AUSTRALIAN SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW

number eighteen

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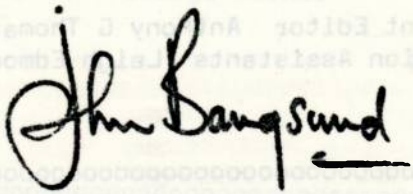
EDITORIAL

There is some doubt at present about whether ASFR will continue or not. I have discussed this briefly in a State Of The Fanzine Address, which may be found at the end of this issue. I have placed it there because it belongs there. Even if you read it first, I would like you to read it after everything else in this issue, because what is in this issue is roughly what will be in future issues - namely, pretty straight talk about science fiction and what science fiction has to do with literature.

A number of people will be receiving this issue as a sample. To them I say, if you like what you see, please tell me so and please take out a subscription.

Best wishes,



AUSTRALIAN SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

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GEORGE TURNER

Author (YOUNG MAN OF TALENT, A STRANGER AND AFRAID, THE CUPBOARD UNDER THE STAIRS, A WASTE OF SHAME, LAME DOG MAN) and longtime sf enthusiast; recently awarded Commonwealth Literary Fund grant.

MICHAEL JOSEPH

Associate Professor of English, University of Auckland, New Zealand; author (THE HOLE IN THE ZERO, BYRON THE POET, I'LL SOLDIER NO MORE, A POUND OF SAFFRON) and poet.

DAVID ROME

Pen-name of David Boutland; well-known English sf author, now settled in Melbourne; writes TV shows (HUNTER, POLICE FILE) and thrillers, and all set to make a big comeback on the sf scene.

BRUCE GILLESPIE

Secondary school teacher from Bacchus Marsh; about to publish Australia's newest fanzine, SF COMMENTARY.

JOHN FOYSTER

Pen-name of Kelvin Widdershins (one of the most closely-guarded secrets in Australian fandom); secondary school teacher, polymath and king of Australian fanac.

ROBERT TOOMEY

Young journalist in Springfield, Massachusetts, thinking seriously of emigrating to England - but we want him here.

FRANZ ROTTENSTEINER

Funny, I've never asked Franz what he does, but I think he's a university student; anyway, there he is over in Ortmann, Austria, a few miles from the Czech border, wondering why I never write to him.

JOHN BANGSUND

Gifted layabout, currently laying about; former journalist (eight weeks, bedam), librarian, clerk, student minister of religion, bookseller, champion motor-cyclist, expert wheat-bag rammer and sheep herder, &c &c; married to Diane Bangsund and once owned Alvis but no other claim to fame.

ON WRITING ABOUT SCIENCE FICTION

GEORGE TURNER

1 WHY BOTHER?

John Foyster has recently published his opinion that the reviewing of sf books in fanzines serves little purpose because the reviews appear far too long after the books themselves; and he has some right on his side. The flogging of dead horses is certainly unproductive. Nonetheless, fans will continue to write reviews and, I hope, ASFR will continue to publish them. The review is the beginning - small and inconsequential, but still useful - of discussion and ultimately of informed criticism.

The tone of many letters in fanzines suggests that fans resent criticism - that they prefer their likes and dislikes inviolate and regard disagreement as an intrusion on their right to undisturbed enjoyment. An afternoon at the Easter Conference out in the wilds of Boronia reassured my opinion that this is not really so. Here science fiction was discussed knowledgeably and sometimes with insight; and it is interesting that a number of speakers who deprecated the idea of taking sf too seriously proceeded to take it very seriously indeed. And so they should. One's pleasures should be taken seriously. The more you under-

stand the things that appeal to you, the wider and greater pleasures open up before you. Mere acceptance of enjoyment leads to surfeit; the pursuit of the roots of pleasure can offer relaxation and enjoyment for a lifetime.

One of the simplest methods of such pursuit is discussion, but in verbal discussion there is too much diversion and spur-of-the-moment argument and one is apt to retain only a general impression of disagreement and perhaps one or two striking points. One's own ideas rarely become clarified under these conditions, except on relatively simple points.

A better method is to write down what you think - and then try to justify what you have written. And then write down what you really think. The written word stares back at you, unaffected by your emotional involvement; your only recourse is to erase it and begin again. If you persist, you are likely to evolve a statement very different from the attitude of mind you started out with, because you have begun to think with your brain instead of with your emotions. You will have written something useful because it is true as far as your knowledge can encompass truth, and it may be in complete opposition to what you thought was your opinion. You will have done something good for yourself, and possibly for others. You will have added a little more to what is known and thought.

So by all means write about science fiction. In the dear dead days of Amazing and Gernsback, fans changed sf by writing about its weaknesses and possibilities. It can happen again; sf is still only a literary youngster, with development before him.

So write reviews, and write them honestly. It is a beginning. But remember that praise and blame do not constitute criticism. They are statements of personal opinion, and worthless. The reasoning and justification are what matters. Much good work has waited too long for lack of informed understanding; much valueless work has persisted too long on the wave of thoughtless praise. (One could do a joyous article on the nitwittery of Hugo voters.)

In fact, if you are going to write about sf (or, for that matter, any kind of literature), there are some basic principles to be observed. They are neither many nor unduly restrictive, but they are essential.

The single great weakness in present writing about sf is a lack

of discipline, with the result that ideas are presented with irritating fuzziness, statements make it difficult to decide where emotion leaves off and thought begins, and far too much wordage is expended on detail while the large issues are scamped. This lack springs not from an unwillingness on the part of the writers to give of their best, but from a lack of realization that critical writing is a craft and not just something that anyone can toss off when he has an opinion to spare.

The amount of careful thought and expression encountered at Boronia was enough to convince this visitor that ASFR could become a force and an authority in sf if its contributors settled down to the business of genuine critical writing.

These notes, then, are designed to indicate the basis of such writing, and to show that it is in essence a fairly simple thing, not the preserve of aesthetes and super-intellects.

They will treat first of REVIEWING, which is the rock-bottom basis of criticism and a valuable discipline in itself; then with the THEME ARTICLE, which is a freer and more rewarding product; and finally with CRITICISM, wherein we will swim in much deeper waters.

It should not be assumed that these notes are presented as being finally authoritative, nor that they are definitive in the sense of saying the last word. Whole libraries have been written on the subject, and even blood spilt in the argument. Treat them as an outline of the craft. The individual will soon find his own style and manner of using the tools of the trade.

2 REVIEWING

Reviewing must be honest and fair. Writers suffer bitterly from the arrogance of reviewers who are more interested in producing a striking article than a just summation of the work under notice. A favourite method is to concentrate on one aspect of the work and write the review as if this were the only notable thing about the book. This is dishonest, unfair to the writer, misleading to the reader, and all too common in reviewing. Another ploy is to choose a good book and seek industriously to prove that it is a bad book, so that the readers will cheer the analytical acuteness of the reviewer and

agree that he is a very cunning and amusing man. The writer, poor devil, can only sweat in silence; if he talks back he will be accused of being unable to accept criticism.

Here are the ingredients of a good review:

A THE PRIME PURPOSE OF A REVIEW IS TO PRESENT A DESCRIPTION OF THE WORK UNDER NOTICE, so that the reader may have some advance idea of whether it will interest him or not. The review which does not do this does nothing. "Description" does not necessarily mean a run-down of the plot (which may do the author an active disservice: most plots sound dull or silly when presented in outline), though this may be done briefly and with discretion. Description should include a clear statement of what appears to be the central theme of the work (and you may be surprised to discover how far two people can differ about this), a note of the type of work it is (eg. adventure, hard science, fantasy, satire, juvenile) and a careful appreciation of how well it succeeds or how badly it fails in what it sets out to do. For this last you must present the hard facts to back your decision. Then should come any outstanding aspect such as characterization, background detail, literary quality (if you are lucky), extrapolative ingenuity, scientific validity and so on. Given so much, your reader has a chance to decide whether the book is his meat or not. If you are uncertain of the writer's intention, say so; you may be dealing with a controversial work which requires discussion and argument of the reader; don't simply adopt a point of view and hammer it, for this is not fair play and you may regret it later when your ideas have clarified with the passage of time.

B A REVIEW SHOULD BE BASED ON WHAT THE BOOK ATTEMPTS AND HOW IT SUCCEEDS OR FAILS. Is it a <u>competent</u> adventure or an <u>inept</u> fantasy? (Note that the words <u>good</u> and <u>bad</u> are avoided in this context; you should be dealing with demonstrable facts.) Here we have John Bangsund's beloved double standard, and here its existence is justified; in fact one needs a standard for each type of work. The question for the reader of adventures is how does it measure up to the general standard of adventures, not how does it compare with a comedy of manners, for example. Placement on the literary ladder is a task for the critic, not the reviewer. One would not review LAST AND FIRST MEN on the same basis as A PRINCESS OF MARS. Under such treatment poor

Dejah Thoris would simply lay her last egg and expire; alternatively, the Stapledon work would have to be dismissed as plotless, wordy and lacking love interest. (This makes it easy for the reviewer. The critic, with the whole body of literature threatening his judgement, has no such enviable task - and no multiple standard to help him out.) Whichever niche the book fills, the general method of review remains the same. If the suggestions in the preceding paragraph are followed, your reader will know fairly surely whether he wants the book or not, because you will have told him that one is a vast extrapolative work dealing with the progress of the human soul in its quest for God, demanding concentration and an open mind, while the other is a cloak-and-dagger shenanigans demanding little beyond the willing suspension of disbelief and an imperviousness to sloppy prose.

C WHETHER YOU PERSONALLY LIKE OR DISLIKE THE WORK IS NOT OF PRIME IMPORTANCE. This is not to say that your opinion is unimportant; only that it must not be offered as a reason for reading or not reading the book. Your business is to display the wares, not to push or pan them at the whim of personal taste. You may get a hell of a kick out of every word of Heinlein, but that does not mean that all his books are equally good (even if he has a roomful of Hugos). You may find Frank Herbert a howling bore (as I sometimes do), but you must recognize his solid qualities, which are many. You are writing for all readers of sf, not crusading on behalf of your own prejudices and enthusiasms.

D NEVERTHELESS, YOUR PERSONAL REACTION WILL APPEAR, though it must not be used to set the tone of the article, which should be judicial and balanced. This is an argument against those who have suggested that a review should begin with "I like/dislike this book because..." The printed word is too influential to use so roughly. When you do this you set the tone of the review for or against, and the reader's opportunity for judgement is withheld. Your personal reaction will appear later in the review, when you decide whether the plus values outweigh the minus or vice versa, but it should be made clear that it is a personal reaction. The dyed-in-the-wool Smith fan will not be influenced by your angry decision that SKYLARK DUQUESNE is a barrage of quintessential bull, but the newcomer

to sf who has heard of the Smith mystique and is considering trying one or two of his books deserves better than an unqualified blackball. Also, if you review consistently, your likes and dislikes will become known and readers will have an extra guide to their choice. They will know how dependable you are, and whether or not your choices habitually coincide with theirs. When this happens you will have arrived.

E BE CAREFUL WITH QUOTATION. Quoting from the text is considered a must among magazine reviewers, and editors are inclined to insist on it. I don't know why, and feel it is a problematic procedure and one that can be grossly unfair to a book. To quote in order to illustrate a point is fair enough, but remember that when you quote out of context you remove the words from their surrounding atmosphere.* The passage of magnificent prose which you quote may seem inflated and pretentious when lifted away from the psychological build-up which preceded it, and your gleeful example of bad grammar may have been put there to gain an effect which your once-over-quickly reading has failed to detect. However, bad work should be castigated and examples may be given. Just take care when selecting. (And having done this, check your own prose. Twice.)

F DON'T GO NIT PICKING. Every work has faults, and the minor faults may be ignored. Bad grammar, for instance, is a major fault if it persists throughout the book, but the occasional lapse is not worth your notice. If the odd lapse is a real howler you can perhaps give it a gleeful line, but don't emphasize it too much. A useful test question is - "Does this particular fault distract my attention and spoil the general effect of the book?" If it does not, ignore it. Most of the book's readers will do just that. The question of scientific validity is less simple. If a whole story is based on a misconception or false data, tear it apart by all means, but don't be too hard on the occasional lapse which does not greatly affect the general validity of the story. At a later stage the critic will consider these things in relation to the writer's work as a whole, but the reviewer is concerned only with the book he has just read.

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* JB: "A text out of context is a pretext." Alexander Campbell said it, but I forget what he was referring to.

G DON'T ATTEMPT CRITICISM IN THE SPACE OF A REVIEW. You cannot say anything useful about ultimate values in the space of a few hundred words and still provide the information which is the purpose of your review. The art of criticism involves reading and re-reading, comparison with other works, decisions concerning manner and matter, consideration of values literary and psychological and philosophic, extended quotation and endless investigation of purpose and meaning. Not only can it not be done in a few sentences, but it cannot be done at all after a single reading unless it is a very simple book indeed. Even such a vulgarity as a Retief story could not be adequately criticized without consideration of the whole body of Laumer's work.

Having done all this conscientiously, what will you have achieved?

Well, you will for once have looked straight at a book with all personal bias removed as far as is psychologically possible. If you do this consistently your entire attitude towards fiction is likely to change - for the better. You will become aware of subtleties and requirements which a writer has sweated over and which you perhaps have in the past dismissed as decoration or incompetence. And your pleasure in reading will gain new dimensions.

But, the writer may well protest, I want to do more than this: I have ideas and arguments to offer, insights to make known and refutations to put forward.

