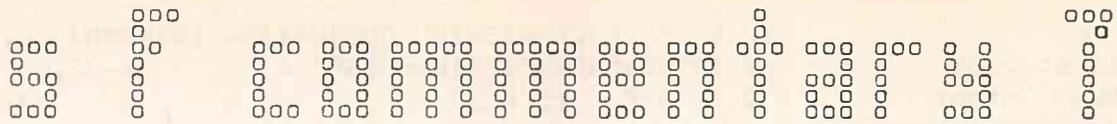


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NOVEMBER 1969

INCORPORATING AUSTRALIAN S F REVIEW

RAISON D'ETRE:

PICKING UP THE STENCILS

The Editor

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INVISIBLE WHISTLING BUNYIPS

Bob Coulson
Ron L Clarke
David Penman
Lee Harding
Ron E Graham
Harry Warner Jr
George Turner
Franz Rottensteiner
John Brosnan
Samuel R Delany
Jack Wodhams
R J N Gibson
John Foyster
Hal Colebatch
Phil Harbottle
Michael O'Brien
Robin Johnson
Damien Broderick
Richard E Geis

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CRITICANTO

Bruce R Gillespie
David Penman
Franz Rottensteiner
Michael O'Brien
John Foyster
Paul Anderson

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Edited, printed and published by BRUCE R GILLESPIE of P O BOX 245 ARARAT VICTORIA 3377 AUSTRALIA for the love of science fiction, fandom, money (\$A 3.00 for 9), and anything you want to throw in my letter-box, barring bombs and writs.

Production assistance from Stephen Campbell, who would not acknowledge the cover even if I took the cowardly way out and blamed it upon him. Need we say that this magazine needs cover art-work (and an art editor as well?) as well as piles of petty cash.

This magazine should contain 45 pages, including cover, unless we have collated badly again.

The editor is indebted to Gestetner for the paper, ink and stencils for this issue, and not so indebted to them for their duplicator, which will probably break down again.

And before you read on, make what you will of this: one astonished barman at the St Louis World S F Convention exclaimed: "You people must really like each other!" (Bob Coulson, YAWDRO 192).

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IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENTS and not-so-important trivia....

1 CHANGE OF ADDRESS

From one box to another have I moved, as you may have noticed if you haven't ignored the Contents Page as usual. Any letter or parcel or (best of all) cheque addressed to

P O BOX 245, ARARAT, VICTORIA 3377, AUSTRALIA

should reach me, but anything already sent to Box 30 in Bacchus Marsh will still reach me okay.

2 VISION OF TOMORROW

Large quantities of free publicity are scattered throughout the rest of the magazine. Any body else who wants to send copies of their publication at top speed from England, or anywhere, might get the same publicity. However, Phil and his magazine remain unique.

3 SYDNEY SCIENCE FICTION CONVENTION (SYNCON)

Not quite so much publicity throughout the issue because, by the time you receive this issue, you should know whether you are going or not, and may even be on the way. For the unconverted... read RAISON D'ETRE.

4 THE POVERTY SITUATION

i.e. mine (although Biafra could do with some help as well). This malignancy may still prevent me getting to Sydney. If you have not yet subscribed, then you know the answer to my problem, don't you?. By the way, if you are American or English and rich, please don't send cheques. They devalue badly, and they take 21 banking days to be cashed. Send cash if you trust the Post Office, and international money orders if you don't. Thank you in advance. Bankbooks and fanzines crossed, I say - see you in Sydney!

say, the World Convention three weeks after it has finished, instead of reading Bob Bloch's report in IF eight or nine months afterward. It is vital to read about the experiences of people who attend various types of conventions throughout the year, if Australians still want to bid for the 1975 World Conventions. It is not until you read the same point over and over again that you realize that the quality and service of the hotel venue is the single most important factor in the success of a possible Worldcon. But no Australian convention has ever been held within or in association with a hotel!

Extend this instant education course throughout a year, so that it includes Basic Introduction to Fannish Characters (this could take years if studied in detail) and Relations Between Fans and Pros (several units of which I have already failed) and the timid, very serious critic-editor turns into a slightly more confident, far more unpleasant critic-fan-editor who has now resolved not to write quite so many 2000 word editorials about reviewing. Instead I may even leaf through the stencils of this issue and the pages of other fanzines and muck around for a few pages. Let's see.

*Much of the news that I could put in this column turns up already in the INVISIBLE WHISTLING BUNYIPS column. So we turn over to that - and face the continued clamour about the leading Pro-Fan event of this year in Australia, VISION OF TOMORROW. The magazine has had its troubles, some of which are mentioned by Phil Harbottle (editor) and Ron Graham (publisher). I've received Numbers 1 to 3, but from the latest hearsay, I cannot tell whether Australians can buy the magazine commercially or will be able to buy it in the future. The easiest way to obtain a copy is to send a sub to Phil Harbottle in England. The magazine should go into offset in January, and will feature stories and articles from most of the important writers working in England at the moment. Chris Priest is promised for Issue No 4, Lee Harding has now sold several stories to the magazine, and despite his first impressions of the magazine as expressed in SFC 6, John Brunner has also sold an article to Phil. I will formally review Numbers 2 and 3 next issue.

*News on the VISION front ties in well with news of the Sydney Science Fiction Convention (otherwise known under varying versions of the abbreviation, Syncon). I thought for awhile that the Sydney Conmen were going to follow the hallowed example of their Melbourne counterparts, and release as few details as possible until the day before the Convention. However, Robin Johnson, Peter Darling and Co have come to light with a hopelessly crowded programme which should go nicely from the 1st January til about the beginning of Easter. Instead, that mad mob Up There hope to squeeze it all into three days (January 1 - 3, 1970). The list of panels looks remarkably like the Contents Page of S F COMMENTARY, which I take as a compliment, but it may frighten people away in droves. The Guest of Honour is VISION publisher, Ron Graham (which explains the connection between this paragraph and the last one), and the program includes (for the whole program would take another stencil) an INTRODUCTION TO FANDOM AND FANNISH ETHICS, which will presumably be a sermon against the unfannish deviations of B R Gillespie; WHAT WAS STAR TREK ALL ABOUT? (??); S F AND FANDOM IN AUSTRALIA IN THE 1940s AND 1950s, which should be a short discussion; S F IN THE '70s; THE GOLDEN AGE WAS IRON PYRITES

(Continued on Page 43)

invisible whistling bunyips

bob coulson
ron l clarke
david penman
lee harding
ron e graham
harry warner jr
george turner
franz rottensteiner
john brosnan
samuel r delany
jack wodhams
r j n gibson
john foyster
hal colebatch
michael o'brien
robin johnson
damien broderick
richard e geis

BOB COULSON

(3rd September 1969)

Route 3
Hartford City
Indiana 47348
U S A

I have here S F COMMENTARY Nos 2 and 3, which arrived not too far apart. No 2 first. I can't find much of a thrill in reviewing, I'm afraid. I started out to try to let my friends in on some of the

books I enjoyed, and warn them off the worst of the crap. I still have that idea in mind, but right now I'm reviewing as much to get free books as for any other reason. (Problem is that I still have some honesty in my reviews, so that after seeing them some companies never send me any more books - Belmont is a prime example. But I manage.)

S f readers and intelligence. I think there is no question but that s f readers have a higher than average IQ; you can argue about what relation that has to intelligence. Emotionally they are somewhat more juvenile than the average (or maybe not; I just read a news account about a woman who blinded her husband by throwing hot grease in his face during an argument and then in a fit of remorse drenched herself in gasoline and touched it off. I have yet to find any stf fans that childish emotionally).

About the rubbish in science fiction. Recently I had occasion

to read a Western Writers of America anthology, and what I assume was an average quality slave novel (slave novels are the newest fad in this country, and I had an idea for a parody, so I needed some background). And now I feel much better about the "rubbish" in science fiction. Have any of you people ever read any of the other popular forms of fiction? The worst of science fiction compares quite favorably with better-than-average westerns, spy stories, historical fiction, etc. (Maybe not with "classic" detective novels, but who writes them any more? All I see on the stands are reprints). You're all trying to compare John Jakes and Lin Carter with Anthony Burgess or Boris Pasternak - or even more literary figures - try comparing them with Frank Yerby or Ian Fleming sometime. I think that one of the reasons why science fiction authors bitch so much about the state of the field is that what they want to do is write literary masterpieces and get paid well for doing it, and in any fiction those are disparate aims.

RON L CLARKE

(4th September 1969)

78 Redgrave Rd
Normanhurst
NSW 2076

What is with all these people who insist on illustrations in fanzines? In Australia we have some good illustrators, yes, and most of them are in Victoria (the ones who are

actively known to fandom, that is) and most of them are comics/sword-and-sorcery (liking CONAN, for example) but they do not usually give the atmosphere s f faneds are after. I'm talking about the artists who have published so far, who like comics/s-and-s mainly and all are first-rate artists. It is a waste of time and money to electro stencil illustrations which are not first rate for a fanzine such as S F COMMENTARY.

****brg**** Some may find fannish talk in this column surprising, but Ron's letter (from a fanzine editor who uses as few illustrations as possible and still makes his product look handsome) gives me an excuse to talk briefly about the Great Problem of Artwork in Australian Fanzines. In Australia, if you do not own an electronic scanner (\$700+), you must ask Roneo, Gestetner or one of the other duplicator firms to scan electrostencils for you at \$3.10 a time. And then it is extremely difficult to force deep blacks from those electrostencils, which means that even artists who use heavy lines (such as Stephen Campbell and Dimitrii Razuvaev) find their works badly served.

In the meantime, American fanzines roll on with illustrations on every other page, and with an offset appearance from electrostencils (such as in SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW). How do you do it? *******

DAVID PENMAN

(early September 1969)

45 Mountain View Rd
North Balwyn
Vic 3104

In my humble and completely uneducated opinion, the last issue of S F COMMENTARY (No 5) was not bad. 45 pages is better than 70,

though it will be better when you can cut it down to about half its present size.

My insistence on brevity may seem pedantic, but I have a reason. In my experience 9 out of 10 keen s f readers think a fanzine is a kind of toast rack. About 18 people in my school read a book within 2 months of it coming into the library (plus eight more in the s f club who have already read it). I am the only one to get a fanzine (this one), and I don't pay for it.

If, perhaps, even this magazine was modified a little and promoted, it might break into a vast new market. The following could be some suggested modifications.

- (a) More brevity and clarity in reviews, format, everything.
- (b) Smaller, handier shape as in ASFR 18.
- (c) 50 word "reviews" on older, good books each issue.
- (d) Promoted, "boom" issue of 1000 at 10c each.
- (e) More "direct" selling, perhaps through universities.

I know this may sound radical but consider the advantages. You have a widely circulated and useful magazine which, if the idea works, will probably run a profit. You are helping to spread s f, and entering a new field.

***brg** This magazine may not run to dangerous visions, but glorious visions we now have. Anybody who wants to capitalize this great idea may apply immediately. In the meantime, I just don't think it would work, but maybe... someday...

LEE HARDING

(14th September 1969)

Olinda Road
The Basin
Vic 3154

Just received S F COMMENTARY 5 - clean and legible at last! - and have been sufficiently moved to sit down and write this loc.

***brg** (First and only interruption in this issue). I consider myself honoured, and might point out that Letters of Comment from Lee Harding do not arrive with regularity. Words of fiction are more frequent... see further news of Lee and VISION OF TOMORROW around the magazine. ***

But don't expect long missives from me on a regular basis. I've got such a sore head from reading through those big-headed American pros currently filling up the better-known US fan magazines - one bragging how he writes a novel in a week (and his stuff reads like it, by which I mean hasty and ill-conceived and filled with inadequate first thoughts and phrases just dropped off and left there unfinished), while another boasts how many drafts he writes; and then rears up on his hind legs and begins to crow about what Writing is All About. And here in S F COMMENTARY 5 we have good old Jack Wodhams doing a similarly graceless thing - albeit more modestly - but enough is enough, dammit, enough! These people should stick to their craft and write more fiction. I would conjecture that a commercial writer of science fiction is rather poorly equipped to discuss literature. Significantly, the better writers seem to leave the fanzines alone; the ones who don't quite obviously can't do away with fond old habits. Perhaps I

should jump on the bandwagon and belabour your readers with my consideration of Writing As A Performing Art...?

Your review of VISION OF TOMORROW No 1 struck me as a mite cavalier, and your comments on my own effort considerably suspect. It was a lousy story, probably the worst thing of mine that's ever got into print, and I squirm to be reminded of the tosh I was turning out - and in all seriousness! - five years ago. I know that writers - and young writers in particular - are prone to bleed; but I can't think of anything worse than a condescending review. I can smell 'em for miles. But this time I'll give you the benefit of the doubt: I, however, thought it was awful.

