just been trying to get the same sort out of Joe for the same reason.
> I made an honest effort to decide without reference to Marie, but I couldn't do it.

Therefore Clement's main character is in an even greater quandary at the end of the novel than at the beginning. On the one hand he still cannot solve those problems he set out to solve, or seem most important to him in the course of the novel - the physical and cultural workings of the city under the sea. At the same time we have been shown the full extent to which one "technological man", at least, is quite inadequate to the more basic human problems, such as love, and loyalty to friends, problems which raise their ubiquitous heads whether human beings are on the ocean bottom or engaged in more normal occupations. One hopes that the eventual publisher of this novel in book form will keep the IF title: it conveys well the claustrophobic feeling that dominates the novel of human beings lumped together in spite of themselves, remaining solidly attached to their own irresponsible personalities despite an alien physical environment.

I could list other strong features of this novel, although there will still be those puzzled by it, or who will find it just dull. OCEAN ON TOP may be Clement-plus, but there is still a great deal of the Hal Clement we have always known. His mastery over detail remains, even extending to the brilliantly light touches with which he suggests the society "on top" - brief familiar snatches about the Bureau that will not tolerate waste, although there is nothing of those mordantly dull wot's-happened-since-1967 passages that litter the pages of writers as distinguished as J.G. Ballard and Philip Dick. Or, for instance, the suggestions of a long elapsed cultural time in the striking touch comparing the mermen's writing to the "straight lines which become modern art every few decades". Of course, there are passages in which Clement the explicator comes firmly to the fore, and these can be almost lifeless. For those benighted IF readers who like at least a pint of blood shed per page, this story is not for you. For those who want to read one of the most beautifully crafted and splendidly observed sf magazine stories to appear in years, OCEAN ON TOP will be a welcome oasis in the American prozine desert.

----oOo----

(Editorial: continued from p.2:)

elsewhere for all we know (there's one in process of formation, or resurrection, at Monash University) - the time is ripe and opportune for the formation of a national organization to act as choirmaster for all these voices.

While there is room for plenty of criticism and divergent opinions, there is also a slight danger of Australian fandom splitting up into factions, and this would be a terrible thing in such a small fraternity. You think I exaggerate? You feel that if LBJ can express his willingness to talk terms with Hanoi then surely something can be done to break down the barrier between the Canberra ghetto of Graham Stone and uncouth fandom at large? If you seriously think that, then you are unacquainted with the turbulent history of fandom.

I have strong words to say about the Brisbane group in this issue, and I can only hope they will be received and interpreted as an endeavour to avoid another ghetto. I have absolutely no objection whatsoever to a person being violently pro-Campbell (or interested only in bibliography, or anything else), but I deplore the organization of exclusive groups of any kind when their titles proclaim that they are science fiction groups. If you wish to form a group of people interested in only one aspect of sf, give your group a title that indicates its area of interest.

The Australian Science Fiction Society, whether formed or not, whether called by that title or not, is an idea worthy of serious thought and discussion. The ball starts rolling at the Easter Conference, but it will need more than a couple of days' talk to make the idea a reality. The pages of ASFR are open to any serious contribution to the subject.

. . . . .

Passing from the sublime to the pedantic...
One day recently I didn't feel like reading during the slack periods at work (oh, I'm now, pro tem, a printer's reader) and thought it might be fun to try a word-game. So I wrote down the words AUSTRALIAN SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW and proceeded to write out all the words I could think of, using those letters. I avoided plurals and other variations ending in "s", and excluded proper nouns. By lunch-time (in between reading galleys, of course) I had written out 750 words, and was tiring of the game. A few more hours would probably have seen me at the thousand mark but, hell! - enough's enough. Next time I'll pick something simpler. Like, say, YANDRO. (A, an, on, any, nary, yarn, darn, and, ray, ran, adorn, yard, roan, road, dory, dray, don, yon, nod, or, rod, day, randy...)

(If you can think of any more, tell Buck Coulson, not me.)

John Bangsund

L E T T E R S

JAMES BLISH
Alexandria Virginia
(pro tem) USA

Mr. Widdershins' guess to the contrary, Fred Pohl cannot have cut more than one or two phrases or sentences from FAUST ALEPH-NULL. When he bought the story, it was with the agreement that he would not cut it all except where the mechanics of making up a page forced him to; and he kept to the agreement, plus slightly censoring one sentence which in its original form would have aroused the postal authorities had they spotted it. There will be a hard-cover version in October (from Doubleday and from Faber & Faber) which is a little over 2000 words longer - mostly devoted to Fr. Domenico, which ought to please Mr. Widdershins - but the new material doesn't represent cuts from IF, but some things I added later. By the way, the book will also be a selection of the Catholic Book Club, which I find very strange.