And rightly so. But for these there is another type of article, requiring a different technique. I call it the Theme Article, or perhaps the Contemplative Review, for it stands somewhere in the great gap between reviewing and criticism and has no true generic name. It belongs, joyfully, in the cut-and-thrust arena of polemic and outright literary warfare.

But the review is the basic work, the discipline which forces the writer to look straight at a work for what it actually is. Who has learned to do that is ready for creative work, for even minor criticism is creative, and I suppose the Theme Article can be thought of as minor criticism. Accent on minor.

And minor critics have a habit of developing into good writers. Why? Because their training teaches them the basic fact of all

effective communication of reality: See what is there. Then describe it.

INTERLUDE

At this point the reader is entitled to ask for proof of the pudding, to say "Put up or shut up. Show some samples." If this is meant to say that the samples must be the author's own, the challenge is not a fair one, since if it were to be applied consistently practically no-one would be entitled to do critical writing of any kind - except published writers, and they are, for many reasons, apt to be unreliable as critics of their own field, though good enough when surveying work which has no competitive personal interest for them.

I could refer you to a dozen books of essays which apply this system entertainingly as well as precisely, but in this case I am able to refer to some reviews of my own, which have been written strictly within the limits set out above. The books concerned are YESTERDAY'S TOMORROWS, THE REVOLVING BOY and LORD OF LIGHT.

THE REVOLVING BOY, being a straightforward novel, required only a straightforward treatment.

YESTERDAY'S TOMORROWS, however, posed a problem because of its complexity. Being non-fiction, it contained much more meat than a novel can hope to encompass, and being in my opinion an important book (in regard to sf) it could not be simply forced into the mould. The mould, however, is flexible and can be expanded sufficiently to hold a book like this in fair perspective. My solution was to devote a major part of the review to an outline of the content of the work (a formidable task, believe me) and to sneak in all other relevant matters as opportunity offered. I have yet to meet with a book which will not respond to this formula for reviewing if the writer gives proper consideration to his task and makes full use of the opportunities to rearrange the essentials and give prominence where it is due.

LORD OF LIGHT posed a more irritating problem, in that it was plain that the author had attempted something which he had not achieved, but in the attempt had achieved something else of importance. The problem here was to decide on the general category of the book and hence on the standard against which it

should be judged. (One can never be too didactic about this; most novels embody aspects of several categories.) Other reviewers might choose other standards than the romantic adventure, which was the aspect which brought forth the most definite response in me, and might be forced to damn it utterly whereas I perhaps gave it a better review than it deserves. And yet it gives pleasure. So you can see that there are problems, and by no means small ones, even with an apparently cut-and-dried system. The thing is that what I have propounded is not a system, but a set of limits within which to work; these limits can be pulled in or pushed out at will.

There was another pleasure in doing this particular review, in that it allowed me to demonstrate my personal method with regard to sf reviewing. This is a determination to discover and present what is good in a given work, and balance it against what is bad; I feel that only in this way can one be fair both to those who will like the book and those who will not. Where I can find no worthwhile virtues I do not propose to waste JB's space and your time on the thing. A bad work is only worth notice in a larger context, as an aspect of some theme covered in a wider discussion.

Which returns us to the Theme Article.

3 THE THEME ARTICLE

This is much more difficult to describe and define than the Review, since it is so much less restricted and can cover so much more ground. In the Theme Article the writer can let his head go, so long as he observes (as always) a few basic requirements. These are broadly the requirements of any good essay, and may be summarized thus:

A State your theme clearly and give an indication of how you intend to approach it. This saves you endless asides to the reader in the course of the work.

B Lay out your arguments without frills. Justify each one of them (by quotation, logic, deduction or whatever method suits) before passing on to the next.

C Don't use digression unless it is relevant. Even then be judicious in the use of it, and don't forget to relate it back to the main line of argument. If you don't, your

readers will be puzzled and probably bored.

D At the end, summarize and present your conclusions briefly.

Plenty of other things matter, such as style, construction, mood and a dozen more, but this is not a treatise on the use of techniques. Good plain prose on the above lines will give a workmanlike job on most subjects. Your own personality will show through as you grow more adept and learn to break the rules with safety - by substituting for them another set of rules, not by flinging them overboard. This has ever been the problem of the rebel - to find something to replace the object of his rebellion.

Broadly speaking, the Theme Article deals with a specific section or group of sections of its subject. It attempts to track down elusive meanings, reveal unsuspected relationships, summarize complex and sometimes apparently unrelated works, or refute the conclusions of other writers. It may do much more. It can do anything you wish it to - if you know your subject, which is the first requirement. You can't write an article on the basis of an opinion and hope to contribute to the pleasure or understanding of others. Reason counts. Opinion counts only after it has been justified.

(Digression: A Theme Article is not just a longer Review. Reviews are for new works. The Theme Article is for reappraisal of works already known, or for investigation of their impact and importance and relationship to the business of being alive. A common practice is for a reviewer to review a book and then expand his comments into a Theme Article. This is a bit unfair to the book, which becomes saddled in the reader's mind with all the faults laid at the doors of a dozen other related books mentioned in the text. It can be done fairly, but rarely is.)

The article may be about a particular book or story, or (more commonly) about a group of works related by the writer's prime subject. Or it may be about an author or group of authors. Or an aspect of sf. Or the policy of a magazine as shown by its contents. Or a scientific or sociological idea current in the genre. Or anything at all which is germane to the policy of the magazine you are writing for.

Here is a list of titles (self-explanatory, I hope) which could head articles of genuine interest to sf fans, together with subtitles indicating the possible range of such articles:

The Decline And Decay of Robert A Heinlein. The history of a descent from clarity to muddled thinking. Works cited: Green Hills of Earth, By His Bootstraps, The Roads Must Roll, Orphans of the Sky, Stranger in a Strange Land, Glory Road, Farnham's Freehold.

R F Starzl As The Progenitor Of Stanley Weinbaum. A comparison of their works, with some notes doubting the claims of some others regarded as "originals",

Why Is H G Wells Still With Us? An enquiry into the continuing viability of the Wells canon as against the ephemerality of so much modern science fiction.

Towards A Definition Of Science Fiction. Notes towards the drawing of a useful line between sf and fantasy.

The SF Critics And Their Blind Spots. A summation of the critical attitudes of Judith Merril, Damon Knight, Algis Budrys, P Schuyler Miller and others, with some remarks on the pitfalls of adopted attitudes.

The Ruthless Editors. The mutilation of manuscripts and the subjection of quality to policy.

Frank Herbert And The Intellectual Approach. Or, Why choke the baby with an excess of bathwater?

An Anatomy of The "Analog" Story. What Campbell has built and what he has destroyed.

The Role Of Character In SF. An answer to the critic who said it could be a disadvantage.

The point about all of these suggested themes is that they could only be dealt with by referring to a broad range of sf novels and stories, common themes and accepted conventions. The value to be obtained from each would be not so much in the summation of individual problems (which, after all, only provide the pegs on which to hang the discussion) as in the side issues, the revelations of individual thinking, the oddments of special information, the production of unexpected relationships which inevitably distinguish this type of work. (The writer's bonus is that by the time he has finished the article he knows much more about his own thinking than he did when he started - and much more about sf, because he has applied his brain to it instead of his emotions.)

In any one of these suggested articles the writer could fire off a whole Guy Fawkes Night of explosive ideas and conceptions. If the titles seem to indicate a limited sphere of action, the attempt to write one of them - any one - would touch off huge areas for exploration and investigation. In fact, these titles have been deliberately chosen because it would be possible, within the bounds cited, to present through them an almost complete summation of the aims, ideals, history and future possibilities of sf. I don't suggest that anyone should try it on this basis, though no great ingenuity would be required; I put it in only to emphasize that in the Theme Article you can range at will - so long as your ranging is relevant to the stated subject.

The Theme Article has far more value than the Review. The Review does a simple service; the Theme Article is the blood and bones of discussion, dissension and the propagation of ideas.

It is also the blood and bones of literary criticism, the accumulation of skeleton and flesh which one day presents itself to its startled creator as a complete and integrated body of ideas, a definitive work on a subject close to his heart.

4 CRITICISM

About the art of criticism there is little that can profitably be written here. None of us is likely to attempt it in the near future, for it is a lifetime occupation, laced with determination, love and tears.

It is fashionable to regard professional critics as cloudborne academics whose findings bear no relation to the realities of the subjects of which they treat. This is both ignorant and unfair. Without the critics, who tirelessly chart the paths of the endeavours of others, those paths would long ago have wound into the morasses and dead ends of confusion and stasis.

Would surgery exist if some form of anatomy had not preceded it? Would it continue to advance if anatomy and microscopy were not forever enlarging its boundaries of effort? Well, the critic is the anatomist and microscopist of literature. He searches and prods down to the last word of text, the final idiosyncrasy of idiom, and even spelling, to wrest out the secrets of meaning and construction. The writer, who is by and large an intuitive

workman, rarely knows the facts of his own production. It is the critic who at length tells him what he has done and even, sometimes, how he has managed to do it. And it is the critic who resolves the puzzles and problems of the reader, who likes such and such a book, but "just doesn't get the idea" of this or that passage. It is the critic who watches trends of social movement and philosophic thinking and rescues appropriate works from oblivion at the moment when their impact will at last be made; who scratches over the rubbish heaps of forgotten books and every so often waves one in our faces, crying "Look what you missed, boys!"

A VOYAGE TO ARCTURUS was published at the wrong time. It failed. 1920 was the wrong climate for it. Re-issued in 1963, it is still in print, and five years is a long time for any but a very good book indeed (or a bad but popular one, which is something else). It was not rediscovered by a sf fan but by a thoughtful critic who realized what he had and persuaded Gollancz to give it a further try. (They did, and made it the cornerstone of a whole series of fantasies of three and four decades ago. Pity. They didn't understand that because one book is good, others in the genre need not be. They weren't.)

But it is not my business to justify the critic's existence. The artist knows the value of the man, and his opinion is, in this case, the only one that matters, because criticism, informed and dedicated, is the touchstone of his endeavour and the compass of his uncertain paths.

It is not likely that high-powered criticism could be of much value to sf. The genre has not yet produced more than half a dozen works worth so much expenditure of effort. Even Wells, in toto, is not considered of much critical importance.

Criticism is, in fact, not for the general reader. It is highly technical work, written for people deeply versed in the subjects treated. (Would you read a chemistry treatise for entertainment?) Criticism requires extensive knowledge of literary techniques, language and languages, philosophy, history, psychology and a sufficient smattering of <u>all</u> really im ortant subjects to be able to bone up on them at a moment's notice.

Don't try it yet awhile. I'm damned sure I won't. But we can all paddle happily in the Theme Article for the rest of our lives and still not have rippled more than the surface of sf.

APPENDIX: SOME SF REVIEWERS

Since I have insisted on a difference between the functions of "critic" and "reviewer", it may be as well to categorize the work of some current critical writers in the three groups I have presented. As with the whole essay, nothing here is offered as being definitive, but my practical examples of who-fits-where may make clearer what is meant by the terms as I have used them.

To start at the top, criticism has been a rarity in sf. Kingsley Amis's NEW MAPS OF HELL is the only volume I have read which deserves that description, though there may well be others. It is an attempt to see sf as a genre, to discover where it is going, what it does best, what purposes it serves and what purposes it might serve. One is not required to agree with Amis's conclusions, but the depth and incisiveness of his understanding cannot be ignored. This is a major attempt to detect and demonstrate definition, philosophy and aesthetic.

On another plane, Jack Williamson's study of H G Wells, published in Riverside Quarterly, must also be admitted as criticism. Written as a degree thesis, it is an earnest estimate of Wells's earlier works, including most of the sf. Unfortunately it is unoriginal, pedantic and dull - the sort of thing which frightens readers away from criticism.

Such articles as Brian Aldiss's "Judgement at Jonbar" (SF Horizons, Spring 1964) may in some quarters be classified as criticism. This one is a lengthy (10,000 words or so) appreciation of Williamson's LEGION OF TIME, used as a basis for a plea for better critical standards in sf. (Rightly so; Aldiss's attempts to discover virtues in the thing cannot hide its grisly cheapness. One bright idea doesn't justify a bad novel.) To the uncritical it may appear profound and scholarly, but it is in fact a pretty slick theme article, entertainingly written but superficial in approach. Don't imagine I decry the article: it is a very good one. Such items are needed, and Aldiss knew precisely what he was doing when he wrote it. I only point out that this is not work of the depth required of criticism. But it could, as part of a large body of work composed of such articles, eventually form an integral section of a truly critical atructure of much broader scope. In itself it is no more literary criticism than a finger is a whole hand. But if we are to develop critics, Aldiss may well become one of them.

Of the magazine columnists only P Schuyler Miller is a true reviewer, the only one who concentrates on the work in hand and doesn't seek to write crafty articles celebrate the knowingness and insight of Miller. You may doubt his value judgements, which are sometimes peculiar, but every reviewer has his blind spots which the reader has to learn for himself. (I instance his relish for inflated prose, which he describes as "poetic", and his curious veneration for Andre Norton's untidy habit of leaving loose ends all over her novels.) But once you recognize these things you can read between the Miller lines and get a sound idea of the work under review.

The rest, from the revered Knight onwards, all write moody theme articles disguised as reviews, and the books inevitably come off second best, even when they praise them. One feels that these reviewers keep one eye firmly fixed on some future collection of their critical gems, and that the writer and book under notice are less considered than the reviewer and his immortal reputation.

