

Small Mammal



PRODUCTION

When the dinosaurs died out they were replaced by the small mammals. So it appears is the way with fanzines. Back in the mists of time, about a year ago, there was a fanzine called OUR FAIR CITY whose purpose was to communicate the good word of science fiction among the students of London University. In time it became massive and sluggish. It could never reach a deadline in time to snare the more interesting articles. Indeed to produce any action at all it seemed that it would have to be supplied with an extra brain in its rear end, or perhaps a kick.

In order to overcome its difficulties SMALL MAMMAL was evolved, intended to be a monthly news listing of all the SF events in London; films, parties, lectures and even rumours of the future appearance of OUR FAIR CITY, which indeed is not dead but only lurking in the undergrowth waiting to strike unexpectedly.

If you have any news which might be of interest to SF fans in the London area then please send it to Martin Easterbrook, Physics department, Royal Holloway College, Egham Hill, Egham, Surrey. Deadline to be the last Thursday of every month (1 week before the 'One Tun' meeting). For last minute news (and only that please I've got to work sometime) ring me on Egham 6371 extension 25.

EVENT HORIZON

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- Oct 7'th Thursday Regular "One Tun" meeting, 1'st Thursday of every month. The "One Tun" is in SAFFRON ST, near Farringdon and Chancery lane stations. If at all possible can any interested students attend as we have to arrange a society Annual General Meeting, convenient for all Colleges, if we are to get our grant.
- 11'th Monday Film. WESTWORD at Bedford College - 5.30 & 8.00
- 12'th Tuesday Talk plus film. "Memorably Bad SF Films" by Ramsey Campbell. PLUS screening of INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS. Admission 15p to ULU Members. Imperial College.
- 19'th Tuesday Talk plus films. "They Shoot SF Movies Don't They" by Philip Strick. Plus short films. ((Recommended : editor)) Imperial College.
- 24'th Sunday Star-Trek fan meeting. 96a Fonthill Rd, Pinsbury Pk. Afternoon.
- 26'th Tuesday Informal meeting at Imperial College. Southside upper lounge.
- Nov 2'nd Tuesday "The Three Worlds of SF" a talk by Thomas Sheridan. Imperial College.
- 5-7 Weekend NOVACON. Trip to Con in Birmingham. A group from Imperial College should be going. Any students interested contact IC SF society or ye editor (address overleaf). ((Room party in my room Saturday night: Ed'))
- 16'th Tuesday "SF And SOCIOLOGY" by Brian Stapleford. Talk at Imperial College.

Location for Imperial College meetings is; Room 220, Mechanical Engineering building. Tube - South Kensington. Bus - Albert Hall. Start 6.30. ((Get there early if you don't know your way around IC, and who does)).

Regular Lectures

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- Fridays - Stanhope Institute 46 Queens Sq, Bloomsbury. Course of 24 lectures on SF, taking the form of discussing one book per week, given by Christopher Priest and Peter Nichols. 6.30 start. Course Fee 35.50
- Mondays - Addison Institute, Mary Boon College, Earsley St w14. Course given by Mike Mitchel. Course Fee 24.00.

Student reductions are possible in theory, but difficult to get in practice.

NEW BOOKS

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THE TWILIGHT OF BRIAREUS FUTURA September
by Richard Cowper
also (running out of room folks) BLOWN, IMAGE OF THE BEAST,
FUTUREWORD from FUTURA. A WORLD SET FREE (Wells) by TRANSWORLD.

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THE BRITISH FANTASY SOCIETY AN INTRODUCTION
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By David Sutton (Vice-President)

The BFS emerged in the early part of 1971 with a huge task. It had allowed itself to become the devil's advocate for a wide range of Fantasy tastes. Unlike its counterpart in the "Science Fiction" field, which had been in existence a number of years previously, the BFS (then awkwardly titled "The British Weird-Fantasy Society") maintained that it would give coverage to a wide spectrum of subjects within the Fantasy genre, a task that is not without problems. Thus the area of coverage includes; ; horror, supernatural and sword and sorcery literature (committing ourselves from Mary Shelley to H.P.Lovecraft and from Robert.E.Howard to Michael Moorcock); and we included horror films (committing ourselves from "Nosteratu" to "The Exorcist"); and we included various comics (of the American fantasy and horror kind).

This determination to offer a society catering for such divergent interests created many problems. Teething troubles naturally arose, but gradually these are being ironed out and at the present time the BFS is moving rapidly along, providing a first rate service to fans of fantasy. (The term fantasy is used to denote all the various sub-genres and does not specify any one aspect).

You'll probably now ask, what do we provide? Well, firstly there's our regular, bi-monthly Bulletin. This item, well printed and illustrated, contains news of new books and films. Reviews of both films, books and comics regularly appear in each as well as other snippets of news, short articles and other items of interest to the BFS member. The latest issue (as I write this) contains reviews of books by John Norman and Michael Moorcock, articles and reviews of H.P.Lovecraft, film news and reviews, including a look at "Horror Movies", a book on the horror film recently published. The regular comics column "Layouts" appears as well as various other items of interest.

