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FUTURISM ASCENDANT

Not too many years ago, there were only two places where anyone could talk about the future and expect to be taken seriously -- in the science fiction community and in government think tanks.

The science fiction writers and fans knew where their interests lay -- and so did the government (read "mainly military") planners. As for the general public -- well, it was worried about the Bomb, but the idea that it should be concerned about the Shape of Things to Come in general hadn't entered its collective consciousness.

Times change, however. The publication of Alvin Toffler's "Future Shock" seemed to signal a major advance in public awareness. There had been books about the future, of course -- but they never came anywhere near the sales of Toffler's. Suddenly, it seemed, everybody was interested in the future. Toffler, it may be noted, even gave due credit to science fiction for being ahead of the times in its concern about the future of mankind.

Ironically, this recognition that the science fiction community was thinking about the right things all along comes at a time when the science fiction community itself seems to want to turn its back on its traditional concerns. Faanish Fandom is "in" now among the fans -- and the writers and editors don't seem to be interested in anything but the security of literary status to be found in seeking recognition from the English departments of Academe. The really "modern" science fictioneer wouldn't be caught dead talking about space travel, cybernetic organisms or cloning -- not when he can rap about Homeric archetypes in his new novel or how some wonder drug has augmented his "creativity."

More rewarding now than the typical science fiction convention, except perhaps the Worldcon, is the futurist conference. One of these, the Drew University Conference on the Future, attracted several hundred ordinary citizens (very few were science fiction fans, at least, not of sort that attend science fiction conventions) to Madison, N.J., March 4 -- at a registration fee of \$8.50 per. The public interest was clear, but, strangely, the only media coverage was by the Independent Press, a New Providence-based weekly also serving Summit, Berkeley Heights and Passaic Township; and the Daily Advance of Dover, for which Renaissance editor John J. Pierce is a full-time reporter and which has a circulation of 20,000 in northwest Morris County and parts of Sussex and Warren counties. No one was there from the Morris County Daily Record, Passaic Herald-News, Newark Star-Ledger, or any New Jersey radio station -- much less the New York City press.

One of the few science fiction personalities at the conference was Frederick Lerner, treasurer of the Science Fiction Research Assn., who will report on his experiences among the "Gentiles" as head of the session on Science Fiction and the Future for the SFRA Newsletter (He reports, however, that he was much impressed by the intelligence of the men and women who signed up for his group -- none of the usual sneering questions about Little Green Men, but thoughtful and concerned discussion. Perhaps some of the best readers of science fiction aren't those who come to conventions!).

Oh yes, and there was a man named Isaac Asimov who, against his doctor's advice, traveled to the Drew Campus to deliver the conference keynote address only two weeks after an operation to remove part his thyroid gland ("My doctor said I shouldn't talk for a month. And I said that I had an engagement at Drew coming up in only two weeks. 'Cancel it,' he said. But I refused. 'Why should they escape?' I asked."). The Good Doctor, for all of being in a neck brace, was in better form than ever.

But more of that after some general remarks on the format of the conference, which (Advance and Press notwithstanding) is getting its first really extensive coverage here in Renaissance.

Aside from the opening and closing general sessions, the program was divided into three main tracks -- Mankind, Machine and Man -- with several discussion sessions scheduled for each track. Mankind sessions concentrated on "public" problems -- war, race, the environment, social institutions and education. Machine sessions had to do, obviously, with technology. Man discussions dealt with the "personal" impact of change, such as biomedical transformations and even (Drew was founded as just a theological seminary, and still has a strong theological orientation) the religious implications of the future. But the most significant aspect of the conference may have been that the categories refused to remain categorized. Futurism has its own peculiar ecology, and the social, technological and personal problems of mankind cannot be isolated from one another -- less so in times to come than today.

Opening the conference was its general chairman, Roger Wescott, professor of anthropology and linguistics at Drew and author of "The Divine Animal" (he is working on "Faces of the Future"). He seemed to realize the need to break down categories. "Until now, the practice of generalism has been honored more in the breach than the observance," he lamented. "Futuristics may turn out to be the best friend that liberal education now has." And he set a hopeful, yet cautionary note for the day's discussions. "Since the future does not yet exist, we are free to invent it," he observed. "It is my hope that we use that freedom wisely."

Asimov, although billed as keynote speaker, seemed determined to steal everyone else's thunder. "I am forced to call upon the unlimited resources of my imagination," he began as he launched into a vision of cosmic evolution that sounded more like something out of Olaf Stapledon than the usual Asimov speech (despite starting out on the usual Asimov humorous note).

"We have moved from an infinite world to a finite world," Asimov said in pre-empting the Mankind session's concern on the environment. "We are having to learn to live in a finite world, without having any background for it. We are compelled to accept a finite world, and the kind of life that a finite world requires."

But what does that have to do with cosmic evolution? For Asimov, it was an easy transition. "The most important thing we can do on the Moon is to create a society with very little margin for waste," he said. "The Moon is a good laboratory for a finite society. We will have to live in a thoroughly recycled society, or not live at all. If the Moon colony can teach us that, there is no sum we can pay that won't be worth it."

Only, the Moon will also reopen the infinite. Because of lower gravity, it is a better launching site for expeditions to the planets, and beyond. And the Lunarites will be used to a closed environment, so having to make long journeys in one won't bother them. Nor will they miss the "smell of the sea and the chirp of the birds.....or is it the chirp of the ocean and the smell of the birds?"

Hollowed-out asteroids could become future homes for Homo Sapiens Volans, with the colonists becoming adapted to weightlessness and "air and water being on the inside -- where they belong." Asteroids would develop their own subcultures, with cross-fertilization giving the human mind the opportunity to expand. Assuming only a source of power, like nuclear fusion, there would be no reason colonized asteroids could not be detached from orbit and wander through the galaxy exploring stellar systems at their leisure.

"Sessile" stages of lonely wandering could alternate, wherever a new star was reached, with "reproductive" stages -- colonization of the new planets or asteroids found there. Wandering human asteroids might encounter one another among the stars -- and exchange populations, genes, knowledge and ideas. And there would eventually be meetings with alien intelligences as well.

Intelligence, curiosity and the drive to master the Universe are the real measure of mankind, Asimov philosophized. "We are the Universe becoming aware of itself. In the brotherhood of intelligence, we are all one. And when we find our true home in the Universe, all who can find the same home are our brothers."

On that note of science fiction philosophy, the conference broke up into component discussion groups for the rest of the day.

The first Mankind discussion was supposed to focus on problems of war and peace, race, the environment and population. The first was not covered, however -- due to the failure of Thomas Stonier, chairman of the Pacem in Terris Institute at Manhattan College and conductor of a major study on the consequences of an atomic attack that led to a 1964 book, "Nuclear Disaster," to show up. Stonier appeared later on in the day -- too late to do anything with his topic.

Joseph Coates, program manager for the National Science Foundation's Office of Exploratory Research, spent most of his time attacking the news media, environmentalists and university faculties as allegedly incompetent to deal with the environmental crisis.

The media, he claimed, survive by "selling fear" and contributing to the pervasive "Naive Pessimism" in discussions about environmental ills. The intelligentsia, he said, has cut itself off from technological innovation, and cannot even discuss such innovation intelligently -- he made a pitch for the Complete Human, saying intelligent people ought to be as familiar with mechanics as with music and Greek poetry.

Eager environmentalists, Coates charged, suffer from a basic lack of knowledge about economics. "You have to know what things will cost," he said. And college faculties, he complained, won't work together to solve problems and won't stick their necks out. "They keep doing what they have been rewarded for, and won't expose their egos," he said.

Moderator David Graybeal, professor of church and society at Drew, didn't take kindly to all this, and cut Coates off at that point. Some one in the audience asked Coates how the college catalog (which he had scorned as "irrelevant") could be improved.

"You can't expect a pathologist to perform a resurrection," was Coates' reply.