Knight and Blish have published collections of their reviews and essays, but in neither case have I found it possible to extract a critical philosophy. Knight is too interested in whooping after hares to bring down any real deer. Blish, despite moments of real insight, seems uncomfortably concerned with the world in relation to James Blish rather than the reverse. Both write good articles in general, and sometimes write them extremely well, but they are neither critics nor true reviewers.

Moskowitz perhaps deserves a mention for sheer persistence and volume of published nonsense, including some pretty cheap scandal disguised as "sf history". Well, that's his mention.

A good standard of reviewing may yet be the contribution of the fan magazines.

---oOo---

GEORGE TURNER
M K JOSEPH
DAVID ROME
JOHN FOYSTER
ROBERT TOOMEY
F ROTTENSTEINER
BRUCE GILLESPIE

W H G ARMYTAGE: YESTERDAY'S TOMORROWS

Routledge & Kegan Paul: 35s0d/A$5.60

GEORGE TURNER

This book is sub-titled "A Historical Survey of Future Societies", which is, I suppose a fair description; but it is much more than that. It is a history, stunningly documented, of man's attempts to determine the direction of his own future, from the days of priestly prophecy to the contemporary use of technical groups armed with the weapons of mathematics, psychology, games theory and that whole intellectual and physical gimmickry which allows man to eavesdrop on the secrets of his own behaviour.

Science fiction rears its anything but bug-eyed head very early in the piece, occupies an honoured position throughout most of the survey (which runs to more than 90,000 words) and is edged out only in the last chapter, wherein real science takes over the running with a vengeance.

That YESTERDAY'S TOMORROWS contains a pretty good outline of the development of sf is incidental, a bonus which happens to be necessary to the theme because the sf writers and their pro-

REVIEWS

genitors have played a major role in documenting man's attempts to read the future. This bonus may prove to be the main attraction for some readers, though the hard-core thesis is never really hard and the only doubtful moments seem to be the fruit of faulty proof-reading. Professor Armytage has, in fact, the gift of presenting the complex in graspable form and of never allowing the reader to become entangled by the many threads of the survey, which of necessity ranges backwards and forwards in time and space in the formative sections. He is Professor of Education and Pro-Vice-Chancellor at Sheffield University and has published two other books on the utopian theme, one a study of actual utopian experiments (HEAVENS BELOW, 1962), the other of technological prophecies (THE RISE OF THE TECHNOCRATS, 1965); so he is no beginner in the subject.

This reviewer simply has not the erudition to judge the reliability of many of the Professor's statements, but sees little ground for doubt, and has enough general knowledge to be reasonably sure that the main argument is sound. Even if it should prove less than perfect, this book will still delight as a grab bag of oddities for the bibliophile and the collector of outré information.

There are many detectable errors of description and ascription which the sf addict will leap upon - the introduction of slans credited to Van Vogt's DESTINATION UNIVERSE, Galaxy cited as an earlier title of Worlds of If, Science Wonder Stories confused with Amazing Stories - but none of them appear to affect the validity of the thesis, in which magazine sf plays only a very minor role. In general the work bears evidence of a daunting thoroughness of research.

The mass of information is vast, and summary can offer only the barest outline; ideas worth a whole article slip by in a couple of sentences.

The book progresses steadily from nonsense to science, as promised in the preface:

> The rise of these "conflict models" of prediction out of what might otherwise be regarded as futuristic fantasies is the theme of this book.

Armytage begins with the Hebrew prophets, with their prophecies of national glory counterpointed by denunciation of private abuses. (SF now uses the abuses as rather sickening pointers to the future.) He moves swiftly through the Greek oracles and the Roman books of the Cumaean Sybil, gives a quick nod in the direction of Plato searching out ideals - and suddenly, on page 14, we are at the birth of sf:

> Bacon considered the fable was a method commended for science.... In other words, inventions which men were not ready for, could be set forth in fables.

Bacon, though he produced his own utopia in THE NEW ATLANTIS, probably derived the method from More's UTOPIA (1516). Previous fabulists, such as Lucian with his Moon journey, had not been concerned with science or speculation, only with a fantastic setting which would permit outrages of satires; they were not science fictionists. More and Bacon were, in essence if not in intention.

They, like most of their immediate successors (Armytage reports 875 such literary items by the year 1800), were concerned with law, religion and politics rather than with technological science, though the aeroplane and the submarine popped up insistently and Baron Münchhausen's "biographers" postulated something like a tape-recorded book. These works were not intended

as prediction but as serious consideration of the ideal human condition. Man's ambitions were not yet technologically centred. But prediction was an obvious next step and by the nineteenth century it was flourishing - in France.

Camille Flammarion's FIN DU MONDE is well enough known; sociologist Gabriel Tard's FRAGMENT D'HISTOIRE FUTURE and novelist Anatole France's PIERRE BLANC (set in 2270 AD) are less well known, and Armytage quotes from at least six other Gallic forecasters busy with their crystal balls. They were not adding much to the genre or to genuine soundings of the future, but earlier, in the eighteenth century, a new voice had sounded. The Marquis de Condorcet had remarked:

> All that is necessary, to reduce the whole of nature to laws similar to those which Newton discovered with the aid of the calculus, is to have a sufficient number of observations and a mathematics that is complex enough.

The way was being prepared for investigation on a tougher than fictional scale.

In the nineteenth century a whole constellation of events pushed prognostication violently ahead and changed its nature. Steam power ushered in the age of technology, the industrial revolution took place, the principles of socialism and communism became widely disseminated and Jules Verne became the father of technological sf. And this last was not the least of these happenings in its effect on prediction.

In 1857 James Clerk Maxwell applied the calculus of probabilities not to card games and elections but to matter in motion - all kinds of matter in all kinds of motion. Mathematician Laplace thought this might lead to "social physics". It didn't, but the idea is not dead, and sf still plays with it uneasily. From this to the idea of actually manipulating the future was a quick move. Malthus's ESSAY ON THE PRINCIPLES OF POPULATION supplied some ideas for Darwin's ORIGIN OF SPECIES, which in turn inspired in Francis Galton the dream of a eugenically controlled society - as Armytage remarks, "the arrival rather than the survival of the fittest".

The day of the grim utopias was upon us. The Malthusian nightmare is a dark thread through all the sf of the period (there was a huge amount of it, including, staggeringly, a novel by

Anthony Trollope), and after Jules Verne the machine age furnished the further nightmare of man ground under the iron heel of his own creation - hence Jack London's THE IRON HEEL.

It is tempting here to plunge into the store of rare and forgotten novels by surprising people which Armytage unearthed in his research, but space forbids. (To me the book is worth having just for these references and the fascinating quotations from many of them.) As yet the scientists had not moved in and the novelists held the field. Bellamy's famous LOOKING BACKWARD held it for many years, being probably the most successful sf novel ever written - it outsold UNCLE TOM'S CABIN.

Then H G Wells arrived on the scene, trailing a herd of imitators, and by 1910 nearly all the major themes of sf had been stated and examined more thoroughly than the modern reader might credit. By the time magazine sf arrived there was little to do but embellish the past and rediscover lost themes. SF, though immensely popular, was in the doldrums; new directions were needed. At this point sf begins to retreat from the foreground of the book, its major duty (popularization) soundly done. It seems to this reviewer that the new directions are being cautiously explored, but Professor Armytage is not concerned with this - he is a historian, not a literary critic (though there is a close connection between the two).

Utopias as such were now to be examined rather than merely postulated, and the scientists, philosophers and mainstream novelists (I wish we could get rid of that silly term) were to move en masse into the field, rather than remain lone and scattered voices.

So we had, in the early twentieth century, a "superman" period, nourished by the German sensational novelists looking over their shoulders to Nietzsche, and in England by Wells, D H Lawrence, Shaw and (surprise?) W B Yeats. There followed a reaction against the superman and mechanization - Kipling and Chesterton were doughty dissenters - and the protest reached its peak with Aldous Huxley (BRAVE NEW WORLD and APE AND ESSENCE) and Robert Graves (SEVEN DAYS IN NEW CRETE).

While the English were reacting against the violent utopias, the Americans were still pushing the dream of a technological future. The sf magazines spawned; industry plunged into the era of the gimmick. Popular culture was, as usual, a generation behind the

intellectuals. Simultaneously the Russians put politics into sf, which was to be expected of a society where all activity is regarded as political. And the British, via Olaf Stapledon, C S Lewis, J B S Haldane and Bertrand Russell, demonstrated religious argument as essential to any understanding of tomorrow and lifted the argument out of sf into the realm of predictive philosophy. (Stapledon and Lewis were not writing genre sf, whatever the fans feel about them; they were creating philosophic fables, using a loose fictional form in order to reach a mass audience. Back to Bacon and More!)

All the ingredients were there save one. The atom bomb provided it. Absolute prediction had become essential.

At last the American materialist outlook and the European humanist argument joined in the effort to really discover the future rather than theorize about it.

The second last chapter deals with "Surmising Forums" - specialist groups whose business is to sort what will happen from the infinity of "might happens". Their progenitor may be visualized as the British Royal Commission on Coal early this century - a board of experts detailed to survey resources, advise on usage and predict the exhaustion point.

What develops here I do not propose to tell: it would be tantamount to revealing the solution of a thriller. Suffice it that this chapter and the next, "Operational Eschatologies", are as far in advance of sf ideas as sf is in advance of popular science. They deal with things that are actually happening. They contain little that one is not at least marginally aware of, but they juxtapose ideas and factual effort in a fashion which dramatizes man's relation to tomorrow with the kind of force every novelist dreams of attaining just once in his career.

Professor Armytage makes no comments, draws no conclusions; he might well object to my outline on the ground that a reviewer with a different cast of mind would perceive a radically different structure in his book. But he gives few clues, only indicates the signposts; you follow and find out for yourself, do your own interpreting.

This is a basic textbook for the science fictionist, be he simply a romantic seeking the lost sense of wonder (it is here), a completist seeking knowledge of the sf past (it is here) or a thinker deeply concerned with the trends and directions of his

civilization (the clues are here). And every sf writer should regard the final chapters, especially the last, as required reading, for here are revealed areas in which sf thinking lags far behind scientific and philosophic thinking.

This is an exciting book; it gives something of a cold douche to reflect that it won't be everybody's meat and that some may even find it difficult or dull. I can only recommend it. I haven't read a sf novel to equal it in interest since A CANTICLE FOR LEIBOWITZ.

And if the final prognostications are rarely reassuring, there is this comforting epigram from sociologist Arnold Green to allow a little hope amid the impending gloom:

> The chattering of one's teeth is often mistaken for the approaching hoofbeats of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse.

I hope he is right. Indeed I do.

GERTRUDE FRIEDBERG: THE REVOLVING BOY

Ace Special: US60¢ A70¢

GEORGE TURNER

This would appear to be Mrs Friedberg's first sf novel, and a highly successful venture it is. Without being a mind bender or world shaker, THE REVOLVING BOY has charm, originality, competence and, in its later stages, the carefully constructed suspense which only professionalism can achieve - and then not too damned often, alas.

The story concerns a boy with a sense of absolute direction, a boy who always knows where he is, even in absolute darkness. Like a compass, his metabolism is orientated in one specific direction, which he is drawn to face automatically, and when he turns away from it he has to make a compensatory opposite turn in order to achieve physical comfort. He has to compensate not only for the normal divagations of everyday life, but for the movement of the earth in space and of the solar system in space, and for every cosmic change which alters his orientation to a mysterious something lying somewhere in the specific direction to which he is orientated. Fortunately for his sanity (also for that of the reader and the author) he does not have to compute these compensations, but makes them automatically.

Mrs Friedberg defends this conception by an interestingly stated comparison with the perfect pitch so highly prized by musicians; she could, I think, have used migratory birds also, but did not. Thank heaven she does not take the incompetent plotter's way out - label it esp and toss realism overboard; her boy's talent has a physical basis.

The first half of the book establishes the nature of this talent, with its peculiarities and disadvantages, and has the easy charm which so many women can give to stories about children. It develops that young Derv's talent is connected with the fact of his having been born in weightless condition in space, and that his basic orientation is due to a signal emanating from the direction which he naturally faces when at rest. For reasons psychological, emotional and practical these things are best concealed, but eventually truth emerges and a team of scientists monitor the signal in order to discover whether or not it is produced by intelligent entities. There is no way of telling. The project becomes a background matter in the institute involved, with observations made from time to time just to make sure the signals still exist. Derv grows up and moves from the area, and changes his name to avoid awkwardnesses of one kind and another. The signals keep coming, but the project is routine; nobody is devoted to it any longer. Then, sixteen years later, Derv becomes physically and psychically ill, and disorientated: the signals have stopped. His wife's efforts to help coincide with a resurgence of interest in the institute, and it is suddenly necessary to find Derv again to make tests. But Derv, threatened with an exploratory operation, has left the hospital and vanished. The rest of the tale is no more than a breathless piece of suspense fiction leading to the location of Derv and the solution of the problems connected with the signals.

Nobody saves the world because nobody needs to. Politics and vast organizations do not move across the scene, because Mrs Friedberg has written a novel about a handful of people with a problem. The aliens sending the signal do not make a dramatic appearance at the end because their presence would be just an obstruction to good story telling; and the way Mrs Friedberg writes her tale, we couldn't care less whether the aliens are sentient vegetables or Barsoomian thoats; they just don't matter. Attention is concentrated on Derv and his personal problems, on the slow and detailed unfolding of his predicament and on sharp little pen-portraits (never deep but always lively enough to

catch the attention) of the peripheral characters.