Our society journal, Dark Horizons is published three times a year, like the bulletin, it is lavishly printed and illustrated by some of the best fantasy artists currently at work. The magazine features various articles on Fantasy, interviews, short stories and biographical essays and so forth. Its intent is for entertainment and serious appraisal of the Fantasy world. The latest issue contains four short stories, some sword and sorcery, and some horror/supernatural, an article/interview on the artist in fandom, plus two further essays on emotion in fantasy and "They Who Oppose Chaos", a look at the various super heroes of heroic fantasy.

The BFS also provides two libraries, a book and fanzine foundation, the later of which will open up a whole new world for those interested in amateur journals devoted to the various sub-genres. Members are provided with library lists each year and a newsletter from the fanzine library twice a year. We can also provide a service we call "Whirlpool", an amateur writers critical circle. Beginning writers of sword and sorcery and supernatural fiction can both obtain and give critical reviews of their own fiction and the work of others in the whirlpool, and all this from the comfort of their own home because whirlpool is run on a postal basis.

"The August Derleth Fantasy Award" is another aspect of the BFS you will hear about if you join as is "Fantasycon" - our 2'nd convention, to be held early in 1976.

You will probably be wondering what all this costs, but we think you will agree that for the services we provide the price is very good value these days. £1.50 is the annual fee, which entitles you to all the BFS publications and the use of the services. You can join by sending your remittance (please cross cheques and postal orders and make them payable to "The BFS") to, Sandra Sutton, secretary BFS, 194 Station Road, Kings Heath, Birmingham, B14 7TE. (Or, if you want further information, we will be happy to oblige if you care to send us a stamped self addressed envelope)

THE BRITISH SCIENCE FICTION ASSOCIATION

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The BSFA has just completed a year of inactivity and non-operation owing to the "defection" of last years membership secretary. However with the latest edition of VECTOR, its magazine it has made a good fresh start. If anyone has heard of last years debacle and is therefore wary of joining let me assure them that the present committee would only permit a repetition of last years disaster over their dead bodies. I suspect that their keenness to banish the disgraces of the past will make membership this year very good value.

This should be particularly true for student as the BSFA is now offering them a reduced rate membership for groups. They will be issued in the name of the group at the rate of 5 memberships for the price of 4 (£2.00 per ordinary member) ie £8 for a group of 5. All the publications including VECTOR and the NEWSLETTER will be sent to the person in charge of the group for distribution. The membership secretary is ; David A.Symes, Green Pastures, Kentisbury, North Devon EX31 4NN.

The membership covers 5 editions of VECTOR ,which this issue contains articles by James Blish, Brian Aldiss and Bob Shaw. The magazine runs to 50 pages this issue and this should be expanded in future. VECTOR is probably the best way to enter the amateur fanzine "scene" as it is intended for people purely interested in SF and does not assume a knowledge of conventions or an acquaintance with other fans as many other "zines" do that are intended for the more experienced fan.

The BSFA was until the appearance of SF Monthly the usual means by which people heard of and became involved in "Fandom". With the same role being partly filled by SF Monthly it now has to make a new appraisal of its function. It would be a great pity if it lost its traditional role completely because although SF Monthly is a good advertising medium it does not really prepare people for what they will find at a Convention or in fanzines. The history of SF fandom in this country goes back more than a quarter of a century. In this time a great many characters have emerged and a great many traditions have been founded. A newcomer to a convention, brought in by SF Monthly, finds a strange and confused world, where everyone seems to know everyone else except him. It is also often difficult for him to realise how approachable the writers are (especially if you offer them a drink) at such functions. It is only by seeing their (unpaid) articles in VECTOR and other fanzines that he will come to realise that many of them consider themselves fans first and writers second, since they originally came into SF by being as fascinated by the field as their present readers are.

Generally the BSFA has a thankless task, as as soon as a fan "learns the ropes" from them he almost invariably becomes convinced that he can do better and will begin producing his own fanzine or organising his own SF group. A current list quotes 41 such fanzines in this country and many more from abroad. There is something in the mentality of SF fans that makes them resent any central organisation. They will not be organised into groups and (in the words of James White) "Some of them will band together to prevent it.". This is, in general very healthy, as it always means that you can find a magazine or group to suit your particular interests but it is not a situation that the newcomer finds attractive or even understandable and he (or she) needs a group that can gently ease him into this weird new world.

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OUR FAIR CITY COMPETITION

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A free pint to the first person to turn up at the "Tun" with the real identity of "Pandora Birch", well known lunatic femme fan who has just joined QMC under her real name. (a special spot the loony competition).

THE BRITISH INTERPLANETARY SOCIETY

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The BIS pre-war years

Founded in Liverpool in October 1933 to promote the exploration of space by rockets, the BIS' first president was P.E. Cleator, a space popularizer and friend of Willy Ley. Articles in the Liverpool Echo, Chambers Journal and the Daily Express helped launch the society, which acted from the start as a magnet for British SF fans. Cleator himself contributed to "Scoops" the short lived British SF magazine (a juvenile) until it folded in June 1934 and he published both fact and fiction in the American magazines.