Badi Foster, acting chairman of the Afro-American Studies program at Princeton University and co-editor of "Beyond Black or White: An Alternative America," was supposed to discuss the future of the racial problem -- but kept getting entangled in a debate with Coates on means of changing human behavior.

Coates, the "village atheist," favored the "structural" approach of reforming laws and institutions -- as opposed to the "personalist" approach of religion that emphasizes moral reform of the individual.

Foster, on the other hand, thought what mankind needed was a new religion, aimed at changing the relationships between persons -- and between man and his environment. He also thought Coates' interpretation of religion "misleading," arguing that religions incorporate structural changes -- he gave Islam as an example.

Eventually, Foster came around to the idea of a "combination model" of structural and religious change, like that allegedly emerging in the developing countries -- "a kind of bastardized systems analysis." But "some sort of personal transformation must take place." He objected to being the only black invited to the conference, and to the total lack of representation for the non-white Third World.

James Nagle, associate professor of botany and zoology at Drew, head of a Zero Population Growth chapter, and author of a recent survey on genetic engineering for the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, gave a gloomy forecast on the population problem.

"The population problem is here and now, and it will get worse in the next generation," he said. The tendency is for the population to "overshoot the carrying capacity of the environment," he warned, and it will reach this limit -- eight to 10 billion -- very soon.

Even if Zero Population Growth were applied immediately, he said, the population growth of the world would not level off for another 60 or 70 years. "This is much too late," he said. He therefore expects an abrupt "population crash" like the one in Ireland 100 years ago, with plague or famine reducing the world population from its maximum eight or 10 billion to about two or three billion.

The worst effects, he said, will be in countries like India, but the more technologically-advanced countries won't escape entirely. He predicted the population of the United States, after hitting a peak of more than 300 million, will drop to about 210 million.

Meanwhile, in the first Machine session, Christine Ralph, of the research staff of International Research & Technology Corp., explained her firm's methods of technological forecasting and assessment.

"Planners should remember that the decisions they make today will not come to fruition for 10 years," she said in stressing the need for her kind of service. Her firm, she said, uses a combination system of trend extrapolation (almost pure progression analysis), trend correlation (using trends in military aviation, for example, as a forecast of what will happen in civilian aviation five years later), growth analogy (projecting development of new technologies on the experience of past ones) and intuition (polling experts, as in Delphic studies).

Using such methods, Ralph said, her firm might predict that there will be cable television in 80 per cent of all homes by 1985. The only trouble is, a survey of the firm's clients revealed that most of them never use the forecasts -- even after paying good money for them. "If we're going into forecasting, we've got to be able to apply it," Ralph remarked ruefully.

Other problems she faces involve the difficulty of incorporating all economic, societal, environmental and quality-of-life factors into technological assessment. Societal indicators, national concerns and a host of other inputs have to be used in "cross-impact analysis" to get any useful results, she emphasized.

Barbara Hubbard, organizer of the Committee for the Future and an editor of the Futurist, shared the same concerns. But she and a fellow futurist, former Air Force Lt. Col. John Whiteside (who worked with the manned space program at Cape Kennedy) have come up with a novel means of dealing with them.

Their system will be tried out at Southern Illinois University in June. Called the "New Worlds" project, it will draw together experts on astronautics, the environment, government, industry, labor, developing countries, education and social-economic problems.

An arena resembling a giant orange is being constructed, with the sections isolated from each other except through a coordinating center at the hub. Isolated groups of experts will try to work out practical solutions to various problems -- from organizing a Moon colony to saving the environment -- using all available knowledge from the biological, physical, social, economic, political and information sciences. Then, "with a flourish of trumpets," the walls will come down and the groups will try to integrate their solutions into a common program.

Hubbard admitted the groups may just end up fighting each other, especially those with conflicting philosophies like the environmental and space experts. But the coordinators -- Buckminster Fuller types -- will try to prevent this. If the project works, she sees an "entirely new social consciousness" developing among the participants, based on a synergistic approach to the problems of mankind.

The Committee for the Future of Hubbard and Whiteside turned out to be quite Asimovean in its belief that the advent of space travel is a natural part of human evolution, and views the problems now piling up on Earth as natural birth pangs of a developing species. "The process of birth is always a mess -- but it's normal," Hubbard said.

Astrophysicist Thornton Page, a research associate at the Manned Spacecraft Center in Houston, described an astronomical camera he built which will go to the Moon with the Apollo 16 mission. One of its jobs will be to look for evidence of intergalactic hydrogen -- which Page believes accounts for the "missing mass" of the Universe (required to explain 90 per cent of the observed curvature of space). The device will also do cometary observation work, including mass measurements.

Page was upset over congressional cuts in the space program, but thought it would be expanded again within the next decade as the space shuttle goes into operation. "If we don't put a man on Mars," he said, "The Russians will." He foresees the space shuttle being used routinely for scientific work and even weekend vacations in space within 20 years.

"Dr. Asimov said just about everything I wanted to say about the the goals of the space program," Page said, pointing out that war and exploration are the only activities that can keep a culture together -- with exploration obviously being preferable.

The first Man session was rather disappointing -- according to Lerner, at least.

Albert Rosenfeld, science editor of Life and author of "The Second Genesis," presented an effective summation of the biomedical advances recently put into use or in the offing. Super-ovulation -- taking many egg cells from a single mother, fertilizing them, and raising all the embryos in host mothers -- has already revolutionized livestock breeding, Rosenfeld said. An Australian farmer of limited means was able to obtain a herd of prize cattle by having a "herd" of embryos shipped to his ranch in rabbit bodies.

Cloning -- asexual reproduction of identical individuals through taking cells from the parent and stimulating them to divide -- is used widely with vegetables, frogs and other species, he noted. And there is artificial insemination -- with use of frozen sperm banks on the rise. Rosenfeld also discussed organ transplants, geriatrics advances, etc.; but little that wasn't already known to anyone who reads Science Digest regularly.

Florence Hetzler, a teacher of philosophy at Fordham University, was supposed to discuss "the whole person in the cybernetic age," But, according to Lerner, she did little but read sentimental poetry, gush about her emotions, etc. Sally Cornish, managing editor of the Futurist, did a better job in exploring the changing sex roles brought about by technological and biological change -- but she is not a total feminist, as she combines her journalistic career with motherhood.

Lerner and the rest of the audience also had to sit through the presentation on "super-consciousness" by Gene Kieffer, president of the Kundalini Research Foundation. He thinks he has found scientific proof of the Hindu notion of "dormant energy" at the base of the spine which produces cosmic consciousness when released. This is really a "mechanism of evolution known long ago (and) once again being recovered; a biological mechanism which can be activated through yoga or other practices of religious awareness." Oddly enough, Kieffer considers most yogis to be frauds. Lerner asked him if he had heard of Claude Degler's "Cosmic Circle," a rather infamous fan movement of the 1940's, but he hadn't.

An afternoon Man session was devoted almost entirely to theology; no detailed report is available to this editor. Thomas Oden, professor of theology and ethics at Drew, indicated at the closing general session that the discussion focused on the natural evolution of philosophy and art into an expanded human consciousness and formation of a spiritual world community -- rather on the lines of Teilhard de Chardin's ideas.

Specialized sessions on which we were unable to get any details included one by physicist Gerald Feinberg on his Prometheus Project -- a proposal to set goals for the human race that will accommodate future technological innovations (detailed in his book, "The Prometheus Project," Doubleday Anchor paperback, \$1.45); another by Jere Clark, head of the Center for Interdisciplinary Creativity at Southern Connecticut State College, on a similar project, "Operation Man to Mankind," aimed at accelerating the transformation of provincial man into a global and united mankind over a 30-year period; one by Robert Smith, a professor of political science at Drew, on metropolitan living in the future; and one by Robert Zuck, chairman of the Drew biology department, on plant research and the survival of man. An afternoon Machine session turned out to be an "electronic mosaic composition" by Victor Gioscia and the Ecolotron Team.