On "tuckerization": I am puzzled by Mr. Widdershins' reference to "the works of writers of doubtful value." It was my impression that tuckerization consisted in nam ing one or more major characters after a fan or somebody else in our micrcosm. My joke names are all confined to one short chapter and not a one of them is a major character - in fact none of them ever show up again; and what "works", please? On the other names: Baines is an obvious pun, having nothing whatever to do with LBJ; Ginsberg is named Ginsberg because he is Jewish and for no other reason; and so on. Theron Ware should remind nobody of anybody but Theron Ware (THE DAMNATION OF THERON WARE, Harold Frederick, 1896). As for Fr. Monteith, Faber & Faber will be unhappy to learn that you don't recognize him. (Brian Aldiss once named a spaceship after him.)

Fr. Atheling has no further quarrel with Fred Pohl, either; I stand on what I wrote, which was intended to criticize Fred's editorial as published, not as it might have been published if he'd had the space. I do think that "masquerading under an assumed name" is laying the rhetoric on a bit thick, though; that "Atheling" is Blish has been public knowledge since at least 1960.

To Brian Richards: My copy of STAR TREK plainly says on its cover, "Adapted By James Blish"; and the circumstances of the adaptation are explained inside in a preface. I think that's fair warning. No slightest pretense was made that I wrote the book from scratch, or that I wrote any of the scripts.

JB: Dr. Widdershins tells me that he also finds the Catholic Book Club rather strange. He conveys his apologies to Mr. Monteith for not having heard of him, but says that he tends not to notice the names of spaceships. ::: Now some more on the same subject from -

BRIAN ALDISS
Oxford
England

I hope to write you a long and fascinating letter in answer to the long and fascinating ASFR 13; but the days go by and it does not get done. However, all shall be performed. Meanwhile, fearful not to miss your next deadline (by God, ASFR has certainly made itself felt, hasn't it? - You may not have won

subscribers but you've certainly influenced people!), I will just send you a scholarly footnote.

The redoubtable Mr. Widdershins reviews James Blish's FAUST ALEPH-NULL. At just one point, his omniscience fails. While mentioning the tuckerizations in which Mr. Blish indulges, Mr. Widdershins offers as "a couple of unidentifiables in the list" a character he fails to name and a certain Fr. Monteith. Sir, to many of us Fr. Monteith is as readily identifiable as Mr. James Blish himself! And surely the perceptive Mr. Widdershins might have guessed his identity by the description of that august entity which he then goes on to quote: "A venerable master of a great horde of creative (though often ineffectual) spirits of the cislunar sphere".

Mr. Blish, in his trans-Atlantic incarnation, has the inestimable benefit (financial and spiritual) of being published by the firm of Faber & Faber. This is the firm - as your readers will scarcely need reminding - who kept alight the flame of hardcover sf publishing in the mid-fifties when all but they had fled! (And by the excellent expedient, I may say, of producing books by Crispin and Aldiss.) Whose were the brains, the integrity, the guiding spirit, behind this venture to which we all - but Crispin, Blish and Aldiss most of all! - owe so much? One Charles Monteith. And it is only by using that adjective 'venerable', which has connotations of age as well as worthiness of reverence, that Blish falters in his description.

Should you still doubt the reality of the existence of Fr. Monteith, I would refer you to the dedication of THE BEST SF SHORT STORIES OF BRIAN ALDISS, where you will see his name affectionately inscribed.

JB: Consider your existence and worthiness established, Mr. Monteith! I wish I could say the same about Dr. Widdershins. ::: I wrote to Samuel R. Delany about some of his remarks in the last issue, and the following excerpt from his reply refers partly to my letter.

SAMUEL R. DELANY
New York
USA

Perhaps I should have said it more clearly in my last letter: if I point out flaws in the ASFR, they are minor ones in an otherwise superb job. If you have published "one or two reviews which had absolutely nothing worthwhile to say" then I've missed them. Really, I enjoy the variety of approach your reviews take. My only request was that of the poor, lazy reader - cue me in.

Let me hasten to add, a good deal of my general praise of ASFR should go specifically to John Foyster, and please tell him so. I look through the Review for Foyster before I start looking for Delany!

John is writing an article on... me!?!? The prospect delights me. Even if I be consigned to the depths of Dis, I know I will be dispatched with wit and precision, both of which I have the highest regard for.