Another founder member was Moore Raymond, the Express reporter responsible for the coverage of the BIS' foundation in that paper. In 1934 he wrote an SF novel "Mutiny on the Moon". The secretary L.J. Johnson was also a moderately known SF writer with such stories as "The Time Traveller" in 1937. Willy Ley was the first foreign member.

After a slow start the society grew and in 1934 began publishing its Journal which has continued, with modifications to the present day. Professor A.M. Low, editor of "Scoops" and another popularizer and SF writer joined that year, as did a youth (paying 5/- associate membership) by the name of Arthur C. Clarke.

In 1937 Eric Frank Russell joined. He was just beginning to sell to the American magazines, and when Walter Gillings (another BIS member) produced the first edition of "Tales of Wonder" in 1937 it naturally contained one of his stories. Indeed "The Pre-ree-t" was one of the favourites of that issue. In that same year EFR collaborated with L.J. Johnson to write "Seeker of Tomorrow" for Astounding. Russell did some work for the society including writing the review for Cleator's book "Rockets Through Space" which appeared in 1936. One of the seminal books of Astronautics, it was an immediate success, and was responsible for a large influx of new members.

Because of the growth of the society the focus of membership shifted to London and the Societies HQ was forced to follow. A local branch was organised in 1936 and only a few months later this became the nucleus of the new council. Though Cleator and Johnson as joint vice presidents remained, the rest of the council was new. Several names will mean much to SF fans. Prof A.M. Low was president, A.C. Clarke treasurer, E.J. Carnell publicity director and A. Fraser librarian. Walter Gillings helped on the constitution committee.

In 1936 Clarke, Low, Carnell and Gillings were also involved in setting up the British Science Fiction Association. Much of the activity of the BSFA and BIS took place from Clarke's flat, above a pub in Gray's Inn Road. It is probably about this time that the monthly meetings of SF fans at the "White Horse" began. William F. Temple and M.K. Hanson also shared the flat with Clarke and were involved with the BIS. Hanson was the editor of "Novae Terrae" the first British amateur fanzine (1936).

Ted Carnell edited the Journal for a short period before going on to "Novae Terrae", "New Worlds" and "New Writings in SF" and it was then that it was taken over for 2 editions by William F. Temple. Walter Gillings was of course editing "Tales of Wonder" in 1937 and he later became involved with "Fantasy", "Science Fantasy" and "Vision of Tomorrow", before writing his present "Modern Masters" series for SF Monthly.

Also in those pre-war years an association began between the BIS and Olaf Stapledon. He did not apparently join until 1946 but there is no doubt that his influence stretched back many years. His first stories "Last and First Men" and the follow up "Last Men in London" had appeared in 1930 and 1932. These semi-philosophical views of man's future and the opportunities open to him (sketched out through 2000 million years of future history) was of enormous scope and originality. Perhaps the first book of its kind and there is no doubt of the influence his writings had on later SF writers much

of his writing expounded the view of a universal "Spirit" -not necessarily divine- which was controlling human endeavour. In 1937 "Star Maker" completed the work of the first 2 books, encompassing the life and purpose of the entire universe. He brought an overview of universal extent to SF. Amongst those enflamed by his ideas was Arthur.C.Clarke as we shall see below.

The year or so before the 2'nd world war was again a time of publicity for the BIS when they announced the results of the 1'st moonship study. A technical committee including A.C.Clarke, A.Janser, M.K.Hanson and the redoubtable pair R.A.Smith and H.E.Ross, had spent some time producing a design for a 100 tonne 32 metre tall vehicle to take a crew to the moon and return with $\frac{1}{2}$ tonne of payload. The stacked solid fuel rocket design may look strange today but as an exercise in practical engineering it was a thought provoking experiment for its time. It also had its influence in SF, it appeared in at least one story (Jack Williamson's "Crucible of Power" in Astounding 1939) and demonstrated once and for all that the ratio of cabin space to fuel tanks was not going to be the same as that of aeroplanes, putting paid to the great ocean liners of space with portholes filling the ships hull that decorated the covers of many an early SF magazine.

THE WAR YEARS AND THE REFORMATION

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The BIS went into suspension during the war and many of its members served in the forces. Those left at home became associated with the Combined British Astronomical Development Societies.

With the war came the V2, the WASSERFALL and other rocket developments, suddenly the BIS' views weer not so laughable to a British public on the recieving end of a particularly potent example of rocket power.

When the BIS reformed after the war its membership was soon much greater, its views treated with more seriousness. It was A.C.Clarke and H.E.Ross who made most of the efforts at reactivation and the BIS soon absorbed the CBAS (including Ken Gatland and Eric Burgess).

Again the BIS was, if not a focal point of British SF then at least a close associate, Clarke became president, in rotation with L.Shepherd. Not yet well known in SF, his first fame came with a series of technical articles on the use of satellites in communications relays. His article in "Wireless World" in 1946 is attributed as being the first such description and if he had been able to patent the idea his royalties by now would have run into millions. With articles and BBC appearances he became one of the main spokesmen for Astronautics.