And Mrs Friedberg has one great ace in the hole at all times - she has an original idea. Thus one can never anticipate her plotting, because the idea is hers alone, to date, and only she knows how she is about to handle it from chapter to chapter. It is a restful book, and easy to read; its prose is at all times adequate, never fancy, and shows a respect for quality and plainness of statement. One hesitates to think of the megalomaniac mess so many writers would have churned out if they had chanced on the same basic idea - or of the manner in which others would have tossed in the gimmick as one of a dozen like it without pausing to examine it for interest and intricacy. Mrs Friedberg really examines her basic idea, lifting it out of the gimmick class and making her book centre solidly upon it.

As a bonus she gives, quietly and unemphatically, a fresh and surprisingly detailed view of everyday life in the near future - the action covers about thirty years from the early 70s - and her ideas about clothing, home construction, decoration, eating and comfort appliances are genuinely original and thoughtful. She treats of these things without emphasis (because they are her characters' mode of life and therefore not obtrusive to them) in quick references here and there. If one cared to go through the book and collect them all, I think there might appear quite a detailed view of one woman's ideas of what we may expect within our lifetime.

I can't imagine THE REVOLVING BOY winning any Hugos, but it is a better book, both as literature and sf, than some which have. It is simpler than, say, LORD OF LIGHT; it attempts less but succeeds better at what it attempts, and is a better book. It may turn out to be forgettable in the long run, but for the moment of reading it has charm and warmth, two qualities cherishable for their rarity.

ROGER ZELAZNY: LORD OF LIGHT

Faber: UK 21s0d A$2.75

GEORGE TURNER

LORD OF LIGHT is excellent entertainment, a repository of novel idea twists, a humdinger of an adventure, and contains a number of more solid features for the serious minded. It shows Zelazny's strength and much of his weakness, but for this reviewer

the strength prevails. Some may consider it pretentious or indigestible, but that is the reader's privilege; like it or not, the book has many virtues.

At a vaguely defined time, at least some centuries before the story opens, a space ship lands on a planet light years from Earth and is, presumably, marooned there; at any rate it does not leave. It may even have been a colonizing vessel. Its crew are occidentals, many of them scientists of one kind or another, some of them possessing or later developing special talents of the esp variety (including at least one fascinating new one). The passengers must have been Hindus, though this is not explicitly stated.

The scientists establish themselves as leaders, dictators, and eventually as gods. They assume the names, aspects and attributes of the illimitable Hindu pantheon, or such of them as seem useful, build themselves an impregnable Heaven, and rule the world. But to establish man on the planet they first have to conquer the local inhabitants, who are a pretty powerful breed of various physical, non-physical and mixed varieties. The most powerful, the Rakasha, are subdued and cast into a pit and sealed in. So here we have Hell and its demons.

And between these opposites are the "mortals" - the unfortunate passengers - who have degenerated under the ungentle guidance of their gods into something like a medieval Hindu culture. They are not permitted technological progress. The gods knock this on the head wherever it appears. Over the centuries the rulers have become literally gods in the minds of the people, and are worshipped in the Hindu fashion. Even the doctrines of karma and dharma are preserved by scientific means. The gods can transfer minds/souls/personalities (have it your own way) into new bodies, and so have themselves lived through the centuries since the advent. They make something of a profitable business of it among the mortals also, and, more importantly, use it to keep the mortals and each other in check. If you don't care for the other bloke's activities, have him reincarnated as a dog or a monkey and so render him harmless; or, if you merely feel spiteful, provide him with a fine physical frame which turns out to be epileptic.

The story is the familiar one of the crew member who disapproves of the cynical and self-seeking rule of the gods and sets

out to improve the lot of the mortals by giving them technology. The story, with its self-evident conclusion, is only a string on which to thread a rip-roaring series of ideas and incidents, and it is in these that the fascination of the work lies, as it does in any fantasy.

"Fantasy", I wrote just then, and stopped to think. LORD OF LIGHT is not easy to classify, for Zelazny provides a scientific, or at least science-fictional, basis for all his miracles; the story is true sf. But the story-telling method is pure fantasy and so is the style. And behind these lie a number of ideas and incidents pointing to the possibility that his original intention was to write an anti-religious satire, which became swallowed in the intrigue and high adventure of the fable. With the science we need not concern ourselves. It is of the Van Vogtian type, and its main use is to keep the reader's feet on the ground and remind him that this is a tale of real people, not a variation on the Tolkien mythology or a sword-and-sorcery romance.

The fantasy element is provided by the uninhibited nature of the incidents, the outrageously stylized characterizations (necessary when the characters are gods with definite aspects and attributes) and the artificial but effective style, which I propose to discuss later.

The satirical element crops up every so often, sometimes but not always amusingly. There is some fun to be had with the religious aspects of the introduction of modern plumbing, the prayer wheel considered as a one-armed bandit and the hot line to Heaven. There is something savage in the treatment of Nerriti, the one fanatical Christian remaining among the gods. His followers are zombies, and his fanaticism is such that he has these mindless and soulless things kneel in the imitation of prayer. Even Jonathan Swift could not have been more brutal than that. And the rebel hero, Sam, is much confused in his idealism. He takes on the aspect of the Buddha but is all too ready to fight when things do not move quickly enough to suit him, and each time loses by it. He makes the ancient and heretical mistake of enlisting the powers of Hell as allies, in the delusion that he can deal with them also when the time comes.

Last, but by no means least, though Sam wins his battle and is acclaimed a liberator, it is in fact Yama, the Lord of Death, the cynical and invincible and allegiance-swapping slayer, who

makes his victory possible. Sam's final apotheosis is as Maitreya, the Lord of Light, but it is Yama who has indeed given light to the world. To investigate this too far is to invite some shuddersome conclusions and perhaps shed some peculiar light on Zelazny's mental processes, but this can only be done at a later date when one has achieved some perspective on the book. My present feeling is that much of this is not ideologically intentional but dictated by the necessities of the plot, and that the satirist has been overwhelmed by the story teller.

A good thing, too. Religious satire is twopence a bunch these days but good story tellers are becoming increasingly rare. There are peculiar errors in the story and some irritating lapses in the style, and even some trick prose which is quite effective until you extract the meaning from it, but these things, though they halt you for the moment, are swiftly recovered and the tale goes quite triumphantly on.

LORD OF LIGHT won this year's Hugo for best novel. Whether or not it was best novel of 1967 is not important (Hugo winners rarely are), but it deserves recognition as a stylish and competent piece of work. For this reviewer, Zelazny deserves a public cheer and a statuette on the workroom shelf. He has done what so many fans have been howling for someone to do - he has brought back the lost sense of wonder. LORD OF LIGHT is by no means a foolproof work of art, but it has given me more pleasure than most sf of the past two or three years.

A NOTE ON STYLE

Those who feel that criticism of a good work is mere carping are warned not to read any further. Those who care for the art of writing may find something of interest.

Since Zelazny has been widely praised for his style, and has a fistful of Hugos to his credit (one of which made me wonder what had got into the voters), it may not be amiss to see how far he has progressed in what seems to me his best work to date.

A ROSE FOR ECCLESIASTES was my first encounter with him, and showed a style laboured but worth watching; at that date he was trying too hard and it showed. (ROSE was good stuff, though.) The novelettes in FOUR FOR TOMORROW showed that ROSE was not


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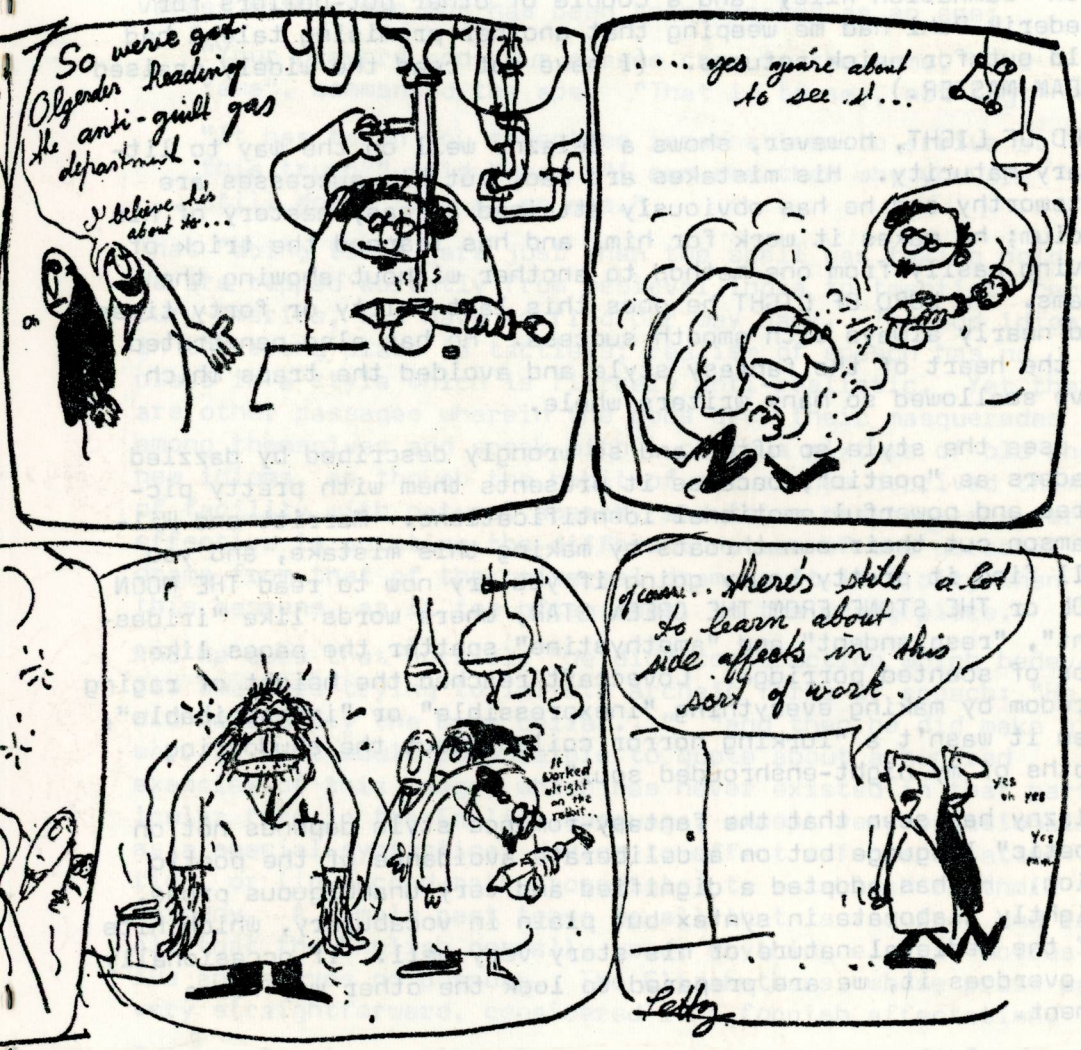
... of course we have our problems here like any one else ...
of course
.. take Sinburn there – just found a way to create mass paralytic retching with cerebral lesions and is overcome with guilt!
nothing from him in three days.
TRUE SCIENCE IS ABOVE MORALITY! MOLECULES FOR PEACE!
ANYWAY THE OTHERS ARE DOING IT!
its working note..
As back to normal .. we've done it!



just a one-shot success; then came THIS IMMORTAL and my heart sank. Bags of style, yards of ideas, a whole cornucopia of incidents, and at the end of it all a tired old solution that sf should have discarded long since. I thought that perhaps he was a novelettist but not a novelist - it often happens like that. Then "Damnation Alley" and a couple of other pot-boilers for Frederik Pohl had me weeping that another promising talent had sold out for quick returns. (I have not read the widely-praised DREAM MASTER.)

LORD OF LIGHT, however, shows a Zelazny well on the way to literary maturity. His mistakes are bad, but his successes are noteworthy and he has obviously attained an easy mastery of his medium; he makes it work for him, and has learned the trick of moving easily from one method to another without showing the seams. In LORD OF LIGHT he does this last thirty or forty times, and nearly always with smooth success. He has also penetrated to the heart of the fantasy style and avoided the traps which have swallowed so many writers whole.

He uses the style so often and so wrongly described by dazzled readers as "poetic", because it presents them with pretty pictures and powerful emotional identifications. Merritt and Williamson cut their own throats by making this mistake, and you will find it pretty soupy going if you try now to read THE MOON POOL or THE STONE FROM THE GREEN STAR, where words like "iridescent", "resplendent" and "amethystine" spatter the pages like gobs of scented porridge. Lovecraft reached the height of raging boredom by making everything "inexpressible" or "indescribable", when it wasn't a "lurking horror coiled about the shuddering depths of my night-enshrouded soul".

Zelazny has seen that the fantasy-romance style depends not on "poetic" language but on a deliberate avoidance of the poetic idiom. He has adopted a dignified and very unambiguous prose, slightly elaborate in syntax but plain in vocabulary, which hits off the medieval nature of his story very well. If occasionally he overdoes it, we are prepared to look the other way for a moment.

Where he fails shockingly badly is, not unexpectedly, in an area where most American writers fail in the fantasy attempt. It seems almost as if they have a defective ear for stylized prose, and commit errors of literary tact which would raise the hair of

an English writer. This may well be because the English writer soaks up the old language traditions with the air he breathes; the comparable American tradition is starker and more realistic. As early as page 2, after several hundred words of dignified introductory work, the Lord of Death converses with a man who has been reincarnated as an ape:

> "Your prayers and your curses come to the same, Lord Yama", commented the ape. "That is to say, nothing."
>
> "It has taken you seventeen incarnations to arrive at this truth?" said Yama. "I can see then why you are still doing time as an ape."