On one point I do agree, and that is that VISION looks like adopting an agreeable Never-Knowing-What-To-Expect character, the sort that typified the old Carnell NEW WORLDS at its peak.

***brg ** The readers of VISION agreed with you, Lee, but I can think of several Harding stories I've enjoyed less than CONSUMER REPORT. I must have read it on one of my few friendly days, I suppose ... ***

RON E GRAHAM

(19th September 1969)

P O Box 53
Revesby
NSW 2212

I am pleased to note that you were impressed with VISION 1 despite its visual appearance. As you can well imagine I am perhaps the magazine's most vehement critic and

I am quite sure that you will find a marked improvement from issue to issue, particularly from Number 3 onwards, when we will be spreading the cover illustration over the cover with logo blocked in as part of the overall picture. Interior illustrations will be far more profuse and we are also proposing to print articles, such as for instance, S F IN THE MOVIES by John Baxter, which will I hope have a very fine visual impact as well as a pleasing and interesting text.

As for Issue No 3, New English Library will be handling distribution and they are also co-operating marvellously well with us in the matter of cover art and interior layout and this co-operation I am hoping, together with Phil's fine choice of stories, will take VISION a bit further along the road towards its eventual goal of No 1 position in the s f field.

You will be interested to hear that Jack Wodhams' story ANCHOR MAN received an overwhelming vote from readers as the best story in Issue No 1, and Jack has therefore been awarded the bonus for this.

In case you are interested the exact order of popularity given by the voting results is as follows:

- 1 Anchor Man
- 2 The Vault
- 3 When In Doubt - Destroy!
- 4 Sixth Sense
- 5 Are You There Mr Jones?
- 6 Swords for a Guide
- 7 Consumer Report

In a forthcoming VISION we will be printing the first of a new series of stories by Lee Harding. The initial one is titled THE CUSTODIAN. This story will be important to us for it will be the first of what we hope will eventually become a whole series of stories with a very definite Australian background and viewpoint. This story will be unique also in that it will be illustrated photographically by Lee himself and I for one am looking forward with immense interest to seeing it in its final form.

Should you feel so inclined, Bruce, I would be happy to have you make some editorial comment to the effect that VOT is particularly interested in receiving submissions from Australian authors of s f stories with an Australian background and setting, and if these can be combined with new ideas or even strikingly new facets on old ones, we shall be happy to give them earnest consideration. We are, I might say, finding it very difficult to obtain sufficient good quality stories by Australian authors to fulfill the 45% Australian content allotted.

HARRY WARNER Jr

423 Summit Avenue
Hagerstown
Maryland 21740
USA

(20th September 1969)

I am not attempting to destroy my image as the person who usually can be depended on to provide an loc on any fanzine. This has been a bad summer from several standpoints. It has caused me to

fall far behind on loc obligations.

You are doing an excellent job with the difficult project of taking science fiction seriously without making it sound stuffy. Your own writing must have a great deal to do with this because a fair proportion of your own material in one issue will cause some contributors to the next issue to show some influence from it and they in turn may affect the attitude of the succeeding issue's contributors and so on. This seems to me to be a fairer way of keeping a science fiction-centred fanzine lively than the subterfuge of alternating serious stuff written dully with froth not really related to the magazine's basic purpose. I am even further behind on my professional reading than with my fanzine comments (current reading: THE WEREWOLF PRINCIPLE; next in line, LORD OF LIGHT!) so I'm unable to relate directly to some of your subject matter. I've never even seen an issue of NEW WORLDS, to give you some idea.

(Re S F COMMENTARY 1): I'm just as suspicious of I Q tests as George Turner. I am the most distant of eight cousins thrice removed from stratified intelligence. Tests I've taken for various purposes have shown my intelligence to be nothing to feel shame about, but far from the suburbs of genius area. But once during an army test, when I was almost drafted, I finished an entire test, accurately, and only later was told that the test was intended to show ability on the basis of what proportion of it the taker finished. Nobody at that induction centre had ever heard of anyone finishing it and getting most of the answers right. People kept staring at me for the rest of the day. I was rejected for physical reasons from the draft, and I still don't know what circumstances caused me to shine intellectually on that sole occasion.

(30th October 1969)

Behold, the reformed has not yet backslid, and is writing about the excellent fifth S F COMMENTARY a mere week after its arrival. This does not represent unalloyed virtue and good citizenship, because I can't find your letter at this moment and don't want to risk answering it under such conditions. But I'll attempt to redeem this new failure on my character a little later.

I was fascinated by the different usage of "hack", one that I'd never suspected. It's a shame that there is the different meaning up here, because over and beyond the confusion that the difference creates, we have no word in our version of the English language which serves as a synonym for your "hack". If we say that a good writer turns out potboilers, we come a trifle closer to your definition of hack, but not close enough, for the pot-boiler, which need not be downright bad, is nevertheless something considerably below the potential achievements of the creator. A related confusion that has always fascinated me is one that exists within the United States. It concerns the word "craftsman". I gather that it's a supreme compliment when Damon Knight or Jim Blish calls a writer a craftsman. But another field that interests me greatly, music, finds the word meaning an entirely different sort of accomplishment: the craftsman when mentioned in a music review is usually the second-rater, the person who can play all the notes in the score or can write music which follows the rules of the kind of music he's writing, but shows none of the personality, the genius, that the great pianists or composers demonstrate.

It's a good thing you included that 10,000-word limit for locs, in the same issue as Franz Rottensteiner's query about why we read science fiction. It saved me from a terrible airmail postage investment to get a bulky letter to you. Briefly, I doubt that it's an answerable question, in the present primitive stage of knowledge about human behavior, and all I can do is try to make some guesses about possible motives of my own.

Force of habit? Probably a partial cause, although I broke the habit for a long while, reading very little science fiction for about a decade. The urge to be in the know about the things I see in fanzines and the conversations I enter at conventions? Possibly, although it's quite easy to be an active fan without reading a word of science fiction and even to engage in the reviews of reviews of science fiction that are becoming epidemic in certain fanzines. An urge to be constantly reminded that there must be entirely different environments and behaviour patterns for living creatures, as a needed relief from the increasingly dismal view that I take of the real world about me? I'd choose that hypothesis, if I were limited to just one. The ever-living hope that I'll chance once in a long while on a sentence or a page or even a couple of chapters in a science fiction novel that more than compensates for all the worthless hundreds of thousands of dull words? I seem to watch bad movies on television for some such reason. Just the other night I sat through two hours of PICNIC, finding almost nothing to give me pleasure, and then all was compensated for by the final thirty seconds or so when the camera suddenly recedes from the earth and pans over the Midwest farmland arousing a chill that could get a dozen guesses if I tried to analyse why that tiny sequence stirred me so strongly.

The main trouble with the way most of us prefer the science fiction we read when discovering the field is this: why does this preference hang on with respect to science fiction, when our tastes change so frequently in most other forms of creative work? I don't find many people who remain faithful to the kind of sketches or paintings that first introduced them to the world of serious art. A few people never get beyond Benny Goodman or Tchaikowsky after discovering jazz or serious music through these gentlemen, but the vast majority of listeners eventually come to regard them with slightly amused tolerance and keep their records in a dusty corner for replaying once every two or three years for old times' sake. But so many of us never get over the special affection we feel for the stories we read during the first year or two of our science fiction enthusiasm, as if these stories fulfilled the function for the intelligent mind that the basic legends about ghosts and fairies and Santa Claus provided for the mind when it was emerging from infancy to first awareness of the world.

The discussion about VISION OF TOMORROW was the highlight of the review section for me. I'm curious, though, at your implying your delight in Australia's major role in its literary diet. I don't mean to criticize you for jingoism, but rather I wonder if you feel that Australian writers have a special outlook or other potential which makes it desirable that they should be published.

About Silverberg's sudden emergence as a major author: the stories of his hack period aren't getting quite the recognition they deserve for one quality. They weren't works of genius by any stretch of the imagination. But they differed from most hack science fiction for their complete competence as space-filling stories. They did not have the terrible grammar, screaming loose-ends, suspicious similarities to other stories, or any of the other evils that hack fiction by untalented writers displayed during the same era. Come to think of it, I've never heard a loose end scream, and if I'm not careful I'll be ranked in your mind's eye as the first New Wave loc hack.

I liked both of the full-page pictures. But I hope you continue to discriminate against artwork. In a time when the printed word is falling into disgrace and neglect, it would be nice to see it reign absolutely supreme in at least one large fanzine.

***brg** You have not been reading SPECULATION recently, then, Harry... but Pete Weston has started to scream for cover art as well. If he thinks he needs art work...

Your word "craftsman" fits my meaning of "hack" very well. In the meantime, Brian Richards from Western Australia reminds me pointedly that I never did get around to apologizing to John Brunner for letting the nasty word cross our pages. Sorry, John; sorry, Brian. In the meantime I notice that SFR 33's lead review uses the word in exactly the same way as I have been doing (about Edmond Hamilton) which means that the Oxford definition is not too well known Stateside either.

My reviews of VISION are, and will be, highly jingoistic. I mean... an s f prozine originating from Australia!... the idea is still astonishing. My jingoism includes the outlying islands of England and Ireland, of course. ***

GEORGE TURNER

(25th September 1969)

14 Tennyson St
St Kilda
Vic 3182

You and John agree that I've missed the point of Cordwainer Smith's work, but neither of you has a word to say about just what the point is. My point (let me spell

it out) is that he is very entertaining, emotionally very persuasive and very overrated as a writer. John says my "beastliness" is merely a reaction to the political philosophy of the writer (about which I know little except by hearsay, and care less). I say it is a reaction against the explicit descriptions of the facts behind the emotionally persuasive Smith universe - and I cite A PLANET NAMED SHAYOL and the relevant passages concerning slave status in THE UNDERPEOPLE. If such a status quo is part of the Smith political philosophy, then I am less impressed than ever.

What matters, from the point of view of a novel which has to stand on its merits, is that the "beastliness" is shrouded in sentimental-ity. A PLANET NAMED SHAYOL is particularly notable for the fact that its catalogue of horrors fails to horrify; Smith wrote of them as if he were one who had read about horror but had never experienced it, and so placidly piled pain upon nausea with the same prettiness with which he wrote about all other emotions. Even his love affairs, so powerful at a superficial reading, are sheer sentimentality, and never lead to anything but melodrama and a slushy touch of soap opera. Real emotions produce true drama; Smith's never do.

What I really had to say about Cordwainer Smith has little relevance to the above, which was a side issue, included among the minor objections. My main contentions have been that he has suffered from too much praise because the work has been closely looked at only by devotees rather than by honest reviewers, and that THE UNDERPEOPLE fails because it is based on a falsification of facts. To those I have now added a third - that his emotional projections are superficial, which is disastrous in a writer who leaned so heavily on the emotional approach.

So please, Bruce and John, if you must defend the idol, defend him in the middle of the arena, not on the fringes. That I have enjoyed most of the Instrumentality stories I freely admit; they have been good entertainment and, like all mere entertainment, ephemeral - they will have their short day and be forgotten save by the kind of cultists who enshrine Lovecraft and E R Burroughs (shudder). The fact that I have enjoyed them has not made me prey to their essential hollowness. And that, I suspect, is my real crime in the eyes of the worshippers.

John Foyster is of course right in his distrust of "solidification of opinion", and dead right in keeping his options open. But the fact remains that on any subject which affects you a stand must eventually be taken; you must adopt what seemsto you a logical point of view and operate on that basis. There are few people so ineffective as those who pride themselves on seeing both sides of every question; they inevitably have nothing creative to say and are liable to finish up incapable of action. But you must, of course, be prepared to throw an opinion overboard as soon as a contradictory fact emerges. And that can be a heart-burning effort. "Solidification of opinion" as I used the term is a

gradual process, a part of the effort to discover a basis upon which to commence creation. Which is one of the reasons why so much contemporary "realism" (so-called, heaven help 'em) fails to impress with its catalogue of observation and failure to attempt evaluation. The really questing mind always evaluates and is cheerfully prepared to be wrong when a better evaluator comes along.