He had of course published some SF as E.G.O'Brien and as Charles Willis in "Fantasy" after 1947, but his first novel seemed to be meant as much for popularizing the BIS' views as serious. Stories like "Prelude to Space" and "Sands of Mars" (1951) were in fact screened by the BIS for technical realism before publication. It was about then that his factual "Interplanetary Flight" and "The Exploration of Space" appeared.

It was not until he brought into his novels the influence of Stapledon that Clarke's literary acclaim mushroomed. "Childhood's End" and "Against the Fall of Night" both showed the "overall view" influence of Olaf Stapledon, and with these Clarke found the track of future literary success, joining the BIS at its reformation had in fact represented a belief to them in 1948 -an overview of the philosophy of his earlier books. While his conception of intelligence and kindness as a basis for the universal "Spirit" was a little wooly, and his idea of eugenics was questionable his influence on the BIS' "Sense of Wonder" was great. It seems strange that so few modern SF readers have ever heard of Stapledon. Concerned with moral and philosophical questions reaching for an ethos of mankind, suddenly endowed with great powers, he had, like H.G.Wells become concerned with campaigning for world government.

Other writers associated with the BIS after the war included John Wyndham, Robert Heinlein, Sydney.J.Bounds, Patrick Moore and James Blish. SF artists like Chesley Bonestell and (later) David Hardy have also been included in the list.

John Wyndham did not apparently join the society but often met the participants and it seems likely that the "Outward Urge" series drew its inspiration from this time. (This is the series of short stories about one family and its association with the exploration of space).

Robert Anson Heinlein joined in 1946. Like Clarke much of his earlier work dealt with technical realism and extrapolation of extant technology. When Heinlein acted as technical adviser with Chesley Bonestell on "Destination Moon" in 1950 the BIS helped to promote the film in the UK. Chesley Bonestell's fame as an SF artist came from illustrating the works of such writers as Willy Ley in magazines like "Collies" and popularizers in the U.S used him, just as Clarke and others used the illustrations of Smith and Ross (Smith being the draughtsman).

Sydney.J.Bounds joined in 1946 -his short stories, too, seem of the realistic type though he has made no novel length contribution to the genre. Patrick Moore who joined in 1948 was responsible for several juvenile SF novels early in his career, somewhat after Clarke's "Sands of Mars" style. Moore edited the BIS second publication "Spaceflight" when it first appeared.

James Blish joined in 1953. His early writing too was in a mood of technical realism and extrapolation (perhaps over extrapolation if we consider the "Cities in Flight" series). He, Heinlein and Clarke from this technical base then set out on literary journeys of their own, exploring each his own mythology. These three well illustrate, in their developments, the parallel changes in SF. In the 1950's SF was often said to stand for "space Fiction" since so much was about rockets, the new "Wunderkind" of technology. When the novelty wore off other preoccupations took over. Campbell's absorption in ESP phenomena led to one group concentrating on this. Ecology became the thing for a while, then SF's period of introspection -"the New Wave" was rolling through the magazines. Blish, Heinlein and Clarke in their various ways shared in the start of SF along this path, Clarke with his "Stapledonian" overall view and its "passion spent" mood. Blish with his growing concern (as William Atheling) for decent criticism in SF and his later excursions into new areas, as with "A Case of Conscience", Heinlein with his proselytizing of a revamped American moral code.

LATER DEVELOPEMENTS

Yet though the BIS started the post-war years hand in hand with SF the relationship was soon to degrade.

In Dec 1948 James.V.Forrestal, former Secretary of Defence announced in a paper to Congress that the first Earth Satellite program had just been initiated, space exploration had come of age and the field was becoming "respectable", so just as SF began looking beyond hard realism the BIS and its associates found itself becoming acceptable and it began straining away from its more "fringe" allies. The SF links began to loosen. There had been several calls already to change the BIS' name to "The Society of Rocket Engineers" or something similar. Only the familiarity and reputation of its old name kept it unchanged. A nuclear committee was formed to consider nuclear engines. Papers and technical reports became common in the Journal. Just as Smith and Ross detailed draught designs had taken over from the pre-war speculations so now experimental reports and intricate technical argument on detailed elements of a design became the norm. The Journal became a technical publication paper in the mid fifties and has continued as such to the present day.

Clarke now left for Ceylon. His SF writing having assured his fame

and income, he now had time to pursue his other great love. The sea ("The Deep Range" 1957). The SF following began to drop away bogged down by technical details. The BIS turned its face from them to search for respectability, just as SF became more interested in other forms of speculation.

In the 1960's the divergence opened as the satellite became manned, Apollo set off on its well oiled route. In SF the "New Wave" started, heralded by "New Worlds" just as Carnell left for "New Writings". The men involved in Apollo began to look more and more like the machines they operated and SF went so introspective that it needed drugs to drag the stories loose.

With its new found clockwork precision there was no element of risk was adventure in space exploration and the public became bored soon after Neil Armstrong's first well rehearsed step. SF in one of its new roles of reflector of modern attitudes was only too happy to prevent apathy and even antipathy. Other elements of SF had joined in the revolution in the arts that everyone was (prematurely) heralding at the end of the 60's.