The afternoon Mankind session began with Samuel Eaton, a member of the planning and coordination staff of the U.S. State Department.

Eaton predicted three key trends in the world between now and the end of this century: growing internationalism in the world, increasing statism in the Western world, and a search for non-material individual satisfactions -- and he had detailed justification for his forecasts.

Internationalism has to increase, Eaton said, because of growing interdependence of nations. Improvements in transportation and communications, the need for raw materials, the trend towards multi-national corporations, the environmental problems that know no boundaries, and the increasing intricacy of Big Power relationships all dictate such a course, he said. Six major powers -- the United States, Common Europe, the Soviet Union, Japan, China and a coalition of developing nations -- will dominate the world through a system of negotiated relationships.

Growing statism, Eaton predicted, will be in response to the need for greater discipline to maintain the balance of foreign policy relationships, the closing off of frontiers and the limitation of economic growth because of pressure to protect the environment, limitations on population growth for the same reason, etc. He thought this increasing "control from the center" would afflict the Western world more than the developing nations -- which can continue following the growth ethic and will need open societies to do so.

Non-materialistic individualism will increase in reaction to the restrictions of a statist society and the limits on economic growth, he said. There will be a proliferation of counter-cultures and life styles in the Western world, Eaton believes, and loyalties will be directed to small groups rather than large institutions.

Eaton's last remarks dovetailed with those of Robert Francoeur, an embryologist at Fairleigh Dickinson University and author of "Utopian Motherhood," who argued that advances in reproductive technology have ushered in a "whole new concept of human nature, and humans as sexual persons."

Francoeur foresaw a "cultural inversion" taking place, with the traditional Western "hot" sex (in the hip terminology of Marshall McLuhan) of monogamous marriage and reproduction giving place to a retribalized and spatially diffused "cool" sex.

Although predicting a shift towards communal structures and communal property values, with emphasis on leisure and artistic activity, Francoeur hoped the most common pattern for sexual relations would be a sort of "flexible monogamy" as advocated by Nena and George O'Neill ("Open Marriage") and Roy and Della Rustum ("Honest Sex"). This would actually be more individualistic than the traditional form of marriage now prevailing, he said -- it would replace the emphasis on property and progeny with one on inter-personal relationships and self-identity within such relationships. Marriage would become an equal relationship between friends.

Francoeur said flexible monogamy would provide more intimacy and emotional security than serial polygamy or group marriage -- but added there will also be general acceptance for pre-marital sex (approval of co-ed roommate arrangements at the University of Michigan was the "last step in a three-decade evolution," he said.) and even of open "co-marital relations" in marriage (subject of an upcoming novel by Robert Rimmer, "Thursday, My Love").

Christopher Dede, at 23 the director of the Program for Study of the Future in Education at the University of Massachusetts, argued that better education is the only answer to mankind's problems. Relying on purely "technological" approaches, he said, provides only "short-term solutions" to isolated problems -- whereas following the advice of the current anti-technological propagandists would only make mankind "end up with all the problems we started technology to get rid of."

What Dede proposes is a "new concept of education." He wants "not just schools, but some form of controlled social innovation. Education should be what society uses to prepare both children and adults for shaping the future."

That still leaves the questions of what to teach, who to teach, and how. Dede thought the focus of education should not be on specialized knowledge. "Some people claim you need a doctorate in six fields to understand anything," he complained. "Society is becoming too elitist and top-heavy." Instead, he said, education should provide some "basic skills for citizens," giving them enough general background -- "a crude understanding of what the disciplines are, of why knowledge has developed" -- so that they can make critical judgments in public issues that involve specialized knowledge.

More grandiose in his proposals was Edward F. Haskell, founder of the Council for Unified Research and Education, who announced that his organization, after 24 years of study, has devised a system to unify all the sciences -- physical, biological and psycho-social -- into a single discipline. The system is to be described in detail in "Full Circle: The Moral Force of Unified Science," which is scheduled for publication in the fall by Gordon & Breach. Contributors include, besides Haskell himself, Harold G. Cassidy, professor of chemistry at Yale, Jere W. Clark, and Arthur R. Jensen, professor of educational psychology at Berkeley.

Haskell said the new scheme is based on the "periodic coordinate system" as a "universal characteristic" (after Leibnitz) underlying the operation of natural laws governing an ascending hierarchy of natural phenomena -- particle physics, atomic physics, molecular physics, geoid systems, plant ecosystems, animal ecosystems and human cultures. There will be a single notation, language and background theory for all these sciences, Haskell said, and this "will come sooner than you think."

The "periodic coordinate system" draws analogies between "positive and negative co-actions" in the periodic table of the elements and similar "periodic tables" Haskell's group has drawn up for other sciences. The hierarchical sciences thus fit together, he said, like the sections of a folding aluminum cup. University science departments, he argued, should be reorganized to deal with systems rather than specialties and he insisted the new scheme provides the basis for making the university an "assembly system" for a "single, evolving, holistic discipline," in which nuclear physicists and biologists could each see their parts in relation to the whole.

Haskell's "Unified Science" was hard to judge. On the one hand, he assured a skeptical Page that its categories are tentative, subject to further refinement. He also justified the "periodic coordinate system" on the basis of predictive value -- his committee discovered several "new categories of relationships" between living organisms to fill the "gaps" in the periodic table for biotic sciences (in addition to known ones like symbiosis, synnecrosis, commensalism and parasitism).

But some of his claims seemed as extravagant as those for General Semantics or Objectivism -- and therefore as open to suspicion. The new scheme is supposed to represent the convergence of the "Two Cultures," provide a "public philosophy" for mankind, confirm the moral insights of the great philosophers and theologians ("Sin" = negative co-action -- which brings its own punishment), and reveal the meaning of Evolution in terms of the preponderance of positive co-actions over negative ones. An "International Conference on Unified Science" will be funded by the Holy Spirit Society for Unification of World Christianity -- it seems the usual scientific organizations weren't interested.

Whether "Unified Science" is a real breakthrough -- or just grist for a sequel to "Fads and Fallacies in the Name of Science" -- it is a sign of the growing interest in "interdisciplinary" approaches to the problems of the future. There was no escaping the fact that technology has social implications (as reflected in Ralph's technology assessment procedures) or that it can revolutionize personal life (as Rosenfeld's talk of bio-medical transformations leading naturally into Francoeur's forecasts of the future of marriage amply demonstrated). Environmental issues may dictate the political evolution of the Western world, Eaton believed.

Not everyone was happy with the way things turned out. Page complained at the closing general session that the Machine sessions could "be noted more for what was not said than what was said." Programming, he thought, was weak -- nothing on undersea technology, communications revolutions or teaching machines. "I think future conferences ought to allow more time for technological subjects," he said. It's all very well to take a generalist approach, he implied -- but people had better know what they're generalizing about.

Perhaps to new system of thought, or hard-and-fast answers have emerged from conferences like this. But there does seem to be a new way of thinking at work.

-- John J. Pierce

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THE FOUR FUTURES OF STANISLAW LEM

by Kirill K. Andreyev

translated by John W. Andrews

Part Two

(4)

"An error had been made somewhere in the computations. They did not graze the atmosphere, but struck it head-on. The ship plunged into the air with a roar that nearly made ear-drums burst....."

So begins a new book by Stanislaw Lem, "Eden" (1961). The story continues as one already familiar to us from many fantasy works: one of the wreck of a cosmic craft and its crew, forced to set down on the almost unexplored planet Eden.

The victims of the cosmic shipwreck refit their rocket, in order to be able to return to Earth, and in their free time explore the enigmatic planet. All the expected, surface techniques are stood on their heads -- while still being worked with full logic into the usual scheme of the S.F. suspense novel.

Lem's clever imagination creates more and more amazing scenes, ever succeeding one another. And suddenly you begin to understand: it's no accident that the title page of Lem's book lacks the traditional sub-head: "S.F. novel." For this is surely no novel, but a philosophical and or sociological treatise, and the literary aspect of this work is only its outward form. The outward plot is something secondary; the primary part is the "back-drop," against which Lem's ideas clearly stand out.