It's a pity to see Robert Silverberg disturbed by my review of MASKS OF TIME, particularly as it was an overall good review and properly appreciative of the book's merits. I offered a paragraph of technical criticism, which he apparently finds offensive and "inaccurate", though he doesn't say wherein its inaccuracy lies. He was probably better pleased by Banger's more starry-eyed summation in S F C 5, but for my part I have often wished that reviewers (particularly when they are also writers who have learned their trade the hard way) would dish out more technical criticism and less literary philosophy. I stand by what I wrote, but must correct Bruce's impression (in his editorial note) that I was treating MAN IN THE MAZE as routine s f and MASKS OF TIME as something different or better. MAN IN THE MAZE was workmanlike, and this is a literary virtue which little s f shares. So was MASKS OF TIME, but with the reservations I noted. Perhaps the cutting of that 15,000 words from MAN IN THE MAZE was, for once, a right action on the part of the editor. MASKS OF TIME would have benefited by the deletion of some five to six thousand. I considered both as novels, with no concessions to the fact that they are s f novels. John Bangsund likes the double standard, and for one who accepts this his review is fair enough. It so happens that I don't accept it, and neither should any self-respecting writer. I would be thoroughly upset to find one of my novels reviewed as an "Australian novel" and therefore to be measured only against more of the same. It's an experience that I haven't had yet.

*** brg ** You are right, George, about the sneakiness of my comments recently about Cordwainer Smith. There is only one factor that prevents me turning them into documented articles - time. Anybody selling that commodity may apply to the address listed on the contents page. In the meantime, there is my adulatory article in MENTOR 14, which you still don't appear to have read, George. ***

FRANZ ROTTENSTEINER

(29th September 1969)

Felsenstrasse 20
2762 Ortman
Austria

Re Stanislaw Lem: if he is an answer, he is an answer to the whole crowd of s f: showing you how real s f, a really speculative literature that is aware of both

science and literature, might be written. He's the closest thing to a universal genius that the s f field has yet produced. During the last few months I have gained valuable insights into his work (although - alas - only second hand!) Still most of his - and probably his best - stories are unavaible to me. But our correspondence has brought me fascinating bits of information, such as, for instance, that during his writing career, Lem has thrown away about 2 million words of fiction, being dissatisfied with them; that a Polish philosopher has just written 60 pages of

analysis on his latest novel, which is 200 pages long; that he fears days when the Russians shoot another satellite into space for then the telephone rings the whole day, reporters asking for his opinion; that there is a conference going on about his book PHILOSOPHY OF CHANCE, a fat volume on literary theory; that he will fly to Moscow to supervise the filming of his SOLARIS (which will appear from Walker & Co in the USA); that in the USSR, his book SUMMA TECHNOLOGIAE has turned him into an authority on cosmic questions, and so on.

Give my regards to all Australians; should I ever be forced to leave Austria, I'll come to you and you will all be disappointed.

(22nd October 1969)

Please note the article enclosed. I'm not very happy with it; my translation leaves a lot to be desired, I feel, so feel free to change what you think needs some change. I hope you can follow the gist of the argument... Naturally I find it about the last word that has been said on the subject. I only wish I could read Lem's detailed analysis of Cordwainer Smith: you know, he likes the man very much: in effect, he said that there is more originality in a story by Cordwainer Smith than in the whole of Tolkien.

Sure, Lem isn't modest, and he has only contempt for most s f. But you must remember that he isn't a writer within a very limited field. In his own country and in the Soviet Union at least, he is generally recognized; he is one of Poland's representative authors, author of numerous articles on philosophy, literature, and the sciences (including medicine - he studied it originally)... Oh, you'll be able to see SOLARIS - Faber and Faber are publishing the English edition.

Dick Geis published the contents of QUARBER MERKUR (19 was my mistake) with some mistakes. Here it is as it really is:

Contents - QUARBER MERKUR 20

Albert Ludwig: ANDROIDS AND HOMUNCULI (reprint, 1918)
Dr Vitali Stolyarev: INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIETY IN THE WORLD OF
THE FUTURE
A J Cox: SOME THOUGHTS ON H P LOVECRAFT
H P Lovecraft: NOTES ON INTERPLANETARY FICTION
Stanislaw Lem: POLAND: S F IN THE LINGUISTIC TRAP
Peter O Chotjewitz: THE VAMPYRE: THEORY OF A MYTH
Franz Rottensteiner: WORLD IN REVERSE (on AN AGE)

QUARBER MERKUR 21

Albert Ludwig: ANDROIDS AND HOMUNCULI (3rd part)
Michael Maier: THREE OLD GERMAN UTOPIAN NOVELS
Herbert Silberer: GOLEM AND HOMUNCULUS
Stanislaw Lem: ROBOTS IN S F (due to appear in JOE 3)
Peter Kuczka: S F IN HUNGARY
David I Masson: SOME THOUGHTS ON LANGUAGE IN S F
and an article on s f in Spain.

Each issue about 80 - 90 pages; 50 c.

***brg** All this is highly unsubtle publicity for the upcoming Stanislaw Lem issue of S F COMMENTARY. Writing in Poland sounds more comfortable than writing in Australia, but we'll help Lem towards those Yankee dollars as well ***

JOHN BROSNAN

(10th October 1969)

12 Barkley St
Fairfield
NSW 2165

Wonder of wonders, another LoC from
John Brosnan. And in the same
year too! But I thought I'd better
write you something if I wanted to
see another issue of S F COMMENTARY.

Why can't more fanzine editors be like Leland Sapiro? Years ago
John Bangsund lent me some fanzines while on a selling trip to
Perth. A few of them I enjoyed so much I sent a dollar away for
future issues. RIVERSIDE QUARTERLY was one of them and ever since
then I've been receiving issues. I'm sure it must be a book-
keeping error - the number my sub is supposed to expire at is 16
and the latest issue is only 13. And I sent my dollar in 1967.
Perhaps there's another John Brosnan somewhere (a frightening
concept) who is wondering where his issues of RQ are going to.
Actually my conscience is beginning to bother me and I'm toying with
the idea of sending Leland an LoC. Also RQ is a damned good
fanzine.

Yours is getting that way too. Number five was the best yet.
The new type face is a tremendous improvement: being able to read
all of S F COMMENTARY without squinting is quite an experience.
Also congratulate Stephen Campbell on his artwork. Of the two I
would have picked the interior illo for the cover, less cluttered
and more effective. But it's your fanzine.

I don't really blame Robert Silverberg for being a little irate
with you. You've really got to learn to be a little more careful
of what you say in print about the pros (or anyone, for that
matter) especially if you intend to send them copies. Robert
Silverberg is one of my favorite s f authors at the moment. His
Hugo win for NIGHTWINGS was well deserved. His style of writing
in NIGHTWINGS was as much fun as Jack Vance's best flowery efforts
(another author I'm beginning to warm to) with the added attraction
of plot and character substance.

At the moment I'm waiting with bated breath for my next rejection
slip, expected at any time from F&SF. It's for a story I wrote
called THE LAST INNOCENT and is my most ambitious effort to date.
It is set in the 25th century and concerns the love affair between
the last Christian and an assassin with the population explosion
carried to extremes in the background. The population explosion
theme was inspired by MAKE ROOM MAKE ROOM, not John Foyster's speech
at the Easter Convention. It could be described as an attempt to
amalgamate the writing styles of Ian Fleming, Cordwainer Smith and
Enid Blyton. Have I succeeded? Only time will tell.

Please mention in S F COMMENTARY that I am organising the auction
at SYNCON and would appreciate lists from people who have anything
to sell. Within reason.

SAMUEL R DELANY

(15th October 1969)

1067 Natoma St
San Francisco
California 94103
USA

Much thanks for the issues of
S F COMMENTARY.

Much thanks as well for the praise
of THE EINSTEIN INTERSECTION,

HIGH WEIR, and ..AYE AND GOMORRAH. I would be dishonest if I said it didn't feel good. I'm often interested in readers' reactions to what I write (maybe I ought to say sometimes I'm interested in readers' reactions to what I write). Out of the three pieces S F COMMENTARY talked about, the point I found most useful was:

He can leave ugly threads of non-communication hanging in metaphors like "The Princess Islands lay like trash heaps before the prickly city".

In the hope that it may be interesting, let me try an exercise in honesty. During the month I was in Istanbul, which provides the scenery for the story, I never saw the Princess Islands. I met several people who had stayed on them, however. Somewhere out in the Bosphorus, from their talk, I built up a picture of a set of islands, fairly small, that one time in the history of the city had been resort areas. Many elegant mansions remained, but delapidated and deserted. The longhaired/sleeping-bag set camp out in the houses, and tell tales of scorpions running about in the night. Istanbul is a city of mosques, and from a distance, the minarets make it look like a pin cushion in a strong magnetic field (keeps all the pins vertical). From what I know of such places as the Princess Islands as they had been described to me, I constructed the simile of trash-heaps in the water of the isthmus. "Prickly" is the adjective that best describes the sky line as I remember it. I set the spacefield, where the sentence is uttered, somewhere down the Asian shore where the city might be seen across the islands.

At least one person who knows Istanbul much better than I, picked this sentence out of the story as a particularly telling bit of description that authenticated the tale for him - an interesting point to me, simply because I have absolutely no idea whether the Princess Islands look like trash heaps or not. What interested me (what was useful to me) was what did not communicate (and... was therefore ugly?). "Prickly"? Was this read as in a "prickly situation"? i.e. metaphorically rather than literally?

Do you know the Dylan Thomas poem, that begins something like:

I see the waters of her face...

which is terribly confusing if you take "face" as literal and "waters" as some metaphor for tears. But it makes perfect sense if you realise the poem was written while the poet was sitting at the edge of a North English canal: "Face" is the metaphor, "waters" is the literal image.

Or is there some other aspect of the sentence that is unclear?

I don't think an author can ever know the value of his own work. Other people telling him, for good or bad, doesn't help. Without trying, I can think of at least four thoroughly atrocious writers who have received the Nobel Prize for literature and probably died thinking they had contributed a major step to the development of their respective languages. As easily I can think of another four who died thinking no one would ever read a word they wrote, and who have joined the pantheon of Great and Reverend Authors.

In general, I tend to like my own work. I can still get some enjoyment rereading my earliest publications. But HIGH WEIR,

along with CAGE OF BRASS and THE BALLAD OF BETA-2 are the three things I've published that I dislike the most. One of the problems (or is it salvations) you have as a writer who writes for an audience larger than the number of people who can fit into one room is that for practically everything you write, at least one person will manage to beat his way to you and exclaim: "That is the best thing you've ever written", while somebody else will make the same trek to tell you "That is the worst thing you've ever written."

So one is left with one's own judgment.

For what it's worth, HIGH WEIR and TIME CONSIDERED AS A HELIX OF SEMI-PRECIOUS STONES overlapped in the writing. I saw them as using identical material, scientific and otherwise. TIME is my idea of a good story; WEIR is my idea of a bad one.

The scientific concept of the brain as a holographic storage unit that you praise in SFC No 3 had been floating around in my mind some three years before I wrote the story - a cover story for Fred Pohl: that is, you are given the cover, and you write a story around it. Perhaps one of the reasons I don't like it is because it was a cover story, and I found myself using all sorts of obnoxious s f cliches, a scientifically untenable Mars, the absurdly international crew in which New Intellectual stereotypes are substituted for Old Racist ones, no less unpleasant. The "idea" is thrown in, not dramatized.

But many people prefer it to the other.

All I can do is muddle on in the direction I think I ought to go; because I think I ought to go there. I gnash through all this: you might find it useful as critic to explore two uses of the same material knowing which one the author feels best about.

Again, I enjoyed the magazines muchly.

It rains in San Francisco, the sky growls, and twice last week the Earth quaked (Rictor reading 5.7); I look forward to the next issue. I can't agree more with Brian Aldiss in the standards he asks for in your criticism. Congratulations that you come as close to them as you do.

*** brg ** Perhaps not close enough: I still have not read the novels of Samuel R Delany. This may explain why I have not yet completely connected with your fiction, although rereading TIME CONSIDERED... provided me with a few more clues. The "prickly city" phrase was annoying, not so much because it was incomprehensible, but because, to understand it fully, I would have had to stop reading the story for several seconds and work the whole thing out... and then find that particular piece of description has little to do with ..AYE AND GOMORRAH's central pre-occupation with human love. After all, a phrase or sentence must not only be striking in itself, but must ring in harmony with every other part of the story. I do not find this harmony in many Delany stories I've read, even in stories I admire greatly, such as TIME CONSIDERED..., but perhaps I've not looked far enough. There are some compensations for being an s f critic: such as a whole 9 Delany novels yet to be explored! ***

JACK WODHAMS

(16th October 1969)

8 Stone St
Berala
NSW 2141

Have received a letter of pardon from John Brunner, have been cleansed of my sin, and we are now all very matey, thank goodness.