So we could say space exploration and SF took off in opposite directions from the signpost of respectability and discipline. We must admit that each in its own way benefited from the parting, but that each has risked losing sight of its roots. Tied too long together they had become scale. SF with too much science had become just mechanical writing, it now blossomed forth into an art form (which is not to say that it had't had a literary capability before). While the science had been pure speculation and little detailed work it stood no chance of reaching its own goal. It was now achieving great things.

So both going their own way found success of a sort. Are they then best separate? Certainly both have also found strings to their new found independence. Space science has suffered worst. Public disillusionment and misunderstanding, funding cutbacks and a desperate attempt at retrenchment by buying more socially acceptable projects has been the lot of NASA's programme at least. What space scientist did not find his inspiration in a copy of "Eagle" or "Amazing Stories", and what does the SF field seem to offer now? SF has suffered less but has to beware of "esotericising" itself away totally from reality - "Write around the Science".

THE BIS NOW

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There are indeed, in the BIS at least, many with a new sense of the old links. The two fields may not be sweating lovers again but perhaps they can find some piece in holding hands as they work.

In the last few years "Spaceflight" the semi-popular magazine, started for the BIS' ordinary members when the Journal's technicality took its somewhat beyond their appreciation, has become more concerned again with the future of space exploration. While Apollo was approaching its climax and NASA's own funding was at its height the BIS, on this side of the Atlantic could only glow in the reflected light of its transatlantic colleagues. With Apollo more or less accomplished this led to two distinct trends as the 1970's unrolled.

(1) On this side of the Atlantic a group used to speculation but not restrained by the needs of concentration on the technical details of working projects has become impatient to try its imagination on the technical problems of the future. This has led to Project Daedalus. This is a group of (usually) young engineers and scientists doing a feasibility study on the possibility of sending probes to the nearby stars. Their work shows that this is not as impossible as generally thought. The pioneering spirit seems that of the old moonship team, and could end up as prophetic. While Project Daedalus is only concerned with unmanned probes, the work is taking place against a background of fresh interest in the society, in the possibility

of CETI (communication with extra-terrestrial Intelligence) and the possibility of life on other worlds. Indeed three or four editions per year of the Journal are now devoted to Interstellar studies.

(2) NASA scientists, and thus colleagues throughout the world, looking to the future but wary as to speculating officially on too grandiose schemes while the blade of financial cutback is still sharp, have found the BIS' "spaceflight an ideal vehicle for presenting their forward views on the near future.

Ken Gatland, Spaceflights editor has managed over the past few years to present a balanced view of present projects and forward looking features. A new series of articles called "New Frontiers" has been presented together with ideas and plans for space stations, lunar colonies, space colonies and solar energy collection from Earth orbit. It was in Spaceflight that Duncan Loonan's speculations on the possibility of a space probe (from Epsilon Bootis) waiting at Earth-Moon Lagrangian point to contact the Earth appeared (Since mainly disproved but an interesting idea as presented at the time.

Its all beginning to look as if the sense of wonder that attracted SF fans is creeping back in.

For details about the BIS, and a sample copy of Spaceflight together with membership application write to.

The Executive Secretary BIS,
12 Bessborough Gardens,
London.
SW1V 2JJ

ALAN FARMER

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LITTLE LOST ROBOT ?

Readers who like to keep up with current events in the scientific world may already know of the machine intelligence department at Edinburgh University, and indeed of the hand-eye mobile robot called KARL IV. They have connected to the main ICL computer.

They have a rather serious problem at the moment, which cannot easily be resolved without disconnecting Karl. The robot is programmed to inspect objects, both in its mechanical hand and visually, while roving the maze of corridors in the laboratory. Using the latest developments in the field it is able to logically deduce analogies and construct a simple internal world model.

It was discovered that Karl had formed the habit of placing the mechanical hand in its mains sockets, battery terminals and other power sources. While this produced only superficial damage to the tactile sensors large areas of the computer's memory store were being destroyed. Karl was able to continue this practice even while under the close supervision of the computer technicians. Several years of difficult programming work have been lost with the injuries sustained by the core and the technicians have been forced to confine the robot to a small enclosed pen in the laboratory, where he now carries out the tasks assigned to him.

Also, at great loss to the unit, the mechanical hand has had to be bound and restricted in movement, as the robot has attempted to disconnect his own main input line. Perhaps more serious is the fact that Karl has developed a technique where, by rubbing part of his runners against the plastic coated wire mesh of the pen, he can build up a sufficient static charge to attain a mild buzz, discharging it directly into the main line of the ICL.

Immobilizing the robot would set the unit back several years in their research, so at present he is permitted these less damaging thrills.