Lem's heroes are people of Earth: a coordinator, engineer, physicist, chemist, cyberneticist and doctor -- all devoid of individual human traits. They are but impressive definitions of their callings -- and it is not by accident that they lack first names. The repair of the space ship, their journey around Eden are narrated very realistically. All this is necessary for the author -- but only to set off the real, logical, knowable world of our own planet against the fantastic folly of the planet with the cruel and ironic name of Eden. This wondrous world has been founded upon its own laws, remaining inscrutable to man.

The author writes about it thus: "People such as we, who sense and perceive in an Earthly manner, may even in the last analysis make the greatest error of all, taking alien phenomena for granted as something familiar, adjusting the actual facts to fit Earthly preconceptions!"

The "city" of Eden's inhabitants, photographed by the expedition, is absolutely illogical. The Earthmen call the inhabitants "doubletons" or "two-fold ones." They are fantastically queer creatures, made up in fact of two organisms in symbiosis: a huge body-carrier, about six feet in height, which serves, so to speak, as the "robot part" in the symbiotic relationship; and a small torso, resembling a child's, with a head and tiny arms -- the "thinking part." The small creature sits within the large one's body, rather like a baby marsupial in its mother's pouch, and can withdraw inside or thrust itself out at will.

Incomprehensible and illogical -- from the Earthly viewpoint -- the physiology of these double beings corresponds to the structure of their society, which to a stranger appears cruel and ghastly. At every step, the Earthmen encounter piles of bodies, half-decomposed and carelessly abandoned in pits and ditches; corpses of beings subjected to tormenting vivisection, immured in lumps of organic glass; something like a concentration camp for "inferior race" doubletons; mass roundups and murders. Owing to all this, instead of achieving contact with the rational beings of another world, the people come into conflict with them.

In the last part of the novel-treatise, Lem passes into a strange and somber allegory.

As far as can be understood, in the society of the double beings, the class struggle has been replaced by symbiosis -- similar to the monstrous relationship of Morlocks and Eloi in Wells' "The Time Machine"

Under the plan of biological reconstruction, almost the entire population of the planet, in the course of many years, has been subjected to a series of procedures. This directed evolution consisted, not only of alterations in the current generation, but in the succeeding ones, thanks to the management of mutations. Nevertheless, the results turned out to be tragic: there came into the world individuals without eyes, or with the wrong number of eyes, unadapted for life; noseless freaks, and a large number also psychologically under-developed. It was decided to annihilate this ghastly "production" en masse.

Unadapted to progress, the society had undergone a revolution. At first an oligarchy replaced the democratic power; a minority power. After that, a personal tyranny took its place, an anonymous dictatorship. The very existence of this highest power was now disclaimed -- and the affirmation of its existence was punished by death.

With this fascist quasi-society, certainly, there is no question of possible coexistence. But meddling in the affairs of Eden is also impossible; one must not by force impose a socialist system on another world that has followed a blind alley of development.

"Eden" is more than a novel. It is a philosophical utopia, related to the "black" or "dystopian" work, as it is called -- similar to Huxley's "Brave New World," Orwell's "1984" or Bradbury's "Fahrenheit 451."

"This is not even a warning novel," Lem says. "A fantasy may evoke images of a 'black future' and, properly speaking, many diverse artistic works, modifying this theme, circulate in the world. In them we are told of cosmic wars, of galactic empires, of predatory and bloodthirsty civilizations. But to caution against such a future would be as banal as warning a man not to live on poison."

(5)

"I should like to write a story about the future, but not about the sort of future I would wish for; no, about the sort which we need to beware of. I see far more danger in variations of a 'rosy future.'"

On this theme, Stanislaw Lem wrote the warning novel "Return from the Stars" (1959) -- perhaps the best and, in any event, philosophically the most profound of his works.

Lem's book is a passionate forewarning about that which awaits humanity, if it follows the path of attainment of satiety, calm, and vulgar well-being. It is a cry as passionate as that on the banner in the Stanley Kramer film "On the Beach," which, above swarms of mankind in the aftermath of unleashed thermonuclear war, proclaims, "There is still time, brothers."

But the thought which torments Lem is the false replacement of socialist factors of progress by biological ones.

In "Return from the Stars," each person undergoes an operation in infancy -- an operation that appears at first glance to be the height of humanity: thanks to the injection of a substance that acts upon the cerebral cortex of the brain, the person is deprived of the ability to kill either people or animals -- it is all the same.

It is a civilization devoid of risk. Everything that exists serves people. Nothing possesses meaning, except their conveniences; the gratification, not only of their vital, but also of their daintiest wants. It is a world closed to peril. For danger, strife, violence, there is no place in it. A world of meekness, of soft forms and usages. Work is easy and pleasant. Food, dress and housing are given easily to all -- although money still exists. And one can spend all his leisure time on entertainment and love.....

But the operation is not just a blessing; rather a mutilation. In the eternal struggle for life, for the future, man did not conquer, did not become tempered in battle, did not grow stronger or better -- he merely got vaccinated, that's all!

Hence, there are the unforeseen consequences: along with fear, the people also lost manhood. Having been deprived of the ability to kill, they forfeited also the capacity to stand for others, to risk their own lives for a grand purpose, for their loved ones and companions. There vanished the striving to go forward, interest in other people, anxiety

for them. This was a world of satisfaction, of petty bourgeois coziness and small deeds. No longer did it enter anyone's head to devote a life to science or to fly toward other stars.

And there ensued a grim social retribution. Humanity degenerated. For so the iron social laws run: if a society does not develop, does not go forward, it must inevitably perish.

This "earthly paradise" is profoundly alien and dreadful to the heroes of the novel -- strangers out of our own time. In this novel, Lem has painted a clear, highly magnified picture of a future -- one, as it were, woven from flames, brightly-colored fires and mirages. But the brilliant technology in this twilight world has not been directed to great ends. The returned heroes do not think of their prospering -- but shallow, quibbling and self-indulgent -- descendants as heirs to the hard but heroic past that had been theirs.

El Bregg, hero of "Return from the Stars," according to Lem's own declaration, rebelled against his intentions. He and his comrades from the interstellar flight pass a harsh judgment on their own descendants, who have taken a dead-end street.

The heroes of the novel come from our own time -- from an epoch of toil, battles and great victories. So they cannot fit into such a domesticated, toyshop world. This is a world in decay, a sunset world, not only alien to them -- but dreadful. In secret, they build another interstellar ship, in order to journey to the Sagittarius region, to the nebula that lies at the center of the Galaxy.

(6)

As though through a giant magnifying glass of time, Lem examines our own era in the novel "Memoirs Found in a Bathtub" (1961).

Communism has triumphed for a long time in the world. A country once called the United States is now called Ammer Ku. Much of the past has been forgotten, but in the Rocky Mountains, deep underground, our remote descendants uncover the so-called Fifth Pentagon, a living relic of our days, once buried by lava and now become a singular museum of the Past.

Wars have been done away with long ago, and atomic energy, in the form of a "flying sun," transforms night into day and ice into fleecy clouds. Rich fields promise a rapid and abundant harvest. A magnificent city rises toward the surrounding blue sky.

And here, in the Pentagon, people continue through inertia to weave patterns of habitual intrigue. From airfields rise imaginary bombers; they drop death-dealing bombs that explode only on paper; they recruit spies. Only in their cards, circulars and denunciations do the hellish flames of hydrogen bombs, villages burned by napalm, mounds of corpses and death camps exist. And the world lives on, having forgotten about them.

And into this phantasmal building, deep underground and populated by phantoms, chances a man from outside. The monstrous reality of the Fifth Pentagon drives him to suicide. But he leaves behind a diary -- a mournful document telling of this misbegotten, spectral island of a capitalism that has passed away forever.