(note c-o-a)

Said before, and now said again:
it is my contention that writing

is to communicate intelligence to as many people as possible, to be understood by as many people as possible. He can't complain, so let's keep taking good old reliable Will Shakespeare, for example. Everybody knows that he is great - but how many people know why, and can appreciate his finer points? Not the vast majority. The average Joe Bloggs prefers Carter Brown. We may say that intellectuals, with their capacity to grasp the subtler messages, have material enough on hand to exercise their wits and should hardly require more to add to their subjects for contention. Joe Bloggs is the man to be reached, the man who would most benefit from a bridge.

To be understood, to impart understanding, to be clear and unmistakable, to reveal depth while at the same time remaining highly readable - to the general public - this is a formidable proposition, a tying of the format of Keith Laumer with the insight of Omar Khayyam. Me, I need one hell of a lot more practice. All the utensils are there for a juggling, the apparatus and flame, but first, as Mrs Beeton observed, we must catch the hare, catch an audience. The hare-brained, perhaps.

Recently I came back from another world. True. The fabled South Seas of Conrad and Maugham was here on Australia's doorstep. It seemed silly not to go and see it, to keep saying "Must go sometime" but doing nothing about it. Mad, impulsive fool, hang the expense, do it NOW! Which is more or less the way it happened.

To be a rich man for a while, by the Lord Jim! Aboard ships, waited on hand and foot - "Crayfish salad, sir? Certainly, sir. After that, sir would like perhaps the Tournedos a la Bearnaise? No? The Duck en Daube? Of course, sir, an excellent choice. That's very good, sir..." - plus duty-free grog and some suckers to play poker with me in the lounges. A civilisation afloat more civilised than my home environment. But it suited me, it really did. It is so nice to get the treatment we truly deserve, the attention and service. It makes a man feel that at last he is where he belongs.

To step from ship to shore can indeed be to step from a higher civilisation to a lower. New Zealand was not all that backward, (sit on that protesting Kiwi's head), but Fiji evidenced a marked decline in standards. Certainly there were spots, in the shape of new hotels, where the surroundings, accoutrements and trimmings could not be said to be inferior to Australia's best - and no more expensive. But outside these islands that contained the living conditions that we have come to desire, accept and expect, there was much absence of the subsidiary elements that contribute to the breadth and scope of our awareness, things that we are accustomed to take for granted.

Suva at least boasted a modest library. Tonga, where I spent a couple of months (without, seemingly, being missed) did not even

have that. Nor a regular chemist's shop in the main town.

There was no hurry in Tonga. No pressure, very restful. Not the least sign that a rat-race existed. It was the Pacific dream-island, away from it all. Bliss, you might think. But... there is nothing to do there. And few agencies to consult, and little equipment to employ. For a couple of weeks holiday, fine, very relaxing. The living can be very cheap. Consider that a labourer earns a dollar a day, and it may be appreciated that \$100 can go a long way. But to go native, for purposes of prolonging the presence of pennies, this \$100 buys existence, with no luxuries.

If the amenities of civilised living are desired - hot water, latest medicines, wide choice of goods and sale prices, free houses of art and information, hire, repair and advisory service, ready availability of anything from formica, floor-tiles and Swedish furniture through to pottery-clay, pigments and typing-paper - then a rat-race type environment is a necessary factor.

What is wanted has to be paid for. Clothes get dirty in a tropical paradise, the same as anywhere else. To launder soiled garments at a stream by bashing the daylights out of them against a rock, may seem touchingly picturesque to a visiting viewer, but the method is inefficient, is a chore and always has been. To save time and labour, which thus might be employed for nobler, more elevating and satisfying pursuits, a washing-machine is required. A washing-machine means capital outlay, plumbing, heating, electricity bills, maintenance. It is a corollary of the simple life that a person must either himself perform the drudgery of burying his own shit-bucket, or by some means, usually with money, persuade some less fortunate being to do it for him.

To need money to buy leisure and freedom from the more onerous but unavoidable facets of simplicity, to wish to sleep between clean sheets upon an innerspring mattress to have an electric jug to make one cup of coffee, thus to save the necessity of first going out to search for two sticks to rub together, to have an easily-cleaned floor underfoot and a roof that is not a harbour for pests - to obtain these things means joining the rat-race. The list is endless, aspects so familiar that to discover them missing, to learn that the normal and obvious and commonplace is not, after all, universal, comes as something of a shock.

How strange that these simple native people should be ignorant of so many simple things. And how odd that these natives, born in such romantic surroundings, should be blind to the delightful uncomplication of their existence. For paradise to them is New Zealand, the US, Britain, Australia - anywhere, in fact, where there might be prospects for higher wages, greater opportunity, and more of that spice of life called variety.

The static way, abiding unchanging by the successive seasons of the year, year in, year out, is attractive for the security of its predictability. But it is not very exciting. To make progress, though, to attempt to improve, this is interesting. And s f is all about innovation and change and forecast, wild postulation and sober prophecy. S f could not survive in a bucolic society. Now that's a thought, isn't it? S f is alive and needs alive people to appreciate it, people tangled and screwed by the complexities of here and now, but game enough to introduce into their minds

additional conceits and problematical fancies.

Pacific Islanders do not read sf. They do not read much of anything. They have an awful long way to go before they can enjoy - yes, enjoy - the challenge modern living makes to sanity.

Bruce G, this is enough. Do you think I've got all the time in the world? Note new address. It is thought that Sydney might be where some action is.

R J N GIBSON

(late October sometime)

2 Baringa St
Blaxland
NSW

My last word on STARSHIP TROOPERS. Gary Woodman is right about Heinleinian democracy - only the RSL members get the vote, or Heinlein's equivalent of RSL members,

which would make his democracy about as progressive as Australia's would be under the same circumstances.

Concerning "purposeful violence": you can tell Gary I didn't invent that. It's the mainspring upon which the book winds out.

Heinlein: "There can be circumstances where it's just as foolish to hit an enemy city with an H-bomb as to spank a baby with an axe. War is not violence and killing, pure and simple; war is controlled violence for a purpose. The purpose is never to kill the enemy just to be killing him, but to make him do what you want him to do; not killing, but controlled and purposeful violence." That isn't by any means an isolated paragraph. There are lots of other things about public hangings and floggings and other things. You know them if you've read the book and so should Gary Woodman. This is all done, as Gary Woodman says, in a quite journalistic style, and there's no pornographic sort of violence, but what I object to is the whole philosophy of Heinlein.

Your comment about placing in jail everybody who took STARSHIP TROOPERS too seriously was amusing, but not entirely accurate. The fact is that we have some Tasmanian politicians at the present moment calling for bringing back the lash, and if not public hanging, then private government-sponsored hangings. The point is that although these politicians may never have read Heinlein in their lives, they have Heinleinian mentalities. On the whole, Heinlein probably does have the majority on his side - but maybe this is too pessimistic.

JOHN FOYSTER

(October 2something, 1969)

12 Glengariff Drive
Mulgrave
Vic 3170

An exam tomorrow and still he writes! A couple of things puzzle me about SFC 6...

One of my puzzles was the reason you published Paul Stevens' article.

Anyway, here are some comments. Is it a coincidence or not that Paul fails to say, in the first paragraph (in which he discusses the importance of sex), that people do it? :: Paul has lately been making quite a few comments on de Sade - in this case describing various of de Sade's works as "innocent". As these books are banned, and as Paul's view is at odds with some others I

have read, perhaps he would like to back up his assertion, quoting chapter and verse. of course. :: The suggestion that "Hugo wouldn't have paid for that sort of story anyway" is most directly belied by Gernsback's well-known publication SEXOLOGY, which he published for many years and which, though I haven't seen a copy lately, is probably still around. :: Burroughs was not a "new s f writer" for Gernsback. :: A WOMAN A DAY was the sequel to THE LOVERS, was it not? :: Paul's description of the plot of Burgess' THE WANTING SEED can only be fairly described as a simplification. And it doesn't really fit in with the point I assume Paul was trying to make. The greatly increased sexual powers of the protagonist/superman in Frank Robinson's THE POWER could hardly be described as protrusive :: "Aurigan". :: Paul seems also to have missed out on such minor matters as the recent novels from Essex House by Farmer and Stine. And surely the most important thing to be discussed in the field is the effect which a perverse attitude towards sex has had in magazines such as ANALOG and so on. Why, in other words, single out the goodies, as Paul has tended to do, rather than go after the baddies and show how stupid/twisted they are? Quoting Smith and Cummings as examples is hardly adequate.

Peter Ripota's article on Sturgeon will go well with the piece George Turner has coming up in JOE (no thanks for the plugs, by the way - Geis blew the gaff on an extinct magazine; you did so for a living one).

HAL COLEBATCH

27 Portland St
Nedlands
WA 6008

I wonder if you can help me locate VISION OF TOMORROW? I am interested in writing for it, and as far as I know there is not a copy in Perth. Brian Richards, who was my only source of information, has gone to Port Hedland to set up shop, so as

far as I know I'm/s^{an} f fan all alone in a million square miles. The tyranny of distance is bad enough in Sydney, but in PERTH,...!

I think John Brunner has betrayed in his letter why, for all his protesting and for all his admitted competence, he is not a great s f writer, on the scale of say, Aldiss or Ballard - he does not look below the surface of the merely current to the great immutable absolutes from which the state of being human arises. He is fashionable, in a way Aldiss and Ballard have never been. Thus, to me at least, he has always appeared just another s f writer, though a perfectly good one. He is going off the deep end when he lays down what the future will be from the limited standpoint of London 1969 - Black Power and drugs. What would he have said had he lived in Soviet Central Asia, or Brasilia, or Tromso Fiord or an oceanic island? I feel that any vision from one individual's set of experiences should know itself to be fragmentary.

My final honours exams begin tomorrow. I should not be writing this.

*** brg ** After that review 'm' all, news about distribution of VISION remains depressing. On latest information, Gordon and Gotch had not guaranteed anything, Merv Binns had not received copies directly from Ron Graham that he had asked for, and... But let Phil Harbottle tell the story..***

PHIL HARBOTTLE

(29th October 1969)

VISION OF TOMORROW
2 St Nicholas Buildings
Newcastle Upon Tyne 1
England

I was pleasantly surprised to receive your copies of S F COMMENTARY. What especially grabbed my attention, of course, was your long review of the first issue of VISION.

I feared the worst, having already experienced some half-baked reactions in my own country. So that I was again pleasantly surprised. Your assessment was fairly accurate, and the criticism were largely well founded. I was particularly pleased at your reception of Coney's story. This is his first published story, and I have bought more of his work and I am hoping that he becomes a regular contributor. However, I do not go all the way with your strictures on Ken Bulmer's story. Although I must admit that its inclusion was something of an experiment. I wanted to see the reaction to a border line story, stressing the adventure angle. I thought it might appeal to the non-sf fan, that is, the general reader who might be attracted to our magazine by way of, say, the cinema or the TV moon coverage.

Unfortunately, it appears that only s f fans take the trouble to write into the magazine (which they are doing in great numbers) so that it will probably be impossible to assess the general reader's reaction. Accordingly I am, for the moment anyway, dropping this experiment. In tead, I hope to include as many stories as possible that stress the human interest side, such as Coney's. People will always want to read about other people, I guess.

Lee Harding's story was an oldie, as you said, but since then he has been working on new stuff and I can assure you that its quality is absolutely first class. Similarly, Damien Broderick has recently come through with two very fine stories. Jack Wodhams has changed his style somewhat. Although comparisons are odious, you will gather the idea if I say they are a cross between Thorne Smith and Eric Frank Russell - plus Jack himself, of course. Bert Chandler has weighed in with an unusual novelette, far removed from his space sea stories, that has terrific human impact.

You were wrong about Temple's story. Bill wrote this one especially for us, and in all honesty I think it is a lot better than you stated. Certainly, it was very popular with most readers. He has a fine novelette in No 5.

At the time of writing I am busy checking proofs for the fifth issue. The lay-out problems which largely stemmed from a bad printer, are being overcome, and we will be featuring lots of attractive art work. Eddie Jones in particular is well to the fore, including covers. Harking back to the rotten printer, please note that they delivered the second issue of the magazine so late, that we decided to put out Number 3 before it, and the second issue will now come out the following month (although it is still printed as being Number 2). Number 4 will follow in January and things will be on an even keel after that - especially as I have tied in with a new and absolutely reliable printer. By the way, John Foyster is doing some regular book reviewing for us, and doing an absolutely marvellous job.

(8th November 1969)

VISION will eventually be imported into Australia for general sale, a few months late, but in the meantime I am negotiating with Gordon and Gotch to arrange individual subscriptions for Australians. I'll pass the gen to you as soon as I have swung it, and then your fanzine and others will be able to announce that "subs are available through Gordon and Gotch at £X." OK?