CHRIS READE

THE EXPENDABLES 2: THE RINGS OF TANTALUS

Coronet 4Op

One can only presume that Richard Avery chose the Expendables as the title for his series of novels with more than half an eye on their spiritual ancestors, the Thrilling Wonder Stories and Future Science Stories that graced the newstands of the 30's and 40's, or more likely were hidden from the public view behind the counter less the garish covers offend the delicate sensibilities of the reading public. They were not well written, indeed some were barely literate, but they served their purpose, these original pulps catered for a need that arose in the depressed towns and cities and in the quiet backwater towns that have always been passed by in the march of, for want of a better word, progress. The pulps provided the inhabitants of these places with a release from an otherwise mundane existence, they gave city locked adolescents the chance to float weightless between multi-hued stars and vicariously fight single handed for the fate of mankind and/or the honour of a beautiful maiden. In those days the maidens invariably conserved their honour, though the titillatory aspect was not entirely forgotten it was usually confined to the covers and illustrations that were usually, alas, empty promises of bizarre and mechanically complex conjugations between tentacular monster and nubile young maiden.

"The Rings of Tantalus" is the far removed but recognizable descendant of these stories of interplanetary idealism and adventure. The motivations have changed but the goals and people portrayed are the same and people still read about them for the same reasons. The world has grown up since the pulps hit the streets, perhaps even decayed a little, Richard Avery's heroes are 'nt the explorers and adventurers of yesteryear. He finds his spacemen amongst the misfits of modern society, the freedom fighters and dropouts who have fought and lost against society and are allowed to work their passage to the stars in return for their lives.

The commander is still tall and firm jawed but he has been cashiered from the space fleet for disobeying orders and he is 'nt above screwing a female crew member when the fancy takes him. The maidens aren't as chaste as they were 40 years ago though they still fight for their honour (not against the captain, there's a demented Arab to serve that function) the crew members of the starship still face destruction though as much from sabotage as from aggressive aliens.

The world has changed in the past 40 years, perhaps we have a more jaded view of humanity, people still read this type of literature for escape from their everyday lives but they are escaping from different things. The depressions and hardships are behind us for the moment, even the poorest reader today is affluent beyond the wildest dreams of the people who read the pulps all those years ago. Yet people today still need that escape, they have to turn that key into another world and live for a few hours where adversaries can be disposed of without any qualms and the trappings of civilisation are left far behind.

Modern man is perhaps farther from the romantic ideal of the individual in a single handed battle against the Universe, there is little opportunity for the lone man to assert himself against the monolithic organisations and rampant officialdom that permeates the world today. The new pressures are reflected in "The Rings of Tantalus", the explorers of the pulps went out to face the mysteries of the Universe on a quest of scientific curiosity, missionary zeal or crusader like chivalry. Now it is not so much the stars that entice man as the Earth that repels him. The emphasis has changed. Richard Avery's expendables are fleeing a world made inhuman by a surfeit of humanity and they take with them his readers, away from the offices and kitchen sinks, from news bulletins and tax returns. The reader escapes from the world he no longer relates to, to a

place where the decisions of men make a difference and the reader becomes that man.

"The Rings of Tantalus" will win no literary prizes but people will buy them and for a few hours will walk on a far off world and do fantastic things beneath a strange Sun far away from the problems that beset them in a modern world. Good luck to them, until man obtains the stars they can travel in their minds to a sharper and more exciting unreality.

There will always be storytellers to make men forget where and when they are. Some will be great writers and will be remembered for as long as the written word lasts. Some, like Avery, are writing for their time. They entertain in the language of the age and will be forgotten a hundred years hence. This makes them no less important to the people who read them, they are entertained and given a little something to dream about, which is all that they can demand of a story.

But perhaps Avery will have the last laugh. If you look in a bookshop today you will find that among the best sellers are the "Doc" Smith space operas, pure pulp from 30 years ago resurrected by popular demand, so many years from now perhaps there will be bookshelves full of the Expendables giving harmless pleasure to the reading public of tomorrow, but what I wonder will sit beside them on the bookshelf? What will our descendants read for their escape from reality, and what will they be escaping from?

MALCOLM DAVIES

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LORD OF THE SPIDERS

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Michael Moorcock NEL 1975 35p

(originally "Blades of Mars" Compact books 1968

Of the literary influences on Mike Moorcock's writing the most obvious is probably the work of Edgar Rice Burroughs. Indeed if Mike Ashley's article in Science Fiction Monthly is to be believed almost all his stories derive in one way or another from the "John Carter of Mars" series. To say "Lord of the Spiders" is more than usually the case would be to risk only understatement.

There are those of course, and many are the number, for whom ERB's work is the epitome of fantasy/adventure writing. His stories of well endowed (well muscled anyway) heroes righting the wrongs of whole nations - nay, whole worlds - with a few swashes of their buckles, have thrilled countless thousands since the 1910's. Exotic locations, beautifully proportioned maidens, a hero with a Phd and 24 inch biceps, monsters with mouths full of teeth and death lust for emotional response, dark skinned savages as baddies, etc are the elements that have been used to weave many a science fantasy. Even for one not a fan of this type of story, it is not hard to see that Moorcock has here woven together all the necessary constituents.