JB: Yes, folks, John Foyster is writing an article about Samuel R. Delany. With a bit of luck you'll see it in the issue after next. ::: Last issue I mentioned the Brisbane Science Fact/Fiction Society, though not quite by that (accurate) name. I also somehow got the name of its Secretary wrong. Here are the facts:

DAVID GRAY
PO Box 174
Broadway Brisbane
Queensland 4000

After receiving two copies of ASFR in the mailbox this morning I decided to write to you tonight - that is if you are still there. The ABC was warning you to leave your home as bush-fires were coming your way. But I expect that it will be snowing when you receive

this - the way my mail is getting delivered of late. We thank you for your offers of help and consideration for our new proposed group. It hasn't got off the ground yet, although I expect it will over the next twelve months or so. About fifteen queer, different people have indicated interest, but none have leadership leanings nor are any falling over to become officers. We have several Uni Graduates, a manufacturer, Architect, Store Supervisor, office-manager and so on. And if I can get myself disentangled for a few days from the church, Boy Scouts, work, and politics, I'll get us organized to do something.

Our name is a tribute to ANALOG and John Campbell jnr. - tell Lee Harding to watch his remarks, we think Campbell a genius, sure he's not perfect, but if a lot of people in high places were to take some education from John the world would be heading at least in the right direction. His editorials have very far reaching implications, it would colour your magazine if you could get some serious articles along these lines. So what - if you upset a few people. We in Brisbane take our sf seriously, we find our reading is the least painful way of learning philosophy, psychology, some science, some politics, economics. We consider sf as the only moral writings of this era, when sex, lust, sadism and brutality hold court. Most good sf authors have a message - have you discovered the meaning behind Wyndham's MIDWICH CUCKOOS for example, where did Mack Reynolds get his politico-economic theories for SWEEET DREAMS, SWEET PRINCES.

I read sf for relaxation only incidentally, what a vast amount of unique ideas I gather in the passing. GALAXY - June 67, Editorial, dynamite says a leading Federal MP; I know. He has read no more than BRAVE NEW WORLD and REVISITED, and 1984, ANIMAL FARM, but I'm sure he is hooked. However you may not like this sort of attitude to sf; anyway why not pioneer ourselves less about what someone else has written, more of original articles with creative ideas.

JB: David, this magazine is not afraid of upsetting people. Right now I will risk upsetting yourself and others by saying that I personally (and I do not speak for other ASFR contributors - they have voices of their own) consider Campbell's editorials hogwash, and the man himself more of a universal humbug than a universal genius. You say that some articles along the lines of Campbell editorials would colour ASFR. That they would, but I doubt if I would publish them. This journal, with very few deviations, is devoted to science fiction. And what the hell does a Campbell editorial have to do with science fiction? At our Conference here in Melbourne at Easter we will be discussing some aspects of sf today, and we have invited overseas writers to give us their opinions on such things as "What dangers (if any) confront the field?" I will be disappointed if no-one suggests that one of the danger signs is the growing cult of Campbellolatry. I think Campbell is a great personality and a man whose immense influence on the field must never be under-estimated. I think I'd like to meet him. There are many many fans in Melbourne who have a lot of time for the man, and I am always interested to see what he has to say. But sf is much much more than John W. Campbell and ANALOG, and I think you people in Brisbane have been unwise to commit your group so uncompromisingly to one man and his magazine. What will you have to offer to fans who like IF? or NEW WORLDS? What will you have to offer to people who are entirely new to sf? What will you talk about if you have no-one in the group like me? - and believe me, you won't get people like me when your group has a name like that! I urge you to reconsider, *and* if the group is not yet constituted formally, think seriously about calling it the Brisbane SF Club, or something equally wide and all-embracing.

MERVYN BARRETT
179 Walm Lane
London NW.2

I went along to the Forum that the National Film Theatre had at the end of its series of sf movies with the idea of taping the words of the great ones, but the tape on the recorder I borrowed was, unknown to me, twisted, so I got the first five minutes or so on one track and the last five minutes or so on the end of the second track and nothing in the middle. J.G. Ballard was to have been on the panel but he was sick and his place was taken by John Brunner. (I have this ambition that before I leave the country I'll see an sf panel without Brunner on it.) The other people were Brian Aldiss (spoke briefly with him after the forum - FLASH! - Brian Aldiss has recently been seen drinking Foster's Lager!), Pierre Kast, a French director, and Arthur C. Clarke, still at work - then - on 2001 AD, but claiming that it would be premiered this coming Easter in Washington. Clarke had some transparencies of artists' renderings for some of the sets - Stanley won't allow any publicity stills to be released yet - and they looked quite good.