That "doing time" jars just when the spell was taking hold. We are ripped abruptly from medieval India to twentieth century America, and have to find our way back. The odd idiom in the wrong place is tactless; realism of speech has no place in a style which is fiercely anti-realistic. Yet there are other passages wherein the gods drop their masquerades among themselves and speak with a curious mixture of old and new idioms, as though the habit of ritual has deprived them of facility with natural speech, and these passages are very effective in pointing the different nature of the personal drama from that of the universal drama. It is a pity when this happens, as it too often does, in the wrong place.

And he uses that horrible "he did" construction which bedevils amateurs trying to imitate archaic forms of speech: "He did near empty the wine cellar..." "and then he did make his way..." It would be possible to quote about a hundred examples of this usage, which has never existed in that particular form in the English language, except very occasionally as a special syntactical device to effect a focus of attention, or (in second-rate prosodists) to establish rhythmic harmony. A simple past tense is all that is required and is all that the English normally used; anything else is obtrusive and serves no purpose. The Elizabethans, whose prose was very straightforward, considered it a foppish affectation.

Zelazny is also guilty of occasional trick prose; that is, writing nonsense for emotional effect in the hope that you won't notice the meaning. "Mustaches the color of smoke", he writes. Now tell me what colour the mustaches are - dirty grey, white, blue, sulphur yellow, oil black? And we have

this: "...the eyes of an ancient bird, electric and clear." Some bird, with a reverse metabolism. The reader has to be on his guard against this sort of thing.

Also against the bit of James-Bond-type snobbery put over when one character produces a bottle of burgundy from Earth! It must have been a thousand years old, and serve him right who drank it! The reddest of wines would be more acid than vinegar by then. Which only goes to show that it doesn't do to throw these "effect" bits in without checking first.

Again, in two places Zelazny writes what he possibly thinks is poetry. I'll say one thing for his verses - they are better than the nauseating tripe Heinlein offered as "balladry" in "The Green Hills of Earth". It is a peculiar fact that few novelists can write verse and few poets can write effective novels (Kipling, Hardy and Graves are outstanding exceptions); they simply do not understand each other's media and in practise mishandle them abominably. I only wish Zelazny hadn't done it; he ruined two good scenes with the unnecessary lines. And that's the worst of it - that they were unnecessary.

If all this sounds very minatory, let's not be too concerned over it. The meaning is no more than this - that Zelazny has proved himself capable of the grand effect but still needs to perfect himself in detail. There can be little doubt that he has, if he cares to use it and to really work at it, the literary equipment to sweep the sf board clean as a stylist and technician.

But to do it he will have to be prepared to forgo the easy money of pot-boiling for the magazines and make his play among the hardbacks. It is only by tackling the toughest competition that a writer, like an athlete, discovers the limits of his form.

One whom I told I was going to review this book murmured, "Be kind to it", as though the poor thing had been delivered over to the tigers. LORD OF LIGHT needs no-one's kindness. Despite weaknesses and shortcomings it can stand up very stoutly for itself.

---oOo---

JB: I'm sorry about this, but George Turner's excellent review of RITE OF PASSAGE will have to be held over until next issue.

DANGEROUS VISIONS (ed Harlan Ellison)

Doubleday US$6.95

M K JOSEPH

As the late Sixties continue to look more and more like Robert Heinlein's Year of the Jackpot, when all the graphs reach a new peak of oddity or disaster, it is perhaps not surprising to find that science fiction, as usual, has its zeitgeist-scanners out, and is registering something bizarre and revolutionary in the field. This, at least, is the claim made for DANGEROUS VISIONS, a massive anthology of a quarter-million words, containing thirty-three new stories, with generous introductions by Harlan Ellison and an afterword by each of the other thirty-one authors. The claim is backed up with unimpeachable respectability by Isaac Asimov's introduction, which says in effect that this represents the Second Revolution in sf, which now supersedes the First or Campbellesque Revolution of the Forties.

The first thing to be said about the claim is that, if this is a revolution, then writers like Theodore Sturgeon (represented here), Kurt Vonnegut or Alfred Bester (not represented) were revolutionaries nearly two decades ago. The kind of writing represented here has perhaps not been the dominant mode in sf, but it has been a valuable element in it for quite a long time, and it would take a very old-think fan indeed to be surprised at most of it. None of the stories have quite that mint-new feeling of the early Ray Bradbury (not represented) or J G Ballard (represented, but looking very like Bradbury).

Few of the stories deal with viable scientific ideas, though I suppose this is unlikely to worry anyone except the hard-liners. It perhaps parallels the movement, in universities and elsewhere, which is causing a drift away from the hard towards the soft sciences, a turning from exteriority towards interiority, from the physical to the humane. This particular battle has, I take it, been fought to a standstill elsewhere; as far as DANGEROUS VISIONS is concerned, it is covered by borrowing Judith Merril's useful device of equating "sf" with "speculative fiction", which leaves the door handily open.

Judging on frequency of appearances, the two most "dangerous" topics appear to be religion and sex - some half-dozen items

about each - with penology as a possible third. SF about God is no novelty (for example, Blish, Vonnegut, Miller); what is relatively new is that none of these writers seem very sure that He exists, or if He does, that He is on our side. One or two of these are good in their own right, particularly "Faith of our fathers" by Philip K Dick in something like his HIGH CASTLE mood, and Jonathan Brand's "Encounter with a hick", which is genuinely funny, rather like Genesis rewritten by Damon Runyon. But the best theological story in the collection is one that is not strictly in the running, R A Lafferty's "Land of the great horses"; ostensibly about the lost home of the Gypsies, this is really a story about Lost Paradise, and it is written imaginatively but without fuss.

The sex stories are slightly more surprising, at least to anyone raised in the rather antiseptic tradition of the magazines. There is some mildish porn, a few x-letter words, a whiff of the Evergreen Review, not to mention the Evergreen Carnation; the Divine Marquis also casts his long shadow, and for good measure there are two stories about Jack the Ripper. The second of these, Harlan Ellison's "The prowler in the city at the edge of the world", is a good bravura exercise; but again it seems to me that a quieter piece scores - in this case, Carol Emshwiller's "Sex and/or Mr Morrison", which hovers effectively between nightmare and hallucination. In the same general it-wouldn't-get-past-Campbell category, we might place two telling stories about the aftermath of World War III: Sonya Dorman's "Go, go, go, said the bird" (about cannibalism) and Henry Slesar's "Ersatz", which is very short, with an original, cruel and logical ending to it.

Keats remarked in one of his letters that we hate poetry which has palpable designs on us; the same thing is true of fiction generally. The obvious case here is Theodore Sturgeon's "If all men were brothers, would you let one marry your sister?", a neat title for one of those think-pieces in which a thin story leads into a piece of homespun philosophy which comes unravelled when you try to pick it up. In this instance the proposition - an ideal society founded on incest - is open to serious biological and social objections; there are sound reasons for exogamy (just think of the Pharaohs and Pekinese dogs - not to mention Jones Planet). And the argument is obliquely answered in Poul Anderson's time-story, "Eutopia", which seems to me a better job because it springs its surprise and does not belabour the point.

Perhaps the real argument about science fiction is not about the veracity of the science but about the purity of the fiction. On this basis, one might still prefer some of the less "dangerous" or spectacular stories, which have no design on us and where the scientific or even speculative content is minimal; for example, Howard Rodman's "The man who went to the moon - twice" and Kris Neville's "From the Government Printing Office" - two compassionate and understated stories, one about unimportant people, the other about children. Technically, the best-made story in the book may well be Keith Laumer's "Test to destruction", in which a brainwashing ordeal is ingeniously interlocked with a mini-invasion from outer space. And "The day after the day the Martians landed", a precise and deadly joke about race-jokes, shows how good an old professional can still be; it is by Frederik Pohl who, with Cyril Kornbluth, might well count as another of the proto-revolutionaries.

What applies to the story also applies to the style. The Second Revolution encourages a freer and sometimes gaudier prose, and this is all to the good if it helps to liberate us from the spaceship-grey or technological-reach-me-down brand of writing. But style for its own sake can be just as big a trap as message, or real science, or making revolutions. The most arguable one here is Philip Jose Farmer's Hugo-winning novella "Riders of the purple wage", which starts off with a promising basic premise, an extravagant extrapolation of the permissive society. But the title is a warning, and when we meet a character named Winnegan we can guess that he will produce a Fake. The idea is developed as a sort of sex-and-custardpie comedy; it goes on far too long, and the afterword really says it all much better.

There are other worthwhile items which I have not mentioned, some plain, some stylish. Altogether there are more than half the stories any of which would help to make a good issue of one of the magazines, and a few of them are memorable; somewhere inside this fat anthology is a thin one screaming to get out. The tales themselves are embedded in introductions and explanations, and it is this that may raise rather than allay doubts. From Harlan Ellison's introductions, we are almost given the impression that sf writers are benign aliens from some better planet, all handsome, rugged polymaths with beautiful wives and a gift for conversation. Now, I am quite prepared to believe from what I have heard that sf writers do have more

integrity than many of the mainstreamers, and fare less of their vanities and meannesses. But every piece of writing must, in the end, stand up on its own feet and not on its begetter's; and it must stand up in its own right, as an exercise in the age-old art of fiction, not as the demonstration of a programme, however necessary or exhilarating that may be. Movements date, but good stories don't; after all, once you have merely thought the unthinkable, and said the unsayable, what can you do for an encore?

DAVID I MASSON: THE CALTRAPS OF TIME

Faber A$2.75 21s0d

DAVID ROME

Masson, a man reluctant to talk about himself, is "between 45 and 50", holds a university post in Britain, and has published literary-linguistic articles in Britain, Europe and the US.

In this collection of his stories from New Worlds, he is going to annoy, bore and frequently amaze you. And somehow, when you close the book, the dull spots will have been lost in the showers of sparks he manages to generate at regular, spectacular and pleasurable intervals.

"Not so certain", an attempt at the science fiction of linguistics, offers plenty of mental exercise for those who enjoy the finger exercises of a language expert. I didn't. Nor was I impressed by "Mouth of Hell", which began excellently with the promise of a second "Brightside crossing". David Masson takes too little interest in his people here, filling his story with names which remain simply labels, and eventually overworking the description of his awesome "slope, nearly uniform, which spread east and west as far as the eye could see", until its early impact is lost. This is a mystery without a conclusion, and an example of Masson's facility to bore, annoy and amaze at the same time in one short story.

"Psychosmosis" is an intelligent story with some fine imagery and a bitter and thoughtful ending, again for the reader who likes to think - hard. From it I turned gladly to "The transfinite choice". "It was his reality which had been fractionated by infra-hypo-subquark shunt" is the punch line of this complex bit of time-space nonsense. Naverson Builth, a brilliant young researcher oddly affected by an accident at the

five-mile linear accelerator, sets about depopulating the over-populated world of the future. But not until Masson's favourite game of language making has been given full rein. So as not to spoil the rest of the fun, I borrow the words of Flatch Bemp, Director Population of the year 2346: "Temporary silence to lower echelons. Eh, Kulf?"

There's no fun at all in "Traveller's rest", the best value all round in this collection by far - and selected by Judith Merril for her 11th Year's Best. The bleak reality of the Frontier, where a pointless war has been raging for eternity, and the Soldier's journey back through decelerating time to a quiet place where he can, for what is to him twenty years, forget the terror of the "forward sight barrier", I count among the most readable sf I've ever come across, and for this story alone the collection would be worth a place on your shelf.

Added value is "A two-timer", the longest story in the volume. A Wellsian time tale which brings a 17th-century traveller into modern England, and manages to do it so convincingly - utilizing the author's expert knowledge of language - that suspension of disbelief is complete. I feel that Masson, through his time traveller, is a little too hard on us; are we really so futile, pin-heads riding in fast automobiles? But this is a good story, only bettered by "Traveller's rest" in this collection, and one that's sure to be reprinted many times.

"Lost ground" is another bewildering time story - a patchwork quilt of time with, I suspect, the rules made to suit the players, in which people vanish and reappear - but not all the time; sometimes they simply vanish, or appear, or they just - never mind, it's an odd, entertaining story, one of the two long stories in the collection. And David Masson has no shortage of ideas. "Lost ground" could be a detailed synopsis for a novel; whole areas are touched on, frustratingly, in a few brief words, and here, I feel, he betrays what might be a weakness - a preference for intellectual puzzles at the expense of dramatic development. But with many of today's stories and novels stretched beyond endurance, Masson, with all his faults, remains an oasis. His is a new talent, and we can hope he goes on exploring this rich vein which seems peculiarly his own. Not everyone will like him - I had doubts myself at times - but THE CALTRAPS OF TIME leaves a sharp after-taste; the book is no sooner closed that one considers going back to it.

JAMES BLISH & NORMAN L KNIGHT: A TORRENT OF FACES

Faber A$2.75 21s0d

CHARLES L HARNESS: THE RING OF RITORNEL

Gollancz A$2.75 21s0d

JACQUES STERNBERG: SEXUALIS '95

Berkley US60¢

HENRY L MYERS: THE WINNER OF WORLD WAR III

Seven Seas pb

JOHN FOYSTER

To what extent may a novel deal with the world in which its action takes place? A TORRENT OF FACES, by authors hereinafter referred to as "Blishknight", must either be the dividing line or be very close to that point. In science fiction most novels are almost solely about the future world, rather than the future people; novels like GRAVY PLANET and GLADIATOR AT LAW are handy examples. In fact this whole tendency has been so basic a part of sf that it was parodied by Lin Carter and Randall Garrett in a piece in Inside called (if I remember rightly) "Masters of the Megalopolis". SF writers are usually concerned with the marvellous new future they have created - and so are their editors - to the extent that the poor actors in the cosmic drama can do no more than lie flatly on the page.