This work originally appeared under the pseudonym of Edward P. Bradbury but in this edition by NEL the nom de plume is dropped and only the initials EPB appear appended to the introductory passage, this being the narrator of the adventures of one Michael Kane, 20th century scientist. (Notice the subtle (?) choice of initials. I'm surprised the hero was not called Johnery Carternelious, since this would have fitted nicely with the other aspects of MM's personal mythology). This is the second book in the Michael Kane series, the first being "City of the Beast" (also available in NEL), and with Moorcock's propensity for trilogies it is not surprising there should be a third - "Master of the Pit". These are NEL retitles of the original Bradbury by-lined novels, which were named much more reminiscently of Burroughs.

The method used to get OH (our hero) to Mars is of course passed swiftly over. Here the story is the thing, and the device used to get us into the appropriate setting only a convenient vehicle for it. Moorcock's one concession to modern knowledge of Mars is to have the story set in the far past, presumably on the basis that we cannot totally rule out such conditions being possible then. (You may say this is anyway irrelevant, since the rejection of trivial adherence to facts where it might interfere with the story is often what provides fantasy with its most memorable moments).

The title, it should be said is something of a misnomer, since the episode with the giant spider and its servants forms only a minor part of these chronicled adventures.

And what of the story? If we use as our criterion for criticism an adherence to the Burroughsian "line" then, fan or not of ERB, one must admit that Moorcock has largely succeeded. As a juvenile adventure story this is faithful to the ERB formula in a host of ways. The tone of a Victorian heroic novel is conjured up well at the beginning, with the style of the introduction and the dismay and despair OH feels on getting to Mars at what seems at first the wrong time and place to find his true love (left behind at the end of "City of the Beast". Fear not he does find her in the end.)

Elsewhere Moorcock manages to imitate even Burroughs' attitudes and prejudices. ERB the anglophile would probably have approved of the American hero starting his transfer to Mars from England's Stonehenge. There is the equivocal attitude to violence, where killing women is wrong - displayed near the end when OH is faced with the possibility of having to kill the witch Horgubl - while murder of males by the abattoir-load is a demonstration of the hero's courage and maturity. (But then, the victims are blue-skinned giants or some such, so its all right really.) The simplistic philosophising of Burroughsian characters, too, is well copied:

" 'Your story is unusual, but possible. Everything is possible'. I realized once again that the Martians are a philosophic folk. "

or

" 'As Bradhi (king) of Mendishar you will have heavy responsibilities for your people all your life.' "

Like much such fantasy this pushes the elements of coincidence to extremes at times. There is the timely saving of OH at the beginning as he is about to be eaten by a dreadful beast. Later he fortuitously finds a machine that can make anything he wants out of a seemingly inexhaustible supply of perfect plastic - just when OH is trying to build a balloon. Helium by the bottle full (and still full after after languishing at least hundreds of years in a ruined building) just happens to be lying around, too. Later he miraculously (with one bound?) survives when his balloon crashed after an attack by a giant bird, and the latter passes out almost immediately from eating too many poisoned spears. After killing the giant spider of the title he 'decides' to take some of the paralysing poison its minions had used in capturing him. Not surprisingly this just happens to come in handy later to help his friend Hooj Haji win the Mendishar throne. And so on. I often wonder if the term 'fantasy' is not meant to be synonymous with coincidence or chance.

OH's manufacture of a balloon, carried out to escape dying in a ruined desert city, may seem incongruous at first in a sword and sorcery novel of this kind, but such ambiguities, well-handled, are often a valuable element for contributing to a mood of strangeness or alien-ness.

Probably Moorcock's only real concessions to modernity over the original ERB formula is in his use of the modern SF explain-all of atomic war induced genetic mutation to explain the weird creatures he meets, and, of course the matter transmitter enabling him to set off on his adventures.

The city in the story is called "Earth" after the planet of origin of its founders. It is a compact unit riding on wheels for which its inhabitants lay a track as it moves relentlessly northwards, trying to keep up with the "optimum" of its world. Before and behind the "optimum" the world is distorted and subjective time is, respectively, speeded up or slowed down. The country through which it moves, although apparently alien until encompassed by the area around the optimum contains villages where terrestrial languages are spoken by the "tooks", or native peoples. The "tooks" resent the affluence of the city, though by necessity they are forced to work for it as it passes (a nicely observed ambivalence that says much too about the attitude of rural communities today to the coming of technology).

The city's founders of 200 years before had originated the city's traditions, set out in "Destaine's Directive", which have ruled the city's life since foundation. One of the key structures is the guild system for the city's elite, with six "first-order" guilds to survey the land ahead, arrange the city's motion and barter with the peoples of the lands they pass through.

the style of writing changes according to the stage reached in the story. The middle is simple narrative; the ending as explained below is seen from a different more immediate viewpoint. The beginning has a Kafkaesque enigmatic uncertainty about it, reminiscent of Anna Kavan, as the adolescent Helward Mann is adopted into the Future Surveyors guild and starts to learn the secrets of the city he has been brought up in. It is, perhaps, an old technique to explain a society by seeing it through the eyes of a youth, he himself "growing into" it, unveiling it to the reader as it is revealed to him, but here it seems better than normally suited to the role. Fear of the unknown vies with wonder and amazement as the secrets unfold. Two adverse criticisms could be made: first, the beginning is a little too long - it could perhaps have been shortened by a third with a useful gain in intensity. Secondly, too many explanations are often given. The strongest element of the beginning is the feeling of strangeness, the enigmatic differences from terrestrial normality. Giving too many explanations, apart from sometimes not accepting the reader's ability to work out some of the simpler points himself, is to risk making the whole vision seem to be, after all, quite prosaic. Since the science is anyway doubtful, too many explanations may start to show up the discrepancies.