On Sunday I spent the day at a programme given by a Film Club on the special effect film. They showed lots of extracts from various things, and two feature films - THE THIEF OF BAGHDAD and JASON AND THE ARGONAUTS. The guest was Ray Harryhausen, and JASON was his film. He answered questions and had with him a couple of his models and some drawings. Jolly interesting.

I have three copies of ASFR to say thank you for and mayhap comment on. The first thing is easy. Thank you, John. The second bit is a bit harder. Issue 11. All the stuff about Cordwainer Smith is deserving of praise. Being brought up in China would seem to give one a terrific advantage in writing somehow. Mervyn Peake was brought up in China.

Issue 12. I liked the naked lady on the cover. George Turner bugged me. While I'm not exactly anti-criticism, I often feel kind of anti-critic. You know, who is this wise guy who knows all about how it should be done; that sort of attitude. The sometimes impassioned rebuttal to criticism by or on behalf of someone criticized - "Well, if you know so much about it why don't you do better?" - comes, I think, pretty close, in the case of written fiction, to being a pretty valid sort of comeback. After all, to state authoritatively that a writer's dialogue is bad, his characters unconvincing, his plotting weak or dishonest, his background detail all wrong, must to some degree carry the implication that the person making these statements knows all about dialogue, has a complete insight into human behaviour and motivations, some idea of what a strong plot should be like, and is a real hotshot in the public library. Of all the arts and crafts, writing would seem to be the least demanding in terms of physical requirements. The writer (and let's face it, the critic is already a writer of some sort) can be tone deaf and colour blind. He doesn't have to have fast reflexes - he can type one-fingered or maybe not even be able to type at all. A writer doesn't have to perform in public and no one sees his stuff until it's published. And there's time working for him. Nobody minds if a writer takes two or three years to write a great book. Which leads me back to George Turner with a question. With all these insights into the direction that sf should move, why isn't he writing the stories instead of just sounding off about what the stories should be about? But wait, perhaps I go too far. Perhaps he is doing just that. Perhaps at any moment we will be amazed and thrilled (not to mention astounded) by a flood of brilliantly written, illuminating George Turner sf. Methinks though that it might be foolhardy to hold one's breath while waiting.

I've been having a little chuckle or two about Mike Montgomery's letter. The part where he talks about my con report and expresses some sort of surprise at my lack of complaint about the elevators in the con hotel. What

elevators? No, to be fair I must admit there was one. I rode in it once, but the idea of having to walk 100 yards horizontally in order to travel 4 yards vertically lost its appeal. Particularly as one somehow always landed in some strange part of the place and generally had to walk up or down stairs anyway to get where one was going. I think that this bit of Mike's letter gives us a little insight into American thought patterns. I wonder how many other fans there are who couldn't conceive that it might be possible to hold a major convention in a building less than sixty stories high?

To number 12. Glad to see you've put Elizabeth Foyster to work. The Gully Foil: very nice. You should allow yourself more rambling space each issue, John. Gee, I wish I was a Senior Administrative Officer (clerk); all I am is a Clerical Officer (clerk). Old Foyster seems to be getting a little, well, almost bitter. I mean he conceals it, or tries to, beneath a sort of good natured jocular cynicism, but I think he's having to admit to himself the existence of a sf monkey on his back, and he doesn't like it. You know how a junky goes through the stage of realizing that he's not getting any kicks any more, but he's stuck with the habit. Maybe like that. I hope I'm wrong.

And that's enough about ASFR. I hate writing letters of comment. They take so long. About eight times as long as any other sort. I have to keep turning to the zine all the time and then I stop to read something over again.

The news broadcasts here told of an English family who emigrated to Melbourne, stayed 36 hours, then came back here again because they didn't like the heat. * sigh * What's wrong with temperatures over 100°?

JB: Re George Turner: Admittedly he hasn't written any sf, that I know of, but as the author of five mainstream novels, all of which have won their fair share of critical acclaim, surely George may be said to know a little of what he is talking about? (The titles of those novels, in case you are interested: YOUNG MAN OF TALENT, A STRANGER AND AFRAID, THE CUPBOARD UNDER THE STAIRS, A WASTE OF SHAME, THE LAME DOG MAN.) Sure, we'd love to see him write sf: he has all the qualifications - a knowledge of science, a knowledge and love of the field equal to anyone writing in this magazine, and proven literary ability. ::: Thought I'd better say that, Mervyn, because you are not the only one to have a go at George on this matter. ::: At present I am not even a (clerk) because I resigned from that insane position a week or so ago. Which is why this issue is a little earlier than expected. ::: It's not so much the 'eat as the 'umidity. I mean, two days ago it was 107° here, and all last week we had bushfires in these parts; today it's raining like mad, and so cold I'm wearing a pullover for the first time in two or three months. Good old Melbourne: if we ever had a WorldCon here we'd probably send all our visitors home with pneumonia. Now you know why Melbourne people are so tough (& pure?) - we're pasteurized! ::: Now, two very interesting letters from -