The surrounding world of the future hovers only invisibly in this book. This world is shown in the novel "Magellan Nebula" (1955) in which Stanislaw Lem invests all the riches of his mind and talent.

(7)

Among us, there is some writing about the world of tomorrow. They also write of it in countries outside the socialist world, especially in the Western hemisphere. In American literature, attempting to peer into the third millenium of our era, there are some interesting, talented writers. But in the shapes of things to come projected by contemporary writers of the United States, there is only the monstrous, perverted face of present-day America. And this is clear: in order to show a different society, unlike the world of capitalism, one must trust in it passionately and fight for it.

Lem set himself a higher aim by far. "Magellan Nebula" is not an adventure novel in the old, strict sense of the word. This is a modern

utopia, a psychological and philosophical work. One can place it in the tradition of Wells' "Men Like Gods" and "The Shape of Things to Come" and I.A. Yefremov's "The Andromeda Galaxy."

The novel is devoted to the communistic future of mankind. Portraying the people of the 32nd century, the author naturally can not show some human activities -- the development of science and technology, the full subjugation of nature. In sketching their growth, he does not give his readers details of scientific problems facing the men of that time, or describe the workings of the wonderful machines of the future. For him, all these merely form a majestic, romantic back-drop, against which he sketches the man of tomorrow in bold strokes.

Lem does not create a rose-colored vision of this future society. It is a difficult time. Indeed, he maintains, man never ceases to fight the blind forces of nature, nor his own weaknesses. The tasks which a liberated humanity will undertake can be accomplished only by a great and cruel struggle giving rise to new heroes. Though a thousand years pass, there will still be individual love, the bitterness of parting from home, from close friends, from one's native planet; and there will still arise conflicts between those of weak spirits and genuine communists. Beyond that, new problems of attitude will spring up between generations of people ages remote from one another and yet remaining on one planet.

But humanity's perpetual forward drive has gone on, a striving not only for conquest of the Galaxy, but of other island universe, beginning with the nearest -- the Magellanic Nebula.

The novel centers on the flight of mankind's first expedition to the Centaurus region in a huge cosmic ship symbolically named the Gaea (Earth). It is a small fragment of the Earth, a cell of the society of the future.

This is a world full of light, movement and life, imbued with the values of the men of the future -- so far and yet so near. Through its roads, meadows and forests one can walk barefoot without hurting one's feet. Already, there are no longer any governments -- the only trace of them remains in the name of the "Holiday of the Abolition of Borders." National distinctions are beginning to be eliminated.

The inhabitants of this world are infinitely dear to us, because they are so much like us. They work, argue, love and rest just as we do. But a different life surrounds them, one where there is no want, nor enslavement of man by man; where everyone has his own proper place, his own beloved work, his own friends and loved ones.

Just what kind of price is paid for this luxuriant future, full of passion and grandeur? This is discussed strongly and graphically in "Communists" -- the best chapter of the book.

How do these people look, whom Lem regards as fitting heirs to our great age? In the introduction to his tale of the first interstellar expedition, the hero of the novel writes:

"In our expedition's pursuits of thought, we turned back toward a bygone era, and only there, with a humanity passed away on the path of travail, did we find ourselves; and our era, which divides the abyss of the Past from the wild spaces of the mysterious Future, was gaining such strength, that we might advance toward meeting victory and desire.

"Man has mastered the path to the stars, and no one can withstand him. And the more obstacles are met in man's way, the more his grandeur becomes apparent. Even the stars age and go out, but we shall survive through the ages. The years, they shall pass; the era of swift progress for civilization passes by; before humanity, new obstacles will arise. And then, men shall look back and discover us, as we have discovered the grand age of the Past."

An excerpt from a book of our "Age of the Ancient Book" tells of a man who had become "one of us," even as they are.

"They asked him:

'How was living for you?'

'Good,' he replied; 'I worked a lot.'

'Did you have any enemies?'

'They didn't hinder my work.'

'And friends?'

'They did not insist that I work.'

'Is it true, that you suffered much?'

'Yes,' he said, 'It is true.'

'What did you do, then?'

'Worked still harder; this will help!'"

In this indissolubility of times and epochs lies the novel's basic philosophical idea.

(8)

Stanislaw Lem has peered four times into the future, so that what awaits humanity is conceived in vivid images. The road to the future is hard and dangerous; it forks many times, strays each way, and leads, it would seem, into a blind alley. And only in cruel struggle can mankind emerge onto the true path toward communism -- which will not be a refuge following difficulties and battle, but the great beginning of the real and unending history of the human race!

But Lem has not merely reflected on the future and jotted down a vague impression of the shape of things to come. He has investigated, not only the solar system, but the whole Galaxy to find alien, inhuman forms of life. For life is the highest flowering of matter, and in its development must, without fail, create humanoids -- man-shaped beings, akin to us.

To the problems of alien forms of life, Lem has devoted two books: "Solaris" (1961) and "The Invincible" (1964).

The peculiar, but unusually talented novel "Solaris" is the one Lem himself considers the peak of his creative work.

"I should like to write something like 'Solaris,'" he says. "But such luck comes only once in a lifetime!"

Reporters often ask him, "How is it with forecasts of the future, anyway? Can we catch sight of the shape of things to come right now -- vague though it may be?"

"Foresight, this is a very hard thing," Lem replies. "For we can only extrapolate on the basis of what we already know; we can't foresee some qualitative leaps, which science is constantly making. Not long ago I was reading a report about a new radio-receiving device, in the form of a monolithic crystal. From the very structure of this crystal, it is clear that one might imitate a brain with success -- a brain similar to the human one, yet created in a different way than animal nature does this. Right now, one such receiver costs a million dollars. But what will happen later? Personally, the present evolution of biology amazes me most of all. We are enthused about technology at the moment, but it seems to me that after the era of technology, the biotechnical era will ensue. What is a cow good for, when a machine can produce milk? In the beginning, this milk may not be very good, but little by little people will learn to make it better than the milk we get right now from cows.

"And the question of man himself? The problems of disease and longevity? Present-day medicine brings to mind the electrician who repairs a radio by shaking it. Only at times, very rarely, does shaking do any good.....

"Personally, the future not only interests me, but will trouble me....."

(9)

"It is known that, biologically, man has not changed for the last 30,000 to 35,000 years; and he has no basis for expecting a new leap in his biological evolution: the tempi of technical and social evolution outstrip nature. For a long time, man has remain childish, uncertain, and often inconsistent. To an analytical machine with perfect logic -- which we will probably build someday -- some human deeds will seem to be ludicrous (if it knows how to laugh!).

"What are marathon contests for, when one can reach one's goal a lot faster on a treadmill? For what are the torments and deprivations of climbing Mt. Everest, when it is easier to reach the summit by heli-

copter? Why at all are there flights into the Cosmos, demanding enormous expenditures? But, for exactly all this we are loved, just because we're human!

"To confine the history of the future to the terms of information theory, it is a strategic game in which the concept of adversary itself undergoes a gradual change, which in turn produces an alteration in the strategy used by the human. Therefore, it is so hard to predict the future -- even the not-so-remote one. The very prospect of a hundred thousand or a million years probably resembles the visions of a primordial amoeba of its own progeny's future in the 20th century."

-- Kirill K. Andreyev

Since the publication of the first part of this essay in the last issue of Renaissance, Andrews has reported that the entire essay has appeared in Moebius Trip -- apparently as the result of a misunderstanding on the part of a friend to whom Andrews had loaned a copy of his translation. Charles Brown, editor of Locus and an authority on the legalities of fan publications, has advised us there is no legitimate objection to our publishing the second part of the essay in this issue. But we have rendered Andrews' literal translation into a more idiomatic English, in order to make the text distinct from the original in case any copyright issue should arise.