Blish is not an author of this kind, and Blishknight seems even less so. Although this novel is basically a novel of ideas, an undoubtedly major concern has been the creation of carefully-balanced, believable characters. That these characters should have been listed on an introductory page puzzles me somewhat, even though I know that it isn't just a method of filling up the front pages of an Ace Double.

The story concerns an overcrowded world. There are people everywhere, except perhaps where people have just been. But the world seems to run all right; food is a little short, but the managers expect that Man will Muddle Through. No-one cares about birth control except the Hero. (You can tell him by the fact that he appears first in the book, and by the fact that other characters dislike him for no apparent reason.) Everyone is sort of sitting around, either twiddling his thumbs or inventing an interstellar drive, when suddenly this fat asteroid

appears, heading for Earth. Then - surprise! - our Hero just happens to be in charge of disaster control. Well, you can take it from there, I guess.

Strangely enough, you wouldn't get anywhere near the book written by Blishknight. For a start, the plot outline above is so sketchy that it almost destroys the work put into the book by its authors. Although it does include the basic plot line, it manages to omit about 90% of the book. This does not mean that A TORRENT OF FACES is a wheels-within-wheels Van Vogtian piece, but simply that the world of the novel has been so carefully worked out that Blishknight finds himself diverging from the main plot at the drop of an asteroid. This is where the problem arises, perhaps. Is it the case that too much background has been put in? My personal belief is that this is not the case. Whereas Frank Herbert's DUNE oozes background (and some of it oozed over into the appendices), the skin of Blishknight's novel is just pleasantly tight: it does not yield when you lean on it, nor does it discharge loathsome odours if dropped clumsily.

Let us say, then, that A TORRENT OF FACES has a carefully constructed world in which to operate, and a skilful hand at the typewriter which allows just enough of this world to impinge upon the plot.

There are flaws. Two, I think. Maybe more, but only two seemed apparent to me. In the section previously published as The Shipwrecked Hotel, the main computer is put out of action (well, its judgement is upset) by silverfish in the circuits. It may be that in Blishknight's world the technicians are just not careful because there are, apparently, no such beasties around normally, but I have my doubts on this one.

The other flaw is so laughable that I hardly dare bring it to your attention. Blishknight has painted his characters so carefully that I actually found myself wondering just whether such-and-such a person <u>would</u> act in that way: and that can only happen if the author has done his job well. In this case I felt that there was no evidence that there was anything wrong with Marg't Splain until <u>after</u> Biond Smith had noticed her "paranoia". But perhaps I missed something.

The novel is so much better than anything which has been reviewed in ASFR that there just can't be any competition for

next year's Hugo, unless Delany's NOVA takes a great leap forward from THE EINSTEIN INTERSECTION. In the meantime, I'll make a note to read this again. You will, too, if you read it but once.

The habit of clothing ordinary characters with Significant Names is spreading far too rapidly amongst sf writers. Cicero found it a comfort some 2000 years ago, but the notion has been generally frowned upon since. Nevertheless a ra h of sf writers have leapt in, with weak puns abounding. Charles Harness was a particularly bad offender with his previous novel, THE ROSE, but manages to restrain himself a little in THE RING OF RITORNEL. However it is still very much a case of vast ideas with a half-vast treatment.

Let's get the sloppy pun out of the way first: the eternal return is a far more serious theme than Harness suggests in this novel. But if we put aside all serious thoughts, dismiss from our minds the idea that Harness imagines himself to be writing something of immense significance - why, then THE RING OF RITORNEL turns out to be a very enjoyable adventure novel, almost as good as THE PARADOX MEN (which Stephen Cook did not finish praising)(ASFR 11), and far far better than THE ROSE. The difference between THE PARADOX MEN and THE RING OF RITORNEL, as Lee Harding has suggested to me, is possibly that Harness is now much older, and this sort of novel needs the expenditure of a great deal of energy. Harness is perhaps too tired to do as dazzling a job as he did with the first novel, but he has learned a lot since THE ROSE. It's the nearest one can get to THE PARADOX MEN, so let's be satisfied.

That French sf writers are now being published in English is undoubtedly a good thing, though you wouldn't think so, considering the massive lack of reviews so far received by Jacques Sternberg's SEXUALIS '95. At least I haven't seen any, and the book has been around now for a year.

SEXUALIS '95 (or TOI, MA NUIT) can be described as "hard to read". In fact it has been described in that way by me, and to me. I suspect that the French title had some subtlety, whereas the American title is just brash. Before discussing the book itself, I must express some concern whether the book is presented entire. The 320 pages of the original must have

been low on word-count if TOI, MA NUIT has been translated into the 160 pages of not very compact print of SEXUALIS '95. Since I could only check by spending the ten francs or so to buy the original edition, I shall have to content myself with raising the question.

Sternberg's world is saturated with sex; so is his hero. Nevertheless, the hero is willing, for the reader's sake, to go through a series of sexual episodes which he finds boring, but describes with loving care for the reader. But he can't make it with one girl, and eventually dies with her in an event of which she had some pre-cognition.

Some parts of this are very well done; the description of the new versions of Walt Disney cartoons would delight Grove Press. But the side of the book which is sf is subordinated to the appeal which the title suggests. There is no reason why a sf novel should not deal with the development of human sexual relations (say, as Evan Hunter did in a fairly superficial way in TOMORROW AND TOMORROW) rather than aliens, spaceships and all that lot. But in SEXUALIS '95 it becomes a little difficult to see where the author is being serious.

Henry L Myers wrote a sf novel which drew some quite good reviews in 1953 or 1954, I think. I'd better mention that it was called OH KING, LIVE FOREVER, for those with short memories. This little volume, which came to my attention quite by accident, is not quite sf, but is very close. Archy and Mehitabel fans will enjoy it, anyway. THE WINNER OF WORLD WAR III is the humble (though not so in this book) cockroach. Pardon me - Blattida Orthoptera. It traces history as constructed and directed by these, er, insects, and culminates in their inheritance of the earth and the fruits thereof. It isn't really a very good book, but it may while away a pleasant hour or so.

50 SHORT SCIENCE FICTION TALES (ed Isaac Asimov & Groff Conklin)

Collier Books US95¢

KEITH LAUMER: ASSIGNMENT IN NOWHERE

Berkley US60¢

ROBERT TOOMEY

If all the definitions of sf were gathered in a heap they would (assuming you could restrain yourself from making a bonfire of

them and toasting old Ray Cummings novels there) certainly sink to the centre of the earth and reverberate from there until the end of time.

Therefore, since reviewing sf has become something of a sub-career with me, I do hereby solemnly swear that I will never attempt to define the medium, an oath anyone with half a mind should applaud. Anyone with more than half a mind wouldn't be reading sf anyway, so I feel fairly safe.

Having said this, I turn to a curious book called 50 SHORT SCIENCE FICTION TALES, of which a goodly proportion probably aren't sf by anyone's standards. It's certainly a generous volume, with 287 pages and a couple of poems thrown in for good measure. And the measure is pretty good throughout, although you'll probably be familiar with at least half of the stories. If not, rush out and buy the book; if so, buy it anyway and give it away to less informed friends - it's an excellent example of tasteful editing and sturdy packaging in a paperback as well as being one whale of a bargain.

Asimov is on hand with an introduction that is brief and witty. Unfortunately I disagree with its basic premise - that it's fair in sf to skimp on character because the background is so vital to the story. Without character a story doesn't exist; instead it becomes a machine. I'll admit that some machines are fun to watch, especially the ones with all those gears going around, but they're still not stories. Fortunately, Asimov doesn't always follow this rule, and when he settles down to write books like THE CAVES OF STEEL he can create real characters and real backgrounds and a dozen other impossible things both before and after breakfast and why should <u>he</u> apologize for bums who aren't fit to carry his typewriter? You tell me.

The stories range in length from W Hilton-Young's bitter little "The choice", which barely takes up a full page of type, to James Schmitz's nasty "We don't want any trouble", which runs all of eight pages.

Around and about these two you'll find classics like Fredric Brown's "The weapon", shoulder to shoulder with the late Anthony Boucher's "The ambassadors". Jack Finney's "The third level" is there, Heinlein's "Columbus was a dope", Knight's "Not with a bang", followed by Kornbluth's "The altar at midnight" and Leiber's "A bad day for sales". Familiar, right? But good, and

they wear well. There's Alan Nourse's understated horror story, "Tiger by the tail", and Eric Frank Russell's "Appointment at noon", which I would call fantasy if I were a man for definitions.

Included is Howard Schoenfeld's "Built down logically", a mad little gem of nonsense that isn't half the story its predecessor, "Build up logically", was. I wish they had included the latter, and wonder why they didn't.

Paradoxes are paradoctored in Jack Lewis's maddening "Who's cribbing?" and Mack Reynolds's "The business, as usual".

If anything is missing from the collection it is people. Except for Mildred Clingerman's "Stair trick" and a couple of others, the joy is in being led gleefully down the garden path then bopped over the head with the spade. Otherwise the stories are short, almost always surprising, mostly bitter and hardly ever disappointing. One of the best collections I've ever seen, more than deserving of hard covers and recommended above all others so far this season.

(JB: I imagine, Bob and readers, that this is a new edition. My copy is dated 1963, and I picked it up for 65¢. A number of the Collier anthologies were apparently remaindered in this country and may still be found in some shops.)

There's a clockwork man writing sf these days, grinding out books like a Georges Simenon or Carter Brown. His name is Keith Laumer, and suddenly we're deluged with his work - ten books on the stands right now, in plain sight, and more in the back room probably.

For the most part, Laumer's books are marked by facile plotting, stereotyped characters and an economical style hewn from pulpish origins. This makes him an ideal "novelizer" of television shows, and this month he has four of them - two Invaders books and two from the British Avengers show. Putting on another hat he dashes out several other series: about a galactic diplomat named Retief, that will seemingly go on forever; about the problem probabilities of the worlds of the Imperium; and others I've missed while my back was turned, probably. Changing hats again, he does stories of grand galactic doings and superbrave heroes in some of the most implausible space opera since wrecking Foundations and founding Empires.

But there's another side to Laumer, one he shows too seldom,

and ASSIGNMENT IN NOWHERE exemplifies it. The book is short, around forty thousand words, barely a novel, but it's the best book Laumer has done to date, containing all he does well plus that indefinable something that lifts it out of itself to - well, not greatness, but certainly goodness anyway.

It's an Imperium story, but this time Colonel Brion Bayard is just a minor character, and the hero is a fisherman named Johnny Curlon, who is more than he seems. Laumer seems to have found his metier here, and one passage of only a few thousand words that takes place in the Blight comes close to the intensity of Delany at his best. With all Time whirling around, funnelled into this one spot of safety and beauty, the story takes on a stature that is as unexpected as it is breathtaking.

The rest of the book never matches that one scene, but hardly anything does these days. Perhaps it's the injection of a little honest emotion in place of the usual mental sludge that Laumer people usually generate, but the book is strange and moving and good. It makes you wonder what Laumer could really do if he put his mind to it; and it makes you hope that he will.

GEORGE O.SMITH: VENUS EQUILATERAL

Pyramid US75¢

FRANZ ROTTENSTEINER

As far as I know, no-one has yet pointed out that the stories in Astounding/Analog are essentially moral tales. In an earlier age - and these fossils possibly haven't died off yet - there were people who conceived virtue as being the necessary and sufficient condition for a happy life. Campbell and his authors tell you that it is not virtue but intelligence and nothing but intelligence - and in particular the intelligence of the engineer - that assures your happiness in life. The good guys who obey "the laws of the universe" get rewarded, the bad guys punished because they don't recognize these laws.

In the stories in VENUS EQUILATERAL that show the Astounding tradition at its purest, intelligence is defined - just as in Eric Frank Russell and Christopher Anvil - by the lack of it in other people. Humour is defined in much the same way: George O Smith thinks that an intellectual cripple is howlingly funny.

In the first story, "QRM interplanetary", we have one of those bad guys, a manager. He not only thinks differently from an

engineer (ie, subordinating science and technology to economic principles), but can in no way understand the superior thoughts of the engineering mind. Technology is simply incomprehensible to him. Yet he thinks he understands most things better than the engineers: he believes he is inventing some way to tighten the communication beams to the planets, although any engineer could tell him that it won't work; he wants the hull of the space station painted nicely (which isn't quite in character, since it would cost money and we have been told that he has a mind to save money); and for good measure he has the weeds of the air plant thrown out into space, mistaking them for garbage. In short, he's such an idiot that you wonder what business he has to be alive, when he should rightfully choked at his mother's breast. And he is a pedant and puritan: he prohibits the free sending of messages to and from Venus Equilateral station for the personnel; he remands the old custom of sending free packages of gifts from home; he censors films; and he introduces taxes on alcohol, candy and cigarettes.

Dr Channing, our engineer, is quite a different kettle of fish. He knows the laws of nature, can tell you how things work and why; and he is a liberal. He is sure that alcohol, candy and cigarettes don't jeopardize the soul of a man; he knows that a woman kissing a man in a movie can't harm you - things only get dangerous when a living woman is around. In which case a modest blush might save a man; or, should she be more obstinate than one has the right to expect of such a species, some stuttering will do to drive her away; should that still prove of no avail, I guess a male character just has to give up his virginity and succumb to the temptation of marriage.