JOHN HAYDEN HOWARD
Santa Barbara
California USA

Looking back, I think the Esks were crowding unseen into my life during 1960. Skin-diving was one of my hobbies then, and I was trying to write a short story showing a confrontation between Americans and Russians beneath the polar ice, both over-armed with nukes. Although the threat of world holocaust has been written in a thousand variations, I believe it has become one of those important themes like love and birth, death and discovery, which have supported endless generations of stories. So I tried, and Frederik Pohl bought MURDER BENEATH THE POLAR ICE for the July 1960 issue of IF, my first appearance there. Encouraged, I began doing research for an Eskimo stf story. Two parallel questions: how would an isolated and unsophisticated

Eskimo react to a SCUBA diver emerging gleaming and black as a seal? How would this same Peterluk react to an extraterrestrial who "fell from the sky"? This gave me the excuse to read more and more about the Arctic. Arctic ecology appeared to have a beautiful simplicity, relatively speaking, and I thought: "Perhaps here is a world simple enough for me to begin to understand..." But I couldn't understand enough. I couldn't finish the story, and Peterluk laughed; with a full belly, he slept for four years.

By 1964, one of my relatives had become a surfer, developing knobby calluses on his knees while paddling his board at Rincon, one of the great winter surfing points, where Midget Farrelly also may have hung five or ten. During minus tides I tickled octopuses and uprooted boulders encrusted with life. Underneath I discovered Ghost Shrimps and Blind Gobies for my marine aquariums. A combination of teen-age surfers, marine aquarium occupants and a living reef grew into GREMMIE'S REEF, which appeared in the October 1964 issue of IF. Instead of destroying the world, I turned it purple. I was discovering the satisfaction of being able to control SOMETHING. In the real world I feel as helpless as a coconut bobbing on endless waves of international crises and national confusion. How do you Australians feel when you open your eyes? Seasick?

During 1964 I made a second attempt to capture and control Peterluk, but Fred Pohl rejected THE DEATH AND BIRTH OF THE ANGAKOK with the suggestion: cut. I amputated several thousand words of fascinating Eskimo customs, and Peterluk finally confronted an extraterrestrial in the April 1965 issue of GALAXY. To me five thousand words seemed a very long story and ten thousand so immense I couldn't see from beginning to end. Attempting a novel would have been like walking from Darwin via Alice Springs to Perth and underwater to Ceylon. So I proposed a series of self-contained short stories about the Esks, who represent population pressure regardless of race, religion or planet of origin - the population pressure which overcrowds classrooms, jams highways, jostles elbows, and in some hungry nations flirts with death.

Fred Pohl suggested I submit BIRTH AND DEATH OF THE ANGAKOK and a synopsis to Ballantine Books, and to continue submitting Esk stories to him, each to be self-sufficient. As I wrote more about the expanding Esk population I was forced to create more and more of a "world". I tried to guess the future of Maoism. I tried to predict the effects of future nationalism upon population planning. Partially eliminating ANGAKOK from the Esks' ancestry, I gradually altered the synopsis for the novel. The series of self-contained stories began with THE ESKIMO INVASION in the June 1966 issue of GALAXY, followed by WHO IS HUMAN?, TOO MANY ESKS, THE MODERN PENITENTIARY, OUR MAN IN PEKING and THE PURPOSE OF LIFE. But this was not the order in which the episodes were written. By the time the series was finished I had begun to understand Dr. West a little better. In the spring of 1967 I took off a couple of months from work (the other kind) and wrote a 15,000 word first chapter for the book. This new beginning is entitled LOVE IS THE NAVEL. And I rewrote and expanded WHO IS HUMAN? and returned with Dr. West to the University of California in a new third chapter: BERKELEY CAMPUS, 1990. Then I partially rewrote the other chapters, including the ending, trying to clarify THE ESKIMO INVASION (book). This was like having a second chance at life. While the series had totalled about 90,000 words, the novel (which is NOT paid by the word) totals about 130,000. This bigger axe I'm grinding was published by Ballantine Books in November.

"Axe? If you tried to split a coconut, you'd chop off your foot, so stay away from the world."

"But this is a fictional world."