*** brg ** Well, not really. 20 to 30 copies sent directly to McGills newsagency in Melbourne would sell out within a week, but I believe negotiations are still progressing on that score. In the meantime, I advise Australian and American potential readers to send subs directly to England. The waiting time will be about two months, but at least you are certain of your copy.

In the meantime, reviews of VISIONs 2 and 3 should appear in the next issue of SFC - and Phil was not kidding. The artwork in No 3 is positively lascivious, as Mrs Malaprop might say.

The "half-baked reactions" in England, which Phil talks about, mainly stem from long-winded and mysterious objections to Phil's known taste for the work of one John Russell Fearn. Since I will not mention the subject again, I might as well say that I have not as yet seen any evidence of a predilection to any one sub-genre of science fiction within VISION, and do not expect to see such a trend. We all have our favourite authors - my prejudices are better known than most - but some English fans have seized on J R Fearn and made of him the most destructive red herring I've heard of for a long time. End of lecture; end of J R Fearn (in these pages at least); let VISION now prove its own worth. ***

MICHAEL O'BRIEN

158 Liverpool St
Hobart
Tas 7000

(30th October 1969)

On the subject of the excellent SEX IN S F feature, well... surely Page 27 would have been more attractive drawn from another angle? :: I hate to quibble,

but regarding John Carter ("he never once used a spaceship") didn't he use an invisible space vessel in SKELETON MEN OF JUPITER? :: Homosexual planets: how about Cordwainer Smith's CRIME AND GLORY OF COMMANDER SUZDAL? (**brg** Should have thought of that. Thanks for buying into our Let's-Correct-Paul-Stevens Issue ***)

ROBIN JOHNSON

33/100 High St
North Sydney
NSW 2060

(9th November 1969)

A propos OUT OF THE UNKNOWN: I was interested in the review by Gibson of the first show in the second series. I hope he keeps it up for some of the others, particularly

IMMORTALITY INC which I see is on this week in your area. Try and watch it: it's a good workmanlike Anglicisation of the original. It is actually from the third season, as I remember seeing it in colour in the UK at the end of last year.

***brg** John Gibson's article also set me off on OUT OF THE UNKNOWN - although nobody has yet thought it worth mentioning, S F COMMENTARY 6 reached Victorian readers a few days before LEVEL 7 was shown on local television. It was a most remarkable program indeed - the horror crystallises implacably as the inhabitants of the shelter realize that they are not perfectly secure. It has also occurred to me that atomic war of some kind is quite inevitable, not because anyone wants it, but because the weapons are there. Many of the other OUT OF THE UNKNOWN episodes that I have seen have also been remarkable. John Brunner's LAST LONELY MAN was particularly well acted, and last night's (Friday, 12th December) episode (John Wyndham's RANDOM QUEST) was as professional a piece of delightful British schmaltz as I have ever seen. Thanks, Mr Gibson, from all the newly addicted OOTU viewers.

DAMIEN BRODERICK

(18th November 1969)

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S F COMMENTARY is developing pleasantly now that it is legible - I was particularly interested by Brunner's long letter on his work

habits, and the piece on Sturgeon was a joy to behold. ::: Dreary and dead though the topic is, I'd better clear up a few points about my Vonnegut article. It was written in 1965 - a good many moons ago. As you may have noticed by the 'trappings, it was done as an English III essay in American literature; as such, it was an exercise in gamesmanship and not much more. It was, I must admit, pretty bloody successful in meeting consumer specifications as laid down by the Monash English Department literati, and if as well my computer brain caught an occasional flash of value I would not regret the fact - but I wouldn't lay odds that it happened. Incidentally, I agree to some extent with the people who felt it was incomprehensible; it was constructed shortly after reading the two books for a tutor who had just done the same, so I alluded rather than quoted. The quotes are there, sort of, but you've gotta be pretty familiar with the novels to pick them up. I should have gone thoroughly from start to finish and quoted chapter and verse, but I couldn't be bothered; it just wasn't that important. Stirring, baby, is all.

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Stevens seems so sure sex is all that is needed to insure sales of a book. In the cases of pure-sex books, however, currently, the average sale is around 15,000 copies. Not exactly enough upon which to make a fortune - even at \$1.95 a copy. I am hoping to make

around \$50 in royalties on one recent book.

***brg** I seem good at ending this column on melancholy notes. Anderson and Robb didn't make it this time, and neither did anything else arriving in December. Keep waiting, hoping, reading....

gratitude as they receive Larry's permission to print the story). One of the really big sixteen of 1967, as they might say.

But what does Mr Average Reader (me, for the duration of this review) find in HANDICAP? For a start there is Cliche (a): One planet, inhabited by a "five-foot hairy creature with a bald, rounded top" which "looks like some stone-age carved idol"; Cliche (b): one wheeler-dealer business man who sounds as if he should be doing the rounds of Illinois, not the plains of an alien planet, and Cliche (c): one automated product - hands for poor handicapped aliens unfortunate enough not to resemble human beings. The distress that this situation can cause our hero is not only imagined, but written down with feeling:

"...Minds but no hands. I tell you, Jilson, it gives me the shivers. For as long as we expand to other stars we're going to meet more and more handless, toolless, helpless civilizations. Sometimes we won't even recognize them. What are we going to do about them?"

"Build Dolphin's Hands for them".

And when the reader is shown that the alien's handicap may resemble that of the dolphin, we have Cliche (d):

"Lilly was trying to prove dolphins were intelligent, but he treated them like experimental animals. Why not? It makes sense. If he's right, he's done the species a service. If he's wrong, he's only wasted time on animals. And it gave the dolphins a hell of an incentive to prove he was right."

And there is no reason to believe that Niven is sending up his scientific corn-cob of a hero! The big solution of this totally uninteresting mystery explodes with all the power of a Cliche (e). In one dried fig of a story lies the seeds of every boredom that blights the pages of IF and GALAXY and ANALOG and F&SF and AMAZING and... : mini-lectures, condescension towards unAmerican races, Normal Red-Blooded Boofhead American Males, and, worst of all, language that scrapes the reader's mind with all the music of a spaceman's rock drill.

Now, Messrs Wollheim and Carr may be forgiven one gaffe. Because of the quality of the material from which they had to select, they may have been forgiven a mediocre uniformity in this volume.

No team of editors can please any one section of the mob while providing entertainment for the whole, although Boucher & McComas, and later, Robert Mills and H L Gold made good attempts.

However, I can only wonder impotently why the editors did not roam much further afield (as they did for the 1968 collection).

Eleven of these stories came from American s f magazines, four from pre-catastrophe English magazines NEW WORLDS and SF IMPULSE, and one story from ORBIT 2. And this was the year that DANGEROUS VISIONS was published! This was also a year in which the new NEW WORLDS achieved some notable triumphs in its first few months.

The selection in this provocatively titled volume looks masochistically narrow, in view of the field available at the time.

There are other aspects of the editor's criteria for selection that puzzle me, including just that central question of criteria. What were they looking for? My own crude ideal when choosing s f would probably resemble that of many readers: originality of

thought and language; new ways of thinking and writing, the widest possible beam of light shed on the maximum width and depth of human activity.

But that one word "originality" gongs emptily against the shells of the stories in this volume. Not just one or two stories should never have appeared in a WORLD'S BEST volume, but story after story reveals a dry core of unoriginal thought expressed in distressingly unoriginal language. Some examples:

SEE ME NOT (Richard Wilson) reads like INVISIBLE MAN acted by Rock Hudson and Doris Day. It is for the WOMEN'S WEEKLY fans among the s f fraternity, and contains such gems of sparkling dialogue as:

"What's so funny?" his father asked.

"Corky doesn't have an invisible daddy."

"That's right."

"Corky's daddy has a jeep, though. Why can't we have a jeep?"

"We can't have everything," Avery said. "Which would you rather have?"

Bobby considered it. "An invisible daddy and a jeep."

DRIFTGLASS is the worst story of Samuel Delany's I have read. The language is ornate, but filled with more soggy expressions than even Chip himself would like to admit ("...my beard is red, my chest hair brown, while the thatch curling over neck and ears is sun-streaked to white here, darkened down to bronze there, 'midst general blondness"). Somehow I have given up believing in characters who speak like that, yet spend their time in dangerous scientific expeditions into the sea off California.

AMBASSADOR TO VERDAMMT (Colin Kapp) pads an interesting notion (That, if we met a truly "alien" race, ipso facto we would be unable to make any contact at all) with boring lectures and uninspiring ANALOG-type characters.

... And Keith Roberts is decorative but unimportant (CORANDA) ... and R A Lafferty not very funny in two stories ... and Harlan Ellison screams incoherently in I HAVE NO MOUTH AND I MUST SCREAM ... and, worse still, Andrew Offutt writes like Harlan Ellison, only worse, in POPULATION IMPLOSION ... and...

... This becomes not so much a review as a cry of protest. Was 1967 quite that bad?

Not quite. There are four stories that lift themselves from the unilluminated horizon, and they comprise a large slice of the book in number of pages. Isaac Asimov's THE BILLIARD BALL is talkative and overlong. Its characters are belligerently implausible: Professor James Price (with "the greatest mind since Einstein" and "the third person in history to win two Nobel Prizes") faces Edward Bloom, his arch-rival in business and science (Bloom was "a living flash of light, colourful, tall, broad, loud, brash and self-confident"). You may have heard the one about the meek and mild scientist forever frustrated by the fabulously successful technologist.

But the story is not quite as fearsome as it sounds. Asimov has

a sense of humour, which is unusual in s f, and almost absent from the rest of the stories. Asimov waves his writer's wand over his unlikely puppets for most of the story, but it is all sleight of hand. The trick ending is surprising, humorous and memorable and a fitting addition to Asimov's long-standing catalogue of tall stories.

Robert Silverberg's HAWKSBILL STATION also balances upon its Big Idea, but in this case the unifying notion is interesting in itself. A future world government dumps its political prisoners in the Cambrian era of Earth's prehistory, sends them supplies via one-way time machine every so often, and so cannot watch the interesting developments in social organization that spring up the leavings of their callousness.

Or, let's say that there are some interesting developments in social organization hinted at. Silverberg does not allow himself sufficient scope to elaborate upon the really important aspects of Hawksbill Station. (I could visualize a psychodrama like CAMP CONCENTRATION devised from the same elements, for instance). Instead, Silverberg tells the reader about some of the more interesting eccentrics of the Station, then spins his tale towards the affair of the "mystery prisoner" who writes little notes about all the other prisoners. HAWKSBILL STATION is not the drama it should have been, but it is a much better yarn than it could have been.

The other two delicacies are verbal contrivances spun from old themes, but for that reason dazzle the reader more than they ought to. Ron Goulart's THE SWORD SWALLOWER relates a further jaunt of Ben Jolson from the Chameleon Corps, and, like THE AVENGERS which blended humour and danger in about the same quantities, this story has lots of good jokes about apacifism and homes for rich old neurotics, and the like. If Mr Goulart has not written for Bob Newhart then he should:

Purviance: "My job is to simply take back all the planets and rule them from Earth. I believe in a strong central Earth, Mr Janeway, as well as Earth's rights. I'm also against any tax on a man's income, most toothpaste, and the parking meter."

"I had a notion," said Jolson, watching the leader of Group A rock, "you were a sort of pacifist, a man aimed at cutting down wars."

"I'm interested in cutting down wars I don't start, yessir," said Purviance.

I could read plenty of similar short stories in s f magazines, but rarely do, but I am a little glad that Ron Goulart does not write novels.

About the best story in this collection, there is least to say. D G Compton's IT'S SMART TO HAVE AN ENGLISH ADDRESS mixes the problems of experiential recording, English archetypes, and civilization in general, with a clarity and precision non-existent in the rest of the book. The themes are not original, the characters are not real, but the combination of the two is made important.

Do four good stories in one year justify your purchase of this book? I leave that to you. Have you collected the others? Complete your collection - the experience will be instructive in a melancholy way. But was it worth collecting the Best of 1967 in the first place? I fear not.

If Wollheim and Carr skimmed the best of the worst in 1967, Damon Knight went the whole hog in ORBIT 3 and plumbed the depths of 1968. Knight does not admit this, of course. He talks about a "new twist" on "an old theme", about a character who is "not a cardboard, fantasy figure, but a real person", although the story proves the opposite, and, most ambiguously, that "much more will be heard of James Sallis".

Those who have not read the volume might be almost tempted to agree with Knight's optimism. After all, two stories from ORBIT 3 won Nebula Awards, and the collection has been praised in journals as prestigious as SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW. ORBIT collections have a long record of success, although, suspiciously, not in the Hugo stakes.