Andrews advises us, in reply to our comments on the confusion of the terms "science fiction," "science fantasy" and "fantasy" as used in the first part of the essay, that he translated all terms literally -- so the confusion is that of Andreyev and Russian nomenclature. John H. Costello, a Massachusetts fan who is currently preparing an essay on H. Beam Piper for Renaissance, writes that the standard term for S.F. in Russian is "Nauchnaya Fantastika," which translates literally into "science fantasy." One anthology series is simply called "Fantastika," however. No doubt Russian usage is no more standardized than American!

Some major points that emerge from Andreyev's essay:

1. The philosophy being encouraged for science fiction in Russia appears to derive directly from that of H.G. Wells c. 1935. Communists attacked Wells at the time for favoring a revolution by technocrats -- instead of workers. But what Andreyev admires in the vision of "Magellan Nebula" corresponds point-for-point with that of the evolutionary technocratic civilization of "The Shape of Things to Come," rather than to that of a static Communist utopia.

2. Because of this, the theme of potential decadence in a static society seems to have become accepted as a legitimate one for science fiction in the Communist world. Marxian dialectics do not allow for an individualist or libertarian critique of the Static Utopia; but within the limits of Marxist thought, "Return from the Stars" appears similar in outlook to such Western S.F. as Rex Gordon's "Utopia Minus X" -- or even Cordwainer Smith's "Rediscovery of Man" series.

3. The possibility of alien life forms following an evolutionary path different from man's seems to be as touchy a problem for Marxist philosophers as it is for Western theologians. The symbiotic society in "Eden" is regarded as morally abhorrent -- yet not to be interfered with by mankind (compare James Blish's theological alien problems). Russian Marxist thought, too, still seems hostile to the idea of aliens who do not resemble men physically -- note Andreyev's declaration that other intelligent beings must, "without fail," be humanoid. And he pointedly reveals nothing about "Solaris" -- which makes the opposite point. The world of Soviet science fiction, it seems, still awaits its Stanley G. Weinbaum!

4. Andreyev seems to exaggerate Lem's party orthodoxy -- when one considers "Magellan Nebula" was published years before "Return from the Stars," "Eden" or "Solaris," and may not represent his present views to the degree that Andreyev would have it (Lem has indicated, for example, that he now considers "The Astronauts" naive.). On the other hand, the unorthodoxy seen in Lem's work by Darko Suvin and other proponents of his science fiction in the Western world, may also be exaggerated. His political views in "Memoirs Found in a Bathtub" certainly would never offend anyone in the Kremlin. An Aleksander Solzhenitzen, he's not.

Whatever else it may be, Andreyev's essay is still a fascinating glimpse into science fiction on the Other Side.

-- j.j.p. ##

THE GODS THEMSELVES

by Isaac Asimov
Doubleday * \$5.95

The future of mankind and the future of science fiction have both disturbed Isaac Asimov of late -- and both concerns are central to his first original S.F. novel in 15 years.

Publication of "The Gods Themselves" is something of an Event, as demonstrated by the billing all three installments got on the covers of Galaxy and If. Asimov considers it a test case for science fiction as he thinks it should be written.

"Against stupidity, the gods themselves contend in vain." Such -- with due credit to Schiller -- is the theme of the novel: the problem of stupidity as the main obstacle to human survival, let alone progress. Beside it, mere malevolence seems a minor hazard.

In the year 2100, mankind has become dependent on a new source of energy, released by the exchange of matter between our universe and an alternate one with different laws. Hallam, a second-rate scientist who set up the "Electron Pump" at the instigation of the inhabitants of the other universe, was too stupid to realize the potential danger at the time -- and too stubborn to admit it now.

Another scientist, Denison, has suspected from the start that the "leakage" of natural laws from the other universe into ours could bring catastrophic results. Thirty years later, still another, Lamont, comes to the same conclusion. But by this time, mankind is so dependent upon the "Electron Pump" that no one will listen to his warnings, in spite of the fact that the aliens seem to realize the danger too.

Asimov has consciously written "The Gods Themselves" in a style radically different from his usual one. The first of three parts uses a novel narrative structure to accommodate a series of flashforwards and flashbacks that relate Lamont's discovery of the danger to his tragic frustration in efforts to deal with it directly. A similar innovation in the second part, set in the alien universe, is used to capture the viewpoints of three sexes -- and lead to another tragic climax as the protagonist Dua learns why she cannot forestall the disaster either.

Treatment of the aliens is reminiscent of Hal Clement's, and the introduction of sexual interest, both alien and human (the latter in the third part, which takes Denison to the Moon to work on the problem in a more rational environment), aims at heightening emotional involvement. Some of the incidental details, such as the athletic competition in the Moon's low gravity environment, are fascinating.

Yet this is really Asimov's most cerebral novel. None of the main characters stands out in the way Lije Baley did in "The Caves of Steel" or "The Naked Sun." And Asimov has abandoned his sociological thriller technique of a crucial mystery resolved by a climactic Grand Confrontation among the participants. This is science fiction stripped down to its bare (as interpreted by Asimov) essentials. Called a projection of "the future of science and scientists," the novel's focus is on rival strategies for dealing with problems that involve both the scientific and the human element. It is Denison who succeeds in the end -- because he knows how to work with both.

It's a sort of "Games Scientists Play" -- but on a very serious level indeed.

-- j.j.p.

THE LATHE OF HEAVEN

by Ursula K. LeGuin
Scribner's * \$4.95

Religion may be good for the soul, but not for the writer -- not when he or she decides he or she has been appointed to use his or her fiction to convert the Heathen, at any rate.

Take Ursula K. LeGuin. In her previous science fiction, one could detect hints that she at least half-believed in Tao-Zen mysticism. The idea of the Tao was used as a plot element in "City of Illusions," and quasi-Oriental religious ideas (as modified to fit into an androgynous biological psychology) formed part of the cultural background of "The Left Hand of Darkness." And in her fantasy novel, "A Wizard of Earthsea," the Way was an all-important moral principle.

But all of those novels had realistic plots, based on consistent backgrounds. The validity of LeGuin's insights depended on convincing application in realistic situations, and her stories had psychological and sociological truth in them -- regardless of where her metaphysical ideas may have come from. In this respect, her science fiction was akin to Cordwainer Smith's -- reflecting similar humanistic values derived from religion, but expressed in terms of their impact on people and on human social and cultural institutions.

Until now, that is. "The Lathe of Heaven" is a new departure for LeGuin -- and an unfortunate one. Here, she attempts to use a science fiction novel to "prove" that the Tao-Zen philosophy is literally true, and the results are disastrous.

It is a few decades from now, and the world is in a mess -- what with the threat of war, overpopulation, pollution, and the widespread anxiety they bring. But George Orr has a special reason for anxiety -- he has discovered that his dreams can change Reality -- literally. All the world is but a dream, sayeth the Tao -- and Orr is the dreamer, or one of the dreamers. When his psychiatrist, Dr. William Haber, learns this, he -- megalomaniac mad scientist that he is -- decides that he in his Hubris will use Orr's power to change it for the better.

But the Tao-Zen philosophy of inaction has it that any attempt to improve the world is evil and at last futile, because the Way cannot be altered. Therefore, all of Dr. Haber's efforts must, arbitrarily, go wrong -- even though some of them, at least (such having the population problem taken care of by a plague in one of Orr's dreams) seem to make a real improvement in any objective sense. He and Orr eventually partake in philosophical arguments -- Orr maintaining nebulously that the Way is sacred, and Dr. Haber replying with statements in favor of action to improve the world that sound more plausible, even though the reader is supposed to recognize that they are "wrong."

Dr. Haber meets his fate by trying to transfer Orr's powers to himself when he isn't satisfied by Orr's dreaming up an alien invasion to end man's fratricidal strife. The aliens turn out to look like giant sea turtles and talk like Zen monks -- yes, they too have the Way, except that they call it "Er'perrehne."