"And it ended in a mess."

"True. For purely fictional purposes I assumed a few world leaders might not be wholly rational or altruistic, when we all know the real world is a masterpiece of co-operation, efficient planning for future generations, and mutual trust. I pretended men may have ascended from (pardon the expression) animals and might occasionally make mistakes."

"Not very likely."

"But I worry that a billion years of evolution might be wasted. My grandmother's family were Macdougalls, so I'd hate to see waste, whether by incineration or..."

"Why worry? Me and Mao, Alexei and Lyndon and Big Charlie, we'll do the job."

"You mean I can safely relax and rest unassured?"

"She'll be right, mate."

"Is that an Australian expression? What does it mean?"

. . . . .

You ask if I'm writing anything else. Sporadically I've been working on a short story showing one way "out" for the hippies of the future. It's beyond words. More seriously, I've been doing background reading for a sf novel in the medical field.

During the time I was writing THE ESKIMO INVASION, the main thing which was bugging me was that we have gained so many hopeful means of population limitation that some people close their eyes and too little is being done in the world too late. No matter what we do this year, professional population scientists are predicting fantastic famines as early as the 1980s. But there'll still be plenty to eat in the US and in Australia, so why should WE worry, yet? In the United States, population pressure within great cities seems to be eroding the quality of life. Transportation channels are clogged. Schools are overcrowded. Increasingly anti-social types riot. If only the population pressure would ease off, so many of these social problems could be ameliorated within the limits of our present capabilities. It bugs me the way population keeps pressing painfully against its momentary limits in so many parts of the world.

The Esks represent population pressure intensified in a world of the future as lacking in international co-operation as our present world.

Here and there in THE ESKIMO INVASION, some bleary-eyed readers may detect satire. It is no coincidence that our continually frustrated hero's last name is West. He's a product of Western civilization. But at least Western civilization shows some awareness. Consciously it does try to control at least its physical environment.

When Dr. West is digging up from Mao III's fortress-tomb through 4,000 feet of Earth's sediments, he is "digging" human history. From a wordless animal to noisily self-conscious man our evolution has become fantastically fast. No wonder we make mistakes along the way. It's a marvel our species is here at all. Evidently at the surface of Dr. West's world there had been some sort of viral catastrophe which killed most of the humans. On our world is just as well could be thermonuclear warfare.

On that other green planet circling a strange sun an entire species becomes extinct on their brown planet.

On our planet, a successful species could perhaps be defined as any species which, after 4 billion years of environmental hazards and genetic competition, is HERE. Refining this, perhaps a successful species is any species here today which is gaining in potential survivability. I didn't say gaining in gross numbers. Although gross numbers seems the most obvious indicator of success, if the fish in an overcrowded aquarium could talk, they might not agree with this as their numbers foul the water and they all die.

Perhaps the urge many people have for survival after death is a natural echo of the chief genetic characteristic of any successful species and this is the tremendous instinctive urge to survive and multiply - or the species wouldn't be here now.

On that other green planet which turned brown, I postulated a species which "managed" to survive after physical extinction, at least surviving in its collective and individual consciousness. But this consciousness could not be maintained unless it were able to gain energy. To do this, it had to grow toward infinity. In this sense, the whole story of the Esks is the " inoculation" of the Earth with certain characteristics of rapid multiplication and eventual mass death which will help maintain the consciousness of the alien species from the green planet. Man's part in this, Dr. West's part, is simply as a small obstacle. Nations are unable to co-operate, and are overwhelmed by the gentle Esks much as we will be submerged by increasing overpopulation during the next hundred years unless we do not co-operate in population limitation. The Esks' purpose in life is not our purpose. When they die en-masse, they leave our survivors on an over-cropped Earth which will recover and again be overcrowded by MEN, who'll still be arguing: What is our purpose in life?

Historically, prehistorically, our purpose in life has been species survival. I think it still is. I hope so!

JB: Australians as a rule don't open their eyes. Oh, we're canny enough when it comes to trading with Japan or thrashing the Irish at football, but generally we neither know nor care what's going on out there. As for worrying about the population problem - are you kidding? ::: On the other hand we don't like the sort of criticism of our national characteristics that Alex tries to put over in his letter which follows. Come orf it, mate: meanter tell me yer couldn't understand Mervyn Barrett?

ALEX EISENSTEIN
CMR Box 291
36 CSG
APO NY NY 09132 USA

J.G. Maxwell and George Turner are fuggheads. Maxwell: "Wyndham is tremendously popular in the English-speaking world, and even fairly popular in America." Pretty cheeky coming from an Australian, that; I'm sure Mr. Maxwell was thinking of the Northern Americas, where English is in fact spoken with a degree of clarity far exceeding the Australian - ask any Briton. Not that I don't find Australian slang absolutely fascinating, but I doubt that any English-speaking fellow would recognize it in its native intonation.