But only those who have not read the volume could also agree with the back-cover blurb writer's presentation of the book as "a superb and uncanny collection of s f stories". In Wollheim and Carr's collection, a few of the writers tried to leap the lips of well-worn grooves. Most of them did not succeed, but at least they did not rumble along the deepest gullies of those same grooves, as do some of the stories in ORBIT 3.

If you will, strike, or rather, sink knee deep into the prose of Richard Wilson (MOTHER TO THE WORLD). I remember Wilson best for his eerie, psychogothic THE WATCHERS IN THE GLADE (GALAXY, November 1964), and for some slick comedies in the years following. I do not remember this vast new nugget of women's magazine sentimentality that Wilson now seems to mine to great (financial) effect. However, this appears the type of story that now appeals to most of the SFWA most of the time.

Knight's introduction to MOTHER TO THE WORLD mentions Mary Shelley's THE LAST MAN, M P Shiel's THE PURPLE CLOUD, and three other stories. I could add others without much research: stories such as EARTH ABIDES that are plundered without too much attempt to shine up the ideas. It's the last-man-last-woman theme again, but the last woman is not very bright, the last man doesn't like stupid women, and so he goes into a huff for half the story. Wilson trivializes 43 pages with the completely uninteresting implications of this situation (yes, I know I said the same sort of thing about SEE ME NOT).

Wilson's varieties of sentimentality are endless: (a) He realizes the "dilemma":

It was difficult for him to look back and remember exactly when he had first realized with certainty that this was the woman with whom he was fated to spend the rest of his life, when it had dawned on him that this moron was to be his bosom companion, that he had to take care of her, provide for her, talk to her (and listen to her), answer her stupid questions, sleep with her!

and (b) decides that:

He jotted down on a separate piece of paper "Obligation to self paramount" and looked at it. He felt that he had to come first, with his duty to Siss a little lower (on the paper and in his estimation) because he was smarter than she was and therefore more worth saving.

Then he had another look and amended it. Siss was more worth saving because she was a woman and able to reproduce her kind.

But not without his help, of course.

Finally he put himself and Siss together at the top of the list.

Wilson is not horrified by his hero, as far as I can see. Exciting twist (c) comes when - how did you guess? - Siss bears a son who is intelligent! And that's all there is to the story.

This sort of thing may satisfy some people for a small part of the time, but how do you survive a whole book of emotional anemia and intellectual starvation? Each story lacks some or all of those elements of originality necessary for success in the field of science fiction.

Apart from its incomprehensibility, THE BRAMBLE BUSH (Richard McKenna) lectures until the reader's mental ears ring with the inanity of it all. Everybody tells everybody what is happening, without anything happening, and any emergent ideas drown before they see the light of clear prose.

Joanna Russ' THE BARBARIAN features a cute little heroine called Alyx who kills most of the people who oppose her, and lives according to the awe-inspiring philosophy that "He died for two reasons only: because he was a fool. And because we are not."

Gene Wolfe's THE CHANGEING could have been the best story in the book, but Mr Wolfe just could not bother. It is a domestic puzzle-story (did the home-coming hero slip into a parallel universe home-town, or not?) which should be interesting, but is not. It's not ^{that} there is not a great deal happening in the story: it is just that there is nothing to make things happen in the reader's mind.

I could continue, but I don't think the exercise would be profitable. The catalogue of absences could be long. There is the absence of poetry in James Sallis' memoir of an interstellar thinker (LETTER TO A YOUNG POET): Sallis' poet is too fond of his beautiful patio to worry about the real problems of humanity within the new, universal environment. Philip Jose Farmer spins a wisp of words in DON'T WASH THE CARATS, but, like Wolfe or Sallis, does not mix in the acid of surprise that might make of this story an experience for the reader. I did not see the (or any) point of Kate Wilhelm's THE PLANNERS, but I suspect that my mind was simply numbed by the rest of the volume before I reached it. And John Jakes (HERE IS THY STING) is the most disappointing writer here, because he attacks an interesting problem (experiential recording again), juggles with it excitingly for ten pages, and then lets the story collapse into a bewildering bathos of exclamation marks.

Blame the vintage? Blame the wine-tasters? Either way, ORBIT 3 is very jagged indeed.

DO ANDROIDS DREAM OF ELECTRIC SHEEP?

by PHILIP K DICK

Rapp & Whiting :: 1968
210 pages :: \$A.2.70

Reviewed by David Penman

After World War Terminus, the answer to man's emotional problems has been found in the Mood Machine. With this marvellous gadget in your home, all you have

to do to experience a particular mood is dial for it. 481 brings on "awareness of the manifold possibilities open to you in the future"... 888 is "the desire to watch television, no matter what's on it". If, for some reason, you don't feel like dialling, dial 3 for the desire to dial.

This is the depressing, and somewhat humorous opening to Philip Dick's new book DO ANDROIDS DREAM OF ELECTRIC SHEEP? It is set after an atomic war has turned most of the world into a lifeless desert. Most of the people who survived have migrated to the colonies such as Mars. The rest huddle together in the shells of the half empty cities.

To me, the setting is the one really strong asset of the book. Dick has envisaged a world where life - even that of a spider - is something precious, to be bought and sold and treasured. The picture is, I think, original, and I found the idea behind it thought-provoking, though the actual theme of the book goes off in another direction.

The story tells of a policeman, hired to kill escaped androids masquerading as humans. One day he is given a group of six to search out and kill. With a bounty of \$1000 each, if he gets them he will have enough to buy a real sheep, instead of an electric one grazing - or pretending to graze - on his rooftop.

The plot is simple. Some of the other ideas in the book are not. I may as well say that I do not like Dick's ambiguity, at least as it is used in this book. He hints at many ideas (android souls, machine induced empathy), but makes himself clear about none. Some people are Dick fanatics. I think that is because they enjoy being baffled, even to the point of being baffled as to what they are baffled about. I do not. Fortunately, there is more to the book than that.

The book would stand little chance competing against ordinary literature. It is a Science Fiction book, with Science Fiction ideas. Lacking depth of plot or character, it could never be a great book, but in the field of s f it stands out as better than average. You might do worse than find out if androids really do dream of electric sheep.

Actually, they don't.

GARBAGE WORLD

by CHARLES PLATT

Berkley X-1470 :: 1967
144 pages :: US.70c

Reviewed by Franz Rottensteiner

Kopra is the garbage world of the title; there the inhabited luxurious worlds of the asteroid belt dump their waste products. The garbage piles up in heaps, rotting and turning

into fertile soil. The place stinks, there is decay, decomposition, bubbles of foul gas forming. Despite all this filth Kopra is inhabited; and its inhabitants are content with their lot. Filthy of body, they are sane of mind (aside from their collecting bug), untouched by the sicknesses of civilization. The inhabitants of the other planetoids, on the other hand, are clean, but full of inhibitions.

This world is visited by an expedition led by one Larkin; ostensibly to install a new type of gravity generator, but actually to blow up the abomination, if necessary without a prior evacuation of the Koprans.

The aptly named Oliver Roach, a member of the expedition, is unaware of those plans. Like his fellow crew members, he detests dirt, but unlike them he is able to see the human beings behind the camouflage of dirt. Soon he falls in love with Juliette Gaylord, the daughter of the boss on Kopra. During a party of the natives he meets her and tries to kiss her, but experiences a disappointment:

But she'd been brought up in the filth of Kopra. The garbage world. Oliver suddenly realized the very taste of the kiss was revolting, the palms of her hands pressing either side of his face were wet and sticky with mud.

With a sudden cry of disgust he pulled himself free of her.

Soon, however, they meet again. Roach starts out with a tractor to inform some nomad Koprans of the imminent evacuation, and Juliette accompanies him as a guide. With them is also her father, whose hoard (a useless accumulation of scrap, broken furniture, bits of machinery and the like) has been stolen, which means a loss of stature for him, as the status of Kopran man is decided by the size of his "hoard".

The novel develops as was to be expected from the symbolic character of the planetoid: the tractor breaks down, the heavy rain of mud particles starts, the earth opens and in storm, flashes and thunder both Juliette and Oliver fall into a stinking pit that threatens to bury them. The pit, the cave, is one of the most common symbols for a return to the womb and the following re-birth: purification by decay. The pit is womb and cloaque at the same time - in the midst of dirt and filth new life originates. "Inter faeces et urinas nascimur" says St Augustine.

After the symbolic re-birth the situation is quite different. Roach has become another man:

In the past two days he had changed beyond recognition. Now, he was plastered with mud. He was unthinkingly breathing Koprans air. He was walking through the garbage jungle dressed only in his grime-soaked uniform. All the off-world habits had left him, as easily as a suit of badly-fitting clothes.

Such are the results of re-birth. Now the solution of his problems is easy. After his return he even dares to revolt against his superior Larkin. Before this he had already dared to ask Juliette for a walk, because he wanted to "loosen his limbs". If that isn't clear enough?

Implied in the symbol of the pit is a wish for incest, strengthened here by the fact that Juliette and Oliver both fall into the same

hole - after their their prejudices are gone; he does not notice her dirt anymore, and she does not mind that he is an off-worlder; he can love her as his sister, and she him as her brother; and soon enough both roll happily in the mud, making love. From the pit they are saved by Juliette's father, astrologically they have been reborn in his sign, and consequently he is master of the situation:

Singlehanded, Gaylord was altering everyone's outlook. He'd got his head back, he'd beaten the off-worlders, and he was back on top again.

Kopra cannot be saved. It blows up, but like a phoenix from his ashes. Kopra will emerge again on the other worlds of the asteroid belt.

The story is good entertainment, although the characters are all cliches, perhaps deliberately so. The symbolism, although a bit obvious, is quite amusing. The German author Arno Schmidt once claimed that intellectuals are indifferent towards dirt; in view of this I do not hesitate to proclaim Mr Platt an intellectual. Intellectuals feel a need for catharsis; the engineers believe that soap will do.

SIDESLIP

by TED WHITE and DAVE VAN ARNAM
Pyramid Books :: 1968 :: US.65c
Reviewed by Michael O'Brien

SIDESLIP is billed as a "science fiction adventure" on the cover, quite truthfully. That's about it. The back cover blurb tells all: "Plucked from his own 'time', a pawn in a Galactic power

play, Ron Archer fights his way through a deadly maze of intrigue and conspiracy to an incredible destiny at the end of the star lanes!"

It's not quite as bad as it sounds, though you may not believe me when you find out that the hero is (of all things) a private eye who just happens to slip into a parallel world while walking down Sixth Avenue one day. He manages to save the world, but his adventures along the way are quite interesting, and written with a few original touches. I won't mention them here, since it would destroy their value as surprises, and hence destroy the story. Good as many, better than some.

THE CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISASTER

by MATTHEW HUNTER
Fontana :: 1969
Reviewed by Michael O'Brien

THE TIMES called this book "the English answer to Dr Strangelove", which shows how much THE TIMES knows about s f. This is a grim Atomic fantasy, with none of the bite or humour of STRANGELOVE. An RSG (underground post-World War III headquarters) in East

Anglia is isolated by an A-Bomb explosion. Tension mounts. Has the country been destroyed? Is their Leader crazy? A quote on the back gives away what was to have been a twist at the end. The characters disintegrate predictably under strain. Conclusion; dull, not to be rated with such Atomic-age stories as DR STRANGELOVE.

A VOYAGE TO ARCTURUS

by DAVID LINDSAY

Ballantine S F Classic 73010 :: 1968
287 pages :: \$A.1.15

Reviewed by John Foyster

To reprint David Lindsay's A VOYAGE OF ARCTURUS was scarcely fair of MacMillan (in 1963) or, now, Ballantine (November 1968). As a "classic" of science fiction, virtually unavailable,

it managed to retain its reputation. But now Ballantine Books have made it available, with all its ghastly flaws, to the general public.

Ballantine have labelled this volume as "A Ballantine Science Fiction Classic", and this is partly true. But only the trivial part is true: even P Schuyler Miller, who will normally allow almost anything to be considered as science fiction, objected that it was not (ANALOG, April 1964, Page 92). For A VOYAGE TO ARCTURUS is unscientific, or even anti-scientific, and as fiction it is scarcely worthy of publication: and as science fiction, alas, it fails because it would not pass even the weakest tests that could be devised. Indeed, it is not even speculative, to use the word much bandied about nowadays.

All these things must have been apparent to Loren Eiseley as they are to me, for his introduction is one of the most defensive I have ever read. In the second paragraph of this introduction Eiseley admits that Lindsay's prose is "rude and awkward", and that his characterisation is poor. He does not favour the "over-dramatic" names Lindsay gives to his characters.

But, he claims, we should forgive these sins because... And it is at this point that I find myself unable to follow the argument any longer.