That's the moral nature of these stories: they show the importance of intelligence, and in order that no reader may mistake the message, and to make the author's task easier, Smith has confronted an idiot with a clever engineer. A reader might not be able to perceive the difference between a man of average intelligence and another somewhat more intelligent, but, by crackey, anyone who can stumble through the pages of Astounding can pick a clinical moron from an intelligent man who proves it by giving off witticisms.

Being human I can suffer only so much, and so I may perhaps be excused for not attempting to uncover the riches in the other nine stories in this book. But I suppose they are just great sf.

John Campbell says they are, in his introduction to the hard-cover edition of 1947, and Arthur C Clarke says they are in his introduction to the paperback edition. Mr Clarke also indicates that the stories contain some valuable ideas on interplanetary communication. Perhaps they do, but they have been hidden away so carefully that only the most enduring reader can get at them.

ANALOG FOUR (ed John W Campbell)

Dennis Dobson A$3.25 25s0d

BRUCE GILLESPIE

Editor Campbell nearly convinced me. In his introduction to ANALOG 4 he rails against those "who don't want the tight, familiar walls of our own little world breached". He tells us that sf is a prose form that scares too many people because of "emotional resistance to concepts that will force major changes in The World and Its Ways As We Know It". Acute nostalgia filled me when reading this introduction as I remembered all the idealistic anticipation with which I started reading sf. Campbell clarions: the rest of the world is mentally crushed as it perpetually fails to jump the wall of the future, while the science-fictioneer flies on to every radical proposal that might prepare us for the unknown....

Then I read Dean McLaughlin's "Permanent implosion", one of the seven stories in this seventh collection of Campbelliana in twenty years. "Permanent implosion" is so bad that it easily qualifies for John Foyster's Worst Story award - and it calls into question Campbell's ability as an editor. It is not the only bad story in the collection; with other selections it illustrates Analog's worst faults. (Few of its virtues are present.) I could spend a page listing McLaughlin's grosser semantic and grammatical errors, but why bother? It is sufficient to say that the prose is virtually unreadable; that the hero of the story manages to solve the problem despite his sub-intelligent actions; and, most exasperatingly, that the story could have been told in seven pages instead of forty. But this is not the central issue concerning the place of this story in a volume esteemed already by so many. Presumably, either Campbell admires it, which would reveal a lack of taste quite horrifying in an editor of over thirty years' practice, or the An-Lab voters liked it, which reveals an even more

abysmal standard of appreciation among the growing horde of Analog devotees. To be quite fair, McLaughlin's unrelieved brutalization of the English language and the standards of science is not entirely typical of Analog; but it did appear there.

What is more generally acknowledged as the "Campbell influence" can be seen in Mack Reynolds's"Genus Traitor" and Poul Anderson's "Sunjammer". From its first paragraph the Reynolds story betrays the cliched if energetic slickness that pervades most of this collection. "Benjamin Fullbright made a beautiful traitor. He had everything" - well, why not call him Benedict Arnold in the first place? Cliche traitor faces cliche beautiful woman reporter and cliche mob (the jury democratically comprises all citizens, registering their votes from tv-side) and is automatically presumed guilty on an as yet unrevealed charge. Reynolds's subsequent "ideas" are interestingly interconnected, but the author invites us to see the action through the eyes of a man who behaves sadistically and illogically throughout, but whom we are supposed to accept as a hero by story's end. Fifty pages, no less, is devoted to a small number of simple effects, with really little to do with the possibilities of the first Earth-Mars confrontation, which is the ostensible theme of the story.

Compared with Reynolds (who can write stories as intellectually stimulating as OF GODLIKE POWER and ULTIMA THULE), Poul Anderson has in recent years concocted his own brand of dullness which can become even less enjoyable in Galaxy than in Analog. Anderson's "idea" (a novel twist to the space-rescue theme) has imaginative possibilities (at every point I could imagine how Clarke might have written it) that quite escape the plodding, disjointed structure of this sequence of events. Campbell's most appalling influence may be seen in the Little Lectures that effectively confound not only this story but Reynolds's and Randal Garrett's ("A case of identity").

Why then does this book have so little to do with Campbell's introductory promises? Not only do these stories entirely fail to "disturb" this reader at least, but only one short piece, Spinrad's "Subjectivity", with its whacky Phildickian premises, really entertains. And even this story, verging on fantasy, makes nonsense of Campbell's statement that sf "authors.... believed what they wrote, and were trying to make her believe".

Maybe Campbell does believe a lot of these stories, but why should we accept such naïvety? Campbell evidently thinks that his magazine extols the intellectual virtues of Science, but the stories reveal the patchwork mentality of trick technology - as McLaughlin's piece clearly shows. Although Campbell would never admit it, Analog's assumption is that the actions of the stupid are justified as long as they succeed, and that sf only deals with the nuts and bolts of the future and has little to do with imaginative or speculative intelligence. Campbell used not to believe this, and I do not believe it. In this light, it is a tragedy for sf that it was ever possible for this Analog collection to be published.

JOHN SLADEK: THE REPRODUCTIVE SYSTEM

Gollancz A$2.80 21s0d

BRUCE GILLESPIE

John Sladek in his first novel attempts an omnibus satire of America's, and the world's, faults. In his one-page prologue he brings to notice one small American town, one Air Force General from NORAD on his way to get a divorce, and the Wompler Toy Corporation, which is duly analysed in the first chapter. His very funny observations of American quirks come thick and fast: the toy firm, long dependent for its livelihood on replicas of 'thirties child star Shelley Belle, proposes to become solvent by selling the government a project that will be utterly, hopelessly useless. Thus enters the Reproductive System, the mysterious scheme which triggers off the plot of the novel, insofar as it has a plot. More or less connected with these things, Sladek parades for our ridicule - meaningless computer semantics, the mechanical brothers Mackintosh, who built the system, General Grawk and the staff of NORAD - and so on. American youth, matrons, spies and psychologists succumb to Sladek's surgical wit; my own favourite is the Newstime report in Chapter XVII, which stands as the best puncture I have yet seen of these journalistic sacred cows.

Mad Magazine does the same thing every month, though far more predictably, far less subtly, and tilting at far less important windmills. Take the beginning of Chapter VIII, for instance, where commences one of the innumerable sub-plots that infest the novel's structure:

Though the television newscaster seemed hysterical,

> Susie Suggs was not agitated in the least. She was not really watching the screen of her portable TV; it served as a flat weight on her tummy, while she did her deep breathing exercises according to Lady Fair magazine. The exercises made her sleepy, and the voice of the little figure seemed to dwindle to a mosquito hum. It was almost as if he were a little man growing right out of her tummy; but the idea was so vaguely disquieting that it brought her fully awake. Forgetting to count her breaths, Susie began actually watching.

The "little man growing right out of her tummy" is striking - Sladek's turn of phrase is irrepressibly original and vivid. The lassitude, the noncommittal mental laziness, the sheer lack of importance of Susie Suggs is fully defined in one paragraph. And yet, upon reflection, is there anything really original in this observation? If this is an archetype of the Typical American Teenager, then she's been around, almost unchanged, for forty years. Therefore, we laugh at Susie Suggs, not from that sudden rush of recognition that is the mainspring of social satire, but from a jaded noting of the resemblance to that cartoon you saw in Saturday Evening Post, Punch or the Woman's Journal back pages.

After gaining so much enjoyment from THE REPRODUCTIVE SYSTEM, it disturbed me to find that this kind of verdict must be made about every one of Sladek's characters and/or targets. Take the astonishing love affair of Dr Smilax (mastermind of The Sy tem); after remaining hidden from us for the first nine chapters, his life story, told in Dickensian fashion, includes the following piece:

> In Zurich, Toto (Smilax) met a young English anaesthetist named Nan Richmond, and for the first time in his twenty years he knew a passion more overpowering than his devotion to science. Not only was Nan beautiful and intelligent, but her X-rays showed a crystalline symmetry that made his breath catch. How long would it be before he might gaze in reality upon that coil of colon, those ovaries, the perfect curves of her kidneys? How long before he might pluck that fragile bloom, her appendix? He asked Nan to marry him and become the subject of his surgical experiments, and - ah, peritoneal bliss untold! - she accepted.

Dr Smilax certainly has a unique "flair", but one must immediately think of Dr Strangelove, nearly strangling himself with his mechanical arm while the world collapses. In Smilax's case, the mechanocracy represented in The System is mirrored in the preoccupations of its creator - if the Ststem's reproduction is sexless, then the Doctor's kicks are entirely non-reproductive. However, we ask ourselves in this case, and over and over as the literary cliches flash past, just what is being satirized? Surely not the modern America of real people, seeking to solve the agonizing problems of the Space/Nuclear/Technocratic Ages, threatened with the loss of their own souls in the process? No, despite Sladek's pretence at analysing these problems, we are left with only superglossed images from American and literary folklore: "biographies" straight from the Victorian novel, including the glorious "happy ending" of that genre; and, from a more recent era, Humphrey Bogart's wilder adventures (the spies of Morocco) and the 'thirties and modern British "world-doom" sf traditions. There is even the astonishing Chapter XIII in which the predominant style of Sladek's current roost, New Worlds, is parodied mercilessly. As Sladek tells us himself, the Mackintoshes are The Brothers Frankenstein, and hero Cal comes straight from Charles Dickens or John Wyndham or Isaac Asimov.

Therefore my contention is that John Sladek is working under false pretences, and it does not help his novel at all. Most readers will wonder why, although they are greatly entertained, so little of the novel sticks in the mind, or in the spirit. Why do the comments appear so pert, so complacent, despite their fun? Most importantly, why do we have no sense of doom throughout the book, when this is its ostensible category? The reader will have to decide most of these questions for himself. For now (and until Sladek's talents are further demonstrated and we can judge this book in context) I would suggest that the Alice-in-Wonderland air of the novel springs at least from these most obvious factors: Firstly, none of Sladek's incidents, characters or images really affects the issue once the Reproductive System has been let loose. There is, on the one hand, the multitude of odd, often anticlimactic events, and on the other, the proliferation of little black boxes eating everything up. For the novel to work successfully, the operations of the System and the world it wants to destroy would need to be systematically contrasted and compared, and have some effect on

each other. However the novel sags most obviously at this point: the System itself, which should be the main character of the novel, is hastily and opaquely drawn, and there is little chance of becoming fascinated by its workings. For Sladek properly to call this a science fiction novel, we would need a far more precise picture of how the System comes into existence, how it threatens humanity, and how it could be destroyed credibly. Instead, Sladek leaves us in Chapter II with the project in a shambles (ie, the useless Government project that the Womplers wanted in the first place), but by Chapter IV the damn thing's built and already reproducing itself and gobbling metal! Sladek's world, like his machine, is causeless, aimless and thus ultimately unimportant.

Because of the vagueness which haloes the System, the other, far more explicit elements of the novel have no central idea against which to resound. There is no emotional architecture to the book - each chapter and person raises its uni-storied insignificance for a chapter or three, and then disappears into an undifferentiated horizon. We must then ask: why is the author unable to involve us in this novel? Such a question answers itself: although Sladek is very witty and observant, his attitude extends far beyond the tongue-in-cheek composure of an Aldiss into what becomes total detachment. Sladek stands so far back from the viewpoint of his subjects, in weaving his tapestry, that he has almost lost sight of them altogether; therefore the background of the novel is pop-literary, rather than experience-based, and the characters and incidents are basically cliches, invested with little or no sympathy. There are parallels of course. Time and again Sladek's methods remind me of Evelyn Waugh (although you've probably thought of your own comparison). His cynicism, rather than poise; his reliance on fun for fun's sake as well as satire, without distinguishing the two; all remind me of the faults of Waugh's first novel, DECLINE AND FALL. However, Waugh went on to write VILE BODIES. After such a promising near-miss first novel, I am sure Sladek will also advance to his own Great Novel.

MICHAEL MOORCOCK: THE WRECKS OF TIME

Ace Double A70¢

BRUCE GILLESPIE

Langdon Jones, former Associate Editor of New Worlds, has written that "in the average novel today a very great part of the total wordage is completely superfluous". In the latest Moorcock Ace novel to reach Australia, the total wordage is superfluous. I have heard, of course, that WRECKS OF TIME is one of a series of novels written at ridiculous speed to help pay for New Worlds's survival. However, John Brunner is said to write at the same speed for his personal survival, and none of his novels has been anywhere near as bad as this.

The book might have been forgivable if Moorcock had given the slightest indication that he was sending up the entire medium of pulp sf publishing. However, for 140 pages he insists with dead seriousness that his main "character", Professor Faustaff, has "powerful (sex) appeal" and in "giving pleasure in general, Faustaff did with such spontaneity, such relaxation, that he could not fail to be attractive to most people". Faustaff, you see, is this real intelligent scientist; but he's not one of these intellectuals, no sir! "'Thinking causes trouble' was a motto he had once expressed in a moment of feeling." Well, you might be one of the 90% of fans who will swallow this, but in my book he's nothing but a fool. If you don't like Faustaff, there are always these real beaut sheilas (not Moorcock's exact words, but he's only an Englishman) - however Faustaff only sees one of them for about ten pages and the other one is sexless. No luck there.

Maybe there's something in the Plot you would like? Well, there's this gang of idiots called the D-Squad having some fun destroying the fifteen duplicates of Earth which lie in the "well of sub-space" (no, I don't know what it means, either), and Faustaff hurtles around, chasing them and finally solving the mystery.