Another point about the explanation "phase" of the story is that the hero must, by this very structure, trace a precarious path between naivety and credibility. There are times when Helward seems to know too much, or take events too calmly considering he has been brought up in a small, entirely enclosed community. (Though there is a beautifully observed scene of great atmosphere when he sees his first sunrise outside the city). Yet at other times, perhaps in order to explain to the reader a particular point, he is made to seem somewhat naive. Priest seems aware of this problem, though, and considering the novels nature it seems fairly free of this type of incongruity. Again, for the "learn as we go" device to work the young Helward, and hence the non-guild inhabitants, must be generally ignorant of the conditions "outside", yet no plausible reason is given as to why this should be so.

Having made these points, it should be added that, against the strengths of the story these seem mere quibbles. In fact, it is perhaps, the mark of the stature of this concept that one finds oneself looking at it from many different angles not dealt with in the novel and wondering how this or that aspect would have then worked out.

No character is wasted. Victoria, Helward's wife of part of the story, is used also to depict the element of dissension in the city. Towards the latter end of the novel, once the reader has learned of the city's apparent immediate condition, it runs into trouble with the "tooks" and its role is examined more closely. An underground group called the "Terminators" use the opportunity to build up their case that the city must be stopped. The Terminator's case is adroitly built on the foundation laid by Victoria's previous arguments. While the potential threat presented by this group is underplayed in the beginning of the book, we see the reintroduction of the

And there you have it. If you are an ERB fantasy fan rush out and buy this book (indeed the trilogy) its made for you! And if you have ever wondered what Burroughs is all about but have somehow missed his novels in the bookshops, then rest assured this will be a more than adequate substitute for evaluation.

ALAN FARMER

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INVERTED WORLD

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Christopher Priest NEL 50p

At the time of going to press the sad news has just come through that "Inverted World" was defeated in the final Hugo award ballot at Aussiecon, however it is no disgrace for a book to be outvoted amongst the high quality of this years nominations, particularly the winner, Ursula Le Guin's "The Dispossessed" indeed it is regrettable that it should be published in a year when it must compete with such excellent works as "The Dispossessed" and Philip.K.Dick's "Flow my Tears the Policeman Said". Certainly though it can stand comparison with these novels. (And "novel" it is too, certainly is - no mere tale or yarn this).

The story is constructed around a city which is surviving in a strange environment where even the very laws of nature seem warped, compared to those we know. There have been many other tales of worlds where our physical laws are broken or different, or at least seem so, for example "Getaway from Getawehi" by Colin Kapp. The idea is there often in elemental form in Ballard's and Niven's works. Kapp's story is an example of the type that relies solely on the "would'nt it be strange" device. This runs the risk of too much dependence on the peculiar situation presented. Any fault in the argument thus mars the story. Priest, however, has managed to make "Inverted World" much more than the physical situation he describes. Its conceptual faults and discrepancies are therefore more acceptable, since they become minor parts of the overall work. (And there are several faults in the physical situation presented as Priest is the first to admit in his afterword. That the story can be read and enjoyed despite the lacunae in the underlying concepts says much for its grip on the reader). Here the science element of SF is used in the best of ways - to tantalize the mind and stretch the imagination as an integral, but not overriding part of the tale.

This book is also much more than just another disaster novel (though this is one element of it), or another closed community story, or yet another mythic fantasy etc, etc. The story's strength is in thnumber of different things it is at one and the same time without being cliched or uninteresting in any of them, and the way in which these elements are woven together to give a truly original whole. As an undercurrent to this there are also the allegorical possibilities. To use one of Priest's own favourite phrases, the possible "symbolic content" is high. It could justifiably be considered an allegory of adolescence, or of progress, of the creation and destruction of myths.

There is also the suspicion of something of Priest personally, some of his subconscious fears, perhaps hidden in the weave of the story. As Ken Bulmer says in the introduction to the short story of the same name (and on which the novel was loosely based) : "There is much of Christopher Priest's enigmatic reaction to life in this infinite world he envisages existing outside the parameters of the known and familiar." Certainly some of the sequences suggest nightmares or subconscious imagery. For instance, Helward Mann, the central character, having travelled southward from the city, finds the world gradually distorting, stretching horizontally and compressing vertically. He finds himself being dragged southwards, and needs to walk more and more at an angle to the vertical to counteract this. Eventually a mountain range shrinks until it affords only a fingerhold from which he "hangs" horizontally in the grip of the southward force. This scene has an immediacy reminiscent of the common type of dream where one is hanging from a cliff and no effort can apparently get one away from the edge.