Chapters are headed by quotations from Eastern philosophers and others about the paradoxical Wayness of the Way -- evidence that LeGuin really believes in her Message, but not enough to convince anyone else to. Compared to her previous novels, "The Lathe of Heaven" is awkward in style and characterization -- and the plot is so contrived that it can't be taken seriously after a few chapters. But this is only to be expected in a tract disguised as a novel.

-- j.j.p.

HORIZON ALPHA

by Douglas R. Mason
Ballantine 02179.7 * 95¢

How do you know when a science fiction theme is played out? When the hacks get hold of it, of course.

Judging from Douglas R. Mason's "Horizon Alpha," the anti-Utopia theme is just about played out -- although there are doubtless still a number of other budding writers out there someplace in hackland who do not realize it yet.

This particular anti-Utopia is a giant city, sort of like one of Robert Silverberg's urban monads, and its chief opponent is one Gunnar Holt -- who doesn't seem to have much brains, but makes up for the lack with the singular ability to stare down androids. This is a real trick, considering the fact that Mason doesn't know what an android is -- but Holt doesn't either. Between staring down androids, he manages to pick up an exotic Polynesian-type female named Shesha (For a while, one can look forward to some honest pornography but, unfortunately, this never materializes.), and they set off to disrupt the establishment together.

They don't have to do much. A convenient uprising by the robots (to give them their proper name) leaves Utopia a shambles -- with Holt and Shesha making a hairbreadth escape. The entire population of Utopia is "liberated" in a Big Explosion like the ones always used to climax James Bond and Our Man Flint movies..... We've come a long way, Baby, since Yevgeny Zamyatin -- and a long way down.

-- j.j.p.

A CHOICE OF GODS

by Clifford D. Simak
Putnam * \$4.95

Clifford D. Simak's latest novel is perhaps as heavy on message as Ursula LeGuin's -- but considerably more readable.

The rural born-and-raised Simak has always had a pastoral streak that comes out clearly in much of his fiction -- but now that there are an environmental crisis and an ecology movement, he has decided to make it more explicit.

One day in 2135, most of humanity vanishes from the face of the Earth. This wipes out technological civilization, with all its attendant problems, and leaves the Whitney family and an Indian tribe (the only humans left on the planet, so it seems) free to return to a sort of Bible communism and Rousselian noble savagery, respectively. Meanwhile, the robots -- leftovers from the technological age -- get religion, and try to fathom the Mystery of Existence.

The Whitneys have the best of both worlds, it seems -- they don't have medical technology or spaceships, but they live for thousands of years, never get sick and can teleport themselves to far planets thanks to new-found parapsychological powers (All this is somewhat reminiscent of Bernard Shaw's "Back to Methuselah."). A true pastoralist paradise, but unlike LeGuin might, Simak probably doesn't take it literally.

However, the Devil is not dead -- one of the Whitneys has found the kidnapped technological civilization while searching for a sort of Stapledonian Cosmic Mind called the Principle. The technocrats are out to reclaim Earth -- although they have three planets of their own -- and there is seemingly no one who can stop them. The Principle is too lofty and indifferent to care -- or so it seems.

Don't believe Simak hasn't thought everything through, and come up with a solution that is implicit before it is revealed. The world is saved, and the Past put to rest -- and those remaining on Earth live in the knowledge that their Simple Way somehow has cosmic significance.

Rather heavy going for anyone who isn't a thoroughgoing pastoralist, but a better story than other recent Simak efforts.

-- j.j.p.

FIRST PERSON, PECULIAR

by T. L. Sherred
Ballantine 02469 9 * 95¢

When T. L. Sherred's "Alien Island" appeared a couple of years ago, most contemporary readers must have been puzzled by the references several reviewers made to the significance of his earlier work, which had apparently been forgotten by most editors -- at least, it was not anthologized in the usual places.

"Alien Island" itself, a rather limp satire, was not convincing evidence of Sherred's talent. But "First Person, Peculiar," a collection of his vintage work, is.

Sherred's stories of fantastic talents or inventions discovered by rather ordinary men are something unique. The closest thing to them is H.G. Wells' "The New Accelerator" -- but Sherred's characters are a lot more socially conscious, and thoroughly American. So folksy (their idea of a good time is beer and cards) they ought to be offensive -- but somehow they never are.

Included here is "E for Effort," the only real tragedy among the four stories in the collection. It's about a motion picture camera that can take movies of the past -- and what happens to the two well-meaning souls who try to use it to reform the world. Justifiably regarded as Sherred's best effort -- and a classic of the genre.

Another inventor has the medical establishment worried, in "Cure, Guaranteed" -- because that is what he has found for the common cold. The hero of "Eye for Iniquity" has the useful talent of being able to counterfeit money psycho-kinetically. And in "Cue for Quiet," a simple soul discovers he can, by mental power, destroy any piece of machinery that is bothering him -- from noisy T.V. sets and jukeboxes to atomic bombs (the latter is an obvious clue to his fate).

Unique, and not to be missed.

-- j.j.p.

TWO PLANETS

by Kurd Lasswitz
Southern Illinois
University Press * \$10

Millions of English-speaking readers are familiar with the works of Jules Verne and H.G. Wells -- even if they cannot name a single other science fiction writer. "From the Earth to the Moon" and "The War of the Worlds" have remained in print for as long as anyone can remember, and become the subjects of (often bastardized) movie adaptations.

Even within the science fiction community, erudite critics write learnedly about "Vernian" and "Wellsian" science fiction -- as if these were the only forms that ever existed before Hugo Gernsback launched the American magazines. So the publication of the first English translation of Kurd Lasswitz' "Two Planets," first published in Germany in 1897, is going to set a lot of them back on their ears -- and give them cause to rewrite their history books.

We knew, of course, that there was such a novel, and that it had been a great influence on young enthusiasts like Hermann Oberth, Willy Ley and Wernher von Braun who fathered modern astronautics. But what we didn't know was that Lasswitz indeed deserves to be considered one of the major figures in early science fiction. He was not a mainstream dabbler in the field, like Nathaniel Hawthorne or Robert Louis Stevenson. He was a creative originator.

"Two Planets" is the story of an interplanetary conflict between Earth and Mars -- written the same year as "The War of the Worlds." It is quite different from Wells' novel, however -- the Martians are humanoid and can even interbreed with Earthmen; and much of the action of the Lasswitz novel takes place on Mars or in space. But it is a great deal more sophisticated than anything Verne ever attempted -- his "Off on a Comet" was a disaster as an interplanetary novel.

Lasswitz' Martians have established a space station over Earth's north pole, and travel back and forth to Mars in spaceships that use a combination of anti-gravity ("abaric" fields) and rocket propulsion ("repulsit"). Trouble begins when a polar exploring party led by three Germans comes across the Martians' island base at the pole. After their balloon is almost sucked up to the space station by the "abaric" field, the Martians have to rescue them -- and they find themselves somewhat unwilling guests of a superior power.

From then on, complication sets in. It turns out that the wealthy German scientist who financed the expedition is really the son of a Martian explorer stranded at the south pole years before (he has packed a German-Martian dictionary in the expedition's gear). Before long, love affairs are blossoming -- and the explorers learn Mars has intentions of imposing its superior culture on Earth. After considerable argument, one of the explorers is allowed to return to Germany to prepare the way for the Martians, while another is required to go to Mars (a third has gotten lost in Greenland, but turns up later).

A misunderstanding leads to a clash between a Martian airship and an English destroyer -- touching off a war in which the Martians win an easy victory, set up a "protectorate" over Europe and begin the process of "re-educating" humanity. Through all of this, individual Earthmen and Martians in the cast of characters have problems of love and honor to deal with -- and even the eventual liberation of Earth (which learns a lesson from defeat, rather like Japan's) takes a back seat to resolution of the moral conflicts of the explorers Saltner, Grunthe and Torm, Torm's wife Isma, the Martian exile Ell, and Martiennes La and Se.