Quite acceptable, if you care a jot by the end of the novel. Personally I gave up interest in Faustaff's meaningless jaunts by about page 20. There are a few Mysterious Symbols near the end, but Moorcock seemed as bored by them as I was, and pleasure-loving Faustaff, and villainous "poison-eyed" Orelli, are too busy to even notice them.

Who cares, Mr Moorcock? I don't, you don't, and your fans soon won't. Surely New Worlds doesn't need money this badly?

LETTERS

LEE HARDING
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Off-hand I suppose I could think of a round dozen reasons for ASFR to fold; I had thought that ASFR 17 was the best reason yet. But now you've gone one better. The no.2 Harbinger is so good it makes one wonder why you persist in this pose of Guardian of SF. I enjoyed every word of this delightful effort - and the material was so much more interesting than this weary old sf kick.

JB: I'll come back to Lee's main point after a few more letters. Meantime, for those ASFR readers who don't understand the reference, I should explain that The New Millennial Harbinger is the fanzine I have been lately producing primarily for the Amateur Publishing Association of Australia. The rest of Lee's letter appears in no.3, since it applies to both publications. I would have liked to publish an earlier letter, which starts off "Three rousing bloody cheers for ASFR 16!" but I gather Lee has changed his mind since he wrote it. He has made it quite clear in conversation that he sees no point in ASFR continuing. Fortunately he has no say in the matter, but you people out there have a large say in it, and I would like to hear from you. I've had only four comments on the last issue - all negative - and it's not what you might call encouraging.

BRUCE GILLESPIE
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My disbelief notwithstanding, ASFR 17 arrived. It's a handsome job, to say the least. The mini-elite type is even readable on the smaller pages, the illustrations were good.... but the product of four months - forty pages?

JB: Et tu, Bruce? Sorry I said all the comments were negative, last page. Your comments on "2001" are quite positive, but I reckon you've had your say, buddy.

JOHN FOYSTER
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I hadn't intended to comment on ASFR 17 just now, but I suppose I may as well get it out of the way. Your gnat arrived and was read with mounting anticipation, but no more. The comments on Kubrick's film seemed to wander all through human knowledge without actually saying anything. I won't say anything at all about the film (because it isn't worth it), but a couple of things that your Four Horsemen said struck me rather forcibly.

I have already discussed with Doc Jenssen the symbolism involved in the 2001 title which Lee borrowed from Jenssen. I pointed out to Dick that J E Cirlot remarks that "21 expresses the reduction of a conflict - two - to its solution - unity". I won't comment on whether it is appropriate to the film or not. It is also of interest, perhaps, to note that the 21st card in the Tarot pack is The World (or maybe the Fool, depending).

I'm inclined to agree with you on the film: if Kubrick knew so much, how come he fouled it up? (JB: I didn't say that!)

I feel very alone with my review. I'm writing about cruddy old sf while George Turner rhapsodizes over a book by William F Nolan (William F Nolan?), Bruce Gillespie is overwhelmed by Conradian lyricism in a serial which appeared in If, and Bob Toomey compares R A Lafferty with Cordwainer Smith. Back to THE HEART OF JULIET JONES, says I.

Ursula LeGuin's report on the Nebula Awards brought a couple of chuckles. Norman Spinrad's attack on Mammon was one: presumably he contemptuously screwed up his cheque and threw it into the bank, as someone once said. On the same sort of theme, I have listened very carefully but have not heard that Harlan Ellison has returned the Hugos he won for that nauseating TV programme.

As I said to LJH, heavyweight paper doesn't offset lightweight material.

LEIGH EDMONDS
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The text for today's lesson is "Fandom for Fun and Profit".

First off, forget the profit bit. It just can't be done, and I should think that forty years of fandom would have proved that.

So that leaves fun. Do you get fun out of ASFR? If not, you are an idiot for continuing with it. In the second issue of Rataplan (JB: Second issue of what?), Mervyn Barrett talks about fannish institutions being run by one person who does everything until he gets pissed off with the lack of co-operation and throws it in. This doesn't apply to ASFR directly, but the spirit of the thing does. Is ASFR something you enjoy doing, honestly, or is it because you think you owe it to your three hundred subscribers (JB: Would you believe two hundred?), or that you feel someone has to discuss sf intelligently? I know you would derive a lot more enjoyment from an in-depth study of sf and all that great stuff than I would, but is it worth all this trouble? - all the typing of stencils, duplicating and other mundane things you have to do to get an issue out?

I think just about everyone would agree that ASFR 10 was your best issue. For some reason you didn't choose to quit while you were ahead. I don't know how many times I've heard about Vega and the way it became the BIG fanzine in one year and folded with the annish; who knows, ASFR might have become like that - everyone remembering that fantastic annish, and no letdown afterwards. But now ASFR is going downhill, no matter what you try to do. There is no life in the old body any more and ASFR is like a zombie staggering through the Amazonian wastes, sort of going nowhere.

JB: For that, you don't get to pat Grushenka for two whole weeks, young Edmonds. Seriously, I appreciate your comments. And anyone who hasn't heard of Rataplan should write you a begging letter immediately. More comments further on. :::: Since I have three lines to spare, I'll mention that Leigh and Paul Stevens, as I write, live with Diane and myself. Paul is about to move off by himself but Leigh will be coming back with us to Ferntree Gully. Mountain air is good for a growing lad.

RICHARD E GEIS
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ASFR 16 arrived yesterday, a thin but fine issue. The blow-off between Blish and Moskowitz was interesting, and Blish defends nicely, but I am still inclined to agree somewhat with SaM: the excuse that Blish had to review his own stuff to keep from "blowing his cover" is thin stuff, and the ethics are there, too, to still haunt him. The whole affair isn't all this important, anyway, but as a storm in a teacup it is interesting.

I missed the many reviews usual in ASFR. I like to compare opinions, and am trying to expand my own reading and reviewing in PSY.

JB: So I've noticed, Dick. If you find you're short of room in Psychotic, I'd be pleased to relieve you of some of your reviews. And some of your letter writers, too, come to that. Incidentally, you shouldn't address my letters to "The Mad Hermit". They all go to Mr Gorton.

GEORGE TURNER
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The much awaited Moskowitz-Blish tournament a l'outrance proved, for this lover of the chivalric arts, a mess of pottage with no compensating potted message.

One feels that Moskowitz had a point in attacking Blish, but that it was so minor as not to be worth making. One feels that Blish had some reason to defend himself but no reason to raise the drawbridge, flood the moat and man the battlements with triffids, hellhounds and robots armed cap-a-pie. In other words, why did he waste so much arnament on such a black beetle of an opposition? Not that I wish to be thought rude enough to call talkative Sam a black beetle, only to point out that he had a black beetle of an argument, which should have been crushed with an old shoe, not beaten to death and then rayed from the surface of the earth.

This was the only Blish effusion which ever bored me after page two. But writers are like that. You should meet them in a crowd - all waiting for the other bloke to stop talking about himself.

JB: Sorry there's not room this time to publish your other comments, George, but future students of Australian literature will be puzzled enough by this issue without confounding them

with a letter column full of Turner. Don't get me wrong, George; just because you've got that grant, you don't need to go writing novels and things; more important, I don't know what I'd do without you right now.

BRIAN RICHARDS
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Some time ago (ASFR 13) our goodly editor descended from the editorial ivory tower in order to deliver a massive castigation of an unfortunate book called THE PLAYBOY BOOK OF SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY. Using his best Johnsonian orotundity of phrase he unleashed upon its editors a short vitriolic torrent of sheer contempt, which must have caused considerable heartburnings to those miserable specimens of the genus editoriensis, and indeed one which these old eyes have rarely seen equalled in many years of enjoying criticism by experts of others.

This lashing rebuke was all the more astonishing coming as it did from one of the mildest mannered men it has ever been my pleasure to meet.

One was so impressed by this review that one made no effort to procure a copy, and when in the fulness of time a copy was presented to me as a gift, my joy was not as marked as perhaps it should have been. As is well known to my acquaintances, my dealings are pervaded with a spirit of parsimony and meanness, and waste is a habit which I find deplorable; so, donning rubber gloves so as to avoid contamination by this tome, I commenced to read it.

The truth must now be revealed. Friends, one regrets having to contradict the goodly editor, but common justice demands it. In truth, Don Quixote Bangsund has been tilting at windmills again, and one must act the part of Sancho Panza to pick up the pieces.

May I first give you a list of some authors who may be familiar to you? - Sheckley, Bradbury, Tenn, Clarke, Pohl, Nourse, Thomas, Davidson, Brown, Wolfe, Friedmann, Langelaan, Beaumont, Ballard, Atherton. All of whom are better than average writers of prose. When JB uses the expressions "slick" and "chrome plated" about the contents of this playbook, one wonders if the same expressions would have been used if the stories had appeared in Analog, or indeed if they had been donated for publication in ASFR.

When the US edition was published, Algis Budrys in his review summed up this book as "containing some of the best sf of our immediate time". This response is just as exaggeratedly in favour as our JB was against an anthology which is made up of good run of the mill stories, and which stands up quite well in comparison with most sf anthologies produced over the last ten years or so.

It is true that the editorial blurb is utter bilge, but most publishers' editorial blurbs are just that. One feels that JB was so irked by this utter bilge that he savagely attacked the spindly editorial trees and failed completely to see the growth of fine wood in the fiction. There are however valid complaints which can be made about the book.

Firstly, a large number of the stories have been over-antholo-gized during the last few years. Most of them were quite familiar to me, and I have never read a copy of Playboy.

Secondly, the price is disgusting, but I feel that this is due to the avarice of Australian booksellers, rather than the publishers.

If you get the opportunity, this is a book which will repay reading; pester your local librarian: if he gets it on his shelves it may make a few converts to sf from the vast horde of the unenlightened.

. . .

(From a later letter:) Picture a scene in the Richards lounge. We are entertaining local Roman-type clergy, who has come in to bum tea from us. He looks at book shelf. "Aah! Holy Mary! - Karl Marx - DAS KAPITAL! Works of the devil!" Richards: "But, father, 'tis on the science fiction shelf." Peace and goodwill restored. Roll on Xmas.

JB: I've never read a copy of Playboy, either, Brian (looked at the pictures, though), but I still stand by my review. And John Foyster will please note the influence my review had on you... :::: And now, have a little decorative thing while I think about what I will write on the following pages.

---oOo---

STATE OF THE FANZINE ADDRESS

oooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo

The first thing that must be said is that the seven letters in this issue represent about sixty percent of the letters of comment I have received this year. During this year I have published six issues of ASFR, including this one; and ASFR was nominated for a Hugo (on the strength, one imagines, of last year's performance - at least that's what the rules say). I can't remember offhand a single letter of congratulation, apart from those of my agents. This is an odd state of affairs, to say the least.

see my letter

Leigh Edmonds raises the question of whether fandom is engaged in for fun or profit - and gives the correct answer. ASFR is, believe it or not, published for fun. But I haven't had much lately.

It has been a pretty lousy year. I started it unemployed, and look like finishing it the same way. Since October 1967 I have spent twenty-one weeks out of work, and by the time you read this it may be as many weeks more as it is from when I write this - 28th November.

I'm not asking for your condolences, but I would like a little understanding (particularly from local friends and fans) when the question of the year's ASFR-output is raised. Each issue (16 excepted) has been costing me about A$100 to produce (ie, about US$119), and I normally earn about $50 clear a week, plus what I have been getting by working for Don Symons each weekend.

I know that I'll eventually get over the money problem. I've done it before, and I'll do it again. But it worries me that Lee, for example, thinks ASFR should fold, and that by your silence all you people out there in that great vacuum which for me at the moment is world fandom apparently think the same.

There are many reasons why ASFR <u>should</u> fold. I'm nearly thirty now, and there's a limit to the amount of time and money you can devote to hobbies when you reach this age and are married and your wife is wondering if you will ever have a family.

I guess, when it comes to the point of really deciding why you do a thing, that I've been producing ASFR partly for recognition, but just as much because I've felt it was needed. If I'm wrong about this, I do wish you would tell me so.

I don't know a hell of a lot about sf - or about anything, for that matter. This means that ASFR mainly consists of what other people write, and it may be that you are thinking ASFR is too impersonal - there's no editorial character in it. How can I know if this is the case, unless you write to me?

Some friends have told me I should get back to the good old ASFR of the early issues. Can't be done, you know. Things change. The early ASFR was Lee, John and myself (under, let it now be admitted, a number of pseudonyms). Lee is out of it now, and his contributions gave a very definite flavour to the magazine. His last intentional contribution (his piece on "2001" being actually answers to George's comments) appeared under a pseudonym in issue no.15 and was written, I think, last year.

Others have told me ASFR is far too serious nowadays. I don't think so. There are plenty of vehicles for the humorous and fannish and offbeat and lightweight things, and a shortage (not, I admit, as severe as when ASFR started) of serious talk about science fiction. In any case, I have always strived to make ASFR serious but <u>not grave</u>. If I have failed, let me know.

Anyway, as far as I am concerned, ASFR 20 marks a deadline. John Foyster will be editing no.19, and I will be back with no.20 about March next year. If I don't get a sufficient response in letters, contributions and subscriptions to nos.18-20, there will be no 21.

Finally, let me assure you that I do not want to set myself up as the Guardian of SF, as Lee implies in his letter. And neither do I find sf weary. The labour involved in this fanzine is certainly wearying, but no matter what happens I shall not find sf weary for quite a long time yet. Not with BAREFOOT IN THE HEAD coming, and....

Merry Xmas, anyway, folks.

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