Maxwell's concern with Wyndham's "he-said" avoidance is pathetic; the examples quoted are hardly of the flagrance and impropriety characterizing true "said-bookism" (to use Mr. Atheling's actual terminology).

For his service to sf in attracting new readers, says Maxwell, "we have to thank John Wyndham - but not necessarily read him." I don't know if John Wyndham's short story collection TALES OF GOOSEFLESH AND LAUGHTER has ever been available on the Southern Continent, but I would advise anyone who would dismiss Wyndham on the basis of three menace-novels to obtain that anthology. It contains many readable and evens timulating stories, and I think it establishes Wyndham's style as far superior to the juiceless idiom of such as James Blish.

George Turner is an irritant of the most exasperating kind; one wonders how in the world to convince a person with such vague formulations in his mind that he is utterly out of touch with his subject matter. I believe this to be true not only in his latest article, but also in his previous discussion of THE DEMOLISHED MAN, though there he presented a few valid criticisms -

along with much ridiculous carping. In the present instance, most of his suggestions are so banal that the answers are either extremely dull and obvious or fictionalized already in half a dozen forgettable stories. If the concrete evidence for psi adds up to anything else, it will almost certainly be the lack of validity of the statistics employed, or of statistics in general. All psi powers might ultimately be reducible to any one, two, or several principles, from contact with a spirit world to control of subatomic flows and electromagnetic emanations, but does this make them any less psi - to be absolutely explicit, are they thus any less extrasensory? Perhaps I haven't twigged to what George is driving at, but do you know what he's driving at? His verbiage is so damnably allusive, not to mention elusive. It's very easy to say "thus-and-so is trite"; suggesting new, viable approaches is more difficult, and Turner reveals a natural shyness in the face of this challenge. Much of his discussion, under the various listed categories of sf convention, is irrelevant to the development of broader horizons: how, for instance, could any theoretical justification of "sub-space" define new plot situations of contribute ideational novelty to a story? A plot device is a plot deviœ is a plot device! (And though Turner disclaims knowledge of such abstruse speculative rigours, I can suggest a man he might consult who does know - Albert Jackson of Dallas, Texas, can cite chapter and verse of an authoritative text that outlines a mathematical rationale for the existence of magnetic "worm-holes" in space-time. In all but name, it is a serious consideration of the advanced, if hypothetical, physics of hyperspace. Jackson's current address will be made available to anyone who writes me - and who is conversant with tensor equations.)

In the search for new directions, Turner's only worthwhile idea is his recommendation to re-examine the sf concept of "the all-female world", but his own scrutiny of the subject relies on the grossest of false assumptions.

JB: Alex presents some very cogent reasons for his last statement, but I'm afraid we must leave him at that point, with apologies. Other correspondents of late have included Ethel Lindsay, Felice Rolfe, John Brosnan, Carlos Buiza, Ron Clarke, Hal Colebatch, Zian Wilkinson, Sten Dahlskog, W.H. Fenn, Raymond Gibson, John Bush, Nicholas Grimshawe, Per Insulander, Bertil Martensson, Mike Moorcock, Stephen Lewis, John Litchen, Jean Muggoch, Peter McInerney, Michael O'Brien, David Ortmann, Franz Rottensteiner, Brian Richards, Fred Strochnetter, Pat Terry, Don Tuck, Gary Woodman, Jack Wodhams, Billy Pettit.

Paul Novitski, a young American studying in Canberra, would like to hear from Tolkien enthusiasts with a view to organizing a Tolkien Society in Australia. His address is Blaxland House, Canberra Grammar School, Flinders Way, Manuka, Canberra ACT 2603. A word of warning: if you get a letter from Canberra and can't make out who it's from, it's from Paul - he signs his name in Elvish or Arabic or something. If you are a Tolkien enthusiast, I would recommend writing to Paul; he has access to all sorts of posters and other goodies.