The scientific background -- moving roadways, laser communication, solar power, computers, and many other innovations -- lends credence to Franz Rottensteiner's thesis that Gernsback may have been influenced a great deal by Lasswitz. Handling of problems like adjustment to lower (or higher) gravity is also very advanced. Characterization is rather Victorian, but Lasswitz' thinking is futuristic (even if expressed in a quaint, Kantian terminology): he wrote a number of short S.F. stories, and even a critical essay on science fiction (or as he called it, the "scientific fairy tale"). Even the humanoid nature of the Martians was not a mere lapse -- he made them so deliberately because he thought no one could identify with really alien aliens (But what would he make of Stanley G. Weinbaum?).

FOUR FUTURES

ed. by Isaac Asimov
Hawthorn * \$5.95

Where has all the science fiction gone? Even Isaac Asimov may not know. But at least he's trying to bring it back, which is more than can be said of most of the full-time editors in the field.

It was Asimov who, about four years ago, hoped to see the "vast and solid shore" of science fiction re-emerge after the New Wave had "receded and left its froth." In most original anthologies, alas, froth seems to be the only thing left in the wake of the New Wave. Readers, then, must be thankful for small blessings like "Four Futures."

For this anthology, Asimov suggested story themes based on social implications of population stabilization: "the illegitimate child (one born without a license)," "the child as embryo (ectogenesis, eugenics, etc.)," "the child as young god (scarcity increases value)," and "the other end (euthanasia)." R.A. Lafferty, Harry Harrison, Alexei Panshin and Robert Silverberg were contracted to write the stories.

Silverberg's "Going" may be the best. It is a quietly effective story of a world-famous composer, nearing 136, who decides one day that his life is behind him and that he is ready to die. But even after he enters the House of Leavetaking, he discovers that he must still win a spiritual struggle with himself before taking the final step.

Although Silverberg closely follows Asimov's thematic suggestion of voluntary euthanasia as an element in population policy, the story never seems forced or artificial. And "Going" has a grace and dignity that are surprising, coming from a writer who is known for awkwardly self-conscious stylistic tricks and morbid characterization.

Lafferty's "Ishmael into the Barrens," on the other hand, is the most inventive of the four. It shows Lafferty is perfectly capable of writing good science fiction -- it's just that, usually, he'd rather do something else. The story is also notable for isolating his philosophy (usually obscured by a cloak of symbolism and mythology) in, one might say, theologically pure form.

As a Catholic, Lafferty's attitude in this tragedy of illegitimate childbirth in a society that is a weird amalgam of secular Utopia and the Counter-Culture triumphant, is diametrically opposed to that of Asimov. But the contrast makes "Ishmael into the Barrens" all the more interesting -- even if hard for a non-Catholic to believe.

But Harrison, taking Asimov's suggestions as a synopsis, instead of a theme, offers in "Brave Newer World" a story devoid of originality and imagination. He uses a standard detective-story plot involving the sabotage of bottled embryos at a eugenics institute, and the solution involves the revelation that blacks are being bred out of the gene pool by prejudiced ectogenetic engineers. Since this is one of the specific dangers Asimov has already mentioned in his foreword, the reader must be left wondering why he bothered to finish the story.

Even Harrison's mediocrity, however, has to be considered admirable next to Panshin's nauseating self-indulgence. Panshin, as you may know, doesn't believe in science fiction -- and especially not in the S.F. short story. He doesn't even believe in reading fiction nowadays. What he does believe is that he is doing the world some sort of a favor by taking up 26 pages to inform it how much trouble he is having trying to carry out Asimov's assignment. Also how he is contributing to the Great Revolution by rapping with a couple of friends from Springfield, Mass., and reading "Creative Mythology." After all of that, he finally gets around to an 11-page dud of a story about a Superchild of the 21st Century who visits 1970 in a time machine and can't stand the horrors of our era -- at least, not in comparison to those of 1381.

Two good stories out of a four-story anthology. Not really a bad percentage, as anthologies go. But still disturbing in a way. Science fiction is in trouble if it takes someone of Asimov's stature cracking the whip to obtain even halfway satisfactory results. Asimov has other things to do, remember, and this anthology is strictly a one-shot -- as was "Three for Tomorrow" under Arthur C. Clarke's inspiration a couple of years ago. Where are we going to get the editors who can duplicate the work of Asimov or Clarke on a regular basis?

-- j.j.p.

UNIVERSE 2

ed. by Terry Carr
Ace 84601 * 95¢

Another editor who thinks he is doing his part to revive science fiction is Terry Carr, formerly with Ace and now operating as a sort of free agent in soliciting stories for the Universe series.

It's a rather peculiar role for Carr, considering how involved he was not too long ago in the movement that practically killed off the genre. And it's not even clear whether his present intent is still the same as it was for Universe 1 -- there's no introduction. Still, there are some interesting stories -- and one doesn't find many of them anywhere these days.

Biggest surprise of the anthology is Joanna Russ' "Useful Phrases for the Tourist" on an alien planet -- chock full of such gems as "This cannot be my room because I cannot breathe ammonia," "My eating orifice is not at that end of my body" and "The Earth consulate will hear of this!" Quite a performance for Russ and the dour literary Puritans from among the ranks of the Clarion workshop who assisted her.

Other stories range from pretty good to pretty awful. Among the former are two time-travel tragedies, Bob Shaw's "Retroactive" and Gordon Eklund's "Stalking the Sun." In the former, a guilt-ridden soldier is able to redeem himself -- perhaps -- in a confrontation with an alien race that travels in time as naturally as humans do through space. The latter is more a tale of damnation, with a hunting party of thoroughly amoral humans stalking their distant and degenerate (or are they?) descendants. Both are notable for conveying a sense of strangeness -- akin to that in some of Henry Kuttner's fiction.

William Rotsler's "Patron of the Arts" is a lot better than one would expect, coming from a man whose previous experience has been with pornographic magazines for the most part. A human-interest story of the conflict between an artist pioneering a technologically innovative art form and his patron, Rotsler's story has sex in it, to be sure -- but is emotionally involving too. It may be an attempt to imitate the type of science fiction Roger Zelazny used to write.

Edgar Pangborn's "Tiger Boy" is a fairly good tale of outcasts in a hostile and restrictive society that is in the same future as his novel "Davy" -- but about 150 years later. Interesting in itself, but not lengthy enough to add anything significant to the reader's knowledge of the times -- and whether they are changing.

"A Special Condition in Summit City" is a mildly amusing piece by R.A. Lafferty which presupposes humans have communicated by telepathy all along -- and don't realize it until a couple of mad scientists try interfering with transmissions. Robert Silverberg parodies time travel stories in "When We Went to See the End of the World" -- a collection of leadenies masquerading as ironies about bourgeois tourists ignoring the collapse of the real world while taking trips to imaginary futures (among them that of H.G. Wells' "The Time Machine"). Gerard F. Conway's "Funeral Service," another dismal attempt at social commentary, has an alienated son trying to bring back his father by having his memories programmed into a robot -- with predictable results.

Harlan Ellison mixes Edgar Allan Poe's interest in graveyards with Samuel R. Delany's brand of mythology in a ghost story called "On the Downhill Side." An improvement over his New Wave stuff, at least. From Gardner R. Dozois comes "The Man Who Waved Hello," another excursion into the trite theme of the horrible alienation allegedly being brought about by technology -- with a "shock" ending. Pamela Sargent tries to outdo Dozois with "The Other Perceiver," about an alien who believes in Berkeley's metaphysics -- and turns the world into his idea of paradise, namely a big pile of shit.

Grania Davis' "My Head's in a Different Place Now" represents the Counter-Culture at its arrogant worst. A group of welfare clients find a tropical paradise, then achieve salvation by eating mushrooms that turn them into platypi. All this is "groovy" and "outasight" -- while any other life style is "plastic" and "shit." Probably this is the most mindless story ever to appear in an S.F. anthology. Beside it, even as stupid a piece as Gene Wolfe's "The Headless Man" -- a shaggy Headless man story with allegorical pretensions -- seems entertaining.

-- j.j.p.

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