For Loren Eiseley claims that we should regard this book as important because (a) it has been reprinted and (b) some people have collected the book, and, in particular, Frank Lloyd Wright read it. I cannot claim to have read Mr Wright's literary works, so I am not at liberty to discuss the value of his opinion. But this is beside the point. The fact that one, or two, or many people like a book does not make it (as Eiseley seems to be seeking to show) "important". Loren Eiseley knows this too, so he continues:

The book, to hold such attention, must contain some message....

Indeed! It seems that we seek the message because Frank Lloyd Wright kept it on his shelf, and Frank Lloyd Wright, as we all know, cannot be wrong. How else can we explain this liking for an admittedly badly-written, melodramatic and juvenile book?

This message, after which apologists must seek so enthusiastically, is much the same animal as inhabits that more recent tower of Babel, Stanley Kubrick's film 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY. Kubrick and Lindsay share a fuzzy-mindedness which, when disguised by a few quick passes of the hand, appears to some as evidence of deep thought - nay, as deep thought itself. In Lindsay's case this manifests itself in what Loren Eiseley suggests by: "David Lindsay was perhaps too honest to record one voice alone among the many conflicting voices that represent the living world".

But even if the reader is able to take seriously this "message", this "journey into the self and beyond the self" (Eiseley, page vii) it is still unsatisfactory. For a book that fails on a superficial level cannot claim that its success lies deeper. I know of no book which is rottenly boring and badly-written but which becomes great because of its message. If the writer does not have the words or the language at his command we can scarcely trust his judgment on more subtle matters. Perhaps the scribblings of such a person may be interesting to the extent that we may discover something about the person but they are of no importance in themselves.

No, we must face the fact that we cannot rely upon a writer whose knowledge of the way the world works was so poor (cf. "Dale", "back rays" and Alfred Jarry). Nor can we excuse the author's errors on the grounds of youth (cf. Raymond Radiguet): indeed, had Lindsay been an at all impressive writer Loren Eiseley would have been able to say "how remarkable that such a young man should be so knowledgeable" instead of asking us to excuse his faults.

Readers of science fiction, accustomed as they are to yards of incompetent writing (writing of a standard which would have made even David Lindsay blush), must be expected to over-react to something a little better. But gentlemen, let us not be ridiculous!

(Reprinted from THE JOURNAL OF OMPHALISTIC EPISTEMOLOGY, No 1, July 1969).

THE WITCHES OF KARRES

by JAMES H SCHMITZ

Ace A-13 :: 1966
282 pages :: \$A.90c

An Ace Science Fiction Special

Reviewed by Paul Anderson

This book has a striking orange and black cover that has nothing to do with the story. On the back cover and inside are listed a number of extravagant claims ranging from Judith Merrill's "highly recommended" to P Schuyler Miller's review from ANALOG.

For a change, I agree with Merrill in recommending a novel. The beginning chapters of the adventures of Captain Pausert of Nikkeldepain are superb and describe the trouble he had when he rescued the three witches of Karres from their owners on the planet Porlumma. Prior to this things were looking rosy for Captain Pausert and he was looking forward to his triumphant return to Nikkeldepain and subsequent marriage to Councillor Onswud's daughter. His fortunes then take a sudden turn for the worse with more and more trouble coming his way until he is on the run from the Nikkeldepain police, and faces charges cooked up by Councillor Onswud.

This first section is space fantasy at its best, with a balance struck between humour and the sober seriousness of Pausert's disastrous situation.

However, this balance is upset in the rest of the book, and so the remaining 200 or so pages never quite reach the heights gained by Schmitz's promising beginning. The novel is an expansion of an earlier highly successful novelette, and it shows. The action

loses a lot of its appeal when the brave captain discovers his latent ability to handle Klatha magic. The plot becomes more and more involved and fantastic as his control over the wandering witches increases. Unfortunately as the plot unfolds the reader needs an ever increasing suspension of disbelief to continue reading.

However Schmitz does manage to maintain the quality of the humour with hilarious sequences following in quick succession. The scene depicting the clash between the pirates and Pausert and Gath is carried to perfection. But even the humour begins to lose its effect towards the climax when the invincible Captain Pausert saves the galaxy from domination by the infamous Nuri, the slaves of the Warm world Manaret. The final scene rings all too familiar with its confrontation between the good, heroic, brave, champion of the free galaxy and the evil, savage, rotten, nasty villains who seek to rule the galaxy. Besides, Doc Smith did it all much better in the Lonsman series.

For all that, this book is very good, and Schmitz almost brings off a masterpiece of a parody of that very hackneyed plot mentioned above. He uses a series of laugh-packed incidents to make his points, each of which extends further and further into the realm of the incredible.

The characterisation is adequate for the needs of the working of the plot, which is the important thing. Schmitz does not slow things up long enough to take a deep look at Captain Pausert or any of the other characters. The witches are merely convenient plot devices and are not allowed to be shown fully-developed in case some of the effect of parody is lost.

This novel is very good as it stands, but it does not live up to the expectations of the reader after the first two parts of the story. It is a worthy addition to the series of Ace Science Fiction Specials because of the very outrageousness of this brave captain's adventures.

CATCH THE STAR WINDS

by A BERTRAM CHANDLER

Lancer 74-533 :: 1969

206 pages :: \$A.90c

Reviewed by Paul Anderson

This book is printed in a Lancer Easy-Eye edition with space wasted on print that is "at least 30% larger than usual". This makes the whole package more expensive than it seems at first sight. The book comprises only 168 pages. The balance is taken up with a novelette reprinted from way

back in 1956. Unfortunately this reprint is not very good and is well below Chandler's current standard of writing. The story is based on an old gimmick but still reads fairly well.

CATCH THE STAR WINDS is good Chandler, but is only 168 pages long, and with that adjustment for 30% larger type it is reduced to about 129 of Ace's pages, or about one half of the average Ace Double costing 70 cents.

As usual, Chandler's love of the sea is woven into the story, and in this case it provides added interest to the plot. Chandler describes the maiden voyage of the "first of the real lightjammers",

the Flying Cloud.

Unfortunately the novel loses some of its impact when the Flying Cloud takes off for space because the most powerful character in the story is left behind. This in itself is a commentary on Chandler's powers of characterisation, for he has now built up Commodore Grimes, of the earlier Rim World novels, to the point where Grimes has taken on a life of his own independent of the stories. However in this novel Commodore Grimes is supposed to stay in the background, and the focal point of the plot shift to the lightjammer Flying Cloud. This ship is designed to function as a true sailing ship of space, "a vessel to run before the photon gale". The vessel is powered by a modification of the early Erikson drive, and because of this the crew is required to undergo an extensive training in the handling of ordinary sailing ships and a blimp in the rough weather on Larn. All too soon, this interlude finishes, Grimes bows out of the story, and the ship's crew have the task of sailing the ship on a ten year voyage through space.

The captain is handsome, of course. There is an eternal triangle variation in the story. Because the captain is so attractive the female members of the crew constantly try to win his favour, and, later, his affections. Chandler uses this hackneyed situation to good effect, and it all culminates in an abortive attempt to make the lightjammer exceed the speed of light. This leads to a series of short visits to some alternate universes, and in each, the crew-members change roles. At least there is fresh interest in a seemingly slight story.

The book is worth buying, if only for the short appearance of Commodore Grimes, but at 90c many may not bother.

THE SWORD OF RHIANNON

by LEIGH BRACKETT

Acc F422 :: 1953

126 pages :: A.50c

Reviewed by Paul Anderson

This book is described as one of "Cosmic peril in a lost world" on the front cover. For a change this is a fair description of the plot. THE SWORD OF RHIANNON is fairly standard fantasy, but can be regarded as science fiction, as it is set on a Mars of the future which varies little from that shown

by the Mariner 4 cameras. Reference is made frequently to the desolate deserts of the now almost dead Mars.

The reader is introduced to the now familiar Martian deserts at the beginning of the book, and the author wastes no time in starting the action. The book then proceeds at a furious pace in the best tradition of the Edgar Rice Burroughs formula of capture and inevitable escape of the hero. Fortunately the reader does not notice how hackneyed is the plot until he has finished reading.

Matthew Carse, ex-archaeologist, now adventurer, visits the ancient sea-faring civilisation of a Mars lost millions of years in the past. He fights friend and foe to redeem the name of Rhiannon, "The Cursed One". Rhiannon was a member of an extremely ancient race of great scientists, the Quira, and was exiled by them for teaching the reptilian Caer Dhu some of their science in a naive

attempt to lift the standard of living of the rest of Mars. However, the Caer Dhu used their newly acquired knowledge merely to gain domination over their less fortunate neighbours. Then as a punishment for his foolish action the Quiru imprisoned Rhiannon (whom Carse finds millions of years later) but they did nothing to rectify the damage done by Rhiannon. Therefore the name of Rhiannon was cursed for aeons by all Martians. (This gives rise to one of the paradoxes in the story. The book opens with Rhiannon called "The Cursed One", universally hated by present-day Martians, but at the end of the story his name is redeemed by those same present-day Martians, and he is restored to favour with the Quiru millions of years before the beginning of the story.)

The characterisation is about normal for a sword and sorcery book like this - about non-existent. The puppets are shuffled on and off stage, and none of the minor characters are developed. The only character that appears long enough for the reader to identify with is the hero Matthew Carse, but he is only a cardboard cutout like the rest. The author does not even allow him any serious errors of judgment.

This book has all the faults of the "capture-and-escape" genre, but Leigh Brackett manages to endow it with some life. The book is extremely readable, and should be read at one sitting.

THE RING

by PIERS ANTHONY and ROBERT E MARGROFF

Ace A-19 :: 1968

248 pages :: A.90c

An Ace Science Fiction Special

Reviewed by Paul Anderson

The front cover blurb for THE RING describes it as "chilling extrapolation" (Cliff Simak). Is it?

The plot is reminiscent of John Campbell's often quoted challenge of "What would you do if you were

absolute dictator of the world?" The story does not quite extrapolate that far, but the continued use of the ring of the title could create absolute dictatorship for the user. Ostensibly the ring is placed on the hand or foot of a "convicted criminal" in order to ensure that he/she does not transgress again while serving his/her sentence. The ring affects the nerves of the wearer so that if he goes against the programming of the ring he will be punished by an acute pain which quickly becomes unbearable.

On the surface, the idea of the ring is a good one. In fact, everybody already has one (a conscience) but can usually ignore it because it does not punish as well as evaluate the results of actions. It's easy to think of ways in which criminals might beat the ring, however. Any criminal worth his salt should be able to control his emotions so that the ring will not be able to discover whether a crime is being committed. A ring with such power could easily be made into a warning device: instead, the ring of this book is solely a means of revenge on the part of society against the person wearing the ring, but the authorities claim it as a means of reducing crime. (You could think of innumerable variations on this theme, none of which are included in this book. It could be adjusted to dole out moments of intense pleasure each time the

ringed does something the programmer considers either good or of benefit to society. A benevolent, if inhuman, dictatorship indeed!)

After looking at the gimmick, there is not much else to talk about. There are too many words in which to bury the somewhat limited plot. There is much space wasted on unwanted lecturing about the ring itself. In between lectures the plot is handled well, and should sustain the interest of a reader who merely wants a good action novel to while away a spare hour or so.

SHOCK WAVE

by WALT and LEIGH RICHMOND

ENVOY TO THE DOG STAR

by FREDERICK L SHAW Jr

Ace G-614

123 pages/123 pages :: A.60c

An Ace Double

Reviewed by Paul Anderson

The cover of the Richmond half of this double is awful, but the story inside is worse. Its main virtue is its length: a mere 123 pages. The normal difficulty with novelettes and short novels is that the author does not leave himself enough scope to develop his story, but uses a premise so thin that it would not stretch into a full novel. Such is the case with SHOCK WAVE.

The Richmonds' characters have no real life to them. The hero from Earth, Terry Ferman is put through his paces to keep the story moving. The other characters are moved in the same manner, although they often seem less alive than the hero. One character is a young girl to whom Ferman proposes at the end of the novel, but otherwise fails to gain his interest during the course of the novel.

The dialogue ranges from banal to painful.

The book reads like a reject from ASTOUNDING during the forties. The hero is one of those brave, intrepid engineers who can do no wrong. He investigates reports of some "anomalous signals" originating from a hidden canyon. All goes well until Ferman steps through some sort of space-warp and arrives at a base on an unknown planet. He is greeted by a computer which gives him "a basic orientation as Galactic Citizen" - whatever that may mean. This serves him in good stead until he outwits the computer and casually rediscovers some of the old Galactic Empire's best science. Every time the courageous band looks like landing in trouble Ferman discovers some more science and quickly applies it to their needs.