ADVICE FROM PUBLISHERS — Recent & Forthcoming Books

FABER Aldiss: REPORT ON PROBABILITY A .... Kornbluth: BEST SF STORIES OF C.M. KORNBLUTH .... Blish & Norman L. Knight: A TORRENT OF FACES .... Zelazny: LORD OF LIGHT .... Harrison: THE TECHNICOLOUR TIME MACHINE .... Masson: THE CALTRAPS OF TIME .... Gonner Jones: THE DOME

GOLLANCZ Ferman: BEST FROM F&SF 16th SERIES ..... Budrys: THE IRON THORN Pohl: THE 10th GALAXY READER .... Simak: THE WEREWOLF PRINCIPLE Sturgeon: STARSHINE .... Delany: THE EINSTEIN INTERSECTION .... Delany: NOVA .... Clarke: THE DEEP RANGE .... Sladek: THE REPRODUCTIVE SYSTEM .... Galouye: PROJECT BARRIER .... Nolan & George C. Johnson: LOGAN'S RUN .... Merril: DAUGHTERS OF EARTH .... Harness: THE RING OF RITORNEL .... Chloe Zerwick & Harrison Brown: THE CASSIOPEIA AFFAIR .... Sturgeon: THE DREAMING JEWELS .... Clarke: THE CITY AND THE STARS

DOBSON Van Vogt: ROGUE SHIP .... Campbell: ANALOG 4

LANCER Moorcock: SORCERER'S AMULET .... Farmer: THE DAY OF TIMESTOP (formerly A WOMAN A DAY) .... Howard: WOLFSHEAD .... Brown: DAYMARES .... Williamson: SEETEE SHIP .... SEETEE SHOCK .... Fairman: I, THE MACHINE .... Asimov: OF TIME & SPACE & OTHER THINGS (non-fiction)

ADVENT Alexei Panshin: HEINLEIN IN DIMENSION (hardbound: $6.00)

ACE Ley: ON EARTH & IN THE SKY .... Verne: YESTERDAY & TOMORROW Whitten: PROGENY OF THE ADDER .... Norton: VICTORY ON JANUS Lafferty: PAST MASTER .... Delany: THE JEWELS OF APTOR (revised & expanded) Petaja: THE PRISM / Faucette: CROWN OF INFINITY .... Jones: DOOMSDAY ON AJIAT (Prof. Jameson no.5) .... Brunner: BEDLAM PLANET .... Dick: THE SOLAR LOTTERY .... Fiedburg: THE REVOLVING BOY .... Lafferty: SPACE CHANTEY / Hill: PITY ABOUT EARTH

BALLANTINE Niven: NEUTRON STAR .... Silverberg: THE MASKS OF TIME .... Tenn: OF MEN AND MONSTERS .... THE SQUARE ROOT OF MAN .... THE WOODEN STAR .... THE SEVEN SEXES .... McCaffrey: DRAGONFLIGHT .... Sheckley: CITIZEN IN SPACE .... White: STAR SURGEON

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Best Novel:	Samuel R. Delany:	THE EINSTEIN INTERSECTION
Best Novella:	Michael Moorcock:	BEHOLD THE MAN
Best Novelette:	Fritz Leiber:	GONNA ROLL THE BONES
Best Short Story:	Samuel R. Delany:	AYE, AND GOMORRAH

MAGAZINE NEWS

GALAXY will go monthly starting with the June issue. Editor Frederik Pohl has announced also that a new fantasy-oriented magazine will shortly be produced, with Lester del Rey as editor. STELLAR STORIES OF IMAGINATION is a new magazine edited by Ted White, to be distributed only in bookshops. Price $1.00 or 6 for $4.50, and it may be ordered direct from Ted White, 339 49th St., Brooklyn, NY 11220, USA. According to Andy Porter's SF WEEKLY, NEW WORLDS has ceased publication with the March issue, but to our knowledge no announcement to this effect has been made by the publisher. Circulation is reported to have dropped from 25,000 to 8,000. Distributors of NEW WORLDS, W.H. Smith & Son, refused to handle the March issue on discovering four-letter words in Norman Spinrad's novel BUG JACK BARRON. Presumably they had not looked at earlier issues.

THE MELBOURNE SCIENCE FICTION CLUB
meets on Wednesdays at 8.00pm
at 19 Somerset Place Melbourne 3000
and the Club is open on Saturday
mornings. The Film Group meets
regularly, on selected Friday nights.
For information contact Mervyn Binns
c/- the above address, or call on
him at McGill's Newsagency.

THE SYDNEY SCIENCE FICTION FOUNDATION
meets on Thursdays at 8.00pm
alternately at 55 Drumalbyn Road
Bellevue Hill 2023 and Flat 12,
13 Second Avenue Campsie 2194.
Secretary: Ron Clarke 78 Redgrave
Road Normanhurst 2076, tel. 48 5826.

CORRECTION & APOLOGIES
Stephen Christopher Harding was
born on 12th January, not 12th
December as reported last issue.

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