All in all this story manages to combine most of the faults that have ever been common in science fiction.

The other half of the double, ENVOY TO THE DOG STAR, is little better than the Richmond effort.

Some years ago, Earth scientists and geneticists combined to increase the level of canine intelligence to a point equal to that of humans. The new improved dogs were then used to function as the crews of space probes. The book itself begins far out in space, and tells of a reconnaissance mission sent to the Dog Star Sirius, and the resulting adventures of one of these Dogs. The

story is told from the viewpoint of the Dog, and the story regularly stops for the author to insert some manufactured propaganda expounding the virtues of the canine as a species.

This first third of the book finishes when the Dog finally reaches Sirius. Here, by strange coincidence, the dominant race is not Man but a race of Dogs.

The whole story is written at this level of predictability, and interest quickly wanes after the first few chapters. There is very little difference between this Noble Dog and any number of lesser human heroes.

SPACE TIME AND NATHANIEL

by BRIAN W ALDISS

Four Square 1496 :: 159 pages

Original publication 1957

Four Square new edition 1966

Reviewed by Bruce R Gillespie

Preparing an article on the novels of Brian Aldiss gave me a good chance to take a look at this early collection of short stories as well. It was a delight to find this collection which shows that in 1957, Brian Aldiss was already within the Top Ten s f writers, without having written a novel (NON-STOP

appeared in 1958). The stories in this collection necessarily ride the formulae of the fifties more obviously than do the stories that Aldiss has written since. However, within the sting-in-the-tail range, these stories show a wide variety of styles and approaches.

There is DUMB SHOW, for instance, the last story in the book. There are enough of the sort of faults that dog the rest of the stories in this piece: Aldiss insists on the inclusion of a couple of paragraphs of "explanation" within a story that depends on its slice-of-mind moodiness. The action flickers, not flows. The Big Idea nearly swallows the characters. But Aldiss uses the effects of sonic warfare as a light globe with which to illuminate the plight of "the ill-matched pair, the grubby girl of three and the shabby-elegant lady of fifty-eight", sufferers in a world shattered by violent waves of sound which may kill and contaminate as effectively as any multi-megaton weapons. The effects are worse - the warring sides do not erase life from the Earth, but disintegrate the genetic structure of all living things so effectively that biological evolution becomes random.

The idea could do for a novel, and probably has. Aldiss reaches beyond an "idea" towards the mutated, and beyond that to what Aldiss has called the unique value of the "image" in science fiction - the one moment in the great s f story which you remember all your life. In DUMB SHOW, the last attack on this mute pair begins. All life is thrown out of focus until:

This was the latest application of the sound: it enlarged the human cell now, as easily as it enlarged vegetable cells...The giants were still growing. They were taller than a house now, thirty feet or more high. They began to mop and mow, like drunken dancers.... She knew then that the giants were no enemy troops; they were victims. One type of VM levels the houses. Another inflates the people, blowing them up like grotesque dummies.

Most of these stories are comedies, not horror stories. They are all vivid, memorable, and one, THE FAILED MEN, is as profound as any of Aldiss' later stories. Couldn't they stand another reprint, NEL or Sphere?

(RAISON D'ETRE continued from Page 6)
which should have all the appeal of Lionel Rose and Johnny Famacheon attending the Convention; SEX IN SCIENCE FICTION; ENCOUNTERS WITH HER MAJESTY'S CUSTOMS; WHAT ABOUT THE WORLDCON?; THE HISTORY AND FUTURE OF THE VISION PROJECT and a Panel on IS THERE A MARKET FOR SCIENCE FICTION IN AUSTRALIA? I'm exhausted already, even though I still can't work out whether I can afford to buy a train ticket for Sydney or not. With a programme like that, I can't very well afford not to go.

*In the meantime I've been given the job of thinking about the arrangements for the Easter Convention (imagine trying to turn out two S F COMMENTARYs in the last three weeks of the year, and to think as well - I'm finding it hard enough to prise off the typewriter lid these days) although Paul Stevens and Merv Binns are nominally in charge. Since the influence of comics fans has reached dangerous proportions, it looks as if the Easter barney will be a Triple Fan Fair, even though neither Merv nor Paul seem to have thought of this brilliantly original name as yet. Films will be a drawcard, as happened last year. The Ditmar Awards will be awarded, even though I am supposed to be organizing the voting. Comics fans will be accommodated, or ignored, as the case might be. And the s f fans may have to listen to yet another panel, unless I can do something to prevent it. My own suggestion is that we send \$500 to Brian Aldiss and invite him as Permanent Talking Guest of Honour, but somehow I don't think this idea would be welcomed. With all these chatting professionals around, perhaps we can round them up somewhere and persuade them ("firmly, but gently") to teach us all how to write stories that will sell to ANALOG or VISION. Plans for an authors' thumbscrew may be sent to Box 245, Abarat, along with any other good ideas for the Easter Convention. Don't write to Binns-Stevens or you will receive a return note assigning you to organize the Fancy Dress Orgy.

*One of the main ring events at the Syncircus will be the sight of various distracted fanzine editors wandering around shoving their wares under the noses of bombed-out fans and gesticulating pros alike. In order to cut down the competition as far as possible, I mention the following magazines that you will want to ignore. I cannot be bothered dragging 50 copies of SFC to Sydney so I want to make sure the competition don't get anywhere either.

*Most consistant and legible of this year's Australian fanzines has been Gary Mason's THE NEW FORERUNNER (Gary Mason, Warili Road, French's Forest, NSW 2086 - 10c plus postage). Gary manages this magazine like a magazine, and not just like a fanzine. Unfortunately he reveals intimate details of semi-private organisations like ANZAPA and moans about his non-subscribers... which all means that he is on the job and will eventually have far more hard-won subscribers than I will.

*Leigh Edmonds produced one RATAPLAN - MAGAZINE OF THE ARTS this year, which shows that Leigh's enthusiasm is not what it once was. However, RATAPLAN 4 was creditable enough, and No 5 should be out any month now. RATAPLAN is a fannish, r-e-l-a-x-e-d fanzine, so be warned (P O Box 74, Balaclava, Victoria 3183, Australia, for letter, article, review or any other show of interest).

*I mentioned JOE last time, which didn't bring me bouquets from the editor, because he did not know at the time that Dick Geis had revealed the new title as well. I suppose brilliant fanzine

editors all have their little crosses to bear, but continuous publicity in SFR is one cross you can nail to me any old time.

*Ron Clarke has virtually given up fanzine editing, as he and a bunch of mad Sydneyites are riding a refitted bus from Sydney to Heidelberg, and then on to London. It all costs money and time, and in the meantime I'm sure you can get back copies of MENTOR, M31 or EQS from Ron at 78 Redgrave Rd Normanhurst, NSW 2076.

*Alex Robb produced one orange horror edition of SIXPENCE and since then has talked about SIXPENCE 2 but has not yet delivered the masterpiece. You may inquire, if you can withstand the barrage of answering correspondence, from Alex at 120 Herring Road, Eastwood, NSW 2122.

*You may notice that a depressing number of these fanzine vendors come from the vast alien territory to our north, New South Wales. (Local columnist Keith Dunstan was talking about Melbourne today on ABC radio, and said that Collins St still best typified Melbourne as a whole because it was a street upon which "you could never imagine anyone being raped". Dunstan then went on to talk about the most famous brothel-that-was in Lonsdale St, conveniently located near Parliament House. Sydney has only the common old drug scene). (?) Victoria's fannish centre, currently located at 44 Hilton St, Clifton Hill, radiates weakly, no doubt because of recent electricity strikes. The only alarming sound of typewriters comes from the pros: Lee Harding busily churning out the words at The Basin, and David Boutland doing likewise in St Kilda. Damien Broderick has landed a job at THE AGE. Only Ararat remains resolutely poor and fannish.

*Talking about fanzines, which I might have been if I could work out just what I was talking about; there are many American and English fanzines that I have enjoyed which I have never given myself room to talk about before in S F COMMENTARY. I'll try to think of a few of them now.

*D J 3, from Texas (Joe Bob Williams, 8733 Boundbrook something, Dallas, Texas 75231, USA) does not talk about anything that interests me for its own sake, but it has one of the best covers I have ever seen (by Michael Arden), and is duplicated with alarming care. Number 2 talked about s f interestingly, so I suppose there should be plenty more good reading in the magazine.

*DOUBLE:BILL 20 (Bill Mallardi, Box 368, Akron, Ohio 44309, and Bill Bowers, Box 87, Barberton, Ohio 44203) had its points, including a cartoon spoof of 2001, but had some idiotic questionnaires which just happened not to ask the right sorts of questions. The editors did ask the right sort of people, however, and indeed, the two Bills seem to have become so successful that they have priced themselves right out of the trade category. Haven't received a copy for months.

*YANDRO 188 (Robert & Juanita Coulson, Route 3, Hartford City, Indiana 47348, USA) was the last issue of this legendary magazine that I received. Lots of bits and pieces, 32 pages only (yes, I know he pays his way, Mr Harding) and entertaining editorials make this worth subscribing to (12 for \$US.4), but I don't seem to have made Bob's trade list yet.

*GRANFALLOON (Linda Bushyager, 5620 Darlington Rd Pittsburgh,

Pennsylvania 15217, USA) contains some chatty editorial material, articles and stories from Piers Anthony, Alexis Gilliland, Jack Gaughan and Jerry Kaufman. Whoops - I'm talking about No 6 by the way. Miss Linda Eyster has now become Mrs Bushyager, but I am told by LOCUS that No 7 is on its way. No 6 contained a useful S F MAGAZINE REVIEW 1968 by Richard Delap, and back copies may be available.

*PEGASUS (Joanne Burger, 55 Blue Bonnet Ct, Lake Jackson, Texas 77566, USA). You don't believe in two fanzines produced by femme-fans, either? Joanne does what I only appear to do: type up a huge stack of material and then run it all off in a mixed bag for which an index is impossible. The effect is oddly pleasing, especially as Joanne puts in a few corny jokes every now and again, and prints Letters of Comment from Australian fans.

*HARPIES (Various members of the Michigan Science Fantasy Society, although Richard Schultz, of 19159 Helen St Detroit, Michigan 48234, USA) is the best person to write to. HARPIES is one of my favourite fanzines because it is so badly produced that SFC looks handsome, but the Michigan mob are nearly as mad as their counterparts in Melbourne, so HARPIES remains constantly entertaining. One of my relatives gave a sigh of relief as she read in a purloined HARPIES that "the average stay in fandom of any one fan is about three years" (Richard Schultz, probably misquoted). Richard has been around longer than three years and makes a useful guide around the darker recesses of fannish minds.

*I've also received Lynn Hickman's THE PULP ERA, Manfred Kage's HECK MECK, the WSFA JOURNAL (Don Miller), and, at last, Vera Haminger's CRY. And nobody who likes "Irish fanzines", such as WARHOON and ASFR, should miss the aforementioned THE SCARR (George L Charters, 3 Lancaster Ave, Bangor, Northern Ireland) which gives an idea of the Protestant-Catholic thing more accurately than a bundle of newspaper photos, and reviews Amanda McKittrick Ros's HELEN HUDDLESON which would presumably revolutionise popular literature if it ever escaped from Ireland. I've not yet seen copies of HUGIN AND MUGIN, ODD or SCYTHROP.

*Did you think my rave-on would never end? What you want to know, of course, is why this isn't the Melbourne Convention Issue. Since I've hidden these excuses away in some corner of the magazine, I could probably tell the truth safely. But I won't: Peter Darling has not yet transcribed the Author Panel, and Waller and Chester of Ballarat have not yet printed the photos. Since I did not really hustle these weak links in the chain until three weeks ago, then I suppose I should wear sackcloth-and-Gestetner-paper and forgive you all. But, again, I won't: if somebody wants a Syncon report, they will have to pay hard cash in advance. (That was a nasty one, wasn't it?). Meanwhile, if the photos and all don't arrive in the next week or so, Number 8 will be the Stanislaw Lem Issue which I mentioned in the LetterColumn. Most of that is typed, and so is a lot of other material. Until this week, I have not had a complete magazine though. It's probable that I still haven't a complete fanzine - for instance I don't even know if I will have any art at all (Thanks for that letter, Harry). I have got a letter from Damien Broderick however, which I consider the most remarkable achievement of my long career in fanzine publishing. And Chip Delany's letter set me whistling for a while as well.

*Sweat dripping from the armpits, typewriter crumbling with exhaustion, I finish my latest bout of relaxing. Back to Stanislaw Lem for a holiday. See you in a couple of weeks or a month-and-a-half.